Sarah Churchill, first Duchess of Marlborough (1660–1744) has not lacked attention from scholars and biographers interested in the Court of Queen Anne and in the political influence of elite women. In particular, Frances Harris’s remarkable political biography, and the exhibition she organized at the British Library in 1980, has provided inspiration to those wishing to explore other aspects of the Duchess’s achievements. I will continue by examining how material things played a part in unconventional forms of communication and in the exercise of power. I have chosen to focus on two artefacts, a tent and a statue, and a genre or category of object, namely jewels controlled by the Duchess of Marlborough, including her husband’s jewel-encrusted sword. Along the way I shall also have occasion to address a range of contemporary evidence in manuscript and in print, visual and written.

Sarah Churchill began life as plain Sarah Jenyns; her husband, John Churchill, was made Baron Churchill of Sandridge in 1685, and in 1689 was created Earl of Marlborough, his wife becoming thereby Countess. In 1702 she became Duchess when he was elevated to his Dukedom. After his death in 1722, she became Dowager Duchess. She is often referred to as Sarah Churchill both before and after 1689 but for the sake of consistency I shall refer to her throughout as Marlborough, an appellation arguably justified by the dominant role she played in establishing a dynasty and its wealth. I shall begin this article by situating Marlborough through her universally acknowledged achievements, and in relation to the difference between her and others of her class and era who attained independent reputations as successful women.

THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH IN RELATION TO HER CONTEMPORARIES

Marlborough’s fame rests on four chief areas of accomplishment. Firstly she was the confidante of Princess (later Queen) Anne to whom she became Mistress of the Robes, Groom of the Stole and Keeper of the Privy Purse – until she was forced to resign after a stupendous quarrel succeeding a long period of animosity, though she remained a Ranger of Windsor Park. Secondly she exerted a powerful influence in English parliamentary politics in her own right, through her
husband, Supreme Commander of the English and Dutch forces in the wars of the Spanish succession, and through the couple’s close friend, Sidney Godolphin (1645–1712), Lord Treasurer: the patronage system that was central to eighteenth-century English politics operated, it has been observed, ‘readily face-to-face in the dining room and ballroom as it did at politicians’ levees, in the lobbies of Westminster, or at Court’. Thirdly her financial acumen enabled her, as a direct consequence of her husband unusually having given her sole control of her own finances, to build up a great fortune and ensure dynastic marriages for their daughters of whom the eldest married Godolphin’s son, the second Charles Spencer 3rd Earl of Sunderland, the third the Earl of Bridgewater, and the fourth the 2nd Duke of Montagu. Of this last alliance one commentator adjudged: ‘there was not in England a more acceptable sacrifice to be offered up for appeasing the rage of parties’, though the Duchess herself insisted later in life that she ‘would not have married any child to a king against their own inclination’. Similarly advantageous and politically motivated marriages were arranged by the Duchess for her grandchildren. But, though Marlborough strove all her life for the financial independence of women, her female progeny were not always as willing to accept her authority as they were her money. Nonetheless, she established a tradition for the participation of women in politics that carried on into the fourth generation with Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Fourthly Marlborough was a serious presence in the arts; her achievements in this area were by no means confined to her well-documented and quarrelsome relationship with Vanbrugh. In addition to Blenheim, she built or remodelled six houses (Holywell near St Albans; Windsor Park; Bedford House in Bloomsbury; Marlborough House, St James’s; Wimbledon House; St Albans’ Alms Houses) and employed William Talman, Sir Christopher Wren and Michael Rysbrack.

Much attention has been paid by scholars to women who acquired education and learning in eighteenth-century England; it is therefore important to establish that Marlborough was different. The vitality of Marlborough’s intelligence and her determination to participate fully in public life is the underpinning of her accumulation of wealth and her deployment of material possessions to secure her ambitions. Unlike her female contemporaries, such as Mary Delany and Elizabeth Montagu, Marlborough lacked formal education and struggled to overcome what she perceived as a disadvantage. Even her handwriting was a matter of lament and she often employed secretaries for her voluminous correspondence. Writing in 1727 to her protégé Humfrey Fish, who had been sent abroad as tutor to her wayward grandsons, Marlborough, remarked:

Writing of French well is certainly a very useful Talent for a gentleman; But I dare hardly name that; since I never yet had the Satisfaction of finding that either of the Brothers wrote their own Language well; tho their two Sisters, that are of the Simple Sex, both write very correct. And here is a French man . . . who has learn’d in a year’s time to read all the English Authors, & both to write & speak English. His name is Voltaire.

The Duchess would never, like Elizabeth Montagu in 1769, publish a learned essay on Voltaire. Indeed it is very doubtful whether she read his work at all, though she did try to enlist him in the Whig cause in which she remained loyal and active her entire long life. Yet the wistfulness of her observations on the ‘simple sex’
are typical of this remarkable woman who, born in 1660 to an impoverished gentry family, died in 1744 aged 84 possessed of twenty-seven estates in twelve counties and easily the richest woman in her own right in England.12

There can be no doubt that Marlborough ranks high in any account of gender in relation to power in early Modern England. But what she craved and fought for was not so much the power of learning as the power of government. She described her own role at Court as that of a ‘She Minister’,13 and in 1739 told her friend of later life, the second Earl of Stair, after reading Cardinal Retz’s Memoirs from the French Court under Mazarin’s administration translated into English in 1723: ‘If I were a man, I would not rebel to have the greatest Employment any Prince coud [sic] give me. But if any Tyrant broke the laws, and oblig’d me to draw my sword, I would never trim, and sheath it till justice was done to my Country’.14 This from a woman of 79! On the House of Commons she perceptively observed, to the same correspondent, that she had no hopes of a body of ‘five hundred & fifty odd members who are composed of the same sort of men’.15 She described herself in 1737 as ‘nothing but an ignorant old woman’ but declared she had seen much of Courts and she knew she possessed experience and knowledge of politics.16 Nonetheless, she knew that what could be acquired from books was important. While it was left to her children and grandchildren to build up the great libraries at Althorp, Woburn and Blenheim, she purchased books and read them, especially during her numerous periods of enforced or voluntary exile from Court.17

And, eager to display that she was not unfamiliar with the Classics, she sometimes touchingly embellished her correspondence with earnest and sometimes naïve literary allusions. In 1713/14 shortly before the death of Queen Anne and the accession of George I, she wrote from Germany, ‘I am greatly troubled at what is coming to my country, which I shall never see again, and that makes the Tears fall, and I cry out with Cato, O Liberty, O Virtue, O my Country, and O my Friends and Children, and after naming them tis impossible to say more . . .’. At this point the sentence, in her own hand, peters out dramatically mid-page.18

JEWELLERY AND JEWELS

Here I want to change tack in order to focus on a series of material phenomena. My aim is to move away from exclusively written evidence adduced to open up a life of intent and consequent achievement. Rather, I shall focus on artefacts and the representational traces they leave as a way of indicating a process of incorporation whereby property appropriates its owners, whereby capital acquires symbolic charge, how meaning may be produced without subjective intention.19 I shall, of course, deal with choices made by Marlborough, choices determined by her position within a certain class and cultural environment. Just as we must address the paradoxes generated by portraits that work to convey the idea of presences that erase the processes that went into their production, so we must, I suggest, address artefacts as not reducible merely to economic data, informative though that may be. In Bill Brown’s words, ‘the story of objects asserting themselves as things . . . is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject–object relations.’20 While women’s achievements in the early modern period (and I am thinking of figures such as Elizabeth Carter, Mary Delany, Hester Thrale, Fanny Burney, Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman) are defined by
intellect and by ability to command certain media of communication normally the preserve of men, the materials with which women of this class were more generally associated were not, I shall argue, devoid of accumulated meaning.

