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"I to my selfe am strange:"

The Competing Voices of Drayton's "Mistres Shore"

Half of the figures in Michael Drayton's Englands Heroicall Epistles (1597) are female. The complaints, reproaches and bemoanings of political fortune by most of the women are typical for the 1590s, but with "Mistres Shore" Drayton untypically explores the dilemma facing an ambitious Renaissance woman determined to turn sexual objectification into a self-constructed identity. Having been courted as a sex object by Edward IV, Shore's clever wife is portrayed by Drayton as rhetorically resisting, then transforming and finally accepting the king's proposition to become a royal mistress on her own terms. Drayton simultaneously interjects an overt authorial voice into the discourse, ostensibly to constrain such social subversion. The interplay between this authorial voice (itself a rhetorical creation of Drayton's imagination) and the richly imaginative play given to female self-fashioning in the voice of Mistres Shore, all within the context of the superficiality of King Edward IV's rhetoric, ultimately subverts the traditional moralistic warnings set forth by the authorial voice.

Drayton's epistolary structure has received significant critical attention regarding its ability to create "independence of . . . expression [in characters who] are distinct from their creator and possess a sometimes disturbing degree of autonomy."¹ In creating literary figures who shape "historical" events and transform reality to suit their own political or amorous agendas, Drayton seemingly approaches those qualities which Bakhtin attributes to Dostoevsky, whose major characters are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying

discourse."² Such equality of ontological weight between character and author, however, is precisely what the authorial voice of Englands Heroicall Epistles resists. Indeed, the authorial voice strives to sustain a "monologic" world where

other thoughts and ideas--untrue or indifferent from the author's point of view, not fitting into his worldview--are not affirmed; they are either polemically repudiated, or else they lose their power to signify directly and become simple elements of characterization.³

One function of the authorial voice throughout the Epistles is to ensure that there will be no doubt as to which perceptions and transformations of reality should be considered "right" or "wrong."

Drayton selects for Englands Heroicall Epistles historical figures who are already well established in the popular Elizabethan imagination. He seldom creates revisionist, demythologistic, or iconoclastic characters, but rather subjugates the dialogue created through exchanges of letters between pairs of familiar and conventional historical figures to a confirmation of his own apparent sense of moral and political propriety.⁴

Mistress Shore, however, was an especially complex figure for the Elizabethans. Her story was well known through Thomas More's sympathetic review of her life in his History of Richard III, as well as Churchyard's "Shores Wife" in The Mirror For Magistrates, Antony Chute's Beawtie Dishonoured, Heywood's two part play Edward IV, and various popular ballads. According to most accounts, the historical Mistress Shore was married quite young to an old and miserly London goldsmith.⁵ When her renowned beauty caught the eye of the lecherous Edward IV, she abandoned her husband and became the king's favorite royal mistress. She supposedly used her influence over Edward to champion good causes and was noted for her compassion and charity. Upon Edward's death and after briefly being Hastings' mistress, "Jane" was driven from court by Richard III for political purposes and forced to do open penance, about which More claims: "Many good folke also that hated

her liuing, & glad wer to se sin corrected: yet pitied thei more her penance, then reioyced therin, when thei considred that the protector [Richard III] procured it, more of a corrupt intent then ani vertuous affeccion."⁶ Richard commanded that no man feed, clothe, or house her, but she reputedly lived long into the Tudor era, eventually starving to death in her seventies or eighties as a beggar prostitute in the streets of London.⁷

The mixed reactions which Mistress Shore evoked during her own lifetime prevailed throughout the sixteenth century; she was condemned as an adulteress, yet acclaimed for her charitable acts while in the king's favor and often pitied for her harsh end. Elsewhere in this volume, Jean E. Howard argues that while Heywood in particular "fudges the issue of Jane's own responsibility"⁸ in her seduction, he then both criminalizes and rehabilitates her in the aftermath. Rowan distinguishes between a sympathetic "literary" treatment of Shore's wife intended to blacken Richard III in accordance with Tudor myth and a "popular" tradition in ballads and songs where "she is held up to all as an example of the wages of sin."⁹ Thus Drayton has competing source materials from which to create "Mistres Shore" through three distinct voices: the epistolary voice of "Edward IV," the epistolary voice of "Mistres Shore" which arises in response, and the ostensible "authorial" voice which provides direct commentary through "Annotations" and other devices and self-consciously seeks to contain and refute the other two voices.

