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# Building Gender Into the Elizabethan Prodigy House

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## **Building Gender Into the Elizabethan Prodigy House**

Social and political structures in Early Modern England controlled the understanding of both class and gender in addition to the construction and use of domestic and public space. The spatial divisions of the Early Modern country house—its political, social and cultural imperatives—were maintained and upheld by gender divisions. The category of “woman” supported an ideology that separated men and women as well as separate classes within the domestic environment. This separation and the spatial ideology of class and gender also provided one woman the tools to break down the divisions between men and women, to reinforce class status, and to alter one of the most profoundly masculine spaces within the Early Modern domestic environment—the great hall.

Bess of Hardwick, born about 1527 to a Derbyshire family of the minor gentry, was the patron of at least two major country houses: Chatsworth and Hardwick Hall. She attended the courts of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I and was familiar with the buildings of these monarchs. She also was responsible for a number of smaller building projects and was probably influential in the building undertaken by her fourth husband, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, Earl Marshal of England and jailor of Mary, Queen of Scots.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David N. Durant, *Bess of Hardwick: Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998, reprint), *passim*.

Bess's construction of Hardwick Hall exemplifies the traditions and continuities of Tudor building practice as well as significant change in the layout and use of the spaces within it. This building encodes social hierarchy in the Early Modern country house in a new way and helps to dismantle traditional notions of space, gender, and power.

In the last half of the sixteenth century, women were placed in significant positions of royal authority and influence. In England, Mary I and Elizabeth I ruled for over fifty years. In Scotland, Mary Stuart's disastrous reign caused intense upheaval and in France, Catherine de' Medici exercised considerable influence over her sons, the kings of France. The construction of prodigy houses in England stemmed directly from changes in royal patronage during Elizabeth I's reign; this change in patronage also altered perceptions about the relationships between men and women in the last half of the sixteenth century.

The binary division of the human race into two distinct, mutually exclusive categories of "male" and "female" was so much a part of the Elizabethan world view that political, social, and even architectural ideology was infused with maintaining that difference. In the Early Modern World, the sexual division of space followed a rigorous division: women had their "place," as did men. However, a contemporary reader of Elizabethan architectural history might be surprised to find that domestic architecture was as much a site for debates over gender ideology as public, governmental, or royal building. The ideology of gender infused the debate over new trends in domestic architecture—that is, in the construction of the country houses of the late sixteenth century.

Domestic architecture in this context should not be understood as small scale or unimportant. Elizabeth I's annual progresses dictated that her courtiers, receiving the favor of a visit from their queen, construct or significantly enlarge their own country houses into palatial buildings suitable for her entertainment. Ian Dunlop writes, "Although [Elizabeth] cannot be described as a patron of the art, she did exercise a formative influence on the architecture of the home counties by making these progresses."<sup>2</sup> As courtiers vied for the favor of the queen, their country houses and plans for the queen's entertainment caused intense competition.

The prodigy house, as defined by architectural historian John Summerson, tempers tradition with innovation in order to impress the queen as well as her courtiers.<sup>3</sup> Each of these houses, which include almost all the buildings with which Robert Smythson was associated, shows some novelty, some particular feature intended to catch the attention of the court as well as the ultimate spectator—the monarch.

Wollaton Hall, built by Sir Francis Willoughby outside Nottingham between 1580 and 1588, and Hardwick Hall, built by Bess of Hardwick between 1597 and 1601, are both defined as prodigy houses. Elizabeth I undertook no new royal building; it was left to those who wished to make an impression to construct new houses that could amaze and please their queen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Dunlop, *The Palaces and Progresses of Elizabeth I* (London: Cape, 1962), 118-119.

<sup>3</sup> John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 59-60. Prodigy houses include Theobalds, Burghley, Holdenby, Wardour, Worksop, Hardwick, Longleat, and Wollaton. The last five are all connected to Robert Smythson.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Wollaton and Hardwick both demonstrate a novel arrangement of rooms within the house as well as decoration on the exterior. The internal spatial complexity of these buildings shows a clear understanding of the roles men and women were to play. At Wollaton, those roles were rigidly reinforced; at Hardwick, the great hall, serving spaces and state rooms were re-arranged, revealing an awareness of entrenched gender ideology and providing a site for its resistance.

