Connections Between Female Sexuality and Hell: Misogyny in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

by

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Dedication

To my husband, Trever–with my most sincere gratitude for your undying love and affection. Thank you is not enough, but there are no words that can accurately convey my love and appreciation for all you have done. I trust that you know.

To my son, Dylan–for your wonderful sense of humor and patience with the time I have taken to bring this work forth into the world.

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Abstract

This paper explores the primary way misogyny is exhibited in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and finds that it is through a connection between the female body and sexuality with Hell. The link between the two continues a long-standing literary tradition which includes medieval Catholicism, and is also expressed by writers including Petrarch, Chaucer, and Boccaccio. Shakespeare continues this tradition in the *Sonnets*, and it becomes the primary way that women are presented in a misogynistic manner within them. This conflation of female genitalia with Hell furthers early modern anxieties regarding the control of women's bodies, as well as the expression of lust when it is exhibited by a woman. I draw comparisons between the "Fair Youth" and "Dark Lady" Sonnets to demonstrate the differences in their representations of love and sex and closely analyze Sonnets 129, 144, 145, and 147 to demonstrate the pervasive connections between Hell and the vagina that aid in furthering misogyny by connecting the female body with Hell, darkness, death, and evil. The specific language choices within the *Sonnets* help to perpetuate a legacy of misogyny through the representation of women's bodies. Through their connection with Hell, women become linked with the negative connotations and aspects of Hell inherent in its conception within a Christian culture. The conflation of Hell and the female body displays early modern anxieties regarding the power of uncontrolled female sexuality through its link of the female body with arguably the worst place with which one could be associated.

Introduction

In his *Sonnets,* Shakespeare ties women's bodies literally and metaphorically to Hell and darkness while he simultaneously demonstrates unease about women's lust. Shakespeare's poet-speaker represents and manifests sexual desire as a cause for anxiety. Anxiety regarding race and gender as larger social constructs is also made overt within the sonnet sequence by continued expressions of a desire to control female sexuality. These anxieties are intertwined, and the axis of them is sex, through which racial and gendered anxieties are also manifested. For the poet, this anxiety is personal, but it also reflects Early Modern perturbation regarding sex and the body, and most particularly as it relates to female sexuality and genitalia. This anxiety emerges from a longstanding Western literary tradition that stems from Medieval Catholicism and persists in subsequent literature. Ultimately, this anxiety is used to control women's sexuality while simultaneously condemning any instances that portray female lust. The misogyny used to represent women in a negative manner in the *Sonnets* stems from a long tradition of misogyny, which is linked to religion, previous sonnet traditions, and the literature of Boccaccio and Chaucer. Specifically, sex and evil are conflated. Female genitalia become a metaphor for Hell, which then perpetuates stereotypes of misogyny through the female body.

In order to talk about female genitalia, we must name it, and historically, the terms *vagina* or *vulva* have been used. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *vagina* originally meant a sheath or scabbard. Sheaths and scabbards both imply violence, due to their use as protectors of weapons such as swords. Furthermore, symbolically that

etymology implies that they have one purpose, to be a place to house a penis. More possibilities exist, and they should be marked in the language used to describe them. I use the word *cunt,* which has been traced to historic roots concerning both power and agency, and thus break from a tradition that furthers misogyny through phallocentric language used to name women's genitalia.

Originally, the word "cunt" was considered to be sacred, but it is currently in use as "arguably the most powerful negative word in the American English language" (Muscio xi). Originally, cunt was a title "of respect for women, priestesses, and witches or derivatives of the names of various goddesses" (Muscio 5). Much like the reclamation of the term, queer, by scholars and activists in previous decades, I seek to be intentional and selective about my use of language to reference female genitalia, and aim to convey a sense of power and ownership over female sexuality by returning to the original meaning of cunt. Barbara G. Walker's, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets,* defines cunt as a "derivative of the Oriental Great Goddess as Cunti, or Kunda, the Yoni of the Universe" (197). Additionally, she writes that "in ancient writings, the word for 'cunt' was synonymous with 'woman,' though not in the insulting modern sense" (Walker 197). Michael Dames writes that "cunt is not slang, dialect or any marginal form, but a true language word, and of the oldest stock" (110). Words have power, and they "spur images, associations, memories, inspirations, and synapse pulsations" (Muscio 8). In Inga Muscio's *Cunt,* she describes the evolution of the word, cunt, from its status as revered to abhorred:

> Cunts were anathema to forefather types. Literally and metaphorically, the word and anatomical jewel presided at the very root of many earlier religions, impeding

> phallic power worship. In Western civilization, forefather types practiced savior-centered religions, such as Catholicism. Springing forth from a very real, very fiscal fear of women and our power, and eventually evolving into sexual retardation and womb envy, a philosophy and social system based on destruction was called to thriving life. (Muscio 6-7)

I draw from this evolution and use the word, "cunt," in my analysis not only to return to the original sense of the word, but to use this language to critique the misogyny that is inherent in words like vulva and vagina. However, not only does my analysis of the *Sonnets* critique Shakespeare's use of words associated with vagina; I also take aim at what the term itself means. The word "vagina" is inherently misogynistic given its original definition as a "sheath for a sword" for the penis, thus placing it within a heterosexist and misogynistic framework (Muscio 4). Using the term cunt conveys its original definition and understanding, which is to convey power, and signals an abrupt shift from misogynistic language each time it is used. While analyzing the misogyny present in the language of the *Sonnets,* I break from the misogyny I am analyzing by being intentional and conscious of the language I use to talk about women's bodies, in order to refrain from perpetuating misogyny through my own language. This use may lead to a dichotomous experience for the reader, in which misogyny and reclamation are experienced simultaneously when cunt is used to refer to women's genitals.

Helen Vendler's, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets,* demonstrates several instances in which Shakespeare's own language becomes a play on the word "cunt." The first instance is found in Sonnet 20, in which a pun is made between "*acquainted* [cunt], "one thing / "*no*-thing," and "*prick*," which demonstrates its use in the *Sonnets* to refer to

female genitalia (Vendler 129). The association continues in Sonnet 58, where "we may read a pun on *cunt* in *cont-rol* and *ac-count"* (Vendler 277). Once again, in Sonnet 136, "a pun on *cunt* may be intended" where the text reads "account" (Vendler 578). Finally, in Sonnet 151, a pun is once again made with "*con[cunt]tented,"* an additional intended use in the *Sonnets* (Vendler 640). Through my own language choices, I match the *Sonnets,* in which cunt is repeatedly used through puns to refer to situations and actions having to do with female genitalia.

Shakespeare, in his sonnet sequence, and more specifically within Sonnets 127-154, represents women both positively and negatively through the character of the Dark Lady to counter the Petrarchan conventions inherited from the English sonnet tradition. Although the *Sonnets* represent women widely, they include few positive representations; the majority portray women in a neutral manner at best, and in a deeply misogynistic one at worst. On the positive end, there are some instances of proto-feminist representations of women within the sequence. The *Sonnets* demonstrate these feminist portrayals of the Dark Lady, which, for the purposes of this analysis, I have defined as depictions of women that demonstrate power and strength, without disparaging remarks regarding sex or gender. Two such references exist within the sequence, and they are *Sonnets* 149 and 150, both of which display portrayals of the Dark Lady, where she is quite commanding and capable of exerting her own desires to control the poet-speaker and induce him to act in the way she demands.

However, the negative and misogynistic portrayals of women vastly overpower these two instances of a more commanding representation of her. These misogynistic representations are depictions of women that focus on derogatory stereotypes, the

disparagement of female sexuality, and the belief that women should not exert their own agency. Unlike Petrarch's Laura, Shakespeare's Dark Lady is not described with a sense of other-worldly wonder, but rather as intertwined with shame, darkness, guilt, lust, and evil throughout the sequence. This negativity prevails through nearly every aspect of the *Sonnets*, culminating in the persistent connection between Hell and female sexuality.

Although there are egalitarian representations of women apparent in the Dark Lady portion of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, I focus exclusively on the negative portrayals of women that are presented by the poet-speaker as they allow me to explore the reasons why and through what means women are represented in a misogynistic way within the *Sonnets*. The misogyny persists through the continuous connection made by the poet-speaker that equates Hell with the Dark Lady's cunt, wrapping female sexuality in with all of the other negative connotations of the word "Hell." This misogynistic representation of women has a long textual history—including St. Jerome, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Petrarch, among many others—that Shakespeare inherited.

Women are primarily represented negatively in the sequence through Shakespeare's historical linkage of female sexuality and desire with Hell. This linkage occurs most notably in the sonnets that address both sexual desire and love (the most significant of which are Sonnets 129, 144, 145, and 147). The language that Shakespeare uses creates the misogyny. Many scholars address ideas of misogyny prevalent in the *Sonnets*, including Phyllis Rackin, Melissa E. Sanchez, and Bruce R. Smith. Rackin refers to the validity of reading the sonnets as an "expression of deepest misogyny," which convey "disgust for the flesh—especially female flesh" (100, 102); Sanchez focuses her discussion on misogyny in the *Sonnets'* presentation as a "denial of female

agency" (516); and Smith examines sexuality in the *Sonnets*, and claims it is the "unruly desires expressed in the Dark Lady *Sonnets*" that "threatened the social order of early modern England" (219). These scholars all acknowledge the existence of misogyny in the *Sonnets* to some extent, and provide references to the *Sonnets* to show exactly where they represent women in a misogynistic manner throughout the sequence.

What these scholars do not address are the reasons for this linkage and how women are represented in this manner. This gap is where I situate my own research in order to determine the means through which women are represented negatively and tied to Hell in the sonnet sequence. Language has power, and the power of specific words, as well as their historical contexts, are what the poet-speaker uses to perpetuate misogynistic portrayals of women in the *Sonnets*. Shakespeare employs a historical connection between female sexuality and Hell furthered by Chaucer and Boccaccio, which is evident in the *Decameron* as a pervasive convention that establishes the primary method for women's representation in a misogynistic manner in the *Sonnets*.

