Early Theatre 2(1999)

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Play Houses: Drama at Bolsover and Welbeck

Between 1590 and 1634, a period more or less exactly coterminous with the great age of English Renaissance drama, a group of remarkable houses took shape in the north Midlands of England, on the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. All of them were connected with members of the Cavendish family, many of whom were themselves either patrons of drama or amateur playwrights, and almost all were designed either wholly or in part by Robert Smythson, his son John, or his grandson Huntingdon. The first of these houses was Hardwick Hall, built by Elizabeth Hardwick, countess of Shrewsbury, on a hilltop site immediately next to the Old Hall, in which she had grown up.[1] Bess of Hardwick's ambitions for her children meant that other buildings, intended to house them, soon followed: her eldest son William was already heir to Chatsworth, but the second son, Sir Charles, began a fantasy castle at Bolsover, a few miles along the ridge from Hardwick, as well as converting Welbeck Abbey, which he bought from his brother-in-law and stepbrother Gilbert Talbot, son of Bess's estranged husband, the earl of Shrewsbury. In due course these and his other properties passed to his son, William Cavendish, earl and later duke of Newcastle.

While other houses such as Penshurst and Nun Appleton were immortalized in country-house poetry, the houses of this younger Cavendish line thus became not only the principal homes of a leading patron of the drama, but also the settings of a distinct and very interesting group of plays, which can almost be termed country-house drama. These include, amongst others, Jonson's *Love's Welcome to Bolsover* and *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck*, and Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley's *The Concealed Fancies*, plays which were not only written for performance in these particular houses, but also engage directly both with particularities of their geography and chorography and with the political implications of their domestic and architectural spaces.[2] I shall be concentrating on these plays, and on *The Concealed Fancies* in particular, but I want also to bear in mind their positioning within

the broader framework provided by the twin Cavendish traditions of building houses and of using them and their surroundings as venues for theatrical entertainments. Additionally, Newcastle and his second wife, Margaret Cavendish, wrote plays both during and after the Civil War which can further illuminate the values and philosophies embodied in the architecture and traditions of the Cavendish houses, and those too will be more briefly considered.

Bolsover and Welbeck: Before the War

In 1633, Charles I stayed at Welbeck on his way to Scotland, and Bess of Hardwick's grandson William Cavendish, then earl of Newcastle, commissioned from Ben Jonson a work whose full title amply tells its story: *The Kings Entertainment at* Welbeck *in Nottinghamshire, A house of the Right Honourable, William Earle of* Newcastle, *Vicount* Mansfield, *Baron of* Botle, *and* Bolsover, *&c. At his going into* Scotland. *1633.* Performed on 21 May 1633, the work is indeed best described as an 'Entertainment', since it is neither play nor masque.[3] It begins with a song, a dialogue between Doubt and Love, sung while the king was at dinner, with the first of many local references coming in Love's second stanza, 'When was old Sherewood's head more quaintly curl'd?' (272);[4] Welbeck's park reached well into Sherwood (containing, for instance, what is now the Major Oak), and Charles I, on his accession, had appointed Newcastle lord warden of the Forest of Sherwood.[5] The entertainment resumed after dinner, when 'The King, and the Lords being come downe, and ready to take horse, In the Crowd were discover'd two notorious persons, and men of businesse, as by their eminent dressing, and habits did soone appeare' (273). One wears a cassock – chiming neatly with Welbeck's former abbatial status – and the other a tabard bearing 'old Records of the two Shires, and certaine fragments of the Forrest' (273), alluding to Welbeck's location on the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire as well as on the edge of Sherwood Forest.

The particularities of location are stressed even more when the second of these two, Fitz-Ale (a reference to Derbyshire as the alleged region of ale), comically dismisses the request of the first, Accidence, to be told which of the company is the king, declaring instead 'we have nothing to say to the *King*, till we have spoken with my *Lord* Lieutenant'. Of course this reprises a familiar motif of disguised royalty, but this may well seem to have an extra edge here, since both men concur in the assumption that the lord lieutenant is more important than the king and no other character challenges it. Indeed

rather than the order of importance thus proposed being comically revealed as inverted, it is in fact bolstered: 'Of *Nottinghamshire* adds Accidence, and Fitz-Ale cuts in again with 'And *Darbyshire*, for he is both. And we have businesse to both sides of him from either of the Counties' (274). This is no courtly masque flattering the monarch; what is instead clearly stressed is its status as essentially household drama, a form which, Greg Walker has recently proposed, generally challenges the assumptions of its audience, and particularly those of the most socially important members of it, rather than pandering to them. (Though Walker's examples are taken from a chronologically earlier period, the resurrection of such an ethos is distinctly appropriate to the nostalgia evidenced in both the architecture of these buildings and, I shall later suggest, the habitual dramatic and political allegiances of drama sponsored or written by Newcastle and his family.) Charles, who was often felt to be out of touch with his subjects and to underrate the importance of his nobility, is here being firmly reminded of both.

