

# ‘I Have Neither Interest nor Eloquence Sufficient to Prevaile’: The Duke of Shrewsbury and the Politics of Succession during the Reign of Anne

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This paper reassesses the role of Charles Talbot, duke of Shrewsbury, during the construction of the Harley ministry of 1710 and in the management of the final days of Queen Anne. Shrewsbury has tended to be overlooked, but this paper will contend that his role was more central than usually assumed. Between them, the duke and his duchess formed an influential pair at court on a par with the better known duke and duchess of Somerset, and Shrewsbury’s role as Harley’s partner may not have been as subservient as some have suggested. As a moderating Whig influence Shrewsbury’s recruitment to Harley’s scheme underscores the original direction aimed at by this new duumvirate in the spring of 1710 and the way in which the Hanoverian succession was assured in the summer of 1714.

On 9 July 1714 Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, ‘sensible of the uneasiness’ Matthew Prior must be experiencing in his foreign posting<sup>1</sup> ‘set pen to paper’ to recount the events of the session of Parliament that had just concluded:

These four or five months last past have afforded such a scene as I hope never again to be an actor in. All the confusion which could be created by the disunion of friends, and the malice of enemies, has subsisted at Court and in Parliament. Little or no public business has been transacted in domestic affairs; and as to you and your Continent, we have not once cast an eye towards you. We never could so justly be styled *divisos orbe Britannos*.<sup>2</sup>

The cause of all this disunion and malice was, of course, the political turmoil occasioned by the steady decline of the queen’s health through the summer of 1714 and the concomitant battle for position both within and outside the administration. Ever since Robert Harley, as he then was, had established his new ministry in the late summer of 1710, there had been tension within the

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<sup>1</sup> Prior was plenipotentiary at Paris from 1712 to 1713. He remained there until 1715 though without official accreditation.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Correspondence of Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke*, ed. Gilbert Parke, vol. iv, pp. 561-2. The Latin quotation is from Virgil, Eclogue I. 66: ‘Britons, wholly sundered from all the world’. *Virgil I: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge MA, 1999), pp. 28-9.

ranks of those around him. His early plans for a mixed ministry had to be altered quickly for one dominated by Tories, and he had also been compelled to promote young firebrands such as Henry St John (as Bolingbroke then was) to offices far in advance of his original intentions.<sup>3</sup> Plans to attract Junto members such as Charles Montagu, Baron Halifax, Edward Russell, earl of Orford, and even the former lord chancellor, John Somers, Baron Somers, came to nothing, as did efforts to hang on to some of their other associates. At the same time, efforts to reach out to the influential Finch family, headed by Daniel Finch, 2nd earl of Nottingham, had met with only mixed success.<sup>4</sup> Over the next four years Harley fought a continual battle to keep his troops in line. His removal to the Lords as earl of Oxford in the summer of 1711 further distanced him from his familiar area of operations in the Commons and ill health and family difficulties caused still more distractions from the task in hand.<sup>5</sup> He also overreached himself and invited the queen’s annoyance by seeking the dukedom of Newcastle for his heir.<sup>6</sup>

By the summer of 1713 Harley was on the brink of surrendering his position, subjected to continual sniping from a variety of colleagues (as well as from his formal opponents at court and in Parliament). Viscount Bolingbroke (as St John had by then become) was at the heart of the mischief, while the Whigs played a cynical game by allying with their former *bête noire* Nottingham in order to destabilize the ministry still further.<sup>7</sup> The death of old heavyweights like the queen’s uncle, Lawrence Hyde, earl of Rochester, who had been demonstrating increasing reasonableness in his old age, and malleable courtiers like Edward Villiers, earl of Jersey, also stripped Oxford of potential allies.

All this left a convoluted political situation with the result that the manoeuvring that overshadowed the final days of Anne was intricate and at times difficult to unravel.<sup>8</sup> The rivalry between Oxford and Bolingbroke was obvious enough, but others were also targeted for their participation in what the Whigs considered the brinkmanship that threatened the Hanoverian Succession. Thus, following the queen’s death Oxford, Bolingbroke and James Butler, 2nd duke

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Holmes notes that St John suspected Harley might even wish to keep him from office altogether. Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, rev. edn (London, 1987), p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> The appointment of William Legge, 2nd Baron Dartmouth, son-in-law of Heneage Finch, Baron Guernsey, as secretary of state was a compromise for Harley but did have the benefit of bringing in a man connected to the Finches. Henry Horwitz, *Revolution Politicks: The Career of Daniel Finch Second Earl of Nottingham 1647-1730* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 222-3.

<sup>5</sup> It is instructive that in the summer of 1723 the ennoblement of Robert Walpole’s son provoked ‘some discourse’ that Walpole was not himself ennobled at the same time. The reason for his remaining in the Commons was explained in the new Lord Walpole’s patent as reported in a newsletter to the earl of Wigtown. This ‘setts forth that his father is better satisfied with [deserving] titles then possessing them but besides that its argued by some knowing people that this Gentleman is so very serviceable in the house of Commons to his king and country that it may not be judged expedient to remove him from [thence]’. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. eng. hist. c. 1042, f. 49.

<sup>6</sup> B. W. Hill, *Robert Harley: Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier Minister* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 199-201.

<sup>7</sup> Horwitz, *Revolution Politicks*, pp. 230-41.

<sup>8</sup> This is admirably summarized in a letter of George Lockhart to Harry Maule at the end of June 1714. ‘In my last I gave you some accounts of Meuse [the proclamation], which in some respects is still a mistery, tho in others it rather unfolds a mistery and shews us wee can expect no good from Ash [the ministry] of any kind [...] This is certain, that Frog [Queen Anne] first mentioned it at councill, and that Frog was put on it by Rabbit [the Duke of Shrewsbury?]. Now whither Rabit favours Orange [Bolingbroke] or Haddock [Oxford] time will show. But I belive my information is good, that Purves of Tyger [the Earl of Anglesey?] (who was once reckoned a Hound [Jacobite] and is one of the cheif pillars of Goosberry [the Opposition?]) came to Orange and told him he was Goosberry’s darling and Goosberry woud stand by him and enable him to get the better [of] Haddock if Goosberry were convinced he was not a Hound but a freind to Baker [the Hanoverian succession], and that Orange to give satisfaction entered in to this measure. If this be fact, then tis plain Orange is as great a blockhead and knave as Haddock, and that wee’r to expect he’l follow the same deceitfull way.’ *Letters of George Lockhart*, ed. D. Szechi (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 108.

