

ESSAY

Unfairing the Fair: Sexuality and the Affective Epistemology of Race in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

MARIO DiGANGI

In an indispensable essay that examines “how fairness is racialized in Elizabethan culture,” Kim F. Hall argues that the “desirability and overvaluation” of whiteness in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (1609) point to “an emergent ideology of white supremacy” that underwrites European colonialism (“These Bastard Signs” 66; 67).¹ The first seventeen of the 154 poems that make up the *Sonnets* lavishly praise the fair beauty of an elite young man and urge him to have a child as a way of preserving his beauty through time.² Hall demonstrates how these early sonnets associate the friend’s fairness with the dynastic legitimacy and aesthetic refinement that would come to signify the superiority of racial whiteness. Building on Hall’s foundation, I consider in this essay certain later sonnets that compromise and threaten to revoke altogether that “mark of racial privilege” (Hall, “These Bastard Signs” 73). As the sequence develops, the speaker unfolds his intimate connection with the friend, as well as the feelings of sadness, bitterness, and anger that accompany the friend’s absence, neglect, and sexual straying. These sonnets present an image of the speaker’s object of devotion that is very different from the pristinely white youth of the sonnets analyzed by Hall. Darkening the friend’s complexion, these scattered poems—numbers 27–28, 33–35, 43, 58, 93, and 119–120—materialize him as a nocturnal shadow; stain his lovely face with black clouds, smoke, mud, wrinkles, and ink; and associate his sexual estrangement from the speaker with the torments of blackest hell. To be sure, some readers have noted that in later sonnets the friend “is not always fair” or “is found to be less than fair” (Matz 483; Kerrigan 59). The decline of the friend’s fairness, however, is almost always understood as a metaphor for sexual immorality, not

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as a symptom of the complex interanimation of sexual and racial ideologies in the *Sonnets*.³ By darkening the promiscuous aristocratic friend, I argue, these later sonnets suggest that racial fairness is not simply an ontological fact—a stable epidermal sign of aristocratic lineage—but a fluctuating sign contingent on interpersonal value judgments.⁴

The early sonnets warn the friend that time will “unfair” the beauty that now “fairly doth excel” (5.4),⁵ but in the event it is the speaker who accomplishes this chromatic transformation through the rhetoric of embodied darkness. Powerfully illustrating how chromatic language can be used to stigmatize transgressive sexual behaviors, the *Sonnets* participates in an early modern form of “race-making”: “the underlying imaginative horizon, belief system, or individual and collective mental landscape that seeks to divide humans along unequal lines” (Thompson, “Did” 8). In her analysis of race-making in the *Sonnets*, Melissa E. Sanchez foregrounds the “racial dimensions of ideals of sexual purity” (*Queer Faith* 102), particularly the ways in which a “racialized female promiscuity” is represented as the inverse of an idealized “homonormative (white) friendship” (106, 112).⁶ Although she acknowledges that the speaker’s “relationship with the youth is as compromised and faithless as that with the mistress” (100), Sanchez nonetheless argues that the *Sonnets* preserves “‘fair’ male infidelity” from the stigma of “‘black’ female promiscuity” (107).⁷ Adopting Sanchez’s fundamental opposition between white fidelity and black promiscuity, I argue instead that in response to the friend’s promiscuity, the aggrieved speaker unfairs the whiteness that marks the friend’s “racial privilege” by representing it as diluted, stained, or obscured by darkness (Hall, “‘These Bastard Signs’” 73). At the level of complexion, then, “‘fair’ male infidelity” is shown to be untenable.

At work in this process of unfairing is what I am calling an affective epistemology of race: an intersubjective mode of deriving racial knowledge and making racial judgments about other bodies from the evidence of one’s own shifting, contingent emotions.⁸ My understanding of affective epistemology

is informed by Sara Ahmed’s account of the “cultural politics of emotion,” which holds that “emotions work by working through signs and on bodies to materialise the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (191). In other words, emotions can “shape” individual bodies by attaching to them certain feelings (such as fear, disgust, or shame) that convey “collective ideal[s]” about communal, national, or racial belonging (15). Whereas Ahmed focuses on affective speech acts informing the contemporary “cases” (14) of indigenous reconciliation, terrorism, and immigration, her account of how “emotional responses to others also work as forms of judgement” (195–96) and “involve investments in social norms” (196) is applicable to earlier periods as well, particularly in its insistence on the inseparability of emotion and reason, the subjective and the social. In Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, the speaker draws on early modern “collective ideal[s]” and “social norms” linking sexual purity and racial belonging (in the community of elite English whiteness) when, racked with sorrow, anger, or anxiety about the friend’s infidelity, he poetically materializes the surfaces of the friend’s body through the rhetoric of darkness.

Exerting his own racial privilege as the adjudicator of race, the speaker deploys the language of somatic darkness to make judgments about the friend’s promiscuous degeneration from idealized whiteness and fidelity, in effect making an argument for the friend’s return to “homonormative (white) friendship” (Sanchez, *Queer Faith* 112).⁹ Thus, the *Sonnets* might be said to provide a very early literary illustration of the ideological resilience of white supremacy, a concept that has largely been explored in relation to the legal, institutional, and social adaptability of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racism in the United States (Alexander 25–73; Blake; Siegel 1113–14). Particularly relevant to my approach is the philosopher Briana Toole’s definition of white supremacy as a “resilient epistemological system” whose “underlying governing structure remains intact” even when it gives the appearance of having been revised or abandoned (77, 82). In the *Sonnets*, this “governing structure” takes the form of (the speaker’s) sustained belief in

the desirability and propriety of whiteness as a sign of elite, sexually orderly manhood, even when a paradigmatic elite male—the “fairest creature” (1.1)—has violated that ideal. Although they use different rhetorical strategies, then, the later sonnets that “unfair” the friend promote an “emergent ideology of white supremacy” as earnestly as the early sonnets that “fair” the friend by describing and praising his pure complexion (Hall, “These Bastard Signs” 67).

