

**THE PLACE OF « SHORE'S WIFE » IN MORE'S
THE HISTORY OF KING RICHARD III**

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Readers of *The History of King Richard III* have consistently singled out More's description of « Jane »¹ Shore for acclaim. For example, Charles Whibley declared that the sketch was « drawn by a master »; Miss Routh saw the « unforgettable portrait » as « one of the most memorable in the literature of the period »; Paul Kendall concluded that the « account...is surely the most charming piece of prose that had yet been written in England »; Richard Sylvester called the « portrait...charmingly profound »; and Richard Schoeck lauded « the sharply drawn and haunting portrait of Shore's wife » as « perhaps the most brilliant » of the character sketches in the *History*.² Although the praise accorded the passage is fully justified, its importance to the work as a whole, its intrinsic appeal, and More's « attitude » toward Shore – as well as the inextricable relationship among these – have never been thoroughly examined.³

At first it seems paradoxical that More, who condemned adultery so emphatically in *Utopia* and in his polemical works, would provide such an engaging portrait of Shore. However, the reasons for the compassionate presentation of an adultress lie not so much in any contradiction in More's thought or in his feminism⁴ as in his concern for dramatic effectiveness: More designed « Shore's wife »⁵ to provide an important foil for Richard and Elizabeth Woodville⁶ and to mitigate Edward's « fleshly wantonness. » Although some scholars have argued that the passage mars the unity of the *History*,⁷ close examination will reveal that it decisively affects the way in which the reader responds to the Protector (and some of his followers), Edward IV, and the queen.

More carefully prepares the context for the description of Shore by having Richard introduce her as Elizabeth Woodville's accomplice in practicing witchcraft against him (48/7-9),⁸ by explaining that she was the « concubine whom the king...had most loved » (48/17), and by identifying her, in the proclamation against Hastings, as the Lord Chamberlain's mistress and fellow conspirator. All this – especially the charge that she was one of Hastings' « most secret counsel of this heinous treason, w^h whom he lay nightli, & nameli y^e night last passed next before his death » (53/26-28) – establishes her importance to the events More is relating and intrigues the reader. Thus, it seems logical and natural that More follows the report of Richard's proclamation with his

character sketch of Shore.

Much of the independent appeal of « Shores wife » results from the irony⁹ and humor compressed into the brief description, which divides naturally into two parts. The first part, replete with irony, describes Richard's persecution of her (54/13-55/7); the second, which includes much of the humor, details her relationship with Edward IV (55/7-57/13).

More uses the first part not only to provide ironic examples of Richard's hypocrisy but also to develop the character of the Protector as he outlined it at the beginning of the *History* (7/16-8/13). Much of the irony in the passage arises from seeing Richard against the generally sympathetic portrait of his defenseless victim. Unable to prosecute her on the trumped up accusations of witchcraft and treason, Richard, the « goodly [i.e., godly] continent prince clene & faultles of himself, » charges her with adultery, which « euery man laughed at to here it then so sodainly so highly taken » (54/23-25). In the process, the Protector, « as it wer for anger not for couetise » (54/14),¹⁰ confiscates her goods. The public penance, through which Richard hoped « to win approval of the City, »¹¹ engages the pity of the crowd and provides her moment of greatest dignity.¹² The ultimate irony, however, is that the description of Shore, whom Richard had hoped to use to denigrate both Hastings¹³ and the late king, evokes only pity from the reader and, as an exemplum illustrating what can happen to the citizen when a tyrant rules, provides some of the most obvious and effective evidence of Richard's dissimulation and cruelty.