I shall start with jewels. When Hester Thrale described Elizabeth Montagu as ‘Brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgement, critical in talk’ she was using the term brilliant both descriptively and, by implication, metaphorically. A brilliant was the term used for the many-faceted cut pioneered at the end of the seventeenth century that made diamonds so sparkling and so desirable. In candlelight especially, once faceted and polished, the high refractive index of this gemstone ensures maximum effect, and diamonds rapidly became the favoured stone of the eighteenth century, taking precedence over pearls that had been the preferred ornament of the seventeenth. If Montagu was solid in her judgement, the diamonds she wore were not only an appropriate visual image of her innate sparkling qualities of mind but also solid in a different sense. They were solid in investment terms – that is, they were not linked to the stock market that, it is worth remembering, evolved rapidly in the eighteenth century. Jewels worn generated passing effect – a brief moment of visual impact that could serve to consolidate the impression of a person’s worth, primarily financial but by extension also symbolic. The word ‘investment’ links the economic and the symbolic, the monetary and the imaginative domains. With something so striking as jewels, and so necessary to Court ritual, the absence of jewels may operate as powerfully as their presence. It is not uncommon for elite women in the late seventeenth century to be represented with minimal or no jewellery – their naked flesh was a site of visual pleasure that was itself carefully evaluated. Nonetheless, in the case of Marlborough, who as Keeper of the Robes was responsible for the Queen’s jewel casket, to have herself represented by Kneller in a much reproduced portrait (plate 2) without any significant sign of jewellery may give pause. Marlborough appreciated the importance of managing portraiture and demonstrated an astuteness and determination in this regard. She has been inaccurately credited with naïveté in relation to painting owing to a misreading of one of her 1734 letters, which was transcribed by an archivist at Woburn with the following statement: ‘many women are now drawn in Vandyke manner though Vandycke has been dead I suppose three hundred years’. In fact the second half of the sentence reads: ‘tho Vandycke I suppose has been dead these hundred years’.

There is ample evidence not only that Marlborough owned great quantities of jewels but also that she made very clear to portrait painters the results she wanted. In a well-known remark to her granddaughter, she averred that ‘Painters, Poets, and Builders have very high Flights but they must be kept down’. However, while the painter, Isaac Whood might be at her beck and call, in a rapidly expanding print market, she was no more able to exercise control over her image than she was able to prevent the publication of scurrilous biographies. Marlborough was included in Horace Walpole’s Royal and Noble Authors by virtue of the Memoirs she published. He described them as ‘digested by one Hooke, who wrote a Roman history; but from her materials, which are so womanish, that I am sure the man might sooner have made a gown and petticoat with them’. When Richard Bull grangerized this work as a gift for the author, he included a head and shoulders of the Duchess (plate 1), about whom Walpole had written scathingly in the same text, and inscribed on the engraving: ‘Youth that lovely Princess
here behold./Thinks age nor Death can’t make her cold’. When it came to pamphleteers, her image was as open to subversion as that of anyone else, as we may observe in the title page to *The Life and History, of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, containing Her Birth, Family, and Education . . .* (plate 3). It seems very unlikely that the patches on Marlborough’s face are accidental (there are no other blotches anywhere on the page). The portrait appears to have been adapted from a stock woodcut and then possibly demeaned by facial damage.

Contemporaries observed, however, how in life Marlborough managed her appearance. The sharp eye of John Evelyn noted the apparently deliberate way in which Marlborough organized her attire on the occasion of the victory celebrations for the Battle of Blenheim in 1704 to suggest noble simplicity. He noted that

---

2 John Faber, *Her Grace the Dutchess of Marlborough*, after Sir Godfrey Kneller, c. 1706. Mezzotint, 46.5 × 30.5 cm. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
the Queen appeared in a very rich coach and ‘none with her but the Dutchesse of Marlborough; in a very plaine garment. The Q full of jewels . . . ’. The Marlborough’s wealth and success were already contentious. Evelyn had remarked in 1702 that the marriages of the first three Marlborough daughters had done no favours to the reputation of their father. ‘Thus suddainly rising was taken notice of & displeased those who had him til now in great esteeme’. Queen Anne was a punctilious observer of form (to the irritation of many) and though she had revived Court ceremony in ways that may have been deliberately intended to distract attention from her own physical infirmities, and appeared at her coronation with diamonds in her hair (many of them borrowed or hired) that ‘brill’d and flamed’ at every motion, she had also acquired a reputation for personal frugality which both the peers and Marlborough’s enemies would have certainly known and which contrasted with the Duke and Duchess’s alleged greed. The rewards promised to the Duke for his victory at Blenheim during the wars of the Spanish succession reinforced criticism of their behaviour. One example of this criticism is a spoof catalogue of books to be sold at Auction at Marlborough’s lodgings in St. James’s on Sunday 25 July 1704, the year in which the Elector of Bavaria joined with France, forcing John Churchill at short notice to The Hague to plan a new campaign, while his wife’s relations with the Queen and the latter’s Tory allies worsened by the day. The anonymously authored single sheet catalogue (plate 4), circulated in manuscript among an educated but undetermined group. Books for sale include ‘The grt. Advantage of early whoring by Sarah Jens now Ds of M’ in octavo and ‘The Whole Art of War, of encamping, Retreating, & running away &c: written originally in Dutch by Baron Obdan . . . dedicated to the Dk of Marlbor’ in two volume folio’. 

If Marlborough was not seen wearing her jewels, they were nonetheless by no means hidden from public knowledge: the fact that in 1715 she decked out her eldest granddaughter, Henrietta (called Harriet), daughter of Francis Godolphin, with jewellery, and clothes purchased in Paris to ensure she would be noticed when launched into society, would have provoked public discussion of the origins
of all these accessories.\textsuperscript{36} Indeed Marlborough’s jewels were a familiar point of reference in elite circles. Thus Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, searching for a yardstick of financial value when describing to her sister in 1718 the extraordinary array of jewels worn by the Sultana Hafife (whom she had just visited in Constantinople), towards the end of a list of wonderful ornaments describes four strings of pearls, the whitest and most perfect in the world, ‘at least enough to make four necklaces every one as large as the Dutchess of Marlbro’s, and of the same size, fasten’d with 2 roses consisting of a large ruby for the
middle stone, and round them twenty drops of clean di’monds to each’. Evidently Marlborough’s jewels existed in public awareness. They also registered, at an empirical level, in inventories and in a lost, but transcribed, ‘jewel book’ dated 1718. Inventories have attracted attention recently as analogies or metaphors for memory. They are also important for historians seeking to establish class, status, income and expenditure, and to cultural historians concerned with goods and chattels. Little jewellery survives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because gem stones, even when not dispersed as raw wealth, were re-set in accordance with the demands of later fashions. Other sources of historical evidence are, therefore, crucial. In establishing how dress and accoutrements specifically marked out membership of the beau monde in the eighteenth century, Hannah Gregg has utilized information derived from private correspondence. From her reading of the 1712 correspondence of the Countess of Strafford, for example, we learn that Marlborough is reported to have ‘given a great many of her dear friends Diamond rings’ and that ‘none of her Whigg Friends but she had given jewels of considerable value’. Among visual sources are pattern books from which jewellers drew inspiration (plate 5). Other publications provided specific designs, such as one that appeared in 1770 and included a diagram illustrating the principles of the girandole earring (plate 6). Portraits may provide evidence of jewellery though it is often, for the reasons stated above, difficult to be certain that they show items that actually existed.