In arguing that the speaker’s affective projections destabilize the friend’s racial whiteness, I draw on the work of several scholars of early modern race, sexuality, and affect.¹⁰ Like Hall and Sanchez, Sujata Iyengar has shown how early modern “mythologies of skin color”—the “beliefs surrounding the significance of skin of all perceived shades”—intersect with beliefs about sexual morality (14). The speaker of the *Sonnets* deploys these mythologies of skin color to represent the friend’s complexion as a kind of epidermal map of his own feelings of yearning, grief, betrayal, and doubt. The *Sonnets* thereby illustrates Geraldine Heng’s account of the premodern “sensory character of race” (80). Describing how Jewish bodies in medieval England were stigmatized as loud, noisy, and leaky, Heng proposes that race could be felt “through channels more direct, intuitive, and primitive” than “rational thought” (81; see Kaplan). Finally, I have been influenced by Valerie Traub’s argument that the speaker’s “psychic affect” informs his evaluation and representation of male and female bodies (“Sex” 438). However, whereas Traub holds that, despite “differences of age, status, beauty, and physical location,” a “homoerotics of similitude” obtains between the poet-speaker and the friend (441), I argue that when the speaker’s belief in a moral and affective similitude between himself and the friend is corroded by sexual neglect or betrayal, the language of racial difference becomes a resource for registering and lamenting his mistreatment.¹¹ The intertwining of sexual phenomenology and racial knowledge that constitutes the affective epistemology of race, I hope to demonstrate, can promote the goal of “denaturaliz[ing] whiteness as a cultural signifier” both in early modernity, when racial “standardization was

still incomplete,” and in our own time (Royster 442, 448).

Having established the “moral force” of the friend’s “fair” and “bright” beauty in the first twenty-six poems, Shakespeare gives sustained attention to images of blackness and night for the first time in Sonnet 27 (Hall, “These Bastard Signs” 70). Whereas “night” (12.2, 15.12) and “shade” (18.11) appear sparingly in the earlier sonnets, Sonnet 27 overflows with the imagery of phenomenological darkness. The speaker recounts a sleepless night in which visions of his absent friend keep him

Looking on darkness which the blind do see.
Save that my soul’s imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.
(8–12)

At once “blind” and gifted with mystic vision, the pining speaker perceives the friend’s “shadow,” meaning image or ghost, through his soul’s “imaginary sight.”¹² Exemplifying how affective epistemology can translate emotions into racial perceptions and judgments, the speaker manifests his thwarted desire for physical intimacy as a shadowy, albeit beautiful, presence. Yet the speaker struggles to sustain this redemptive vision of a black figure that beautifies the otherwise “ghastly” night. First, although the relative pronoun clause beginning “Which like a jewel” (11) appears logically to refer to the friend’s “shadow” (10) as the agent of night’s beautification, syntactically it refers to the immediately preceding phrase, the speaker’s “sightless view” (10). Thus, even as the friend’s vaunted fairness informs the simile of the shining jewel or star, the absence of that fair body from the speaker’s “bed” (1) burdens the speaker with the imaginative labor of actively brightening or beautifying his own pain. To maintain his sightless view of the beauteous shadow, he must “work [his] mind” (4): his “drooping eyelids” (7) cannot close; he can “no quiet find” in sleep (14). Second, only after the medial caesura in line 12 do readers realize

that the speaker is personifying night as a “ghastly” (11) black woman whose “old” (12) face is covered or eclipsed by the shadow’s beauteous “new” (12) face. The representation of night as a black woman is not uncommon in early modern texts: Juliet asks “civil night,” a “sober-suited matron all in black,” to teach her how to lose her virginity (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.2.10–11).¹³ However, the speaker’s description of night’s “ghastly,” “black,” “old” face seems an uncanny displacement of racialized disgust from the figure who is really responsible for his erotic pining: the missing friend, who manifests as a shadowy black face.

That the blackness of the friend’s “shadow” has a racial significance is supported by the word’s frequent use in mid-seventeenth-century “poems of blackness” to refer to Moors who are courting or being courted by a white person.¹⁴ For instance, in one poem a “black-moor maid” assures a “fair boy” that she can serve as his own “black shade,” or shadow (275); in a companion poem, the scornful boy quips that she, like a “shadow,” should fly from him (276). In another poem, a “fair nymph” worries that her black suitor’s “shade” (both shadow and color) will eclipse her white “[m]oon,” or face (286). Trying to convince their white interlocutors of the beauty of dark skin, the Moors in these poems sometimes argue that night proves the universal appeal of blackness; by closing one’s eyes, one can create a private, figurative night. A “Negress” instructs a white man: “Shut now your eyes, and, lo, all black is found; / Or ope, a shadow-casting form you see” (274). Similar sentiments are found in other poems. Gina Filo argues that the shadows in Eldred Revett’s poems paradoxically represent blackness as simultaneously “material” and “intangible” (60). In Sonnet 27, the speaker’s oxymoronic “sightless view” accommodates a similar paradox: the friend’s shadow is both the beautiful (immaterial, vast) black night and the (material, particular) star that beautifies it. But whereas the Black speakers of these mid-seventeenth-century poems rhetorically deploy shadows or night to cajole others into sexual intimacy, for the speaker of Sonnet 27 the presence of the friend’s black shadow indexes a sexual intimacy he painfully lacks.

The racial connotations of the friend’s shadowy, nocturnal blackness are further corroborated by the companion Sonnet 28, in which the speaker, tormented by the continual absence of his friend, first flatters the day by telling him that his “bright” (9) friend provides light when “clouds do blot” (10) the sky, and then flatters the “swart-complexioned night” (11) by observing that his friend “gild’st” (12) or adorns the sky when the stars fail to shine. Sonnets 27 and 28 require readers to keep the earlier sonnets’ description of the friend as a shining white body in the “golden time” of youth (3.12) in tension with the speaker’s current nocturnal visions of a “swart-complexioned” shadow.¹⁵ Shakespeare’s juxtaposition of chromatic opposites in Sonnets 27 and 28 should be distinguished from the familiar rhetorical technique of setting a white beauty against a dark foil, as in Romeo’s praise of Juliet, who “hangs upon the cheek of night / As a rich jewel in an Ethiopie’s ear” (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.5.42–43).¹⁶ In Romeo’s perception of fairness, the bright jewel and the black ear are sharply distinguished, antithetically valued entities: the earring needs the contrast of black skin truly to shine. In Sonnets 27 and 28, however, Shakespeare depicts a figure whose blackness transvalues blackness, “gild[ing]” or overlaying it with a brilliant golden color.¹⁷ Much like the mistress of Sonnet 127, the friend in these poems possesses a “black” that is “counted fair” (127.1).¹⁸

If the speaker’s pining for his absent lover is responsible for this nuanced transvaluation of chromatic blackness, his grief at the friend’s apparent sexual infidelity in the “mini-sequence” Sonnets 33–36 more aggressively degrades the friend’s once pristine whiteness.¹⁹ Whereas the absent friend is in Sonnet 27 a bright star that gilds black night and in Sonnet 28 a bright light that illuminates a cloudy sky, in Sonnet 33 he is a darkened sun no longer “[g]ilding pale [white] streams” (4), but obscured by clouds in “disgrace” (8). The octave of Sonnet 33 narrates the ruin of a “glorious” (1) morning when the sun “permit[s] the basest clouds to ride / With ugly rack on his celestial face” (5–6). This narrative, the speaker reveals in the sestet, describes a time when the friend denied the speaker his “triumphant

splendor" (10)—his social favor, sexual attention, or loving presence—to grace the "basest clouds" (5): morally compromised inferiors. Joseph Pequigney reads the imagery of the sun's face kissing the green meadows, gilding white streams, and ridden by clouds as a reference to same-sex fellatio (106). It seems likely, in any case, that the friend has committed some kind of sexual "disgrace," a reading supported by the final line's concession that "[s]uns of the world may stain when heav'n's sun staineth" (14; see Wall 134–45).