The opening couplet of Edward's epistle reveals the superficiality of his voice with its single-minded attempts to persuade Mistress Shore to become his mistress:

To THEE, the fair'st that ever breath'd this ayre,

*From English Edward, to thee fairest faire.¹⁰ (1-2)

This shopworn salutation suggests that Edward's myopic configuration of Mistress Shore will lack any imaginative, fresh, or even varied poetic images. Throughout his epistle, Edward reduces Mistress Shore to a physical object, and his proposition is dominated by a recurring conceit of her being a precious gem-stone. His argument that great beauty should be appropriately

displayed in a royal setting, with a pun on "Gilt" (32), is standard in Elizabethan poetry; in the Epistles alone it has already been used by both King John and Edward the Black Prince. The metaphor of the goldsmith's wife being a rich jewel is also commonplace, occurring in virtually every earlier account of "Jane" Shore (especially Heywood's Edward IV) preceding Edward's twenty or more uses of it here.¹¹

Edward's descriptions of Mistress Shore are singularly sensual:

Thou comfort'st ev'ry Sense with sweet repast,
To heare, to see, to smell, to feele, to taste. (91-92)

He does manage one platonic reference,

So like a Goddess Beautie still controules,
And hath such pow'rfull working in our Soules, (105-106)

but even here the simile is simply a device to stimulate the physical senses (109-112). Indeed, "Learning" and "all Arts" should be practiced only to praise her physical parts (123-140).¹² For Edward, Mistress Shore's physical beauty is literally a commodity to be bought or sold. He twice uses the word "Ware" (10, 93) in allusion to her and curses the fact that she is the one item in her husband's shop that he "might not for Love or Money buy" (42).

Whereas Edward's intellectually impoverished voice never extends beyond his reputation as an "amorous King" (Arg. 6), Mistress Shore's epistle reveals the voice of a clever, ambitious and (therefore) frustrated woman. She refutes all of Edward's arguments, rejecting the king's conceptualization of her, yet accepts his proposition as her only means for liberating herself from her current situation. The trick throughout her epistle is to rebuff Edward's characterization of her while transforming his proposition for her own purposes. In sharp contrast to Edward's feeble salutation to her as the "fairest faire," Mistress Shore begins with an extended simile in which she claims that her position as the object of a monarch's desire is overwhelming, like a "weake Child" first encountering the lute (1-8). The sensual elements of Edward's proposition are clearly high in her consciousness (as demonstrated by her descriptions of the child's "delicious fingering," "soft touch" and

"trembling hand"), but the conundrum facing her is how to claim her sexuality without being reduced to a commodity.¹³ Her initial resolution of this dilemma is to suggest through the simile that what she finds awesome in Edward's proposition is not the physical act as much as the mysterious art of "play[ing]." She nullifies the identity that Edward has cast for her while indicating that his proposition nonetheless remains attractive.

Mistress Shore refutes Edward's conventional seduction flattery with equally conventional disclaimers (9-20),¹⁴ but at the same time she suggests that the king's excessive praise of her beauty shows that either his judgment has been distorted by "Affection" or else his royal eye perceives some "exquisite" quality within her beauty, beyond the physical "Object" that the common eye beholds. Mistress Shore thus configures herself as transcending the sex object Edward desires, while still asserting her empirical desirability.

The second paragraph of Mistress Shore's epistle (21-64) begins by reducing to a sententious couplet Edward's entire argument that the royal court is the appropriate setting for great beauty:

"To housed Beautie seldome stoop's Report,

"Fame must attend on that, which lives in Court. (21-22)

While never denying her beauty, Mistress Shore's images, metaphors, and allusions ("Apollo's Brood," "sacred Muse," "ravish'd Spirit," "Promethian fire") all suggest that as her physical attributes transcend the conventions of poetic artifice, so too she transcends Edward's perception of her as a precious jewel to adorn his trove of sexual conquests.

The middle section of Mistress Shore's epistle (65-114) systematically sets forth conventional counter-arguments to Edward's persuasions and proclaims the staunch resolution appropriate to married chastity; indeed Mistress Shore argues that to succumb to Edward's depersonalizing seduction would truly be a loss of "selfe" (79). At the same time, she reminds Edward that her words do not necessarily represent what they say and that he should not conclude that she has rejected his proposition:

But our kind Hearts, Mens Teares cannot abide,
 And we least angry oft, when most we chide. (83-84)

Mistress Shore is willing to be seduced, but not by conventional flattery:

If any naturall Blemish blot our Face,
 You doe protest, it gives our Beautie grace;
 And what Attyre we most are us'd to weare,
 That, of all other, excellent'st, you sweare:
 And if we walke, or sit, or stand, or lie,
 It must resemble some one Deitie. (93-98)

Her acknowledged familiarity with Ovid's Amores (103) makes her impervious to these seduction techniques, and she teases Edward for thinking that he could win her with such artificially defining rhetoric:

Who would have thought, a King that cares to raigne,
 Inforc'd by Love, so Poet-like should faine? (105-106)

But within this very rejection Mistress Shore introduces the verbal construct to which she will finally succumb: the prospect of "sovereignty."