This assertion that local matters take priority over national ones resurfaces in the introduction of Accidence as the 'Schoole-master of *Mansfield*' (274) and the information that Fitz-Ale is 'Herald of *Darbie*, Light, and Lanthorne of both Counties', whose tabard represents the '*Wonders* of the *Peake*', the Derbyshire Peak District being close at hand. These '*Wonders*' are further enumerated as being 'Saint *Anne* of *Buxstons* boyling Well, / Or *Elden* bottomlesse, like Hell: / *Pooles-hole*, or *Satans* sumptuous Arse' (the last being a cavern in Castleton, Derbyshire, still known by that name). Although these are in one sense obvious points of local and scenic interest on which to light, in another way they represent a rather distinctive set of choices, for they are all natural rather than artificial phenomena. There is no mention of any notable local buildings such as the seven halls of the Eyres (later an inspiration to Charlotte Bronte), Haddon Hall, where George Vernon, self-styled 'King of the Peak', had lorded it, Bolsover's twin castle of Peveril, or even the Cavendish house of Chatsworth. Indeed, what Jonson has chosen to enumerate are actually things which challenge human superiority rather than attest to it, for they could all stand as emblems of inversion: a well that boils, a cavern that might literally lead one down to hell, a satanic irruption into the earth's surface. This is no evocation of place-as-placing, an emanation of an ordering impulse which subordinates geography to human plan; rather it is a celebration of place as possessing an irreducible specificity all of its own. In this case, these particular geographical locations produce a set of specificities whose connotations of inversion and hence misrule again work both to underline the importance of the local as opposed to the national perspective

and also sketch out another element of challenge to the masque genre's more customary praise of rule.

The herald also mentions 'our Outlaw *Robinhood* / That revell'd here in *Sherewood*' (274), and during the course of the play six Hoods who are said to be descended from Robin Hood compete in the sports. Later, '*Peakish* Nicetie' and 'old *Sherewoods* Vicetie' are mentioned in tandem (278). Not only was Robin Hood a famous local figure, but reference to him had, after the issue of James I's 'Book of Sports' in 1618, come to be closely associated with devotion to the monarch;[6] nevertheless, it might continue to encode memories that though Robin Hood had been a loyal servant to the ruler of his choice, he had vigorously resisted other forms of centralized authority. King Richard the Lionheart might be one thing, but Sherwood was notoriously a location where the writ of Prince John and his sheriff had not run – and they had been powerless to do anything about it.

The piece's allusions are not only local, though. The episode of a rustic wedding, with the Bride dressed 'like an old *May-Lady*' (278), takes us on a journey both in miles and years, back to the celebrated Kenilworth festivities of 1575, when the earl of Leicester entertained Elizabeth I. These too had featured a rustic bride-ale, and Herford and Simpson's notes point to the way in which Accidence's wearing of 'the Towne-Pen-and-Inkehorne' echoes the accoutrements of Laneham's bridegroom at Kenilworth. They also compare his mention of proposing to present a wedding with 'the Laneham *Letter*, which Jonson used for the *Masque of Owls*', presented at Kenilworth in 1624,[7] and the allusion seems even more unmistakable when we recall that Leicester's nephew Sir Philip Sidney had written, for a later entertainment for the queen, a masque called *The Lady of May*. Newcastle was very interested in the career of Leicester, who provided the model for Manly in his 1641 play *The Variety*,[8] and just as Leicester used the Kenilworth festivities for a last-ditch attempt to plead for a closer relationship between himself and Elizabeth, so Newcastle would doubtless have welcomed any sign of Charles I being disposed to rely more on his advice. (Since Leicester had set much store on taking the waters at Buxton, it is also appropriate enough to recall him in the context of praise of St Anne's Well.) In this sense, then, it is not only the geographical location of Welbeck that is stressed, but also its status and what it stands for: it is a great courtier house, and it is being presented here in ways which draw directly on the iconography and traditions of the Elizabethan great house, many of which, like Kenilworth and Theobalds, had taken on virtually the status of alternative royal palaces.[9] Once again, the entertainment can thus be seen as not only flattering the king but also staking out an independent political agenda.

In July of the next year, Charles I returned to the region. Although he stayed at Welbeck again, the entertainment this time took place at Newcastle's other house of Bolsover, the neo-chivalric fantasy castle built by his father, Sir Charles Cavendish, a few miles along the ridge from Hardwick Hall, where Newcastle himself was currently working on adding an additional range, under the direction of John Smythson. The new range may in fact have been planned partly with an eye to this and other royal entertainments: the guidebook notes that '[t]he provision of ... private rooms off the formal state bedchamber may be compared with the similar layout at Hampton Court and points to the regal state for which Bolsover was planned',[10] and P.H. Currey similarly suggested that the terrace buildings were erected primarily for hosting entertainments because '[t]heir scale is so vast, and their arrangements apparently so unsuited for family life'.[11] Mark Girouard, concurring with the suggestion that this building might have been partly planned with the king's visit in mind, further proposes that the fact that '[t]he main feature of the masque was a "dance of mechanics", in which a surveyor, carver, free-mason, carpenter, and so on took part, was probably inspired by the fact that the new range was unfinished and building work was still in progress'; he also suggests that 'the fountain garden must have been completed, or complete enough, since the king and queen "retired into a garden" to watch the dance of mechanics. The central figure of the fountain ... is of Venus, a deity appropriate to the title of the masque, *Love's Welcome [to] Bolsover*'.[12]

Possibly, however, it is not merely the garden but also the interior, particularly that of Sir Charles Cavendish's Little Castle, which finds a reflection in the masque, since the 'Song at the Banquet', where the first Tenor asks 'When were the Senses in such order plac'd' and the second adds 'The Sight, the Hearing, Smelling, Touching, Taste, / All at one Banquet?' (281),[13] also seems to be a direct reference to Frans Floris' representations of the Five Senses in the Pillar Chamber.[14] It seems, therefore, that, as at Welbeck, the initial phase of the entertainment was most probably indoors, almost certainly in the Pillar Chamber itself, to give point to the song. Then, 'After the Banquet, the King and Queene retir'd, were entertain'd with Coronell Vitruvius his Oration to his Dance of Mechanickes' (282). This, an obvious satire on Jonson's erstwhile partner Inigo Jones (Coronell Vitruvius' first name is later revealed as 'Iniquo' [283]), does seem to have been designed for outdoor performance, since it requires both space and unwieldy props like an anvil. Finally, when the dance is ended there is 'a second Banquet, set downe before them from the Cloudes by two Loves', Eros and Anteros, for which the Venus fountain

would indeed be a suitable setting. That the entertainment was a memorable one certainly seems to be implied by the parallels with it contained in Newcastle's own Christmas masque, which also alludes to Jones as well as to Jonson's *The Case is Altered*, and which seems to have been performed at Welbeck, probably later in the 1630s.[15]