Historical Context of Women's Bodies

The culture surrounding the discussions of, and the attitudes towards, women's bodies displays continued systemic anxiety regarding the control of the female body, and as such promotes an inherited legacy of misogyny when dealing with the treatment of women. Perceptions of women's physical bodies were influenced by their social standing, legal treatment, historical perception, and in medical matters as well. This wide-ranging scope of control meant that women's lives were impacted in numerous areas by a sense of cultural anxiety and fear. The same anxiety and fear are carried through the

literature, and are seen in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in the way that the poet-speaker represents female sexuality and sexual power. The poet-speaker seeks to control the "Dark Lady's" body as well as her sexuality throughout many of the sonnets. Most prominent in these instances of the poet-speaker's attempts to control her is anxiety, and precisely the same systemic cultural anxiety that is expressed throughout the ways in which women were treated by early modern society.

The early modern population had strongly-held beliefs regarding sex and gender that they, as a culture, adhered to and that fed specific ideals regarding women's bodies and sex. Society was created around these standards, with gendered viewpoints seeping into nearly every aspect of early modern life and contributing to a culture where women were relegated to an inferior place, continuing a pervasive historical and cultural legacy of misogyny. These beliefs stem from real scenarios and cultural issues, but they are also readily apparent in the literature of the time. At the most basic level, early modern culture believed there to be a fundamental difference between women and men, that they were born unequal—which, according to Beate Popkin, ensured that they "must assume different positions in society" (194). However, the early moderns were not the first to assume women's subjection to men; they simply inherited the tradition from "ancient Greek philosophers, their Roman counterparts, church fathers, and medieval scholastics" (Popkin 194). A woman was considered inferior for three primary reasons: "she was physically weaker than man; she was intellectually less capable; and she was less able to control her emotions through reason" (Popkin 194). Early moderns assumed this idea to be true because of the long-standing historical tradition that it was so, including dating back to the Bible, which was taken as fact, and that "seemed to corroborate these

assumptions" (Popkin 195). The supposed inferiority possessed by early modern women contributes to a culture in which women are systemically subordinated to men in myriad ways. The subjugation of women was not, even then, a timely or modern phenomenon; instead, it was linked to the Bible, which was arguably the most historic reference that early modern society would have experienced. Rather than re-writing this legacy of misogyny, the culture simply continued it and ushered it into society, where it influenced nearly every aspect of a woman's life.

The disparity between the inherent status of men and women led to different treatment of both in several areas, including social and financial matters, which had an enormous impact on the overall treatment of women. This disparity is also evident throughout Theresa Kemp's book *Women in the Age of Shakespeare,* in which she claims that women were defined "in terms of their gendered relationships to men as maids (daughters to be married), wives, and widows" (30). In addition to this gendered dynamic, there was a clear economic disparity between men and women of the same social class, and the standard of living for women was "disproportionately lower than for men of similar class status (Kemp 30). The social and financial differences that were thrust upon women served to further divide society into one based upon gender stratification.

The division of society on the basis of gender emerged out of a desire to regulate, and subsequently control, the female body. Laura Gowing attempts to historicize early modern attitudes towards sex and gender, situating them in relation to both a gender divide and a shift in class and social order. During Shakespeare's time, one of the government's high priorities was to ensure that the bodies of its citizens were regulated,

so sexuality was an enormous political concern (Gowing 814). Additionally, community members used religious standards to regulate and police the "unruly desires" of both men and women (Gowing 814). Legal records of the time reveal such regulation, as in the case of Anne Stacy, who was accused of both "illegitimacy and possibly of infanticide" (Gowing 815). The master of the house "desired to have the carnal knowledge of her body," while assuring her she would not possibly conceive; so he did, twice (Gowing 816). However, she did conceive a child and delivered a stillborn boy whom she disposed of in a ditch; afterwards, her Dame suspected something was amiss and had her examined, at which point her recent birth was revealed, and she was turned over to the authorities (Gowing 816). Treatment of the female body varied depending on the marital status of the woman; single women's bodies were considered particularly common, and this status was especially true for servants whose masters could, and did, touch them whenever they desired (Gowing 819). However, Gowing also states that married women could exert "the power of control through touch," in vocational capacities such as midwifery, or in their capacity as mothers who were expected to sit on juries dedicated to proving the validity of claims of pregnancy (Gowing 819). These gendered regulations and limits placed upon the bodies of women demonstrates society's goal to control women's bodies.

The ideas that early modern society held about sex and the body reflect a systemic cultural anxiety regarding the two. This sense of systemic anxiety leads to the idea that women's bodies had to be tightly regulated, that they had to be kept in a subservient place. One cause of this trepidation, which the society as a whole experienced, can be seen as the general lack of true medical understanding of how women's bodies

functioned in regards to sex and reproductive matters. However, early modern views regarding the inequality of gender and the way sex and the body were to be dealt with were not original; they were also part of a tradition stemming as far back as the Bible, and merely continued into that era, according to Popkin (194-195). Ultimately, these views helped give rise to a number of theories regarding the function of the female body, as well as the understanding of reproductive matters. These traditions contributed to the creation of a pervasive legacy of misogyny in many components of early modern culture, including everything from the physical body, to literature, and to a woman's role in society.

The conception of a one-sex theory of the body spurs on the legacy of misogyny by defining women, and their anatomy, only in relation to men. According to Thomas Laqueur in his influential *Making Sex,* a one-sex theory of the body was depicted in anatomical "Renaissance illustrations" (see Figures 1 and 2), and these would, of course, make male and female genitals appear more similar (Laqueur 84). According to Laqueur, this has the effect of making the "uterus and vagina look more, not less, like a bladder and penis" (Laqueur 84). Figures 1 and 2 below, depict the similarity of both male and female anatomy according to this view of the body. The creation of these similarities depicts women not as having an anatomy with a unique appearance or function, but with the anatomy of a man, albeit with drastically different functionality. Laqueur asserts that these illustrations helped lead to "the 'fact' that the vagina really is a penis, and the uterus a scrotum" (Laqueur 79). The organs of women were depicted "as versions of a man's" (Laqueur 81). Within this theory, women's bodies were defined through their relation to male anatomy, and were not considered to function as a unique system.

Women's bodies were not seen as unique, but rather as flawed renditions of the male body; at the time, female anatomy was seen "as an inferior version of the male's" (Laqueur 86). This viewpoint furthered the notion that women, down to their very anatomy, were always seen as inferior versions of men, and continues from the ideas regarding sex and anatomy into literature. This sense of inferiority relegates women to a subservient, and non-individualized place in relation to their very physicality and anatomy. This conflation of both male and female anatomy in turn demonstrates a systemic cultural phenomenon in which women were valued not for their individuality or uniqueness, but for their relation to the physical semblance of a man.

Illustrations of the One Sex Theory of the Body (Laqueur 79, 83).

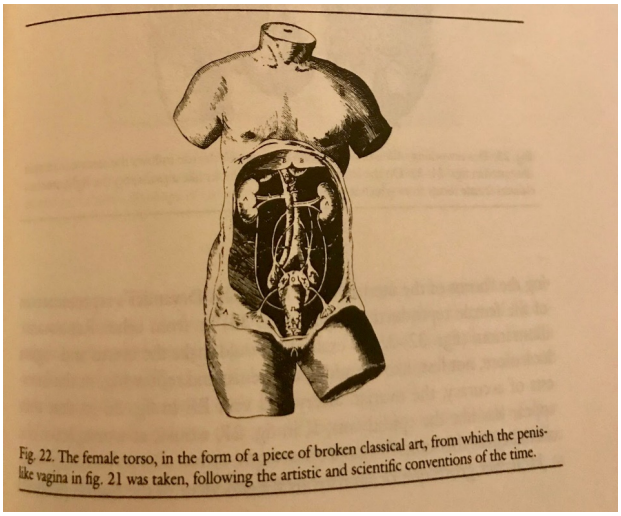

Figure 1. Illustration with conflated female and male genitalia.

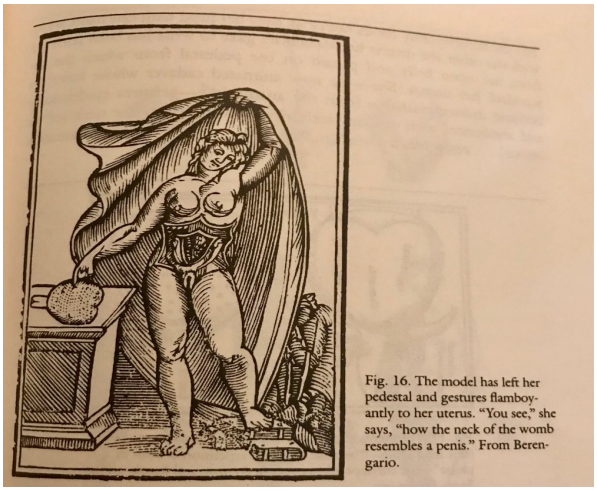

Figure 2. Model with conflated female and male genitalia.