In the last section of her epistle Mistress Shore rhetorically designs a new temptation which only a king can provide, namely freedom from the gender and class restrictions of her current existence; although Edward has failed to recognize this possibility, Mistress Shore demurely insists that this was the king's idea all along (115-116). She reviews her stifling life as a young wife doomed to perpetual boredom married to a "churlish" (119) husband who has sated himself with her youthful delights and has now terminated sexual relations with her, "preaching abstinence of Meat" (131), while acquiring a young mistress for himself. Shore, however, remains proud of possessing such a beautiful creature and worries that someone else might steal this object from him. Mistress Shore clearly is attracted to Edward's proposed relief from her current frustration, but by castigating Shore for perceiving her exactly as Edward's epistle does, she also makes clear to the king that she will not accept his proposition only to find herself again a commodity.

Although Edward has proposed for Mistress Shore essentially the same identity (albeit with the reintroduction of sex) which she finds so intolerable with Shore, she creates within the king's proposition an irresistible difference:

But to this griefe a medicine you apply,
 To cure restraint with that sweet Libertie;
 And Soveraigntie (O that bewitching thing)
 Yet made more great, by promise of a King. (151-154)

Mistress Shore transforms Edward's verbal construction of her as a valuable physical object into an entirely different "promise" of an existence enjoying "sweet Libertie" and "Soveraigntie" reflected by the king. The proposition which "overcome[s]" (157) her has been radically changed, although she is clever enough to make all of this seem to be the king's own intention:

Yet grant, that we could meaner men resist,
 When Kings once come, they conquer as they list.
 Thou art the cause, Shore pleaseth not my sight,
 That his embraces give me no delight;
 Thou art the cause I to my selfe am strange,
 Thy comming is my Full, thy Set my Change. (159-164)

Thus Mistress Shore's epistle engages in an internal dialogue not only with Edward's voice, but with other voices (including Ovid's, Petrarch's and even Mantuan's, to be discussed below) far beyond Edward's actual letter in order to create the voice in response to which she wishes to define herself through the "Sovereignty" trope. While she never can be truly sovereign, Mistress Shore plays off Edward's desire to possess her with her own desire to be free from her husband, thus seizing the only control available in a willful submission to a more powerful male. At the same time, she cleverly proclaims her lack of moral culpability, insisting that her new identity emerges from the king's proposition which she is too weak to resist.

Having crafted this transformative voice for "Mistres Shore," Drayton imposes an ostensible authorial voice which directly condemns her. Throughout

the Epistles Drayton explores the always fascinating subject of illicit royal passions: the work opens with Henry II's mistress Rosamond bewailing her condition in the manner of Daniel's Complaint of Rosamond; Matilda's epistle portrays the equally stereotypical woman of steadfast virtue whose will to resist John's seduction never wavers, even unto death; Alice, the widowed Countess of Salisbury, similarly rebuffs the Black Prince's seductions and is rewarded by his marrying her (Drayton acknowledges the historical dubiousness of this legend in his annotations, but portrays the fiction anyway); Isabel's adultery with Mortimer becomes subordinate to political passions. With *Mistress Shore*, Drayton presents a variation of the willful courtesan who initially demonstrates the resolve of a Matilda or Alice, but then cunningly justifies accepting the proposition on the grounds of being another weak-willed Rosamond unable to resist seduction by a king.

Brooks suggests that "the classic or standard amatory suasoria (the soliloquy in which the girl analyses her eros and persuades herself to yield to it)"¹⁵ is exemplified by Ovid's *Medea*. The coquettish *Mistress Shore* does not succumb to her own sexual desires any more than she does to Edward's persuasions. Her sexuality becomes a vehicle for manifesting her will with Edward, but it is the voice of *Mistress Shore*, enhanced by clever wit and clear intellectual superiority to the king, which indeed proves seductive.

