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Sarah Claudia Bonanno

*Bowdoin College*, sarahcbonanno@gmail.com

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The Epistemology of Observation: Performance, Power, and the Regulation  
of Female Sexuality in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*

An Honors Paper for the Department of English

By Sarah Claudia Bonanno

Bowdoin College, 2018

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## Introduction

Jean Calvin and Francis Bacon present remarkably different epistemologies of observation. As a theologian, Calvin's use of observation was religiously motivated. He used observation to demonstrate the wonder and omniscient power of God—pointing to the visible beauty of the natural world as a visual manifestation of God himself. Bacon was similarly interested in the natural world, but instead used observation as a fundamental tool in his newly founded scientific method. For Bacon, scientific observation invites the necessary skepticism to make new discoveries about the natural world for the common good of humankind. Calvin's observation seeks to maintain existing power structures, while Bacon's observation can accommodate new ideologies about how the natural world works. Interestingly, these two viewpoints about observation existed simultaneously within early modern culture with 40 years separating the publications of the English translation of Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion* (1559) and Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1599). These two thinkers and their works help to indicate that we should consider early modern observation as an expansive form of knowledge that is not always uniform in its discourses.

Indeed, when examined in its entirety, the epistemology of observation presents competing viewpoints on the function of observation not only in scientific and religious contexts, but also impacts we understand other entities that rely on observation, such as early modern systems of regulation and the theater. In a similar manner to Calvinist observation, early modern systems of regulation use observation as a mechanism of state control. Observation as a form of regulation relies on a centralized power that accepts one way of interpreting visual signs. On the other hand, theatrical observation allows for

multiplicities of interpretation due to the way in which the playwrights, actors, and audiences all come together to create meaning. Theatrical observation, then, creates a decentralized form of power.

In Jacobean tragedies, observation as regulation and theatrical spectatorship come directly into conflict with one another. Jacobean tragedies such as *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster and *The Changeling* by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley especially demonstrate this conflict through their portrayal of regulatory forces on the stage. In other words, these plays ask us to consider what it means when observation as a form of regulation is placed within a theatrical context. Below, I argue that the regulation of female sexuality is not simply a key thematic and plot component of Jacobean tragedies. Rather, the spectacular and visual nature of Jacobean tragedy creates ideal moments to understand how observation as a form of knowledge works in service of maintaining systems of regulation. Indeed, the use of spectacle in Jacobean tragedy to depict female sexuality reveals how the link between observable visual signs and regulatory practices can unravel through putting bodies on display in performative settings. Thus, we can begin to account for the grand and excessive spectacle of sexuality associated with Jacobean tragedy by understanding how it troubles the connection between observation and regulation.

### *Spectacle of the Scaffold and the Stage*

Both the theater and early modern regulation place the body in situations where it becomes legible before an audience attempting to form an understanding about the meaning of behavior through visual signs. Indeed, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault examines early modern systems of regulation in a chapter called “The

Spectacle of the Scaffold,” highlighting how early modern torture as a mechanism of regulation functions as a kind of perverse theater. Within the early modern penal system, torture becomes a ritualized and public spectacle that encodes the status of guilt or innocence:

It is an element in the liturgy of punishment and meets two demands. It must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy; even if its function is to purge the crime, torture does not reconcile; it traces around or, rather, on the very body of condemned man signs that must not be effaced; in any case, men will remember public exhibition, the pillory, torture and pain duly observed. (Foucault 34)

Both the marking of the body and the public nature of early modern torture establish a mechanism of regulation. In this regard, torture writes several scripts of guilt or innocence that are “inscribed” on the body (Foucault 35). In other words, guilt or innocence becomes legible on the body—meaning that the signs produced by torture are subject to scrutiny by observers. To this point, the public nature of torture brings into focus the importance of an audience as a force of observation. In Foucault’s model, observation works to interpret the body under scrutiny and becomes the mechanism through which regulation is most easily sustained. More specifically, the public nature of torture also serves as a reminder to those watching of the potential pain that results from regulatory transgressions. Thus, early modern torture as a form of regulation highlights the ways that observation is used to interpret bodies under scrutiny, as well as how the act of observation itself can also serve as a regulation force.

According to Foucault, the way in which this model of observation places the body under scrutiny ultimately reaffirms the centralized power of the state. Foucault argues that confession, often produced by torture and an essential part of the early modern penal system, works to produce truth (Foucault 39). As part of the ritual of torture, Foucault explains how confession after torture takes away the secret nature of judicial investigation and hearings in order to create a “mechanism” for determining truth (Foucault 39). In several ways, then, torture serves as both the investigation and the punishment. As Foucault writes:

In the practice of torture, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together: they work together on the patient’s body. The search for truth through judicial torture was certainly a way of obtaining evidence. The most serious of all—the confession of the guilty person, but it was also the battle, and this victory of one adversary over the other, that ‘produced’ truth according to a ritual. (Foucault 41)

There exists an underlying assumption in Foucault’s model that the body not only reveals guilt, but also reveals encoded political and social beliefs due to the public and ceremonial nature of the torture. More specifically, “punishment is also a way of exacting retribution that is both personal and political,” wielding the full power of the sovereign (Foucault 48). Torture, as such, works as a spectacle to demonstrate the absolute strength of centralized power, and those watching become complicit in reaffirming that same power that tortures or executes its citizens. The “pomp” associated with the ritual of torture is ultimately a “triumph of the law” (Foucault 49). In presenting a model of



observation linked to regulation and power, Foucault helps us to understand how early modern observation in the penal system is used to sanction and reaffirm state power.

Thus, Foucault's model of spectatorship and observation as it relates to the early modern penal system demonstrates how early modern regulation renders the body legible through techniques of observation. However, even though we use the same language of spectacle to describe both the theater and the early modern legal system, I believe it is also critical to ask whether these two systems produce the same types of observations from their spectators. The permanent, commercial theaters that emerged in the sixteenth century are especially relevant for understanding early modern observation. Several early modern accounts of theatergoing describe the audience as spectators, highlighting how the audience responds to visual cues based on the representation of the actors. For example, a letter from Henry Jackson in 1610 describes watching *Othello* from the audience:

Moreover, that famous Desdemona killed before us by her husband, although she always her whole part supremely well, yet when she was killed she was even more moving, for when she fell back upon the bed she implored *the pity of the spectators* by her face. (Dillon 86, emphasis added)

This quote aptly describes the emotional impact of theater on its audiences, as well as the general power of acting. Jackson does not describe the impact of the language or dialogue between the characters, but rather focuses on the power of the actor's face as a visual cue to solicit a reaction from the audience. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Early Modern*

*Theater*, Janette Dillon uses this quotation along with others to discuss how audiences behave during tragedies. Dillon argues that

it is unlikely that the companies would have performed anything other than comedies and rabble-rousing heroics if audiences had not been capable of listening and responding to the full variety of plays that were in fact on offer. (86)

Given the nature of Henry Jackson's letter, we know that audiences responded to the theater in very specific ways, including through the use of visual cues given by the actors' bodies. Thus, implicit in Dillon's argument is this broader idea about *how* people experience the theater as spectators responding to observable moments on the stage.<sup>1</sup> Spectatorship as a form of observation helps us to understand that observation is not simply the act of seeing something, but rather requires a sort of active engagement with, or response to, the visual signs on the part of the observer.

Dillon further discusses the relationship between actors and audiences, arguing that Jacobean spatial features for viewing were "shared, open and interactive" between the audience and the actors, meaning that early modern drama straddled two worlds: the real world and the world of fiction (89). The "fiction" of the play is located through the use of costumes and props, as well as through spatial use of the stage—the further from the audience a character is, "the more easily he is perceived as inhabiting that fictional world" (Dillon 89). Conversely, the actor loses his fictional markers when he moves

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<sup>1</sup> To this end, the *Oxford English Dictionary* has two definitions of spectator that are of worth for this paper. The first can be traced back to use in 1586, "a person who sees, or looks on at, some scene or occurrence; a beholder, onlooker, observer" (s.v., "spectator" *OED* def. 1.a). Four years later, there is evidence that the word was used to describe the theater specifically: "a person who is present at, and has a view or sight of, anything in the nature of a show or spectacle" (s.v., "spectator" *OED* def. 2.a).

closer to the edge of a performance scene or does not use props, such as during a monologue or soliloquy (Dillon 89). Props, costumes, and staging all share categorization as visible cues that are subject to observation by the audience. Indeed, the visual cues of theater uniquely situate the audience as an interpretive force within the shared space. By breaking down this distinction between the real world and the fictional world of the play through visual representation, it seems that early modern theater does not and cannot serve as strict escapism. In other words, the interactive space between the actors and the audience shapes theatrical observation beyond the appreciation of a fictional story. Instead, the relationship between the audience and the actors begins to demonstrate how theatrical observation functions as an interpretive tool.

In *The Shakespearean Stage*, Andrew Gurr argues that early modern drama relies upon moments of spectacle to convince audiences that the action on the stage is “real” through using “special [effects] designed to intensify the inherent comedy or tragedy of its occasion” (184). In other words, the visual and observable moments of spectacle are supposed to convince the audience of the play’s realism despite also revealing the highly constructed nature of the drama. There indeed seems to be a relationship between the visual representation of actors, costumes, props, and, of course, spectacle in establishing the fictional portions of the play, while also maintaining the theater as a shared space between actor and audience. Moreover, this tension between visual representations of fiction and realism relates to the purpose of the theater and the audience. Since the action performed on the stage is not done in an escapist manner but rather acknowledges its connection to the world of the audience, it seems that the theater can serve as a tool of critique—allowing for plays to hold more meaning than simply plot and storytelling. In

turn, the spectators must understand these plays through a critical lens that might turn them into critics themselves. Such deconstruction of the fictitious and the real through an observable manner in early modern drama demonstrates how theatrical observation works as an interpretative and critical force.