As in Sonnet 27, Shakespeare in Sonnet 33 at first appears to be drawing on the rhetorical technique of placing a fair, "shin[ing]" (9) beauty against the foil of "ugly" (6) blackness, which in this instance serves to "mask" (12) instead of to set off its superior whiteness. The language of staining, however, suggests a stronger reading in which the friend's physical intimacy with base partners has impressed their own dark coloring onto his formerly "golden" (3) and "celestial" (6)—bright and luminous—face.²⁰ As Lara Bovilsky demonstrates in a compelling reading of the "racial darkening" of Desdemona in *Othello* (57), the "links between ideologies of race and gender" are "far more literal and materialist than has been generally believed" (51). According to Bovilsky, Desdemona's formerly pristine fairness is darkened by her "gross" disobedience to her father and by her willing submission, in Roderigo's racist account, to the "gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (59). This irreversible racial and sexual degeneration condemns Desdemona to an unjust death for infidelity. Because the sonnets, unlike *Othello*, are lyrics that convey the speaker's subjective account of his changing erotic circumstances and emotional states, the speaker can reverse his darkening of the friend—wiping clean his stains, dispersing his clouds—to reflect his own affective brightening. The happier affects that accompany Sonnet 34's reconciliation inspire the speaker to figure the friend's tears of remorse as white "pearl[s]" (13) that have the power to "ransom" (14) the sexual fault signified by the darkness of "base clouds" (3) and "rotten smoke" (4).²¹

In Sonnet 35 the speaker extends his forgiveness to the friend by elaborating on the metaphors

of fairness introduced in the early sonnets to praise the friend's beauty: "rose" (1.2), "sweet" (1.8, 4.10, 5.14), "bud" (1.11), and sun (Sonnets 7 and 18). Excusing the friend's sexual fault, the speaker concedes that "[r]oses have thorns, and silver fountains mud, / Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun, / And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud" (35.2–4). To acknowledge the constituent defects of these natural bodies is to drain them of the epideictic idealism bestowed by conventional Petrarchan poetics. Thus, whereas the early sonnets present the rose bloom as an emblem of the friend's fair complexion, here when the speaker scans down the "body" of the rose—presumably the site of a "sensual fault" (9)—he discovers its wounding "pricks" (see Sonnet 20, line 13). Likewise, if silver fountains, like pearl tears (34.13), are familiar images of precious whiteness, the speaker now finds that their pure waters have intermixed with the black earth of their foundations, just as the fiery sun is "stained" by the airy black clouds and eclipses below.²² The precise sensual fault committed by the friend is possibly suggested by the image of mud at the bottom of a silver *fountain*, a word that evokes the anal pun on *foundation* or *fundament* (Masten). Shakespeare draws here on the hierarchical valuation of the four elements in pre-modern philosophy: at the bottom is gross earth, surmounted by water, air, and ethereal fire.²³ With the imagery of fountains (water) darkened by mud (earth), and the sun (fire) darkened by clouds (air), the speaker fittingly acknowledges how the friend's sexual "fault[s]" have chromatically tempered his fairness.²⁴

Comprising another mini-sequence centered on the friend's sexual transgressions, Sonnets 40–42 are followed by a poem that, in expressing the speaker's pining for his absent friend, returns to the "bright shadow" paradoxes of Sonnet 27. Whereas in Sonnet 27 the speaker sleeplessly labors to brighten his melancholy through a dark vision of the absent friend, Sonnet 43 seems more hopeful in anticipating a time when the speaker would see the friend once more in the light of day. In the meantime, the speaker dreams of the friend, perceiving him with "sightless eyes" (12) that "darkly bright, are bright in dark

directed" (4). Suffused with the conflicting emotions of melancholy (for his pain and loneliness) and excitement (for this compensatory vision that foreshadows a daytime reunion with the friend), the concluding line of the first quatrain employs an astonishing array of contrary and mirrored rhetorical figures, including antithesis ("bright" and "dark"); oxymoron ("darkly bright"); polyptoton ("darkly" and "dark"); antistasis ("bright" [adj.] and "bright" [adv.]); diacope ("bright" [are] "bright"); antimetabole and antimetathesis ("dark[ly] bright" and "bright dark").²⁵ These wrenching contraries constitute a miniature emotional tragicomedy.²⁶ Chromatic, sensory, and affective uplift is embodied in eyes that are bright (brilliant, lustrous, luminous, white, illuminated, glorious, perceptive, hopeful, animated); chromatic, sensory, and affective decline in eyes that are dark (unlit, somber, black, unhappy, sightless, ignorant, concealed).²⁷ Directed by his divided emotions, the speaker's bright/dark eyes might perceive an image of the friend that shines brightly in the dark, that radiates a bright darkness, or that brightens the darkness. Each of these possibilities might convey a distinct affect. In his yearning for the friend, what kind of body does the speaker see and how is he affected by this vision?²⁸

The second quatrain seems to answer this question by stressing the pleasure the speaker takes from the paradoxical luminescence of the friend's shadow. Cued by the initial rhyme words "Then" and "When," the outer lines of the quatrain begin in darkness ("shadow," "unseeing eyes") and rise up into the light ("bright," "shines" [see Vendler 224]):

Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright—
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so! (5–8)

Centered by the doubling of epizeuxis ("shadow shadows"), line 5 points in two directions. One reading implies that the friend's beautiful shadow—meaning his image, ghost, or dark figure cast by the light—brightens other shadows: it illuminates, burnishes, or cheers them; it makes them

lighter or more vivid in color, more fair-complexioned, more glorious, or more animated.²⁹ Asleep in the dark, darkened with sorrow, and darkened ("unseeing") in sensory perception, the speaker can be counted among those shadows whom the friend's radiant shadow brightens or cheers. Alternatively, line 5 might attest to the luminosity of the friend's own form: you are so bright (fair-complexioned, glorious), the speaker seems to say, that even your shadow is bright. Just as "darkness," "black," "shadow," "jewel," "swart-complexioned," and "bright" in Sonnets 27 and 28 convey antithetically somatic meanings, so here "thy shade [that] shines so" (8) refers at once to the luminous white shade or color of the friend's actual face, which the speaker recalls to memory and hopes to see again, and to the luminous black shade or shadow of the absent friend, which the speaker perceives only with "unseeing eyes."

