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Misogyny in the Sonnets: Connections between Hell and Female Sexuality

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In his *Sonnets*, the language that Shakespeare uses about women becomes the primary manner through which they are portrayed in a misogynistic manner. Shakespeare's language ties women's bodies both literally and metaphorically to hell and darkness throughout the sonnet sequence, while consistently demonstrating anxiety and unease in relation to the concept of lust as expressed by a woman. Sexual desire causes anxiety that is both represented and manifested by the poet-speaker in Shakespeare's sonnet sequence. However, anxiety regarding race and gender as larger social constructs are also made overt within the sonnet sequence. This anxiety exists on a personal level for the poet, but also in a greater cultural sense that reflects Early Modern perturbation regarding sex and the body, and most particularly as it relates to female sexuality and genitalia. This anxiety exists in a longstanding literary tradition and originating from the desire 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 this tradition of misogyny, which can be seen as a link to previous literature, including Boccaccio's *Decameron* in which hell is used to refer to the vagina.

Primarily, women are represented negatively in the sequence through the continuity of the historical linkage of female sexuality and desire with hell, which is pervasive throughout the sequence, and most notably so in the sonnets that address both sexual desire and love, the most significant of which are sonnets 129, 144, 145, and 147. The language used in these sonnets is their strongest tie to 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 presenting as a "denial of female agency" (516); and Smith examines sexuality in the sonnets, claiming that it is the "unruly desires expressed in the Dark Lady sonnets" that

“threatened the social order of early modern England” (219). These scholars 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.

However, rather than reading the *Sonnets* for expressions of misogyny, I undertake an analysis that demonstrates the connections through specific language used about female sexuality and the female body that perpetuates a legacy of misogyny. Throughout this analysis, I focus exclusively on the negative portrayals of women that are presented by the poet-speaker because they allow me to explore the reasons why and through what means women are represented in a misogynistic way throughout the *Sonnets*. The misogyny in the sonnets persists through the continuous connection made by the poet-speaker that equates hell with the Dark Lady’s vagina, 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 that Shakespeare inherited.

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 employed a historical connection between female sexuality and hell also used by Boccaccio to directly tie vaginas with hell through the language used to discuss the female body. This language becomes a pervasive convention that establishes the primary method for women’s representation in a misogynistic manner within the *Sonnets* as a link between female sexuality and hell.

Women’s Bodies in Early Modern Society

The Early Modern population had specific ideals regarding sex and gender that they, as a culture, adhered to in their beliefs of women’s bodies and sex. At the most basic level, early modern culture believed there to be a fundamental difference between women and men, and that they were born unequal, and, according to Beate Popkin “therefore must assume different positions in society” (Popkin 194). The disparity between the inherent status of men and women led to different treatment of them both, in several areas including social and financial matters. This idea also courses through Theresa Kemp’s book *Women in the Age of Shakespeare*, where Kemp 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, 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). These social and financial differences that were thrust upon women served to further divide society into a one based upon gender stratification.

The division of society on the basis of gender can be seen to have 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, and situate them in relation to both a gender divide, as well as 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, and sex 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, and so he did, twice (Gowing 816). However, after this she did conceive a child, and delivered a stillborn boy whom she disposed of in a ditch; after she had done this, 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). This scenario demonstrates the enormity of male power, as well as the lack of common understanding regarding conception. Furthermore, Ann Stacy’s master is here proven to be ignorant of the way women’s bodies worked, as evidenced by his assurance that she would not conceive, which is later proven blatantly false. Here, it can be seen as a fissure in the sense that male, patriarchal, knowledge has failed in terms of understanding and predicting the female body. Later, this same lack of understanding leads the poet-speaker of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* to express both fear and anxiety regarding female sexuality, and his lack of ability to control it.

