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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.

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