In this first part More also develops other traits mentioned in his initial character sketch of Richard. For example, the seizure of Shore's goods graphically illustrates his early reference to Richard's particular kind of avarice : « Free was hee called of dyspence, and sommewhat aboute hys power liberall, with large giftes hee gatte him vnstedfaste frendshippe, for whiche hee was fain to pil and spoyle in other places » (8/3-6). And, in the parenthetical « as a goodly [i.e., godly] continent prince clene & faultles of himself, sent oute of heauen into this vicious world for the amendement of mens maners » (54/24-26) More specifically labels Richard as an Antichrist, a characterization that had been hinted at in the description of his birth by Caesarean section (7/23-25).¹⁴

Where More effectively uses the first part of this sketch to blacken Richard's character, he utilizes the second part to enhance Edward IV's character. In particular, he develops an important aspect of his initial characterization of the late king : « hee was of youthe greatelye

geuen to fleshlye wantonnesse » but « Thys faute not greatlye gryeued the people : for neyther could any one mans pleasure, stretch and extende to the dyspleasure of verye manye, and was wythoute violence » (4/19-20, 22-24).¹⁵ How the reader perceives Edward's « fleshlye wantonnesse » is crucial to the work because it is his well-known reputation as a seducer that became important support for Richard's « inuencion » that the young princes were bastards, the basis for the Protector's claim to the throne (59/15-22).

Unable to deny Edward's licentiousness, More uses « Shores wife » to place it in the best possible light. This he accomplishes through humorous comments on the effects of that wantonness and by adroitly turning his favorite concubine into an asset.¹⁶ For example, he remarks that Shore's husband, after the king had seduced his wife, « (as he was an honest man & one that could his good, not presuming to touch a kinges concubine) left her vp to him al toghether » (55/17-19). This is wittily expanded in the *Historia* : « 'So very polite was he to others, whose right to her was by no means as good as his own' » (55/19-20; 230). In describing Edward's three concubines, More observes that the « thirde [was] the holiest harlot in his realme, as one whom no man could get out of y^c church lightly to any place, but it wer to his bed. The other two were somewhat greter parsonages, & Natheles of their humilite content to be nameles, & to forbere the praise of those properties » (56/8-12).

In describing the Edward-Shore relationship, More stresses its positive aspects. She was the « meriest » of his mistresses, the one « he loued » (56/12, 14). (As Sylvester points out, Edward's conduct is further extenuated in MS Arundel 43 : « '[Edward loved this one...] yet there was no harm it it beyond that created by the passion itself, for he embraced his wife with the deepest affection and treated her in an honorable way' » [p. 231].) Though Shore was beautiful, « Yet delited not men so much in her bewty, as in her plesant behauiour. For a proper wit had she, & could both rede wel & write, mery in company, redy & quick of aunswer, neither mute nor ful of bable, sometime taunting w^tout displeasure & not w^tout disport » (56/1-5).¹⁷ (The *Historia* is even more precise : « 'And even if the beauty of her face was so great that everyone easily turned his eyes upon her, nevertheless she had such a delightful wit and her behavior was seasoned with so much affability that she seemed to be loved more for the soundness of her character than for the beauty of her countenance' » [56/1-4; 230].) Most effective in extenuating Edward's « fleshlye wantonnesse » is More's description of her use of her power, which

she neuer abused to any mans hurt, but to many a mans comfort & relief : where the king toke displeasure, she would mitigate & appease his mind : where men were out of fauour, she wold bring them in his grace. For many that had highly offended, shee obtained pardon. Of great forfeitures she gate men remission. And finally in many weighty sutes, she stode many men in gret stede, either for none, or very smal rewardes, & those rather gay then rich. (56/15-21)¹⁸

The effectiveness of More's use of « Shores wife » to counter Richard's attempts to capitalize on Edward's « fleshlye wantonnesse » is nowhere more evident than in the refutation it provides of Buckingham's charges that « more sute was in his [Edward's] dayes vnto Shores wife a vile & an abhominable strumpet, then to al the lordes in England, except vnto those y^t made her their proctoure [i.e., advocate] which simple woman was wel named & honest, tyll the kyng for his wanton lust & sinful affeccion byreft her from her husband » (71/31-72/2). Throughout More makes it obvious that Shore neither abused her power nor was forced by Edward to become his mistress.¹⁹