Although these characteristics apply more broadly to early modern drama, I argue that the spectacular nature associated with Jacobean drama also demonstrates how theatrical observation works as a mechanism of interpretation. Similarly, Anja Müller-Wood describes Jacobean tragedy as a theater of excess with “its bloody bombast, hyperactive, emotionality and graphic violence” (9). In *Theater of Excess: New Perspectives on Jacobean Tragedy*, Müller-Wood gives a history of criticism on Jacobean tragedy that accounts for the genre’s aesthetic and theatrical excess (13). According to Müller-Wood, scholars writing in the mid 1960s “set out to explain the excess of Jacobean tragedy as an expression of deeply-felt morality on the part of the playwrights” (13). In reaction to the moralizing scholarship, critics such as J.W. Lever in his book *The Tragedy of State* decided to “[foreground] the political quality of the plays’ excess” (Müller-Wood 13).<sup>2</sup> In her reading of the aesthetic excess of Jacobean tragedy, Müller-Wood attempts to break down this dichotomy between viewing the excess as representative of a moral or political plight through using the works of Foucault and Lacan as interpretative lenses to understand both the subversive and psychological

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Jonathan Dollimore’s *Radical Tragedy* “reads early modern revenge tragedies as staging the last resort of alienated individuals creating destructive sub-cultures ‘dedicated to revenge’” (Müller-Wood 13-4). Similarly, Francis Barker “links the excesses of early modern drama with the violence of early modern culture, suggesting that the violence of these plays reflected the violence of the Elizabethan and Jacobean crown” (Müller-Wood 13-4).

aspects of Jacobean tragedy.<sup>3</sup> As John Huntington describes in a review of Müller-Wood's work, "her general thesis is that by depicting and acknowledging excess, whether of absence or of surplus, the drama allows the author and the audience to gain power over those excesses and explore them at their leisure" (686). The excess or spectacle associated with Jacobean tragedy creates ideal moments when the role of the audiences as observers allows for them to be critically and interpretatively engaged.

In addition to visual excess, Jacobean tragedy also differs from other forms of early modern drama due to the rise of the indoor playhouses, which uniquely re-configure theatrical observation.<sup>4</sup> John H. Astington primarily gives social reasons for the rise of indoor theaters—ranging from the expansion of the city of London and increase in "civic wealth and power arising from foreign trade reached new heights," particularly in the west end of London where many of the first indoor playhouses were built (Astington 26). These indoor playhouses were smaller—roughly a third of the size of the globe by modern estimates—and had seats for the entire audience that were charged at a significantly higher price (Astington 27). But more importantly, there were indeed features of the indoor theater that affected performances. In addition to the smaller size of the theater and the more expensive seating, the indoor theater also allowed for

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<sup>3</sup> Müller-Wood uses Foucault's model of discursive containment to argue that "by putting violence, bloodshed and terror on the stage, early modern playwrights demonstrated their ability to rein them in...As I will suggest, Jacobean tragedy is less a mirror of fixed moral positions than a stage for the evolution of these positions; rather than teaching a specific morality, it illustrates how morality is achieved through the strategic representation of its immoral other. The problematic implication of this dialectic is obvious: discursively taming excess, these plays reveal that the moral messages they propose rely upon an unsettling underside" (19). In other words, Müller-Wood uses Foucault to understand the process by which a moral discourse is shaped through a theatrical imagination.

<sup>4</sup> Both *The Duchess of Malfi* and the *The Changeling* were performed inside indoor playhouses, the Second Blackfriars and The Phoenix theater, respectively (Dustagheer 254, 257).

productions to experiment with lighting and musical accompaniment, which contributed to the spectacle found in Jacobean tragedy.

The indoor theater also changed the ways in which the audiences interacted with or observed the actors. In her essay “The Audience of the Indoor Theater,” Penelope Woods examines how audiences engaged with dead, female bodies on the stage.<sup>5</sup> Wood argues that “this different, voyeuristic regime of looking produces a different affect” that places the audience in “greater proximity to the actor’s body” (Woods 154). Indeed, Woods uses the same letter from Henry Jackson observing the death of Desdemona in *Othello* to argue that “Jackson’s account...perhaps proposes a complex condition of proximate voyeurism instantiated at the indoor theater, in which doing *certain* things (rather than saying things) might move an audience to tears” given its proximity to the stage to fully engage with the actors and their bodies (Woods 156). In other words, observing actors in the indoor theater allowed for greater proximity and intimacy between actors and audience—meaning that the actors’ bodies could fully observed by the audience through an emotional connection.

Although the early modern penal system and early modern theater share a similar vocabulary based in spectatorship, the interpretation of bodies and the role of the audience of these two systems ultimately present very different understandings of observation. For Foucault, observation itself works as a form of regulation that forces us to read the body in terms of the signs it produces. Although the body is placed under a type of scrutiny, there is little interpretation to the meanings of the signs produced by the

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<sup>5</sup> Both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling* depict the dead bodies of the female protagonist on the stage. Indeed, the deaths of both Beatrice and The Duchess—along with the deaths of other female characters—are performed on the stage and serve as climactic and moralizing points for the two plays.

body. Instead, those engaged in observing the spectacle of the scaffold are reminded of the power of the state, and the body itself becomes a sign of that power. Observation as regulation, then, reinforces the mechanisms of power that force the body to be subject to interpretation of potentially arbitrary signs of guilt or innocence. Similarly, theatrical observation places the body under scrutiny. However, the medium of theater seems to allow for interpretation and even critique of what is being observed. I argue that the theater is form of decentralized power that takes into consideration the role of the playwright, the actors, and the audience in producing a given staging of a show. Thus, the visual signs produced by the theater can create potentially endless significance. Below I argue that both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling* examine this relationship between regulation as observation and theatrical observation through the plays' uses of spectacle to depict the regulation of female sexuality.

*Female Sexuality, Observation, and Jacobean Tragedy*

Both *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling* feature strong female leads who transgress the prescribed bounds of female sexuality. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess secretly remarries and starts a new family against her brothers' wishes, while in *The Changeling* Beatrice-Joanna loses her virginity to her father's servant as a form of payment for the murder of her fiancé so she can marry a man of her own choosing. In both of these examples, the female characters transgress the prescribed bounds of female sexuality by removing patriarchal figures from the process of deciding their marriages. In turn, both of these women are able to have a sense of agency—however limited in actuality once they are punished for their transgressions—over their sexual and reproductive choices. The themes of female sexuality and patriarchy are explicit in *The*

*Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, as evident by the copious amount of scholarly work completed through a feminist lens.

Feminist scholarship related to *The Duchess of Malfi* tends to focus on the power dynamics associated with the Duchess and questions the amount of agency that she exhibits throughout the play. Theodora A. Jankowski was among the first to analyze the Duchess as a political figure rather than a victimized, private figure. Indeed, this shift is significant for she reads the Duchess's secret marriage as a threat to the broader social and political scene rather than simply an act of disobedience. In her essay "Defining/Confining the Duchess: Negotiating the Female Body in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*," Jankowski argues that the Duchess slips between embodying the body natural of a private widow and the body politic associated with her political position as a duchess—indicating both the public and the private significance of her decision to marry not only against her brothers' wishes but also wed a man beneath her social station (229). Through controlling her own marriage, the Duchess is able to subvert marriage as the major mechanism of regulating female sexuality. Jankowski views this subversion on two levels:

First, in her decision to keep her marriage 'private' and separate from her 'public' identity as a ruler; second, in her unconventional concept of what a marriage between a man and a woman might be like. This marriage—both in choosing a virtuous husband and the ceremony itself—represents the major conflict between the Duchess's natural and political bodies in the play. In actively choosing her own husband in marrying him in a way



that scorns accepted legal practices, the Duchess reinforces her sense of self as a political person. (234)

Jankowski's argument is indeed significant, for it highlights *The Duchess of Malfi* as a play not only describing family dynamics but also portraying the consequences of female subversion on political power.

The second area of focus dedicated to criticism on *The Duchess of Malfi* is Ferdinand's obsessive and incestuous regulation of his sister's sexual acts. In his essay "Incest and Ideology," Frank Whigham argues that most readings of *The Duchess of Malfi* apply two types of analysis when discussing Ferdinand, "psychological inquiry (what are Ferdinand's motives?) and moral evaluation (what is the status of the duchess's marriage to Antonio)" (263). Instead, Whigham turns to question the relationship between Ferdinand and the Duchess—arguing that we should read their relationship in terms of anthropological notions of incest (263). Essentially, Whigham argues that Ferdinand's incestuous desire for his sister is representative of his desire to only associate with the upper class and his fear of mixing with the non-noble class:

The taboo enjoins transfamilial bonding: when Ferdinand flouts the taboo he violently refuses such relations. His categorical pride drives him to a defiant extreme: he narrows his kind from class to family, and affirms it as absolutely superior, ideally alienated from the infections of interactive social life. The duchess then becomes a symbol, flooded with affect of his own radical purity. (266)

Importantly, Whigham's project demonstrates the political impact of incestuous desire and reveals incest as a potentially perverse mechanism of patriarchal control over class structure.