However, critics of Laqueur's work oppose the theory he posits in *Making Sex*. Primarily, these scholars argue that the theory he espouses was not as widely accepted nor believed as he makes it out to be. Winfried Schleiner, in a critique of the theory in early modern society, posits that the conflation of the two may be challenged due to the tendency of Renaissance anatomists to focus on the clitoris and penis, but particularly the "differences in size, function, and structure," and the devotion of "such attention to finding differences in male and female genitalia speaks against the notion that a one-sex model was pervasively accepted" (183). King asserts that one of the primary issues with Laqueur's conception of the body is the transition from the one-sex theory to the two-sex theory and the inconsistency of the timing (3). Furthermore, King asserts that it is "difficult to identify any historical period in which a 'one-sex' model dominated" (7). Rather than having a set timeline indicating the shift from one model to the next, King posits that that both theories of the body may have been available simultaneously to those who ascribed to either way of thinking (King 8). However, the conflation of the penis and uterus can be seen as a plausible one, "since clearly the former must fit into the latter"

(King 49). The similarities of this theory of the body stemmed from "analogies between various parts of the male and female organs of generation; for example…he links the appearance of the womb to that of the scrotum, and he comments that the mouth of the womb resembles the opening in the glans of the penis" (King 57). Additionally, Sally Shuttleworth, a reviewer of *Making Sex*, describes it as "ambitious," but notes that Laqueur devotes his analyses to "his overarching theory" which "tends to iron out contextual complexity" (633-634). Shuttleworth thus criticizes the book for focusing too much on one view of the model of the human body and the differences in the reproductive systems of men and women (635). The diverging theories regarding Renaissance ideas of human biology demonstrate the myriad ways of thinking about the body that were in existence during the time, but still posits the centrality of Laqueur's work to the conceptions of human biology at this time.

Although Laqueur's theory certainly has its gaps, the concept of the female body as an imperfect specimen of the male illustrates the subjugated manner in which women, and their bodies, were perceived throughout history. Even from a biological standpoint, as depicted in the anatomical illustrations, women were viewed as not wholly individual. They are seen here in their relation to men because even their physicality cannot be conceived of as entirely different than a man's. The continuity of these views about sex and the place of each gender in society mirrors the origin, and subsequent continuity, of linking female sex organs with Hell. It is this history, then, of specific and pervasive views about women that later inform the writings of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, that further a misogynistic legacy based upon the denigration of women's bodies and their sex organs.

Societal traditions that seek to control women from financial, legal, cultural, and medical standpoints demonstrate the fear early modern society held about uncontrolled women, and the lengths they were willing to go in order to maintain control over women, their bodies, and their sexuality. Dominating women in this manner resulted in the lives of women being controlled, regulated, and limited due to societal constraints and desires to keep female sexuality controlled by men. This sense of oppression infiltrated many aspects of a woman's existence, and even permeates the literature of the period as well. Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are inundated with instances in which the poet-speaker, as a result of this systemic cultural anxiety, attempts to exert control over the Dark Lady's body and sexual expression.

Literary Tradition of Misogyny

Conflating the female body—specifically the cunt—with Hell is a tradition that is illustrated throughout literature and continues into Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. This tradition perpetuates misogyny in literature through the shared tradition that Shakespeare inherited from those who came before him, including Petrarch, Chaucer, and Boccaccio, who helped to establish these conventions in their writings. This legacy is evidenced in Petrarch's sonnets, Saint Jerome's *Against Jovinianus,* Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. These writings are all connected, and share common threads of misogyny, as well as similar source texts in some instances. In the *Sonnets*, this trope becomes the primary way that women are represented in a misogynistic manner. The pervasive nature of this specific trope has spurred many misogynistic portrayals of women that are primarily apparent through literature that perpetuates linking their

anatomy with negativity, evil, Hell, and the devil. In turn, this connection between conflating women's bodies with Hell, and all of its associated concepts, became one clear method through which women were relegated to lower positions and status in society.

Their lower status and position are made clear through the negative portrayals and associations with their bodies that tie women to the most abhorred and feared aspects of society. Not only is misogyny apparent through social positioning; it is also prevalent in language, especially the language used about and directed towards women. Language helps shape reality, and although these works are about fictional characters, the language used about them aids in creating and shaping reality, including perceptions of real women who because, of these standards and this misogynistic legacy, may have been seen in a negative light because of their representation on the page.

This use of language perpetuates misogyny in Shakespeare's work, as well as the work of other writers, both English and otherwise. Using language in this manner participates in a tradition that directly connects the ability to generate life with evil. Conflating the generation of life with evil aids in continuing a culture and legacy of misogyny through literature that is historically linked through multiple authors and is seen in the progression of time from saints to Shakespeare. Language is arguably the most powerful tool humans have to create meaning and significance, which is precisely what renders this representation of women so deeply misogynistic. Words gain power through the meanings ascribed to them and in the ways they are used, and the usage of language to convey misogyny by conflating female sexuality and Hell demonstrates the power of negative language to further alienate and belittle people. This connection can be seen to link Saint Jerome, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and finally Shakespeare, through the

repeated use of a literary and cultural trope that denigrates women's bodies and links them directly to both the devil and Hell.

Saint Jerome's *Against Jovinianus*, which details the intricacies of marriage and sexual relationships within the confines of Christianity and a Christian culture, while proclaiming the negative aspects and evil connotations of sexual relationships with women, provides one of the first links in this legacy of inherited literary misogyny. Essentially, *Against Jovinianus* lays the foundation from which later writers engage to describe women in a misogynistic manner. This foundation includes both the physical aspect, as he describes the prescriptions regarding sex within a Christian culture, as well as describing societal standards in which the life of a man is valued more highly than that of a woman. In *Against Jovinianus*, Saint Jerome explicitly condemns having any physical relationship with women, going as far as to say "it is bad to touch one," and further calling it evil (8). In addition, he advocates for husbands to withhold sex from their wives, to "seek [their] own welfare by destroying another" (15). Even within the confines of marriage, the female body is seen as both negative and evil, which helps give rise to the later connections that directly link Hell with cunts.

Furthermore, Jerome advocates for the control of a woman's body as a means through which society can improve the lives of men, while degrading the lives of women. Controlling the female body is seen as a way for men to improve their own lives, through both withholding sex, as well as entering into a marriage. This degradation is clear through Jerome's advocacy for men to, essentially, save themselves while condemning their wives. Under these terms, marriage is then seen as a method through which "carnal love" can be made somewhat more acceptable in the eyes of religion at the time, as it was

believed better to marry and have sexual relationships than to have them while unmarried (Saint Jerome 40). The scriptural basis for this comes from 1 Corinthians 7, in which the Christian religious practices surrounding marriage and sexuality are detailed: "it is good for a man not to marry" (1 Cor. 7.1). However, the religious community makes a concession, in which "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor. 7.9). Although this belief system demonstrates an instance where sexual relationships are accepted, it still continues to link sexuality and sex with women to negativity because of the continued perception that marriage was a way of making such actions less sinful. Sex within the confines of a Christian marriage may have been considered better than sex outside of such a marriage, but a comparison between two scales of negativity still leaves both objects of comparison rendered in a negative manner.

Finally, the negativity towards women and sexuality is conflated with race in a deleterious approach. Saint Jerome writes that "there is nothing blacker than to love a wife as if she were an adulteress," connecting implications of racial blackness as well as Hell to this reviled deed of sexual passion with a wife (66). The pairing of these two aspects is also seen later in the *Sonnets*, where the "Dark Lady's" description as black links her with racialized meanings of the term, as well as connecting her to Hell. This further associates the two writers and their work, but also demonstrates this connection between lust, Hell, and blackness as an inherited and pervasive tradition that continues this representation throughout literature. Negative connotations are continuously linked to women's sexuality, here rendering them inseparable from negativity and evil, which is a legacy that persists into later writing.

Linking female sexuality and Hell is a literary tradition that pre-dates Shakespeare's work and provides a method to further misogyny through the language used about women and their sexuality. The correlation, and the use of the word "Hell" to refer to a woman's cunt, is apparent in literature through Boccaccio's *Decameron*; it is also further perpetuated by Shakespeare in his *Sonnets*. The frequent use of this convention in the *Decameron* demonstrates the pervasive use of this meaning of Hell. Boccaccio's work is situated in terms of this connection, which can be seen during Day Three, Story Ten in the story of Alibech. A story is told about "how the Devil is put back in Hell," which reveals this connection (Boccaccio 109). Alibech, a girl of 14, wants to serve God and finds herself asking Rustico, a hermit, how she can best be of service to God. Rustico shows her his erection, which he terms "resurrection of the flesh," and tells her it is the devil that needs to be put back into Hell (Boccaccio 111). As the pair are on their knees, naked, and directly across from each other, Rustico proceeds to tell her that she has "Hell there," and teaches her that the way to remedy his devil is through intercourse (Boccaccio 111). As they begin, Alibech tells Rustico that the "devil" "even hurts Hell when he's put inside it," to which Rustico replies that "it won't always be like that" (Boccaccio 111). Rustico, in order to ensure that the pain would not continue "put the Devil back in there a good six times before they got out of the bed" (Boccaccio 111-112). After this, Alibech continues to ask Rustico if they can "go and put the Devil back in Hell" (Boccaccio 112). The frequent and continued use of the word "Hell" throughout this story to refer to Alibech's cunt demonstrates the conflation of the two that Boccaccio employs. Furthermore, this convention occurs frequently in this story, demonstrating that it is not just a one-time occurrence, but a frequent use of the word, and meaning. This

story aids in the establishment of a precedent for linking the cunt and female sexuality with Hell that continues into early modern times and re-emerges in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as the primary manner through which misogyny is represented within them.

