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All People Seen and Known: Dorothy Osborne, Privacy, and Seventeenth-Century Courtship

It is thus that we should live,—as if we lived in plain sight of all men; and it is thus that we should think,—as if there were someone who could look into our inmost souls

—Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*

It is a very great safeguard to learn by heart instead of writing. It is impossible for what is written not to be disclosed.

—Plato, *Letters*

DOROTHY OSBORNE CARRIED on a clandestine correspondence with her future husband, Sir William Temple, from 1652 to 1654. As a young woman carrying out a romance of which her family did not approve, Osborne was under constant surveillance. Violations of her personal privacy had such a strong effect on Osborne that, in her love letters, she frames the central dilemma in her courtship as a choice between maintenance of a spotless reputation (one she values highly) and her devotion to Temple. Osborne's multivalent (even contradictory) reaction to invasions of privacy adds significantly to our understanding of the intersection of privacy and romantic autonomy as experienced by early modern women.

Osborne was in her mid-twenties when she wrote her letters. She had met William Temple travelling to St. Malo from the Isle of Wight in 1648. Temple was supposed to continue with his

voyage on the continent, but he lingered for several days, finally leaving at the command of his father, who might have been anxious about the possibility of romance between the couple.¹ Osborne and Temple met at least once between 1648 and 1652, at which time Temple wrote Osborne to see if she was well and still unmarried. She wrote back demurely but tellingly: "I am extremely glad...to heare from you, since (without complement) there are very few Person's in the world I am more concern'd in."² Only Osborne's side of the correspondence survives. As a series, her letters serve as a chronicle of two individuals who sought to convince their disapproving families to allow them to marry; they are also a rich source for the study of private life in the early modern period.

Writers have claimed that the two families opposed the union because they stood on different sides of the Royalist and Parliamentary conflict, but partisan politics were not the source of their objections, which were motivated entirely by financial concerns. Both the Osbornes and the Temples were, as Kenneth Parker aptly points out, "actively looking for a marriage that would help to solve their liquidity problems"³ and Sir John Temple required a dowry that was significantly higher than what the Osbornes were willing—and indeed able—to provide. The English Civil War and its aftermath had a deep impact on the finances of Osborne's family. Osborne's father, Sir Peter Osborne, fought on the royalist side as Lieutenant Governor of the Island of Guernsey, in the Channel Islands. He defended a royalist stronghold, Castle Cornet, while it was under siege by the Parliamentary townsmen, from 1643 until 1646, when he was relieved of his post.⁴ Sir Peter did not return to England until 1649, when he compounded for his estate in rural

¹ William Temple's sister Martha Giffard offers an account of the couple's meeting. See "Lady Giffard's Life and Character of Sir William Temple," *The Early Essays and Romances of Sir William Temple Bt. with The Life and Character of Sir William Temple by his Sister Lady Giffard*, ed. G.C. Moore Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930) 5–6.

² Dorothy Osborne, *The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple*, ed. G.C. Moore Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929) 3. All quotations from Dorothy Osborne's letters are taken from this edition.

³ Osborne, *Letters to Sir William Temple*, ed. Kenneth Parker (London: Penguin, 1987) 4.

⁴ For an account of these events, see F.B. Tupper, *The Chronicles of Castle Cornet, Guernsey, with Details of its Nine Years' Siege During the Civil War and Frequent Notices of the Channel Islands* (Guernsey, Channel Islands: Stephen Barbet, 1851).

Bedfordshire, which would otherwise have been sold. The financial exigencies of the siege of Castle Cornet, and prosecution at the hands of the Parliamentary government, greatly reduced the family fortune.⁵ Dorothy's mother died shortly after the Osbornes returned to Chicksands, their Bedfordshire home, in 1649/50, and Peter Osborne fell seriously ill.