Second, feminist scholarship on *The Changeling* circles around Beatrice's sexuality and the consequences of her transgressive acts. Jennifer Panek is among the first to explore the relationship between female sexuality and shame in *The Changeling*. In her essay "Shame and Pleasure in *The Changeling*," Panek argues,

The idea of finding erotic enjoyment, for both men and women, in female sexual shame was very much available to an early modern audience...while *The Changeling* works to produce the audience's shame-induced titillation at the moment of Beatrice-Joanna's imminent defloration, it revisits this enjoyment with a devastating critical difference, to unsettle the audience's acceptance of the moral order that Alsemero declares resorted by Beatrice-Joanna's shameful death. (192)

Panek offers a unique avenue to understand the impact of intensely regulating female sexuality. More specifically, her reading of *The Changeling* demonstrates how "a culture that produces female shame by frightening female desire and arousal with prohibitions will end up transmuting its own anxieties" about the pleasure that other characters and the audiences receive from watching female shame.

The virginity test scenes in *The Changeling* also provide ample opportunity for feminist critique. Douglas Duncan gives us a foundational reading of how *The Changeling* demonstrates that virginity is an over-valued social concept. In his essay appropriately titled "Virginity in *The Changeling*," he argues that the play treats virginity

as a religious ideal “inseparable from virtue and holy marriage” (Duncan).<sup>6</sup> Duncan uses biblical allegory to frame his reading of virginity, arguing that we can see similarities between Beatrice’s loss of her virginity and the fall of Adam and Eve. Ultimately, he argues that virginity in *The Changeling* serves as a “study of religious delusions leading to tragedy,” essentially labeling virginity itself as a delusion (Duncan). Although grounded in a reading based in scriptural interpretation, Duncan’s analysis is useful because it points to how the play seeks to criticize and delegitimize virginity.

This project’s readings of *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling* fall within these lines of feminist criticism. In what follows, I expand upon existing readings of patriarchal power, incest, female sexuality and virginity in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling* by focusing on theatrical form and style. The spectacle of Jacobean tragedy presents a unique opportunity to understand the relationship between observation and the regulation of female sexuality, since spectacle highlights the visual nature of theater. As we saw with theatrical observation and regulation as observation, observation as an epistemology has many different modes. I argue that *The Duchess of Malfi* uses a Calvinist model of observation that uses the interpretation of visual signs not only as a mechanism of regulation, but also as a method of maintaining the supremacy of power structures. On the other hand, *The Changeling* uses a Baconian model of observation that privileges observation as a form of skepticism and critique.

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<sup>6</sup> He discusses the difference between virginity in Protestantism and Catholicism, arguing that “with regard to virginity, Protestant and Catholic teaching diverged in that the former stressed the exercise of moral self-discipline involved in restraining the flesh, while the latter laid its emphasis on the preservation of a spiritual state akin to innocence” (Duncan).

However, looming in the background in both of these plays—despite their difference in depicting observation in relationship to the regulation of female sexuality—is the role of theatrical observation that invites the interpretation of the audience as integral to the theater-making process, giving the audience’s observation a status of power. This project examines the tension between using observation as a mechanism of regulation and the type of observation that occurs when engaging with theater as an audience. I argue that theatrical observation serves as a potential remedy for observation as regulation, since theatrical observation allows for multiplicity of meaning, whereas observation as regulation tends to uphold one form of centralized meaning and power. In other words, theatrical observation has a potentially subversive power. I argue that we can account for the spectacle of Jacobean tragedy through analyzing these plays through this broader lens of theatrical observation, which makes sense of spectacle as prime opportunities for interpretation and criticism.

**Chapter One:** Calvinist Observation in *The Duchess of Malfi*

As the *Duchess of Malfi* opens, Ferdinand asks Bosola to become “an intelligencer” (1.1.167) and to inform him of “What suitors do solicit” the titular Duchess for her hand in marriage (1.1.160). Ferdinand’s request that Bosola serve as a spy asserts the primacy of surveillance for the regulation of female sexuality within the microcosm of the family. The motives of the Duchess’s brothers for hiring Bosola—the Cardinal’s former servant who spent time in jail for murder—are quite explicit: Ferdinand and the Cardinal do not want their widowed sister to remarry in order to maintain legal power and authority over her estate. Indeed, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, with their respective positions within the nobility and the Roman Catholic Church, represent overtly sanctioned, systematic patriarchal power.

The scenes where Ferdinand psychologically tortures the Duchess rely heavily upon spectacle and theatrics, making them inherently visual scenes that lend themselves well to observation. In these torture scenes, *The Duchess of Malfi* explores the role of observation as a mechanism of regulation. More specifically, Calvin’s framework of observation serves as an ideal lens through which to analyze how the regulatory power of observation can maintain patriarchal control both in the family apparatus and more broadly at the level of the state. The Calvinist model of observation centers on the interpretation of signs for visual discovery of God’s judgement, meaning that Calvinist observation is in service of maintaining a world order where God has the ultimate judgement on salvation. Indeed, a large component of Calvinist observation is also understanding how to interpret signs actively and correctly as well as how to self-regulate to maintain a good life and encounter signs of salvation. *The Duchess of Malfi*, however,

stages a perverse mode of Calvinist observation that not only uses the interpretation of visual signs in service of regulation and maintaining of order, but also demonstrates how regulatory power can be abused in a devastating fashion. Moreover, by analyzing the spectacular torture scenes of the play through Calvin's framework of observation, we see how the theater serves as an ideal medium through which to understand patriarchal power as a system that sanctions abuses such as incest, torture, and tyranny in the family.

*Calvinist Observation: Interpretation of Signs and Omniscient power*

Calvinism privileges observation as a method of discovering knowledge of God's plans for salvation, as Calvin notes in his seminal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The *Institutes* was first published in Latin in 1536, with translations into English and French in 1559. The 1559 *Institutes* also expands more fully on the Latin edition "to understand scripture as a whole and how to practice the Christian faith in the church and the world," making it a sort of guidebook for how Christians should live their lives (Mckee viii). In this regard, the 1559 *Institutes* formally presents divine providence and predestination as two key components of Calvinist doctrine (Mckee xiii). Such providence, in the words of Jon Balsarak, "relates to God's governing of all things; that is, his deciding, or willing, or (the theological term usually used) decreeing of all things" (84). And among God's decreeing of all things is the notion of predestination, which stipulates that God has "chosen" the people to convert, while all others are "bound to suffer eternally in hell," although no individual knows for certain whether they are among the elect (Balsarak 12). Thus, the practice of Calvinism attempts to discern God's will in order to know who is among the chosen. Part of this discovery process concerns preparationism or when "a person is to search inside herself for signs revealing that she is

one of those whom God has predestined—signs like sorrow for sin, a willingness to stop sinning, and a desire for forgiveness” (Balsarak 20). In addition to the search for inward, invisible signs, Calvinism relies heavily on visual, interpretable symbols as a way of discovering God’s judgement.

As a mode of knowledge, Calvinism primarily concerns itself with how to understand God in service of salvation—including observing visual signs as a reliable confirmation of God’s intentions. According to Calvin, people have some limited internal knowledge of God since “the Lord has breathed into all people some understanding of his Majesty” (25). However, despite “the effect of planting in our hearts some seed of religion,” both the “errors and wicked ideas” of the world and the “incomprehensible” nature of God interfere with our ability to obtain “the right knowledge” needed for salvation (Calvin 27, 30). Interestingly, Calvin uses the language of observation to posit that God’s “essential being is concealed from us” (Calvin 30). Calvin further claims that God’s intentions are at least in part made visible through “[engraving] in each one of His works certain signs of His majesty by which He offered himself to be known by us according to our small capacity” (30). Thus, the knowledge of God required for salvation—meaning the discovery of his judgements—is directly related to *seeing* “notable and obvious signs” (Calvin 30). For Calvin, the visible nature of these signs is indeed important, for they make God’s power “continually visible before our eyes” (30). Thus, Calvinist observation centers on discovering and interpreting signs related to salvation.

Rather than simply noticing signs of salvation, a Calvinist mode of observation requires a direct and contemplative engagement with the signs presented. More

specifically, Calvinist observation dictates not only that there is a proper way in which to engage in observation in interpreting signs, it also defends God's omnipotence. As Calvin writes:

Particularly you cannot look around and contemplate this beautiful masterpiece of the whole world, in its breadth and width, without (in a manner of speaking) being completely blinded by the infinite abundance of light. (30)

Although these visual signs are perhaps obvious even to the untrained eye, engaging with natural signs of God's power is not without focus and the knowledge of how to observe the world for signs of God's salvation. In other words, even though the "beautiful masterpiece of the whole world is on display," its observation is not passive. More specifically, the use of the word "contemplate," as chosen by the translator, in this passage indeed is significant given its definition: "To look at with continued attention, gaze upon, view, observe" (s.v., "contemplate" *OED* def. 2). The interaction with nature described by Calvin is both active and deliberate, and it requires the knowledge to observe the world in a particular way. Observation is not merely an act of looking at the world, but also is a tool for understanding how God has arranged the world in such a magnificent manner. In other words, part of this active contemplation associated with observation also includes discovering God's immense power over an individual's salvation and the world. Indeed, to this point, Calvin suggests that observing God for the sake of having full and complete knowledge of his power would blind us, further pointing to God's immense capabilities. More specifically, this type of active observation to discover signs of salvation is in the service of maintaining a specific vision of order. In



other words, Calvinist observation reaffirms both salvation as a practice as well as God's power to have the ultimate judgement on salvation, making Calvinist observation a tool of maintaining a hegemonic and patriarchal world view.