Thomas Laquer's ground-breaking work on the history of gender ideology, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, describes the historical process of creating sex in order to reaffirm and justify political and cultural ideas about humanity. In the pre-modern (or, in Laquer's terms, pre-Enlightenment) world there was only one biological sex—man. Those described as women were simply less perfect forms of men. In this construction, one's gender was neither scientifically nor biologically defined. The body was merely labeled as male or female in order to justify its position on the socio-political spectrum. If labeled female, it lacked rights, duties, and privileges while at the same time fulfilling the function of bearing children in order to perpetuate the system in which it lived. If labeled male, the body assumed rights, privileges and duties that gave it socio-economic status and ordained that it serve as father rather than mother—as maker rather than bearer of children. Modern notions of scientifically verifiable biological sex are, in this instance, unnecessary, since

what is at stake “are not biological questions about the effects of organs or hormones but cultural, political questions regarding the nature of woman.”<sup>5</sup>

This one-sex model of gender identity, in Laquer’s thesis, permeated the European worldview throughout the ancient and medieval periods. The sixteenth century in England saw its own contributions to the gender debate in the so-called *querelle des femmes*, which centered on women’s fitness for rule.<sup>6</sup> But in general, the idea that women were simply less perfect men was the most powerful argument against women’s full participation in the political and economic realms.

The presence of Elizabeth I on the throne of England for forty-four years created a unique situation in the Early Modern world. Not only the issue of women as rulers, but the entire ideological basis for kingship was called into question. The king, by nature the father of the country and its people, was in this case a queen: a queen, moreover, whose physical body was small, frail, and feminine.<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth’s courtiers were called upon to serve as well as woo and the diplomacy surrounding her possible marriage was extraordinarily complex.<sup>8</sup> But more than that, Elizabeth’s feminine body was the site for the contest among courtiers for her favor. The favoritism of a king—such as Elizabeth’s father,

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 22. This discussion of gender in the Early Modern World is indebted also to the following texts: Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), especially Chapter 2 “Contexts;” Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven: Yale, 1994); and Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 86-133.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-130, 137.

<sup>8</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 39-64.

Henry VIII—had been a consistent feature of rule in European countries throughout the medieval period. This contest had been played out among men and in the presence of men alone, in the physical spaces of the king’s privy chamber and bedchamber. Access to this privileged space was open only to men—councilors and courtiers who vied for the king’s attention.<sup>9</sup>

In every reign, the court had two distinct functions: administrative and ceremonial. The administrative functions were run by the Privy Council and overseen by the monarch. The ceremonial aspects of the monarch’s life were organized and run by the royal household. During Elizabeth’s reign, these two branches of government were distinct—one run by the male privy councilors, the other run by Elizabeth’s ladies-in-waiting and female servants. The women who made up Elizabeth’s intimate household held the power to smooth the way into the queen’s presence for the men of the Privy Council.<sup>10</sup>

Thus Early Modern gender ideology and real spatial arrangements in Elizabeth’s court conflicted: men were in charge of the government, but not in charge of Elizabeth’s private life and personal space. This conflict demonstrates that assumptions about space—that men own or organize space and women inhabit it at the pleasure of men—were negotiable in the Early Modern period.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David Starkey, “Intimacy and Innovation: The Rise of the Privy Chamber, 1485-1547,” in *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, edited by David Starkey (Harlow, England: Longman, 1987), 71-118.

<sup>10</sup> Pam Wright, “A Change in Direction: The Ramifications of a Female Household, 1558-1603,” in *The English Court*; David Loades, *The Tudor Court* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1992), 55-59; 134-136.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Wigley, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender” in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), *passim*.

Women could and did control their own spaces, excluding or limiting men's access to them. This rift will become even clearer in the analysis of Wollaton and Hardwick.