Traditions in literature, including the ones Shakespeare inherits and perpetuates in, help demonstrate the development of various types of literature, including sonnets, by demarking the influence of each poet's contribution to the form. The sonnet form evolved with each poet, who added their own mark to the form. Although Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are among the most well-known in the English language, he was drawing from an influential tradition that pre-dated his work. Petrarch helped shape the sonnet tradition, and in a sense revolutionized it, which in turn helped establish a path for future development of the sonnet tradition. The Petrarchan sonnet was invented around 1235 BCE, and "passed to Petrarch through a series of developments in the thirteenth century" (Spiller 51). Its defining characteristics include "two quatrains and two tercets, marked always by a change of rhyme and nearly always by a break in syntax and thought at the 'turn' (*volta)* between octave and sestet" (Spiller 51). Although the style is unique, it is not what Petrarch was most widely known for, which was his "mastery of metaphor" (Spiller 51). In his sonnets, Petrarch creates "one of the richest poetic fields for representing the self ever mapped by a single poet," as his sonnets provide a view into himself, even more than they do of the sonnet mistress (Spiller 62). The lover, or love-object, in Petrarch's sonnets was "unvaryingly idealized" (Hutchins 563). Laura, the woman to whom Petrarch's sonnets are addressed, is not portrayed in a realistic manner with both faults and better qualities; instead, she is consistently described only in overly-idealized and unrealistic terms. Petrarch's sonnets describe her in an other-worldly

manner, as if she is not human and in possession of the same qualities and frailties that every other human is. However, in drawing from previous traditions, Laura can be seen as more real, particularly more so than Beatrice, who inhabits Dante's sonnets.

In writing his own *Sonnets,* Shakespeare adapted many components of the sonnet traditions that preceded his work. His adaptation of these components are what eventually become the hallmarks of a Shakespearean sonnet. Ultimately, Shakespeare adapts the praise component of the sonnet tradition while also subverting it. His *Sonnets* can be considered a "reinterpretation of an exhausted tradition of praise, notably Petrarchan praise," in which the love-object from the classical sonnet tradition is viewed and depicted on the page in a more realistic, humanizing manner than had existed previously (Dubrow 120). Additionally, Shakespeare once again breaks convention in his *Sonnets* by shifting the lovers' torment from "conventionally tortured" in terms of love and longing, to experiencing a unique and "disconcertingly sadistic and masochistic" form of expression (Hutchins 552). This subversion is clearly evident within Shakespeare's *Sonnets* when the poet-speaker muses about sex with the "Dark Lady," as well as when her beauty is discussed.

Many other writers also influenced the English sonnet tradition and helped push the genre further by additionally creating more ties to previous literature, such as that of Petrarch. Additional writers were considered influential in the English sonnet tradition, including "Chaucer, Wyatt, Sidney, Lodge, Daniel, and Drayton" (Hutchins 552). Notably, however, Chaucer is named as the most influential early English poet who was believed to have the ability to rival Petrarch, and "was the poet that English writers had chosen as their English rival to laud continental writers such as Petrarch" (Hutchins 554).

Chaucer is known to have translated one of Petrarch's sonnets into the English language, but chose to not keep the form intact (Spiller 63). Furthermore, Chaucer in *The Clerk's Tale* reveals Petrarch as the source for his first encounter with the story, which was simultaneously adapted by Petrarch from Boccaccio in the *Decameron* (Hutchins 554). The connection between these writers, along with the interplay of texts shared successively between them, demonstrates the continuity of this particular strain of misogyny through its appearance in various types of literature.

The Griselda story connects Petrarch, Chaucer, and Boccaccio, demonstrating a link between these writers to Shakespeare, through which one may determine the literary traditions and legacies in their work that represent women in a misogynistic manner. This connection becomes the thread that can be used to trace the particular strain of misogyny that Shakespeare inherited, and later used in his *Sonnets*. In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale,* Griseld is the woman whom the clerk decides that "he wolde wedde" (130). Eventually, they do marry, and Griseld "a doghter hath ybore" (131). She is "meke and stille" as a lamb, who endures her "crueel sergeant" of a husband (133). He then takes her daughter from her, and then "to Boloigne… broghte" her son (135). Then, when their daughter "twelf yeer was of age," he makes it known that the pope "bad hym to wedde another" (135-136). When Griseld finds out she answers "in pacience" that she "wol gladly yelden hire" place in the home to his new wife (137). Eventually, it comes to light that Walter has no intention of marrying his daughter, and instead has been hiding the children away in Bologna, to which Griseld responds with "wepynge…and tenderly kissynge" upon learning of her children's location (140). Essentially, this story demonstrates the common plight of a woman who must endure unnecessary pain and suffering brought on by her

husband and display patience and virtue throughout the trial in order to be rewarded. Women are subjugated here, and their virtues are praised for the amusement of men who would like to torment them.

Boccaccio's, Petrarch's, and Chaucer's work remain connected to each other through similar source texts, direct references, and inherited literary traditions. This connection demonstrates the interplay among the writers, and these literary traditions and conventions remained intact through their work. Several studies have compared the three authors, but "have shied away from" directly linking the three through the use of the story of Griselda (Finlayson 256). The Griselda story, as told by Petrarch, is the source text for Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" (Finalyson 257). Additionally, Finlayson asserts that although this relationship between Petrarch and Chaucer has been studied by several scholars, there is an additional point that has not received a great deal of critical focus, where Boccaccio, and Petrarch embody the sources that Chaucer adapts (257). Between the three authors, Boccaccio composed his version of the Griselda story first; he is referenced in an extensive prologue to Petrarch's version along with "his attraction to the story, his reasons for 'translating' it into Latin, and his modest claim that, while not a word for word translation, it is still Boccaccio's story" (Finlayson 258). This demonstrates Petrarch's familiarity with Boccaccio's work, and provides a basis for continued connections demonstrating the interplay between the works.

Furthermore, Chaucer would have been familiar with this link due to his "access to Petrarch's Latin," which leaves it likely that he "must have known that Boccaccio had written an earlier version in his *Decameron"* (Finlayson 258). These writers' works

directly connect to each other's, and through these connections, attitudes towards women, historically, can be traced.

The misogyny in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* thus stems from a literary tradition predating his work that equates female sexual expression and the female body with Hell. This tradition is evident in the works of writers from whom Shakespeare inherited sources for his work, and also through the works of writers who used each other's material as the basis for their own adaptations, as in the case of Chaucer with Petrarch's translation of Boccaccio's work. Although Shakespeare was not the first to perpetuate misogyny in this way, in the *Sonnets,* the conflation of cunts with Hell, stemming from this tradition, becomes the primary method through which misogyny is furthered.

Misogyny in the *Sonnets*

In the *Sonnets,* it becomes clear that women, through the characterization of the "Dark Lady," are verbally linked directly with Hell through their own sex organs and the specific language used about them. Language regarding female sexuality becomes the primary way misogyny is perpetuated throughout the *Sonnets*. Specifically, the language surrounding female genitalia is used to advance misogynistic ideas related to sex and sexuality of women. This connection further perpetuates links in previous literature between Hell and female genitalia, foregrounding it in the most well-recognized sonnet sequence in the English language as a convention, continued on throughout history, which binds female anatomy with Hell and the myriad connotations that brings. There is immense power in language, and the language used to represent women and their anatomy is especially powerful. Each word chosen in these poems carries the weight that

is derived from the meaning ascribed to, and created by, it. Furthermore, these meanings are in flux; language is not static, but evolves and reconfigures itself based upon common usage. The metaphor of cunts as Hell used in the *Sonnets* is the most pervasive convention through which misogyny is demonstrated.

Consistently in the *Sonnets* the word "Hell" is used to mean "cunt" when referring to the "Dark Lady." The word "Hell" has immense power, particularly in a Christian-oriented society like Shakespeare's and ours today. As the worst place one could become trapped in, Hell conjured visions of souls being stuck in anguish for an eternity. Hell also connects with other concepts and ideas such as evil, devils, darkness, death, and sin, expressing an interplay of these concepts and their own unique meanings, which help to inform an overarching concept of what Hell can be. All of these words have immense power because they signify the indescribable and unknown, but most importantly, they refer to perhaps one of deepest human fears—death. When the word "Hell" is used as a term for female genitalia, the term "cunt" carries these associations as well. Therefore, sex becomes bound up in negative connotations that persist throughout the sequence. These connotations include guilt and shame, a regret at having had sex, and an overarching shadow of negativity towards the act as well. This negativity becomes linked with women through the *Sonnets* as it describes systemic and cultural anxieties, beliefs, and feelings regarding the expression of female sexuality. Specific instances of language perpetuate meaning throughout literature, and this convention of conflating female sexuality with Hell aids in the progression of misogynistic portrayals of women throughout literature, but it becomes particularly apparent in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

The representation of women in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is extraordinarily multifaceted, and contains both feminist and misogynistic portrayals of women demonstrating a wide gradient between feminist and misogynist. The vast majority of the misogyny in the *Sonnets* is concentrated in the Dark Lady sonnets. Overall, most of the *Sonnets* do express ideas and concepts relating to misogyny. Primarily, the misogyny in the sonnets is demonstrated, according to Kathryn Schwarz, by compelling an affront to "men in relation to a promiscuous feminine sexuality" (738). This is notable in Sonnet 129 in which sex and Hell are explicitly connected, with the claim that the speaker's sexual relationship with the Dark Lady will eventually end in "Hell in its fulfillment" (Fleischman 115). These misogynistic aspects of the sonnet are primarily linked with controlling female sexuality and desire through limiting agency and connecting the language used about women's bodies with Hell. However, some more temperate portrayals do occur, and there are instances in which some sonnets can be considered to be more egalitarian in their representation. One example of such a sonnet is Sonnet 130. In her analysis of it, Ashley Imus describes the manner in which the poet-speaker praises the Dark Lady, describing it as "praise more worthy than that of other models" (117). In Sonnet 130, the Petrarchan beauty conventions of overly-idealized praise and beauty are twisted, which leads to Shakespeare's more realistic categorization of the Dark Lady's features. It is important to note that a small minority of feminist sonnets do exist, and two sonnets can be considered as such. These feminist sonnets describe power, and refer to the Dark Lady's ability to exude influence and control over the poet-speaker. Portrayals of the Dark Lady that are more feminist in nature are not necessarily imbued with

positivity, but they do present a reality in which she is able to take full control over her own actions.

