



## Royal Harlot

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## **Royal Harlot** Susan Holloway Scott

London, 1660: Ready to throw off a generation of Puritan rule, all England rejoices when Charles Stuart returns to reclaim the throne.

Among those welcoming him is young Barbara Villiers Palmer, a breathtaking Royalist beauty whose sensuality and clever wit instantly captivate the handsome, jaded king. Though each is promised to another, Barbara soon becomes Charles's mistress and closest friend, and the uncrowned queen of his bawdy Restoration court.

Rewarded with titles, land, and jewels, she is the most envied and desired woman in England--and the most powerful. But the role of royal mistress is a precarious one, and Barbara's enemies and rivals are everywhere in the palace.

## **Royal Harlot Details**

Date : Published July 1st 2007 by Berkley Books (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9780451221346

Author : Susan Holloway Scott

Format : Paperback 380 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, European Literature, British Literature, Literature, 17th Century, Romance

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## From Reader Review Royal Harlot for online ebook

### **Rio (Lynne) says**

No doubt Barbara Villiers was a harlot, in all senses. Barbara was up for anything to climb the social ladder. She was King Charles II mistress (he had many) but she was the first and most important one when he returned to the throne of England. She had more influence at court than his queen and she was called the curse of the nation by her haters. She worked the system in every way to secure her future. If you want to read and learn about this time in history (when England was Republic and lost and regained it's monarchy) this will give you Charles II side. I enjoyed googling Barbara and seeing her famous paintings by Peter Lely. This book is saucy, be warned.

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### **Alaine says**

For me personally, what makes a historical fiction book fantastic is one that tells me so much about the period that is it written in, that I want to get straight onto Google and search for more information. Susan Holloway Scott truly brought these historical figures to life and left me wanting more. As with any good author she explains in her notes at the back of the book why she wrote the story the way she did and why she portrayed Barbara the way she did.

I have to say that this is a very raunchy novel, so if you don't like reading about sexual exploits then this book is not for you. However, I thoroughly enjoyed it and whilst it was raunchy I learned a lot about this period of history that I didn't know.

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### **Natasa says**

The novel built up the compelling relationship between Barbara and Charles II and at its peak; it was a definite page-turner. It lost its spark towards the end and fizzled out rather drastically.

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### **Orsolya says**

I always say that actors in films "do a good job" when they play a mean character I am supposed to hate and I indeed "hate" them while watching a movie. In the same respect, we are generally meant to hate Barbara Villiers, the famous greedy and sex-crazed mistress of Charles II. Susan Holloway Scott allowed her character to play a Oscar-winning performance because frankly: I hate this mistress (okay, granted I am a fan of Nell Gwynne).

A wonderfully saturated book including the sexual craving and power ambitions of this long-standing mistress while feeding you with some insight into her personal reasoning. We may never know how the mistress actually felt and thought in "real life" but Scott provides a rather close depiction.

Love her or hate her, this is one mistress who will grab your attentions either way.

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## **Mandy Moody says**

Royal Harlot is told by the most famous and longstanding mistress of King Charles II. It is a story of her life, and of his return to the throne.

I thought this book was very well written. The story was well told and historically accurate, and even better - so much fun to read!

Scott's portrayal of Barbara Villiers is much more sympathetic than most historians, and I appreciate her more feminist view.

A warning for those that are looking for G rated material...Like most historical fiction, Royal Harlot is full of sex. However, I didn't think it was overdone.

I thoroughly enjoyed this one, and am currently reading Duchess.

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## **Ariel says**

If we are meant to see Barbara Palmer as a villain, a seductress, and a very unapologetic and ruthless one at that, the author has done so and done so well. I can't help but balance the two views of her: the feminist "let her sleep with how many men she wants and can we stop slut shaming four centuries later?" with the "holy Hannah how many men did this women sleep with?" This women would do anything for advancement and for the care and wellbeing of her own children, and my word, was this an interesting tale to read. The writer was fantastic in choosing to share this viewpoint of the woman that would have been queen and really should have been. Her court of intelligent and ruthless followers, the love and friendship she had of the king, her own skill at gambling and knowing just how to utilize gossip and horror to her advantage: had Barbara Palmer been Queen, I think we would have seen the bright flame of Charles II rise to a roaring bonfire and have witnessed a much different dynasty begin for England. She was powerful and intelligent, and good hell, how did she not die of syphilis at the age of 20? She is a fascinating character and I want nothing more than to look up the art that she had done and see what this woman really looks like.

