



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

*Neil L. Rudenstine*

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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. Elizabethan scholar and former Harvard University president 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 relationship 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 in to 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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