One very notable feature of all the locations which seem to be implied for the masque is the emphasis not just on literal but on symbolic geometry and geography, something in which Newcastle, who had a scientific bent, would inevitably be interested.[16] Anteros refers to 'The King, and Queenes Court, which is circular, / And perfect' (282); the Bass has already said that 'Love is a Circle' (282), and later Philalethes tells Eros and Anteros that

> The Place ... wherein ... you are now planted, is the divine Schoole of Love. An Academie, or Court, where all the true lessons of Love are thoroughly read and taught. The Reasons, the Proportions, and Harmonie, drawne forth in analytick Tables, and made demonstrable to the *Senses*. Which if you (Brethren) should report, and sweare to, would hardly get a credit above a Fable, here in the edge of *Darbyshire* (the region of Ale) because you relate in Rime. (282–3)

There is something evocative even today in the thought of standing 'in the edge of *Darbyshire*'; it is doubly so to anyone who has seen how Bolsover Castle still stands stark above the tiny mining cottages which lie between it and the M1 motorway. Moreover, the language of Philalethes (whose name means 'lover of truth') suggests that even in remote Derbyshire, with its preference for the unaristocratic drink of ale and its suspicion of rhyme, a serious attempt has been made to build in the style of symbolic architecture, with its quasi-mystical correspondences of figures and proportions, epitomized in such Elizabethan architectural conceits as Sir Thomas Tresham's triangular lodge, symbolizing the Holy Trinity.

Indeed, there is a distinct suggestion both in the masque and in the actual design of Bolsover that it was this older style of architecture that its patron preferred. Mark Girouard comments that 'one gets the impression that William Cavendish did not much appreciate the architecture of Arundel's protégé, Inigo Jones', and remarks on the distinct lack of Jonesian elements at Bolsover, despite John Smythson's recent exposure to his work on a visit to London.[17] Since, as Girouard also points out, 'John Smythson must almost certainly have been present at the time of the royal visit to Bolsover, and perhaps watched the masque' (277), it is perhaps fair to assume that the masque's satire on architectural pretensions would have been considered to be an obvi-

ous hit at Jones, rather than a deliberate insult to Smythson, and the logical inference, therefore, would indeed be that the two men's styles were considered to be clearly and radically distinct.

Perhaps, then, we can use *Love's Welcome to Bolsover* as a key to some of the complex meanings of this curious castle, allowing us to read into the building not only the obvious allusions to medieval keeps but more recondite ones to the building practices and aesthetic beliefs of the Elizabethans, with their assumption of a correlation between physical spaces and abstract ideas. The careful intersections of shapes created by the regularly patterned oblong and square rooms, and the round pillars and semicircular vaults of the square Pillar Chamber in particular (not to mention the odd and still unexplained hemispherical protrusions on the façade of the terrace), together with a decorative scheme with a marked emphasis on beauty and the senses, would thus need to be read as meaningful in their own right. Presumably, they suggest that the squareness of the castle accommodates the circularity of love, thus providing a suitable backdrop for a masque with a title whose first word is 'Love', and this implication is further strengthened by the fact that the Pillar Chamber, the setting for the first part of the masque, not only displays a carefully constructed interplay of circle and square but also has its fireplace dominated by an achievement of the arms of William Cavendish impaling those of his then wife, supported by cherubs.

However, we should also be alert to the ways in which the presence of such a scheme of meaning is already inherently politicized, since it suggests a nostalgia for the Elizabethan period which implicitly critiques Charles I and signals a preference for a period in which the aristocracy were perceived as having enjoyed greater power and in which Elizabeth's own parsimony and her annual habit of progresses had combined to ensure that the great courtier houses were as much centres of power as the court itself. (The guidebook notes that the panelling in the Pillar Room is modelled on that of Theobalds.) This harking back to the past and its attendant devotion to the idea of the great house are consistent keynotes of Cavendish concerns, with Hardwick Hall itself, where the state rooms took up so much space that the Old Hall had to be retained to provide accommodation, as a prime example of a house built to be capable of entertaining a queen – perhaps even a queen with Cavendish blood in her veins, if, as Bess seems to have hoped, her granddaughter Arbella had succeeded to the throne. It is, then, no surprise to find them expressed here, but it is nevertheless useful to be alert to the ways in which the very architecture of Bolsover chimes with the politicized subtext of Jonson's masque.

Welbeck: The War and After

There was other drama at Welbeck during these years, most notably the *Masque of Ladies at Welbeck Abbey* performed in around 1635,[18] but I want now to turn to a particular play which, though it was probably never performed, was almost certainly written for performance there, and which inflects the Cavendish tradition of household drama with a probing exploration of the gendered politics of domestic space. *The Concealed Fancies*, written by Newcastle's two eldest daughters Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, certainly shows clear marks of its location, as well as working firmly within the traditions of drama associated with the Cavendish family – Alison Findlay suggests that the girls had most likely seen the two Jonson pieces, and that costumes from them might even have been still available.[19] Written when the two sisters were under siege by parliamentary troops, most probably at Welbeck,[20] it alludes repeatedly to both its historical moment and its geographical setting. A character identified only by the speech-heading 'Sh', who, like the authors, is besieged by the parliamentarians, asks her sisters, 'Pray, how did I look in the posture of a delinquent?';[21] Tattiney's references to her 'dark parlour room' (150) and Luceny's to walking in the 'nuns' gallery' look like specific allusions to features of the abbey; and the two sisters, appropriately enough for a play conceived in a former abbey (doorways and stonework from which can still be seen today in the lower portions of the building), dress up as nuns.[22]