A Calvinist mode of observation helps us to understand the nature of visual spectacle and forms of observation in early modern drama. The spectacular nature of Jacobean tragedy in particular heightens the visual components of theater—foregrounding spectacle as a medium for interpreting visual signs in a contemplative and deliberate manner on behalf of both the characters on the stage and the audience. Furthermore, the intensely visual nature of spectacle tends to take invisible forces—such as power structures and systems of regulation—and make them visual in a similar way to the manner in which God's power revealed is to the world through the obvious physical beauty of the natural world. The structure of observation in *The Duchess of Malfi* is two-fold. First, the Calvinist mode of observation reveals systems of power. Second—and most importantly—the nature of the theater as an interactive art form between audience and actors also demonstrates how the contemplative observation for which Calvin advocates can also serve as a mechanism of critique against systems of power that are not only subject to abuse, but perhaps themselves are inherently tyrannical. More specifically, we can locate Calvinist observation through the ways in which *The Duchess of Malfi* uses the interpretation of visual signs in service of upholding systems of power to create cycles of containment. However, this form of theater as revealing power dynamics not only puts them on display, but also allows for us as the audience to critique how power structures can be abused.

*Torturing the Duchess: Revealing Patriarchal Power as Tyrannical and Abusive*

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the family is the primary mechanism of regulation, as indicated by the brothers' desire to control and regulate their sister's sexuality. In her well-known essay "Alice Arden's Crime," Catherine Belsey argues that the liberal humanist family of the seventeenth century becomes an ideal mechanism of regulation because it operates in a less visible manner. The family, in other words, appears to be apolitical and private, when in reality it offers a microcosm of political and social orders (Belsey 145-6). Belsey focuses primarily on the ways in which marriage regulates female sexuality. As she argues, marriage during the Middle Ages in England was considered an institution of regulation and surveillance of sexuality through its implementation of monogamy (Belsey 138). Later, in the eighteenth century, various Anglican courts tried to regulate sexuality and marriage, but not without difficulty since the divorce debate attempted to liberate marriage by removing God and salvation from the discourse to define marriage as a civil union (Belsey 139).<sup>7</sup> These conflicting meanings of marriage could not be separated from the realm of politics. As Belsey writes, "both sides make explicit the parallel between the family and the state, marriage and the monarch" (Belsey 143). Ultimately, the evolution of the liberal-humanist family has come to represent a "mechanism of regulation" and replaces the ecclesiastical courts in a "less visible" manner (Belsey 145). As a result, the private family becomes the ultimate mechanism of surveillance—both internalized and invisible (Belsey 147).

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<sup>7</sup>According to the Anglican and absolutist position on marriage, marriage "was indissoluble, that couples were joined by God for avoidance of fornication and the procreation of children, and there was no remedy but patience for marital disharmony or discontent" (Belsey 140). On the other hand, the Puritans defined marriage "as a civil covenant, a thing indifferent to salvation" dependent upon Consent rather than the power of God (Belsey 140).

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the micro/macrocosm relationship between the family and the political sphere becomes only more apparent through Ferdinand and the Cardinal's dual roles in the play as both brothers and public figures. In other words, in addition to existing in the play as the Duchess's brothers, they also exist as statesmen and clergy representing overt examples of patriarchal power. However, the family as a mechanism of regulation in *The Duchess of Malfi* is ultimately a perversion of Belsey's model. Upon learning of the Duchess's secret marriage and secret family, Ferdinand abandons the secret and silent regulation from Bosola's observation and resorts to torturing her as a form of both punishment and enforcement. Thus, rather than operating as an invisible force, Ferdinand's regulation of his sister becomes profoundly visible through its spectacular nature. *The Duchess of Malfi* demonstrates what happens when the family as a mechanism of regulation is placed in a theatrical context. The theater through its use of spectacle reveals the family as a mechanism of regulation that ultimately works in a similar manner to Foucault's spectacle of the scaffold. In other words, the use of spectacle makes visible the micro/macrocosm relationship between the family and the state.

The Duchess's brothers—particularly Ferdinand—are obsessed with regulating their sister's sexual acts. This obsession with the Duchess's sexuality not only links patriarchal control to the regulation of female sexuality, but ultimately reveals how patriarchal power is rooted in abuse and tyrannical control over women's bodies. When Ferdinand explains to the Duchess why she cannot remarry, his language becomes increasingly violent and sexual. Ferdinand threatens the Duchess by saying “you are my sister; / This was my father's poniard”—an obvious phallic symbol—to ensure that

Duchess understands the consequences for transgressing Ferdinand's regulation (Webster 1.3.38-9). We can read Ferdinand's threatening of his sister with a phallic symbol as a threat of sexual violence. In effectively threatening to rape his sister as a form of control over her, Ferdinand also expresses, at least symbolically, a degree of incestuous desire for her.

Interestingly, it is not until the Cardinal exits the scene that Ferdinand wields their father's sword against his sister—making this a private moment between Ferdinand and the Duchess. Although this threat of sexual violence happens as a preemptive form of regulation within the family, the incestuous nature of Ferdinand's advances prevents me from classifying this as part of Belsey's model of familial regulation. Even though this interaction is private within the family, Ferdinand's threat does not exist as an invisible mechanism of regulation, as is the case with Belsey's formulation of the family as a regulatory microcosm. Instead, this form of regulation is visible and overt, bringing us to the role of observation in this scene. In making regulation observable, the sword acts as a visible sign for the Duchess to interpret as a threat if she commits any sexual transgression against her brother's wishes, thereby reinforcing Ferdinand's patriarchal power. Furthermore, as a form of Calvinist observation, the use of the sword as a visible form of regulation simultaneously condemns the Duchess's transgressions while sanctioning Ferdinand's incestuous and violent desires as necessary to regulate female sexuality within the realm of patriarchal power. Indeed, this threat of torture from Ferdinand is similar to Foucault's understanding of the spectacle of the scaffold as a place where the body of the tortured represents and sanctions violence in service of maintaining an absolute and centralized monarchial—or in this case patriarchal—power.

More specifically, Ferdinand couches his violent and incestuous threat with an outward and public consequence. Ferdinand warns that the Duchess will be shamed by wearing “a visor and a mask,” articles of clothing traditionally associated with women who frequent carnivals and the theater, places where sexual moral codes are consistently broken (Webster 1.3.41). This threat of forcing the Duchess to wear a visor and a mask demonstrates how the issue of female sexuality is both a private and public concern. If the two threats ever happened, the Duchess would encounter the sword in private between herself and Ferdinand, while wearing this specific dress would mark her as transgressive in the public eye. Indeed, both the visor and the mask are visible signs that fit within the Calvinist mode of observation that uses signs in service of regulation. Given the public consequences for transgressive sexual behavior, at first glance it makes sense that Ferdinand would be concerned with protecting his sister’s reputation and image. As the patriarch of his family, protecting the reputation of the Duchess would be part of his duties and within the norm of patriarchal power. In other words, patriarchal power can be nonviolent—after all, the Duchess would only have to wear a visor and mask as her punishment. The public threat removes the bodily harm. It seems, then, that public nature of patriarchal power seeks to legitimize itself, while patriarchal power in private reveals itself as abusive, tyrannical, and incestuous—all of which we can consider as transgressive attributes.

Ferdinand’s threat of violence becomes a reality when he psychologically tortures the Duchess for marrying Antonio and having his children. This climactic scene between the siblings uses stage lighting and intense props, which point to the use of spectacle in Ferdinand’s torture. In this scene, there are two main props: a wax hand and wax figures

of the Duchess's family. In the reality of the play, the wax hand imitates Antonio's hand, while the wax figures represent the dead bodies of the Duchess's children and Antonio. The visual cues for this scene are complex. When the Duchess first enters the scene, Ferdinand tells her that "this darkness suits you well," indicating that this scene is happening in the dark and that the characters cannot see each other (4.1.31). Ferdinand tells the Duchess that he has come "to seal [his] peace" with her through offering a hand for her to kiss (4.1.43). At this point, due to the darkness of the scene, the Duchess believes that she is kissing Antonio's hand, as Ferdinand tells her that she has "vowed much love" to the hand and gave "the ring upon 't," referring to the Duchess's marriage and Antonio's wedding ring (4.1.44-5). In actuality Ferdinand "*gives her a dead man's hand*," according to the stage directions (4.1). And as the Duchess "affectionately [kisses] it," Ferdinand tells the Duchess to "bury the print of it in your heart" and that she can have both the ring and "the heart too" (4.1.50). Ferdinand exclaims "let her have lights enough" after the Duchess remarks that the hand is cold—revealing the dead man's hand and the wax figures of her family and signaling that this scene is the psychological torture of the Duchess through visible signs (4.1.54).

In his essay "Light and Darkness in the Indoor Jacobean Theatre," Martin White explains how both the Blackfriars theater and the Globe would have used different techniques to bring the stage to darkness and then reveal the action using light. White argues that *The Duchess of Malfi* was meant to be performed in an indoor theater given that

the detailed use of light and darkness to create states that not only enhance the atmosphere of scenes but also reflect the shifting emotional moods of

the play, so enriching the theatrical experience for the audience in many ways unavailable on the daylight stage of the Globe. (132)

As White explains, in order to achieve the necessary darkness for this torture scene, candles in the chandeliers would have been extinguished in between the third and fourth acts, and the chandeliers would have been hoisted into a higher position (134). The shutters near the stage would have been closed and the light outside would already be fading at 3:45 p.m., the start time of the fourth act; at the beginning of the fourth act, Bosola extinguishes and removes the candles on and near the stage on orders from Ferdinand (White 134): “the stage will now not only appear, but of course actually *be*, darker than at any point of the play thus far” (134). Due to the near darkness on the stage, the audience would be in the same position as the Duchess: unaware that she is kissing a severed hand. When Ferdinand allows for light to reveal his diabolical plan, White argues that “a torch is used here, no doubt, not only because of its ability to focus the attention of specific things on stage, illumination them surrounded by darkness, but also because its intensity fits the violence and horror of these moments” (134-5).<sup>8</sup>

In this torture scene—assuming that it was performed in an indoor theater—the audience and the Duchess are aligned in their roles as Calvinist observers and experience the same shock upon realizing that Ferdinand is holding a severed hand. The light’s function as a revealing force has two purposes: to show us both the severed hand and the

