

BlackLucyNegro I

The idea of her
warm brown
body long stretching
under his hands
is a righteous want—
she's become an Other
way to talk about skin,
the world-heavy mule
of her, borne line by line
down the page:
run and tell everything,
every truth you ever knew
about BlackLucyNegro.
Say she is the loose light.
Say she is the root.
Say she ate at his table.
Say she ate at all. Say she.
Say she. Say she.

In August of 2012, I got it into my head that Shakespeare had a black lover, and that this woman was the subject of sonnets 127 to 154. These sonnets have been called the “Dark Lady” sonnets for quite a while now, because of their focus (in contrast to the preceding 126, which are addressed to a “fair youth, and a “rival poet”) on a woman who consistently figures as “dark,” or “black,” in his descriptions of her.

Duncan Salkeld, a professor of English at the University of Chichester, put me on to the idea. I’d never met him; I discovered his work the way I discover much of the news in

my life: from one of Britain's most disreputable newspapers, *The Daily Mail*. The article, dubiously titled "Was Bard's Lady a Woman of Ill Repute," piqued my interest, so much so that I hunted Dr. Salkeld down online, and wrote to him.

Anatomy of Lust

i.

the red room
of my body
the pain that rattles
me with sparking

a prick of
blood on the tip
on the tip
a prick
blood pricks
the tip of
the prick on a tip
of blood
the blood
the tip of
of of

ii.

What part shame,
the anatomy of lust?
What part humiliation?
What part exposure?
What part transgression?

What part chthonic impulse?—

Bet Persephone got just a little bit wet
toward the end of summer,
and Hades
on her mind.

Nude Study

or, Shortly Before Meeting Lucy. A White Boy.

Once, in the night with maybe one lamp glowing,
My shirt was finally raised over my head,
My brassiere unclasped, tights rolled down
And underwear offed—hip, knee, ankle.
Then, what would you think of my body?
Had you ever negotiated such coarse hair,
Seen nipples dark and darker in their tensing,
Breasts swaying sideways with the weight
Of them? Did you know how much it was to ask,
To be the first glimpse of a naked black body?
Did you know the fear of being found fearful?
And later, after you'd grown accustomed,
Proved yourself equal to the task of my landscape,
You laughed and said, let's play masters and slaves.
I wore it lightly, said no, moved on,
But it made me think about my teeth on the couch,
Glowing white there in the light of the television
Against my skin, made me grateful for my perfume
Covering the smell of my body, made me wonder
When it would be time again to get a relaxer
Before my hair betrayed my best efforts
To straighten it, made me alive to all the offenses
Nature is prone to. When you said
Let's play masters and slaves, you thought
Role play. I thought black girl.

One of the most interesting things about Black Luce, as Dr. Salkeld points out in his book, is that she was never once arrested. She appears in the records as the shrewd, evasive mistress to a series of less fortunate women, and the happy, unprosecuted business partner to one Gilbert Easte, whose surname she took in her last appearance on the books. Her notoriety on the pages, and her absence behind bars, suggests that she knew people. Or that she knew people who knew people.

All of this is very well, but my impulse is to put forward a third option. The missing book contains all the records from

1579 to 1597—the years of Shakespeare’s late teens to early thirties—years during which Lucy was herself likely a vibrant grown woman with a successful business. It seems to me that if ever there was a time to be arrested, it would have been somewhere right in the midst of that stretch.



Kayla Rowser, Owen Thorne



Rhiannon Giddens



Rhiannon Giddens, Francesco Turrisi



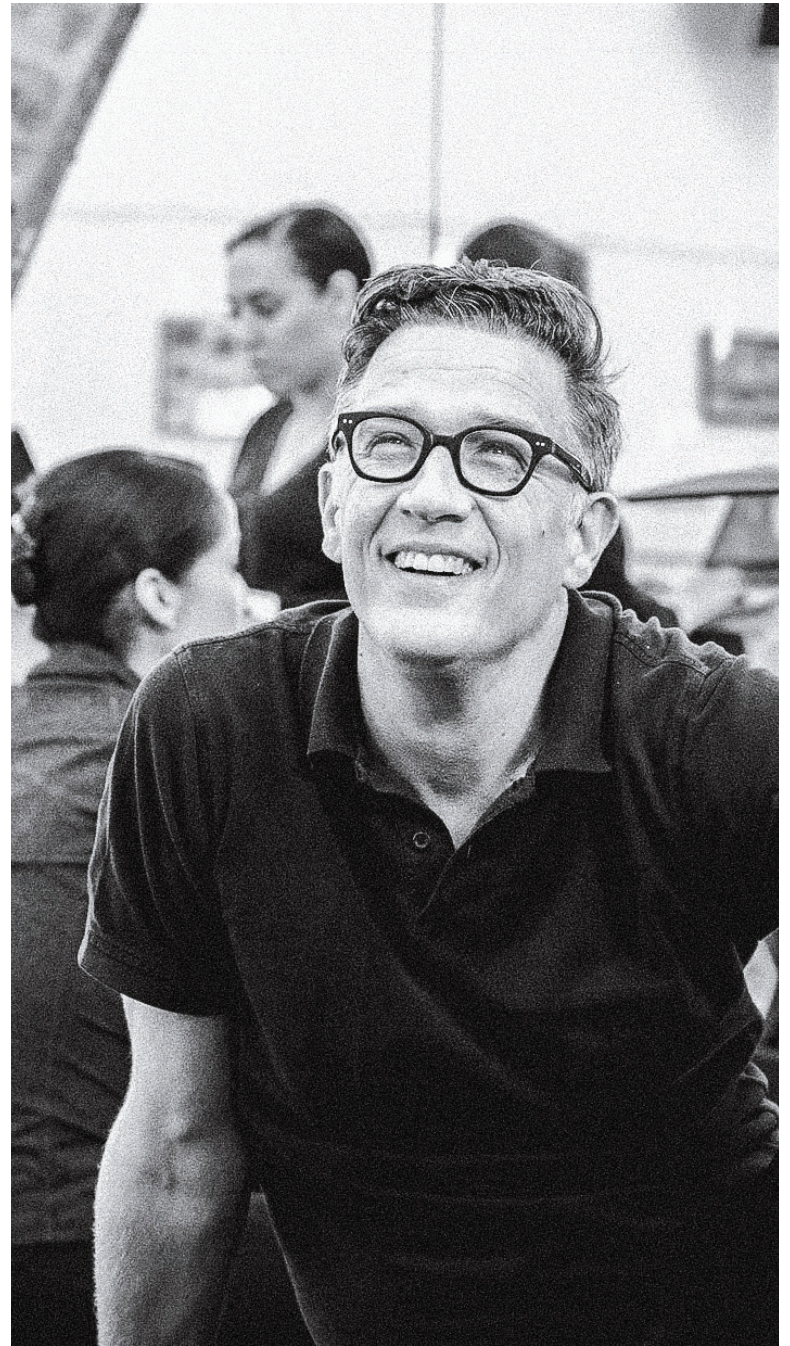
Kayla Rowser, Paul Vasterling, Mollie Sansone, Brett Sjoblom, Owen Thorne



Kayla Rowser, Rhiannon Giddens, Caroline Randall Williams



Rhiannon Giddens, Paul Vasterling, Caroline Randall Williams
Photo by Alexandria Kominsky



Paul Vasterling