Although the second quatrain's inner lines have usually been read as offering a "happy" (6) resolution to the speaker's ardently desired reunion with the friend, the speaker finds that the lovely black shadow he has conjured in his sorrow is not so easy to dismiss. Recent editors gloss "shadow's form" (6) as the real substance from which the imaginary shadow derives: that is, the friend in the flesh.³⁰ However, it is not until the next quatrain that the speaker expresses, in language that strikingly departs from the poem's earlier obfuscations, his hope of "looking on thee in the living day" (10). Moreover, the notably plainer language of the third quatrain is signaled by an unusual diegetic—"How would, *I say*, mine eyes be blessed made / By looking on thee in the living day" (9–10; emphasis added)—as if acknowledging the need to rectify the contorted language of the previous quatrain. Before readers have arrived at the clarification that the speaker hopes to see the friend in the flesh, "thy shadow's form" is more intelligible as "your shadow's shape" or even "your shadow's image" than as "the living body from which your shadow derives."³¹ Equivalent in meaning to "your image's image" or "your shadow's shadow," this reading is corroborated by the double epizeuxis of "shadow shadows" (5) and "form form" (6). In

other words, these lines say nothing more than that the speaker can at best hope to see the friend's shadow—certainly not his body, and possibly even a second-order derivative of the shadow that originates in his dreams—during the day.

If my reading of these lines has not been previously proposed, it is perhaps because the speaker's anticipation of seeing the friend's black shadow brighten the "clear day" with his "much clearer light" appears so manifestly futile. How could the friend's shadow, illuminated from within even more brightly than from without, retain its dark "form" and coloring, and hence its identity as a shadow? The dilemma evokes Shakespeare's Antony in decline: "Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.15.13–14). Even as the speaker anticipates moving from the nocturnal dreamworld to the sharper-edged world of "living day" (10)—even as he seems able to imagine the friend's "visible shape" and "clear" (white) complexion as they would appear during a sunlit reunion—he reveals himself to be drawing on a dark phantasmatic vision constructed from the emotional detritus that his unfaithful, unavailable lover has left in his wake. Hence the possible significance of describing the eyes that would see the friend as "blessèd" (9), a word that conveys antithetical feelings of bliss and injury.³² In the aftermath of grief and disappointment, the speaker can no longer see in the friend the unmitigated physical "perfection" (15.2) of "beauty's rose" (1.2); the most he can hope for is a glimpse of the friend's "fair imperfect shade" (43.11).

One consequence of my attention to the affective epistemology of race in the *Sonnets* has been a softening of the antithetical values typically attributed to the friend and the mistress.³³ For instance, in her illuminating account of the sonnets' association of heteroerotic desire with sodomy, Traub argues that, despite the gender ambiguity produced by the poems' frequently ambiguous or missing pronouns, the sequence produces gender difference through the antithetical language applied to the friend's and mistress's bodies. Observing that insulting bawdy tropes such as "cunning love,"

"abhor," and "hell" are reserved exclusively for the mistress, Traub claims that hell "necessarily refers" to the vagina or uterus in the later sonnets ("Sex" 442); when hell appears in poems explicitly addressed to the friend, it is "associated with the young man as a metaphor for anguished waiting" but is "not a bodily trope" (450n17).³⁴ In other words, Traub believes that when applied to the mistress hell is ontological (a metaphor for a body part), and when applied to the friend hell is epistemological (a metaphor for mental doubt).³⁵ In what follows, I argue instead that references to hell in sonnets addressed to the friend carry a meaning that is just as embodied as in sonnets addressed to the mistress. The speaker depicts the friend as more or less sexually and racially pure—as more or less in line with an ideal of "homonormative (white) friendship" (Sanchez, *Queer Faith* 112)—in accordance with his shifting emotions. Like the mistress, therefore, the friend can at times be understood to possess an infernal blackness that is nonetheless "counted fair" (127.1).

Although Traub correctly notes that certain sonnets describe the emotional "hell" caused by the capricious friend's neglect (58.13), in Sonnets 119 and 120 the speaker associates hell with his own enacted sexual faults or "errors" of his "heart" (119.5): responses, in part, to the friend's earlier neglect. In Sonnet 120, the speaker worries that his sexual "transgression" (3) might have "shaken" the friend (5), causing him to have "passed a hell of time" (6). Sonnet 119 explicitly renders these transgressions in embodied terms: "What potions have I drunk of siren tears, / Distilled from limbecks foul as hell within" (1–2). Stephen Booth forthrightly reads these lines as describing male-male fellatio, "as is obvious from the shape and interrelation of the parts of alembics," glass vessels used for chemical distillations (400).³⁶ If Booth's reading is correct, then the limbeck "foul as hell within" would describe the penis of a sexual partner who is just as "foul" (meaning both wicked and black, ugly, or unfair) and "hell[ish]" as the "woman coloured ill"—and her vagina (144.8, 5, 4).³⁷ When erotic betrayal—even his own—is on the speaker's mind, hell can be an apt trope for sexually foul male as well as female bodies.

Moreover, there is plentiful evidence of an early modern conceptual link between male-male sexual transgression and the infernal. This association pervades seventeenth-century sermons that treat God's justification for and method of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. According to Genesis 19.24, "the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire," both of which substances constitute hell, "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," in Revelation 21.8 (*Holy Bible*). In *An Alarum to England* (1609), published in the same year as the *Sonnets*, the preacher Robert Gray warns that "of all the judgements which God hath inflicted upon man in this world, there is none which doth more resemble the pains of hell, then this wherewith Sodom and Gomorrhah were overthrown" (sig. B1v). Sodom, explains the reformed divine Richard Capel, is in fact "a type of hell, it is a crying sin" (359). Figuring the Sodomites as types of devils, the minister Robert Horne reasons that if Lot's "righteous soul was vexed so much, with the unclean conversation [intercourse] of the Sodomites, with whom he dwelt but for a time: how shall they be vexed in soul and body, that are thrust into hell, that ever-burning Sodom, where they must ever dwell with unclean spirits and ugly devils" (sig. C7r).