This second part of « Shores wife » demonstrates how Edward's conduct « not greatlye gryeued the people » and thus provides a decisive contrast with Richard's seemingly upright, but obviously hypocritical, moral standards. More casts further negative reflection on the Protector through the explicit contrast Shore offers to four of Richard's henchmen who are introduced immediately after the passage contrasting her « beggerly condicion » and the « men...which be now famouse, only by y^e infamy of their il dedes » (56/31, 57/2-3). Unlike Edward's concubine, Richard Ratcliff (who superintended the execution of Rivers, Vaughan, Haute, and Grey and « whose seruice y^e protector specially vsed in y^e counsel and in thexecucion of such lawles enterprises » [57/21-23]) has « a shrewde wit, [and is] short & rude in speche, rough & boustiouse of behaiour, bold in mischief, as far from pitie as from al fere of god » (57/24-26). Shore's concern for justice and the welfare of others also offers a direct contrast to Edmund Shaa, who joins Richard « vpon trust of his own aduancement, whereof he was of a proud hart highly desirouse » (58/17-18), and to John Shaa and Friar Penker, who are picked by Richard because they « had no scrupilouse consience » (58/21).

Placed just before the first mention of Richard's attempt to capitalize on Edward's licentiousness, « Shores wife » – with the generally sympathetic treatment of Shore, the contrast she provides to Richard (and some of his subordinates), the humorous comments on Edward's « fleshlye wantonnesse, » and the overt emphasis on the positive aspects

of the relationship between the king and his favorite concubine – effectively undercuts the Protector's strategy.

More's depiction of Shore inevitably reflects on that of Elizabeth Woodville, the only other woman discussed at length in the *History*. While the two women are linked through Richard's accusation of witchcraft as well as through his victimization of each, the essential difference between them is introduced by More's observation that of all women the queen hated Shore the most (48/16). Like Shore, Elizabeth Woodville had been propositioned by the king, but « she verteously denied him....And...shewed him plaine...[that she] thought her self to good to be his concubine » (61/15-16, 23-25). The contrast Shore provides reinforces the queen's appeal as a pathetic heroine, which in turn further blackens Richard's character.

That much of More's « sympathy » or « pity » for Shore is conditioned by the functions she serves is now evident. However, it is easy for the reader to become captivated – as many have been – by More's irony, humor, and necessarily sympathetic treatment, and thus fail to realize that he by no means exculpates her.

Although More partially excuses her desertion of her husband by portraying her as the too-young victim of a forced marriage (« forasmuche as they were coupled ere she wer wel ripe, she not very feruently loued, for whom she neuer longed » [55/10-12]), he suggests that vanity was one of the primary causes of her acquiescence to Edward (« y^e hope of gay apparel, ease, plesure & other wanton welth, was hable soone to perse a softe tender hearte » [55/15-16]). Though her adultery pales in comparison to Richard's crimes, More does not excuse it. The citizens laugh at Richard's charge (the intent of the charge, not its substance), but More points out that Shore « could not deny...y^t she was nought of her body » (54/22, 24). (MS Arundel 43 goes even further : « esset meriatrix » – « 'that she was a whore' » [132/3; 229].) Even though More describes her penance in such a way that it emphasizes Richard's hypocrisy more than her own sin, he does not present Shore as a repentant sinner but as Richard's victim. In describing her forced penance (not her repentance) he is careful to point out that « her great shame » (the result of being « out of al array saue her kyrtle only » and of « the wondering of the people ») « wan her much praise, among those y^t were more amorous of her body then curious of her soule » and to establish that the pity of the « good folke...y^t hated her liuing, & glad wer to se sin corrected » arose from their recognition of Richard's hypocrisy (54/30-55/7). For all his emphasis on her qualities, he does not allow the

reader to forget – especially when comparing her ready submission with Elizabeth Woodville's virtuous denial of Edward – that she willingly became the king's (and later Hastings') concubine.