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<sup>8</sup> When *The Duchess of Malfi* was performed at the Globe, “it provided an example of how a play might be radically changed depending on its venue” (White 135). Unable to plunge the stage and its audience into darkness given the nature of an outdoor theater during the day, the Globe instead would use instruments to signify the darkness along with verbal references (White 136). As White argues, the audience at the Globe “where the audience could presumably see what Ferdinand was doing, they would observe the cruelty enacted upon her” rather than experience the same shock as the Duchess in revealing the wax bodies and the dead hand (136).

true nature of patriarchal power as abusive and tyrannical. As the Duchess kisses the hand in the dark, Ferdinand asks the Duchess to pour her heart and love into the hand and its wedding ring. But once light is added to the scene and all parties involved see the severed hand, and we retroactively understand Ferdinand's speech as a parody of wedding vows—signaling how Ferdinand uses incestuous desire to torture and punish the Duchess for her transgressions. If we take a moment, it would be helpful to envision how this scene would play on the stage: the Duchess is caressing and kissing a severed hand being held in her brother's own hand. Thus, by extension, the Duchess is caressing and kissing her brother's hand and his vows refer to himself and his sister. Indeed, the severed hand becomes a visual symbol of Ferdinand's incestuous desire and his regulatory power, since he is torturing the Duchess for disobeying his orders. In other words, upon observing the hand, both the Duchess and the audience are aware that it serves as a visual form of torture similar to Foucault's spectacle of the scaffold. Both Calvinist observation and Foucault's observation as regulation allow us to understand the hand as a visual symbol of Ferdinand's power. But unlike Foucault's model of observation as regulation, the torture in this scene is done in private, and the use of lighting to create spectacle demonstrates how patriarchal power itself is transgressive through the use of torture, abuse, and incest.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to torturing the Duchess with the severed hand, Ferdinand also displays wax figures of the Duchess children and Antonio, which he hopes will trick her

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<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand is not the only male character who demonstrates the transgressive qualities of patriarchal power through the regulation of female sexuality. The Cardinal's sexual relationship and murder of his mistress, Julia, provides another example of how patriarchal power reveals itself as abusive and tyrannical through torturing female bodies. The Cardinal kills Julia after he admits to her that he played a role in strangling the Duchess and her children. The Cardinal kills Julia by presenting her with a poisoned Bible that she must kiss and swear upon that she will not reveal the Cardinal's secret.



into thinking that her entire secret and illicit family is dead. Similar to the use of lighting, the role of the wax figures as props also highlights the spectacle of the torture scene. But rather than highlight Calvinist observation and observation as regulation, the wax figures point especially to the role of theatrical observation in the play. Indeed, wax is an interesting medium for the fake bodies.<sup>10</sup> In her article “Wax Magic and *The Duchess of Malfi*,” Lynn Maxwell explains that “wax’s ability to mimic both the appearance and feel of human flesh led to its use in anatomy sculptures during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (34). Maxwell further argues that the wax figures ultimately affirm Ferdinand’s power “since he needs to actually catch [the Duchess’s] family and execute them to destroy her” (40). Thus, this use of spectacle is indeed a deceptive one, and the Duchess and the audience learn at different moments in the play that corpses are just wax figures. As Maxwell argues, the wax figures highlight the artificiality of the scene:

To the extent that we sympathize with the plights of characters and mourn their deaths, we collapse together the actors playing and the characters being played, repeatedly forgetting that we are watching fiction. Indeed, moments when playwrights draw attention to the artificiality of their spectacle are noteworthy precisely because they rupture the illusion created on stage. (50)

In rupturing the illusion created on stage, the role of the wax figures uniquely draws the audience’s attention in a critical manner in a moment of theatrical observation. The wax figures demonstrate how theatrical representations can create meaning in a complicated

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<sup>10</sup> However, it remains unclear whether productions of *The Duchess of Malfi* would actually have access to wax figures, which were an expensive medium of art to be commissioned. Maxwell suggests that “the wax sculptures would have been played by actors in exactly the same way that corpses would have been” (50).

way. More specifically, theatrical observation demonstrates how there can be multiple ways of understanding visual signs, including those symbolic of the Duchess's grief and transgression as well as representative of Ferdinand's unwieldy and incestuous power. This form of theatrical observation, then, creates a dynamic understanding of theatrical representation.

Indeed, Calvinist observation and theatrical observation can support one another in understanding how patriarchal power is transgressive in *The Duchess of Malfi* as a means of regulating female sexuality. Despite revealing the transgressive characteristics of patriarchal power, *The Duchess of Malfi* ends in a corrective measure that is hopeful of the ability of the state to work in a "normal" regulatory fashion. The last monologue of the play delivered by Delio—a courtier who was not involved in the mess between the siblings—attempts to restore patriarchal power as simply a force of non-corrupt regulatory power. After the murder of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, the son of the Duchess and Antonio is brought to the stage: he is now an only child without any parents, thus removing the possibility of incest. In removing the possibility of incestuous torture, it seems that the son would not have the same opportunity as his uncle to abuse patriarchal power in the privacy of his home. Delio wants "to establish this young hopeful gentleman / In 's mother's right," meaning that the son will inherit his mother's station and position (5.4.8-11). As a result, the son, too, will participate within the system that sanctions patriarchal power.

On the stage, the son becomes a visible sign—in keeping with Calvinist observation—of total and omniscient systematic power. This last visual on stage is supposed to be a hopeful one. The three siblings and Bosola are dead, and the rest of the

court seeks normalcy after so much death. However, spectacle in *The Duchess of Malfi* also highlights the role of the audience as an interpretative force through theatrical observation, and throughout the play's darkest scenes the audience is aligned with the Duchess as she is tortured. But rather than simply creating sympathy for the Duchess, theatrical observation allows us to understand how Ferdinand's transgressions are the result of unchecked patriarchal power—causing us to question the validity of continuing patrilineal lines through the Duchess's son. Instead, the spectacle of torture overshadows this moment and we are left reminded of a system of power that is at its worst when regulating and punishing women for transgressing the boundaries of sexuality imposed by patriarchal power that allows abuse, incest, and tyranny.

## Chapter Two: Baconian Observation in *The Changeling*

In 1613, Frances Howard found herself at the center of an infamous national sex scandal. During court proceedings to secure a divorce from her husband, the Earl of Essex, Howard underwent a physical examination by a group of female jurors to prove that her marriage had never been consummated and that her virginity remained intact. Despite the fact that Howard had previously submitted to the court a statement testifying to her virginity and the results of the examination declared her a virgin, many in the court remained unconvinced that Howard truly was a virgin. In fact, the entire divorce proceedings and Howard's virginity became a matter of national importance and fascination. These events brought into the spotlight the uncertainties and ambiguities of proving a woman's status as a virgin, which was important in upper-class families for ensuring birth lines, property rights, and, of course, the validity and legality of marriage as an institution.

In her essay "Bodily Narratives and the Politics of Virginity in *The Changeling* and the Essex Divorce," Sara Luttfriing explains how, despite the widespread anxiety about virginity, the mechanisms for proving virginity were at best inconsistent—medical professionals did not agree if presence of the hymen was evidence of virginity and a woman's blushing could be a sign of both sexual indecency and purity (98-9). Thus, since medical examination did not offer any type of definitive proof, a different method was needed to determine a woman's sexual status. As Luttfriing describes, people instead turned to "the assumption that a woman's outward appearance and conduct would mirror her inward physical state" (100). Since a woman's word could not be trusted, her virginity had to be proven through observable signs. But this method had its own

problems, for men quickly realized that women could easily fake or even perform purity (Luttfring 100).

It should come as no surprise that the Essex scandal served as deliberate inspiration for the scenes depicting virginity tests in *The Changeling* (Luttfring 97), especially considering that the same anxieties surrounding the observable nature of virginity is also at the center of the play. As in the case of Howard's own virginity test, *The Changeling* takes to task the regulatory power associated with observation when it comes into conflict with the power of performance and spectacle. In this chapter, I argue that Bacon's mode of observation serves as an ideal lens through which to analyze the tension between regulation and performance in the virginity test scenes. More specifically, it seems that observation in *The Changeling* functions as a Baconian tool of skepticism through its demand for active experimentation and critical thought. Beatrice's ability to perform virginity works as an observable subversion of the systems of regulation through creating an atmosphere of skepticism that questions the legitimacy of virginity as a mechanism to control female sexuality. Moreover, by analyzing the virginity test scenes through the lens of Bacon's theory of observation, I argue that performance itself in *The Changeling* serves as an experimental laboratory that calls for the active questioning of regulatory systems—turning observation from an integral aspect of implementing regulation into a force of subversion.

#### *Bacon's Model of Observation: Skepticism and Subversion*

In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon introduces his model of scientific observation, which includes a heavy reliance on experiential learning and the use of tools—two aspects that help us to distinguish Bacon's model of observation. In

advocating for experiential learning, Bacon calls “upon men to sell their books and to build a furnace” (172). Books provide knowledge in a second-hand fashion, whereas the “building of a furnace” provides direct, hands-on experience that ultimately provides a builder with more knowledge about a furnace than a reader. As such, Bacon wants us to consider that books are “not only the instrumentals” for learning, and instead tools such as “spheres, globes, astrolabes, maps, and the like” are preferable because these tools require us to understand nature through observational and visual terms (172). Since the tools Bacon mentions are all related to the visual interpretation of the natural world or visual representations of the natural world itself, Bacon’s natural philosophy privileges active, visual engagement with nature, or what I will call Baconian observation.

