cites lost plays, plays that were never performed on stage, and many plays that were all but forgotten in subsequent years. Although any play can be said to respond to the pressures of its time—social, political, and cultural, as well as literary and theatrical—a successful play not only articulates and affects the concerns of its audience; it also conditions their responses. A play successful in a subsequent period articulates and affects the concerns of *that* audience. The satiric distortions in *Epicoene* expressed anxieties and aspirations that Jonson shared with his audience; they also helped to construct a gender ideology that has not yet lost its power.

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University of Pennsylvania

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[1] As Leonard Tennenhouse has recently pointed out (in *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres*, New York: Methuen, 1986), "Shakespeare was not alone in abandoning romantic comedy after 1602 . . . none of his fellow dramatists took up the form again either . . . " (3). Tennenhouse argues, in fact, that an excessive preoccupation with "generic categories automatically detaches the work from history": "So long as discussion of the plays remains within the conventional literary genres. . . . [o]ne cannot explain why certain forms were abandoned, why others were taken up, or why a genre might turn against itself and openly renounce a logic that was one and the same as its form during an earlier period of time" (5, 4).

[2] As Shapiro himself has pointed out (in *Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and Their Plays,* New York: Columbia UP, 1977), *Epicoene* typifies the satiric city comedies of its time, in which an attractive young gallant, who "has a moral if not a legal claim to . . . land or money," must obtain it from a "miserly father-figure" (56–57).

"Our Ever-Living Poet"

To the Editor:

Donald W. Foster's "Master W. H., R.I.P." (102 [1987]: 42–54) was a delight to read. I hope that his inspired research and thinking will indeed lay the W. H. brouhaha to rest forever. For if the notion of proof has any meaning at all in the arts, Foster has demonstrated that Thorpe's readers—readers who had no incentive to go searching after bizarre usages of common words—*must* have understood "begetter" in this particular context as "author" and, what is equally important, that Thorpe *must* have known, as he dashed off the dedication, that his readers would so understand it. Ineluctably, therefore, W. H. has to be a typographical error.

My guess is that Foster will find less enthusiasm with respect to his second hypothesis, to wit that "our ever-living poet" is God. If the wording had been "*the* ever-living poet," his case would have acquired some solidity. But, unlike "our Lord" or "our Saviour," "our poet" is simply too familiar in this context, and the whole conceit too strained. In this instance, I believe that the thriftier hypothesis remains the one, rejected by Foster, naming the poet as Shakespeare himself. "The sonnets," Foster writes, "strictly speaking, promise 'eternity' to no one. We find, admittedly, the conventional boast that poets may confer a kind of immortality, but not everlastingly" (48). I don't know what this second sentence means, but the point here is that Tom Thorpe was not a professor of literature dependent for survival on "strictly speaking" analysis but a literary businessman. To him and to most of his readers (and to most of us), the sonnets seem to do a great deal of promising in the "eternity" line. Hence there is no strain whatsoever in interpreting Thorpe's convoluted compliment as "I wish you the same eternity you promise others in your sonnets" or "May you in fact enjoy the eternity (of fame) you have promised yourself in the poems." Whatever Shakespeare's popularity may have been in 1609, the compliment, or puff, of "ever-living" seems like a credible move by a publisher.

Of course, the identity of this "ever-living poet" is a far less interesting problem than that of W. H., and Foster's solution of the more interesting of the two problems calls for a resounding bravo.

Oscar Mandel
California Institute of Technology

To the Editor:

Donald Foster is right in stating that the "begetter" in the epigraph to *Shake-speare's Sonnets* must be the author. He is also right in saying that it doesn't make much sense to wish the author the eternity promised by himself. Therefore "our ever-living poet" may refer to God. The epigraph makes the best sense if one assumes that in 1609 the author was deceased (as was Edward deVere, Earl of Oxford). Then the "only" preceding "begetter" does assure the reader that the work is authentic, as Humphrey Moseley does more lengthily in his prefatory note to William Cartwright's posthumous *Comedies, Tragedies, with Other Poems*. Since, as Foster also points out, in the Renaissance "ever-living" was never used about a living person, if "ever-living poet" does refer to a man, he certainly cannot be the Stratfordian. Also, since in the dedications that Foster cites, the dedicatee is not the author, there is certainly something fishy about dedicating a work "to" the begetter if he is alive, but it is not so peculiar if he is not. Most of the dedications Foster cites also refer to happiness *in this world* and eternity in the next. Of course Thorpe or W. H. or whoever wrote the epigraph couldn't guarantee that, so he rather loosely wished the poet heaven and eternity in suggestive terms, as appropriate for a deceased poet.

As more and more evidence of earlier work by Shakespeare emerges (the hyphen definitely indicates a pseudo-

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nym), for example, Eric Sams's *Shakespeare's Lost Play: Edmund Ironside*, it is apparent that the Stratfordian could not have written all the works in his style, and in my opinion he didn't write any of them. And since no one assumes a conspiracy when I announce that Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, why assume a conspiracy, as Stratfordians do, about the contention that Edward deVere wrote under the name of Shakespeare and had posthumous plays produced?