Inventories not only offer factual data but are significant indices of sentiment. The Marlborough jewel records contain many references to pieces containing the Duke of Marlborough’s portrait; jewellery containing miniature portraits and locks of hair embodied the presence of distant or deceased friends and relatives. One such is described as ‘the picture of the Duke of Marlborough covered with a large Diamond [a luxurious substitute for crystal, or glass] & hung to a string of small pearls for a bracelet’. At her death, Marlborough still kept ‘in the closet within my bed chamber at Wimbledon a little picture of the late Duke of Marlborough which was given me by Mrs. Godolphin’. I want to focus on two particular aspects of this documentation: firstly acquisition and secondly disposition. Marlborough appears to have had few, if any, inherited jewels either from her own family, the Jenyns, or from the Churchills. In so far as we can establish intention, by purchasing jewels we presume that she was building heirlooms – that is, precious things that are inalienable and only available for use during a subject’s lifetime. Jewels were also needed for her daughters’ dowries, as bait to attract husbands from the best families and as gifts to the young women intended as marriage partners for male members of the family. Jewels, as we have seen from the Countess of Strafford’s remarks quoted above, made visible political alliances. John Spencer (Marlborough’s grandson) married Georgiana Carteret in 1734 laden with the jewels Marlborough had given her. But the Carterets were, like Marlborough, members of the ‘Patriot’ opposition and when the young couple presented themselves at the Drawing Room (at court) a few days later, at which occasion the jewels would surely again have been on display, they were snubbed. Later in life as Marlborough’s properties and other investments accumulated (she astutely liquidated her assets in the South Sea company just before the ‘bubble’ burst), she probably saw jewels as an alternative form of investment, especially useful during times of political and financial turbulence.
Buying jewels was no more a private activity than giving them. Moreover, what was acquired came with a provenance or pedigree, and carried residual associations with previous owners. When the Duke of Beaufort’s third wife died in 1714 (the previous two had died within the space of seven years), Marlborough purchased a particularly grand pearl necklace for £608, an extremely large sum. To this, by 1715, she had added five pearls bought from the Duchess of Montagu bringing the total number to thirty-nine. The twelfth Earl of Shrewsbury was a godson of Charles II and after being brought up by Jesuits converted to Protestantism. He was an important ally to the Duke of Marlborough and Godolphin, and Queen Anne made him Lord High Treasurer on her deathbed. While in Italy for his health he married in 1705 an Italian widow called Roffeni, daughter of the Marquis of Paleotti; he brought her back to England, where her foreign manners and style were the subject of great wonder. The Duchess of Marlborough described her behaviour at court, ‘entertaining everybody aloud, thrusting out her disagreeable breasts with such strange motions’. This did not prevent Marlborough from sending someone to the sale following Roffeni’s death in 1726, to purchase on her behalf a piece of embroidery and several items of jewellery. The origins of these jewels are noted in the inventory, situating Marlborough and her family in a historical narrative endowing brilliance and distinction. Another spectacular example listed in the inventory is ‘Two extremely fine Pearl Drops, sold by Peg Hughes, and which were the Queen of Bohemia’s’. Elizabeth of Bohemia, the ‘Winter Queen’ (plate 7), was Charles I’s sister and mother of Prince Rupert, one of the most dashing figures of pre-Restoration England. Margaret (Peg) Hughes, an actress, was Prince Rupert’s official mistress and mother of his daughter. The jewels purchased carried therefore an extraordinary set of
associations, especially considering that in 1674 the Electress of Hanover complained bitterly to her husband that Margaret was in high favour with the court at Windsor and that she seemed certain to gain possession of those family jewels that had once belonged to Elizabeth of Bohemia.\textsuperscript{47}

The many wills Marlborough drafted prior to the final version – Lady Mary Wortley Montagu described her as passing the last years of her life ‘padling with her will’\textsuperscript{48} – evince a gendered manoeuvring of material that textually inscribes hierarchies, political loyalties, rewards and strategic relations long after the actual jewels have been dispersed, hidden in bank vaults, or remounted and given new identities. A list in Marlborough’s own arthritic hand is attached to an earlier list written in the 1730s and is headed ‘A List of the Dutchess of Marlborough’s Diamonds’.\textsuperscript{49} It commences with the statement: ‘Since this list was made I gave the Duke of Bedford [her son-in-law] the large diamond ring given by the Emperor [Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor]’. According to the earlier list, and the transcription in the Jewel Book,\textsuperscript{50} this is ‘A brilliant of the first water, and very lively weight, in a ring; the gift of the Emperor’ to the Duke of Marlborough. It was ten carats and one and a half grains and was valued at £900 – a huge stone. The list continues as follows:

\begin{quote}
The ring given me by Charles Earl of Sunderland [son-in-law] I gave to him again/the diamond given me by Queen Anne I gave to Diana Duchess of Bedford/the pearl necklace bought of the Duchess of Beaufort I gave to Mrs/Spencer [grand-daughter-in-law] & the fine large pear drops that were the queen of Bohemia’s [perhaps those we see in her portrait (plate 7)]/bought of Peg Hughes/given the Earl of Sunderland a fine paire of Brilliant Sho buckles/given to Lady Dillon [her sister’s daughter] the diamond earrings cross & pendance set in/black jett & diamond/given
\end{quote}
lady Jersey [a good friend] a yellow diamond ring that is not in this paper/some of the small diamonds have been used to make crosses for Mrs/Spencer & for Ladye Spencer/I gave the Duke of Marlborough’s butons to Mr. Hanbury & thi? large/diamond to Lady Delawarr [a protégé with Jacobite connections]/the diamonds and pearls that are wanting & made up what I had/ were used to fill up those jewels [John Russell, later] the Duke of Bedford, gave at his/marriage [to Marlborough’s granddaughter, Diana] which were very imperfect a necklace that wanted many/pearls & some little diamonds.

The list evinces not only the immense monetary value of some of the jewels in Marlborough’s collection, and their provenance, but also the ways in which an assemblage of jewels like this functioned as a personal mine from which items could be withdrawn to become gifts to allies, actual or potential, at politically expedient moments. Jewellery comprising precious stones is financial wealth masquerading as artful ornament. The work of anthropologists such as Mary Douglas has alerted us to the difference between accepting money and accepting a present (such as jewels), ‘We have . . . succeeded’, Douglas states, ‘in defining consumption as an area of behaviour hedged by rules which explicitly demonstrate that neither commerce nor force are being applied to a free relationship.’ She goes on to say: ‘This is why, no doubt, in our society the line between gift and cash is so carefully drawn.’ We have likewise learned from Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida of the complex patterns of obligation and the uncertain reciprocities that attend the gift. These considerations colour an approach to other elements in Marlborough’s inventory. Gem stones are mobile players in a large and long-term game: it must surely have seemed proper for sentimental and financial reasons that Mr Hanbury, one of the Duke’s trustees, should have been given his buttons. These would probably have been diamonds and would have been, like much jewellery of the period, detachable and designed to be re-configured, or sold. Practices of giving, reciprocation, and inheritance in relation to jewellery involved recycling precious materials. Thus Marlborough, we see from the inventory, has taken some small diamonds and pearls she already possessed to repair a necklace; records of relations between jewellers and clients in the eighteenth century offer ample evidence of this economy.

Given the fact that jewellery is so transient, there is a certain futility about the process of listing diamonds by which Marlborough in common with her peers set such store. Moreover, if stolen or appropriated, gems may be re-cut which immediately transforms them into something unrecognizable. So the inventory manifests an element of wish fulfilment – a desire to fix in a state of permanence a form of material wealth that may easily be scattered, lost or transformed out of recognition. The naming of items serves to insert the owner, Marlborough, into the history of her own times; it is, therefore, a way of asserting her powerful position, equivalent to the many times re-written defences of her own conduct and, like them, neither precisely private nor exactly public. The inventory images the intertwining of friendships, and also of marriages and enmities. Alongside the will it articulates the power of the owner to recognize or ignore friends, relatives, wayward daughters, or trusted servants. To this latter group Marlborough was notably generous. The inventory is also a trace of a collection of artefacts, the plenitude of which it strives to represent; for all the linguistic limitations of the list format, the dazzling character of these objects as invoked bursts forth in all their specificity: ‘A pair of
Pendants [earrings], the Tops Single Stones, Tossetts\textsuperscript{59} – very much pointed and thicke the first Water and quite perfect. Six brilliant Drops, two of them very large the other four much less. The Bar which these drops hang upon has six little Brilliants and one a little bigger in the middle\textsuperscript{60} (making it a girandole, the term originally used to describe a branching candlestick that soon came to be used extensively for the fashionable pendant ear ornament in which three or more jewels hung suspended from a fourth single gem) (plate 6). Wearing jewels endows brilliance, as Hester Thrale recognized when meeting Elizabeth Montagu, but owning them endows influence. And the two are by no means synonymous in an era in which borrowing and hiring jewels for public events was commonplace.\textsuperscript{61} The manoeuvres undertaken by Marlborough in relation to the jewel collection she owned but appears seldom to have worn suggest that they were driven by the will to control. But sentiment was also involved.