Although the reader is invited to pity Shore because « she is now in the more beggerly condicion, vnfreinded & worne out of acquaintance » (56/31-32), More's conclusion provides a context in which to judge her : « Her doinges were not much lesse [evil than those of men « now famouse, only by y^e infamy of their il dedes »], albeit thei be muche lesse remembred, because thei were not so euil » (57/2-4).²⁰

It is apparent that More designed « Shores wife » to serve as a kind of prologue to the portion of the *History* which details Richard's attempt to secure the throne by « proving » his nephews bastards. Despite its appeal as an independent biographical sketch, the description of Shore is patently designed to create a character with whom the reader sympathizes against Richard, through whom Edward's « fleshlye wantonnesse » is extenuated, and against whom Elizabeth Woodville's character is enhanced. As such, it is clear that More means « Shores wife » to function as an integral, important part of his illustration of Richard's dissimulation and cruelty, the great unifying themes of the *History*.²¹

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1. « Jane » was Thomas Heywood's invention and the name she is traditionally known by; her actual Christian name was Elizabeth (Nicolas Barker, « Jane Shore, Part I : The Real Jane Shore, » *Etoniana*, No. 125 [4 June 1972], p. 385).

2. Charles Whibley, *Literary Studies* (London : Macmillan, 1919), p. 53; E.M.G. Routh, *Sir Thomas More and His Friends, 1477-1535* (1934; rpt. New York : Russell & Russell), 1963, p. 49 ; Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard the Third* (London : Allen & Unwin, 1955), p. 458, n. 4; Richard S. Sylvester, Introduction, in his edition of *The History of King Richard III*, Vol. II of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven : Yale Univ. Press, 1963), p. lxxxvii; Richard J. Schoeck, *The Achievement of Thomas More : Aspects of His Life and Works*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series, No. 7 (Victoria, B.C. : English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1976), p. 44. For other similar appraisals see, for example : Theodore Maynard, *Humanist as Hero : The Life of Sir Thomas More* (1947; rpt. New York : Hafner, 1971), p. 72; and A.M. Kinghorn, *The Chorus of History : Literary-Historical Relations in Renaissance Britain* (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1971), p. 42.

3. Various aspects of the passage have been analyzed, of course. In addition to the works cited in my notes, see, for example : Esther Yael Beith-Halahmi, *Angell Fayre or Strumpet Lewd : Jane Shore as an Example of Erring Beauty in 16th Century Litera-*

ture, 2 vols., Salzburg Studies in English Literature : Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies, 16-17 (Salzburg : Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974); and Barbara Brown, « Sir Thomas More and Thomas Churchyard's *Shore's Wife*, » *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2 (1972), 41-48.

4. Lee Cullen Khanna, « No Less Real than Ideal : Images of Women in More's Work, » *Moreana*, XIV, 55-56 (1977), 35-51.

5. I shall use « Shores wife, » William Rastell's marginal gloss, to designate the entire passage.

6. For a discussion of the dramatic nature of the *History*, see Arthur Noel Kincaid, « The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*, » *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 12 (1972), 223-42; and Alison Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians, 1483-1535* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 152-90.

7. Donald A. Stauffer, *English Biography before 1700* (Cambridge : Harvard Univ. Press, 1930), p. 41. Hanham asserts that when More's work is viewed as straightforward history « the widely praised description of Mistress Shore has so little to do with the matter in hand that it looks like self-indulgence on the part of the writer » (p. 153); however, when she examines the *History* as a literary work, she offers an interesting analysis of the importance of the passage. One might add to this list those readers who refer to the passage as a « digression. »

8. All citations in my text to the *History*, *Historia*, and MS Arundel 43 are to Sylvester's edition. I have used his translation of passages from the two Latin versions. In one instance a variant from the apparatus (8/5) has been preferred.