Osborne expected to marry for a combination of love and social status. In her letters, she fiercely criticizes marriage for purely mercenary reasons. However, she repeatedly expresses a desire not to act in a rash and impetuous manner or marry for passion without regard to social standing. Given the many constraints on an individual who wished to marry, Osborne was aware that marrying according to one's desires was nearly impossible: "I can give noe reason why (Almost,) all are denyed the sattisfaction of disposeing themselvs to theire owne desyr's, but that it is a happinesse too great for this world" (45). Osborne was severely challenged to find a balance between her wishes and those of other people, including her family, and the requirements of her social class. She tried to avoid giving offence to her family; the Osbornes had to deal with straightened circumstances and she was a dutiful daughter. After her father died in 1653 Osborne was able to contemplate marrying Temple. Before she did, however, she had to contend with the powerful opposition of her brother Henry who, out of professed devotion to her, monitored her closely and made it difficult for the couple to correspond. Over time, the opposition of her brother waned, especially after Temple established himself in Ireland. The couple were married on Christmas Day, 1654.

The extant letters reveal great emotional turbulence during the courtship, of which distress over violation of her privacy composes no small part. Osborne expresses both a resistance and a resignation to the fact that she is watched. While deploring the heavy surveillance she is under, she repeatedly comments that she will curtail her courtship rather than be exposed to negative publicity: an exposure she paints as inevitable.

Virginia Woolf dramatically portrayed Osborne's fear about the opinions of her peers: "She dreaded with a shrinking that was

⁵ Osborne writes, "I have seen my fathers [Estate] reduced [from] better then 4000^{li} to not 400^{li} a yeare, and I thank god I never felt the change in any thing that I thought necessary; I never wanted, nor am confident I never shall ..." (178-79).

scarcely sane the ridicule of the world ... a word of gossip about her own behaviour would set her in a quiver."⁶ Woolf's casting of Osborne as "scarcely sane" implies that her sensitivity in this matter was extreme or atypical. Yet given Osborne's position as a woman who was carrying on a forbidden romantic courtship when there was significant familial and societal interest in her personal conduct, her reaction was likely justified. She needed both to further her love affair and keep her virtuous reputation intact. While her family opposed the union, any public link to Temple left Osborne vulnerable to calumny. Significantly (though not surprisingly) she links rational behaviour with the assurance of a material standard of living:

I would not bee thought soe inconsiderat a person
as not remember that it is Expected from all peo-
ple that have sence that they should act with rea-
son, that to all persons some proportion of fortune
is necessary according to their severall qualities.

(179)

Osborne's courtship revolves around a nexus of familial and societal demands Osborne and Temple must meet before they can marry. Osborne is concerned that, in failing to strike the proper balance between personal desire and societal expectations, she will be widely exposed and scorned.

During their courtship, the couple find it necessary to maintain a high level of discretion. They are cautious not to reveal their attachment too openly. Osborne dances around these sensitive issues in Letter 27:

I doe not think it (a propos) to tell any body that
you and I are very good friends, and it were better
sure, if nobody knew it but wee our selves, but if
in spite of all our Caution it bee discovered, tis no
Treason, nor any thing else that's ill, and if any
body should tell mee that I had a greater
Kindnesse and Esteem for you, then for any one
besydes, I doe not think I should deny it. (58)

⁶ Virginia Woolf, "Dorothy Osborne's Letters," *The Second Common Reader* (1932; New York: Harcourt, 1960) 54.

This is a delicately calibrated mixture of frankness and duplicity. If directly challenged, she will not lie about her attachment to Temple, because she is not ashamed of it. However, she has no desire to publicize it widely either. With an odd combination of grace and awkwardness, Osborne thanks Temple for concealing the engagement because it leaves her the "Liberty" to withdraw from the compact, "though I am never likely to make use on't" (59). When their acquaintance Tom Cheke finds out about the partnership, Osborne finds herself mildly disturbed and puzzled about how he got his "intelligence": "the best on't is the matter is not great, for though I confesse I had rather nobody knew it, yet tis that I shall never bee ashamed to owne" (97). Osborne is not content until people in her community conclude that she has behaved properly. Even after they have triumphed over all familial objections and financial barriers, Osborne insists that Temple publicize the fact that he has adequate money to support her so that no one can object to the marriage (136).

Lawrence Stone, among others, has commented on the way that extreme scrutiny worked against the development of intimate bonds in early seventeenth-century communities: "domestic life in the village was conducted in a blaze of publicity."⁷ Stone argues that an increase in personal privacy was a factor in the rise of the companionate marriage (253–56). Due to their class status, Osborne and Temple's case was more complicated: they were immune to many pressures of village existence. Temple was travelling for part of the courtship. Osborne found herself in the relative seclusion of the rural estate of Chicksands, her family's hereditary property. However, her privacy depended on the willingness of relatives to restrain their curiosity, and her family's ability to keep away prying strangers. Lawrence Klein aptly characterizes the fluidity of the public/private distinction in the early modern period: "even if ... women spent more time at home, they were not necessarily spending more time in private."⁸ Osborne is very sensitive to fluctuation in her level of privacy; she may enjoy solitude sometimes but can-

⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Harper, 1977) 144.