The authorial voice's attempts to reinscribe *Mistress Shore*'s voice actually begin with the opening line of "The Argument" to Edward's epistle, which states that the king was "bewitch'd" with reports of her beauty, an allusion to long-discredited rumors that *Mistress Shore* practiced witchcraft.¹⁶ This set of epistles furthermore has a rare introductory annotation that denigrates both Edward and *Mistress Shore*: "[These epistles], being of unlawfull Affection, ministreth small occasion of Historicall Notes" (2:252). Brink observes, "Since four of the preceding epistles also concerned adulterous passion, this explanation is unconvincing."¹⁷ The other "amorous" epistles do contain historical notes with the exception of King John's, which the only other introductory annotation claims is "much more Poeticall then

Historicall . . . touching onely his love to her, and the extremitie of his Passions forced by his desires" (2:152). The reader may well be grateful that Drayton did not encumber Edward's and Mistress Shore's epistles with extensive historical review, but the term "unlawfull Affection" applied to them contrasts sharply with the designation of John's seduction threats as somehow "Poeticall." Indeed, a Derridaean gloss on the appeal to "law" in this annotation would see it as an indicator of the text's transgression of that which the authorial voice wishes to control; Greenblatt argues, "The power generated to attack the alien [Other--heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Anti-christ--] in the name of authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend."¹⁸ Hence before Mistress Shore's voice is even heard, a gap develops between the controlling authorial voice and the reader's response to it.

Throughout Edward's epistle the allusions and conceits, although dripping with voluptuous imagery, ironically never quite work in the way that Edward intends; the wit in this epistle is all Drayton's, not Edward's, as the king unwittingly denigrates Mistress Shore in his attempts to praise her.¹⁹ His opening salutation, for instance, echoes the Squire of Dames' greeting to the false Florimell in The Faerie Queene: "Fayrest of faire, that fairenesse doest excell" (4.2.23); the conceit is so common that it has become pejorative, as evidenced by Pandarus's sardonic welcome in Troilus and Cressida to Paris and the empty-headed Helen: "Fair be to you, my lord, and to all this fair company! Fair desires, in all fair measure, fairly guide them! Especially to you, fair queen, fair thoughts be your fair pillow!" (3.1.43-46). Indeed, Drayton revised the original 1597 version of the couplet,

Unto the fair'st that ever breath'd this ayre,
From English Edward, to that fairest faire:

to the even more redundant 1619 version:

To THEE, the fair'st that ever breath'd this ayre,
From English Edward, to thee fairest faire.

Edward, however, fails to recognize the triteness of this greeting.

In the middle of Edward's epistle, two successive conceits again reflect authorial wit more than Edward's. In the first, the king suggests that Shore can laugh at the alchemists, choking in their fumes and smoke,

When if thy Hand but touch the grossest Mold,
It is converted to refined Gold. (83-84)

Since this epistle is uniquely devoid (among Drayton's works) of mythological references, Edward presumably is ignorant of the fact that Ovid's Midas nearly starved to death until his "touch" was revoked, and that he next was given the ears of an ass for preferring Pan's music to Apollo's; Edward also cannot be aware that Drayton's readers would recognize a possible allusion to Lyly's Midas (printed 1592), whose savage attack on Philip II's covetousness of New World gold and his attempted conquest of Lesbos (England) is hardly a flattering analogue. Edward's obtuseness is confirmed when he insensitively labels the alchemists' gold as "adulterate" (86) in contrast to Mistress Shore.

More humorous is Edward's claim that Mistress Shore need not "weare Perfumes" (89) in that she "comfort'st ev'ry Sense" (91)

Like a rich Ship, whose very refuse Ware,
Aromatikes, and precious Odors are. (93-94)

The preciousness of odors emanating from Mistress Shore's "refuse Ware" would be especially amusing for those of Drayton's readers familiar with Harington's satiric review of Biblical and classical scatology in The Metamorphosis of Ajax (1596).²⁰ Edward's twice debasing Mistress Shore without realizing it is both more clever than the conceits themselves and a signal of attempted authorial enclosure.

In Mistress Shore's epistle, the authorial voice's agenda is even more directly evident. The initial annotation dwells on her physical appearance, but suggests that her reputed beauty has been "magnified" by "two or three Poems written by sundry men" and the praise of Thomas More "[who] verie highly

hath praised for her beautie, she being alive in his time, though being poore and aged" (2:258). More actually emphasizes Shore's wife's wit,

Yet delited not men so much in her bewty, as in her plesant
behaviour. For a proper wit had she, & could both rede wel &
write, mery in company, redy & quick of aunswer,²¹

