

The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets

By Helen Vendler

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Helen Vendler, widely regarded as our most accomplished interpreter of poetry, here serves as an incomparable guide to some of the best-loved poems in the English language.

In detailed commentaries on Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, Vendler reveals previously unperceived imaginative and stylistic features of the poems, pointing out not only new levels of import in particular lines, but also the ways in which the four parts of each sonnet work together to enact emotion and create dynamic effect. The commentaries--presented alongside the original and modernized texts--offer fresh perspectives on the individual poems, and, taken together, provide a full picture of Shakespeare's techniques as a working poet. With the help of Vendler's acute eye, we gain an appreciation of "Shakespeare's elated variety of invention, his ironic capacity, his astonishing refinement of technique, and, above all, the reach of his skeptical imaginative intent."

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The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets By Helen Vendler Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #165780 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 1999-11-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x 1.29" w x 6.54" l, 2.40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 696 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Helen Vendler's *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* is an incredible work of analysis, criticism--and obsession. In giving these complex poems a close reading, Vendler attempts to enter the mind and esthetics of her subject, resulting in an amazing and comprehensive commentary on the sonnets. But this is not a book for Shakespeare neophytes. Vendler assumes a degree of familiarity with Shakespeare's sonnets, and she writes in the language of literary criticism: "...the couplet--placed not as resolution but as coda--can then stand in any number of relations ... to the preceding argument."). However, for those readers who have a basic knowledge of Renaissance poetics, and Shakespeare's sonnets in particular, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* is a gold mine of fascinating interpretation. What's more, though Vendler draws on the work of many commentators who went before her, in the end it is Shakespeare's own meaning, and not the interpretation of modern critics, that she reads for. A nice bonus is the CD inside the back cover of the book, which contains the author's reading of 65 sonnets.

From Library Journal
A respected literary critic and Harvard academic, Vendler has created an exhaustive and wonderful work on Shakespeare's sonnets. Most of the many studies of the sonnets focus on the dozen or so most famous ones. Works that do study the complete group usually offer detailed, scholarly annotations, such as G. Blakemore Evans's highly recommended The Sonnets (Cambridge Univ., 1996). Vendler examines the lyrics as works of poetry, presenting all 154 sonnets, first in the 1609 Quarto version and then in Vendler's modernized text. Close readings relate the meaning of the language and the structure of individual sonnets and link them to other sonnets by theme or unit. The work is accompanied by a CD of Vendler reading 65 of the poems. A lengthy, useful introduction; a bibliography; an index of first lines; and two appendixes (of keywords and defective key words) complete the work. This study will become a standard work and is essential for all academic libraries.?Neal Wyatt, formerly with Mary Washington Coll. Lib., Richmond, Va.
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From Kirkus Reviews
Close readings that train a brilliant spotlight on Shakespeare's poetic performance, without however quite doing justice to the full dimensions of his achievement. A celebrated and prolific critic, reviewer, and lecturer on poetry, Vendler (The Given and the Made, 1995) offers an illuminating companion for Bardolators of all levels and stripes. Adamant that hers is a work of ``commentary,'' Vendler analyzes each sonnet in turn (they appear in both original and modernized formats), explicating in an accessible manner the structures that organize them, without dwelling on the significance of her interpretations. While Vendler attends dutifully to imagery, and occasionally (too seldom, in fact) to rhythm and meter, she makes Shakespeare's language her central object. She illuminates the sources--practical, philosphical, Anglo-Saxon, and classical--for his multifaceted vocabulary; underlines his love for anagrams, puns, and echoing effects; and highlights the subtle ways in which the sonnets draw on his dramatist's knack for dialogue. Her overall purpose is to showcase the dynamic force of the sonnets as ``speech acts,'' as interventions in ongoing discussions. This approach works best where Vendler can invoke an intimate interlocutor for Shakespeare typically the Young Man or the Dark Lady, considered by critical tradition to be the sonnets' addressees. For example, her discussion of the famous sonnet 116 (which begins ``Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments'') convincingly contends that Shakespeare there responds to the Young Man whom he so admired. But Vendler seldom considers how the poet might have been seeking to project his voice into broader discussions. Nor, unfortunately, given her gifts, does she even so much as gesture toward relating her readings to the discussion of Shakespeare-in-history that has lately absorbed not only academic

commentators, but also such mainstream writers as Garry Wills. Nevertheless, an immensely enriching account of Shakespeare's complex verse: readings whose perspicuity and accuracy will form a solid basis for many more. -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Information is provisions for folks to get better life, information currently can get by anyone at everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even a problem. What people must be consider if those information which is inside the former life are difficult to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you get the unstable resource then you obtain it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen with you if you take The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets as your daily resource information.

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