⁸ Lawrence Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 29.1 (Fall 1995): 105.

not take it for granted. She knows she would be more prone to scrutiny in an urban setting:

I am heer much more out of Peoples way then in Towne, where my Aunte and such as prettend an interest in mee and a power over mee, doe soe persecute mee with their good motions, and take it soe ill that they are not accepted; as I would live in a hollow Tree, to avoyde them. heer I have noe body but my Brother to Torment mee, whome I can take the liberty to dispute with, and whome I have prevailed with hitherto, to bring none of his prettenders to this place, because of the noyse all such People make in a Country & the tittle tattle it breed's amongst neighbours that have nothing to doe but to inquire whoe marry's and who makes love. (43)

Osborne displays considerable resentment over the power others might have to scrutinize and control her. Depending on her physical situation, Osborne finds herself either catapulted onto the public stage, or hovering uncomfortably nearby. After her father's death, Osborne grumbles about her brother Peyton's house where she lives as a dependent relation:

never trust mee if I write more then you, that live in a desolated Country where you might ffinish a Romance of ten Tomes before any body interrupted you; I that live in a house the most filled of any since y^e Arke, and where I can assure [you] one has hardly time for the most necessary occasion's.

(172)

The crowding makes her "weary as a dog" (171), detracting from her ability to perform basic, necessary tasks, and making letter-writing difficult.

Occasionally, the couple's letters, the tangible symbol and vehicle of the courtship, are opened. As will be the case in the eighteenth-century novel, exposed letters become a means to reveal intimate secrets, to Osborne's dismay. Witness her horror when she realizes that a letter from Temple has been opened, possibly by a letter-carrier:

when hee gave mee your letter I found the uper seale broake open, and underneath, where it uses to bee only Closed with a litle waxe, there was a seale, w^{ch} though it were an Anchor & a heart, mee thoughts it did not looke like yours, but lesse, and much worse cutt. this Suspition was soe stronge, upon mee, that I chid till the Poore fellow was redy to crye, and swore to mee that it had never bin Touched since hee had it, and that hee was soe carefull of it, as hee never putt it with his other letters, but by it self, and that now it cam amongst his mony, w^{ch} perhaps might break the seale, and least I should think it was his Curiosity, hee tolde mee very ingenuously hee could not reade and soe wee parted for the present. (48)

Two mysteries remain unsolved. Who broke the seal of the letters? Who owns the unfamiliar seal whose imprint the letter now bears? The character of the letter-carrier is also subject to doubt although he does not possess the sophistication to carry out the act of which they accuse him: "hee could not reade" (48). It is not to the letter-carrier's credit that the only thing preventing him from spying on Osborne is his illiteracy. His main excuse is not lack of guile but lack of capacity (although illiteracy is, indeed, a foolproof excuse here). Osborne implies that the letter-carrier did indeed commit the crime. It is only her displeasure that will deter him from further spying: "in grace of god this shall bee a warning to him as longe as hee lives" (49). Osborne's firm, even grim, tone shows that her anger at this violation has translated into concrete action. However, her resolution to discipline the letter-carrier with her displeasure seems a stopgap measure. The letter-carrier, a mere servant, is humbled, yet he is one of many possible culpable agents. As Osborne has insisted, escaping scrutiny is impossible. Even lowly letter-carriers are treacherous.⁹

⁹ Some element of class snobbery lurks behind Osborne's reaction here. The sharp discipline she visits on someone not her social equal shows that Osborne can prevent spying when she can control her inferiors, but she cannot eradicate the surveillance that social equals impose on her. It seems as though part of Osborne's vexation here is derived from the fact that it is a servant who spies.