Hell and Sodom could also be useful metaphors for both sin and the physical embodiment of sin. In *Some General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1626), the preacher Robert Bolton offers the less than comforting reminder that "thou camest into this world a sink, a Sodom, a very hell of all filth and impurity, of all corruption and crookedness, even a little devil for darkness and damnation" (344–45). Using a rich rhetorical color palette, Bolton later consoles the faithful with the promise that even if their sins are "as black as hell, as foul as Sodom, as red as scarlet," they will be "fairly and forever washed away"—whitened and permanently cleansed—by "the precious blood of that immaculate lamb, Jesus Christ" (363). Francis Osborne likely had the link between Sodom and hell in mind when, in his satirical *True Tragicomedy* (ca. 1655–58), he has the Earl of Somerset complain of the notorious

homoerotic attentions of King James I: "I am so stifled with the unnatural heats of the old King—that I would exchange it for any fire on this side Hell" (qtd. in Hammond 136).

As Bolton's colorful metaphors for Christ's cleansing of sins suggest, the rhetorical resources of chromatic racial difference were readily available to early modern theologians; indeed, Robert Hornback suggests that in early modern England "proto-racist logic/belief was wholly governed by metaphysical thinking" (244). When the Christian imagery of sin and the infernal was projected onto bodies, the result might be the familiar misogyny of King Lear's comparison of female genitalia to "hell," "darkness," and the "sulphurous pit" (*King Lear* 4.5.121–22). The result might also be what Heng calls the "epidermal politics of *sin* and the epidermal politics of *the infernal*" (186). According to Heng, European Christians tended to associate black people not with the devil or hell but with sinfulness, since sin could at least be redeemed through Christian faith, thus leaving open the possibility of conversion.³⁸ Sometimes, however, European racism did embrace the epidermal politics of the infernal, as with the "influential conception of blackness as a spiritually determined sign of abject folly and degradation among devils" (Hornback 80). Shakespearean drama sometimes evokes infernal blackness in interracial contexts. Determined to execute his wife for adultery, Othello calls for "black vengeance" (*Othello* 3.3.451) not to descend from the "marble" or white "heaven" (3.3.463), but to ascend from the "hollow hell" (3.3.451; see Schiffer, "*Othello*" 337–38). In *Love's Labor's Lost*, Ferdinand rejects Biron's praise of his black mistress by sententiously observing, "O paradox! Black is the badge of hell" (4.3.250; see Schalkwyk 9).

Hell conveys similarly embodied sexual and racial meanings in *Sonnets* 58, 119, and 93, which are addressed to the friend. These poems do not explicitly cite the theological discourse of sodomy, although some readers might have been attuned to the sodomitical implications of the sonnets' homoeroticism (see Duncan-Jones 63, 69–72). Rather, Sonnet 58 links hell with slavery as a racially

charged metaphor expressing the bitterness of the speaker's bondage to the friend's will.³⁹ That black skin could signify as one of the "somatic markers of enslavement" in the seventeenth century is supported by increasing archival as well as cultural evidence (Chakravarty 187). Imtiaz Habib, Gustav Ungerer, and Emily Weissbourd have provided compelling documentary evidence that African slaves were transported to England to serve in Elizabethan households (Habib 63–101; Ungerer 70–95); moreover, an "emergent discourse" in Elizabethan England "naturalized the enslavement of black Africans" (Weissbourd 13). For over a century before the sonnets' 1609 publication, the stereotyping of Africans as inherently ignorant and irrational had fostered the conflation of blackness with slavery (Hornback 93); "racial thinking," moreover, had been steadily working "to stabilize the category of value that enslavement was based on" (Morgan 67). Blackness and slavery as heritable conditions were also conflated in early modern interpretations of the biblical curse of Ham.⁴⁰ In her recent study of early modern English servitude and slavery, Urvashi Chakravarty demonstrates how "the fictions of slavery and those of race are coarticulated and coextensive in this period" (215n20).⁴¹

Sonnet 58 is structured around the agonizing division between the speaker's emotional constraint and the friend's physical liberty: as a "slave" (1), the speaker has no right "in thought [to] control" his friend's "times of pleasure" (2), a phrase that strongly implies "occasions of your lust" (Booth 234n2).⁴² What prevents the speaker from exerting "control" over the friend in the sense of "censure," "exercise power or authority over," or "restrain from action" is a considerable self-control, meaning "to hold in check or repress (one's passions, emotions, tears, etc.)" ("Control," def. 4b).⁴³ Restraining himself from demanding an "account" (3) of the friend's activities, the speaker does, however, passionately account for the kind of "liberty" (6) the friend is taking with his body and with whom. Throughout the sonnet, the speaker—"your slave" (1) and "your vassal" (4)—is grammatically aligned by means of the possessive pronoun with the friend's bodily parts

("your hand" [3]); gestures ("your beck" [5]); occupations ("your times of pleasure" [2], "your time" [10], "your pleasure" [14]); and privileges ("your leisure" [4], "your liberty" [6], "your charter" [9]). Impossibly, it is as if the farther the friend strays, the closer the speaker is pulled into his suffocating orbit. No wonder, then, that the speaker suffers what he calls the "imprisoned absence of your liberty" (6), a formulation that syntactically muddles who is absent and who is present, who is confined and who is free (see Booth 234–35n6). For all this confusion, however, the speaker acknowledges with brutal clarity that "I am to wait, though waiting so be hell" (13), while the friend enjoys with impunity his sexual "pleasure" (2, 14), "will" (11), and "self-doing crime" (12). Ensnared in the hell of his own emotionally enslaved body, the speaker activates a familiar early modern associative chain: from (the friend's) sexual promiscuity to (the friend's) sodomitic sins to (the speaker's) suffering in the black prison of hell. Punished for the friend's sexual transgressions, the speaker is understandably indignant.

A fitting final subject for my analysis, Sonnet 93 establishes a parallel conceptual chain: from (the friend's) sexual promiscuity to a darkening of (the friend's) complexion to (the speaker's) damning self-deception. Positioning himself somewhere between a cuckold (a husband humiliated by his wife's infidelity) and a wittol (a husband who tolerates his wife's infidelity), the speaker determines to live in a state of self-deception:

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband—so love's face
May still seem love to me, though altered new:
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place. (1–4)

From this double vantage point as both cuckold and wittol, as both unknowing and knowing, the speaker experiences a kind of double vision of the friend's "looks" (4)—a doubleness underscored by the double meaning of "looks" as both the (speaker's) "act of looking" and (the friend's) "appearance."⁴⁴ On the one hand, the speaker acknowledges the alteration of "love's face," meaning "the appearance of

affection” or “loving facade” (Booth 303n2). On the other hand, he willfully refuses to register that change, a self-deception facilitated by the “sweet love” (10) that always resides in the friend’s face, no matter how full of “hatred” (5) his “false heart” might be (7). In brief, although the friend’s false heart has altered his “looks” (4), the speaker willfully continues to perceive a face that “seem[s] love” to him “still” (3), in the senses of “always” and “unmoving.” The friend’s unchangingly fair complexion sustains the comforting illusion that his heart is not in “other place” (4).