Marlborough was immensely wealthy so it is hard to believe that it was for financial reasons that she pursued the Duke of Bedford for the return of the jewels she had provided on his marriage to her granddaughter, Diana Spencer. Granted that she may have been settling old scores, there remains the question of the symbolic importance of precious stones as representative of attachment (the Greek name for the hardest of all minerals, the diamond, was adamas and it was universally believed at this period to be indestructible). The set of jewels (totalling fifteen items, several containing elaborate parures or matching ensembles) was a strategic move to ensure that Diana appeared at the very public arena of her wedding suitably brilliant in jewels; there remained, however, the obligation for them to be returned, an obligation that ensured a connection was maintained between the Bedfords and Marlborough whether the young couple wished for it or not. The deal was that, should Diana die without issue prior to the death of her grandmother, all that had been given to her was to be returned to the Marlboroughs. Diana was married in 1731 and died in 1735 at which point Marlborough wrote to the widowed Duke of Bedford complaining that he had dragged his feet over the restitution of the jewels and £100,000 (in cash), and that he had failed to honour his late wife’s wishes in respect of her grandmother. The letter, dated [10] March 1737 (eighteen months after Diana’s death) concludes a long diatribe concerning property not returned by declaring:

Some time after the Fatal stroke was given, finding You took no Notice of the Jewels lent at your marriage, to save your Grace’s mony I sent to put you in Mind of them. And I receiv’d a letter from your Grace, which I have by me, which plainly shews that you had a mind to keep ’em. But Mr. Hetherington\textsuperscript{62} having seen that was impossible, from a Will to which he was a witness, in which it was express that she should have my Jewels, and at least £100,000 more, with power to give it all away to Your Children, if she had any by you: But if she dyed before Me (which was very unlikely to have happened) all that was given Her in that Will was to have return’d to my own Family. And your Grace knows, besides this, that I had given her Wimbledon, which I built & all furnish’d for Her. And which, together, has cost £70,000. These things were so demonstrated that your Grace did at last bring the Jewels, and a Duplicate of an inventory I had kept of the jewels your Wife had at marriage. Which shewed likewise, that Your Grace knew from ye Beginning that what You had a Mind to keep was not Your’s. And yet all this Extraordinary Kindness of mine to your Wife, for which she was to be much the better, did not hinder You from making Use of your great Dexterity in Contriving a way to defeat me of a kind Legacy that
my Dear Child told me Herself she had left me with the most tender Expressions. And it was not worth above £100. But the Value of it, was that she had wore it. And she beg’d me to wear it for her Sake, and remember her for ever. Several of Her Friends that were with Her, knew this to be true, as there is no Doubt Your Grace did too.63

What is worthy of note about this letter is the interweaving of financial and sentimental concerns: hard-headed economic valuation is accompanied by the valuation of something because it had been worn by the loved person.

MARTIAL MATERIALS

Precious stones and jewellery were not, of course, the exclusive preserve of women in elite families. The status of men was often marked by jewelled orders of merit, ceremonial swords with jewelled hilts, diamond rings and buttons, jewelled shoe buckles, and snuff boxes studded with gem stones. A vivid illustration of the merging of sentiment with strategy around material effects may be seen in the efforts made by Marlborough, a woman not averse, as we have seen, to martial language, to preserve the Duke’s presentation sword (current whereabouts not known). The sword he actually fought with he gave to the great General, Prince Eugène of Savoy, but he also possessed, at the time of his death, a sword with a jewelled hilt that had been presented to him by Emperor Charles V. This fabulous artefact was an object of public interest. In *Royal and Noble Authors* (1758), in a passage he omitted from the second edition having perhaps regretted harping on the Duke’s reputed financial motives for pursuing the war, Horace Walpole opined that, had the Duke ‘written his own history from his heart as the partner of his fortunes did, he would probably have dwelt on the diamond sword, which the Emperor gave him, and have scrupulously told us how many carats each diamond weighed . . .’64 The sword had been bequeathed by the Duke to his male heir as an heirloom, and Marlborough handed it over to Charles Spencer (1706–58) in what her biographer describes as ‘a weak moment’ after the Marquis of Blandford’s death in 1731.65 Along with his brother John, the heir to the Marlborough estates was constantly in debt to money lenders, and it became something of an obsession on the part of Marlborough to get the sword returned to her before the diamonds were – as she envisaged – picked off the hilt. She went unsuccessfully into litigation to retrieve this highly symbolic item. The actual financial value was a drop in the ocean of her vast wealth but this was something that incorporated visible value, ritual (since no one actually fought with a sword like this) and, through metonymy, the masculine and martial body of the Duke. Like all weapons, swords act as prosthetic extensions of the body and in their form symbolize phallic power. The statement reportedly made by Marlborough in court is couched in characteristically extravagant terms: ‘What! Shall I suffer that sword, which my Lord would have carried to the gates of Paris, to be sent to a pawnbroker, to have the diamonds picked out one by one?66 The threat of dispersal of the diamonds on the sword’s hilt was a threat to the integrity of family, and to the continuation of the male line which, for the Marlborough clan was already a troublesome issue. After the death in childhood of both their sons, it was the first Duke’s eldest daughter, Henrietta, who inherited the title but, after the early death of her only son, it went to Robert (who died in 1729) and then the problematic Charles, both sons of Marlborough’s daughter Anne, who had married Charles Spencer, 3rd Earl of Sunderland.
I want to stay with the idea I dwelt on in relation to the inventory, that is the idea of a dynamic historical relationship between what is hidden but known materially to exist, and what is displayed and re-presented within patterns of ritualized social and political activity. The key terms in play here are material and representation. Practices such as writing and imaging have material and non-material consequences. Via conversation, gossip and reportage – relays of representation – the resulting artefacts are distinguished by the interaction of material substance with social and political function. They permit of interpretation that takes into account both sides of the equation while privileging neither. The class of artefact I shall now consider is the tent. Largely now associated with camping, boy scouts, military history, and the study of nomadic societies, the idea of a tent remains a powerful political and military metaphor. But tents hide those inside from public view and exclude those left outside, a dichotomy that imagery is richly able to exploit. I will take one example. The Scotch Tent, or True Contrast (plate 8a) was published in 1762 and shows a large tent in the shape of a Tartan petticoat on which is represented a large irradiated jack boot from which a Scotch thistle issues. The Duke of Cumberland as the ‘Emblem of England’ stands on one side declaring he will put a stop to this Scotch and French scheme, while on the other stands the Duke de Nivernois, as ‘Emblem of the state of France’ declaring ‘me like a de tent schemes but me no like dat fat man …’. The ostensible subject matter concerns the Seven Years War and the Treaty of Paris to which many, including William Pitt the Elder and Horace Walpole, were vehemently opposed. This is, however, a ‘transparency print’ composed of two separate engravings stuck together so carefully that even the paper lines are aligned. Thus when the print is held up to the light, the people who are inside the feminized tent appear and, suddenly, the Scottish reference makes sense (plate 8b). They are George III; the Princess of Wales his mother; and the Earl of Bute her (Scottish) favourite, the King’s mentor and Prime Minister. The Earl wears Tartan and above the King’s head a large petticoat is suspended. Whether a screen, an arras, a tent or indeed a petticoat, is employed the function is to suggest that words or deeds may be witnessed and overheard without those witnessing them revealing their presence. Such devices are the stock in trade of the eighteenth-century stage. We need think only of Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro (1786). The eliding here of tents and petticoats reminds us of how petticoat, like distaff, stood for females in general but also, more particularly for (unwelcome) female empowerment. In the case of The Scotch Tent, the material construction of the print allows not only an act of revelation (we see the plotting inside the tent) but also makes visible the mechanism of oscillation between seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing, which is one of the cornerstones of political subterfuge.

Tents are not only images, they are also material artefacts, they are moveable, and can be highly ornamental. One such was the Duke of Marlborough’s campaign tent, an artefact with a functional purpose that may be seen to have lived many lives, undergone many transformations and appropriations. The word manoeuvre, a military term, is appropriate here not only because this was an object that saw active service, but also because it became the site of manoeuvring in the political and social sense and, arguably, at the final count outmanoeuvred its commanders. As a decorative textile, the tent connects to the sphere of female occupations, as a military object it is rooted firmly in masculine endeavour. Marlborough strove to participate in both. The example of the Duke of

Marlborough’s campaign tent also demonstrates how an artefact is appropriated for different usages and becomes embedded in family memory. At a difficult time for them politically, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough were able to seize the tent’s potential as an exotic object and, eventually, the Duchess was able to turn it into something approximating a family heirloom. So how did this happen?

At the end of 1711, Queen Anne, having created a dozen new Tory peers, secured a government majority for peace terms to which the Duke of Marlborough and his supporters were vehemently opposed. The Duke was dismissed from his post and, with his wife, whose ongoing conflict with the Queen was also approaching a point of no return, retired to Holywell House, the home near St Albans that the Duchess had inherited from her mother and improved with the help of William Talman. Here, on the bowling green, on 13 August, was pitched ‘a magnificent Tent, said to be the same his Grace formerly made use of in the Camp’. The tent is described in the press as ‘Arras Work’ but the Duchess later referred to it specifically as ‘the Turkish tent’. Arras was woollen tapestry as made from the Middle Ages in the French town of Arras, but the word had acquired the generic meaning of wall-hangings behind which (as is attested, for example, in Hamlet) a person might hide. Turkish tents were war booty, much prized not only as artefacts of great beauty but also symbolically as the mobile space wherein strategic decisions concerning the conduct of wars were made.