Another situation of exposure related to a letter-carrier follows, showing that such violations of privacy crop up everywhere. This second situation is different from the incident with the letter-carrier because it involves Osborne's brother rather than a shadowy figure who has mysteriously opened her letters. Her brother badgers a letter-carrier to see if he has been carrying love letters to Temple:

my B. coming from London, mett him goeing up & cald to him, & asked what letters hee had of mine, the fellow sayed none, I did not use to send by him. my B. sayed I tolde him hee had and bid him call for them, hee sayed there was some mistake int for hee had none, and soe they Parted for a while. but my B. not satisfied with this rides after him, and in some anger threatned the Poore fellow, whoe would not bee frighted out of his letter, but looked very simply and sayed now hee rememberd himselfe hee had carried a letter for mee aboute a fortnight or three weeks ago, to my Lady D.R. but hee was sure hee had none now; my B. smiled at his innocence and left him, and I was hugely pleased to heare, how hee had bin defeated. (65)

Henry Osborne does not try to hide his strongarm tactics from Osborne, virtually declaring to her that he intends to read her letters to Temple. This time, the naïveté of the letter-carrier protects Osborne; he "simply" says that he has carried letters for her, but to friends, not a lover. There are two distinct moments of deceit in the letters. The brother tells the letter-carrier a lie and is told a lie himself. In this passage, Osborne sees her privacy both invaded and defended.

This scene reads almost like a scene from a novel; what motivations does Osborne have to recount it to Temple? First, she uses these scenes to illustrate the extreme nature of the scrutiny brought to bear on her, whether it is the anonymous breaking of a seal, or the heavy-handed outbursts of Henry Osborne. Furthermore, she wishes to engage Temple in the fight for privacy: to strengthen the bond between them by establishing a common en-

emy. She tells Temple about this surveillance in part because his privacy is also being violated.

Although there is little chance that the letters will remain private, Osborne is nonetheless solicitous of their safety. Like spies, Osborne and Temple try various techniques to ensure that their letters do not fall into the wrong hands. For example, Osborne advises Temple to redirect and disguise his letters:

lett yours bee made up in some other forme then
usuall, and directed to M^r Ed: Gibson at Ch: in
some od hande, and bee at the Charge pray of
buyeing a twopeny seale a purpos for these let-
ters. (65)

The concealment involves three elements: manipulating the address, disguising the handwriting, and increasing the strength of the seal. This is the second time Osborne has advocated increasing the security of the letters, having previously written to Temple: “seale your letters soe as the difficulty of opening them may dishearten any body from attempting it” (49). The couple must take action against the relentless scrutiny of the outside world, relying on mere sealing wax to hold firm against persistent curiosity.

Osborne experiences blatant invasions of privacy, but she tends to reveal herself inadvertently to others. In company, she blushes at the letter she has received from Temple. The incident reads as if it were a scene from a novel where a torrid romance is being concealed:

In the midst of our Play in comes my blessed
Boy with your letter, and in Earnest I was not able
to disguise ye Joy it gave mee, though one was by
that is not much your freind, and took notice of a
blush that for my life I could not keep back. I putt
up the letter in my Pockett, and made what hast I
could to loose the mony I had left, that I might
take occasion to goe fetch some more, but I did
not make such hast back againe I can assure you,
I took time enough to have Coyned my self some
mony if I had had the Art on't. (22–23)

Osborne isolates herself so that she can enjoy Temple's letter without displaying her feelings. The scene employs irony for comic

effect, but the communication of the need for privacy, and the pleasure of privacy, is serious.

In another letter, Osborne confesses the habitual nature of her inability to control her blushes:

what would I give I could avoyde it when People speak of you? in Earnest I doe prepare my self all that is possible to heare it spoken of and yet for my life I cannot hear your name without discovering that I am more then ordinarily concerned int. A blush is the foolishhest thing that can bee and betray's one more then a red nose dos a drunkerd, and yet I would not soe wholly have lost them as some women that I know has, as much injury as they doe mee. (164)

Unwelcome blushes are another sign that there is no purely private space in which to experience desire: intense emotion will spill out. Osborne cannot control entrance onto the public stage, although she craves to do so. Alternatively, Osborne's eagerness to speak of her blushes could be a self-conscious attempt to draw Temple's attention to a fetching combination of modesty and sensuality.