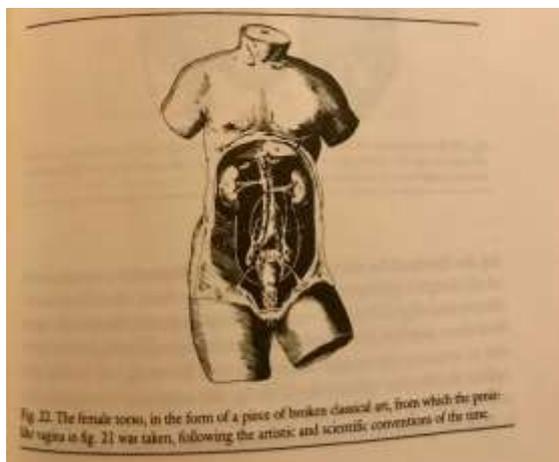
Treatment of the female body varied depending on the marital status of the woman; single women’s bodies were considered particularly common, and existed for the use of men; this was especially true so for

servants whose masters could, and did, touch them whenever they desired (Gowing 819). However, Gowing also states that married women could also 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).

The ideas that the early modern society held about sex and the body reflects 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, and they had to be kept in a subservient place because of this trepidation that the society as a whole experienced due to the general lack of true medical understanding of how women’s bodies functioned in regards to sex and reproductive matters such as childbirth. 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 part of a tradition stemming as far back as the Bible according to Popkin (Popkin 194-195). According to Thomas Laqueur, in *Making Sex*, a one-sex theory of the body was depicted in anatomical “Renaissance illustrations” (see fig. 1 & 2), and these would, of course, make male and female genitals appear more similar (Laqueur 84). This would, according to Laqueur have the effect of making the “uterus and vagina look more, not less, like a bladder and penis” (Laqueur 84). The continuity of these views about sex and the place of each gender in their society mirrors the origin, and subsequent continuity of linking female sex organs with hell.

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

(fig. 1)



(fig. 2)



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 to 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.

Boccaccio's use of "Hell" to mean "Vagina"

Linking female sexuality and hell is a literary tradition that predates Shakespeare's work and provides a method to further misogyny through the language used about women and their sexuality. The correlation, and use of the word "hell" to refer to a woman's vagina, is apparent in literature through Boccaccio's *Decameron*; it is also further perpetuated by Shakespeare in his *Sonnets*. 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 fourteen, 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, 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 this 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 continued use of the word "hell" throughout this story to mean "vagina" demonstrates the conflation of the two that

Boccaccio employs. This story aids in the establishment of a precedent for linking the vagina 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.

Use of “hell” to mean “vagina” in the *Sonnets*

Consistently in the *Sonnets* the word hell is used to mean vagina when referring to the “Dark Lady.” The word “hell” has immense power, particularly in a Christian-oriented society like Shakespeare's. The worst place one could become trapped in, hell conjured visions of souls being trapped 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 form 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 the deepest human fears—death. When the word “hell” is used as a term for female genitalia, the term “vagina” carries these associations as well. Therefore, sex becomes bound up in several negative connotations that persist throughout the sequence. These connotations include a sense of 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*.

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 connections with ignominy and hell eventually overtake 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 done, when climax has been reached, shame becomes the overriding description given 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 “vagina”. 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 vagina connecting the physical act of sex and its relation 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 vagina. 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 figuratively, women and their vaginas 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 through the use of the word to mean vagina. 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 (Schalkwyk 18). The concept of hell is linked both with darkness and evil, and so here, 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 of 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 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 vagina. 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, she 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 vaginas.

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 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 woman’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). She becomes a fiend, carrying a bodily hell with her at all times. 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. With the

move from heaven to hell, it demonstrates that the woman was not always seen in relation to hell, at some point in their interactions together that the pair was, at one point, 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 him is when the connections to hell become even more readily apparent throughout the *Sonnets*.

Sonnet 147 describes love as a disease and continues the pre-established association between women and hell through the description of his mistress. One reading of this sonnet is that love is viewed as a disease, or perhaps more accurately the cause venereal disease, so that the speaker believes that “desire is death” (147.8). Love is directly compared here to “a fever” which 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 lust, even as his logical mind incites him to cease (147.5). This disease, which may be a reference to venereal disease, continues to progress throughout the sonnet, until an additional reference to hell is once again made in the *volta*. Madness is also a 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 admittance of 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-Estes 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. The connotations of evil in relation to hell reappear here, as they do 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, 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 vaginas, 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 idea of a location in society. Hell was arguably the worst possible place that people could conceive of, and to conflate it with the vagina 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 vagina 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. The poet-speaker uses this connection as a rhetorical device in order to consistently denigrate the Dark Lady. 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.

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