We do not know the origins of the Marlborough Turkish tent but it may have been a gift of Prince Eugène with whom the Duke, having crossed the Danube and invaded Bavaria in July 1704, joined forces the following month. Prince Eugène served three Habsburg Emperors and first saw action against the Ottoman Turks at the siege of Vienna in 1683; he secured his fame with a crushing victory against the Ottomans at the Battle of Zenta in 1697. Many tents were seized as war booty at the relief of the siege of Vienna and, even allowing for poetic licence, the variety can be seen in some of the many depictions of that event (plate 9). It may well be that the Marlborough tent was taken on this occasion and was subsequently given to the Duke by Prince Eugène. It seems not to have survived but its appearance can be gleaned from examples that are preserved at Wavel Castle, Cracow, that holds the largest collection of Oriental tents in Europe, and in Berlin. The tents vary in size from the so-called vizier tents that are very grand and highly ornamented to more modest ‘szopy’ (sheds) for the army and ‘saybans’ for official audiences. The grandest of the tents in Cracow is 21 metres along each wall and is made using the traditional technique of appliqué architectural design that imitates the divisions of a palace or mosque interior and, in this instance, covers the entire surface of the walls. In Berlin can be seen a tent that would have been used as a reception hall for high-ranking military personnel (plate 10). It was taken outside Vienna in 1683 by Friedrich von der Groeben, Lieutenant-General and aide de camp to the victorious Polish King John III Sobieski. It later came into the ownership of William II. An octahedron, the tent is canvas and largely unornamented on the exterior apart from appliqué quatrefoils around the base and at the seam of the roof and the walls; the interior has richly ornamented silk/cotton embroidered panels, the most elaborate of which are on the raised flap of the tent, which provides a canopy supported by poles (modern replacements but originally probably painted), without preventing the aperture being closed for privacy. Its deep reds and blues are now faded but it is not difficult to imagine what an astonishing sight such an artefact would have presented on an English lawn.
Although the Ottomans used tents like this also for leisure activities, the overwhelming associations in the West were with military manoeuvres. The erection of such an exotic object on a private lawn just outside St Albans was a manoeuvre worthy of two brilliant tacticians. Alienated from the Queen, they devised an alternative space to Court, one that could only serve to remind the Duke’s adversaries firstly of his great military prowess, and secondly of his popularity. It was reported in the press that on the anniversary of the Battle of Blenheim, the Marlboroughs held a dinner party in this magnificent tent ‘said to be the same wherein [His Grace] held the Councils of War’. Those who dined with the Duke and Duchess in the tent were said to include ‘the Lord Godolphin, Lord Cowper, Duke of Montague [sic], Lord Bridgewater, Lord Rialton, Mr. Walpole, cum multis aliis’. This was a meeting of grandees of the political class as well as relatives by marriage and close allies. The Duke and Duchess of Marlborough’s political allies meeting at Holywell in a tent constituted themselves as public spectacle; they were in the open air in daylight and, given the layout of the property must have been close to the road.79 And yet, as with The Scotch Tent, or True Contrast (plates 8a and 8b), they were also inside and hidden in an exotic and moveable structure whose very impermanence – the ability to move rapidly from one site to another – is of the essence. The writer confesses that what was discussed and agreed on after dinner is not known but that ‘his Grace set out early this Morning for London’.80 Shortly afterwards the Marlboroughs went into exile in Germany to wait for the Queen’s death. Perhaps the guests sat on the
chairs which belonged with the tent and which the Duchess later described as ‘whimsical odd things’ and ate off the plate which in the 1730s in one of her many lists she cites as that ‘given the late Duke … when he was Commander in Flanders & was always left there when he came into England’.

The tent, ‘very curious of its kind’, remained on the green at Holywell and, in something of a public relations coup, throughout the summer it drew ‘a vast Concours of Country People, of all Sorts, to see it, the Price being but Six-pence a-piece’ (suggesting either a jibe against the Marlborough’s perceived miserliness, or that it was country gentry primarily who were expected). Textiles and wall hangings were an expensive and highly valued part of domestic furnishing, and one to which the Duchess devoted much love and attention in her various houses. During the Marlboroughs’ exile 1712–14, the walls of Marlborough House in London were painted by Louis Laguerre with scenes from the Duke’s campaigns. However, the decision was made for Blenheim that ten large panels illustrating the Duke’s principal victories (with the single exception of Ramillies) would be commissioned in tapestry from De Vos in Brussels. In a letter of 1721 to an unknown recipient Marlborough wrote of a gift of ‘hangings that represented the world’ sent to her by the old Electress of Hanover in return for a portrait of the Queen, and she was delighted in 1732 at observing at Southampton House that ‘a set of blue and Gold Leather hangings which I bespoke which is now as

10 Turkish Tent, seized at the relief of Vienna, 1683. Cotton fabric with silk and cotton appliqué, wooden poles, cotton rope, circumference 20 meters, diameter 7 meters, height 3.5 metres. Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum.
fresh as when ‘twas put up’. She decided to order the same for Wimbledon House. When Diana Spencer moved to Woburn on her marriage, Marlborough must have been delighted to see the tapestries commissioned by the Fifth Earl and made at the Mortlake factory between 1661 and 1664. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the Duchess retained the tent with its embroideries and its furnishings and that, like the presentation sword, it acquired with the passage of time (and especially after the Duke’s death) an increasing patina as symbolic capital; it was effectively a secular (military) relic which, like the display of martial emblems that would ornament the façade of Blenheim Palace, could be deployed as a reminder of family might and the origins of wealth. Like the sword, the tent had the capacity in civilian life, in peacetime, to invoke through its material presence those military endeavours that had secured the peace.

The Duke’s campaign tent continued from time to time to make appearances. During her sojourns at Windsor Lodge, Marlborough used the tent as a recreational facility then when, in August 1735, Diana, now Duchess of Bedford, was sick, the tent was again brought into play. The hope was that Diana was merely suffering the symptoms of the early stages of pregnancy. Renowned for her expertise as a nurse and pharmacist, Marlborough arranged for the Turkish tent to be transported to Woburn from Holywell. Though by this time ‘some brass thing . . . which fasten’d the tent together’ was lost, the carpet for the table and, importantly, the great carpet to lay on the ground, were with the tent, as were the ‘whimsical’ chairs though rats had made holes in some of these. In 1732 Count Marsigli’s celebrated L’Etat Militaire de l’Empire Ottoman with its detailed descriptions and illustrations of Turkish tents was published in Holland. But it seems to have been in England that the fashion for Turkish
tents as garden pavilions originated, a vogue that spread to continental Europe. In 1758–62, Charles Hamilton erected six garden buildings at Painshill: a Gothic pavilion, a mausoleum, a Temple of Bacchus, a Hermitage, a castle and a Turkish tent; the original design for the tent, attributed to Henry Keene (plate 11), survives and was used (along with other evidence) to construct the blue and white replica tent that graces the gardens today. Henry Hoare followed suit with a replica at Stourhead and there was also a tent at Vauxhall Gardens in 1765. These tents were constructed from a combination of plastered brick, canvas and papier mâché and were evidently colourful. The Painshill tent was, like the large Cracow Turkish tent, oval; it measured 16 feet by 12, and was still standing in 1850. Indeed, Mrs Lybbe Powys made a point of saying in 1776 that the Stourhead tent ‘remains up the whole year’. A Swedish architect visited Painshill in 1779 and sketched the tent. More permanent versions were erected from the end of the eighteenth century in Sweden, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Belgium and eventually Russia. A corollary might be the fashion for tent rooms that developed in the early years of the nineteenth century in England and France, a style, understandably, favoured by military men. However, the Marlborough’s Turkish tent was almost certainly unique in England at this early date, and may have served as a prototype for the later garden pavilions. Marlborough’s attachment to artefacts with family or dynastic associations, as well as the uniqueness of the tent, ensured that she would battle to retrieve it after Diana’s death. In fact, in the letter written to her grandson-in-law, the Duke of Bedford from which I have already quoted, before she gets on to debating her rights to her own portrait, the return of the jewels, and her granddaughter’s memento, with a caustic jibe that underscores the way this artefact continued to serve as a repository for memory, Marlborough states:

I remember very well that I did write to Mr. Hetherington to desire the Tent might be return’d. Being very certain that your Grace would never make Use of it, as a Soldier. And without that Reason I might well have expected your Grace would have sent it home to me; For I never gave it your Grace, tho’ You say in your letter I did. But I have one from my Dear Grandchild, who writ to me to borrow it, that she might sit in the Air, wherever it was most Convenient to put up this tent. I sent it to Her immediately; and had She lived, I believe, I should never have desir’d it again. And according to the Custom of the World, it was very natural for the Duke of Marlborough’s Family to like to have a Tent, which Their Grandfather had made use of in so many pitch’d Battles. And writing something to this Purpose to Mr. Hetherington, your Grace was pleas’d to return it. Which was nothing but Calico and Canvas, and of no Manner of Value. But . . . Your Grace, I do believe, has made a mistake in saying . . . that in this letter to Mr. Hetherington I said ‘I would never make any further demand upon your Grace’ . . . .