Because the speaker actively avoids the knowledge of his friend’s infidelity, he avoids the explicit language of blackness that characterizes other sonnets that lament the friend’s absence or infidelity. Nonetheless, Sonnet 93 provides several ironic indications that the false face of love the speaker is trying not to acknowledge has indeed been blackened by his projected grief. First, the speaker claims to know that if the friend were unable to dissemble, his “false heart’s history” (7) would be “writ” on his face “in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange” (8). Early modern English writers commonly associate wrinkles not only with creasing but also with darkening, as in Cleopatra’s boast that she is “black, / And wrinkled deep in time” (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.5.28–29).⁴⁵ The speaker, whose own face is “[b]eaten and chopped with tanned antiquity” (62.10), cannot deny that time will “[t]an sacred beauty” (115.7; see Cranfill 50). Second, in Sonnet 95, Sonnet 93’s near neighbor, the speaker is caught in a similar epistemological double bind between perceiving the friend as still fair and perceiving him as newly blackened by infidelity. Although the speaker’s disgust at the friend’s “lascivious . . . sport” (6) makes him attribute “spot[s]” (3) and “blot[s]” (11) to his rose-like “beauty” (3), he cannot help perceiving as “sweet and lovely” (1) the body that so appealingly “enclose[s]” (4) such vices. Unlike in earlier sonnets, in which “blot[s]” (28.10, 92.13) and “stain[s]” (33.14, 35.3) index a blackening of complexion expressive of the speaker’s pain, in Sonnet 95 the strength of the speaker’s affective investment in the friend’s beauty masks any affective projection

of darkness: “beauty’s veil” (11) turns all things “to fair that eyes can see” (12).⁴⁶

Finally, Sonnet 93’s conceit that the false heart’s history is “writ” (8) in wrinkles recalls Sonnet 63, in which the speaker anticipates how “age’s steepy night” (5) will fill the friend’s face with “lines and wrinkles” (4). That these “lines” might refer to black marks darkening a formerly fair complexion is suggested both by the phoneme “ink” within “wrinkles” (Vendler 296) and by the poet-speaker’s triumphant appropriation of time’s inscribing power: the “black lines” of printed verse, he boasts, will forever preserve the friend’s beauty (63.13). Even though inky black lines will someday mar the friend’s white face, then, that face will continue to be perceptible as “green” (14), or vitally young (hence fair), through the conveyance of black lines printed on white paper (see Grier 322–23). Sonnet 63 shares this confidence in the preservative power of ink with Sonnet 65, in which the speaker boasts that his friend will always “shine bright” thanks to the miracle of “black ink” (14).

Sonnet 93, however, is concerned not with the black lines of poetic verse but with the black face that might be concealed under the fair facade of beauty. The speaker’s double vision of the friend’s face—the unchanging fair complexion veiling the wrinkled and darkened face of altered love—ultimately produces the final split image of the friend’s body as “Eve’s apple” (13), the shining skin of which veils the blackened rot of love’s “altered” face (3). Because Adam and Eve’s disobedience is analogous to Lucifer’s, the tempting apple renders the speaker’s self-deluding desire as a kind of damnation, thereby linking Sonnet 93 with those sonnets (58, 119–120) in which the blackness of hell conveys the speaker’s despair at his sexual enslavement to and estrangement from the friend.⁴⁷ The first (human and angelic) rebels, Adam, Eve, and Lucifer are grievously punished by God for their disobedient and prideful knowledge: “Knowledge threw the angels out of heaven to hell; knowledge threw Adam and Eve out of an earthly Paradise into a wilderness of miseries,” writes the clergyman Robert Shelford (59). Moreover, as *A Book of*

Christian Exercise (1584) explains, Adam's decision to taste Eve's apple brought sin and death to "the whole race of mankind," who would be "cast down unto the unspeakable torments of hell" if not for Christ's sacrifice: Adam "was thrust out of paradise, condemned to perpetual misery, and all his posterity to eternal damnation, together with himself, if he had not repented" (337). Adam might be the original "deceivèd husband" (93.2), but the speaker of Sonnet 93 knows better: as a son of Adam, he cannot "unknow" the sorrow that tasting Eve's apple will bring, even as, desperate for his love to be reciprocated, he chooses to "unsee" and hence to "unknow" the wrinkled, blackened face of altered love veiled beneath the friend's constant fairness.

Affective epistemology stresses the role of an unreliable, changeable, but all-shaping fantasy in matters not only of sexual desire but also of racial definition. As Douglas Trevor observes, because "everything we learn in the course of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence is either offered to us or shaped by the speaker, . . . the plot or facticity of the sequence is itself a projection: a dream—fantasy and nightmare alike—of the speaker's hopes, desires, and frustrations" (234).⁴⁸ I have argued that the speaker's "hopes, desires, and frustrations" generate racial visions and projections that cut against the "facticity" of a stable, ontological race in the *Sonnets*. This proposition is corroborated by Elizabeth Harvey's argument that in premodernity "color is less an inherent property of the body than a necessary part of the sensory mechanism of vision" (315). Harvey is concerned with the physical perception of bodily color "through the interplay of object, light, and the faculty of sight" (316). I have instead addressed how the speaker's "imaginary sight" and "sightless view" (27.9–10) produce fluctuating visions of the friend colored by the speaker's volatile emotions. Ideally white but blackened by sexual neglect and promiscuity, the friend is variously a black shadow that gilds blackness, a glorious sun stained by base clouds, a silver fountain mixed with black mud, a shadow that brightens shadows, a master who enslaves the speaker in a dark hell, an unchangingly

sweet face masking the black-lined face of altered love, a spotted complexion concealed by beauty's white veil, and a lovely but corrupted apple. To put this more schematically, the friend is "right fair" (144.3) when the speaker views him as a faithful friend or patron and as the embodiment of a white aristocratic lineage (or race) that demands reproduction. Once the reproductive argument has been abandoned and the speaker has suffered the miseries of love, the friend's complexion comes to bear the signs of the speaker's affective projections, which racially "unfair" him in multiple ways. By demonstrating the "sensory character of race" (Heng 80), an affective epistemology of race can help readers understand how the friend's fairness (race as complexion) continues to matter for the impassioned speaker of the *Sonnets* once the orderly sexual reproduction of his fairness (race as lineage) no longer seems to matter.