of Ormond, were all the subjects of legal actions. In the case of Oxford he was impeached and imprisoned in the Tower for two years awaiting a trial that ultimately collapsed;<sup>9</sup> Bolingbroke and Ormond both chose exile and were rewarded with acts of attainder.<sup>10</sup> And yet there was another figure overlooked in these actions, one who had been a crucial figure in the formation and running of the Harley ministry. Charles Talbot, duke of Shrewsbury, had been the first new minister appointed in the spring of 1710, his return to office an indication that the time of the Duumvir-Junto alliance was running out. How central Shrewsbury was in this process and how he came to escape the same treatment are questions worthy of further examination.<sup>11</sup>

In the historiography of the period, Shrewsbury has tended to lurk in the shadows even though his significance at the time of the formation of the Great Ministry has been duly credited by a number of commentators, notably Geoffrey Holmes, Edward Gregg and Brian Hill.<sup>12</sup> For all this, he has tended to be superseded by other players in the drama. Part of the reason is the way in which he was outmanoeuvred and relegated to the background not long after the establishment of the new ministry. His marginalization was then exacerbated by his posting to France as ambassador in 1713 following the death of the duke of Hamilton and thence to Ireland as lord lieutenant.<sup>13</sup> Another factor is Shrewsbury's own impenetrable personality. As Gregg noted, a month after Shrewsbury's return from Ireland in 1714 Bolingbroke could still not quite decide 'where he stood' with the duke.<sup>14</sup> And yet, when the queen was finally induced to take the lord treasurer's staff from Oxford and convey it to another, it was Shrewsbury to whom she turned. It proved to be a brief appointment but a most significant one.

Few men could muster the same standing as Shrewsbury. By the time of Anne's demise, the majority of the House of Lords bore titles of relatively recent creation.<sup>15</sup> Shrewsbury, on the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this see Clyve Jones, 'The Opening of the Impeachment of Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, June to September 1715: The Memorandum of William Wake, Bishop of Lincoln', *eBLJ* (2015), art. 4, pp. 1-4 <[www.bl.uk/eblj/2015articles/article4.html](http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2015articles/article4.html)>

<sup>10</sup> Bodleian Library, MS. eng. hist. c. 1039, f. 29. Bolingbroke was ultimately to stage a return to Britain and restoration of his titles, though, significantly, not of his right to a seat in the Lords.

<sup>11</sup> For details of Shrewsbury's complete career in the House of Lords see *History of Parliament: The Lords 1660-1715*, ed. R. Paley (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Holmes credited Shrewsbury with being Harley's 'principal collaborator' but he still viewed Shrewsbury as a lesser member of the partnership. He considered Shrewsbury's appointment as lord chamberlain in the spring of 1710 as a coup for Harley, who he considered had 'foisted' Shrewsbury on Godolphin, and was explicit in stating: 'There was never any question of Shrewsbury's being equal to Harley in real influence'. Holmes, *British Politics*, pp. 168, 192-3. Edward Gregg conceded that Shrewsbury may have been of greater importance, noting of the crucial period around the time of Shrewsbury's appointment as lord chamberlain in 1710, 'Although the major rivals for the queen's trust and reliance appeared to be Godolphin and Harley, Shrewsbury was in fact a third competitor'. Gregg, *Queen Anne* (New Haven, 2001), p. 311. Brian Hill also acknowledges that in the early summer of 1710 'only Harley and perhaps Shrewsbury knew the next move'. Hill, *Robert Harley*, p. 126. In his study of Lord Somers, Sachse too has acknowledged Shrewsbury's significance: 'Though disenchanted with high politics, scared by the Fenwick publicity, and incapacitated by real or fancied ailments, he was still a man to be reckoned with [...] he was, like Sunderland and Godolphin a great "undertaker"'. Sachse, *Lord Somers: A Political Portrait* (Manchester, 1975), p. 122. Henry Horwitz, too, accepts that the balance of the ministry was something that concerned both Shrewsbury and Harley, suggesting some form of joint leadership (*Revolution Politics*, p. 222).

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton was killed in a spectacularly bloody duel with Lord Mohun. Ostensibly the cause of their disagreement was a long-standing feud over the settlement of the Macclesfield inheritance. Some, though, thought the quarrel had been staged and that Mohun had been employed by the Junto as an effective assassin of the duke, whose Jacobite sympathies were well known and thought dangerous in a man shortly to serve as ambassador to France: see V. Stater, *High Life Low Morals: The Duel That Shook Stuart Society* (London, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, p. 388.

<sup>15</sup> John Cannon has argued that in 1700, 38 per cent of peerages were less than two decades old and 82 per cent of them less than a century old. J. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 14.

other hand, was one of a few who was able to claim a more distinguished heritage. One of his forebears was the valiant John Talbot (the first earl) who had gone down charging French cannon during the Hundred Years' War. Other ancestors had helped secure the Tudors on the throne by participating in the defeats of Lambert Simnel at Stoke, and later of the Scots forces at the Battle of Pinkie. Shrewsbury's immediate heritage was less martial and rather more scandalous. His father had died as a result of wounds sustained in a duel with the duke of Buckingham fought over the countess of Shrewsbury, Buckingham's mistress.<sup>16</sup> The death of the 11th earl left Shrewsbury in the hands of his (Catholic) Brudenell and Tuchett relatives but this did not stop him falling under the influence of John Tillotson (then dean of St Paul's) and ultimately converting to the Church of England.<sup>17</sup> More impressively, Shrewsbury rebuffed James II's later attempts to entice him back to the faith of his fathers and went on to play a prominent part in the Revolution that unseated James from the throne.<sup>18</sup> In spite of later doubts expressed about his ongoing commitment to Protestantism, Shrewsbury brought his wife,<sup>19</sup> an Italian countess of somewhat colourful history,<sup>20</sup> over to the reformed religion.<sup>21</sup> Prior to these achievements, during the 1690s, Shrewsbury had been one of a relatively small number of English politicians who were genuinely close to William III.<sup>22</sup> He had occupied a number of significant offices and been offered others.<sup>23</sup> Following his return from his self-imposed exile (for health reasons) mid-way through Anne's reign it is thus unsurprising that he was watched closely by politicians of all shades to see towards which side he would tend.

And yet, his copybook was more than slightly blotted. Having started out a standard-bearer for the Whigs – and a close friend of the more forward of them such as Thomas Wharton (later marquess of Wharton) – he had rapidly lost his nerve and, like several others, the duke of

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<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Somerville, *The King of Hearts: Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury* (London, 1962), pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Somerville, *King of Hearts*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Shrewsbury was one of the 'Immortal Seven' who signed the letter of invitation to William of Orange. In the wake of the Revolution he was appointed secretary of state and enjoyed the distinction of being one of a handful of English nobles trusted by the new king.