A FINAL GESTURE IN STONE
It is evident from my account so far that it was important to the Duchess, or ‘Old Marlborough’ as contemporaries often referred to her later in life, to control material possessions of financial and/or sentimental value (jewels, swords, tents) and that she deployed these artefacts in ways calculated to influence the behaviour of those around her – whether friends or enemies. This deployment raises questions such as: how did an object that stood for one socialized body interact
through representation with a repertoire of imagery that crossed class and political boundaries? What of those elements that could not be regulated? These elements are instructive of the ways in which the calculated exercise of dynastic power transmutes into formations that produce grotesque bodies that project back upon that social construct of the individual and their family, a construct that was – as contemporaries recognized – even in its most outward manifestations impossible to regulate and subject to frequent breakdown. Marlborough’s many well-documented quarrels testify to this propensity. In conclusion I want to look at one of Marlborough’s most enduring monuments to her own history, one which – like all that she did – exposed her to public scrutiny and produced a legacy she could not have anticipated. The object here is a major material icon produced in Marlborough’s name with strategic intent but – as we shall see – with uncontrollable consequences.

Despite her well-publicized quarrel and subsequent schism with Queen Anne, the Duchess was soon disaffected with the Hanoverians, whom she saw as in thrall to Sir Robert Walpole, and she took a particular dislike to Caroline of Anspach, wife of George II. Writing to the Duchess of Bedford in 1735 to describe for her the comical spectacle of Merlin’s Cave at Richmond, she acidly concludes: ‘These pretty diversions look as if we have no need to apprehend Dangers from France, since Her Majesty seems so extremely easy.’ Having employed Rysbrack in 1730 to create a great monument to the Duke for the Blenheim Chapel, she called on him again in 1735, this time to create a statue of Queen Anne. The statue, as Matthew Craske has recently established, was installed outside the St Albans’ almshouses that Marlborough had built, but it was there only for a matter of months in 1737 before she directed Rysbrack to bring it to Blenheim. Whether it was ever intended to remain in St Albans is, however, very doubtful. Marlborough wrote as early as 1735 of her plans for this statue in relation to her favourite bow-window room at Blenheim where the family gathered and held theatricals. Once delivered, in 1738, it was, however, placed in the Great Gallery. No commission of this kind could be a private act. Rysbrack provided the statue with a substantial plinth that he used for a simple inscription with the date of completion. However, Marlborough had planned for this space an elaborate account of the Queen, listing all her virtues and in particular those relating to financial matters, that would have run round the pedestal and been signed by Marlborough. The blatant re-writing of history reached a wider public than it would ever have done on the plinth of Rysbrack’s statue when Marlborough’s text and the statue were reproduced as the upper section of a finely engraved broad sheet, headed ‘The Glory of Old England’ against a background of Blenheim Palace (plate 12) (the lower part is an unrelated advertisement for an ice picture). The text to ‘The Glory of Old England’ concludes: ‘all this I know to be true’. The floating monumental female figure, as well as the statue on which it is based, and the declaration around its plinth, suggests not secular motherhood (as Craske argues) but a religious icon supported by Blenheim Palace in place of the church.

The inscription took on a life of its own: when Marlborough’s Memoirs, the centrepiece of which was her account of her relationship with Queen Anne, was published in 1742, it was immediately compared unfavourably with the fulsome inscription in praise of the Queen. The omniscient phrase from the statue – ‘All this I know to be true’ - outlived its author and was incorporated in a political
caricature published around 1746, two years after Marlborough’s death. True to her political convictions to the end, Marlborough – whose will was published immediately after her death and subsequently many times reprinted – left large bequests of £10,000 and £20,000 apiece to William Pitt and Lord Chesterfield in recognition of their opposition to the Tory ministry. However, as Walpole puts it, ‘she was scarce cold before [Chesterfield] returned to the King’s service’, while Pitt on 22 February 1746 accepted the office of Vice-Treasurer of Ireland and, soon afterwards, Paymaster General and Privy Councillor. In this image, To W—m P—t Esq’, A Ghost (plate 13), Pitt is sitting up late (the clock indicates it is past midnight) reading papers by candlelight. In a moment of drama the startled Pitt looks up to see advancing into the chamber wearing a frilled and hooded white nightgown the figure of the Duchess of Marlborough, followed seemingly unawares by a statue of Queen Anne who glides in behind her. It is likely that Pitt’s pose would have been identified by viewers with Hogarth’s portrait of Garrick as Richard III in the famous tent scene from Act V, scene iii of Shakespeare’s play (plate 14), itself inspired by Le Brun’s The Tent of Darius. The Duchess is darting flashes of lightning at Pitt and tramples underfoot a portrait of Chesterfield. She is breathing: ‘Furies – Where’s my 10,000£’ and she holds two labels, one inscribed ‘Taken a Place’ and ‘Voted for ye C—t’ [Court] and the other stating ‘and you too 20,000£’ as she points to the portrait on the floor. The papers on Pitt’s writing table make clear that he is now Treasurer of Ireland. The stage-like quality of the space in which the drama is enacted is enforced by the looped curtain at the right and by the perspectival lines of the floorboards. An unidentified man, perhaps the Duke, has been hidden behind a screen; hearing Pitt’s audible alarm he has poked his head over the top of the screen and calls out ‘Screen Screen’ (scream scream).
The caricature comprises not only a reminder of Marlborough’s reputation as a schemer and the terms of her will but also of her problematic relationship with Queen Anne for it is the words ‘all this I know to be true’, that are inscribed on the statue in To W—m P—t Esqr . A Ghost. The implication is that the final laugh is on Marlborough, since she is, for all her belated devotion in thus commemorating her Queen and her erstwhile patron, unable to escape from her even through death. But there is another way of looking at it. The material commemoration in the form of a statue at Blenheim endures – as monuments were supposed to do – and it survives also in popular as well as elite forms of representation. At the end of the day, the laugh was, perhaps, rather on one of Marlborough’s most energetic detractors, Horace Walpole, with his contempt for petticoats. For Marlborough had installed at Blenheim not only Rysbrack’s statue of Queen Anne but also a collection of dresses actually worn by the Queen. In his compelling testimony to the affective impact of material manoeuvres, Walpole – like some unsuspecting visitor to Miss Havesham’s house in Dickens’ Great Expectations – found himself on a visit to Blenheim in July 1760, sixteen years after Marlborough’s death, confronted and repelled not only by: ‘all the Acts of Parliament and gazettes on the Duke in inscriptions’ but by ‘all the . . . gowns and petticoats of Queen Anne that old Sarah could crowd amongst blocks of marble’. As Rosalind Jones and

Peter Stallybrass have pointed out, clothing is, unlike money, not neutral, and materials in the early modern period embodied memories and social relations. By installing Rysbrack’s statue of Queen Anne at Blenheim, and by preserving and displaying the clothing that had allegedly once been worn by the subject of the statue, Marlborough not only ensured Blenheim was seen as the museum which its grandiose architecture sanctioned but also built a powerful conceptual bridge between past and present, between hardwearing (eternal) marble and fragile textile, between cold stone and materials shaped for and redolent of a particular body that once lived. The incorporation of these items into the residence that had been constructed as, and remains, a monument to her husband’s military achievements represents the final flourish of a woman who, whether by instinct or conviction, recognized the powers of persuasion of material objects.