which the annotation excludes; indeed, while Mistress Shore's voice reflects this historically ascribed wit, the authorial voice will make it the basis of her downfall rather than a credit to her. The annotation mentions a "picture" Drayton saw of her "as shee rose out of her bed in the morning, having nothing on but a rich Mantle, cast under one arme over her shoulder, and sitting in a chaire, on which her naked arme did lie" (2:258-9). Other than a single reference to "her countenance cheerefull" (2:258), the annotation offers no assessment of Mistress Shore's character or personality, in sharp contrast to More's characterization which, according to Kinney, "includes various ironic affinities with Augustine's sainted mother (Confessions 9.9.19--9.11.27); the gaunt, humbled 'Jane' Shore also bears some resemblance to the traditional penitent Magdalen."²² The annotation does, however, adopt More's description of Shore as "a yong man of right goodly person, wealth, and behaviour" (2:259), even though most other sources depict him as old and miserly. The authorial voice also totally ignores Mistress Shore's charitable deeds and good causes, as well as the pity people felt for her during her miserable treatment by Richard III, noting only that Richard's harshness toward her stemmed "not so much for his hatred to sinne," but more to blacken Edward's reputation in order to cover his own "horrible treasons the more cunningly" (2:259). In short, the authorial voice's selective "reading" of "textual" sources in this annotation is similar to Mistress Shore's transformation of Edward's epistle to fulfill her own purpose.

Authorial control within Mistress Shore's epistle twice develops her own voice against her, the first instance being her reference to Mantuan's vitriolic attacks on the folly of women:

Nor are we so turn'd Neapolitan,

*That might incite some foule-mouth'd Mantuan,
 To all the World to lay out our defects,
 And have just cause to rayle upon our Sex;
 To pranke old Wrinckles up in new Attyre,
 To alter Natures course, prove Time a lyer. . . . (49-54)

The entire passage is perplexing in that it is impersonal to Mistress Shore, scarcely bears on her argument, and disclaims an allegation never made by Edward; indeed, it serves only to warn the reader that women can become absurdly self-deluded, and as such is seen by the reader as authorial commentary on Mistress Shore's desire to reconfigure herself from housewife to royal mistress. The term "Neapolitan," associated with syphilis in Elizabethan England, plus the annotation stating that Mantuan "bitterly inveiyeth against Womankind; some of which, by the way of an Appendix, might be here inserted" (2:259), signal blatant usurping of Mistress Shore's voice by the authorial voice.

The second use of Mistress Shore's voice to denigrate her own newly created sense of self occurs as she describes her current married status:

Our churlish Husbands, which our Youth injoy'd,
 Who with our Dainties have their stomacks cloy'd,
 Doe loath, our smooth Hands with their Lips to feele,
 T'inrich our Favours, by our Beds to kneele,
 At our Command to wait, to send, to goe,
 As ev'ry Houre our amorous servants doe. (119-124)

While these lines recall the fact that husbands often take wives for granted (which lovers don't dare!), they also negatively foreshadow Mistress Shore's transformation of Edward's proposition into an opportunity for exercising personal "sovereignty." The social uses of power which Shore's wife manifests in the source accounts (championing the weak and using her influence over Edward IV for charitable purposes) are all ignored, and she is instead portrayed as craving a grotesque parody of sovereignty whereby she lies in bed all day ordering everyone about to satisfy her silly whims and pleasures.

This reducing of Mistress Shore's desires to a mere exercise in personal power does not accord with the identity she creates for herself elsewhere in the epistle, and the dissonance again alerts the reader to the oppressive authorial voice.

As Mistress Shore's epistle concludes, authorial containment is twice more directly evident. First, a final annotation comments on Mistress Shore's chafing at being denied "loose Libertie" (134) to attend the public theater:

Ovid, a most fit Author for so dissolute a Sectarie, calls that place, Chastities Shipwracke: for though Shores Wife wantonly plead for Libertie, which is the true humour of a Curtizan; yet much more is the prayse of Modestie, then of such Libertie. (2:260)

The full significance of this summative denunciation emerges only in the context of Drayton's professed purpose for including annotations within the Epistles: a prefatory "To the Reader" explains that "because the Worke might in truth be judged Braynish [fondly foolish], if nothing but amorous Humor were handled therein, I have inter-woven Matters Historicall, which unexplained, might defraud the Mind of much Content" (2:130). The annotations, then, are ostensibly for explaining "historical" allusions, not for providing moral commentary on the characters' expressions, as occurs with Mistress Shore. Throughout the Epistles, this purpose is violated only one other time, when an annotation upon Matilda's final lines to King John refers to them as "Knitting up her Epistle with a great and constant Resolution" (2:159). Several annotations provide moral summaries of the historical figures or "correct" a character's professed version of historical events,²³ but only with Mistress Shore does an annotation specifically evaluate what the character has written within the epistle in an attempt to besmirch that character's morality.