According to Lena Cowen Orlin, the medieval household was concentrated on the great hall, defined as

a large room to accommodate the lord's retainers in eating and sleeping, with a central hearth for heating and cooking... Entrance to the house was into a wide corridor known as the screens passage, named for the partial wall or screen that divided this entranceway from the hall.<sup>12</sup>

Several surviving manor houses of the 15<sup>th</sup> century provide examples of the hall and service areas, such as Haddon Hall, Derbyshire; Dartington Hall, Devonshire; and Penshurst Place, Kent.<sup>13</sup>

Haddon's hall is separated from the serving areas by two openings in the screen that provided ceremonial access to the hall for the serving of meals. At Dartington, the screen has three openings. Penshurst retains its original central hearth in the great hall, although the rest of the house has been modified. Most scholars agree that the central hearth began to be replaced by fireplaces in most country houses in the fourteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Common to all the above examples was the dais placed opposite the screens passage. Meals were served by bringing the food in procession through the screens passage and up to the high table on the dais where the lord sat. This

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<sup>12</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Causes and Reasons of All Artificial Things' in the Elizabethan Domestic Environment," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 7 (1995), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 33-39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

arrangement was continued during the sixteenth century even when the lord was not eating in the hall: meals were ceremonially presented to the lord's place at the high table even if he was absent. The important factor was that the lord maintained his *symbolic* presence as head of the household, as the ultimate authority for those gathered in the hall.<sup>15</sup>

Great houses in England altered their layouts significantly in the fourteenth century and eating habits changed as the nobility moved to the great chamber—usually located on an upper floor beyond the great hall—to dine, listen to music, and entertain important visitors.<sup>16</sup> These changes produced new rooms as well as a staircase at the dais end of the great hall. The ritual of service was extended beyond the great hall, up the stairs, and into the great chamber.

The traditional medieval house has been outlined by architectural historian Mark Girouard in *Life in the English Country House*,

Changes in the ceremony and hierarchy of eating led to architectural changes. The processional route from the kitchen was often extended up a spacious and richly decorated staircase leading from the hall to the grand chamber, as at Penshurst. The hall tended to get smaller...But it was still the room by which great people entered the house, and its lord and his guests came back into it on great occasions, or on feast days, or for plays. The lavish ceremonial serving of meals in the hall and the generous entertainment of visitors there remained an essential part of the *image* of a great man, even when the upper level of both household and guests had been creamed off into the great chamber. Moreover, it had the weight of *tradition* behind it (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>16</sup> C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 61-63.

<sup>17</sup> Girouard, *Country House*, 52-53.

This picture of the ceremony of hospitality emphasizes the important occasion which would certainly have been less formal on ordinary days. It also stresses the way in which the spaces for this ritual were refined over time to codify the hierarchy of space within the great hall. The hall had an “upper” and “lower” end. The upper end was reserved for the dais, great chair, and high table to enhance the lord’s position. This description applies to the medieval tradition as practiced by noble landowners into the sixteenth century, even though the monarchy had largely abandoned eating in the great hall by that point. As the sixteenth century progressed, the practice of holding elaborate meals in the great hall diminished as a daily occurrence.

Despite the evolution of royal building in the sixteenth century, country houses of the nobility and gentry continued to follow established tradition. Houses such as Haddon, Dartington and Penshurst served as paradigms of medieval ceremonial space. A palace like Hampton Court exercised a profound effect on later builders and fifty year-old models of upper class or royal building were copied by the nobility and gentry. By the end of the century, however, Wollaton and Hardwick each dealt a blow to traditional medieval arrangements, though for distinctly different reasons.

Early Modern England’s master builders were not “architects” as Brunelleschi or Bramante were in Italy during the sixteenth century. The lack of architects in the sixteenth century is well-documented, most notably by John Wilton-Ely in his article “The Professional Architect in England.” The first person in England to call himself an architect was John Shute, author of a short

treatise called *The First And Chief Grounds Of Architecture*, published in 1563, whose patron was the Duke of Northumberland. Shute was well-read in Vitruvius, Palladio and Serlio, but has not been connected with any identifiable building.<sup>18</sup> Only after the death of Elizabeth I and the rise of Inigo Jones in the seventeenth century does the term architect come into regular use by those who had previously occupied the position of “master builder.”

Thus, throughout the sixteenth century, the medieval model of craftsmen controlled by a master builder was still the most common system for building in England. Of the half dozen or so named master builders from this period, there exist plans from only a few. One of the most prolific of these was Robert Smythson, who began his career at Longleat, working for Sir John Thynne, in 1568. By 1576, he had accepted a commission from Sir Matthew Arundell at Wardour Castle. Four years later, Smythson was hired by Arundell’s cousin, Sir Francis Willoughby, for his new house at Wollaton.