Most intriguingly, there seems to be a reference to the elaborate decorative schemes characteristic of Cavendish houses when Luceny says that 'Each chamber ceiling doth create true sad, / Yet tempered so as I am quiet, glad' (149). Welbeck has been much altered since the seventeenth century, but a painted ceiling has still been preserved, albeit invisibly: the duke of Newcastle's riding school (built in 1623), now divided into a library and chapel, has paintings of dawn on one side and sunset on the other. (They are now hidden behind a plaster barrel-vault ceiling, but a small door in this still gives access to the roof-space.)[23] The divided feelings of which Luceny speaks find a nice echo in the dawn/sunset pairing, and lead me to wonder whether the Riding School, which would offer a suitably large space, was indeed envisaged as the venue if the play were ever to be performed. Certainly Luceny's words seem to suggest that the authors were imagining any performance as taking place in a room with a painted ceiling, and though the fact that this is the only one still surviving does not, of course, establish that there were never any others, it does at least prove that there was such a space at Welbeck.

It may, moreoever, be worth noting that there was probably a considerable similarity of planning and design between the Riding Schools at Welbeck and Bolsover, and that the latter does indeed seem to have been envisaged as allowing of an audience of sorts, since '[a] triple opening, now blocked up, in the northern end suggests a gallery for spectators to view the feats of horsemanship'.[24] One might also wonder whether this triple opening was not reminiscent of the architecture of the screens passage, which was traditionally so closely associated with the performance of household dramas; this would certainly be in line with the typical practice, in the houses built for Newcastle and his father, of retaining and emphasizing earlier and traditional features.[25] And it would, of course, invest the play with added poignancy if the sisters had imagined the setting for this play which is so closely concerned with their father as taking place in a space consecrated to his favourite pursuit of riding.

The interplay with Welbeck's past created by references to its former abbatial status is matched by an acute awareness of its present. We are constantly reminded that Ballamo Castle – the Welbeck of the play – is under siege, not only by the insistent use of military language such as 'the magazine of love' but also by a sustained emphasis on the difficulty of preserving private space inviolate. Though much is made of the sisters' neglect of household affairs – 'those wits will ne'er be housewives' (134) – they are very aware of the house itself, and what it means both literally and metaphorically: Luceny asks Courtley to 'make an honourable retreat out of the house' or she would 'cause Mr Steward to make him make his retreat with more confusion' (135). Just as we hear in technical detail about the defensibility of the siege works at Ballamo (140–1), so we have a clear sense here of the physical and psychological importance of the house's boundaries, as one might indeed expect from those who have to defend them.[26]

However, although the absence of Newcastle himself meant that the defence of Welbeck fell to his daughters, houses in the play are notably not imagined as spaces in which women are allowed to move freely, as we see in Luceny's imagined dependence on the intervention of the Steward, and Presumption's threat that Tattiney will not be able to speak to a male servant when they are married, 'were it but to know who it was that came last into the house' (142). Nevertheless, houses remain the only spaces which they can possibly inhabit, and to be in them boosts their status: Presumption threatens that if Tattiney 'do not give respect to my mother and sisters, I will tell her she hath not deserved to enter into my honourable old house' (142), striking a similar note to William Cavendish's *A Debauched Gallant*, where there is an acute consciousness of how a woman who is not legitimately married may

end up having to give birth literally in the street, since her seducer has barred his door.[27] The Cavendish girls may be defending the house against the enemy, but they themselves are not its full possessors. A house is a thing that belongs to a man.

Both the constraints and the boundaries of the house are most forcefully explored in the scene where the three besieged cousins contemplate opening Lord Calsindow's closet, which in turn follows immediately on Luceny's and Tattiney's apparent overhearing of Presumption's and Courtley's plans, subtly introducing the motifs of espionage and being watched. Fascinatingly, the besieged Sh. reminisces to Cicilley and Is. about how 'I practised Cleopatra when she was in her captivity' (143). The sense that Sh. has found performance and the presence of an audience empowering segues neatly into their ransacking of the absent Calsindow's closet. Is. opines that 'Truly, if he knew he would wonder how we durst offer to look of them', but Sh., in keeping with her earlier mood, actually wants him to look at their 'look[ing] of them': she says, 'I wish he saw us in a prospective' (143). In one way, she is clearly fantasizing about collapsing the gulf which separates the Cavalier, exiled to the continent, from his womenfolk, trapped at home and under siege by the parliamentarians, but there also seems to be an attraction to this inverse voyeurism for its own sake, as well as a sense that this is, finally, a way for the women to reclaim some measure of power. Looked at themselves, and with their own space violated, they too will exercise the gaze and violate the space of another, a motif continued when they propose breaking open the seal of one of Calsindow's letters and picking the locks of his cabinet (144), and even go so far as to procure for the purpose a smith (146), whose presence echoes that of the one in *Love's Welcome to Bolsover*. Though the plan is eventually abandoned, the ideas are not, for Courtley, disguised as a pedlar, offers to sell both 'doubt's multiplying glass' and 'a prospective, wherein you'll see / My griefs of fuller moan, like rocks to be' (147).

