



Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets

Neil L. Rudenstine

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An approachable and indispensable guide to Shakespeare's sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnets are the greatest single work of lyric poetry in English, as passionate and daring as any love poems we may ever encounter, and yet they are often misunderstood. *Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets* reveals an underlying structure within the 154 poems that illuminates the entire work, and provides a guide for first-time readers as well as scholars that inspires a new understanding of this complex masterpiece. The Elizabethan scholar and former president of Harvard University Neil L. Rudenstine makes a compelling case for the existence of a dramatic arc within the work through an expert interpretation of distinct groups of sonnets in relation to one another. The sonnets show us a poet in turmoil whose love for a young man who returns his affections is utterly transformative, binding him in such an irresistible way that it survives a number of infidelities. And the poet and the young man are drawn into a cycle of lust and betrayal by a "dark lady," a woman with the "power to make love groan." Rudenstine's reading unveils the relationship between major groups of poems: the expressions of love, the transgressions, the longings, the jealousies, and the reconciliations. This critical analysis is accompanied by the text of all of Shakespeare's sonnets. Accessible and thought-provoking, *Ideas of Order* is an invaluable companion to this cornerstone of literature.



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