In the sixteenth century, the phrase “a man’s home is his castle” came into general usage well after the decline of the castle as a residence.<sup>19</sup> This phrase would certainly have been popular with a man of the reputation and temperament of Willoughby. His rise in Elizabethan England was due to family connections to the Greys and to his service in the household of Sir Francis Knollys. From there, he rose to prominence and even entertained Elizabeth I at his house at Middleton

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<sup>18</sup> John Wilton-Ely, “The Professional Architect in England,” in *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession*, ed. Spiro Kostof (New York: Oxford, 1977, 1986), 180-208.

<sup>19</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2.

after her departure from the famous entertainment staged at Kenilworth in 1575 by the Earl of Leicester.<sup>20</sup>

At Wollaton, Sir Francis Willoughby constructed a country house as a showpiece to replace the antiquated manor house in which his family had lived for several decades of the sixteenth century. He sought to create a modern house that still retained the ceremonial and authoritative aspect of the great hall and great chamber. He eliminated the courtyard, instead placing the great hall at the center of the plan, accessed via an oblique route and separated from the passage by an elaborately carved stone screen.

On the exterior, hundreds of windows provide light to the interior and break up the façade; the stone work separating the windows is covered with statues, busts, and elaborate ornamentation. The decorative scheme is drawn largely from pattern books by Dutch architect Vredeman de Vries and the Italian Sebastiano Serlio. De Vries' influence wins, however, in the elaborate strapwork, metopes with grotesque heads and cartouches that cover the façade.<sup>21</sup>

Wollaton's symmetry, on both the inside and the outside, displays the increasing use of inspiration from continental sources. On the interior, the original entrance (now changed) led to a corridor with two right-angle turns which eventually directed the visitor to the screens passage, then into the hall. The elaborate stone screen with its three large doorways provided access to the hall, with its curious hammerbeam roof and "prospect room" above it. Alice

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<sup>20</sup> Alice Friedman, *House and Household in Elizabethan England: Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96; 108-109.

Friedman's reconstruction of the original ground and first-floor plans shows that the arrangement was traditional.<sup>22</sup> The hall rose two stories and had an area devoted to a dais and high table; doors led from the hall to a parlor on the northeast. A staircase led to the south great chamber, with its matching north great chamber on the other side of the hall. The gallery on the northeast side of the house connected the two great chambers. Wollaton's great chamber was located on the first floor above the parlor—as at such traditional houses as Haddon Hall.

The ritual of service at Wollaton was an essential part of Willoughby's search for display and importance that he sought for himself—he was intimately connected to the court but was in fact reluctant to attend the queen. At Wollaton he could be in charge and suffer no one to order his comings and goings, something that was impossible at Elizabeth's court. Friedman writes:

The household was run with strict attention to protocol and ceremony; a set of regulations written by Francis Willoughby himself describes the service of meals in the hall and great chamber, the rules for receiving visitors, and the tasks of the usher, butler, and under butler. Watching over this small army of officers, servants, visitors, and laborers was Willoughby himself.<sup>23</sup>

These instructions, which might have been written two centuries earlier, show us that Wollaton's building fabric unites with the personality of its owner to reinforce a gender ideology that places the male at the top and the female-- Willoughby's contentious and physically frail wife—in a subservient position. Willoughby's household was run by men. His wife was in many ways secondary

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

to the fulfillment of the medieval rituals of lordly display to which Willoughby was attached. His design of the physical spaces at Wollaton reflects his emphasis on customary forms of authority. The plan reveals Willoughby's commitment to medieval ceremony and reinforces assumptions about Early Modern gender difference through traditional spatial arrangements.

Hardwick Hall, in Derbyshire, was constructed between 1590 and 1597 probably to a plan by Robert Smythson, whose designs for Wollaton and Longleat were probably known to Bess of Hardwick. When construction began, Bess was a widow. Her fourth husband, the Earl of Shrewsbury, died early in 1590 after an estrangement of over three years. He had been a builder as well. His last project, constructed during the late 1570's, was Worksop, known as "the high house in the Midlands," located in Nottinghamshire.<sup>24</sup>

Most writing about Elizabethan architecture emphasizes the prominent role of the patron in the development of the plan and appearance of the house. There is little doubt that Robert Smythson was responsible for the plan of Hardwick Hall. But while the patronage of Thynne at Longleat, Willoughby at Wollaton, and William Cecil at Burghley and Theobalds has been assigned a central role in the architectural innovation of those houses, Bess's role has been overshadowed in favor of the "genius" of Smythson's plan. However, the construction of Hardwick Hall was not a decision made at the end of Bess's life, nor was it without precedent. Although Hardwick is the most famous example of her building, she had been an architectural patron for more than half her life.