Notes
I would like to thank Frances Harris for her generosity in sharing with me, during several conversations, her extraordinary knowledge of the Marlborough family and their era. Thanks also for their help and advice to Sheila O’Connell, Lucy Peltz, Elizabeth Eger, Matthew Hargraves, Maria Hayward, Margaret Gray, and the two anonymous readers of my first draft. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Yale Center for British Art and the Lewis Walpole Library.

3 The period of worsening relations, and the final denouement, is documented in P. Roberts, ed., The Diary of Sir David Hamilton 1709–1714, Oxford, 1975. Hamilton was the Queen’s doctor. For an excellent nuanced analysis see R. Weil, Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680–1714, Manchester, 1999.
5 See Harris, A Passion for Government, 6.
7 Letter from the Duchess of Marlborough addressed ‘My Lord’, 12 May 1721, MS. HMC 205, i. 2, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive. This and all subsequent Woburn material is quoted by kind permission of the Duke of Bedford and Trustees of the Bedford Estate.
9 Duchess of Marlborough to Humfrey Fish, 21 January 1727, British Library Add MS. 61444 (11). Humfrey Fish and John Spencer both fell ill after Charles, having come of age, had returned to England. John survived but wrote...
to the Duchess in September 1728 to inform her of his tutor’s death. Fish had been taken into the Marlborough household during Queen Anne’s reign and became an indispensable and much valued member of it, so much so that the Duchess was stricken by his death and hung his portrait at Blenheim. Personal communications.


11 Harris, A Passion for Government, 316.

12 For details of her wealth at the time of her death see Harris, A Passion for Government, 349.

13 Writing to Mrs Clayton (later Lady Sundon) from exile abroad 1713/14, Mrs Clayton’s copy book, MS. Osborn collection fc 110/I/2 no.59, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

14 Duchess of Marlborough to the Earl of Stair, 23 June 1739, Osborn collection, Stair Papers (24), Beinecke Library, Yale University; Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz: containing all the great events during the minority of Lewis XIV, and administration of Cardinal Mazarin (Done out of French), London, 1723.

15 Duchess of Marlborough to the Earl of Stair, 3 March 1738, Osborn collection, Stair Papers (24), Beinecke Library, Yale University.

16 Duchess of Marlborough to the Earl of Stair, 1 Dec. 1737, Osborn collection, Stair Papers (24), Beinecke Library, Yale University.

17 See, in particular, inventories in British Library Add.MS. 75402.

18 Duchess of Marlborough to Mrs Clayton (later Lady Sundon) June 1713, British Library Add. MS. 61463, G 1–16, f. 105. There is a transcript in Mrs Clayton’s copy book, MS. Osborn collection fc 110/I/2 no.59, Beinecke Library, Yale University, but it fails to indicate the fact that the letter ends so abruptly.

19 I am drawing here on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, in particular of his concept of the habitus as articulated in The Logic of Practice, Cambridge, 1990 [1980].


23 MS. HMC 206, ii, no. 89, 13 June 1734 Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive. This is by no means the only mis-transcription in Letters of a Grandmother; my italics.

24 Duchess of Marlborough to Diana Russell (née Spencer) 13 July 1734, MS. HMC 205, ii, no. 98, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

25 Isaac Whoed 1689–1752 worked as a kind of retainer to the Russell family; there are a number of portraits by him at Woburn and he is often mentioned in Marlborough’s correspondence (see Letters of a Grandmother). There is a typescript set of notes on Whoed by C. H. Collins Baker in the Heinz Archive, National Portrait Gallery, London.


27 Walpole to Horace Mann 3 March 1742, Horace Walpole’s Correspondence, ed. W. S. Lewis, London and New Haven, CT, 1937–1980, xvii, 356–7. The historian Nathaniel Hooke ‘ghosted’ An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough. The first draft was written in 1711 by the Duchess herself but she was dissuaded from publication by Sir Robert Walpole.

28 I have been unable to identify the source of this quotation.

29 While patches (known as mouches) were fashionable from the seventeenth century as aids to beauty, covering skin defects and drawing attention to the whiteness of the face, they were also evidence of disease, whether small pox or venereal. See Peter Wagner, ‘Spotting the symptoms’, in Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal, eds, The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2001, 102–18.


30 The Diary of John Evelyn, v, 525, 30 December 1702.


32 The argument is made by R. O. Bucholz in The Other Hogarth, 102–18.

33 Osborn collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University folder 9931; a copy is also in the British Library, Harleian Miscellany V 267. A similar MS. mock catalogue of a book sale in the name of the Duchess of Shrewsbury is reported to exist in the Bodleian Library (Frith b 18 ii 7) (note on Beinecke file).

34 Nos 8 and 15 in the sale.

35 Harris, A Passion for Government, 208. Marlborough’s friend, Lord Stair was Ambassador in Paris.


MATERIAL MANOEUVRES

42 Inventory, Althorp Papers, British Library Add. MS. 75402 5b; see also the jewel book transcribed in Thomson, Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. The MS. valuation list compiled by a steward James Stephen and headed ‘Valued by Mr. Eyemaker’ has details that were not transcribed in the published version.
44 Harris, A Passion for Government, 296.
46 The Diary of Sir David Hamilton, 87 n. 145.
47 Oxford Dictionary of National Biography where it is also reported that in his will, written shortly before he died in 1682, Prince Rupert left Margaret the string of pearls which had once belonged to the Winter Queen; his diamonds; and all of his tapestries, gold stucco work, and hangings.
48 The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, ii. 134.
49 Althorp papers, British Library Add MS. 75402, ff. 4a and 4b.
50 Thomson, Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, i. 469.
51 Lady Jersey’s problems with her marriage settlement and her need to sell some of her jewels to provide a settlement for her children are discussed at length in Marlborough’s correspondence with her granddaughter Diana, Duchess of Bedford, see MS.HMC 206, vol. ii, 42, vol. iii, 129, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.
52 Charlotte Maccarthy, daughter of the Earl of Clancarty, married in 1721 John West, first Earl De La Warr, a loyal government Whig and soldier. John Hanbury MP was one of Marlborough’s trustees.
53 See also ‘A List of the jewels which my Lady Russell has of the Duchess of Marlborough’, Althorp papers, British Library Add MS. 75402, f. 3a (1731/2).
56 The Garrard ledgers, held in the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, G30.UU.18. offer many examples. A typical entry under the account of the Rt. Hon. Lady Mary Coke, 15 March 1779 reads: ‘To Setting a Large pin with her own Brilliant’. For a history of Garrards, see Charlotte Gere and John Culme, Garrard The Crown Jewellers for 150 Years, London, 1993. The Delaval family’s household accounts for the 1770s and 1780s also provide much evidence of jewellery being dismantled to create new settings with a mixture of old and ‘new’ stones. In this case the jeweller was the London-based Charles Belliard, Northumberland Archive Collections 2DE/31/10, 1–64.
57 Marlborough was much preoccupied with putting before the public her own version of events at the Court of Queen Anne prior to her quarrel with the Queen that appeared in An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough.
58 Marlborough’s will was published as A True Copy of the Last Will and Testament of Her Grace Sarah, late Duchess of Marlborough with the codicil, London, 1744.
59 The lower part of the earring that dangles from the upper section and moves (tosses) with the owner’s head.
60 Althorp papers, British Library Add MS. 75402, f. 3a (1731/2).
62 Mr Hetherington was a high ranking servant (probably secretary or steward) in the Bedford household.
63 MS., HMC 206, vol. iii, 152, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive. The transcription in Letters of a Grandmother (175–8) wrongly gives the date as 16 March and modernizes Marlborough’s spelling and punctuation.
64 Horace Walpole’s Correspondence, x, 89. n. 14.
65 Harris, 291.
66 Quoted in Thomson, Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, ii. 405. The current whereabouts of the sword is not known. In reply to an enquiry by letter (not about its location but about its survival), Earl Spencer states that he is not aware of the sword ever having existed. S. J. Reid, in John and Sarah, Duke and Duchess of Marlborough 1660–1744, based on unpublished Letters and Documents at Blenheim Palace, London, 1914, 436–7, states that the sword is still with the Duchess’s descendants.
67 Witness the usage both by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown on his attaining power, and by the press in connection with the election of Barack Obama in the USA invoked to suggest a kind of inclusiveness or bi-partisan-ship in the interests of a greater good.
68 Dorothy George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires . . . in the . . . British Museum,
London, 1935 no. 3912; Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, 762.90.25.