In addition to allowing for experiential learning, the use of tools and instruments alleviates the mistakes that people are prone to make without tools since “by often seeing or hearing, we do not learn to see or hear the better” (Bacon 260). Bacon highlights this idea that natural philosophy differs from other and older forms of observation since naked eyesight cannot be trusted. The intersection between observation, experimentation, and tools is crucial for understanding how discovery functions as Bacon’s ideal mode of knowledge. Simply observing the natural world through the senses does not necessarily produce the best knowledge. As Lorraine Daston argues, Bacon explains that the use of tools allows for “reasoned experience” to take place, or for critical thinking to occur about what is observed (82). In fact, Bacon’s “artificial experiments” use the laboratory as a tool to imitate nature in order to understand nature, for “only once nature had been understood could it be commanded” (Daston 86). Thus, the use of tools both manipulates the senses for accurate observation as well as nature to strengthen in order to control the

experimental process. As Daston explains, “the language of artifice, invention, manipulation, demonstration...and casual inquiry defined the *experimentum*,” highlighting the importance of tools in relation to interpretation (86). Bacon’s use of tools and distrust of the senses on their own demonstrates how experimentation and observation become increasingly intertwined in Bacon’s world, since good observation needs to be supported by thoughtful and critical experiments. It seems, then, that observation and revelatory discovery would become increasingly related, too.

In addition to relying on physical instruments, Bacon also considers doubt and skepticism as tools of interpretation that work to combat human error and to advance knowledge. In this way, doubt directly relates to Bacon’s quest for discovering new knowledge rather than simply discounting existing knowledge. As he explains:

The entry of doubts are as so many suckers or sponges to draw use of knowledge; insomuch as that which, if doubts had not proceeded, a man should never have advised but passed it over without note, by the suggestion and solicitation of doubt is made to be attended and applied.

(Bacon 203)

Like a sponge, doubt absorbs knowledge and has the capacity to touch all or seep into aspects of knowledge. Through this metaphor, it seems again that Bacon demonstrates not only the importance of critical engagement with the particularities of nature, but also defines doubt specifically as one form of that critical engagement. As such, doubt becomes a mode of interpretation that should be “attended and applied” to scientific observations when thinking about how particularities relate to the general. Doubt, however, is at its most useful when it “laboureth to make doubtful things certain, and not

... to make certain things doubtful” (Bacon 203). Doubt, then, also functions in service to Bacon’s ultimate project of applying inductive reasoning to moments of observation to reveal knowledge. Thus, although explicit mention of observation is lacking from Bacon’s discussion about doubt, I argue the connection he makes between experimentation and observation makes them one in the same— allowing us to consider a broader definition of observation. In particular, Bacon’s observation privileges how the relationship between experimentation and skepticism can contribute to the ways in which observations can become a subversive force.

I argue that the theater as a space of performance also privileges active engagement and observation—similar to the scientific tools of a telescope or microscope. More specifically, performative acts—the theatrical representations or moments of spectacle within plays—function as tools to engage in active and critical thinking about what is being portrayed on the stage. In relation to moments of regulation, the theater acts as an observational tool that helps to make mechanisms of regulation obvious when these moments typically otherwise behave like invisible forces. This form of theater as a tool of discovery is indeed subversive in the way that it challenges systems of order and the status quo—calling into question why we interpret certain bodily signs in a specific and regulatory fashion. It is in the overt moments of performativity and spectacle of the virginity test scenes in *The Changeling* that we can locate the Baconian model of observation that invites experimentation, skepticism, and ultimate subversion of the regulatory forces at play.



*The Results of Beatrice's Tests: Virginitv as Observable, Performable, and Subversive*

Throughout the play, Beatrice's character stands for the cognitive dissonance of discourse about virginitv—specifically about whether it is truly an observable, bodily state or simply a social construction associated with what it means to identify as an upper-class woman seeking marriage. At the beginning of the play, she calls virginitv “the dear companion of [her] soul” that she needs to part with “so rude and suddenly” upon marrying (1.1.185-90). Interestingly, although virginitv is clearly an important part of Beatrice's identity and perhaps religiosity with the reference to her soul, she does not view her virginitv through bodily terms. In fact, her virginitv almost seems like a private matter for herself and not part of the public scrutiny that we see in the Essex trial. However, upon marriage, Beatrice's virginitv is no longer just her concern, as indicated by her shift in tone from the gentleness and fondness of *my dear companion* when referring to her single life to the aggressiveness of *rude and suddenly* when referring to her upcoming nuptials—implying an outside force quite literally taking away her virginitv. More than simply a reference to her wedding night, this transition of virginitv from an aspect of individual identity to a communal anxiety suggests that the regulation of virginitv turns the private into matters of public concern. But, as we learn from the Essex divorce scandal, the anxieties surrounding virginitv and its regulation surface in the face of marriage.

Furthermore, once Beatrice is no longer a virgin, she seems to view virginitv no longer as part of her soul, but rather part of her physical and bodily anatomy. In her monologue that opens Act Four, she acknowledges that her lack of virginitv has become “ennobled in blood and mind” on her wedding night—highlighting the bodily aspect

associated with virginity (4.1.5). It is once Beatrice herself uses language to highlight her own body that we also hear the language of regulation surrounding the wedding night. For example, her use of words such as “judgments,” “crimes,” and “tribunals” to describe her wedding night—which she perhaps uses in part because her fear that her secret will be discovered—that the line between the bedroom and the courtroom is a thin one. A bride’s new husband can serve as the judge and jury when there is concern surrounding her virginity. Beatrice’s fear of regulatory judgement from her husband on her wedding night implies that there is also a way to prove that a woman is not a virgin, and her use of bodily language suggests that her own body will betray her. Interestingly, it is once Beatrice comes to this realization that there is some bodily aspect of virginity that she realizes it indeed can be performed and faked or, to put it more broadly, that it is defined in part through observation. Thus, through the character of Beatrice in particular, we can understand how virginity embodies what would appear as conflicting: simultaneously recognizing virginity as an essential, biological aspect of an upper-class woman and believing that virginity is a social phenomenon that can be performed. In both instances, the body is observed and interpreted for visual signs. In other words, highlighting the body and its ability to produce signs allows Beatrice to harness the power of performance, making the “realness” of virginity somewhat of a moot point. Instead, the relationship between the biological and the performative comes to the forefront in the scenes with the virginity test to create powerful moments for critique through observation.

The virginity test appears twice throughout the play: once when Beatrice administers the test to her handmaid Diaphanta in private and once when Beatrice fakes

her virginity before her upcoming wedding in front of a panel of men. And in both of these examples, Baconian observation plays a key role in creating the skepticism necessary to turn observation from a regulatory force to one of subversion. Beatrice first finds the virginity test in Alesmero's closet in a book called *The Book of Experiment, Called Secrets in Nature*, a title that alludes to natural philosophy. As evident from the title, this book aims to use experimentation to reveal nature's secrets, which is indeed the first step of Bacon's scientific method. The instructions for the experiment "to know whether a woman be a maid, or not" (4.1.40) read as follows:

Give the party you suspect the quantity of a spoonful of the water in the glass M, which upon her that is a maid makes three several effects: 'twill make her incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a violent laughing—else dull, heavy and lumpish. (4.1.45-50)

Not only does the test involve some level of scientific precision with exact measurements and symptoms, but more importantly it foregrounds both the body and the role of observation in relationship to experimentation. All of the symptoms of the test impact the body in some way—yawning, sneezing, and laughing—and are also all observable by the experimenter, associating scientific observation with the regulation of virginity. To this end, the virginity test very much seems in line with Foucault's spectacle of the scaffold where the body reveals inherent truths in an observable fashion—connecting observation and regulation.

However, given the somewhat ridiculous and random symptoms of the test that do not have anything to do with virginity, I cannot help but think that the virginity test in the play serves to parody virginity tests such as the one in the Essex divorce—giving us a

hint on the play's stance towards virginity and virginity tests. As Luttfiring argues, people, courts, and books continually attempted to outline physical symptoms that could prove virginity while simultaneously knowing that many of the methods could not give definitive proof of a woman's virginity status. In reducing virginity to the symptoms of yawning, sneezing, and laughing rather than conducting a vaginal examination, it seems that *The Changeling* is commenting on both the inaccuracy and therefore uselessness of the tests themselves as well as critiquing standards on which virginity is based—making virginity as a form of regulation seem arbitrary. More specifically, in relation to observation, the use of parody in conjunction with the language of natural philosophy in the virginity's tests instructions suggests not only that we cannot expect to observe and interpret visible signs in an accurate fashion, but also that the link between observation and regulation has the potential to become a tenuous one. Thus, we can begin to understand how and why we can classify the type of observation required by the virginity test as Baconian—it invites skepticism and creates space for active, critical thought on the systems of regulation in place.

This type of Baconian observation continues throughout the scene in which Beatrice administers the virginity test to Diaphanta. In this moment, Beatrice acts as the primary observer and experimenter. It was actually customary for women, specifically female midwives, to act as the sole examiners during virginity tests, meaning that “interpretative authority over the female body fell to women rather than men, despite fears of male medical writers that midwives would misread or mishandle the female body” (Luttfiring 100). However, in the case of the virginity test in *The Changeling*, I have to wonder exactly how much interpretative authority Beatrice has over Diaphanta's

body, especially considering that Beatrice finds *The Book of Experiment, Called Secrets in Nature* in Alsemero's closet and that it is presumably written by male natural philosophers. In fact, the test itself leaves little room for any interpretation given that the signs are yawning, sneezing, and laughing—these symptoms are not very ambiguous.

