

# Observation

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sydney  
observatory  
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**INT. GRAND HOME - DAY**

*The door of an ornate, 19th Century cupboard, creaks open and a man, GALILEO GALILEI, emerges.*

*In one corner a woman, CAROLINE HERSHEL, sits at a piano, tinkering with the keys. As GALILEO continues to scan the room, he sees a large telescope set up, pointing out the window. He walks over to inspect the instrument. The woman stops playing the keys.*

GALILEO            May I?

CAROLINE         Of course.

GALILEO *looks through the telescope.*

GALILEO            This is fine instrument.

CAROLINE         Yes. I discovered a comet with it only moments ago.

*He looks at her, very dubious. She stands, looks through the telescope, moves it a little to the left and gestures that he should look through. He does and then pulls back, aghast.*

GALILEO            Are you a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society?

CAROLINE         No. Not at all. Women are barred from membership.

GALILEO            And yet you have found a comet.

CAROLINE         No, sir. (Pause) I have found eight.

GALILEO            Eight!

CAROLINE         Yes. But I would have made a wonderful singer.

*She returns to the piano and begins again to tinker. He goes over to her.*

GALILEO            But what have you pondered of their nature madame? Do comets return? Do they refuel the Sun and other stars?

CAROLINE         I have no idea. My brother William told me to find comets, so I have. I have no interest in their nature. I have also remapped the British Catalogue of stars into zones of similar north pole distances, correcting Flamsteed's errors and lately I have done the same with all the nebulae, cataloguing them by north polar distance and in order of right ascension.

*Almost distractedly, she hands GALILEO two books. He looks at them, intrigued.*

GALILEO            What is your name?

3.

CAROLINE Caroline Hershel, and with a fifty pound annuity from George the Third  
I am the first woman in history to make my living from astronomy.  
*He looks at her, again bemused.*

GALILEO I do not believe you.

*She smiles.*

CAROLINE Are you Galileo Galilei?

GALILEO I most assuredly am.

CAROLINE Would you put this over your head, Sir?

*She takes out a brown paper bag. He takes it from her but does not put it on.*

CAROLINE You were the founder of observational science.

GALILEO Correct.

CAROLINE Then put the bag over your head if you would, Sir.

*He looks at her, takes the bag and puts it over his head.*

CAROLINE What do you see?

GALILEO (With voice muffled by the bag) I can't see anything.

CAROLINE Wait for your eyes to adjust.

GALILEO Ah. I can see small holes in the bag, in the configuration of the stars.

CAROLINE Now if you would be so kind as to remove the bag, Sir.

*GALILEO is blinking, dazzled by the light.*

CAROLINE Please make a note of your observations.

GALILEO I would happily do so as soon as my eyes adjust to the light.

CAROLINE And in that time the accuracy of your observations would diminish.

*He takes up a paper and begins to draw his observations.*

GALILEO If only I had two sets of eyes.

CAROLINE And supposing you did, Sir, which pair of eyes would you name as belonging to the astronomer? Those that observe or those that preserve?

GALILEO Why. Both. I suppose.

4.

CAROLINE goes to the telescope.

CAROLINE            My brother would stay outside and call out to me his observations, while I, in the lit house, would log the findings, calling back what objects he might expect to find as the heavens drifted through the eyepiece.

GALILEO             As the earth turned?

CAROLINE           As you most correctly observed, Signor.

GALILEO             I am delighted to make your acquaintance.

*He takes her hand.*

CAROLINE           And yet I must to my horse, Sir, to ride to inform the Astronomer Royal of my finding lest the skies cloud over before my mail reaches him.

*She leaves and GALILEO goes over to the telescope again. He peers through it.*

GALILEO             It is not knowledge that is monstrous  
Only our determination to be ignorant of what does not suit our  
purposes.  
Slaves to our fashion for grouping things together  
Ideas, stars, people  
While all the while they are single shooting particularities winking in  
the daylight winking with a nod to the authorities of propriety and  
convention  
Those oafish bores  
but at night we shrug off their control  
as our eyes and hearts drift out into the eternity of space  
collapsing time with the truth of our findings  
looking at the lights  
looking at the heavens  
looking  
always  
looking and still forever gasping in wonder  
at what we see