<sup>19</sup> Adelaide Paleotti, daughter of an Italian count and descendant of the Dudley earls of Leicester. She had previously been married, briefly, to Count Rossini. Somerville, *King of Hearts*, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> Lord Raby's characters of the period noted of Shrewsbury and his wife how the duke had 'married a lady very poor and of an indifferent reputation'. Raby attributed Shrewsbury's falling out with his former Junto colleagues to this mismatch. *The Wentworth Papers, 1705-1739, Selected from the Private and Family Correspondence of Thomas Wentworth, Lord Raby, Created in 1711 Earl of Strafford*, ed. J. J. Cartwright (London, 1883), p. 134.

<sup>21</sup> Shrewsbury explained in a letter of 21 Sept 1705, the day after his marriage, that his new wife had 'made her change to our religion upon arguments well grounded as to the next world' (BL, Add. MS. 32866, f. 6.). Nevertheless he was aware that his decision would attract criticism. To his kinsman, Sir John Talbot, he admitted: 'Her being without fortune and a foreigner will make my choice censured by everybody, but I am persuaded she will approve herself so good a wife and so good a Protestant that I shall not have just cause to repent what I have done.' *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, p. 711.

<sup>22</sup> Shrewsbury remained loyal to William after the king's death, referring to him as 'that great prince'. *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, p. 762.

<sup>23</sup> Shrewsbury had been one of the 'Immortal Seven' to sign the letter of invitation to the prince and after the Revolution was appointed secretary of state. Disgruntlement with William's policy of preferring a number of Tory politicians led to Shrewsbury's resignation from the post, but he was persuaded to resume the seals a few years later. He was also one of only a few able to maintain cordial relations with Robert Spencer, 2nd earl of Sunderland, who served William from behind the curtain through much of the 1690s. Shrewsbury clearly was proud of the distinction. He noted in his journal on 18 May 1702: 'Yesterday I had a letter from Lord Godolphine [*sic*], to tell me the Queen would keep the place of Master of Horse for my return. Now I have almost been offered all the great places of the kingdom; twice I quitted Secretary, once Chamberlain; King William once offered me to be Lord Treasurer, often to be President and Privy Seal, to be governor to the Duke of Gloucester, and last to be Lieutenant of Ireland and Groom of the Stole at the same time'. *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, p. 762.

Marlborough among them, sought to re-establish links with the exiled court. His association with Jacobite agents left him exposed to severe embarrassment in the aftermath of the Assassination Plot, when Sir John Fenwick included Shrewsbury among a number of high profile ministers that were in contact with Saint Germain. On this occasion Shrewsbury was able to rely both on the king’s support and on the willing protection of his Junto associates, notably Somers, Russell, and Wharton, who led the proceedings against Fenwick in Parliament.<sup>24</sup> It was pressure such as this that caused Shrewsbury to quit his post twice – and to attempt to do so on frequent occasions in between – and towards the end of William’s reign he threw in the towel and made for the continent to recover his shattered nerves just at the time when his allies were under serious pressure from a resurgent Tory party.<sup>25</sup> He was thus absent for the attempted impeachments of Somers and the earl of Orford (as Russell had become) – a dereliction that sundered him from Wharton for good. Shrewsbury may have been accounted a ‘big beast’ in politics, but he had a worrying tendency towards pusillanimity.

## I

Shrewsbury had good reason for some of his timorous behaviour. He suffered from appallingly bad health. He lost one eye early in life and spent much of the rest of it struggling to retain the use of the other. He also seems to have been afflicted with some variety of tubercular disease and was frequently incapacitated with a malady that left him spewing up blood. It was this wretched condition that eventually persuaded him to leave England towards the end of William’s reign and seek a cure in the milder climes of the continent. His initial plan seems to have been to stay in France but fears of Anglo-French hostilities persuaded him to move to Geneva and thence to Italy.<sup>26</sup> He was feted by the grand duke of Tuscany at Florence and by the summer of 1702 was settled at Rome.<sup>27</sup> There he indulged in schemes for rebuilding Whitehall and collecting art.<sup>28</sup> In July 1704 he wrote to congratulate Marlborough on his latest success informing the duke: ‘your name is so terrible in these parts, that in this wholly ignorant city, they have an idea of you as a Tamerlaine, and had I a picture of old Col[onel] Birch<sup>29</sup> with his whiskers, I could put it off for yours, & change it for a Raphael’.<sup>30</sup> His journal of his time away recorded his disdain for his

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<sup>24</sup> R. Paley, ‘Justice and Sir John Fenwick’, *King’s Law Journal*, xix (2008), pp. 507-24. The trial of Sir John Fenwick attracted a substantial turnout in the Lords with attendance at its height fluctuating between 132 and 134 members. For more see Clyve Jones, ‘Robert Harley, Christmas and the House of Lords’ Protest on the Attainder of Sir John Fenwick, 23 December 1696: The Mechanism of a Procedure Partly Exposed’, *eBLJ* (2007), art. 4, pp. 1-19 <[www.bl.uk/eblj/2007articles/article4.html](http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2007articles/article4.html)>.

<sup>25</sup> Shrewsbury’s journal notes that he left London on 1 November 1700. By 4/15 November he was in Calais. *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2 pp. 746 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Bodleian Library, MS. Carte 228, f. 402.

<sup>27</sup> BL, Add. MS. 70073-4, newsletter, 27 Jan. 1702.

<sup>28</sup> Shrewsbury’s re-invention of himself as a connoisseur seems to have amused at least one of his former Junto colleagues, Charles Montagu, recently elevated to the barony of Halifax. On 10 November 1704 Halifax wrote to Shrewsbury in Rome: ‘I am very glad you are grown so great a virtuoso; I shall have much more pleasure in that sort of conversation than in the field sports you admired when you went from hence’. *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, p. 703.

<sup>29</sup> Probably John Birch, who was returned for Weobley in 1690 aged 75. See E. Cruickshanks, S. Handley, D. Hayton (eds.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690-1715* (Cambridge, 2002), vol. iii., pp. 216-18.