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 115.

Chatsworth and Hardwick Old Hall, as well as her involvement in smaller constructions, proves that architecture was a life-long interest—perhaps even a passion.<sup>25</sup> Girouard notes that prominent noble patrons were intimately involved with the construction of their houses<sup>26</sup> and Bess would have been no exception. Summerson speculates that Bess of Hardwick may have been “the prime mover,” in the construction of both Worksop and Hardwick.<sup>27</sup>

Bess of Hardwick’s management of building projects may be traced back to her second marriage to Sir William Cavendish. Surviving letters include many references to sending workers to various manors; specific directives to level floors or mend windows; and the accounts of her projects include her signature to approve expenditures.<sup>28</sup> This meticulous attention to detail testifies to Bess’s intense interest in building throughout her life.

The plan for the new hall was no doubt completed by Robert Smythson. A variant plan is contained in the collection of his papers at the Royal Institute of British Architects; it shows the cross hall arrangement and the general outline of the building. Smythson not only built Bess’s tomb, he also worked for her son Charles Cavendish at Bolsover.<sup>29</sup> Another reason for supposing Smythson to be involved has been overlooked. Surely Bess, whose knowledge of the Elizabethan

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<sup>25</sup> Sara French, “Women, Space and Power: The Building and use of Hardwick Hall in Elizabethan England” (Ph.D. diss, Binghamton University, 2000), 144-145.

<sup>26</sup> Girouard, *Robert Smythson*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Summerson, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Mss. X.d. 428(82) & (83), Cavendish-Talbot Letters and Mss.X.d. 486 (Cavendish Account Book, 1548-1550).

<sup>29</sup> Summerson, 59; Girouard, *Robert Smythson*, 144-149.

building world was extensive, would have settled for nothing less than the best—and Smythson was unquestionably the most qualified and best-known builder in England. His reputation would have been known to her not least through Shrewsbury but also through Willoughby and Thynne.<sup>30</sup>

Smythson's plan combined Longleat's Palladian simplicity and Wollaton's elimination of the courtyard along with the re-orientation of the great hall ninety degrees. It is set perpendicular to the façade and is immediately visible upon entrance to the house. The oblique and circuitous route left over from medieval houses and repeated at Wollaton has been eliminated.

To an Elizabethan visitor, this difference must have been striking. Hardwick's screen—two columns atop a narrow, chest-high plinth—is a mere pause when entering. Upon entry, the great hall is visually and physically accessible. The great heraldic overmantel is striking: the antlers of its stags, lifted from the crest of Bess's second husband, reach to the ceiling. Nothing impeded the visitor's progress through this room. There was neither a dais nor high table to mark a place of honor for the lord of the manor. Important rooms and people had to be found elsewhere.

At the opposite end of the hall from the entrance, the visitor would be directed to the right, through a doorway, to the great staircase. Wide, shallow steps pull the visitor upward, past decorated doorjambs but always toward the upper floors. At the main first floor landing there is nothing to encourage one to

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<sup>30</sup> Sir John Thynne had proposed marriage to Bess in 1565 after the death of her third husband, Sir William St. Loe (Durant, 53); Bess visited Wollaton in 1592 (Durant, 175-176).

stop. Instead, the visitor begins to see light pouring down the stairs from a dramatic opening above. Above, just before the staircase turns to guide the visitor into the high great chamber on the second floor, the ceiling opens to the towers and light from hundreds of tiny windowpanes pours into the house.

This may have been Bess's goal—to pull the visitor away from the lower floors and up to the showcase on the top floor, where magnificent views of the countryside that Bess owned could be had from every room. In the high great chamber, a painted plaster frieze runs around the room just under the ceiling. It depicts various classical scenes, including Diana and her court, a bear hunt, and a personification of Summer. The overmantel bears the royal arms: thus honoring Elizabeth I in her classical guise as Diana as well as through her crest.