Two close readings of different sonnets within the sequence provide an opportunity to illustrate both feminist and misogynistic portrayals of women. These sonnets can almost be seen as opposites, representing vastly different sides of a continuous spectrum presented in the *Sonnets*. The notable aspect is the scale of representation that exists, with neither neatly confined to one side of the divide. The *Sonnets* may be varied in this representation; however, what continues throughout the *Sonnets* is a connection between female sexuality and Hell that becomes the primary expression of misogyny.

The first example, Number 128, illustrates the misogynistic aspect of the Dark Lady's portrayal, which is exceedingly common throughout the sequence. In this sonnet, it becomes clear that the poet-speaker sees himself as responsible for controlling the Dark Lady's sexual agency. Throughout, the poet-speaker displays his jealousy of anyone, or anything else that may touch the Dark Lady, while demonstrating his pervasive beliefs that her sexuality is only for his own use. Jealousy is clearly expressed here using the word "envy," and the speaker envies "those jacks that nimble leap, / To kiss the tender inward of thy hand" (128.5-6). This sense of jealousy demonstrated in regards to a physical object that the Dark Lady can touch reveals the poet-speaker's anxiety regarding her capacity to physically touch anything besides himself. A sense of anxiety continues on throughout the sequence, and is primarily evident when it appears that the Dark Lady would deign to choose a sexual partner besides the poet-speaker. This anxiety is the literary manifestation of a system that had cultural reticence about accepting women's sexuality and sexual choices outside of marriage.

This sonnet demonstrates misogyny primarily through the concept of sexual control as a means to limit female sexual expression. Misogyny has numerous forms, but a key expression is through the repression of female sexual desire and experience, which recurs throughout this poem, as well as rape. This sonnet's depiction of rape furthers the idea that the poet-speaker believed the Dark Lady was meant to be his, and his alone. In Line Seven, the poet-speaker discusses his "poor lips, which should that harvest reap," and by his "harvest" he means the kisses mentioned earlier in conjunction with jacks (128.7). The word "reap" implies the forceful taking of something, which can also be seen to be connected with rape. The poet-speaker implies rape here by expressing his desire to take the kisses she does not consent to give him by other means. Finally, the sonnet closes with a command, which further demonstrates the removal of the Dark Lady's agency in this poem. The poet-speaker orders the Dark Lady to "give them thy fingers" and him "thy lips to kiss" (128.14). This order demonstrates the speaker's lack of regard for her free agency by commanding her to acquiesce to his demands. Between the expressions of the desire for sexual control coupled with the implications of rape and forced kisses, it becomes truly difficult to see this sonnet as anything other than misogynistic.

Contrasting with this expression of misogyny, Sonnet 150 explicitly portrays the Dark Lady as exceedingly powerful, and this sonnet is the primary example of sonnets within the sequence that display more feminist portrayals. From the very beginning of this sonnet, the Dark Lady is said to be mighty. In fact, the word "power" or a variation such as "powerful" is used in this sonnet multiple times, along with explicit references to her strength. The poet-speaker says that the Dark Lady has "powerful might" (150.1). This phrase implies both strength and power from the first line of the sonnet. She is said to be

both powerful and mighty, which sharply contrasts from the sexually degrading epithets used to refer to her in other sonnets. Additionally, the next line of the sonnet is when the poet-speaker professes the Dark Lady's ability to influence him directly, to force his heart "to sway" (150.2). This expression of influence once again demonstrates power and more specifically, the power that she wields influencing him.

The theme of power continues throughout the rest of the sonnet, in which the Dark Lady is invited "to make" the poet-speaker admit to her love and beauty (150.3). She is capable here of forcing him to action in service of her own goals, which is something not previously seen in the sequence. Furthermore, she is explicitly said to have "such strength and warranties of skill," further demonstrating her newfound position of strength and influence (150.7). She is depicted as occupying a freer and more equitable position in a situation in which she is given the agency to act in the manner she chooses and to influence whom she chooses. To some extent, this statement about both strength and influence is the most powerful utterance made about the Dark Lady; it demonstrates her capacity, and through that the capacity of other women, to embody power and strength in a patriarchal society.

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* demonstrates misogyny throughout, which has been detailed and described by many critics using myriad different ideas and points of textual reference to illustrate their claims. The sonnet sequence has a storied history in terms of feminist criticism, but many scholars have explored it for themes of love, sex, power, beauty, and misogyny. The *Sonnets* is an ideal body of work in which to explore misogyny because "unlike the playscripts, the woman is described in the poet's own voice but also because her representation is not mediated by the presence of a male actor

performing her part" (Rackin 95). The Dark Lady differs dramatically from the Petrarchan sonnet beloved; she is "dark rather than fair, she is also lustful rather than chaste; and instead of inspiring the poet to spiritual elevation, she degrades him in shameful lust" (Rackin 100). This expression of lust becomes an additional way for the Dark Lady to be denigrated through the sexual choices she makes regarding who to have sex with, and with how many people.

Ultimately, the depiction of the Dark Lady's sexual proclivities reflects cultural and societal anxiety regarding female sexuality, and this unease is reflected within the *Sonnets*. Importantly, it must be noted that "female sexual desire, we are repeatedly told, was regarded as threatening" (Rackin 44). This sense of threat associated with female sexuality incites representations of women that are either sexually controlled or berated for their lack of adherence to societal standards regarding sexuality. Within the *Sonnets,* it becomes clear through the "Dark Lady's" representation that "misogyny makes objects of women in order to assert the sovereign self-sufficiency of men," which can be seen in many of the sonnets (Schwarz 738). The Petrarchan mistress becomes an object for which the poets can express their own views and opinions, while saying more about their own beliefs than they reveal about their beloveds. Not only do they describe these misogynistic experiences, but "the poems are less a story than an anatomy not of a passively objectified female body but of the dynamic and consequential encounters that produce gendered identities" (Schwarz 738). Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are rampant with misogynistic references to "contempt for the flesh, and for female flesh in particular" (Rackin 103). This lust, writes Rackin, becomes "a metaphor that identifies the site of damnation with her vagina" (103). "Hell," in both senses of the word, becomes the site

through which misogyny is extended in the *Sonnets,* and further binds misogyny with the language used surrounding female sex and sexuality.

Interestingly, the way love and sex are represented by the poet-speaker differs based on the gender of the object of his affection. In the "Fair Youth" sonnets, the poet takes a significantly less critical tone towards both love and sex than exists in the Dark Lady sonnets, demonstrating a clear divide in the representations of both love and sex. The "homoerotic desires the poems represent" display a clear divide between the two widely accepted "halves" of the sequence (Traub 277). The "Fair Youth" sonnets, overall, are much more temperate in the expressions of love than the ones directed towards a woman. This divide encompasses the poet-speaker's declarations of love, both eroticized and romanticized, throughout the sequence. The sonnets addressed to the "Fair Youth" can be seen as "a celebration of the joys and pains of faithful even if imperfect love" (Wyk Smith 36). Love for a man is seen as "true love," and the love-object is addressed using affectionate terms such as "my love" (40.3). Furthermore, the speaker goes so far as to acknowledge that even though the "Fair Youth" may have faults, they can be considered ones that "well shows" (40.14). The negative qualities possessed by him are looked upon gently, and not seen as qualities that should incite the same amount of vitriol as they would if they were exhibited by a woman, which is seen later in the sequence in the Dark Lady sonnets. The Dark Lady sonnets "dwell on lust, treachery and darkness," as opposed to the milder and more romanticized themes of the first portion of the sequence (Wyk Smith 36). This disparity clearly demonstrates the divide between the two portions of the sonnets in terms of the way love and sex are addressed.

The poet-speaker writes frequently of the young man's beauty, as well as the idea that he will linger, immortal, in the poet's "verse distils" (54.14). Additionally, these sonnets lack the sense of "anxiety over the fair young man's beauty" as the Dark Lady sonnets do (Smith 212). This anxiety becomes a key theme in the Dark Lady sonnets, but remains notably absent from the "Fair Youth" poems. Deep affection is demonstrated towards the "Fair Youth," who is referred to as a "great gift" and considered "too dear" (87.11). The sonnets tend towards excess, either excess in praise or in vitriol; and in the case of the "Fair Youth," praise for his love and affection is abundant. Primarily, this divide demonstrates the disparity that exists in terms of female sexuality, along with a double standard that further shows the inequities in the way sex is presented in the *Sonnets* based on the division of gender. Although these sonnets are not as overtly sexual as the Dark Lady sonnets, they continue to demonstrate the poet's perception of love, which further aids in characterizing the portrayals of love and sex in the Dark Lady sonnets. Sonnet 54 of the "Fair Youth" sequence demonstrates the poet-speaker's views regarding his love and affection towards his male beloved. These views differ drastically from the poet-speaker's attitude towards his female beloved. The young man is described as a "beauteous and lovely youth," which is a temperate and loving expression regarding him, but particularly so when compared to the expressions used to describe the Dark Lady (54.13). The expressions of beauty here are closer to the Petrarchan concepts, which are vastly different than later in the sequence. The love expressed in this sonnet is far more kind and redeeming than the love and lust expressed in the Dark Lady sonnets.

The Dark Lady sonnets express a contrary viewpoint regarding love and sex, which are both presented in a negative manner throughout this portion of the sequence.