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## **Elis Madison says**

This one starts with young Barbara Villiers's hook-up with the gifted seducer Phillip, the Earl of Chesterfield. But Chessy (Cheesy?) wasn't in the marriage market at the time, so in the end she married Roger Palmer.

Poor Rog probably knew he hadn't married a virgin, but still, could he have realized what he was getting into?

Eventually Barbara found her way to the exiled and impoverished court of Charles II. She's beautiful; he's a Stuart. Inevitably, Babs and Chuck became lovers and this is about as much of an LTR as anyone could expect.

The rest of the book revolves around court intrigues and Barbara's ability to pull herself out of various political potholes. The one time we see Barbara actually meet Nell Gwynn is a bit anticlimactic, when, in *The King's Favorite*, we're told about times when Barbara encountered Nelly's rapier wit and at least appeared to enjoy it.

This one gets 4 stars. The story doesn't grab me and drag me into any real conflict, but hey, it's history, and it's about a woman. Nice girls never did make history.

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### **Lauren says**

I picked this book up after I read *Forever Amber*. The book is about Barbara Palmer, Lady Castlemaine, ancestress to the late Princess Diana AND Camilla Parker Bowles. Barbara Palmer was a prominent character in *Forever Amber*. She was one of the famous mistresses of King Charles II in bawdy restoration England.

Basically, there is nothing likeable about Barbara Palmer. She is conceited, promiscuous, and self-absorbed. While this novel did not portray Barbara as the shrewish woman, as she was portrayed in *Forever Amber* (and as contemporary rumors portrayed her), even this sympathetic author has little respect for her. In essence, it is a story of greed and corruption. While Barbara had power, nobody respected her.

This book was also overly sexual for my tastes. While it was historically accurate, it read too much like a harlequin romance. Because the main character was so repugnant, it was hard for me to get past that.

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### **Renaë (Romantic Parvenu) says**

As a general rule, anything related to the Stuarts isn't an immediate draw, for one reason or another. Though I read and enjoyed Kathleen Winsor's seminal *Forever Amber*, I tend to find the risqué happenings of the Restoration era to be somewhat tedious. So with that in mind, *Royal Harlot* didn't scream my name while reading, but I was able to find it entertaining and often interesting all the same.

Barbara Palmer is not a well-liked woman by really anyone, especially by a modern audience. But in writing this, Scott seems to be attempting to color the notorious Countess of Castlemaine in a more human light, as I doubt she could entirely pull off casting Barbara as a likable protagonist. The end result is a book where Lady Castlemaine tells the reader quite a lot about herself and her motivations. Barbara tells us she cares deeply for her children, for instance, though we never see her interact with them on the page beyond their births. I felt that the author was attempting to put a positive spin on events, but couldn't quite commit to that portrayal.

But don't get me wrong, I didn't dislike how Scott dealt with Barbara Palmer's difficult character. It was simply that I couldn't exactly discern what angle the author was going for, as sometimes the reader was presented with incomplete or conflicting ideas. This didn't really affect my enjoyment of *Royal Harlot*, but it did bring up some questions about the author's bias.

Writing-wise, *Royal Harlot* is well-done, though I think the sex scenes (and there were several, given the protagonist) were overly purple-prose. Scott had many euphemisms and metaphors that, rather than evoking

a passionate encounter between two people, made me laugh.

One area where I was especially disappointed was how Scott seemed to cheat the book out of its end. We spend a lot of time with the build-up to Barbara's first encounter with Charles II, and then a good portion of the book with the years of their relationship. But then all of a sudden, in one chapter, it was over, and then I was reading the author's afterword. I felt like things had been rushed and not given proper time to develop.

Even with all these things considered, *Royal Harlot* was still an informative, entertaining historical novel. Scott did a good job of trying to give such a notorious character as Barbara Palmer a balanced portrayal. I think more could have been done with her character, but overall, I was satisfied with the way this book approached history.

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## **Koren says**

The first introduction I had to Barbara Villiers was in my first ever Jean Plaidy novels, *A Health Unto His Majesty*, and *The Pleasures of Love*. Plaidy portrayed her as a villain you love to hate. She was calculating and vindictive and I rooted for the queen who just couldn't compete for Charles II's attention. Coming into this book, I tried to set aside my existing views of Barbara and be more open minded about her motives and actions.

