

That subject would include Aristide. In *Fred Voodoo*, Wilentz recalls him vividly from the late 1980s: “His sermons were fiery, explosive, eloquent things that heaped irony, invective, and metaphor in stunning blows upon the reputations and personalities of the ruling junta and the thugs, soldiers, and gangsters who continued to wield power in the months and years after Duvalier fled. Aristide’s personal courage was also astounding....[H]e would give his regular sermon at Sunday mass even on days when he knew the regime was sending its killers out into the church. I sat in the hot, overflow-

ing church for so many of those sermons, squeezed between proper church ladies in their Sunday satins and taffetas, or between men in thin suits, their backs rigid with attention.” Wilentz got to know Aristide well, but he cooled considerably after she criticized him in print years later.

She did, however, sustain her relationship with the titular “Fred Voodoo,” an archaic term the British media coined for the Haitian “man in the street,” embracing both the wisdom and folly of his views. “Fred” in some ways embodies the nation that became “my touchstone and my cen-

tral obsession,” says Wilentz. Her status in Haiti is a rare one: she is both outsider and insider, an intimate, sympathetic observer who remains acutely aware of how the outside world views Haiti, how it distorts the country’s nature and barges into its life in self-serving ways. This includes her colleagues in the media. “The objectification of the Haitians’ victimization—that’s one aspect of the Fred Voodoo syndrome,” she writes of the earthquake’s aftermath. “How beautiful the Haitians look in their misery: they always do. You can count on them.”

## Let the Sonnets Be Unbroken

Neil Rudenstine guides readers through Shakespeare’s lyric masterpiece.

by SPENCER LENFIELD

**T**HE SUBTITLE of former Harvard president Neil L. Rudenstine’s new book, *Ideas of Order*, announces that it is “A Close Reading of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.” But it is not really a “close reading” in the usual sense—and that is the heart of its strengths. Rudenstine instead interprets the sonnets as a sequence, paying special attention to how the poet develops his increasingly pessimistic concerns about the honesty and durability of romantic love in these 154 lyric poems.

“Close reading” was the favored term of the New Critics in the 1930s to describe and denote the method of interpretation they advocated to replace the philological criticism and belletrism then dominating the study of literature. They wanted to study poetry not just as an instance of language, but as art. However, they insisted that literary study should be more like a science than like mere book-reviewing,

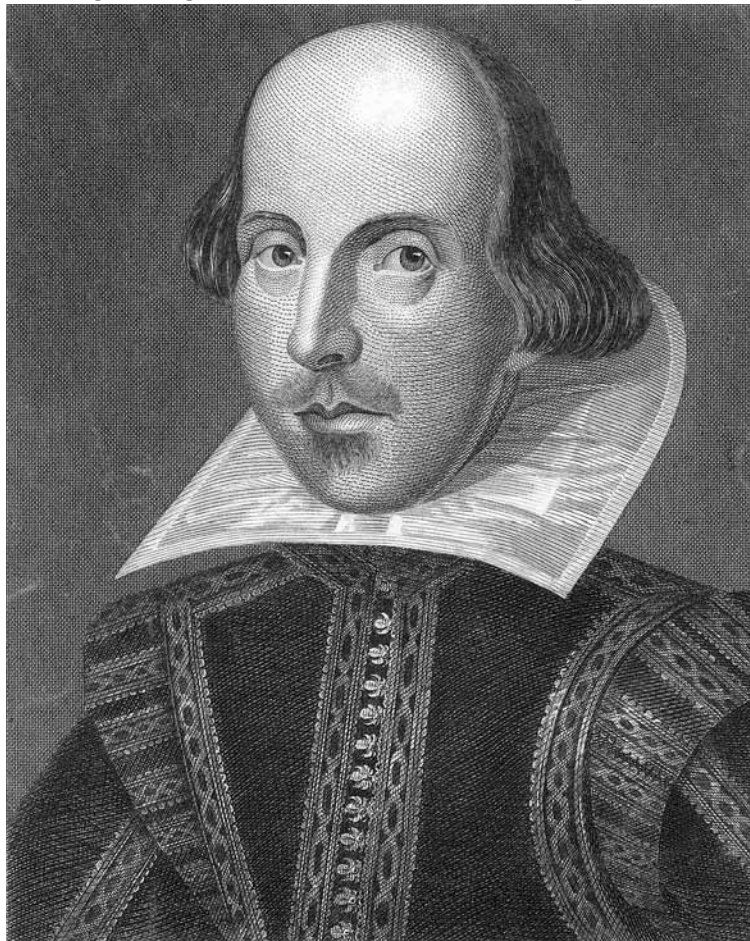
**Shakespeare, as rendered in an eighteenth-century engraving**