Although she confesses to some modest indiscretions, Osborne presents her ability to continue in the courtship as predicated on the achievement of privacy. In the middle of the courtship, exhausted by the continuous pressure exerted by her family, Osborne argues that the couple should break off romantic ties. Her unease is expressed as a function of her desire to retain privacy: "I have still some sence of my reputation left in mee, I finde that to my last I shall attempt to preserve it as Cleer as I can" (120). Osborne cannot bear the scandal sparked by visits from a man who will never marry her. She was, in fact, the victim of wagging tongues. Many strangers kept track of her courtship, leading her to confide miserably to Temple: "I hear from all people that I know part of my unhappy Story and from some that I doe not know. A Lady whose face I never saw sent it mee as news she had out of Ireland" (124). That the news actually comes from a distant place, and from a stranger, exacerbates the pain of revelation.

In theory, Osborne wishes to avoid outright duplicity as she pursues union with Temple, but she violates her own ideals of perfect frankness at least somewhat. Even the mild equivocation

necessary to advance the courtship offends her finicky sensibilities. She registers a difference between the paragon she would like to be and the creature of contingency she actually *is*. She is undeniably fond of making lofty statements about her own honesty. When her brother is absent, Temple asks if he should visit, and Osborne concludes that he should not: “your coming in his absence should bee thought a concealment” (57). She concludes resoundingly: “I am not for disguises, it looks like Guilt, and I would not doe a thing I durst not owne” (56–57). She lacks guile and the ability to wear a “mask.” Temple also has an honest nature: “I did not lay it as a fault to your charge, that you were not good at disguise; if it bee one, I am too guilty on’t my selfe, to accuse another” (70). Osborne repeatedly claims that she does not connect her hope of avoiding surveillance to a desire to dissemble or deceive: she has a great deal of “franchise” in her character. If she had been a part of the monarch’s court (in exile in France during the interregnum), she might have learned to “disguise handsomely.” However, she lacks worldly experience; she associates herself with the fresh-faced charms of rustic culture rather than the sophisticated court’s veiled daggers. Osborne’s remarks anticipate the Restoration period’s fascination with disguises and masks, although she will not go so far as to attribute to disguise the ability to reveal the true self. For Osborne, at least in theory, the discrepancy between the mask and the self is an unhealthy state of affairs.

For all of her earnest desire to uphold frankness, Osborne employs a falsehood in her courtship at least once, allowing her brother to believe that she and Temple have broken their engagement. Osborne reveals herself as an accomplished plotter, able to answer her brother’s machinations with efforts of her own, though not without regret:

god forgive mee and you too, you made mee tell a great lye, I was faine to say You came only to take your leave before you went abroade and all this nott only to keep quiett but to keep him from playeing the mad man, for when hee has the least suspition hee carry’s it soe strangly that all the worlde takes notice on’t and often Guesse at the reason or else hee tel’s it. (129)

Osborne soothes her conscience, assuring herself that the couple did not lie *outright*. Much of the deception resided in Temple's demeanour: "a sadnesse that hee discoverd at your goeing away inclined him to beleeve You were ill satisfyed, and made him Creditt what I sayed" (130). Her lie is one of expediency: if she does not stem her blabbing brother's revelations, the outcome will be disastrous. Osborne tries to rationalize her own behaviour by arguing that the situation is desperate, urgently requiring decisive action. Through lies, she creates the privacy she has otherwise been denied.

The relationship between truth and virtuous appearance is strong in the letters. Osborne's struggle to present an unspotted reputation fits in well with the enormous body of literature, from the Commonwealth period onwards, concerned with self-vindication. Religious and secular writers alike attempted to clear their reputation in print. Dissenters sought to justify their faith in public, translating the private experience of religious revelation into a form that was acceptable for the entire congregation.¹⁰ Royalists like Margaret Cavendish sought to justify their actions during the war and bolster their posthumous reputation.¹¹ Unlike these thinkers, Osborne was not primarily grappling with issues of religious or personal conscience against a background of political contestation, despite a few (jocoserious) comments about her need to break off from potentially seditious commentary when describing events like Cromwell's *coup d'état*: "I shall talk treason by and by if I do not look to my self, tis saffer talking of the Oringe flower water you sent mee" (39). For Osborne, the conflict between public and private resides most strongly in the freedom to conduct her personal life. If she cannot attain privacy, she will be forced to renounce treasured desires. However, she is not entirely willing to escape the pressures which bear on her because, to some degree,