The book begins with Barbara's journey to Antwerp on a secret Royalist mission to meet Charles Stuart, son of the executed English king Charles I, while he's still in exile. As soon as the two meet, Scott takes us back in time to fifteen year old Barbara's arrival in London to live with her mother and stepfather. Her mother plans on polishing away Barbara's country attitudes and behaviours in order to prepare her for a good marriage. However, Barbara is stubborn and follows her own heart. This leads her into the arms of Philip, the Earl of Chesterfield and a notorious womanizer. Though Barbara isn't faithful to Philip, or anyone for that matter, Philip's treatment of her hardens Barbara.

Once she meets Charles, the story really gets interesting. Not only does Barbara realize her interest in power, but she also feels like she's found a match in the king (not that this stops her from dallying with other men). Having children pushes Barbara's power-seeking to a new level as she collects titles, positions, income, and jewels from the king. The book follows the ups and downs of her relationship with Charles, including Barbara's succession of lovers during this time. Scott ends the book with the end of Barbara and Charles' relationship. The author's note provides a good summary the rest of Barbara's life as well as the other main players in the novel.

Political and religious issues of the Restoration were skillfully weaved into the story and Scott was able to show how these issues affected the king and his relationship with his mistress. I wish Scott had gone into a bit more depth with Barbara's involvement with international relations – she mentions a few times how the French and Spanish ambassadors woo Barbara with jewels because they believe she can influence Charles in their favour but beyond the jewel-flaunting. Scott does a good job of bringing out the flavor of the Protectorate and especially the Restoration. I'm a sucker for good description and I enjoyed Scott's descriptions of Barbara's jewels and gowns.

At the beginning of the story, Barbara wasn't seeking anything beyond her own immediate pleasure and I found her quite shallow. Her extreme vanity is ever-present, and she constantly dresses and poses in provocative ways. I found this exhausting at times – yes, you're unbelievably gorgeous, we get it. Her dominating concern for her beauty and to secure her status as fairest of them all is troubling for her as she ages. Her power is in her beauty, and Barbara recognizes that.

I respected Barbara's desire for freedom and doing what her heart desired – going against social expectations – I just couldn't sympathize with her character, at least at first. She could be so very cruel and vindictive, especially to the queen. By the end of the story, I did feel sympathetic towards her as she recognized that her "glory days" at court were finished. Barbara comes across as very self-aware, and is quite intelligent financially. In a day when women were considered the weaker sex and expected to follow strict social rules, Barbara effectively works the system to her and her children's advantage while she can (meaning, while her beauty lasts).

While Plaidy glossed over Barbara's bawdy thoughts and romantic "dalliances", Scott puts them all out there on the table for all to see. I guess I shouldn't be surprised when the title of the book is Royal Harlot, and it's the story of Lady Castlemaine, the famous mistress of the famously randy king, Charles II. Barbara was unashamed of her sexuality and sexual appetites and Scott really brings this out. I'm sure I blushed while reading this.

Overall, an enjoyable read. For more Restoration-era court romance and adventure, I recommend Plaidy's trilogy of Charles II (The Wandering Prince, A Health Unto His Majesty, and Here Lies Our Sovereign Lord) and Rose Tremain's Restoration.

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### **Marie Z. Johansen says**

I seem to be a serial reader. When I find an author I like - especially one that writes of a time period that I am exceedingly fond of - I seem to try to read every book written by them! This same propensity holds true for Susan Holloway Scott - whose novels never cease to please me. Her books transport me and I am always sad when I come to the end of one of her books. That's high praise from me and is, perhaps, why I go on the hunt for the next title right away.

Since I generally read so much about the Tudors I have thoroughly enjoyed reading about the reign of King Charles II, the "merry" king. "Royal Harlot" follows the life of Mistress Barbara Villiers, later Lady Castlemaine, as she becomes Charles' II maitress-en-titre - better know as Charles' "head honcha" mistress. Barbara Villier's family, the second Earl and Countess of Anglesea had been staunch Royalists during the reign of Charles' father, Charles I, but after the government was overthrown ,and Charles I beheaded, the family fortunes had turned. Necessity brought the young and beautiful Barbara to an an arranged marriage to Roger Palmer, the Earl of Castlemaine. Barbara become Charles' mistress while she still married to her Palmer, but ultimately he was, it is believed, paid off in one manner or another leaving free Barbara to devote her energies to Charles alone.

The story chronicles the many flirtations and mistresses that Charles had during his relationship with Barbara. She gave the King five children that he acknowledged as well as a sixth girl who Charles adopted as his own but who most likely was a product of Barbara's own affair with the dashing military officer John Churchill (who ultimately married Sarah Jennings - the topic of the book I am currently reading be Ms. Holloway).