<sup>30</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, ff. 5-6. The letter was written about three weeks before Marlborough’s crushing victory at Blenheim.

former faith<sup>31</sup> and his jaundiced response to the conversion to Catholicism of the former bishop of Galway: ‘Nothing but interest and no religion can make a man of sense and learning embrace that sect in this country, where one sees nothing among them but pride, luxury, and ignorance.’<sup>32</sup> Despite this, by the autumn of 1704 Shrewsbury got wind of rumours back home that he had also fallen prey to the efforts of the cardinals to convert him back to Catholicism. In a further letter to Marlborough he asserted his absolute adherence to Protestantism and his country:

If it be possible to be more averse to that belief than I was in the year 1688, I assure your Grace I find myself under that disposition, now that I have seen it nearer than ever, and tho these scandals be so notoriously false that they give me little disturbance, yet it seems time I should look homeward to show the world there is nowhere a man more zealous than myself against both France & Popery, & who would more readily venture his life to preserve the religion & constitution of England.<sup>33</sup>

Shrewsbury’s tour may have been extended far beyond its original scope, enabling his detractors to spread such rumours, but during his Italian holiday he was able to maintain close contact with a number of former political allies back in England. As well as Marlborough there was correspondence too with Godolphin and Somers.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, though, another correspondent was Robert Harley and it is possible that this period away from Britain contributed to the early development of the Shrewsbury-Harley alliance of 1710.<sup>35</sup>

Shrewsbury’s association with Harley long antedated this correspondence. Their initial connexion probably dated from the early (thwarted) efforts to secure the passage of the triennial bill in the winter of 1692-3. The bill was championed by Shrewsbury in the Lords, while Harley spoke in its favour in the Commons.<sup>36</sup> On this occasion the bill failed, vetoed by the king. When the measure was reintroduced, Harley and Shrewsbury were again to be seen working for its passage. Hill has argued that Shrewsbury’s ‘alliance with Harley [...] was rooted in the common cause which the two men found at this time’.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> He seems to have rebuffed several efforts by one Father Forbas (or Forbes) to persuade him to return to his earlier faith. In one journal entry he noted a conversation on the subject, which ended with him enquiring: ‘I asked him what ground I had given him to make me such a proposal; that when once I thought their belief the true one, I would not be afraid or ashamed to own it, but that at present I was so far from thinking that, I believed it more impossible for me to be a Papist than to be a Turk, and desired he wold hold such discourses no more to me’. *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, pp. 763-4.

<sup>32</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61118, ff. 54-6; *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. p. 767.

<sup>33</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, ff. 11-13.

<sup>34</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, ff. 1-2, 3, 5-6; Add. MS. 61118, ff. 54-6; Add. MS. 28056, f. 19; *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, pp. 652, 662, 695.

<sup>35</sup> On 10 September 1703, Godolphin, writing to Harley, noted his pleasure that Harley had received news from Shrewsbury. *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv. p. 66. The following year Shrewsbury wrote to Harley to congratulate him on his advancement to the office of secretary of state. He took the opportunity to flatter Harley’s abilities while warning him of the pressures he would face: ‘I am sensible the public has more reason to rejoice than you who will enter into an employment of great trouble, but the superiority of your genius will make that easy to you which others have found vexatious.’ *HMC Bath MSS.*, vol. i. pp. 57-8.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Hill, *Robert Harley*, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Hill, *Robert Harley*, p. 36.

## II

Shrewsbury returned from the continent early in 1706 with his new bride in tow. His journey back had not been uneventful as his health once more deteriorated<sup>38</sup> and it was probably for this reason that he made the crucial political error of failing to visit the court of the Elector Georg Ludwig (future George I) en route, an omission that clearly still rankled in Hanover several years later.<sup>39</sup> For the time being Shrewsbury made a point of keeping his distance from court and parliament and concentrating on improving his estates. From this new perspective as a 'country gentleman' he came to the conclusion that the costly war of the Spanish succession was one that England could no longer afford to wage and he was gradually converted to Harley's scheme to remove the more hardline members of the Duumvir-Junto alliance and replace them with a broader alliance of Whigs and (some) Tories.

Prior to his departure for the continent Shrewsbury had been on the lookout for a new estate, less remote than his seats in Worcestershire and Staffordshire. The matter had still been unsettled at the time of his quitting England but on his return he settled on Heythrop in Oxfordshire. Heythrop was a second choice – Shrewsbury had earlier investigated the possibility of renting the earl of Clarendon's seat at Cornbury Park<sup>40</sup> – but it had certain benefits for a man of Shrewsbury's delicate health. Oxfordshire was close enough to London to enable Shrewsbury to remain in touch with affairs in the centre. Heythrop was, besides, very close to Marlborough's Blenheim estates. The two seem to have remained close at this point; Shrewsbury entrusted Marlborough with his proxy in the House of Lords for the winter session of 1706.<sup>41</sup> Shrewsbury visited Blenheim on several occasions in the summer of 1706 and Marlborough and his duchess's building works appear to have been part of the inspiration for Shrewsbury's own development.<sup>42</sup> The architect he chose to execute the work, though, was Thomas Archer rather than John Vanbrugh, a choice that indicated similar Whiggish sensibilities while also demonstrating Shrewsbury's conversion to the Italian baroque.<sup>43</sup> Heythrop was also important to Shrewsbury as a place where he could recover his strength. According to a contemporary commentator, Shrewsbury's new estate was 'situated in a very wholesome air and it is besides a very pleasant place for hunting'.<sup>44</sup> For Shrewsbury hunting had multiple applications. It was considered to be good for the health. It was also an activity that enabled the elite to congregate, to co-operate over the breeding of dogs and horses, and to discuss matters of politics away from Westminster.<sup>45</sup>

Progress on building the new house was slow and both Shrewsbury and his duchess suffered relapses not long after returning to England. In September the duchess was one of a large party at Bath (Shrewsbury had been there for a time but quit before his wife).<sup>46</sup> By the following month the duchess had returned to Oxfordshire and at the close of October she confessed to the dowager Viscountess Longueville, one of Shrewsbury's relations, 'wee are in a house that makes us ashamed to think of it'. Nevertheless, she offered the dowager the use of 'the best part of the worst house' when she came to visit them. While Shrewsbury concentrated on building anew the crumbling manor on the estate, he and his duchess passed, to all intents and purposes, a quiet rural life there, developing the stock and striving to overcome their various maladies.

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<sup>38</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, ff. 22, 23, 25-6.

<sup>39</sup> *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv, pp. 559-60.

<sup>40</sup> *HMC Buccleuch MSS.*, vol. ii. pt 2, pp. 639, 640, 642.

<sup>41</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, f. 41.

<sup>42</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, ff. 34-6, 37-8.

<sup>43</sup> John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, ninth edn (New Haven, 1993), pp. 268-9.

<sup>44</sup> Bodleian Library, MS. Carte 228, f. 330.

<sup>45</sup> In the autumn of 1696 Shrewsbury sent a pair of hounds to the earl of Carlisle. He was sorry not to have more to spare, 'but what are so ugly and lame it would be a shame to sell them.' Bodleian Library, MS. Carte 233, f. 27.

<sup>46</sup> *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv, p. 329.

