

## **The History of King Richard III (extract: A King's Mistress)**

*The History of King Richard III* was written by Sir Thomas Moore (1478-1535), English humanist scholar and lawyer. He is famous for refusing to accept King Henry VIII as the supreme head of the Church of England. This led to his execution as a traitor. His most famous works are *Utopia* and *The History of King Richard III*. This latter, which portrayed the last Yorkish king as a monstrous individual, influenced Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

This woman was born in London, worshipfully friended, honestly brought up, and very well married, saving somewhat too soon, her husband an honest citizen, young and goodly and of good substance. But forasmuch as they were coupled ere she were well ripe, she not very fervently loved for whom she never longed. Which was haply the thing that the more easily made her incline unto the King's appetite when he required her. Howbeit that respect of his royalty, the hope of gay apparel, ease, pleasure, and other wanton wealth was able soon to pierce her soft tender heart. But when the king had abused her, anon her husband (as he was an honest man [...] and not presuming to touch a King's concubine) left her up to him altogether. When the king died, the Lord Chamberlain took her, which in the King's days, albeit he was sore enamored upon her, yet he forbore her, either for reverence or for a certain friendly faithfulness. Proper she was, and fair: nothing in her body that you would have changed. Thus say they that knew her in her youth. Albeit some that now see her (for yet she liveth) deem her never to have been well visaged. [...] For now she is old, lean, withered and dried up, nothing left but rivelled skin and hard bone. And yet being even such, whoso well advise her visage might guess and devise which parts how filled might make it a fair face. Yet delighted men not so much in her beauty as in her pleasant behavior. For a proper wit had she, and could both read well and write, merry in company, ready and quick of answer, neither mute nor full of babble, sometime taunting without displeasure and not without disport. The King would say that he had three concubines, which in three diverse properties diversely excelled: one the merriest, one the wiliest, and one the holiest harlot in his realm, as one whom no man could get out of the church lightly to any place but it were to his bed. The other two were somewhat greater personages, and nathless of their humility content to be nameless and to forbear the praise of those properties. But the merriest was this Shore's wife, in whom the King therefore took special pleasure. [...] Where the King took displeasure, she would mitigate and appease his mind. Where men were out of favor, she would bring them in his grace. For many that had highly offended, she attained pardon. Of great forfeitures she gat men remission. And finally in many weighty suits, she stood many men in great stead, either for none or for very small rewards, and those rather gay than rich, either for that she was content with the deed' self well done, or for that she delighted to be sued unto and to show what she was able to do with the king. [...]

I doubt not some shall think this woman too slight a thing to be written of and set among the remembrances of great matters. [...] But me seemeth the chance so much the more worthy to be remembered, in how much she is now in the more beggarly condition, unfriended and worn out of acquaintance, after good substance, after as great favor with the prince, after as great suit and seeking to with all those that those days had business to

speed, as many other men were in their times, which now be famous only by the infamy of their ill deeds. Her doings were not much less, albeit they be much less remembered, because they were not so evil. For men use if they have an evil turn to write it in marble; and whoso doth us a good turn, we write it in dust, which is not worst proved by her; for at this day she beggeth of many at this day living, that at this day had begged if she had not been.