What I enjoyed the most about this book is that it effectively takes you the the Court of Charles II. One can so easily 'feel' the pique and jealousy of Barbara as Charles wends his way through affair after affair. One glimpses the life of Charles' wife as well - the tolerant and lonely Catherine of Braganza who, it seems, was unable to provide the King and England with an heir.

In the end, Barbara leaves the English Court and Charles. By this time Charles has taken Louise de

Kerouelle, Duchess of Portsmouth, as his maitress-en-titre. Barbara moved to France in 1676 and returned to England only in 1679 to attend the marriage of heir son, Henry to Lady Isabella Bennett. Surprisingly, while she lived in France she became reconciled with her former husband, Roger Palmer and they maintained a friendly relationship hereafter. Charles died at an early age, 55, of a presumed stroke. Barbara lived to a relatively ripe old age of 68, dying of edema (dropsy) in 1704.

Susan Holloway's books about the many mistresses of Charles II are all, in my opinion, exceeding well done, highly entertaining and well worth reading. I am currently reading another of her "mistress" books, "Duchess, A Novel of Sarah Churchill" which is also a terrific read! I have already read her two other "mistress" books - "The King's Favorite : A novel of Nell Gwynn (a must read I think!) as well as "The French Mistress" (about Louise de Kerouelle). I don't think any of the excellent titles would disappoint in any way !

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### **Tara says**

No weekend would be complete without some sweeping saga of historical fiction I can tear through in one day. Frankly, this is the kindest portrait of Barbara Villiers Palmer I've ever read. She is a character whose reputation proceeds her in history, and her legacy has not been kind to her. Scott, however, seems to strike an effective balance between championing the infamous Countess of Castlemaine (and Duchess of Cleveland) and acknowledging her very well-documented faults: jealousy, temper, pettiness, and ... how should I put this ... an extremely ribald lifestyle.

To me, the hallmark of a good historical novel that features an actual figure from the past is the book's ability to engross a reader without requiring a background in history. I think Scott's book does an admirable job; even a reader with no clue about Restoration England will be engrossed, and even better, informed. I'd recommend this to any (fellow) fan of scandalous historical fiction.

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### **Amanda says**

By now, I've been starting to rack up a good number of Susan Holloway Scott reads. I'm at a grand total of 3 now, and I'm eager to keep that number growing. Thus far, though, Scott's Royal Harlot is by far the best book in her library.

Scott has firmly positioned herself as a historical resource on the bawdy pre-Restoration Court of Charles II, having explored no less than three of his mistresses in her novels. In Royal Harlot, she takes on Barbara Villiers, the Countess of Castlemaine, who, it appears, was one of Charles' first mistresses after he was restored to the British throne, and one of his longest. Barbara is a low-born citizen who manages to make her way to court, where she catches the eye of Robert Palmer, whom she soon marries. But things are unsteady in the highly-Puritan government of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, especially among the nobility. After Cromwell dies, many of the Royalist nobility move to restore the Stuart line to the British throne. Thus, through her husband's Royalist leanings, Barbara meets Charles II, who, it seems, has always had a soft spot for beautiful women. It's not long until Barbara, a free spirit, becomes his mistress and begins to grow her power. Even after Charles marries, Barbara is the unspoken queen of court and, through her relationship with Charles, she gains incredible power, wealth and other prestige that women of the period could never imagine. But, as a mistress rather than a wife, Charles could cast her off at any moment without consequence.

I feel like Scott has really found her writing zen here. The writing style is completely comfortable and flows very easily (as in, it's a joy to read). The novel is well-paced and intriguing from the very beginning to the very end. It doesn't hurt that Barbara is an unknown and incredibly compelling historical figure. Scott depicts her as a free spirit with intelligence, beauty and a hint of wantonness that helps her use the gifts she has to get further than any woman could in the period. I was completely enthralled with Barbara's story and cheered for her as she overcame obstacles and found her place in politics and power (not to mention the Restoration-period setting is a welcome change from the absurd amount of Tudor fiction out there right now).

Highly recommended to anyone who enjoys reading historical fiction, especially about scandalous women, women in power or women who rose above their place despite the society of the time and did something amazing with their lives.

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## **Jinny says**

This is a novel about Barbara Palmer, the Countess of Castlemaine, who was one of the main mistresses of King Charles II, during the period of Restoration England. Historically, she was known to have been a great influence on King Charles, so much so that people would call her the Uncrowned Queen. She was known to be promiscuous and extravagant, leading her to have left a rather negative view of herself throughout the centuries.