In one letter of April 1707, in which she thanked Viscountess Longueville for the gift of two pheasants, the duchess commented wearily that she had 'begun to drink sage tea with great faith but small hope'.<sup>48</sup> Later that year she wrote again to explain their seclusion from court:

My Lord remembers when he was a courtier that contry [*sic*] Gentlefolks made so ill a figure in a drawing Room that he resolved to act that personage as little as is consistent with his duty to her Maiesty.<sup>49</sup>

Shrewsbury may have returned determined to play the country buffoon – he insisted to James Vernon in the spring of 1707 that he was willing to support Marlborough's candidate in the forthcoming elections while suggesting somewhat disingenuously 'elections is what I never medled in with eagerness, & understand nothing of the nicety of management' – but one should not be fooled.<sup>50</sup> He was not shy of recommending his kin for places and he remained one of the grandees of the court and of value to whoever was able to attract him to their colours, not just because of who he was, but also because of the interest he was likely to be able to wield over a number of members of Parliament – particularly in the Lords.<sup>51</sup> On the bishops' bench there was William Talbot, bishop of Oxford (latterly of Salisbury and ultimately of Durham), who had owed his early preferment to Shrewsbury. Talbot might not always have danced to Shrewsbury's tune but there was undoubtedly familial association there.<sup>52</sup> Talbot was a guest of the Shrewsburys at Heythrop in June 1707.<sup>53</sup> Among the peers there was Shrewsbury's nephew, George Brudenell, 3rd earl of Cardigan. Cardigan had previously been disqualified from sitting in the Lords on account of his Catholicism, but thanks to Shrewsbury's intervention, he was now also a potential ally in the upper House. In October 1707 Cardigan and his countess were at Heythrop. The duchess noted 'we discourse of nothing but fox hunting', a sport of which she was not yet an initiate: 'I am myself a hare hunting but not yet arrived to the perfection of fox hunting'.<sup>54</sup> The third obvious connexion on which Shrewsbury might draw was his young kinsman, Viscount Longueville.<sup>55</sup> The Viscount was some way under-age, and away on grand tour at the time of the formation of the Great Ministry (as Harley's ministry has come to be known), but the Yelverton interest in Northamptonshire was still something over which Shrewsbury might also be able to exert some influence.<sup>56</sup> Shrewsbury was involved with the discussions over who should accompany the young Viscount as tutor on the grand tour. He was also closely engaged with negotiations between the Longuevilles and Marlborough over land purchases some time during 1706 or 1707 and in November 1711 Shrewsbury assured the dowager Viscountess Longueville that 'when the time comes to appoint sheriffs I will endeavour to serve Mr Johnson upon your la[dyship]'s recommendation'.<sup>57</sup> Two years later, writing from Windsor, Shrewsbury undertook to

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<sup>47</sup> BL, Eg. MS. 1695, f. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Of the pheasants: 'The lady' she noted 'is in good health but the gentleman was so much hurt in carrying that he dyed the next day', BL, Eg. MS. 1695, ff. 32-3.

<sup>49</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, f. 41.

<sup>50</sup> BL, Add. MS. 40776, f. 46.

<sup>51</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, f. 47. In the summer of 1707 Marlborough and Godolphin both seem to have been keen to attract Shrewsbury back to government, though this was opposed by some Junto members who had not forgotten his abandonment of Somers, Orford and Halifax: see *The Marlborough Godolphin-Correspondence*, ed. Henry L. Snyder, 3 vols (Oxford, 1975), vol. ii. p. 807.

<sup>52</sup> According to Thomas Hearne, after Shrewsbury's marriage, he wrote to Bishop Talbot to ask that he would involve himself with giving 'such arguments to her, as may settle and fix her in the Protestant religion'. *Reliquiae Hernianae: The Remains of Thomas Hearne*, ed. P. Bliss, 2 vols (Oxford, 1857), vol. i. p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, ff. 37-8.

<sup>54</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, f. 43. The duchess's comment suggests that Shrewsbury had not forsaken his delight in field sports in spite of his conversion to connoisseurship.

<sup>55</sup> Talbot Yelverton, 2nd Viscount Longueville, later created earl of Sussex.

<sup>56</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, f. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, ff. 35-6, 50.

do what he could for his young cousin at court, even though the young man seemed disinclined to take up the offer:

I have taken the best opportunity I could to speak to my Ld Longueville as your La[dyshi]p desired; as to his own settling [*sic*] [...] I find him not inclined to take that resolution as yet; and when I offer'd him my service or the little interest I have, to obtaine for him at Court any thing he might reasonably pretend to if he would let me know his Inclinations I could not perceive he had much disposition as yet to that neither; But as I hope to return next spring, and understand I shall find your la[dyshi]p at London I shall then readily receive your commands and Instructions in what manner to serve Lord Longueville.<sup>58</sup>

Shrewsbury may have been quick to dismiss the extent of his own influence – and his duchess's letters may hint at a bucolic lifestyle at odds with the image of that of a great duke – but neither of these elements should be given too much weight. Shrewsbury avoided court as much as possible, but he was on occasion to be found in company with former Whig associates.<sup>59</sup> From 1708 he was also consorting with Harley and his allies in a fashion that only served to emphasize the seriousness of their scheming. In July 1708 Shrewsbury announced his willingness to meet at Heythrop, noting that it would 'look too much like mystery if we should meet at any third place'.<sup>60</sup> Late the following year, Shrewsbury seems to have experienced a loss of confidence, doubting 'how far I am from being able to act any considerable part in the good you mention'.<sup>61</sup> Despite this, by the spring of 1710 he had recovered his nerve and was installed as lord chamberlain over the heads of Godolphin and the other members of the ministry.<sup>62</sup>

Shrewsbury's importance is indicated by the manner in which he acted as the new grouping's front man in the months following on from the trial of Henry Sacheverell and the gradual unravelling of the duumvirs' administration.<sup>63</sup> John Drummond referred to Shrewsbury overtly as Harley's 'premier minister' in August 1710.<sup>64</sup> Shrewsbury's early advance was no great surprise. Ever since his return from the continent, there had been speculation that Shrewsbury would return to the ministry in one form or another but having taken the decision at last to accept the post of lord chamberlain, replacing the much maligned marquess of Kent, who was promoted to a dukedom in compensation, the question remained quite how Shrewsbury would influence the shape of the new ministry.<sup>65</sup> Shrewsbury's experience away from the administration had convinced him of the need for Britain to withdraw from a war which he considered unaffordable. It seems that this was a subject he had discussed with Marlborough,

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<sup>58</sup> Eg. MS. 1695, f. 51.