¹⁰ Patricia Caldwell's book, one of the best studies of the conversion narrative, focuses on its American origins, although some attention is paid to British narrative. Caldwell addresses many of the issues raised when a narrative of personal faith is offered for public scrutiny. See *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

¹¹ See Margaret Cavendish, "A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life," *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen*, ed. Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox (London: Routledge, 1989) 87–101.

she sees them as necessary preconditions for her participation in society. She comments that “the world” appears rife with rumour, insinuation, and judgement:

if one could bee invisible I should choose that, but since all people are seen and knowne, and shall bee talked of in spight of their Teeth's, whoe is it that do's not desyre at least that nothing of ill may bee sayed of them whither Justly, or Otherwise? I never knew any soe satisfied with their owne innocence as to bee content the worlde should think them Guilty; some out of pride have seem'd to contemme ill reports when they have founde they could not avoyde them; but none out of strength of reason though many have pretended to it. (138)

She sets up a marked contrast between the invisibility she desires, and the scrutiny she expects to experience: “if I might bee allowed to choose my happinesse, part of it should consist in concealment, there should not above two persons in the worlde know that there were such a one in it as/ Your faithfull” (134).¹² There is, however, no escape from examination: “all people are seen and known.” Since they are heavily scrutinized, individuals must invest significant energy in the public presentation of character. Early in the correspondence, Osborne both combats and accepts the pressures brought to bear on her:

I confesse I doe naturally hate the noise and talk of the worlde, and should bee best pleased never to bee knowne int upon any occasion whatsoever, yet since it can never bee wholly avoyded one must satisfye on's selfe by doing nothing that one need care whoe know's. (58)

¹² Osborne has something in common with *Clarissa Harlowe*, who is described by her friend Anna Howe as being “desirous, as you always said, of sliding through life to the end of it unnoted.” Cited in Rachel Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 44.

The judgement of others is particularly keen because any scandal present in the general society will be “magnified”:

if an Action take a litle in the worlde it shall bee magnified and brought into Comparison wth what the Hero's, or Senatours of Rome perform'd, but on the Contreary if it bee once condemned nothing can bee founde ill enough to compare it with, and People are in Paine till they finde out some Extravagant Expression to represent the ffolly on't; only there is this difference that as all are more forcibly inclined to ill then good, they are much apter to Exceede in detraction then in praises.

(136–37)

Osborne speaks of “People” who judge and condemn. Everyone in the community is involved in censorious behaviour. The tendency to magnify indiscretion is described as a basic, universal human trait; it is possible that individuals will be praised, but it is somewhat unlikely. Furthermore, the negative impact of judgement cannot be mitigated by “praise,” since it is not as powerful as denigration. Scandal has its own momentum.

Osborne's internalization of this imperative to act as if one's actions were under constant surveillance is reminiscent of Foucault's suggestive idea of the panopticon, where the modern individual is under complete surveillance. Foucault's model stresses complete construction of the individual rather than repression:

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth ... it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.¹³

Foucault's description of the “forces and bodies” which fabricate an individual rings true for Osborne. She seems resigned to the judgement being levelled at her, and vows to behave without re-

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 217.

proach. As she says herself, no individual should perform any action “that one need care whoe know’s” (58). Her reaction is almost instinctual; she realizes that members of her society are watching her and conforms to this pressure. On the other hand, she possesses enough resistance to the scrutiny of the “world” to realize that the keen scrutiny of others curtails her actions. In this regard she resists the total construction of the self under surveillance of which Foucault speaks. She is capable of tracing the imperative to avoid scandal to an external source, the “noise and talk of the world,” which demonstrates that she sees the possibility, even the desirability, of being free from such pressures.

Osborne might speak of scrutiny in such hyperbolic terms because she is aware of being perceived as a sexual object by unwelcome suitors. She was a magnet for male attention; unwelcome suitors, with the encouragement of her brother, often paid court to her aggressively. She describes herself as a woman whose suitors repeatedly violate her privacy, in part because her family is encouraging such behaviour, and in part because she is considered sexually attractive and is ardently pursued for that reason. Her strongly expressed desire for concealment, then, is a means of preserving autonomy against possibly disconcerting sexual interest expressed by men.