That is not to say, however, that as the primary observer in the scene that Beatrice does not have any power or authority. Instead of gaining her authority as the examiner, I argue that we can locate Beatrice's power in the scene through her power as an observer and experimenter. Beatrice has two objectives in giving the test to Diaphanta. First, Beatrice wants to see how and if the virginity test works. Second, if Diaphanta is able to pass the test, Beatrice then wants Diaphanta to take her place on Beatrice's wedding night to continue to keep Alsemero in the dark about her lack of virginity. Thus, Beatrice seems truly curious about the virginity test—and she herself even calls it an experiment before Diaphanta drinks the potion:

BEATRICE: Now if the experiment will be true, 'twill praise itself,

And give me noble ease. [*Diaphanta gapes*]—Begins already:

There's the first symptom; and what haste it makes

To fall into the second, [*Diaphanta sneezes*] there by this time!

Most admirable secret. On the contrary,

It stirs not me a whit, which most concerns it.

DIAPHANTA: Ha ha ha!

BEATRICE: [*Aside*] Just in all things and in order

As if 'twere circumscribed; one accident

Gives way unto another. (4.2.104-12)

Interestingly, Diaphanta does not have any dialogue during the virginity test and instead simply acts out its symptoms—forcing both Beatrice and the audience to focus solely on reading Diaphanta’s body. In fact, the performativity of Diaphanta in this scene is also highlighted through the text’s use of stage directions dictating her actions. Beatrice, on the other hand, vocalizes her observations of the test—expressing relief that it works in the manner that the book says it will. Given that the experiment works exactly as it should, it seems at first glance that a Baconian model of observation might not be present in this scene—especially considering that this scene does not produce explicit doubt or skepticism surrounding the validity of virginity tests.

However, we must also remember that this scene serves just as much to prove Diaphanta’s virginity as it does to demonstrate Beatrice’s power as an experimenter through observation. And while it does not cast doubt upon virginity just yet, this scene does link together performativity through the character of Diaphanta and observation through the character of Beatrice. Indeed, this connection between observation and performativity indicates where we can begin to find the experimentation within the scene. More specifically, through highlighting Diaphanta’s status as performer and Beatrice’s status as observer, it seems that the performance itself can be rebranded as a sort of experimentation. And, as we know from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, proper experimentation based in observation is meant to lead to new discoveries or new ways of looking at the world—even if that discovery is as small as Beatrice realizing that the virginity test can be faked. In other words, the experimentation in this scene helps to subvert the hold that mechanisms of regulations have over observation. Instead, through linking observation to performance this first instance of the virginity test, we can

understand that the body does not always produce signs that can be accurately interpreted and, in fact, has a subversive potential.

When Beatrice herself takes the virginity test in front of a group of men, the performative aspects of virginity come forefront. But even more significantly, Beatrice's performativity also induces Baconian skepticism that allows for active questioning of the mechanisms of regulation at hand. Before Beatrice drinks the virginity test in front of a large group of men including her father and fiancé, she says in an aside, "I'm put now to my cunning: the effects I know, / If I can now but feign 'em handsomely" (4.2.137-8). Though the men in the scene seem to have the power in this scene because of their status as observers, Beatrice ultimately is able to subvert their power as regulators because they do not discover her secret. When Beatrice yawns, sneezes, and laughs, the men watching believe that they have been able to determine her status as "chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning's womb" through interpreting her body through its visual signs (Middleton 4.2.149). More specifically, the two different types of observation as forces of regulation or subversion seem to be in direct conflict with each other—further demonstrating the complexities associated with observation as a form of knowledge. Although Beatrice subverts Alsemero's regulatory power, since she does not face punishment for her transgression, we wonder how that subversion can operate if it does not cause those in power to question the validity of certain mechanisms of regulation, such as virginity. Between the characters on the stage, there certainly seems to be a lack of skepticism associated with the men's observation, perhaps demonstrating that there is not space for skepticism within regulation as a mode of observation.

In addition to Beatrice's ability to subvert the regulatory power of the men, the use of the aside as a dramatic technique is indeed significant because it draws attention to the audience—Beatrice breaks the fourth wall to speak directly with the audience. Thus, although on the stage the group of observers is a group of men, the more important observers seem to be the audience itself, because the audience has the knowledge to read Beatrice's taking of the test as a performance as well as the knowledge that Beatrice is tricking the other characters on stage. Through this additional knowledge, it seems that the audience is able to engage in skepticism and critical thought related to the validity of virginity tests and perhaps to virginity as a whole. For if a virginity test can be faked, what does that say about virginity as a mechanism of regulation? Beatrice's performativity demonstrates the ambiguity and instability not only of virginity as an institution, but also of marriage and other patriarchal institutions. As a result, I argue that the audience itself serves as the ideal form of Baconian observation due to its ability to invite skepticism. In this way, it seems that the theater itself can serve as a sort of laboratory that invites critical thought and allows audiences to imagine worlds where virginity can be scrutinized and therefore destabilized.

Furthermore, to use Foucault's language, Beatrice's body during the virginity test is put under trial to reveal a certain truth. In addition to its detectability by sight, virginity also follows scripts of womanhood that encode the entire body. It is not simply that there are visual components to this test, but rather that it places the body and its movements at the forefront of the stage, thus making it a moment of spectacle. In Judith Butler's terms, Beatrice understands gender as the stylization of the body and "Hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of



various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler 900). Even if this virginity test is not an example of a “mundane bodily gesture,” it does merit consideration under Butler’s framework, since it reveals the “illusion” surrounding virginity. Furthermore, Butler argues that these stylized acts exist within a script “so the gendered body acts part in a culturally restricted corporal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler 907). The characters in the play craft scripts of femininity, which the audience then realizes can be manipulated. In this sense, spectacle becomes a tool for skepticism, since it makes such scripts obvious to the audience. In a way, we can understand that there are several different scripts at work during the virginity test. First, there is the actual script of the play that the characters follow, an obvious connection given Butler’s metaphor of performativity in gender. However, this first script is then influenced by the script of womanhood, since virginity is perceived by at least Beatrice as a fundamental part of what it means to be an upper-class woman. As tool of skepticism, however, the theater reveals an inability to perform virginity as a biological truth. The audience also directly engages with these scripts of virginity, but also is able to actively critique virginity as a mechanism for regulating female sexuality. The skepticism of theater challenges this type of realness that is visually interpreted.

Both Beatrice’s lack of virginity and her faking of the test have far-reaching consequences in the play—ending with the entire castle burning and killing Beatrice. As the play comes to a close, Beatrice fears that her secrets will be exposed and decides to “set some part a-fire / Of Diaphanta’s chamber” in order to protect her marriage (Middleton 5.132-3). And although Beatrice worries “that may endanger the whole

house,” Deflores replies, “You talk of danger when your fame’s on fire,” meaning that the entire structure of the castle needs to burn to save Beatrice’s reputation (Middleton 5.1.34-5). Throughout the play, the castle holds broader symbolic meaning than simply serving as the setting for the play. I argue that the castle’s burning is emblematic of play’s consequences of delivering a destabilizing critique of virginity as performative. In other words, although the play invites skepticism of virginity through Baconion observation, the play’s ending with the castle burning and Beatrice’s death suggests that such skepticism—particularly skepticism of virginity as a mechanism of regulation—is not a benign force. For example, in her reading of the play, Luttfiring argues that “women’s enactment of virginity gives patriarchal society structure coherence by providing at least the appearance of an orderly system of patrilineal descent, dynastic power, and stable sociopolitical hierarchies” (107). And although a virginal body must eventually “fall,” it must do so within the marriage system (Luttfiring 109). In *The Changeling*, Beatrice not only removes herself from the linear patriarchal marriage system through losing her virginity outside of marriage, but that removal constitutes “a threat to the system of marriage and reproduction by which society perpetuates itself” (Luttfiring 109). In other words, the skepticism about virginity produced in *The Changeling* demonstrates how women can manipulate virginity—instead of functioning as a mechanism of regulation in the service of patriarchy, it becomes a subversive force that threatens male power.<sup>11</sup> Thus, I argue that *The Changeling*’s dramatic ending of

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<sup>11</sup> Luttfiring also gives us a reading of *The Changeling* as a political allegory for anti-Catholic sentiment. She argues that “as a political allegory, *The Changeling* reminds viewers and readers that women, both foreign princesses and homegrown English wives and mothers, might undermine male authority both sexually and politically, and that even those who, like Beatrice-Joanna *appear* to be ideal daughters, wives, and subjects might spread the Catholic corruption hidden within them via sexual and/or verbal persuasion” (Luttfiring 114). Of course, Luttfiring is referring to the Spanish Match—the

burning the castle and the killing of its protagonist indicate not only the extremely subversive nature of uniting skepticism with virginity through observation, but the ending also suggests a figurative burning of the patriarchal system itself that allows for virginity to serve as a regulatory force.

Although Beatrice and Diaphanta are the only two women in the play who are subjected to the virginity test, they are not the only women in the play whose sexualities face regulation. If we turn briefly to the madhouse subplot of *The Changeling*, we meet the characters of Alibius, Lolio, and Isabella. Alibius, the doctor of the madhouse, wishes to lock up his significantly younger wife, Isabella, in the madhouse for the fear that she will cheat on him with a younger man. And he places Lolio, one of the residents, in charge of observing Isabella. When compared to the small, dark, and private spaces within the castle, the madhouse displays its residents and the space seems more communal—characters entering and leaving scenes and speaking from both on and offstage. Indeed, the combination of humor and madness makes it seem as if the characters are constantly in performance, since it remains unclear to us who is *actually* mad. Although the humor, play, and violence found in the spectacle of the madhouse does not embody the same type of Baconian observation found in the virginity scenes, the regulation of Isabella's sexuality does highlight the power of theatrical observation more broadly.

Due to her husband's fear of her infidelity, Isabella is locked in a cage guarded by Lolio. Isabella explains her house arrest:

Whence have you commission

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proposed marriage between the son of James I and Infanta Maria Anna of Spain—which prompted fear of Catholic infiltration of England through marriage.