<sup>59</sup> *Private Diary of William, First Earl Cowper, Lord Chancellor* (Eton, 1833), p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> *HMC Bath MSS.*, vol. i, p. 191.

<sup>61</sup> *HMC Bath MSS.*, vol. i, p. 197.

<sup>62</sup> R. A. Sundstrom, *Sidney Godolphin: Servant of the State* (Newark, 1992), p. 247; Frances Harris, *A Passion for Government: The Life of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough* (Oxford, 1991), p. 168.

<sup>63</sup> Shrewsbury's central role in Harley's plan is made plain in Geoffrey Holmes's unpublished study, 'The Great Ministry', pp. 7-8.

<sup>64</sup> *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv, pp. 559-60.

<sup>65</sup> Significantly, Shrewsbury had voted against convicting Sacheverell. His intervention was the more important in that in one contribution to the debates he underscored his own credentials as a good Revolution man: 'The D[uke] of Shrewsbury said that he did not think the Doctor guilty of the first article. For as he had as greate a share as any man in the late Revolution, soe he would ever goe as far as any to vindicate the memory of our late glorious deliverer. That tho' he thought the Church safe under her Majestyes Administration yet he would not have it made a High Crime and Misdemenor to say that the Church is in danger because times might come that it really might be in danger.' Brian Cowan (ed.), *The State Trial of Dr Henry Sacheverell*, *Parliamentary History: Texts and Studies*, vol. vi (2012), p. 95.

who, in the summer of 1708, had written to Shrewsbury hoping that his latest success would 'contribute to the easing us of a burdensome war'.<sup>66</sup> It was this conviction that ultimately led him into Harley's camp. Peter Wentworth was convinced that Shrewsbury was playing a double game, that or attempting to be all things to all people, when he asserted in June 1710 that the duke 'has promised the Whigs to be entirely in their interest and has promised the same to the Tories'.<sup>67</sup> Sarah, duchess of Marlborough, was confident that Shrewsbury meant the Whigs no good at all and that nothing was to be gained from negotiating with him.<sup>68</sup> Certainly the duchess could expect no favours from the new ministers. By August the key figures in the new regime appear to have emerged as Harley, Shrewsbury and the duke of Somerset, but Shrewsbury's particular access to the queen as lord chamberlain was underscored when it was noted that he was 'above two hours this morning with the Queen and went down to his apartment by a back door'.<sup>69</sup> While one should not neglect Somerset's significance, in essence this was to be a new duumvirate with Shrewsbury and Harley the most significant figures. This seems to be the purport of Daniel Defoe's comment at the end of July 1710, when he lauded the pairing of Harley and Shrewsbury, which he considered made it plain 'that moderate counsels are at the bottom of all these things; that the old mad party are not coming in; that his Grace the Duke of S[hrewsbury] and yourself, are at the head of the management'.<sup>70</sup>

Defoe's analysis invites at least two questions. First, if Harley and Shrewsbury were at the head of affairs, was their role an equal one? A letter from the earl of Kinnoull to Harley on 26 September informing him that a party of Scots peers had sent a letter to the queen care of Shrewsbury about the management of forthcoming elections for new representative members in Parliament can be interpreted in two ways.<sup>71</sup> This might suggest that they thought Shrewsbury quite as appropriate as Harley to receive their messages, more so perhaps, given that his office of lord chamberlain made him peculiarly well placed to pass on missives to the queen publicly or privately. Or it might hint that Shrewsbury was perceived as subservient, a mediator, someone who stood in between the new ministry and court.<sup>72</sup>

The second point about moderate counsels is also open to interpretation. Moderation may have been the watchword, but at the heart of the ministerial programme of 1710 was a desire to see certain members of government removed. Chief among them was 'the family', Charles Spencer, 3rd earl of Sunderland, and the duke and duchess of Marlborough. There was to be no place for Godolphin either in the new scheme of things. Shrewsbury's role here is harder to determine for he was, on the surface, thanks to the development of his new Heythrop estate, both a friend and neighbour of the Marlboroughs. At the time of his appointment as lord chamberlain the queen had insisted that she meant for no further alterations in the ministry.<sup>73</sup> Marlborough greeted the announcement with as little credence as his wife had done. Scornfully, he professed to admire Shrewsbury's courage at entering 'into a certaine storme, with, I think, the greatest knaves of the nation' and asserted that in spite of Shrewsbury's assurances of moderation 'they are ready to go into all the extravagances imaginable'.<sup>74</sup> Marlborough's concerns proved perfectly accurate. Although Shrewsbury was by inclination a Whig (it was as such the queen insisted she had brought him back into the ministry) he had become distanced from his former Junto confreres and in particular dismayed by the effects of the wartime economy on the country.

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<sup>66</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61131, f. 68.

<sup>67</sup> *Wentworth Papers*, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Harris, *A Passion for Government*, p. 170.

<sup>69</sup> *Wentworth Papers*, pp. 128-9.

<sup>70</sup> *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv, p. 553.

<sup>71</sup> *HMC Portland MSS.*, vol. iv, p. 601.

<sup>72</sup> In his unpublished study of Harley's ministry, Geoffrey Holmes seems to take this line about Shrewsbury's role, noting at the time of Shrewsbury's return to government that he was 'well primed by Harley'. Holmes, 'The Great Ministry', p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> *The Diary of Sir David Hamilton, 1709-1714*, ed. Philip Roberts (Oxford, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, ed. Snyder (Oxford, 1975), vol. iii, pp. 1470-1.

However, his appeal to William III had always been his ability to mediate between factions and this now was no doubt why he was of such use to Harley. Even if there was ultimately to be no place for Marlborough in the new scheme for the time being, it was necessary to maintain communication and Shrewsbury was eminently qualified to do this. Shrewsbury was also able to maintain cordial relations with the old Tory grandee, Rochester, and in October the two men were observed in close conference. As Peter Wentworth explained to his brother:

All I know is that Lord Rotchester [*sic*] seem'd to be very great with the Duke of Shrewsbury and that he always dines there when he comes to Hampton Court, and Sunday after dinner they retir'd from the company that drink tea with the Dutchess, and satt talking in the Window for above half an hour, and so I left them very earnest in discourse.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to this, it is perhaps worth noting that there was no great immediate change made within the lord chamberlain's department. The significant early loser was the duchess of Marlborough, who lost her places as keeper of the privy purse and groom of the stole, but other associates of the old ministry such as the 2nd duke of Montagu and duke of St Albans for the time being at least remained in place. In part this reflected the crown's influence within the department but perhaps also hints at Shrewsbury's moderating role.<sup>76</sup>

