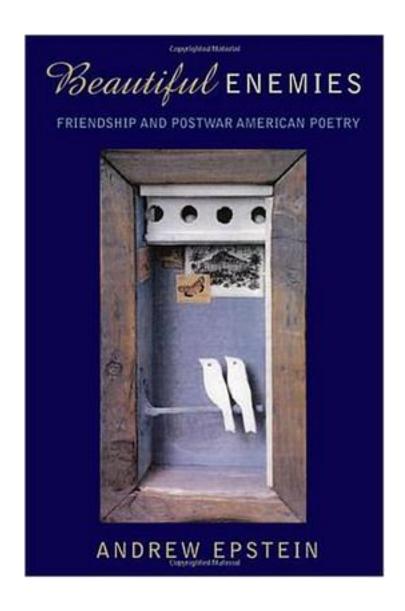
Beautiful Enemies



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Despite the deep-seated notion that the archetypal American poet sings a solitary "Song of Myself," much of the most enduring American poetry has actually been preoccupied with friendship and its pleasures, contradictions, and discontents. Beautiful Enemies examines this obsession with the problems and paradoxes of friendship, tracing its eruption in the New American Poetry that emerges after the Second World War as a potent avant-garde movement. The book argues that a clash between friendship and nonconformity is central to postwar American poetry and its development. By focusing on of some of the most important and influential postmodernist American poets--the New York School poets John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, and their close contemporary Amiri Baraka--the book offers a new interpretation of the peculiar dynamics of American avant-garde poetic communities and the role of the individual within them. At the same time, this study challenges both the reductive critiques of American individualism and the idealized, heavily biographical celebrations of literary camaraderie one finds in much critical discussion. Beautiful Enemies foregrounds a fundamental paradox: that at the heart of experimental American poetry pulses a commitment to individualism and dynamic movement that runs directly counter to an equally profound devotion to avant-garde collaboration and community. Delving into unmined archival evidence (including unpublished correspondence, poems, and drafts), the book demonstrates that this tense dialectic--between an aversion to conformity and a poetics of friendship--actually energizes postwar American poetry, drives the creation, meaning, and form of important poems, frames the interrelationships between certain key poets, and leaves contemporary writers with a complicated legacy to negotiate. Combining extensive readings of the poets with analysis of cultural, philosophical, and biographical contexts, Beautiful Enemies uncovers the collision between radical self-reliance and the siren call of the interpersonal at the core of twentieth-century American poetry

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