Osborne’s experience resonates with that of her female contemporaries, for whom public visibility underscored their vulnerability to male power. Margaret Blagge Godolphin literally hid her charms to make herself less prone to the dangers of male attention. John Evelyn described Blagge’s lack of comfort with the impact she had on her social circle:

her Beauty & her Wit was so extraordinarily Improvd; as there had been nothing ben seene more surprizeing, & full of Charmes: Every body was in Love with, & some almost dying for her: whilst (with all the Modesty, & Circumspection imaginable) she strove to Eclipse the Luster which it gave, and would often checq the Vivacity which was Naturall (innocent, & perfectly became her) for feare of giving Occasion to those who Lay in waite to Deceive.¹⁴

¹⁴ John Evelyn, *The Life of Mrs. Godolphin*, ed. Harriet Sampson (London: Oxford UP, 1939) 29.

Blagge was sensitive to the possibility that being visible on the public stage will lead to notice from male admirers. While she was conspicuously pious, and concerned to appear so, more than mere prudery is at work here. A hint of unpleasantness hovers around the beauty of Blagge, as witnessed by the reference to those who, like the Luciferean serpent, “lay in waite to deceive.”

Vulnerability to male attention is not limited to questions of physical beauty. Exceptional behaviour of any kind invites scrutiny. Mary Mollineux, the Quaker poet, thought her poetry would provoke scrutiny from men, as her friend Tryal Ryder explains:

I remember, that several Years ago, when she was a single Woman, upon the Perusal of some Copies of her Verses, which she gave me, I felt such Unity of Spirit with them, that I said, I thought they might be of Service, if made publick in Print; but she was not then free, that her Name should be exposed; she not seeking Praise amongst Men, but to communicate the Exercise of peculiar Gifts amongst her near Friends and Acquaintance.¹⁵

It is possible that Mollineux's anxiety about the publication of her verses extends further than the specific threat of sexual attention. It is significant that Ryder emphasizes that Mollineux was single when she first saw the poems, and that she shied away from making them public at that time particularly.

Both Mollineux and Blagge attempt to veil their desirable qualities; they might lead to unwanted attention.¹⁶ Distant in class and political affiliation, they are aware of the strong impressions they make. Osborne's concern about being surveyed, for example, unites with the intuition that she startles her suitors with her dignified, grave mien. She asks Temple whether she looks “stately”: “let mee aske you one question seriously, and pray resolve mee truly; doe I look soe stately as People aprehende?” (60). While she is glad to be free from unwelcome attention, she is aware of her

¹⁵ Mary Mollineux, *Poems Moral and Divine, Being Contemplations, Letters, &c. Written on a Variety of Subjects and Occasions* (London, 1702) A7^v.

¹⁶ In some senses, these women are early practitioners of “non-adornment feminism,” which seeks to free women not merely from male attention but from the impositions of the ideals of femininity. See, for example, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

strong effect on others (literally “what I doe to other People”) and wonders if she should change her demeanour. In this case, she has to maintain a difficult balance, discouraging unwelcome attention without being perceived as unfriendly. She wishes to find out whether Temple objects to anything in the way she presents herself. If he has no objection to her stateliness, it will trouble her much less. However, the fact that she queries Temple about her appearance betrays at least some insecurity; whenever she is looked at, there is some violation of her privacy.

Osborne speaks about her awareness that she will be “seen and known” not only because she is aware of a societal trend toward scrutiny but because she is closely watched in her daily life. Her family monitors her because she is on the marriage market. They watch her more intensely when she becomes involved with Temple because this association represents a marked threat to their wishes and authority. At times, the scrutiny of Osborne’s family takes on the qualities of a trial or religious examination:

Would you had heard how I have bin Chatechised for you, and seen how soberly I sitt and answer to interrogatory’s! would you think, that upon Examination it is founde that you are not an indifferent person to mee, but the mischeif is, that what my intentions or resolutions are, is not to bee discovered, though much pain’s has bin taken to collect all scattering Circumstances, and all the probable conjectur’s that can bee raised from thence has bin urged, to see if any thing would bee confessed. And all this done with soe much Ceremony and complement, soe many pardon’s asked for undertakeing to councell, or inquire, and soe great kindenesse and passion for all my interest’s professed, that I cannot but take it well, though I am very weary on’t. (26–27)