### III

Shrewsbury's early prominence in the new ministry was quickly downgraded as relations between him and Harley deteriorated. His marginalization was the result of two factors in particular: first a return of his habitual ill health; second, the nominal promotion to offices, the Paris embassy and the lieutenancy of Ireland, that carried him far from the centre of things. By the time of the ministry's unravelling then, Shrewsbury was looked to by Harley's (by then earl of Oxford's) enemies as a potential ally. Yet, although by the middle of June 1714 it was assumed that Shrewsbury had resolved to act with Bolingbroke and bring down Oxford, he retained an independent stance possible only in one of his particular standing.<sup>77</sup> He stood apart from Bolingbroke over the schism bill, voting against extending the measure to Ireland, while backing Bolingbroke and his cronies against charges of misconduct over the Asiento.<sup>78</sup> In mid-July, with the administration in melt-down, it was Shrewsbury who was called upon to save the day, even if some remained sceptical of his ability to achieve so much. As Charles Ford wrote to Swift on 15 July:

I am very sorry you have had occasion to remove your premier minister [Parvisol]. We are told now, we shall have no change in ours, and that the Duke of Shrewsbury will perfectly reconcile all matters. I am sure you will not believe this any more than I do; but the Dragon [Oxford] has been more cheerful than usual for three or four days; and therefore people conclude the breaches are healed.<sup>79</sup>

Two days later, Erasmus Lewis's report to Swift demonstrated just how far from being reconciled the parties were. He recounted a dinner held at Lady Masham's attended by both Oxford and

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<sup>75</sup> *Wentworth Papers*, p. 152.

<sup>76</sup> J. C. Sainty and R. O. Bucholz, *Officials of the Royal Household, 1660-1837*, 2 vols (London, 1997-8), vol. i, pp. 6-7, 35, 58, 63.

<sup>77</sup> BL, Add. MS. 72501, ff. 130-1.

<sup>78</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, p. 388.

<sup>79</sup> *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. H. Williams (Oxford, 1963), vol. ii, 1714-23, p. 64.

Bolingbroke in which she had berated the lord treasurer for his failures. Oxford remained mute but, according to Lewis, ‘his revenge is not the less meditated for that, he tells the words clearly & distinctly to all mankind, those who range under his banner, call her ten thousand bitches & kitchen-wenches. those who hate him doe the same’.<sup>80</sup>

By 22 July, it was believed that matters would quickly come to a head and that when the queen left London for Windsor, as she was expected to do on the 27th, all would have been settled. While speculation about their various futures continued, Oxford and Bolingbroke maintained their dysfunctional relationship. They met each day at cabinet, dined and walked together – and then abused one another to their friends in such terms, so Ford said, that none ‘but ministers of state could bear without cutting throats’.<sup>81</sup> The extent to which Oxford was being steadily abandoned was confirmed by Swift on the 25th, who noted how at a dinner at Oxford attended by Oxford’s son, Lord Harley, far fewer healths were drunk than normal and that the company had drunk to Arbuthnot ‘six glasses before the usual time’.<sup>82</sup>

In the event, the queen proved too sick to leave London and the final manoeuvres were all played out in the environs of the court in London. Shrewsbury may have been willing to stand against, or at least at a distance from, Bolingbroke, but he proved no more reliable a friend to Oxford. At the end of July, with Oxford’s imminent dismissal common knowledge, it was reported that Buckingham, Shrewsbury and Poulet had all agreed to resign should Oxford be put out. In the event, when Oxford was finally dismissed on the 27th, none abided by the undertaking.

Oxford’s removal threw the court into a state of perplexity. The council sat long into the night attempting to agree on the names of a new treasury commission but the result was an impasse that left Bolingbroke effective head of the ministry from his berth as secretary of state. He maintained that position for the next two days.

If Bolingbroke was briefly triumphant, the council’s failure to determine the future of the Treasury indicated just how uncertain affairs remained. On the night of 30 July the council was forced into arriving at a decision prompted by a sudden downturn in the queen’s health and a gathering of senior ministers and court officials assembled about the bed of their stricken queen, who had finally retreated to her chamber for the last time. As far as Lady Masham was concerned, and this view was supported by the queen’s physician, Dr Hamilton, Anne’s breakdown at this point was attributable almost solely to the mental anguish she had suffered while attempting to deal with and then dislodge Oxford.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, a fierce political struggle continued to be played out. Even now, some hoped that the crown might be offered to Anne’s half-brother, James Edward Stuart, the exiled ‘Old Pretender’. Bolingbroke was one of those believed to be sympathetic to this solution, though by now he was probably more interested in securing the future for the Tories under a more likely Hanoverian monarchy. Nevertheless, his selection as lord treasurer could have indicated a last-minute change of heart on the part of the queen and that she had reconciled herself to the restoration of her estranged Catholic half-brother. In the event, Bolingbroke was to be disappointed. A cadre of court officials agreed amongst themselves that another name should be offered to the queen instead and when the barely conscious monarch stretched out her hand it was to award the staff of office to Shrewsbury.<sup>84</sup>

#### IV

Shrewsbury’s appointment came as a considerable surprise to Oxford’s heir, Lord Harley, but the young man was in no doubt that it was a very welcome one: indeed he proclaimed it ‘one of

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<sup>80</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. Williams, vol. ii, p. 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. Williams, vol. ii, p. 77.

<sup>82</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. Williams, vol. ii, p. 83.

<sup>83</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. Williams, vol. ii, p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> BL, Add. MS. 72496, ff. 149-50.

the happiest turns in the world'.<sup>85</sup> For, although Shrewsbury was a decidedly ambiguous figure by this point, his appointment did provide a clear signal that there would be no alteration in the act of settlement and that it was to the queen's Hanoverian cousins that the crown would pass. It also indicated the likelihood of a return to government for at least some of the displaced Whigs. As it was, his appointment heralded the beginning of the best part of half a century of Whig supremacy in British politics. Shrewsbury was also to be the last lord treasurer created. Following his displacement soon after the arrival of King George I, the treasury was put into commission (permanently as it turned out).