The crossover between reality and fiction in *The Concealed Fancies*' representation of imprisonment is doubly appropriate because the text shows itself perpetually aware of the performed and theatrical nature not just of conventional social intercourse but of *all* selfhood. In only the second line of the play, Presumption uses an extremely suggestive phrase: commenting on Tattiney's behaviour to him, he says, 'Faith, my misfortune is, she knows her scene-self too well' (133). To think of one's self as something that is played seems indeed to be second nature to the more intelligent characters of the play, as is the use of theatrical and metatheatrical metaphors. Presumption counsels Courtley, 'Come let's go to them and see how they will act their scenes' (133),

while both girls separately affect to assume that the courtships of Presumption and Courtley are not genuinely intended but are either dress rehearsals or action replays of some similar scene in which they have been in earnest. The awareness is, however, particularly acute for the two sisters, since, as for their authors, language and performance are the only arenas of action currently open to them. Although the play fictionally displaces the siege conditions onto some imagined and rather sketchily dramatized cousins, leaving its heroines free from peril, this cannot disguise the constraints under which the authors labour. Living in a kind of suspended animation in the absence of the father who alone can authorize action, the sisters' exertion of vicarious authority through authorship mediates not only generalized observations about their society and lives, but also far more immediate and particular pressures.

One of the most acute of these, as the name 'Courtley', Luceny's contemptuous 'there is nothing I hate more th[a]n a country gentleman' (136), and Presumption's threat of banishing Tattiney to the country while he goes to town (141) all remind us, is the absence of a court. Newcastle's daughters, like their father, who had served as governor to the young Charles II, were brought up specifically for a mode of behaviour and a style of living very closely identified with service to the court and a detailed, reasoned awareness of its morals and *mores*; the two sisters' writing includes a poem 'On hir most sacred Majestie',[28] and Henrietta Maria is also clearly alluded to in Pert's comments about 'my sweet Platonic soul' (148). Though Newcastle had frequently distanced himself from aspects of Charles I's policy making, and had often felt unvalued and underused by the court, he had never ceased to engage with it; his comments and even his own dramatic representations of it may critique it, but they do not reject it, and indeed after the bitter defeat of Marston Moor, when Newcastle's own White Coats had been slaughtered, the reason that he gave for leaving England was that 'I will not endure the laughter of the Court'.[29] Though *Love's Welcome to Bolsover* may insist on a local perspective, slighting references to rusticity elsewhere in these plays suggest that the country is valued not in its own right, but as a power-base for the magnate's own quasi-court. What the sisters in *The Concealed Fancies* face, though, is a world in which the very survival of courtly society has become a matter of serious doubt.

One of the ways in which anxiety about this possibility manifests itself most acutely is in the play's intense concern with being seen. With the disappearance of the court from English life, those educated for the court not only had no one to look to, but might, indeed, have no one to look *at* them. It might perhaps have been some such psychological stimulus as this which

helped propel the two sisters toward the one act which could guarantee them an audience of eyes, the writing and performing of a play; and if it did so, then it is worth noting that, once again, a Cavendish property is effectively being suggested as an alternative venue for a possible court (and, if performance was indeed envisaged, as effectively reviving some at least of the traditions associated with the idea of 'court performance'). As with Hardwick, where Bess of Hardwick's ambitions for her royally-descended granddaughter Arbella meant that the state chambers were perpetually held in readiness for a queen who might or might not have been the official one, the play house of Welbeck is being imagined as a location where the functions of the court can be fulfilled.[30] Once again, the performance or even the envisaged performance of drama in one of these properties can be seen as an act with wider political implications, which serves a distinctively Cavendish agenda as much as a royalist one.

The Concealed Fancies, which makes so clear its debt to the drama to which the girls had been accustomed before the Civil War,[31] also anticipates Restoration comedy in its emphasis on appearances and dress, and thus leads on neatly to the comedies which were in fact produced by the girls' father and stepmother, William and Margaret Cavendish, duke and duchess of Newcastle, in the early years of the Restoration, a period when, according to Shadwell, '*Welbeck* is indeed the only Place, where the best Poets can find a good Reception'.[32] Although written so much later, these plays are often very revealing about the ways in which Newcastle and his family envisaged the great house as functioning. Like her stepdaughters' play, Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* may well seem to draw on the monastic associations of Welbeck, the family's principal residence: there is much emphasis on Lady Happy's decision to 'incloister' herself[33] and on the comforts and amenities of the house and its grounds (14–16).[34] Nor is defence neglected: there is much emphasis on the impregnability of the convent, which accords with Girouard's observation that though '[i]n the plan for Welbeck ... the castle allusions are less strong [than at Sir Charles Cavendish's other properties], ... there are a series of vaulted rooms and an approach consisting of a turreted gatehouse between turreted pavilions';[35] it certainly proved defensible in the Civil War.[36] Moreover, just as in *The Concealed Fancies* the imprisoned cousins recall their amateur performance of a play about Cleopatra (presumably, though not necessarily, Shakespeare's), Lady Happy and her companions watch a series of plays-within-the-play acted in the Convent of Pleasure, which suggests that for Margaret Cavendish as well as for her stepdaughters dramatic performance is an important part of household life.

William Cavendish's *The Humorous Lovers* (1677) relates even more closely to *The Concealed Fancies*.[37] One of its main characters, Emilia's suitor Courtly, repeats a name from the earlier play, as does the chambermaid, Pert, while Newcastle, like Lady Jane and Lady Elizabeth before him, refers to 'my Lady *Kents* powder' (16),[38] and here too there is a masque-within-the-play, which, like *Love's Welcome to Bolsover*, centres on Venus and Cupid, and even refers to '*Lovers[']* *Circle*' (30)[39] before ending with a banquet (32). Unlike his daughters' work, however, Newcastle's play was both set and acted at Covent Garden, and is appropriately self-reflexive: Sir Anthony Altalk's mistress is 'The Princes *Panthea* in the King and no King, she is married to day by Proxie to the Prince *Arbaces*' (5), while Emilia compares Courtly with another Beaumont and Fletcher character, Pharamond (8). On another note also very characteristic of Cavendish attitudes, Mistress Tatle laments the 'modernity' of Courtly and the changing times, complaining that he '[n]ever so much as broke a Launce to maintain your beauty, he dares not run a Tilt without it be at a waiting Woman, I warrant him' (8),[40] while Mistress Hood harks back to 'Queen *Elizabeth*'s time of Famous memory' (22). Despite the stylish urbanity of the play and its dismissal of a '*Derbyshire Horn-Pipe*' as 'too Countrey like' (23), such comments suggest a nostalgia for the chivalric ethos which had inspired Bolsover, and certainly for all its setting in the heart of theatreland, this play does register a great interest in the politics and practicalities of domestic space – something which was indeed very close to Newcastle's heart in the years after the Restoration, since added to his existing interest in architecture was the fact that so much of his own property had been violated and despoiled during the Civil War.[41]