with a rigorous consideration of a poem as a self-enclosed object possessing its own internal coherence. At its best, close reading is the literary equivalent of microscope

work in a biology lab: scrutinizing every element of a poem, no matter how minute, and its impact on the poem’s range of meaning. The technique, which has long outlasted

the doctrine that gave it rise, has forcefully shaped the way poetry is taught in the English-speaking world in both high schools and colleges. Entire class sessions are often spent on a handful of short lyric poems. It is somewhat unusual to find a syllabus assigning an entire volume of poetry by a single poet that is taught as a continuous whole rather than as a set of discrete texts.

This tendency to focus on close reading has also affected and perhaps distorted how we read lyric cycles, including the Elizabethan sonnet sequences, Shakespeare’s in particular. One symptom is that none of the major anthologies used for survey courses reproduces the sonnet cycles of Spenser, Sidney, and Shakespeare in full. Instead, they are presented through a kind of “greatest hits” approach that further pushes students toward understanding them



GRANGER, NYC

not as continuities, but as collections. Within this approach lies a vestigial New Critical assumption that the proper unit of decipherment is not the sequence, but the sonnet, and that one can treat a given sonnet as an aesthetic whole, independent of the sequence of which it is a part.

*Ideas of Order*, a charmingly nonconfrontational book, never goes so far as to call that approach a misreading. But Rudenstine (who trained as a scholar of Renaissance poetry at Harvard, taught undergraduates throughout his presidency, and still teaches a freshman seminar on twentieth-century poetry at Princeton) obviously sees the absence of a book that teaches the reader how to consider the sonnets as a sequence—to see the joints and beams in the thematic and dramatic architecture of the work—as a mistake. Some academic work has addressed this problem (most notably Brents Stirling's 1968 book, *Shakespeare Sonnet Order*), but there is little writing that presents these ideas to the general public. *Ideas of Order* aims to fill this gap: omitting

footnotes and critical crossfire, it is clearly meant for a nonacademic audience. It also addresses the unfortunate state of affairs that Rudenstine describes at the book's outset: despite their lofty reputation, the sonnets "are scarcely read, except for the few that are regularly anthologized."

Rudenstine's book consists of an interpretive essay, followed by a complete, unannotated text of the sonnets. In the essay, he sketches a loose "road map" for the sonnets that charts the progression of the poet through a succession of emotional stages and romantic situations, and traces a kind of "plot" through the cycle. Even casual Shakespeareans know that the majority of the sonnets are addressed to an attractive young man, urging him to have children, before they turn to a "dark lady" late in the sequence. But Rudenstine points out that many discernible episodes intervene. At sonnet 21, insecurities creep in. In 33-36, the young man betrays the poet; qualified pardon ensues, followed by separation, and then another, more severe betrayal, followed

by plaintive condemnation. A horrible, long separation seems to fall between 96 and 97; after an uneasy reconciliation, the poet himself is unfaithful to the young man beginning at 109. Finally, both the young man and the poet fall under the sway of the dark lady. Rudenstine is far from dogmatic about this schema, noting that it is only one possible way to carve up the sequence, and that it does not account for the scattering of sonnets that seem to stick out at loose ends. But his modesty belies how convincing—and useful—his divisions are.