Although Elizabeth I never visited Hardwick, it is not unreasonable to presume that Bess had the idea a later monarch might be received there. The close relationship between Bess of Hardwick's granddaughter and James VI of Scotland meant that royalty was already in residence. Arbella Stuart, the daughter of Elizabeth Cavendish, Bess's daughter, and Charles Stuart, brother of James VI's father, Darnley, was born in 1574. The early death of Arbella's parents left her in Bess's care and her residence at Hardwick was something like imprisonment after a kidnapping plot was revealed in 1592.<sup>31</sup>

It might be argued that Bess's household did not require the same kind of ceremony and thus not the same spatial arrangements as had been seen in earlier houses and at Wollaton, since it did not include a "lord of the manor." However,

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<sup>31</sup> Lansdowne Mss Vol. 71, f. 2 (Bess of Hardwick to Lord Burghley, 21 September 1592).

the construction of Hardwick was undertaken on behalf of Bess's second son, William, on whom it was entailed. William lived with Bess at Hardwick.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Bess not only eliminated the traditional great hall, but made it impossible for her male descendants to use the hall at Hardwick in a traditional way.

The traditional medieval house linked the great hall to the living spaces of its owner. The hall, parlor, and great chamber, were placed in a ceremonial continuum, grouped together opposite to the serving spaces of buttery, pantry, and kitchen. At Wollaton, this spectrum was maintained by placing the hall in the center of the house—eliminating the courtyard in the process—and placing great chambers above and on either side of it. The hall was still a ceremonial space tied to the lord's lifestyle.

Hardwick's hall is different not simply in its re-orientation but also in its relationship to the rest of the traditional spaces within the medieval house. The pantry and buttery are placed on either side of the entrance end of the great hall and the state rooms are placed on the top floor. Rather than tying the hall to the living spaces of the house, Hardwick plants the great hall *between* the serving spaces. If the spectrum of space in the Early Modern country house has a conceptual framework, then Hardwick radically shifts the location of the great hall within that framework: rather than a living space, connected to parlor and great chamber, Hardwick is now part of the serving spaces, cut off from its original location in the medieval ritual of authority and display.

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<sup>32</sup> Durant, 186.

The spaces at Hardwick reveal a difference from other houses of the same period and that difference may quite securely be attributed to the gender of its builder. As Alice Friedman states in her article, “Architecture, Authority and The Female Gaze: Planning And Representation In The Early Modern Country House,” “The most innovative architectural designs of the period were built for patrons whose needs failed to fit within conventional design typology, whether because of their intellectual interests, their social status, or their peculiar programmatic requirements.”<sup>33</sup> Bess’s needs certainly were not the same as Willoughby’s or Thynne’s. Smythson provided a design that reflected Bess’s position as the head of her non-traditional household.

Neither Elizabeth I nor Bess of Hardwick set out to subvert gender roles for women, but each made her own contribution to a subversive agenda. According to Breitenberg, Elizabeth I occupied a position of authority that, “despite a broad and powerful discourse that assumed a natural, divinely ordained basis for authority based on (male) gender and status” overset those assumptions.<sup>34</sup> Bess of Hardwick made a distinct difference in the conceptual use of space, creating room for women to re-conceive their approaches to the domestic interior. Despite the fact that the change in the great hall did not immediately catch on, Hardwick’s innovation did create a lasting change in the way country houses were laid out in the seventeenth century. Although later houses did include great halls, most notably Montacute in Somerset, Hardwick’s

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<sup>33</sup> Alice Friedman, “Architecture, Authority and the Female Gaze: Planning and Representation in the Early Modern Country House,” *Assemblage* 18 (August 1992), 57.

<sup>34</sup> Breitenberg, 1.

alteration of the use and arrangement of the great hall and state rooms sounded the death knell of the great hall's traditional ceremonial and gendered importance. Even if it was constructed in a similar fashion, Hardwick's innovation proved more lasting than the medieval display of lordly authority.

The traditional great hall, functionally superseded long before Hardwick was built, was fundamentally changed with the active input of Bess of Hardwick. It was no longer connected to the rooms most used by the nobility and their households in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It no longer functioned as the symbolic center of authority in the house. The great hall was no longer great, no longer the symbol of the medieval lord's hospitality and authority. The hall no longer contained a dais for enacting lordly authority; the state rooms overtook these functions. At Hardwick, the state rooms were Bess's dais, elevating her above the hall as the supreme authority within her household. As the Early Modern country house evolved, laying bare the ideology of gender roles in the sixteenth century, Bess of Hardwick's contribution was to reveal that ideology and place a woman firmly at the top of the Early Modern country house.