9. On More's use of irony see Leonard F. Dean, « Literary Problems in More's *Richard III*, » *PMLA*, 58 (1943), 22-41.

10. As Sylvester points out, the « per iram scilicet » of the Latin texts makes clear that this « is to be taken ironically » (p. 228).

11. T.G. Heath, « Another Look at Thomas More's *Richard III*, » *Moreana*, No. 19-20 (1968), p. 14.

12. Sylvester, p. xcvi.

13. The absurdity of the charges against Shore also underlines Richard's hypocrisy in his treatment of Hastings. Richard's attempt at guilt-by-association results instead in sympathy for Hastings.

14. In one fifteenth-century blockbook, one of the fifteen signs of Antichrist is delivery by Caesarean section (*Der Antichrist und die fünfzehn Zeichen*, ed. H.Th. Musper [Munich : Prestel, 1970], plate 2Va). Christopher Hill (*Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* [London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1971]) points out that « the charge of being a forerunner of Antichrist, or Antichrist himself, was part of the normal vocabulary of abuse of medieval politicians » (p. 7). Schoeck suggests that More intends a contrast

between Richard as Antichrist and Shore as « the Magdalene manquée, perhaps » (p. 78).

Although the *Historia* omits this reference to the blasphemous savior (MS Arundel 43 has it), both Latin versions underscore the characterization of Richard as Antichrist by having Shaa speak « of himself as a John the Baptist who will denounce the illegitimate marriage of Edward IV and prepare the way for the advent of Richard, the 'verus & indubitatus filius' » (Sylvester, pp. lxxii, n. 2; 229). Rous had labelled Richard an Antichrist, and George Buck seems to have recognized More's characterization of Richard as an Antichrist (*The History of King Richard the Third*, ed. Arthur Noel Kincaid [Gloucester : Alan Sutton, 1979], p. 126 and note).

15. John Speed seems to have recognized this function of « Shores wife » when he removed the description of the king's three concubines from its original context (56/5-12) and placed it just before this passage (*The History of Great Britaine* [London : J. Sudbury and G. Humble, 1611], sig. 5L2^v).

16. The effectiveness of « Shores wife » in palliating Edward's reputation is admirably illustrated by J.R. Lander's observation on Edward's character : « Numerous though rumour makes his amours, especially in his earlier years, they never, apart from his rash marriage, affected his political judgement and in his later years his devotion to the winning and charitable figure of Jane Shore, so compassionately depicted by Sir Thomas More who, after all, was no advocate of unchastity, throws a gentler light upon his character » (*Government and Community : England, 1450-1509, The New History of England* [Cambridge : Harvard Univ. Press, 1980], p. 306).

17. As Khanna points out, these are many of the qualities More considered necessary in a « good wife » (pp. 45-46).

18. It is quite probable that More offers this description as an explicit contrast to his early summary of Richard's manipulation of his power : « Hee was...arrogant of heart, outwardly coumpinable where he inwardely hated, not letting to kisse whome hee thoughte to kyl : dispitious and cruell, not for euill will alway, but offer for ambicion, and either for the suretie or encrease of his estate. Frende and foo was muche what indifferrent, where his aduantage grew, he spared no mans deathe, whose life withstoode his purpose » (8/7-13).

19. That Shore's submission to Edward was voluntary is made even more explicit in the *Historia* : « 'whence it was that, once she had cast off her husband, she easily surrendered to the king when he solicited her' » (55/11; 229).

20. This discussion of More's attitude toward Shore makes obvious my disagreement with Khanna, who sees her (and Elizabeth Woodville) as « standards of virtue in a world of corrupt men » (p. 47) and as « touchstones for moral order » (p. 49).

21. On dissimulation as theme, see Dean (pp. 36-38) and Kincaid (« Dramatic Structure, » p. 229).