She is not referred to with a similar expression of affection as the "Fair Youth" anywhere in the sequence. Furthermore, discussions about her center around the demonization of sex and expressions of shame at human behaviors and experiences of lust and sex. These poems demonstrate "sexual cynicism bruited in many of" them, furthering claims of misogyny (Smith 212). The negativity directed towards her throughout this portion of the sequence is readily apparent, but is most obvious when both sex and sexuality are mentioned in the *Sonnets*. The misogyny in the *Sonnets* is at the forefront in these discussions, but reaches its pinnacle when the poet-speaker describes both the act of sex and the Dark Lady's genitals. Essentially, these *Sonnets* describe a belief that "sex without love and commitment is immoral, dangerous, degrading, indefensible–especially for women" (Traub 506). The Dark Lady "has—and likes having—multiple sex partners," and when read in a patriarchal society demonstrates deeply imbedded misogyny that can begin to be countered when one begins "explicitly challenging the view that sexual promiscuity is categorically immoral" and exploring "the ways in which the possibility of female promiscuity" is seen as a threat to such a culture (Traub 507). This connection, between the references to "cunts" and "Hell," becomes the primary way that misogyny is perpetuated throughout the sonnet sequence through the further alliance of female sex and misogyny.

Sonnet 129 opens with a barrage of negativity towards sex; it is called "murd'rous, bloody, full of blame" (129.1). This sonnet can be read "as an icon of the whole of the sonnets" (Moten 150). This choice of words immediately presents the speaker's negative and disparaging views regarding sex, which is positioned later in the sonnet to have a direct link to Hell. However, this sonnet also includes positive descriptions of sex, and

the poet-speaker uses the words "bliss" and "joy" to describe the initial experience of engaging in the act, but the connections to ignominy and Hell eventually override the positive connotations presented in the sonnet (129.11-12). Furthermore, sex is connected not only to Hell directly, but also to shame throughout the sonnet. In the opening line of the sonnet, sex, but more specifically, ejaculation, is tied to "a waste of shame" (129.1). Additionally, "waste" is a pun for "waist," further demonstrating a sense of shame, but in this scenario aligning it directly with her body as a vessel of shame. This sense of shame is linked with "squandering energy and becoming morally compromised," and the speaker experiences "physical as well as moral degradation" (Duncan-Jones 372). The poet-speaker displays a trajectory in which he experiences lust and sex is later had, but then is overcome with shame, stating that the act is "despised straight" (129.5). As soon as the act is completed, when climax has been reached, shame becomes the overriding emotion as described by the poet-speaker. This sonnet is intensely physical "with extremity and volatility marking every moment" (Fleischman 115). Throughout the entirety of the sonnet, sex is characterized as an act that forever connects participants with shame, thus demonstrating intense negativity towards the physicality of a woman's body.

The last word of the sonnet is "Hell," and it can be read as a term synonymous with "cunt." The poet-speaker refers to sex with the words joy and bliss, and even heaven at one point in the sonnet, when discussing the physical act, but then quickly turns these positive associations into a negative one in the *volta*, where the poet states: "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well / To shun the heaven that leads men to this Hell" (129.13-14). Ultimately, this couplet demonstrates the idea that the poet believes to be

true about sex: it may be pleasurable in the beginning, but it will inevitably lead one to Hell, both literally, in the anatomical sense, and figuratively, regarding the mental anguish expressed in the sonnets. Therefore, the connection with Hell here is both literal and figurative. In one sense, Hell is used directly as a term to mean cunt connecting the physical act of sex and its relationship to a woman's body with Hell. Furthermore, using the term Hell for female genitalia "conflates the woman's vagina with the place of eternal damnation and torment" (Rackin 104). However, there is also a figurative sense of the word Hell that arises when discussing the connections between sex, Hell, and cunts. This sonnet also perpetuates the idea that the speaker will encounter a figurative Hell after engaging in sex. The duality present demonstrates that in both senses, literal and figurative, women and their cunts are connected with Hell.

The connection between Shakespeare's Dark Lady and Hell persists into Sonnet 144, where she is once again associated with Hell. In this sonnet, the poet-speaker compares the speaker's "two loves," with one being a man "right fair," whereas the other is "a woman coloured ill" (144.1-4). The reference to the woman's coloring could, of course, refer to race, but it could also be seen as a reference to the so-called blackness of Hell, with which the woman is inextricably linked in this sonnet. Metaphorically, she is connected here to darkness, which has common associations of negativity. The metaphorical blackness can refer to behavior; "'black' behavior is not confined to one who is 'coloured ill': one can be both 'fair' and 'black'; one can be both 'black' and 'fair', in every sense of the words" (Schalkwyk 18). Furthermore, "a necessary symmetry between colouring and morality" is enacted here, in which color is used to refer to the

metaphorical and moral aspects, rather than just physical ones (Schalkwyk 18). The concept of Hell is linked both with darkness and evil, and so, here too, is the Dark Lady.

In this sonnet, the woman ultimately becomes a devil, who attempts to lure the speaker "soon to Hell," as well as corrupting the man, the angel, into being a devil (144.5). The idea of corruption here perpetuates misogynistic stereotypes regarding the corrupting capabilities of women in general. It is often considered that the Dark Lady is "the paragon of immorality and corruption" (Charalampous). This corruption speaks volumes regarding the societal views of the corrupting nature of women throughout history. Of course, the most famous example of connecting women with corruption occurs in the Christian exegesis of the Genesis story, where Eve is blamed for her and Adam's expulsion from the garden. Historically, women have long been tied to the capacity to corrupt, which allows a pervasive legacy of misogyny to flourish throughout history as seen in women's experiences as scapegoats. This tendency persists throughout Sonnet 144, and is made more apparent in the discussions of Hell throughout. The speaker explicitly states that the Dark Lady is able to "corrupt" his "saint to be a devil" (144.7). Here, the historical connection between women and corruption is continued; and she has the capacity to tempt his male lover, who is considered the better of the two, to evil—just as she is. Here, the woman is tied to the supernatural; she is referred to as a "worser spirit" (144.4). This reference, in contrast to the man, "a better angel," places her in a position of inequality, where she is relegated to the second, and last, position of the lovers (144.3).

The poet-speaker's two lovers embody the concept of psychomachia, which can be seen as their engagement in necessary battle, in which the prize is a permanent claim

to the soul of the speaker. This is demonstrated through the comparison of the lovers to spirits who do their best to tempt the poet-speaker into complacency and eventual alliance with either side. Alternately, this sonnet can be read instead as an inner conflict, "the speaker torn between a fair, masculine orderliness and an ill, feminine, and sexual energy– a gendered early modern version of the tiny angel and devil perched at either ear" (McIntosh 113-114). However, a sexual application of psychomachia is found here: the poet-speaker expresses his views regarding the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady and "his fears that the latter has inveigled the former into her sexual space" (Duncan-Jones 402). This fear regarding a possible sexual foray between the two lovers becomes quite apparent when the poet-speaker wonders if there might be a sexual relationship between the two, but can "not directly tell" (144.10). Here, Hell again is used as a stand-in for "cunt." The poet-speaker states that "one angel" [is] in another's Hell" (144.12). Within the context of the speaker's fear that a separate sexual relationship exists between his lovers, it becomes even clearer that Hell is linked with sex.

Throughout the sonnet, the Fair Youth is referred to as an angel, which he is again in Line Twelve immediately preceding the reference to Hell. The description of him "in another's Hell" illustrates the speaker's fear that his angel is "in" the lover he claims to be evil (144.12). References to Hell, along with evil and devils, abound throughout. Furthermore, the Dark Lady is consistently referred to using language that further connects her with Hell. Several times throughout she is referred to as a "fiend" and a "spirit," explicitly labeled "a devil" (144.4,5,9). Alternately, the Fair Youth is referred to as a "better angel" and "saint" throughout the sonnet, contrasting with the imagery and descriptions of the Dark Lady as negative and tied to evil (144.6-7). Throughout the

sonnet, the woman is continuously associated with evil and the devil, as well as perpetuating the link of women with Hell through the act of sex with direct references that equate Hell with cunts.

The pattern established within the two previously-discussed sonnets continues in Sonnet 145, where women are once again linked quite directly with Hell and all of the other connotations that it has. In this sonnet, the poet-speaker expresses his anxiety that the woman will not return his love, and he fears that her hatred will be revealed as directed towards him. However, this anxiety occurs while the poet-speaker simultaneously continues his comparison of the Dark Lady to the supernatural and abhorred. Initially, he describes her as merciful when she shifts the phrase that comes after "I hate" to "not you," where he imagined that he would become the bearer of her hatred (145.9,14). This statement, in addition to demonstrating women's relationship and association with Hell, also serves to showcase masculine anxiety, which has been tied to fears of "love's ability to emasculate the male lover" (Dawson 3). This sense of anxiety is clearly demonstrated throughout the sonnet as the poet-speaker essentially implores the Dark Lady to have mercy on him through directing her hate elsewhere. This poem is full of conflicted desires from the very outset, where both love and hatred exist in the very same breath (145.1-2). The poet-speaker clearly verbalizes his anxiety with the description of relief that he expresses when he realizes that his lover, does not, in fact, hate him, as he so deeply feared she did. However, it also demonstrates the emotional power that she possesses through the description of this all-consuming anxiety. Her approval carries both weight and power for the poet-speaker; he describes his life being "saved" by the admittance of the Dark Lady's lack of hatred towards him (145.14).

However, this sense of power is still coupled with a persistent connection to Hell demonstrating this continuous connection with darkness and negativity present throughout the *Sonnets*. Even when she simultaneously is described as having saved the speaker, she is unable to escape the constraints he places upon her with this inescapable link to Hell.

She is once again tied to Hell by the comparison of her to "a fiend / From heaven to Hell is flown away" (145.11-12). These continued binds with Hell leave an indelible imprint on the imagery surrounding the Dark Lady, rendering her forever linked with Hell, darkness, and evil in myriad ways. Here, the Dark Lady continues to be associated with both Hell and the supernatural. There persists a consistent trope in the *Sonnets* in which the Dark Lady is directly described as a fiend escaping from Hell (145.11-12). However, even though the association with Hell remains constant, this sonnet shows a different perspective that the others have not. The move from heaven to Hell demonstrates that the woman was not always seen in relation to Hell, and that at some point in their interactions together the pair was amicable. This shifts the development of the relationship between the two as a change from positive to negative, and the catalyst for this change is what permanently binds her with Hell. Her connection with Hell can be seen as a direct result of the romantic and sexual relationship between the two. When she fell out of favor with the poet-speaker is when the connections to Hell become even more readily apparent throughout the *Sonnets*.