At the same time, he keeps his eye and ear trained firmly on the individual poems, though his interpretation principally takes the form of summary reflection upon *what* the poems are doing, rather than technical analysis of *how* they do it. At its best, this method produces elegantly articulated insights, as when he notes that in the

Neil L. Rudenstine, *Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$26)

## Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

**Diana Westgate seeks** the complete words of a sonnet written to someone old who remained interested in the aspirations of younger people. She thinks it includes the phrases "grim desire to possess" and "younger hearts grow dim."

**Niels Proctor writes**, "In the 1982 puzzle book *The Secret*, by Byron Preiss, the verse that is thought to apply to Boston includes these words: 'Near those/Who pass the coliseum/With metal walls.' Some people have suggested that 'coliseum with metal walls' was once used to describe the Harvard stadium. Does anyone happen to know the source of the phrase?"

**Diana Avery Amsden hopes**, in the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, that some reader can identify the wit(s) who first declared, "A fortune-hunter is a man without any dollars who is trying to find a rich woman without any sense" and "Marriage is like a game of cards. You

need only two hearts and a diamond to start, but after a while, you wish you had a club and a spade."

**"elephants coming two by two"** (July-August 1988). John Reading recognized this phrase as a garbled excerpt from the chapter heading to Rudyard Kipling's short story "My Lord the Elephant," collected in *Many Inventions* (1893). "Each as big as a launch in tow" refers to the "long-black-40-pounder-guns" dragged by the elephants.

**"All science, all religion"** (November-December 2014). Colleen Bryant used ProQuest to track down this assertion by Norman Thomas in his article "Civil Liberty: A Look Back and Ahead," published in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review* of November 28, 1954.

**"Lazy people"** (November-December 2014). Peter Baylor offered Algernon's comment "It's awfully hard work doing

nothing," from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, as a possible variant of the idea. An anonymous correspondent wrote, "This reminds me of a similar usage here in the Mid-South Appalachians: Carrying too many things at one time is referred to as a 'lazy man's load,' a phrase directed in a joking way toward someone thus attempting to avoid additional trips from point A to point B." And as we went to press, George Bason sent more information on his own query, after further research: "I somehow came across a version saying 'Lazy folks take the most pains,' which was attributed to one John Wesley Monette, who lived from 1798 to 1851 and whose papers are in the University of Michigan's William L. Clements Library Manuscripts Division—but again no luck; and finally I found that Benjamin Franklin wrote in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of February 18, 1734 or 1735, that 'tho' it be true to a Proverb, That Lazy Folks take the most Pains'—but he failed to provide any source for that 'Proverb.'"

Send inquiries and answers to "Chapter and Verse," *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to [chapterandverse@harvardmag.com](mailto:chapterandverse@harvardmag.com).

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## MONTAGE

“rival poet” sequence (76-86), “In view of the poet’s desire to avoid all forms of overt flattery and artifice, his only stylistic alternatives are to repeat, in a variety of ways, what he has already said...or else to lapse into silence.” It can, however, occasionally incline toward vagueness: of sonnet 40 he writes, with little further detail, “Repetitions and variations combine with a form of logic to suggest that the complexity of the poet’s emotions depend upon the sonnet’s linguistic intricacy in order to find the means to express themselves.”

But at only slightly more than 150 pages, his essay can hardly close-read every sonnet, or even a choice few. Rudenstine sticks to drawing out the evidence he needs for whatever larger point he is making—a strategy more likely to provide a helpful compass to a confused reader than would compulsively unstitching every single seam in the poem’s syntax. This deliberately thin, fast book seems intended to complement rather than duplicate the labors of Porter University Professor Helen Vendler’s thorough and imposing 1997 study, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, which averages three pages per sonnet and *does* aim to provide detailed commentary for each poem.