Unsurprisingly, all parties made haste to claim the victory for themselves. It is no doubt in part as a consequence of this that conflicting accounts exist of the order of events that led to Shrewsbury's appointment as lord treasurer. Bolingbroke's confreres asserted that it had been Bolingbroke himself who had advised the queen to hand the staff to Shrewsbury. This was Charles Ford's understanding: as he reported to Swift, it had been assigned to Bolingbroke to inform the queen of the privy council's recommendation.<sup>86</sup> In doing so Bolingbroke's eagerness to ensure that Oxford was at last formally set aside and disqualified from acting in the regency council, may have been as great as his concern about who received the staff.<sup>87</sup> By now, for Bolingbroke, this was a damage limitation exercise. Other accounts included assertions that the queen had not even been conscious when Shrewsbury's name was settled on – so it was effectively a council coup necessitated by their inability to agree on a treasury commission.<sup>88</sup> A later tradition (echoing stories that she had been unconscious all along) suggested that the queen had never given her assent to Shrewsbury, but rather that it had been assumed.<sup>89</sup> The Hanoverian resident, Bothmer, working in association with the dukes of Somerset and Argyll, has also been suggested as one of the prime movers in ensuring that the staff went to Shrewsbury. Certainly his role should not be discounted, though, as Ragnhild Hatton pointed out, he arrived at court after Shrewsbury had been given the staff and so was absent from the final crucial meeting.<sup>90</sup> One of the best accounts is that of Sir John Evelyn, the diarist's grandson, who recorded in his journal the order of events as he had it from Lord Chancellor Harcourt. According to this, it was Harcourt who had played the central role in pressing for Shrewsbury's appointment, and it was he, and not Bolingbroke, who had guided the queen's hand.<sup>91</sup> Another brief account that matches the Evelyn version while eliding Harcourt's particular role is that conveyed by the earl of Sunderland to the earl of Nottingham. According to him it was 'the council' who were able to take advantage of a brief improvement in the queen's condition to press her to make the award.<sup>92</sup> Sunderland's apparent insider knowledge perhaps accounts for Swift's enquiry of Charles Ford, shortly after the queen's death, whether there had been Whigs present at council on the day Shrewsbury was appointed.<sup>93</sup>

All of this, of course, ignores Shrewsbury himself and it is worth reminding oneself that he was no mute observer in these transactions. Since his return from Ireland he had carefully repositioned himself, distancing himself from both Oxford and Bolingbroke, while making overtures to the Hanoverians via Bothmer and Marlborough, whose return to England he now

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<sup>85</sup> BL, Add. MS. 70144, Edward, Lord Harley to Abigail Harley, 31 July 1714.

<sup>86</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. H. Williams, vol. ii, p. 93.

<sup>87</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, pp. 392-3.

<sup>88</sup> BL, Add. MS. 72501, ff. 152-3.

<sup>89</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. H. Williams, vol. ii, p. 94n.

<sup>90</sup> Ragnhild Hatton, *George I*, revised edn (New Haven, 2001), p. 109.

<sup>91</sup> This is the version preferred in several accounts and is based on information contained in Sir John Evelyn's journal. Henry L. Snyder, 'The Last Days of Queen Anne: The Account of Sir John Evelyn Examined', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, xxxiv (1971), pp. 261-76. See also James Anderson Wynn, *Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 633-4; Hatton, *George I*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>92</sup> Leicester, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, DG7 box 4950, Sunderland to Nottingham, 30 July 1714, 8 o'clock.

<sup>93</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. H. Williams, vol. ii, p. 99.

joined in demanding.<sup>94</sup> For Bolingbroke, of course, the result was the same, and whether he was compelled to grit his teeth and tender the advice to the queen himself or not, he was forced to watch his plans (such as they were) undone in those final moments. As he wrote to Swift on 3 August: 'The earl of Oxford was remov'd on Tuesday, the Queen dyed on Sunday [...] what a world is this, and how does fortune banter us?'.<sup>95</sup> There is little doubt that the decision to appoint Shrewsbury as lord treasurer was a clear signal that the act of settlement was not to be interfered with and that any speculation that the queen may have favoured restoring her putative half-brother remained just that – speculation. It also seems clear that Shrewsbury was looked to as a statesman of real weight, who was an appropriate choice for the times. Almost as soon as his appointment became known, share prices in the city, which had been crumbling, made a rapid recovery.<sup>96</sup> Unlike some of the other court grandees who may also have hankered after the treasury, he had a rare ability to appeal across the divides of party. And yet, it is difficult to escape the rabbit-like analogy referred to earlier in the Lockhart papers. By 1714 Shrewsbury had been secretary of state, lord chamberlain, ambassador and lord lieutenant of Ireland. He had excelled in none of these posts – and complained heartily about all of them. By selecting Shrewsbury, then, it might be said that the council had deliberately opted for a short-term fix; a man of unquestionable breeding and experience, though one who would be expected to be pushed aside in short order. That would certainly fit with his experience once George I had ascended his throne. As early as 5 August Charles Ford was commenting that the regents appointed with overseeing affairs until the new king arrived in England had collapsed into factions and by 24 August Shrewsbury was making his usual complaints about poor health and weight of business.<sup>97</sup> Never one to bear office for long, Shrewsbury was quickly removed from the Treasury and from his lieutenancy in Ireland. He retained the lord chamberlaincy for a while longer, but by the spring of 1715 he was once again out in the cold and reliant on his wife to save him from the same kind of treatment meted out to Oxford and Bolingbroke.<sup>98</sup> While he lost his positions, the duchess was appointed a lady of the bedchamber to the new Princess of Wales.<sup>99</sup>

Shrewsbury's later career, it might be said, is a suitable metaphor for the final years of Anne's reign – or indeed for Anne's reign altogether. This was a caretaker regime, whose primary function was to set the terms for the future. Was the Revolution to survive, or were the Stuarts to be welcomed back with all the uncertainties that went with them? But also, and perhaps just as importantly, this was a period in which the Lords remained a more than significant force in high politics.<sup>100</sup> How appropriate, then, that it was to a great duke that the lord treasurership passed at this point. Anne reached out her hand and touched Shrewsbury just as Shrewsbury then presided over the quiet succession of the dynasty agreed on by the terms of the Revolution settlement, which he had played such a signal part in bringing about. Neither received much comfort from the decision (Shrewsbury probably continued to flirt with the exiled court in his final years) but both are deserving of more attention than is often accorded them. Both vain, both weak, they were noisily aware of the role fate had cast upon them and only too willing to let it be known that they resented the burden. But for all this, they each played their role and ensured that what came next was not Franco-Italianate Stuart but decidedly Hanoverian.

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<sup>94</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, p. 389.

<sup>95</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. H. Williams, vol. ii, p. 101.

<sup>96</sup> BL, Add. MS. 72501, f. 154.

<sup>97</sup> *Swift Correspondence*, ed. H. Williams, vol. ii, p. 103; BL, Add. MS. 72483, f. 232.

<sup>98</sup> BL, Verney (microfilm) M636/55, Sir Thomas Cave to Lord Fermanagh, 23 June 1715.

<sup>99</sup> BL, Add. MS. 61492, ff. 232-7.

<sup>100</sup> This is a view that was expressed persuasively by Geoffrey Holmes in his seminal study of the period: *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (London, 1967), pp. 382-403.