This sonnet continues to establish the connection between female sexuality and negativity, even to the point that death is seen to be a result of love and physical intimacy. Sonnet 147 describes love as a disease and continues the pre-established

association between women and Hell through the description of the poet-speaker's mistress. One reading of this sonnet is that love is viewed as a disease, or perhaps more accurately, venereal disease, so that the speaker believes that "desire is death" (147.8). Love is directly compared here to "a fever" that still longs for what "nurseth the disease" (147.1-2). Essentially, this is the poet-speaker admitting that even though he may have experienced disease due to his sexual encounters with the Dark Lady, he still continues to want to have sex with her, even as it causes him physical suffering. This idea relates to the expressions of masochism present throughout the *Sonnets*. Consistently, the poet-speaker expresses enjoyment of an almost masochistic relationship with the Dark Lady in which he experiences physical and emotional torment, but continues his relationship with her. The references to death are quite explicit in this sonnet, and the poet-speaker directly states that sexual desire will lead to his death (147.8). "Reason, the physician to" the speaker's love is unable to help him with this disease; he remains ill and in love, or at the very least in lust, even as his logical mind incites him to cease (147.5). This disease continues to progress throughout the sonnet, until an additional reference to Hell is once again made in the *volta*. Madness is also prevalent concept in this sonnet, with the speaker noting that he is "frantic mad" and eventually referring to himself as like a "madm[a]n" (147.9-10). The admission that love induced madness further demonstrates the masochism present in the *Sonnets* by displaying the speaker's mental torment over his relationship with the Dark Lady.

However, this particular sonnet can also be read in relation to lovesickness. Lesel Dawson notes that in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries lovesickness was "classified as a species of melancholy, with mental and physiological etiologies and

cures" (2). In turn, this informs the way writing about love must be read, as a means through which "the expression of reflexive feelings is bound up in wider historical narratives about bodies and inferiority" (Dawson 1-2). Inferiority is a prevalent theme throughout the *Sonnets*, with the Dark Lady being seen as the inferior of the poet-speaker's two love objects. Additionally, an even more prominent thread of inferiority runs through all of the Dark Lady sonnets; she is perpetually considered inferior to the poet-speaker, and his negative views regarding her abound when considering both love and sex throughout the *Sonnets*. This inferiority manifests through the writing of the *Sonnets* "from the male's subject position, the courtly or Petrarchan lover's primary focus is his own dejected state of mind – the pleasure and pain of the love-melancholy or lovesickness that he has suffered" (Starks 48). Furthermore, lovesickness, specifically the cures suggested for it, demonstrate "anxieties concerning love's ability to emasculate the male lover" (Dawson 3). Desire, as expressed here, contains a masochistic component "which has as its aim intense emotion and sensation, rather than resolution and consummation, uncovers the narcissistic and solitary aspect of lovesickness" (Dawson 7). These themes of inferiority and anxiety continue throughout the *Sonnets* in the way the poet-speaker demonstrates both his feelings and actions regarding his mistress.

In Sonnet 147, not only is there again the mention of Hell, but there is once more the reference to both blackness and Hell simultaneously, and the woman is depicted as "black as Hell" and "as dark as night" (147.14). Once again, this can be read from a racialized standpoint where blackness and race are intertwined, but it can also be seen as furthering the links to Hell pervasive throughout the poems. The myriad connotations of the word Hell reappear here, including the connotations of evil in relation to Hell, as

elsewhere in the sequence. Furthermore, the pairing with darkness once again indicates a metaphorical sense of darkness often associated with Hell, evil, and the demonic, all of which are frequent associations with the Dark Lady in these sonnets. The pairing of blackness and Hell perpetuates the connection first seen in sonnet 144, when the woman's blackness is stated in conjunction with her association with Hell. Throughout this sonnet, Hell and darkness are both intertwined with the characterization and descriptions of the "Dark Lady," helping to cement her indivisible link to them both in the *Sonnets*.

These four Dark Lady sonnets share two distinct sets of characteristics: a misogynistic representation of women and a correlation between sex and Hell. Furthermore, they also exhibit the same connections and interplay between Hell, darkness, and evil throughout each of them. Since those characteristics are present in each of these four sonnets, as well as others that discuss both love and sex, it can be posited that the two sets of characteristics are connected in a much deeper way than simply through their inclusion in the *Sonnets*. Their connection describes the way women are represented in the *Sonnets*, through the language used surrounding female sexuality and genitalia. By equating Hell with cunts, the anxiety experienced by the poet-speaker becomes exceedingly clear, and it further demonstrates systemic cultural and societal anxiety regarding women's bodies. The *Sonnets* manifests this anxiety through the way the poet-speaker discusses women's bodies and sex, which essentially reveals cultural fear, which is presented in the *Sonnets* through anxiety about sexuality and monogamy in particular. Most notably, though, it becomes exceedingly apparent in the connection of female genitalia to the most abhorred location in society. Hell was arguably the worst

possible place that people could conceive of, and to conflate it with the cunt and use the word Hell as a direct term for it demonstrates the depth of this systemic anxiety regarding the power of female sex and sexuality.

Furthermore, this connection can be seen to have a causal relationship that informs the way the *Sonnets* are read, as well as perpetuating a deeper understanding of both Shakespeare's work and early modern culture. Using the word Hell to mean "cunt" informs the way the *Sonnets* are read by continuing to perpetuate this legacy of misogyny that equates female sexuality and sexual power with negativity and evil. The linkage between female sexuality and Hell is the primary manner through which women are presented in a misogynistic manner throughout the Dark Lady portion of the sequence. Women in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are represented in a deeply misogynistic manner, and are frequently seen within them as less valuable, honest, and loving, than men are portrayed to be. Sonnets directed to a male lover demonstrate deep affection and mutual respect in their representations of love. However, this sense of an almost noble aspect of love is not seen in the sonnets addressed to the Dark Lady. Throughout the sequence, women are seen as less reliable, and the accuracy of the woman's statements and declarations of love are constantly questioned and under verbal attack from the poet-speaker. Furthermore, many conventional stereotypes regarding women and their behavior are employed within the *Sonnets* to further perpetuate these types of ideas about women. They function, ultimately, as a kind of subterfuge, one in which the goal is to exert control over women through the denigration of their bodies in order to have them remain, as the early modern society put them, in a place subjugated to the men of society, both on the page and off of it. Sex is correlated with violence, death, and most notably,

Hell, which means that through this association and distinctive word choice to discuss sex and the female body, that women become indivisibly linked with all of these negative attributes and characteristics.

Conclusions

The misogyny present in the *Sonnets* primarily exists through the perpetuation of this connection between cunts and Hell, stemming back to previous literature, including both Chaucer and Boccaccio, thereby demonstrating the way that language can become the primary method through which negativity is thrust upon women. However, it is not only language in general; it is the specific, repeated, and intentional use of one word to mean another that becomes the avenue for the perpetuation of misogyny. The use of "Hell" to refer to a cunt conflates the two, with all of the inherited negative connotations and associations inherent with the idea of Hell in a Christian culture. Language has immense power, and often the true weight of specific words is often forgotten, particularly when they serve to repurpose a common trope, as occurs in this instance. In the *Sonnets,* language is used about women that helps perpetuate misogyny. This language serves to both demonize and degrade women based upon their anatomy, and the associations that are created when their cunts are tied to Hell. This tradition is extant throughout Western literature, and persists in the subjugation of women. It is well established that the *Sonnets* contain many expressions of misogyny throughout, but it is important to note that although these expressions are widely accepted, it is still worth determining precisely how the misogyny in the *Sonnets* is furthered. In my view, it is furthered through language that equates cunts with the site of damnation and death. The

impact of this language is enormously powerful, and can be seen as such throughout the history of its use in literature and religious writings leading up to Shakespeare's work.

Ultimately, the true power of this specific language lies in the associations that it brings upon women through the multifaceted connotations of the word "Hell." This association brings with it cultural connections and perspectives regarding Hell, death, and evil, which, in turn, become, through association, meanings ascribed to cunts as well. Women's bodies, when this language is used about them, become vessels for society to place its cultural expectations regarding the expression of female sexuality leading women, and through her, men as well, to Hell. These connotations aid in the creation of meaning regarding the use of such language, and through it, continue to demonstrate societal associations that have been placed upon women's bodies and their status in relation to Hell. The use of such language, which binds sexuality to Hell, evil, and death, demonstrates systemic cultural anxiety and unease regarding female sexuality and women's bodies more generally, which are represented in the *Sonnets* specifically through the desire to repress female sexual agency.

Additionally, in the *Sonnets,* sex is linked with death, which also displays the overall cultural fear regarding female sexuality, in the sense that the poet-speaker demonstrates an abiding belief that sex with the "Dark Lady" will bring him shame and eventually death. In the *Sonnets,* the poet-speaker persistently expresses his fear that his sexual relationship with the Dark Lady will condemn him to die. Death becomes associated with women; indeed, it can be seen as being brought about by women, through this connection between sex and death. This fear of death becomes an exceedingly powerful way of examining the fear related to the uncontrolled nature of female

sexuality. It shows a view in which women's bodies had to be controlled, lest they lead men to an untimely death through their unruly and unpoliced sexuality. This legacy of misogyny perpetuates traditions in which women are connected to evil, and reviled for it through no fault of their own, rendering their portrayals in literature significantly more problematic.