NOTES

This essay has benefitted from the generous advice of Julie Crawford, Heather Dubrow, Will Fisher, Miles P. Grier, Jean Howard, Patricia Parker, and Nicholas F. Radel.

1. Hall is among a large group of scholars who have established that premodern racial thinking was not limited to skin color but also comprised categories of lineage, religion, status, geography, and so on. Nonetheless, the presence of distinct but overlapping discourses of "hermeneutic" (symbolic) and "physiognomic" (embodied) race in premodernity means that writers had available a rich vocabulary of color with which to signify racial difference, as Shakespeare does in the *Sonnets* (Heng 185). My reading of the *Sonnets* is indebted to Hall's account of the racial significance of the fair/dark language that pervades Petrarchan poetry ("These Bastard Signs"; *Things* 62–122). On the premodern racialization of whiteness, see Bovilsky; Caviness; Erickson, "God" and "Images"; Floyd-Wilson; Gillen; Karim-Cooper; Little, "Is" and *Shakespeare*; Poitevin; Royster; Sanchez, "Was"; Taylor.

2. Although I have learned from arguments that express skepticism about the division of the *Sonnets* into two addressees, I concur with the general consensus that Sonnets 1–126 (mainly) address a young man and Sonnets 127–54 a female lover described as "black." Despite ambiguities, "[s]ome kind of binary division appears to be at work" (de Grazia 98). Important contributions to these debates include Booth 430; Burrow 123, 132–34; de Grazia 96–98; Dubrow, "Uncertainties"; Duncan-Jones 46–49, 99–101; Kerrigan 12–14; Traub, "Sex" 442; Vendler 14–17. To

suggest the contingency of the embodied qualities attributed to them, I henceforth refer to the addressees as the “friend” and the “mistress.” Although these terms convey their own value judgments, I primarily wish to avoid the reification of racial identity conveyed by the conventional labels “Fair Youth” and “Black Woman” (or “Dark Lady”).

3. Bell, who suggests that later poems might be critiquing the friend’s blackness, is an exception.

4. On race as lineage, see Feerick.

5. All quotations from the *Sonnets* are from Booth’s edition and are cited by poem and line number.

6. On the homonormativity of early modern male friendship, see especially Shannon; Bray.

7. Sanchez’s primary argument is that in focusing on a theologically derived “erotics of the divided will,” the *Sonnets* “symptomatically confess the fragility of the racial and sexual taxonomies that underpin the modern Western ideal of sincere, monogamous love” (*Queer Faith* 107).

8. In this essay I use the terminology of both emotion and affect, without attempting an overprecise distinction between them. Generally speaking, I use *emotion* to describe “vehement passions” such as anger or grief (see Fisher); I use *affect* to stress how the speaker’s passions prompt intersubjective judgments about the friend’s complexion. I also avoid the familiar theorization of affect as precognitive in favor of an early modern understanding of affects as thoughts (see Robinson). On early modern race and affect, see Mejia LaPerle (*Race*); on early modern affect, see Bailey and DiGangi. My understanding of affective epistemology has benefitted from Iyengar’s definition of race as “both an epistemology and an ontology—that is, both a way of knowing or of organizing knowledge, and a state of being—an imaginary category with real consequences” (7).

9. Regarding the exertion of (white) racial privilege to define and assess race, Erickson writes of *Othello*: “The Duke, not Othello, is the one in the position to define Othello’s racial makeup and to judge the degree of its acceptability” (“Images” 142).

10. I use *projection* in an affective sense informed by Ahmed, not in the Freudian sense adopted by Adelman, who argues that in *Othello* Iago mobilizes racism in order to see his own psychic “darkness localized and reflected in Othello’s blackness” (127).

11. Fineman’s anachronistically heteronormative account of the *Sonnets* distinguishes between a poetics of homosexual similitude and a poetics of heterosexual difference, the latter of which Fineman credits with the invention of the “dominant model” of literary subjectivity (188). On Fineman’s heteronormative assumptions, see Goldberg 257n30; Traub, “Sex” 449n8; Burrow 135.

12. On blindness and disability in Shakespeare, see Chess; Wood.

13. All quotations of Shakespeare’s plays come from *The Norton Shakespeare*. Although Juliet appears to describe a woman dressed in black, not a black-skinned woman, the theatrical use of black cloth to represent Moorish skin suggests the possibility of imagining a black-complexioned figure. Hendrick Goltzius’s *Dawn* (ca. 1590) depicts night as a naked black

woman (Hall, “Object” 353). In Jonson’s *Masque of Beauty, Night*, explicitly black in “color,” angrily prevents the African nymphs from whitening their skin (69).

14. I cite these poems from Hall, *Things* 269–90. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the Prince of Morocco describes his black “complexion” as the “shadowed livery” of the sun (2.1.1–2). The terms *Moor* and *black-moor* (or *blackamoor*) were common, and loosely used, descriptors for a variety of racialized others in early modern Europe. *Moor* often meant a Muslim from Africa, Asia, or the Ottoman Empire, with the implication of dark skin; the term could also be used, however, broadly to identify Africans, East Indians, or (less frequently) Native Americans. *Negress* and *negro* referred more specifically to sub-Saharan Africans.

15. Taylor argues that the ideal European complexion in this period was golden, not white (44).

16. This image is discussed by Mejia LaPerle, “Race” 85; Radel 29.

17. See “Gild,” defs. 2, 3a; Taylor 44, 76.

18. See Harvey: “the interiority of sonnet 27 aligns it much more closely with the dark lady sonnets, bound together as they are through their common representation of sightlessness and blackness” (326).

19. Traub defines “mini-sequences” as “discursive, thematic, or tonal clusters” (*Thinking* 257).

20. The ability of blackness to stain whiteness is central to Grier’s theory of “inkface”: the “conceit that black complexion and ink share physical qualities such as transferability and indelibility and the cultural property of meaningfulness” (321). On staining as an index of sodomy in *1 Henry IV*, see Goldberg 156. On “celestial” as sky blue in color, compare “welkin eye” in *The Winter’s Tale* (1.2.138).

21. “Poems of blackness” frequently represent black skin as smoke.

