THE DOWAGER COUNTESS AS A POOR OLDE AWNTE: LADY ELIZABETH RUSSELL IN "RETIREMENT"

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• Remarkably well-educated, along with her four sisters.
• Famous for rallying her neighborhood and the English government to force Shakespeare to move the Globe Theatre away from her house.
• Related to powerful families such as the Cecils and the Bacons.
• Wielded a lot of political power as a young widow, but faded from the public consciousness as an elderly woman – why? And why is that stage of her life understudied?
DEFINING LATE WIDOWHOOD

• Comparative age and length of widowhood. Especially poignant in the case of Elizabeth because she had been widowed twice.

• Lack of young children under her guardianship.
  • While her sons were young, she controlled their financial interests.
  • While her daughters were young, she controlled their marriage prospects.
Some of Elizabeth’s most lasting legacies were formed in her old age.

For example, her book was published in 1605.
Elizabeth used the funerary monuments of her family to express socio-political statements that she no longer expressed at court, both in images and in words.

- Her husband, John’s, funeral monument features his daughters holding his coat of arms in a definitive statement that they were his legitimate heirs, despite being female.
ELIZABETH’S OWN MONUMENT

- Her children in various postures of power
- Dressed in widow’s weeds
- Latin and Greek inscriptions display her expertise
CONCLUSION

• Although Elizabeth faded from court news when she moved back to her estate at Bisham, she continued to exercise her influence on those around her. She continued her work as a scholar and left monuments to herself and her family, helping to define the way that later generations would analyze her life.
IMAGES

• *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man*, Lady Elizabeth Russell Dowager, 1605. Provided by Early English Books Online.

• All remaining photos: author’s collection, taken March 2019.