Royal Harlot is not a novel that seeks to bring "another side" to the story of Barbara Palmer (at least, I did not get that impression). She is presented just as negatively, I think, in this novel as in history. It is a straightforward story about Barbara's life as King Charles II's mistress, beginning from when Oliver Cromwell's government was still in power. 15 year old Barbara is stunningly gorgeous, but is not the "proper lady" that her mother would have liked her to be. Barbara is spirited and cheerful, but also self centered, calculating and very good at stringing men along by their noses. She's terribly unfaithful to her husband, Roger, and has all sorts of sexual relations with men. Her biggest catch of all is, of course, the king himself.

Barbara and Charles begin a not-so-secret relationship. Barbara is pleased to be the center of Charles' life and enjoys being at court, throwing parties, showing off, and accepting lavish gifts from all sorts of people hoping she can wave some of her influence over the king. Barbara has the most power over Charles and she knows it. She is perfectly happy to use her relationship with Charles to her advantage.

If liking the main character, who is in a first person voice, is very important to you, then you may struggle a bit with Royal Harlot. Barbara is not easily likeable in this book. As mentioned earlier, she is self centered and enjoys playing the role of a poor little victimized woman. She remembers all the slights and insults people have done to her and is perfectly willing to wait patiently, even for years, to get her revenge. Even her moments of generosity seemed fake to me; to me, every time she was nice, she did it just to look nice. Barbara was every bit the vixen in this novel. I don't even think she truly loved the king — certainly she liked him and thought he was attractive and had a great personality. However, from what I can tell from this book, Barbara was more attracted to the fact that he was king and had all this wealth and power. She also didn't seem to care that he had other mistresses as long as she didn't have to run into them, and she wasn't above taking other lovers as well.

Normally such a petty character would annoy me, but I think because Barbara was the first person narrator, it was tolerable. She explained her rationale and reasoning for why she did certain things, so that it made some sort of sense, rather than leaving the reader to conclude that she's being a bitch "just because she can". No, I didn't agree with everything she did, sometimes it was downright childish. For example, there was a scene where she decided to basically brag to Charles' queen how Charles always visits her in the night and they

have all these lovely children, while the queen hasn't been able to give Charles a single baby. I remember thinking, "Oh come on ... she's the queen and Charles' wife! Stop being so immature!" (Though I do have to admit, one could argue that the queen is the "other woman" since Charles and Barbara met and hooked up way before he even married his queen).

Even though Barbara is not a very nice character in this book and all that, I was still engrossed in the story. Partly, this has to do with the fact that I haven't read very many (if any ... can't remember) books having to do with the Stuarts of Britain, so all these stories regarding this part of British royalty history is new to me. With a character like Barbara, you can surely expect lots of court drama. I never felt a dull moment in this book! So yes, I did actually enjoy reading this book a lot, even if I wasn't particularly crazy about Barbara, heh. The strange thing is, this book made me feel incredible pity for Charles' queen, Catherine, even though she was mostly a peripheral character, and now I want to read more about her!

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### **Sandi \*~The Pirate Wench~\* says**

Barbara's story begins with a "prequel" to her story and her first meeting with the exiled King Charles II. As she is the only one who can deliver to him letters of great support and promises of money destined for the royal pockets, she risks being damned a spy and tried for treason or worse convicted and executed.

After constant nagging from her husband Roger ( he more concerned of the Villers name and a better future) Barbara embarks on a mission that will change her life forever, as well as those around her.

From her first affair with a "no-gooder" lord, to being involved with a group of supporters to put the King back on the throne.

Then comes her first meeting to a King in exile, that turns into a wild passionate affair.

Barbara captivates the young jaded King as well as creates enemies and rivals everywhere in the palace.

The "uncrowned Queen" uses her sensuality and wit and becomes the most envied and desired woman in England.

I've always been curious about this woman that history has painted as the "harlot and villain" self-serving and with a temper to boot.

While reading of her and her story, you will either love/hate her for her ambitious climb for a place among her peers.

But I found I admired her for her using her brains ( yes she used her body as well) but she was smart about how she got there and how she handled situations and made the best of them.

I found I liked this independent strong willed woman, despite her "loose morals." Be warned this book has generous servings of detailed sex scenes and may bother some readers as Barbara entered into such a life at age 15.

Also a great book about the restoration of England in the reign of King Charles II.

The history of this time is more a "backdrop" to the story and to me focused more on Barbara's story and her "climb" (more along the lines of Forever Amber which Barbara played a major role in that book)

I'd have to say this read more like a "historical-fiction romance", but still gives the reader some "history" of the time period.

A good story that never "lagged" for me and kept me in till the end.

I look forward to more of this author and her other books.

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