The authorial voice's final attempt to enclose Mistress Shore's voice occurs when she directly states her dual desires for

sweet Libertie;
And Soveraigntie (O that bewitching thing). (152-53)

The attraction of the first has already been undercut with the earlier annotation on "loose Libertie,"²⁴ while the parenthetical addition to the second sinisterly harks back to the initial line of "The Argument" and the allegations of witchcraft. The bewitching attraction of sovereign power to women is explicit in Question VI of Malleus Maleficarum (1486):

Three general vices appear to have special dominion over wicked women, namely infidelity, ambition, and lust. . . . Those among ambitious women are more deeply infected [toward witchcraft] who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adulteresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the Great.²⁵

Gutierrez argues that "the language of witchcraft and adultery in English Renaissance writing is marked by common metaphors: both are considered female crimes that threaten to subvert the patriarchy;"²⁶ she suggests that Thomas Palfreyman's The Treatise of Heavenly Philosophy and Thomas Cooper's The Mystery of Witchcraft "call attention to woman's desire to end her subjection to men, her desire for power, as a motivating factor in her choice for adultery or witchcraft."²⁷ Mistress Shore, however, is not a victim of either lust or bewitchment, but rather is successfully negotiating her own rhetorical constructions of position and self in resistance to gender and class restraints.

Patriarchal efforts throughout the Renaissance to contain women within traditional subservient roles and to silence female voices have been thoroughly documented. In an essay especially relevant to the dynamics of Drayton's "Epistle of Mistres Shore," Stallybrass links verbal and literal enclosures of women:

Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to women's enclosure within the house. . . . The signs of the 'harlot' are her linguistic 'fullness' and her frequenting of public space.²⁸

Stallybrass argues that the Renaissance topos of woman as property is constantly destabilized in that woman is

that treasure which, however locked up, always escapes.
 She is the gaping mouth, the open window, the body that
 'transgresses its own limits' and negates all those boundaries
 without which property could not be constituted.²⁹

Not even the historical anomaly of powerful female rulers, most notably Elizabeth and Catherine de' Medici, could shake the culture's embrace of Aristotelian and Biblical premises regarding the intrinsic servility of women. Indeed, these queens carefully exploited the paradoxical dichotomy between their inferior gender and their princely authority to enhance the unique stations they occupied. But Mistress Shore's rhetorical ability to transform a monarch's sexual proposition into a royal offer of personal sovereignty and liberty from her husband violates the essential fabric of Elizabethan gender and class hierarchy.

The uniqueness of "Mistres Shore" is most apparent through comparison with the other characters in the Epistles. Drayton typically grounds his characters' voices so deeply within the moral maxims of his age and the traditional judgments of the particular historical personages that his women especially tend to be conventional stereotypes offering no subversion of moral or social standards. Throughout the Epistles there are several noteworthy passages (such as King John's blasphemous wit in attempting to seduce Matilda or the mad Elinor Cobham's spell-binding maledictions), but despite the authorial profession "To the Reader" of being Ovid's "Imitator" (2:130), many of the epistles are strictly "historical" with expressions of personal passions having been supplanted by the ambitions or griefs of political fortune. Even the "amorous" epistles often bog down under the weight of obscure historical references, family lineages, and geographical details so typical of Poly-Olbion. This trait is most disappointing with Queen Katherine and Owen Tudor, whose epistles consist of a tedious, rhetorically embellished glorification of the Tudor pedigree, rather than an exploration of the psychological and social implications of a widowed queen running off with a

dancer who had cleverly managed to trip and fall with his head in her lap, an incident apparently of Drayton's own invention.

In dealing with the paradoxical legend of "Jane" Shore, however, Drayton juxtaposes an ambitious female against traditional sexist perceptions as represented by Edward IV. The contrasts between Edward's and Mistress Shore's conceptions of her identity and between their relative wits are so striking that the reader may find Mistress Shore's rationalization fully authentic. Whereas female "Complaints" in Elizabethan England traditionally portray the fallen narrator regretting her actions and grieving over lost reputation, by the 1590s Ovidian influences were generating creative tensions and experimentation as "Elizabethan Petrarchists . . . sought a medium that was aesthetically and morally correct, and yet true to private experience."³⁰ In an earlier foray, Drayton's chaste "Matilda" (1594) denounces the redemption of fallen women by poets such as Daniel:

Faire Rosamond, of all so highly graced,
 Recorded in the lasting Booke of Fame,
 And in our Sainted Legendarie placed,
 By him who strives to stellifie her name,
 Yet will some Matrons say she was to blame.