This motif is introduced early in the drama with one of its most fetching phrases: Emilia says of the Colonel that '[h]e stares, and looks up and down, like a Cat that is carried to a strange house, and newly set out of a basket' (12). This very precise observation of the interplay between psychology and space is followed soon afterwards by James' comment that for Furres, who is perpetually cold and always wrapped in furs, 'it is a tedious journey between the Bedchamber and the Dyning room, every yard is a Dutch mile' (14). We also hear of how Sir Anthony is to be received in 'the Great Parlor' (43), and towards the end of the play there is much discussion about who should or should not be allowed into Mistress Tatle's chamber (49–50). This attention to the particularities of household detail is matched by a more conceptual interest in space. As a stage direction charts the movement of the ladies '*to the Balcony near the Stage*', '*The Colonel takes chalk out of his pocket, and makes a Circle*' (34). He then tells Courtly, 'Why, I have found out a Mystery, the

great Mathematical Secret, that has puzzl'd the greatest Wits of the world so many hundred years ... The squaring of the Circle' (35). In a literalization of the conceit of *The Concealed Fancies*, he then '*pulls out a Perspective-glass*' to see his mistress, and declares, 'Oh yonder she appears afar off, she stands on *Dover Cliff*, and here I am on *Calice Sands*, I see her in my Perspective' (35), upon which Sir Anthony asks him if the glass is Galileo's. We come here very close to Newcastle's own world, for he had a long-standing interest in optics: Thomas Hobbes declared that his *A Minute or first Draught of the Optics* (1646) was 'grounded especially upon that which about 16 years since I affirmed to your Lordship at Welbeck, that light is a fancy in the mind, caused by motion in the brain', and the earl himself gave much thought to 'a burning or multiplying glass' and tried to obtain a copy of Galileo's *Dialogues*.[42] Equally, we are back in the world of *Love's Welcome to Bolsover*, where squares and circles are things which both have a material existence in the physical world and also offer a bridge toward a way of conceptualizing the spiritual one.

The Colonel then serenades his mistress:

> *Can thy love for our meeting no way find?*
> *Bestride a Cloud, and sail upon the wind,*
> *Or from our Dover Peer, that height so steep,*
> *Leap down into the bosome of the deep,*
> *A Sea-horse shall be ready to convey*
> *Thee safely over all this washy way.* (35)

This speech plays some very sophisticated games with space. Its insistence on the literal as well as on the symbolic place is made quite clear when '*The Women withdraw from the Balcony*' and the Colonel exclaims 'Ah! the day grows cloudy, and now I cannot see her' (35), but it juggles this acknowledgment of theatrical reality with awareness of theatrical illusion such as the conventions of the masque, where clouds and water may indeed be represented, as well as, arguably, the earlier drama of Newcastle's own daughters, with its interest in perspective-glasses (which in itself may have been intended as a compliment to their absent father); possibly there is even an allusion to the Dover Cliff scene in *King Lear*. Finally, in an appropriate end to the Colonel's imposture of madness, he offers another set-piece description of place which suggestively marries Cavendish's fine sense of domestic space with his ability to perceive it also in symbolic and conceptual terms: the Colonel describes his alleged visit to hell, where

Instead of costly Arras there
The walls poor sooty hangings were;
Spirits went about each Room
With pans of sulphur for perfume. (47)

Later, Mistress Tatle images this supposed 'visit', appropriately enough, as nothing more than him climbing up his chimney, while to cure the apparent madness a dark room is suggested (53).

Although Cavendish's other play of the same year, *The Triumphant Widow*, shares with *The Humorous Lovers* disparaging references to the old-fashioned habit of rhyme, and a modish distaste for the country (Sir John Noddy of the North is the target of much mirth), it is also deeply interested in domestic space. Its opening lines are: 'Nature never contrived so fit a place for the Retreat of Rogues as this, where we have found a Cave the Sun never saw, where we have our Lodging and Tyring-room; for your compleat Rogue must shift as often as your Player' (1).[43] This immediately introduces us to two motifs which, I have suggested, are typical of Cavendish drama: metatheatricality and a sharp awareness of both the literal and the symbolic meanings of place, manifested particularly in an acute sense of the potential fruitfulness of the interpenetration between the actual and the represented space of the stage. Later, Isabella remarks that 'Your Ladiships House I think is the Exchange for Suitors, the Dining-room is always full of Lovers of you, and the Hall always full of eating Parsons' (8), suggesting the same kind of distinction between hall and dining room, the one for the servants to eat in and the other for the gentry, as existed in old-fashioned houses like Hardwick. Later, discussing possible lovers, Lady Haughty dismisses her maid's suggestion of 'a rich Citizen' on the grounds that 'I hate to see a Husband walk the length of his Shop as a Fox, or a Civet-Cat does the length of his Chain, backward and forward, backward and forward', and Isabella agrees, 'And then his House is so dark, as if he were mad, and put there to recover his Wits' – to which Lady Haughty in turn rejoins, 'And a Garden scarce big enough to lye at length, and be buried in' (10).