Throughout the *Sonnets,* women are connected, through sex, to death, which demonstrates unease and fear regarding female sexuality. The expression of female sexuality is seen as something that requires control—male control. This desire for control is related to a social impulse to regulate women both physically and financially. The fear and apprehension regarding uncontrolled female sexuality seen throughout the *Sonnets* can ultimately be seen as connected to a cultural lack of full understanding regarding the mechanics of women's bodies and their function. In addition, it can also be viewed through the lens of property and inheritance, which would follow a bloodline that could be considered uncertain if female sexuality and expression was not controlled and limited to marital relationships. However, this line of thought connecting cunts, sex, and death primarily equates the capacity to generate life with death. The female body is consistently trapped within patriarchal associations that equate uncontrolled female sexuality with a loss of control and eventual death for the men of society. Women are associated with death directly in the *Sonnets,* but also indirectly through linking cunts and Hell. The concept of Hell centers primarily around death and punishment, which is what women are persistently linked with through the association of their cunts with Hell.

Directly in the *Sonnets,* sexual desire is equated with death, and the poet-speaker believes that engaging in sexual behavior with the Dark Lady will ultimately bring about

his death; this association speaks to larger narratives regarding death, shame, and fear that become associated with the female body. He equates desire with death throughout, and expresses an abiding belief that he will die because of his physical relationship with the Dark Lady. This demonstrates both intense fear of sexuality, but also the shame that the poet-speaker associates with having a sexual relationship with the Dark Lady. This shame could be related to many different elements including the lack of marriage or other societal constraints, but it primarily demonstrates the shame placed upon the bodies of women by men throughout time. Shame can be thought of as a historical relation to the female body, where the female body was considered particularly shameful and should be covered or otherwise disregarded in the hopes of making the men of society more comfortable around women. Fear courses through the areas in the *Sonnets* where sex is equated with death, and the poet-speaker's own fear of illness and death befalling him after sex is clearly demonstrated throughout. The fear of death expressed by the poet-speaker demonstrates both his own as well as larger societal expectations surrounding sex, and the negative aspects that were thought to arise in conjunction with a sexual relationship outside of marriage.

In addition to the connection between sex and death, race is also linked with both of these through the character of the Dark Lady, and the intersection of them is used to further misogynistic views of her based upon her gender and concepts of darkness. This association is made clearer through the use of Hell, which is linked to metaphorical darkness. The imagery of Hell conjures visions of colors, and particularly the color black. The blackness in the *Sonnets* can take multiple forms, and can be both metaphorical and literal. The dual sense of meaning here can also help to describe the duality present in

women's place in literature; when docile and non-sexual they are praised, but when they express a sense of sexuality and sexual desire they are abhorred, as in the *Sonnets*. The metaphorical blackness associated with the Dark Lady is the blackness associated with Hell through the connotations of evil that it has. The connections between Hell, darkness, and evil, are intertwined throughout the *Sonnets*. Darkness and Hell are inextricably linked in modern conceptions of the imagery of Hell, as well as the larger concept and ideas that it represents. Furthermore, darkness is also seen in relation to evil frequently and is also used to help portray and represent evil both in literature and in other art forms, including visual arts. She becomes black in behavior through this association and the imposition of a patriarchal value system upon her actions.

However, the Dark Lady can additionally be seen from the perspective of racial blackness, in which case race and gender are used to further tie women to Hell through her character. This association links race and evil, and conflates the two with darkness and Hell. The racial component of the Dark Lady's characterization demonstrates an even more insidious component of the misogyny present in the *Sonnets*. Not only do patriarchal beliefs regarding sex and evil arise in the poems, but so does a view of the Dark Lady in which her blackness becomes an additional component that is used against her as a way to denigrate her, not just for having a cunt, but for having dark skin and features. This demonstrates the disparity, even in such misogynistic representations of women that exist and are further divided based upon race and specified racial perspectives and attitudes towards female sexuality. When taken together, the literal and metaphorical blackness of the Dark Lady aids in an exceedingly misogynistic portrayal of her in which the layer of her connection to Hell are deepened and made more numerous.

In the *Sonnets,* attitudes towards love and sex are markedly different depending on the gender of the beloved who is being address in each poem, and this is vital to their analysis in terms of sex, gender, love, and evil. Overall, the Sonnets addressed to the "Fair Youth" demonstrate a respectful and temperate sense of love through the addresses in the poems. Love here is seen as something that will better the poet-speaker. However, the sonnets addressed to the Dark Lady are extraordinarily different in the treatment of love and sex portrayed within them. His love of the Dark Lady renders the poet-speaker connected to death, shame, and evil through their association. The difference helps to understand the specific misogyny of the Dark Lady sonnets by demonstrating the difference in representation, and then the subsequent questioning of that difference. These sonnets demonstrate both intense fear of uncontrolled female sexuality and deep loathing for the bodies of women who choose to express their sexuality in unmarried non-monogamous relationships.

In the Dark Lady sonnets, sex is spoken about with seething vitriol and echoes of shame, but primarily it is associated with Hell through female sexuality. Shame is linked with female sexuality, and the shame of having a sexual partner who cannot be controlled brings shame upon the poet-speaker by association. The poet-speaker continuously expresses his distaste that he cannot control the Dark Lady sexually and limit her partners. In turn, this then leads to the use of specific and systemic misogynistic language which equates cunts and Hell to describe the perils of uncontrolled female sexual behavior. The drastic difference between the two 'halves' of the sonnet sequence demonstrates the vast divide, all stemming from the association of cunts with Hell. The primary difference between the two lovers is their genitals, and this makes several

elements of misogyny more apparent while demonstrating the constraints of a patriarchal power system upon female sexual power and expression. This power system results in systemic fear of female sexuality, which eventually leads to the control of women's bodies and results in the perpetuation of misogynistic standards and ideals based simply on gender and anatomy.

The *Sonnets* present a pervasive connection between cunts and Hell that becomes the primary way misogyny is represented in the *Sonnets*. This connection displays the denigration of women's bodies as well as the desire the poet-speaker expresses to control the Dark Lady, both physically and sexually. These poems discuss damnation, sex, shame, lust, evil, and rape, which all combine to further the misogyny present in the poems. Specifically, this is accomplished through the conflation of cunts and Hell, taking into account all of the alternate meanings and impressions of Hell displayed within the *Sonnets*. These alternate meanings become the fodder for which women are relegated to Hell and demonized through the numerous negative associations inherent with Hell. The language used to refer to cunts and describe female sexuality and sexual expression becomes the most prominent convention of misogyny in the *Sonnets,* as it demonstrates the subjugation of women, a pervasive connection to evil, and the distrust of female sexual power.

In the *Sonnets,* the poet-speaker describes his dual desires to both control the Dark Lady's body, and force her to acquiesce to his sexual demands. His desire to control her references the larger, cultural sense in which female bodies are to be sexually controlled by men. The discussion of rape here demonstrates systemic cultural and societal anxiety regarding the control of women's sexuality. The use of rape also shows

the fear experienced by the poet-speaker when he believes that the Dark Lady is engaging in a sexual relationship with a partner other than himself, which further demonstrates this desire to maintain control over the female body. His desire to control her is so great that he is willing to go to egregious lengths to maintain this control over her body and sexuality.

The connections to Hell continue, and become even more apparent when the poet-speaker fears that his two lovers have their own relationship. The word Hell is used to describe the Dark Lady's cunt when the poet-speaker expresses his fear that she and his male lover are engaged in a sexual relationship that is entirely separate from his own relationship with each of his two lovers. The fear he experiences as he comes to the realization that the Dark Lady cannot be controlled sexually manifests with an increased attention to equating her with evil. Throughout each expression where the Dark Lady is tied to Hell through the use of the word to mean cunt, it demonstrates pervasive fear that reflects upon the society as a whole.

The descriptions of sex by the poet-speaker throughout the *Sonnets* demonstrate the negativity surrounding the act, but they also serve to tie the Dark Lady directly to Hell through using the same word to refer to her cunt. The descriptions of sex leading one to "Hell" that occur throughout the *Sonnets* serve to further this connection of misogyny as directly linked to conflating Hell with cunts. In this sense, sex becomes the pathway through which one is condemned to an eternity in Hell.

Persistently, throughout the Dark Lady sonnets, she is associated with the supernatural, but more specifically with fiends and demons. Her association with the demonic not only strengthens the associations thrust upon her in her connection to Hell,

but also demonstrates the pervasive connection with the associated concepts of Hell including the demonic. Demons can be considered some of the most feared archetypal figures in society, and through this association female sexuality becomes even more feared. Particularly when combined with Hell, these demons reveal the most feared components of society in the sense that they are associated both with death and Hell, which to Christian cultures is seen as even worse than death itself. These associations further cement the place of women to one that is considered both immoral and demonized. This sense of demonization persists through the *Sonnets*, and has the effect of furthering the misogyny inherent in the connection of female sexuality with Hell due to the bonds it places between women and the demonic, which can be seen as an admittedly feared and loathed concept in society.

Language has power, and in Shakespeare's *Sonnets,* it becomes the means through which misogyny is furthered. The specific use of language, where a woman's anatomy is equated with Hell, through the specific and repeated use of the word to describe her body, demonstrates deeply rooted misogyny throughout the *Sonnets*. This language binds the expressions of female sexuality and women's bodies with Hell through the use of the word as a substitute for cunt. Using the two terms interchangeably creates imagery in which women are inextricably linked with evil, demons, and death. Ultimately, the shared characteristics in the *Sonnets* of the prevalence of misogyny and the equating of cunts with Hell demonstrates that the primary way this sense of misogyny is furthered is through using specific, codified, language about women's bodies as the vehicle to continue a literary tradition of misogyny that uses language to drive misogyny forward.

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