69 The term is used in an advertisement for the print that appeared in The Public Advertiser 7 October 1762, similar devices are tableaux huilés where an engraving is oiled in order to be seen transparently against the light of a candle (see David Landau, ‘Note’ in Print Quarterly IX:1, March 1992). A version of The Scotch Tent was produced in which the figures inside the tent are on the same sheet: The British Antidote to Caledonian poison, consisting of the most humorous satirical political prints, sold at Mr. Sumpter’s, ca. 1763 (Beinecke Library, Yale University, Z17 298n). Copperplate engraved transparent puzzle pictures from Southern Germany, c. 1700, are illustrated in L. Mannoni, W. Nekes and M. Warner, Eyes, Lies and Illusions, London, 2005, 76–7.

70 The best known exposition of the notion that objects have lives is I. Kopytoff, see ‘The cultural biography of things; commoditization as process’, in A. Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective (1986), Cambridge, 1997.


73 Post-boy, quoted in Lediard, The Life of John, Duke of Marlborough, iii, 292.

74 MS. HMC 206, vol. iii, no. 144, 16 August 1735, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

75 See William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act III, scene iv in the Queen’s apartment ‘Polonius hides behind the arras’ but when he shouts out, thinking the Queen is attacked, Hamlet ‘makes a pass through the arras’ and kills him.

76 See A Seventeenth Century Turkish Tent, Wawel Royal Castle, ed. M. Podlodowska-Reklewska, Cracow, 2002, where it is stated that the collection of tents at Wawel Castle: ‘Their exceptional value consists in their excellent pedigree: the most precious of them were captured by John III Sobieski’s army at the battle of Vienna in 1683’. Norman Davies in Europe: A History, London: Pimlico (1996), 1997, p. 643, quotes a letter from Sobieski to his wife, Queen Marie-Louise written from the Grand Vizier’s tent, in which he tells her: ‘The Vizier took such hurried flight that he had time to escape with only one horse . . . [The camp is] as extensive as the cities of Warsaw or of Lwow within their walls . . . I have all the tents, and cars, et mille autres galanteries fort jolies et fort riches, mais fort riches . . .’. A Seventeenth Century Turkish Tent, n.p.

77 For technical information on the tent and its restoration, see Sabine Josefine Brand’s report at http://www.dhm.de/restauratoren/zelt/diarytxt.htm

78 A contemporary map reproduced in Frances Harris, ‘William Talman’s First Country House’, p. 111, indicates that this was so.


80 MS. HMC 206, vol. iii, no. 144, 16 August 1735, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

81 MS. Althorp papers, British Library Add.MS. 75402.


83 They are still in extant; see Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). An Inventory, ii, West London, London, 1925, plates 210–24 for photographs. The Duchess gave instructions for the commission via Mrs Clayton (later Lady Sunden), see Mrs Clayton’s copy book, MS. Osborn collection fc 110/l2 no.4, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

84 Written in Marlborough’s own hand and addressed to ‘My Lord’, 12 May 1721, MS. HMC 205, i, no. 2, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

85 Duchess of Marlborough to Lady Russell, 22 September 1732. MS. HMC 205, i, no. 31, Woburn Estate Office, Bedford Archive.

86 They originally hung in the family parlour but are now in the fourth duke’s bedroom. They are based on the Raphael cartoons.

87 Duchess of Marlborough to the Duchess of Bedford, MS. HMC 206, iii, no. 144, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

88 They are still in extant; see Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). An Inventory, ii, West London, London, 1925, plates 210–24 for photographs. The Duchess gave instructions for the commission via Mrs Clayton (later Lady Sunden), see Mrs Clayton’s copy book, MS. Osborn collection fc 110/l2 no.4, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

89 Harris, many references.

90 Marlborough to the Duchess of Bedford, MS. HMC 206, iii, no. 144, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.


93 Quoted N. and B. Kitz, Pains Hill Park, 64.


95 See H. Theunissen, ed., Topkapı & Turkomanie, Turks-Nederlandse ontmoetingen sinds 1600, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, 1989.


97 Neither Dr Maria Hayward of the Textile Conservation Unit at the University of Southampton nor Margaret Gray, House and Collect-
tions Manager at Powis Castle (National Trust) where there is a later Mughal tent (1725-50) know of any Turkish tents in English collections.

98 MS., 10 March 1737, HMC 206, vol. iii, 152, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive. The transcription in Letters of a Grandmother, 175-8, wrongly gives the date as 16 March and modernizes Marlborough’s spelling and punctuation.


100 The Duchess’s quarrels with her daughters and then with most of her grandchildren was well known and is well documented; see Harris for details.

101 MS. 21 August 1735, HMC 205, iii, 148, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.


103 Harris, 225 describes the way the room was used. Marlborough speaks of the commission in a letter to the Duchess of Bedford on 24 June 1735: ‘I am going to Rysbrack to make a Bargain with Him for a fine State of Queen Anne, which I will put up in the Bow Window Room at Blenheim with a proper Inscription. It will be a very fine thing, and though but one Figure will cost me £300. I have a Satisfaction in shewing this Respect to Her, because Her kindness to me was real. And what happened afterwards was compass’d by the Contrivance of such as are in Power now’, MS. HMC 205, iii, 132, Woburn Abbey, Bedford Archive.

104 On the statue and its commission, see also M. I. Webb, Michael Rysbrack. Sculptor, London, 1954, 163-4. The Gallery is now the Library at Blenheim and the statue remains in a commanding position at one end.

105 The inscription included the lines: ‘She had no Vanity in Her Expendes, nor bought any one Jewel in the whole time of her Reign’, which were much quoted subsequently; see W. King, ed., Memoirs of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, London, 1930, 274: ‘She was never expensive, nor made any foolish buildings, nor bought one jewel in the whole time of her reign, but lived on £50,000 a year till she was Queen’.

106 Matthew Craske, The Silent Rhetoric of the Body, 234-8 argues that Queen Anne was ‘the ultimate example of a mother blighted by the death of her sons’ and that since Marlborough had ‘lost many children despite dedicated parenting, it was a central importance to her to make manifest her virtuous mothering’. In fact, in an age when the loss of a son and heir was commonplace, the Marlboroughs neatly circumvented the problem by arranging through act of parliament that their eldest daughter should inherit the title, which is not to say that the Duke and Duchess were not in great grief at the deaths of both their sons (John and Charles) as well as the death in infancy of their first child, Harriet. But four daughters survived and produced sons. Marlborough’s problem in 1735 was not the lack of a male line but the deeply unsatisfactory behaviour of her male heirs.

107 An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough.

108 A Review of the late Treateise, entitled An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager D— of M— 6c., London, 1742 by ‘Britannicus’, 53-4: ‘All the World expressed an Esteem for this Great Lady, when she erected a Statue to the Honour of her Mistress, inscribed with a Character which she was known to have deserved. But these Letters seem to have blotted out the Inscription; and, if I may be allowed the Expression, injure the very Statue, which will be no longer thought to be erected to the Glory, but to be set up as a Monument of the Weakness of that Princess.’

109 A True Copy of the Last Will and Testament of Her Grace Sarah, late Duchess of Marlborough with the codicil, London, 1744. Reprints appeared in 1745, 1750 and 1780 and the contents were widely debated. See, for example, The Life of Her Grace Sarah, Late Duchess Dowager of Marlborough, To which are annex’d Remarks on Her Grace’s Last Will, London, 1745 (billed as a defence of ‘one treated with Indecency, Inhumanity, Virulence, Scurrility, Obloquy . . .’). Marlborough’s letters were still being quoted in the press nearly twenty years after her death; see ‘Copy of a Letter, written by the late Duchess of Marlborough to Prince Eugene of Savoy, recommending a young Irish gentleman to his notice’ (26 June 1735), London Chronicle for 1761, Scafe scrapbook, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, f.76 verso.

110 Horace Walpole, Memoirs of King George II, i, 38, 64.

111 Garrick appeared in this, one of his most famous roles, at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1741. Hogarth’s portrait (Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery) was painted probably in 1745. The Tent of Darius is one of the Triumphs of Alexander series painted for Louis XIV and now in the Louvre.

112 A version in reverse lacking the figure behind the screen and with other variations is in the British Museum 1868.0808.3792.

113 Horace Walpole’s Correspondence, ix, 289, 19 July 1760.