Country gentlemen, however, are no better, for their heads are 'full of nothing but Dogs and Hawks, and the House pester'd with here a Marrow-bone, there the excrement of a Dog, there the muting of a Hawk' (10). What these women want is a house that will be run properly, as indeed Lady Haughty's currently is, with a place for everything, the hierarchy established, and a continued observance of old-fashioned traditions of hospitality, so that when the Justice enters and asks, 'Is my Lady at home?', the Servant replies,

'She is, Sir, but she's in her Chamber dressing', and the Justice then asks, 'Prethee Friend call the Butler, that I may have a Cup of Sack before Dinner' (16), all of which sits perfectly with Newcastle's view in his other writing that 'Seremonye though Itt is nothing In Itt selfe yet Itt doth everye thing' and that a person's domestic dignity and degree of ritual should correlate precisely with his or her social station.[44] In a similar vein, Sir John notes that 'I entertain them well at my house, and my Sister makes much of them, they love me the best of any Gentleman in the Shire of any Quality' (18).

Throughout this play, indeed, a constaint refrain is 'the house' and its doings. After we are told by Mall that 'My Lady has sent me to the Cook, Madam, to bid him make haste with Dinner' (23), we actually see the varied activities of the amply-staffed kitchen, with the Master Cook issuing directions like 'Be very careful and diligent there in the Scalding-house' (23) and dispensing drink from 'the Can that measures Ale by the Yard, *Derby* measure' (26). This kitchen scene, such a rarity on the Restoration stage (though reminiscent of the presence of Jack and the Cook in *The Concealed Fancies*), underlines the extent to which the house itself, encompassing the whole range of those who work and live within it, lies at the heart of this play. Appropriately, when Cicely announces her marriage to her fellow-servant Gervas, Lady Haughty at once responds, 'Joy to ye, I'le give you your first piece of Household stuff' (38), and we see household rituals such as the removal of the table and cloth and the adjournment of the ladies to the garden to wait for the gentlemen (39). The very phrase 'the house' resonates through the play: we hear 'Tell-tale of the house', 'young Men of the house', 'every Dog-bolt in the house', 'ne're a one of the house' (40), 'of the house', 'all the house', 'in the house' (65), 'the House is rob'd of Plate and Jewels' (73), 'did you never abuse my House?' (78), 'we were betrothed for the honour of your Ladiship's house' (79), 'Well, Sir, we will come and visit you at your House' (95). Here again, as in its impassioned praise of Ben Jonson (60), the play is harking back to familiar Cavendish concerns about the importance of the house.

Thus, though the characters in Newcastle's plays may all have identities which draw, in highly self-conscious ways, on social and theatrical roles, these identities are also fundamentally mediated through a profound sense of their spatial as well as their actantial situations; indeed, in the Christmas masque Newcastle pokes fun at the very concept of the Invisible College – the vicar calls himself 'the visible vickar off the Inuisible churtch off Norton'[45] – as though he has no faith that anything can exist which does not have a material and spatial manifestation. Along with Restoration theatre's habitual

deployment of its stock cast of fop, suitor, witty maid, and so forth, there is a residual but still strongly marked Renaissance sense of place as having more complex meanings and associations than can be enclosed in the simple, schematic town/country dichotomy so typical of Restoration comedy. In the hands of William Cavendish, Covent Garden in *The Humorous Lovers* becomes not merely a stage that mirrors urban society to itself, but one which also encodes memories of an older way of life in which parts of a house and geometric shapes both had symbolic as well as literal meaning; and in *The Triumphant Widow*, he records a way of life in which a house can function as an organic and self-sufficient community – a use, and indeed a philosophy, of space well exemplified in the drama shaped in the houses of his own family.

Notes

1 Bess's other house, Chatsworth, was built earlier than this, but it passed into the hands of her elder son William, and is thus not germane to this study. There are good photos of both houses in Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven, 1983), 183, 206–8, 229–30, 234–45, 252–4, and 266–8.

2 On the dynamics and domestic politics of household drama in general, see the recent account by Greg Walker, *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, 1998), 56–7. Both the Welbeck and Bolsover entertainments have recently been very interestingly discussed by James Fitzmaurice in 'William Cavendish and Two Entertainments by Ben Jonson', *The Ben Jonson Journal* 5 (1998), 63–80.

3 Charles I, when prince of Wales, had already stayed in another Cavendish property, Hardwick, in 1619, and was apparently entertained there, but the only possibly relevant entry in the Hardwick account book for the period, apart from the hiring of extra cooks, appears to be the information that some time between 9–13 August there was an expenditure labelled 'To my Lady *whi*ch hir honor gaue away to the Princes servant*es* Twenty four po*unds* iiij s. 024 04.0' (Hardwick MS 29, p 594). I am grateful to the Keeper of Collections, Chatsworth House, Mr Peter Day, and the Archivist, T.C. Askey, for their courtesy and helpfulness in allowing me to consult the relevant volume of the Hardwick accounts and to Barbara D. Palmer and John M. Wasson, co-editors of the dramatic records of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, West Riding, both collections forthcoming in the REED series.

4 The text appeared in the second volume of *The workes of Benjamin Jonson*,

printed for Richard Meighen in London in 1640. I quote from the reproduction of this in the Chadwyck Healey English Drama database, which preserves the page numbers of the original.

5 See A.S. Turberville, *A History of Welbeck Abbey and its Owners*, 2 vols (London, 1938), 1.47.

6 See Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Robin Hood of the Records', in *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries*, Lois Potter (ed) (Newark, 1998), 39.