To fetter the doors against me? If you  
 Keep me in a cage, pray whistle to me,  
 Let me be doing something. (3.21-4)

The language that Isabella uses indicates that she is quite literally imprisoned in the madhouse—the use of the word “fetter” implying such containment, and defined by the *OED* as, “to impose restraint upon; to confine, impede restrain” (s.v., “fetter” *OED* def. 1.b). The notion that a door confines someone in a room does not seem significant. However, the physical space of a cage is interesting for several reasons, because of the way that a cage both reveals and conceals its subject. In fact, the *OED*’s definition of the formal aspects of a cage also illuminates its function: “made wholly or partly of wire, or with bars of metal or wood, so as to admit air and light, while preventing the creature’s escape” (s.v., “cage” *OED* def. I.1). In addition to admitting air and light, the physical structure of the cage invites observation and heightens the ways in which Isabella is on display as a character. Indeed, characters in a play are put on display through the very nature of performance and the use of a stage. However, the cage is a very interesting prop or setting choice in the sense that it simultaneously reveals and conceals Isabella—drawing our attention as the audience to her unique visual display and placing Isabella within the dual role of observer and observed. By giving Isabella the power to observe her fellow housemates—Lolio parades the madmen around Isabella’s cage—she is no longer simply subject to Lolio’s observation as a form of regulation. Rather, her role as spectator seems to fall in line with the mode of theatrical observation that allows for active engagement between the observer and observed. In other words, rather than explicitly critiquing the regulation to which Isabella is subject, her imprisonment and

position on the stage blur the line between observer and observed to invite theatrical observation to the stage that can produce an endless number of significances of visual cues—as evident by how the “truth” of madness constantly in flux.

Thus, theatrical and Baconian modes of observation seem to serve similar purposes in *The Changeling*. Both not only highlight the role of the observer, but also demonstrate how observation can serve as a critical force of skepticism through moments of spectacle. Baconian observation demonstrates how skepticism can serve as a subversive force, while theatrical observation highlights the ways in which theatrical representations are constantly being produced, meaning that both the ephemeral nature of theater and the relationship between the audience and the stage make the production of theater a dynamic process. The combination of theatrical and Baconian observation in *The Changeling* privileges the role of the observation as an interpretive force in the service of producing meaning—whether through the subversion of regulatory forces or through highlighting the theater-making process as collaborative between the audience and the action on the stage.

## Conclusion

In *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*, we are presented with a wide range of observations that indeed come into conflict with one another. In particular, these plays ask us to consider what happens to observation as a form of regulation when placed within a theatrical context. Indeed, the intense visual aesthetics associated with the form of Jacobean tragedy points to how theatrical observation can work as a mechanism of critique through its ability to create a decentralized method of interpretation. In other words, the spectacular nature of Jacobean tragedy works to subvert the mechanisms of regulation and abuses of power that are presented on the stage. The theater provides an interesting space where mechanisms of power and regulation are made obvious through spectacle—allowing observation to transform from an implementation of regulation to force of criticism and subversion. As an epistemology, observation is multifaceted in the type of knowledge that it can produce. But theatrical observation should not be overlooked as a critical part of the epistemology of observation. Indeed, through its impactful and powerful interpretation, we can understand how theatrical observation can be elevated as a form of knowledge. This project concludes with three additional points for consideration: the impact of Jacobean spectacle in a film adaptation of *The Changeling*, the capacity for observation to serve as a feminist critique, and the subversive power of these two plays.

First, the 1993 BBC adaption of *The Changeling* is as cinematic as the play is theatrical. For example, instead of breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to the camera, the BBC adaption relies upon voice overs to convey the characters' thoughts—adding to the sense of interiority presented by the characters. Indeed, theatrical

observation of the play and audience engagement with film differ in several ways. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has strongly influenced the ways in which we understand the relationship between the spectator and visual art forms, specifically in film. Using a framework grounded in psychoanalysis and film studies, Mulvey argues that the male gaze subordinates women in contemporary Hollywood films. Mulvey explains that the visual techniques of film—the camera and the screen tell us at what to look—creates a tension between a pleasure in looking and controlling the gaze and identifying with the image on the screen (2094). As a result, the male gaze creates an illusory world where women exist outside of the narrative portrayed on screen while men are allowed to exist within the film's storyline (2094). To put it simply, Mulvey creates a gendered binary between the male gaze as one of power and control and the female subject as submissive to the male gaze (2093-4). Indeed, Mulvey's "the gaze" provides an interesting counterpoint to our version of theatrical observation. For Mulvey, the male gaze—which is a sort of observation of film—reinforces patriarchal power through directing the viewer's gaze in a specific manner that subordinates women and heightens hegemonic masculinity. Mulvey seems to critique film's ability to allow for its audiences to have broad interpretative power over what they are observing. The question remains, then, what happens to the subversive qualities of *The Changeling* and the power it lends to its audience when adapted for the screen?

In the BBC film adaptation of *The Changeling* directed by Simon Curtis, the scene where Beatrice takes the virginity tests loses its performativity. More specifically, we do not get the sense that Beatrice is performing virginity in the same manner—only herself, Alsemero, and a servant are in the room. It does not feel as if Beatrice is on trial.

Instead, the virginity test serves as confirmation for just Alsemero, transforming the test and virginity issues of public concerns to a more private moment. Indeed, the cinematography of the scene uses close-up shots of Beatrice and Alsemero discussing the test—moving between individual shots of their faces. The use of the close-ups makes this scene feel like an intimate moment between them. Once Beatrice drinks the virginity test, Alsemero moves away from her and towards the door where the other courtier is standing. The camera continues to focus on Beatrice's face and body—highlighting the symptoms of the test while using her voice-over to remind us that she is faking her symptoms. After the first symptom, however, the scene cuts to the men watching in the corner and focuses on their reactions in another close-up shot. The scene continues in this manner, cutting between Beatrice and the men and focusing on their individual reactions. We do not truly see all of them in the frame at the same time.

Although the same critique of virginity still exists in this version of the scene—since it is heavily ingrained in the actual text of the play itself—it seems like Beatrice is faking rather than performing virginity. Instead of spectacle and performativity working as a mechanism of theatrical observation, the use of the camera directs exactly what to observe in the scene. Through eliminating the theatricality, it seems as if the camera itself is the main observer in the scene rather than highlighting the role of the viewer.

As a result, the critique of virginity is embedded within the plot and form of the film rather than relying on the audience as a mechanism of interpretation. Thus, Jacobean spectacle as it is performed on the stage seems unique in the sense that it highlights the role of audience as integral to the formation of meaning within a play. In this sense, theatrical observation works to alleviate some of Mulvey's concerns about the male gaze



in film. Indeed, the decentralized nature of theatrical observation serves as an interesting counterpoint to the centralized and focused power found through film's reliance on the camera within the construction of its form. Theatrical observation allows for the viewing of visual art not only to have a wide interpretation, but also demonstrates how the act of observation can have a subversive quality. Thus, the overly visual and spectacular style associated with Jacobean tragedy does not translate well to the screen because of the way that the observers are positioned differently.

Throughout this project, I have suggested that observation can be rehabilitated as a subversive force. At first glance, it does seem as if there is space for observation to work as a form of feminist critique—especially if we consider the impact of observation as a form of regulation. Foucault's model of early modern observation demonstrates how observation can be used to maintain not only mechanisms of regulation, but also can be used to enforce supreme and absolute power structures that ultimately benefit patriarchal power. Similarly, Calvinist observation also works to maintain pre-existing worldviews related to power. Perhaps on their own, these forms of observation serve as forces of containment, but these types of regulatory observation themselves become visible and observable through theatrical representation. In becoming observable, forces of regulation are subject to interpretation just as any visible sign. In this sense, we can see how the theater in general can serve as a laboratory for Baconian observation that invites skepticism and subversion of the status quo. It is not simply observation, but rather the role of theatrical observation that allows for observation to become a mechanism of feminist criticism. In this sense, the theater as an artform can become inherently feminist due to the way in which the theater constructs power in a decentralized fashion.

Decentralized power, I argue, has more feminist potential because by nature it fails to legitimate a consolidated form of power. Thus, the theater and theatrical observation should not be overlooked as modes of feminist critique.

Finally, I wish to conclude with the subversive potential of *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Changeling*. First, subversion is easier to locate in *The Changeling* than in *The Duchess of Malfi*, since the critique of virginity seems very much embedded within *The Changeling*'s plot. We can still see how *The Changeling* critiques virginity in the film adaptation of the play. The role of theatrical observation augments *The Changeling*'s subversive power through giving power to the observer, but Middleton and Rowley themselves seem to at the very least critique the accuracy and usefulness of virginity tests.

The same type of critique does not seem as ingrained into the plot of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Although the scenes of intense violence can produce shock and sympathy for the Duchess, the end of the play attempts to paint her death as simply an abuse of power that will not happen again. The plot of *The Duchess of Malfi* does a lot of work in its final lines to rehabilitate its men and stately power. Rather, the subversive potential of *The Duchess of Malfi* exists within its form as a Jacobean tragedy. The shock and sympathy produced by the torture scenes are important not to overlook, for they demonstrate theater's ability to produce emotional responses that work as a type of interpretation. The task of theatrical observation, then, is not simply one of analyzing the play at hand, but rather fully engaging with what is seen on the stage. It is through this engagement—whether manifesting through an emotional and/or critical response—that highlights the uniqueness of theatrical observation within the general epistemology of observation.

Theatrical observation has the ability to accommodate multiple interpretations and reactions to the stage, and that itself has subversive potential through elevating personal responses to theater.

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