*Ideas of Order* would be a worthwhile endeavor even if it only facilitated the understanding of readers new to the sonnets. But it does more than that, though its author soft-pedals his book’s interpretive climax. By approaching these poems as a portrait of an evolving mind, Rudenstine arrives at a reading of the sequence as a work that winds through mounting emotional pain to a bleak and sober terminus.

Anyone who has read the sonnets in full, even in a cursory manner, is aware that they are rarely the expressions of unqualified and worshipful praise that the popular imagination often takes them to be. They voice stubborn insecurity; jealousy that putrefies into hatred; anxiety about love in the shadow of death; and, most troubling, a crisis of confidence in the ability of language to communicate either sincerely or enduringly. *Ideas of Order* argues that, far from being overcome, these concerns acquire validity and intensity as the work advances. By the end, “Time has become a more powerful adversary, and in the last celebratory poems to the friend, beauty ceases to play any part. Indeed, even the ‘eternizing’ capacity of poetry itself is no longer mentioned.” The poet emerges bro-

ken of his commitment to honesty and beauty, and well versed in suspicion and duplicity.

This view of the sonnets should give us pause. It implies that the most famous poems—"Shall I compare," "When in the sessions," "That time of year," "Let me not to the marriage"—have by the end of the sequence been repudiated by the poet as expressions of a less mature optimism. That makes them no less potent distillations of powerful emotions, of course. But it should make us doubt whether any one sonnet—particularly any early sonnet—

should be taken as Shakespeare's last word on love, truth, beauty, or poetry. As in so many of the plays, the fatalistic and doubt-wracked conclusion of the sonnets tears apart the repertoire of concepts that advanced us to the ending in the first place.

For those who have the time, the best manner of proceeding is probably to read the sonnets once in full; then to read Rudenstine's essay, referring to the poems as needed; and finally to read the sonnets once more straight through, with the benefit of his structural insights in mind. Read-

ers seeking more should consult Vendler's commentary or poet Don Paterson's chatty *Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets*. But *Ideas of Order* is an ideal introductory companion to the sonnets—more detailed than the Arden or Norton introductions and footnotes, but less overwhelming than the line-by-line commentaries. And it also has more than a few sharp observations and arguments for any veteran of the sonnets to consider. ♡

*Spencer Lenfield '12, a former Ledecy Undergraduate Fellow at this magazine, is a Rhodes Scholar studying classics and philosophy at Oxford.*

## ALUMNI

# Talent Behind the Wheel

*A Harvard summa aims for NASCAR.*

by STEVE POTTER

**I**N 2008, amateur racer Patrick Staropoli '12 was blasting down the straightaway at Florida's New Smyrna Speedway, strapped into a stock car. Even on the tight track, he was traveling close to 100 miles per hour. A cacophonous roar filled the cockpit and the car shook from pure velocity, yet Staropoli stared down an approaching turn that required balancing the 1.5-ton car on the knife-edge of traction.

Near the end of the corner, just as all seemed fine, the car's steering wheel popped off and fell in his lap. "I glanced up," he recalls, "and an instant later I hit the wall."

Staropoli limped away from the wreckage with minor bruises. His main concern was the mechanical damage: "It destroyed the whole front half of the car." The third-generation racer later learned that the steering wheel had been improperly installed when he and his crew worked on the car only a few minutes before the crash. Undeterred—even by the fact that a crash at the legendary Hialeah Speedway seven years earlier had nearly killed his father—Staropoli and some friends repaired



the car in time for him to run a few more races that summer before heading north for his freshman year at Harvard.

The South Florida native is the first in his family to attend college. During four years in Cambridge, he developed an interest in neurobiology and ultimately gradu-

**A grinning Staropoli celebrates after winning the NAPA Auto Parts 150 in Irwindale, California, last year.**

ated summa cum laude, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and went straight to medical school at the University of Miami. In the spring of 2013, he was contemplating a ca-