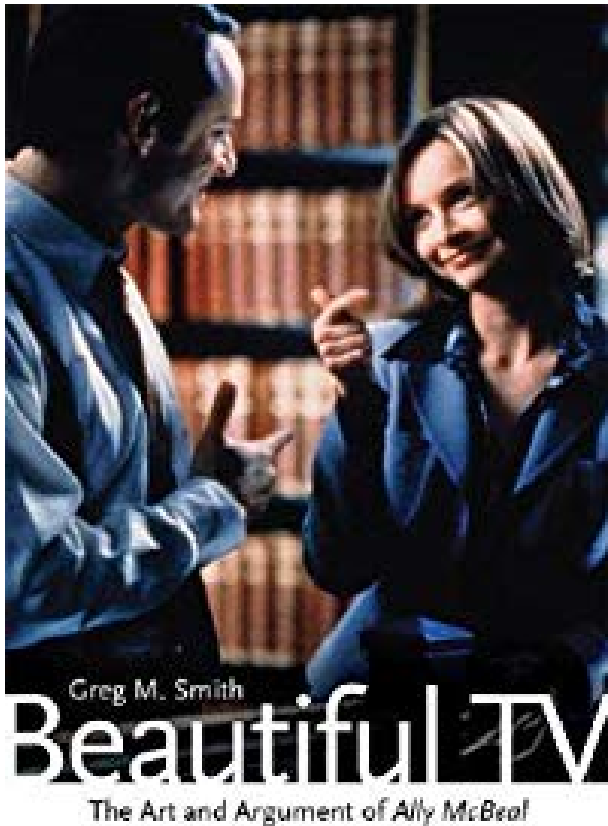


Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of Ally McBeal



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During its five-year run from 1997 to 2002, the popular TV show *Ally McBeal* engaged viewers in debates over what it means to be a woman or a man in the modern workplace; how romance factors into the therapeutic understanding of relationships; what value eccentricity has and how much oddity society should tolerate; and what utility fantasy has in the pragmatic world. In addition to these social concerns, however, *Ally McBeal* stood out for being well-constructed, narratively complex, and stylistically rich--in short, beautiful TV. Starting from the premise that much of television today is "drop-dead gorgeous" and that TV should be studied for its formal qualities as well as its social impact, Greg M. Smith analyzes *Ally McBeal* in terms of its aesthetic principles and narrative construction. He explores how *Ally's* innovative use of music, special effects, fantasy sequences, voiceovers, and flashbacks structures a distinctive fictional universe, while it also opens up new possibilities for televisual expression. Smith also discusses the complex narrative strategies that *Ally's* creator David E. Kelley used to develop a long-running storyline and shows how these serial narrative practices can help us understand a wide range of prime-time TV serials. By taking seriously the art and argument of *Ally McBeal*, *Beautiful TV* conclusively demonstrates that aesthetic and narrative analysis is an indispensable key for unlocking the richness of contemporary television.