22. In her account of racial whiteness in *Titus Andronicus*, Royster finds imagery of miscegenation in Titus’s description of Lavinia to her rapists as “the spring whom you have stained with mud, / This goodly summer with your winter mixed” (449).

23. Dubrow also discusses the “elevation” performed by these lines (*Captive Victors* 198).

24. Sonnet 69 similarly cites the friend’s “common” sexual behavior as the “soil” (dark earth or staining) of his “fair flow’r” (14, 12).

25. On these tropes, see also Fineman 237; Booth 203.

26. In the tragicomic *Winter’s Tale*, Paulina has “one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled” (5.2.67–69).

27. See “Bright,” defs. 2, 3, 4a, 5, 10, 12a, 16; “Dark,” defs. 1b, 2a, 5b, 7a, 9, 10, 11a.

28. Citing Sonnet 110—“Most true it is, that I have looked on truth / Askance and strangely” (5–6)—Trevor observes that love “disrupts the speaker’s capacity to see: that is, both to understand the world around him and to view it accurately and in a healthy manner” (229–30).

29. See "Brighten," defs. 1b, 1c, 2a, 4a; "Bright," defs. 4a, 9a, 8, 10, 16.

30. Booth 204n6; Duncan-Jones 196n6; Kerrigan 227n6; Shrank and Lyne 376n6; Vendler 224.

31. See "Form," def. 2: "image, representation, or likeness." Shadow could also mean a "delusive semblage or image" ("Shadow," def. 6a) or "actor" (6b).

32. See "Bless, V.1," def. 7a: "[t]o confer well-being upon"; "Blessed," def. 3a: "[e]njoying supreme felicity"; "Bless, V.2": "[t]o wound, hurt," from the Old French *blecier*, "to injure, wound."

33. Influenced by Sedgwick's strong reading of Sonnet 144, critics have generally upheld a stark chromatic and racial contrast between the man "right fair" (3) and the woman "coloured ill" (4).

34. Dubrow observes, however, that the "hell" of lust described in Sonnet 129 (14) could refer to the friend, whom Sonnet 35 accuses of a "sensual fault" (9; Dubrow, "Incertainties" 125–26). Bell explains the shock of Sonnet 147's concluding couplet—"For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as dark as night" (13–14)—by arguing that it refers to the friend, whom the speaker has indeed praised as fair and bright throughout the sequence (304). For my purposes, it is particularly significant that the speaker of Sonnet 147, in insisting that his friend is "as black as hell," ascribes to the friend's body a racial ontology that disavows his own agency in race-making: what he has sworn and thought (and written) about the friend's complexion. I owe this insight to Heather Dubrow.

35. Referring to the "epistemological hell" of Sonnet 144, Schiffer links the vaginal and the emotional or cognitive meanings of hell ("*Othello*" 326).

36. Because some alembics connected to each other in the form of tapered pipes penetrating bulbous "heads," they could have suggested an image of fellatio. Halpern argues that the language of alchemical distillation and sublimation indexes male homoerotic desire in the *Sonnets* (14–18).

37. See "Foul," defs. 13a: "[e]vil, sinful"; 5b: "[d]ull and dirty in colour"; 7a: "unattractive, ugly."

38. On early modern conversion and race, see Britton; Degenhardt.

39. On the racialization of slavery in the *Sonnets*, see Archer 158; Burt 182; Hunt 386; Sanchez, *Queer Faith* 84–85.

40. On Ham, see Andreas 180–81; Blackburn 64–76; Hornback 85–89; Loomba and Burton 14–15; Taylor 223–30.

41. For dissenting views, see Guasco 4–10; Allen.

42. The "humble salve" (120.12) proffered to cure an emotional "hell" (120.6) in Sonnet 120 seems anagrammatically linked to the humble slave who suffers an emotional "hell" (58.13) in Sonnet 58. "Salve" (34.7) and "salving" (35.7) also appear in Sonnets 34 and 35, in which the humiliated speaker complains of the friend's infidelity. Parker's work on the malleability of Shakespeare's sexual and racial keywords provides a model of such reading practices.

43. See also "Control," defs. 2b, 3a, 4a.

44. See "Look," defs. 1a, 2a.

45. Duncan-Jones glosses the "wrinkles" in Sonnet 93 as "odd contortions of the facial muscles," not as signs of age (296n8). Those wrinkles, I am suggesting, might nonetheless evoke the image of an aged face, particularly given how frequently the sonnets describe the effects of time on the skin (3.12, 77.5, 108.11, 106.9–10). Duncan-Jones finds an allusion to wrinkles in Sonnet 33's image of dark clouds riding the sun's face (176n5), which I discuss above. On racialized wrinkles in Shakespeare, see DiGangi; Ndiaye 136.

46. "Blot" refers to writing practices that reveal the speaker's agency in blackening the friend's image through inky black lines (see Valbuena; Wall; Grier 321). On "[b]eauty's veil," compare Bassanio's racialized critique of the "seeming truth" produced by the "beauteous scarf / Veiling an Indian [i.e., dark or ugly] beauty" (*Merchant of Venice* 3.2.98–100). It is crucial to note that my argument is not that the speaker is describing the friend as fair on the "outside" and foul on the "inside" (that is, morally), but that he is describing the friend's fairness as a kind of veil or mask that covers his darkened face: a white surface covers a black surface ("a visor for a visor" [*Romeo and Juliet* 1.4.30]). Hence what "eyes can see" (a darkened complexion) is "turn[ed] to fair" by beauty's veil.

47. Relevant to sexual enslavement is the biblical verse, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8.34; see Chakravarty 72).

48. However, Trevor's claim that later sonnets attempt "to recreate the initial fairness" of the friend "as it is compromised through his inconstant, unbecoming behavior" implies, wrongly in my view, that the friend's complexion has an ontological status distinct from the speaker's perception and representation of it (234).

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Abstract: Whereas previous criticism of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* has shown how the early sonnets associate the fairness of an elite young man with the dynastic legitimacy and aesthetic refinement that would come to signify the superiority of racial whiteness, this essay considers certain later sonnets that compromise and threaten to revoke whiteness as a mark of racial privilege. Darkening the friend’s complexion, these poems—numbers 27–28, 33–35, 43, 58, 93, and 119–20—materialize him as a nocturnal shadow; stain his lovely face with black clouds, smoke, mud, wrinkles, and ink; and associate his sexual estrangement from the speaker with the torments of blackest hell. By darkening the promiscuous aristocratic friend, these later sonnets suggest that racial fairness is not simply an ontological fact—a stable epidermal sign of aristocratic lineage—but a fluctuating sign contingent on interpersonal value judgments, or an “affective epistemology.”