They question Osborne for the information she will reveal, and to ascertain whether she will conform to their demands. The language here is both judicial and religious, with references to catechism and confession mingled with the language of evidence (“all scattering Circumstances”). In its mixture of religious and judicial discipline, there is even a hint of an inquisition-like mentality, where

interlocutors conflate religious and social control. Osborne's family wants to probe her inner self and piece together her projected actions. She is willing to reveal her feelings partially, showing that Temple is not "indifferent" to her. However, she does not intend to betray her "intentions and resolutions," or expose what she will do next. Despite her wish to reserve some portion of her soul unexamined, she does not rebel outright at being questioned. In fact, she takes it as a sign of her family's care and interest. Though this attention is negative, it is nonetheless attention, a manifestation of concern. The experience of being watched functions as both violation and protection. Discipline is mixed with scrutiny, expressed and experienced as care.

Although Osborne's use of religious language is highly ironized when she complains of being "chatechized," it is telling that religious discourse creeps into her remarks about her lack of privacy. Religious writers repeatedly affirm that it is impossible to be truly alone in the presence of an all-seeing God.¹⁷ Surveillance was a ubiquitous part of daily religious life, especially in the dissenting tradition. Church congregations required believers to conduct their life in the purview of others, under the rubric of church discipline. Close examination was an essential component of Calvinist doctrine, as members of a community attempted to ascertain who was a member of the Elect.¹⁸ Even an Independent like John Milton remarked on the value of church discipline in improving the individual.¹⁹ Congregational discipline was a means of enforc-

¹⁷ For example, Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1970) 169-70.

¹⁸ Calvin remarks: "The elect cannot be recognized by us with assurance of faith, yet Scripture describes certain sure marks to us, as has previously been said, by which we may distinguish the elect and the children of God from the reprobate and the alien, insofar as He wills us so to recognize them." See the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1986) 61. There is also more than a sprinkling of surveillance writ large: "God judges not according to appearance, nor highly esteems outward splendor, but gazes upon the secrets of the heart" [1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10] (16).

¹⁹ Milton was to grow increasingly resistant to all forms of church discipline throughout his career, but in 1642 he noted that church government was salient for the individual, although he was opposed to the form it took in prelacy. See "The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelacy," *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957) 683. For a detailed consideration of Milton's relationship to nonconformity, see Arthur Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma 1641-1660* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1942).

ing certain behaviours and using the life experience of others for self-patterning. Osborne's concern about outward behaviour is indebted to Christian belief and practices, as filtered through the lens of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*. Not unlike Calvin, Taylor emphasized questions of hygiene or habit readily examinable by outward observers. For Taylor, Christian belief was manifested in outward forms of righteous behaviour.²⁰

In a society where the discourses of scrutiny were already significant, Osborne had to deal with several specific invasions of her privacy: her father's concern with her marital destiny, her brother's scrutiny, the unwelcome attention of suitors, and the disconcerting gossip of strangers. She frames the courtship as a process of securing privacy; the intimacy of her letters is played out against a background of surveillance. She conspires with Temple to disguise their love affair but laments that this cannot be fully achieved.

Surveillance and violation of privacy is manifested in several ways in Osborne's letters. It is both a practical challenge to the courtship and a literal impediment to communication, serving ultimately as a force which shakes Osborne's confidence in her ability to pursue the courtship. In order to reach the negotiation stage, Osborne had to alternatively cope with public exposure of her relationship with Temple, and plot to keep it as secret as possible. Critics have discussed women's anxiety about public visibility in the period as a function of their feminine gender, as a response to the call for modesty, especially given the norm of the "chaste, silent and obedient" wife of the conduct books.²¹ Questions of autonomy which animate the texts of women who sought a voice on the public stage are also present in Osborne's letters, the writings of a woman whose goal was to remain secluded and enclosed in domestic space. Dorothy Osborne's fight for privacy is a fight for romantic and personal freedom. However, her remarks about the need for transparent behaviour, in accordance with the expectations of her society, show that, to at least some degree, she has internalized constraints on both privacy and freedom of action.

²⁰ On the other hand, Taylor is also clear that it is wrong to be overly concerned with the opinions of others: "It is likely our hearts are pure, and our intentions spotlesse, when we are *not solicitous* of the *opinion* and censures of men; but onely that we do our duty, and be accepted of God." See *Holy Living*, ed. P.G. Stanwood (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 32.

²¹ See Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982).