Though all the world bewitched with his ryme,

Yet all his skill cannot excuse her cryme. (1:214, ll. 29-35)

But now in his Epistles, Drayton presents "Mistres Shore" at the apex of ambitious anticipation and (in a significant departure from the source materials) eager to embrace a new identity with no regrets; the moral lessons are provided not by the speaking characters, but by an authoritative authorial voice who considers "Mistres Shore" too bright and witty for her own good. The authorial voice sees no place in English society for Italy's "intellectual courtesans," exemplified by Venice's Veronica Franco,³¹ and accordingly ignores More's praise of this feature in Shore's Wife. No sympathy is shown for Mistress Shore's situation, in contrast to the compassionate portrayal of Henry II's mistress Rosamond, evidence that the authorial voice is not nearly

as disturbed by the existence of royal mistresses per se as it is by the potential for an aggressively clever merchant-class woman to exercise influence or control over male rulers through sex.³²

The Epistles earned for Drayton the reputation of being the English Ovid in reference to the Heroides, not the Metamorphoses or Amores, and even the most "amorous" portrayals reflect a heavy bias toward sustaining the moral values of marriage, chastity, and restraint of will, especially for women. These values are most explicit in the "Annotations," which finally prove problematic as they effect a hybrid between "poetry" and "history." The "Annotations" self-consciously alert the reader to the fact that "Mistress Shore" is not entirely Drayton's creation, but rather an amalgam of historical details, poetic imagination, and the general cultural "reading" of Shore's wife through source portrayals. Drayton likewise seems cognizant of the liberating effects of multiple voices within a text (evidenced by his invitation to Selden to provide commentary on Poly-Olbion) and creates the authoritative voice of the "Annotations" to provide a "politically correct" perspective. But the overt casting of Mistress Shore as an alien "other" in the "Annotations" creates a tension among sources, annotations, and the epistles proper which effectively highlights the subversive threat this figure represents for social order at the close of the sixteenth century.

Whereas "Mistress Shore" writes solely for "Edward" in order to fulfill her personal desires, the authorial addresses to the "Reader" reflect larger political concerns. Brink suggests that Drayton's very selection of Edward IV for the Epistles was politically daring in that Edward was involved in the "deposition of a monarch [and] related to a struggle over succession to the throne,"³³ although both parts of Heywood's Edward IV (along with numerous other representations) were already immensely popular. The portrayal of Edward's lechery is possibly more daring, reminding readers of the legitimacy questions surrounding Edward's children, including Elizabeth's own grandmother for whom she was namesake.³⁴ The leap to questioning Elizabeth's legitimacy

seems inevitable at a time when speculation over succession to her crown is at fever pitch (albeit proscribed).

But male destabilizations of the social order are not the focus of Drayton's interests in this pair of epistles. He leaves unexplored the implications of a merchant publicly displaying his wife for commercial gain as well as the husband's possible complicity in his wife's adultery with a king. Likewise, the irony and social/political significances of this same merchant having previously loaned the king a great sum of money are totally ignored, while the consequences of monarchial adultery are relegated to the annotations and confined to "his Off-spring" (2:252) rather than affecting the moral integrity of the state. Edward's professed willingness to give up his treasure and indeed his very crown (the ultimate in political instability) in order to possess the jewel of Mistress Shore passes without authorial notice.

Drayton's interests lie not in exploring male disruptions of social stability, but rather in the threat Mistress Shore poses for the existing gender and class hierarchy. Of the twelve female characters in the Epistles, she is the only one not of nobility born. Whereas the noble female bloodlines are continually stressed in the other epistles, Drayton portrays Mistress Shore as a woman who understands the transforming power of literacy and uses it to negotiate freedom from the stifling confines of being a merchant-class wife. Discussing Olivia's desire to remain unmarried at the beginning of Twelfth Night, Greenblatt writes:

One extraordinary woman in the period provided, of course, a model for such a career, lived out to its fullest--the virgin queen, aging and heirless and very dangerous. The queen had at once mobilized, manipulated, and successfully resisted decades of anxious male attempts to see her married; but this was a career that Elizabeth herself, let alone her male subjects, could not tolerate in any woman of lesser station.³⁵

Equally dangerous as liberation from the marriage is the prospect of a merchant class woman negotiating the exchange of sexual favors for liberation from the clearly defined social roles that compose her identity.³⁶

"Mistres Shore's" unforgivable threat to patriarchal stability lies in not hiding or suppressing her superior wit and transforming literacy. The "disturbing degree of autonomy" which the epistle format provides for her voice requires extraordinary efforts by Drayton's authorial voice to provide enclosure, but it is also Drayton as poet who empowers "Mistres Shore's" gender and class transgressions in the first place. A detailed analysis of the relationship throughout Englands Heroicall Epistles between the poet Drayton and his overt authorial voice (as manifested not only in the annotations, but also through the arguments to each pair of epistles, the title page, the signed "To the Reader," and the dedications to each pair of epistles) is beyond the scope of this present essay, especially since among the thirteen editions of the Epistles published during Drayton's lifetime significant changes occur within the material constituting the authorial voice (e.g. omission of dedications and the switch in 1619 from prose to verse arguments). Such a study is surely warranted, however, in light of Brink's revisionary portrait of a Drayton who is "noticeably hostile to distinctions of class," extremely self-conscious in his dedications, politically controversial among his contemporaries, increasingly bitter at failures to secure patronage, and "one of the two or three most 'anti-establishment' poets of his age."³⁷