Fortunately for us all, Donald Foster's essay does not solve all the puzzles, so both Stratfordians and Oxfordians can puzzle a while longer.

Winifred L. Frazer
University of Florida

To the Editor:

Donald Foster's essay on Master W. H. is predicated on the assumption that Thorpe's inscription, written as an introduction to the *Sonnets*, is not a "dedication." Granted, it is not one in the usual sense (as Rollins's Variorum edition already indicates), but it has been customarily taken that way and was most probably meant in the way most readers would be expected to take it. The "dedication" is uncommon because Thorpe, rather than the author, signed it with initials, and it contains some eccentric features characteristic of Thorpe's style elsewhere. The title *Shake-speares Sonnets* suggests that the poet did not bring them himself to the printer. To say that these poems were dedicated to their author seems, of course, absurd. But it would be begging the question to claim that for that reason the inscription was not truly a "dedication."

Foster is reductive in asserting that the "battlefield is divided into three camps" (43), for he neglects the most likely published meaning of *begetter*: the person who "gave birth" to the sonnets *in print*, who, according to one *OED* definition, was the producer. In citing "acquire and beget" in *Hamlet* as irrelevant if "beget" is taken as a kind of redundancy (52n3), Foster fails to see how "beget" there can also have the meaning of *produce*. In any case, *begetter* did not have the meaning of *creator* in the inscription, as shown by the allusion, incidentally recognized by Foster, to the Nicene Creed, which also happens to contain the key phrase "begotten, not made." Hence Foster's claim that "the obvious reading [is] that the only begetter of the sonnets is the man who wrote them" (43) is itself obviously at discord with the full credal allusion.

Foster makes light of the view that Master W. H. could be a certain W. Hall, referring to that theory as based on another presumed misprint. But some claimants for Hall see the name play involved as uncomic—not accidental but intentional. The notion that the dot after the *H* prevents the initials from referring to Hall is meaningless simply because of the symmetrical, additional pointing throughout the inscription. The extra em space after "W. H." may well have been intended, too, given Thorpe's penchant for unusual name play and anagrams; it is reasonable enough to believe that Thorpe could even have instructed his printer Eld and the compositor to include the extra em. Foster's view that the "lacuna" (a term that, incidentally, George Walton Williams in *Shakespeare Survey* 36 [1983] corrected to read "em") may be owing to the omission of the letter *S* is fanciful, for the gap occurs after, not before, the *H*. At any rate, it stands to reason that when the manager himself composed the inscription he would have wanted at least to have some hand in proofreading it and would have noticed the misprint, if there was one.

Admittedly, Foster's remarks on what he terms the "ubiquitous conceit" (45) are of interest, but the figure seems to have been used so much that an innovative publisher like Thorpe might easily have wanted to deviate from the general practice. Likewise, though Foster insists that "[i]f, by 'begetter,' Thorpe meant anyone other than the author of the *Sonnets*, his usage is without parallel" (46), I do not find that usage improbable, for Thorpe was very much of an individual. Moreover, Foster's inference that "we cannot, by any rationale, take 'only begetter' as a compliment to 'W. H.' " (50) is odd; if Hall belonged to Shakespeare's son-in-law's family (that of Dr. Hall), the inscription could compliment the physician's brother William for being the "one and only" person responsible for getting the poems to Thorpe. (Recently the suggestion was made in *Shakespeare Quarterly* [37 (1986): 97–98] that the William Hall involved might have been the father instead, but that seems less likely, if only because the elder man died two years before the poems were printed.) In any case, W. Hall was not "a complete nonentity (as the advocates of Hall . . . believe)" (50) if he belonged to the Shakespeare circle and was not merely another stationer's assistant (though he could have been a printer, too, as I indicated in a 1980 article in *Res publica litterarum*). Granted, the case for Hall is speculative, but it is not *inherently* improbable the way that Foster's case for "W. H." as Shakespeare is. As with Thorpe's dedicatory name play on *Blount* and *blunt* (see his epistle dedicatory to the *First Book of Lucan*), the "H. All" collocation involves an "omitted" letter yet does not *depend* on a gap.

Foster argues that "[i]nitials were rarely used in Renaissance dedications unless it was perfectly clear to whom they referred" (50); Sidney Lee, however, had already pointed out in his *Life of William Shakespeare* that initials need show only some intimacy between dedicator and dedicatee.

Agreed, Foster's view that "Benson appears at least to have understood Thorpe's begetter as a figure for the author" (50) is arresting; yet, as Foster himself notes, Digges praised "never-dying" Shakespeare in Benson's edition; thus Digges probably found "our ever-living poet" to refer to Shakespeare—not God, as Foster prefers. For, strictly speaking, the Lord does not "promise" eternity

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