7 *Ben Jonson*, C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds), 11 vols, (Oxford, 1950), 10.705 and 706. See also their notes on ll.154, 237–8, and 244–5 for further points of comparison between the Welbeck and the first Kenilworth entertainments, and their note on l.168 for a similarity between Welbeck and *The Masque of Owls*.

8 See Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642* (Cambridge, 1984), 25 and 195–8.

9 On Jonson's interest in social spaces in general, see for instance Andrew McRae, '"On the Famous Voyage": Ben Jonson and Civic Space', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4.2 (September, 1998), <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04–2/mcraonth.html>.

10 P.A. Faulkner, *Bolsover Castle* (London, 1972), 16.

11 P.H. Currey, 'Bolsover Castle', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* 38 (January, 1916), 18.

12 Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House*, 265–6.

13 This too appeared in the second volume of Meighen, and is reproduced from the Chadwyck Healey database.

14 See John P. Cutts, 'When were the *Senses* in such order plac'd?' *Comparative Drama* 4 (1970), 54, and 60–1.

15 See *Dramatic Works by William Cavendish*, Lynn Hulse, (ed), Malone Society Reprints, (Oxford, 1996), Introduction, xi, and 14. The manuscripts of this and other works by William Cavendish are to be found in the literary papers of that part of the Portland Collection which is now housed in the University of Nottingham Library; a succinct description of its contents can be found at <http://mss.library.nottingham.ac.uk/port_lit.html>.

16 For comments on the importance of circular symbolism in scientific theory of the period, see for instance Walter Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas* (Basel, 1967), 82–3 and 118–19.

17 Girouard, *Robert Smythson*, 251.

18 See *Dramatic Works by William Cavendish*, 19–26, and C.E. McGee and John C. Meagher, 'Preliminary Checklist of Tudor and Stuart Entertainments: 1634–42', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 38 (1999), 33–4.

19 Alison Findlay, '"She gave you the civility of the house": Household Performance in *The Concealed Fancies*', in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama*, S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds) (London, Routledge, 1996).
20 See Nathan Comfort Starr, '*The Concealed Fansyes*: A Play by Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley', *PMLA* 46 (1931), 802–38.
21 Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, *The Concealed Fancies*, in *Renaissance Drama By Women: Texts and Documents*, S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds) (London, 1996), 143. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and reference will be given in the text. On the Civil War setting of the play see, for instance, Susan Wiseman, 'Gender and Status in Dramatic Discourse: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', in *Women, Writing, History 1640–1740*, Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds) (Athens, GA, 1992), 159–177, especially 162.
22 For comment on this, see Findlay, 'Civility'.
23 I am deeply grateful to Mr William Parente for drawing my attention to the existence of this ceiling and for an interesting correspondence about the house; to Mr Keith Crossland, former assistant bursar of Welbeck College, for giving up a considerable amount of time to showing me round the Abbey; and to the bursar, Mr Gordon Payne, for arranging the visit.
24 Currey, 'Bolsover Castle', 18 and 24.
25 See for instance Currey, 'Bolsover Castle', 2 and 11, on the conservatism of the architecture and its tendency to adhere or allude to the plan and shape of the actual castle which had previously occupied the site.
26 On the use of space in the play, see also Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (Cambridge, 1998), 148–9.
27 *Dramatic Works of William Cavendish*, 120.
28 See Wiseman, 'Gender and status in dramatic discourse', 162.
29 Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 107.
30 It is not clear whether the play was ever in fact performed. It reads as though the sisters envisaged staging it only in the presence of their father, and his enforced and prolonged absence may well have meant that it was never actually put on. Nevertheless, it was clearly designed to be acted. There has been a modern (amateur) production, directed by Alison Findlay and Jane Milling, at Bretton Hall, Yorkshire, in December 1994, which I reviewed in the *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies* 12 (1995), 7–8.
31 See for instance Margaret J.M. Ezell, '"To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen": The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51 (1988), 289; Sophie Tomlinson, '"My Brain the Stage": Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy

of Female Performance', in *Women, Texts and Histories 1570–1670*, Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (eds) (London, 1992), 138; and my own 'Judith Shakespeare's Reading: Teaching *The Concealed Fancies*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 1996), 400–1.

32 Quoted in Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 163.

33 Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, Jennifer Rowsell (ed) (Oxford, 1995), 9. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and reference will be given in the text. See also Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 189–90, on the duchess's very precise references to the abbey, and particularly the Riding School, in *The Blazing World*, and her fantasy of constructing a private theatre, since no other would put on her plays.

34 Irene G. Dash, in 'Single-Sex Retreats in Two Early Modern Dramas: *Love's Labo[u]r's Lost* and *The Convent of Pleasure*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 1996), 389, records that some of her students 'connected [this passage] with the author's sex, proposing that Cavendish, like Virginia Woolf so much later, was herself concerned with housekeeping details and the elegance that a woman might consider'.

35 Girouard, *Robert Smythson*, 228–9.

36 See Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 112–13.

37 Shadwell is currently credited with parts of both this play and *The Triumphant Widow* (see Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 166–8), but the sections which I discuss seem to me very suggestive of distinctly Cavendish concerns.

38 William Cavendish, *The Humorous Lovers* (London, 1677); quotations are from the reproduction of this edition in the Chadwyck Healey database.

39 The same phrase is also found in *The Triumphant Widow*, 25.

40 Girouard notes that Newcastle himself was a celebrated tilter (*Robert Smythson*, 232).

41 Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 146.

42 Both are cited in Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 53–4.

43 William Cavendish, *The Triumphant Widow* (London, 1677); quoted from the Cavendish Healey English drama database.

44 See Turberville, *History of Welbeck*, 175.

45 *Dramatic Works of William Cavendish*, 11. He also pokes fun at the Rosicrucians (20).