Certainly in the epistles between Edward IV and Mistress Shore, the gap between Drayton's poetic artistry and the overt authorial voice is considerable. The authorial voice is itself a rhetorical fashioning,³⁸ subject to the same revisions by the poet as the two other voices in the verse epistles. The original 1597 dedication of this pair of epistles to Sir Thomas Mounson, which was abandoned in the 1619 and following editions, concludes: "Your kinde acceptance of my labour, shall give some life to my Muse, which yet hovers in the uncertaintie of the generall censure" (5:127). Commending

one's Muse to the dedicatee's favor to imp out its worth is commonplace, but to cite "generall censure" in the context of these particular epistles would seem to align the controversial Muse more closely with the voice of Mistress Shore than with the politically correct authorial voice.

A more obvious dissociation of Drayton the poet from the authorial voice occurs within "The Argument" to these epistles. The original prose version recounts Edward's military battles and acquisition of the crown, followed by his hearing about the beauty of Shore's wife, his coming to London in disguise to behold her, and finally his writing "this Epistle . . . unto her" (5:127); no mention whatsoever is made of Mistress Shore's response! The 1619 verse argument describes Edward's bewitchment with her beauty leading to his writing to her, with the final line stating:

Whose Answere backe, doth of her love assure him. (Arg. 8)

The authorial voice is simply wrong here; not once does Mistress Shore suggest she "loves" Edward and indeed insists that his professions of love for her are completely artificial. When she asks,

Who would have thought, a King that cares to raigne

Inforc'd by Love, so Poet-like should faine? (105-6)

she not only alludes to the destabilizing aspects of a monarch's illicit lusts, but also associates poetry with that same instability, again suggesting a closer alliance of Drayton the poet with the voice of Mistress Shore than with the ostensible authorial voice.

As noted earlier, the authorial voice's misrepresentation of "Mistres Shore" carries into the annotations, where the reader cannot help but question the stridency of condemnation, especially when the reader knows that history has already punished Shore's wife through her treatment after Edward's death. Possibly the ordering of the two epistles requires these measures in the annotations to prevent Mistress Shore's voice from having the last word. More likely, however, is the possibility that Drayton the poet has intentionally configured an authorial voice for these epistles which is as "churlish" as Mistress Shore describes her husband (with whom the authorial voice

identifies) to be. This foregrounds the confining forces against which Mistress Shore rebels, helps to legitimize her transformation and subverts the authorial voice's attempts at enclosure.

This entire dynamic culminates in the final annotation, where the authorial voice recalls the "Vestall Nunnes" who were able to attend the public theater without "impeachment to Modestie," which both the authorial voice and Shore would deny to wives. Since all the annotations appear after the epistle, this annotation then proceeds to close Drayton's total portrayal of Mistress Shore (1619 edition):

Howbeit, the Vestall Nunnes had Seats assigned them in the Roman
Theatre; . . . though they offending therein, were buried quicke: A
sharpe Law for them; who may say as Shores Wife doth:

When though abroad restraining us to rome,
They very hardly keepe us safe at home.

FINIS.

(2:260)

Mistress Shore's voice has the last word after all!³⁹ Ironically, the authorial voice highlights the extreme cruelty which patriarchal repression can impose upon women, literally burying transgressors alive, but then permits Mistress Shore's most seditious lines to be left ringing in our ears and even provides for her an originally unintended pun on "rome." Drayton the poet has cleverly subordinated his own authorial voice to "Mistres Shore's," and the text reveals the near impossibility of silencing a poetically figured female voice through patriarchal enclosure.

Modern literary theory makes the destabilizing and subversive effects of a tension among competing voices within a text much more obvious for today's reader than they would have been to Drayton's contemporaries. On the other hand, Elizabethan readers (especially women) could inform us of much regarding how to read this text within the context of their received culture and experiences. Surely some Elizabethans would respond to the Mistress Shore of Englands Heroicall Epistles as being no worse than Othello's Emilia, prepared to prostitute herself in return for the world. Whereas the authorial voice of

these epistles would enclose subversive female ambitions within the model of a virtuous but dead Desdemona, the poet Drayton uses the tension of conflicting voices to instill a kind of "loose Libertie" within the text itself that enables alternative, anti-establishment class and gender readings of "Mistres Shore."