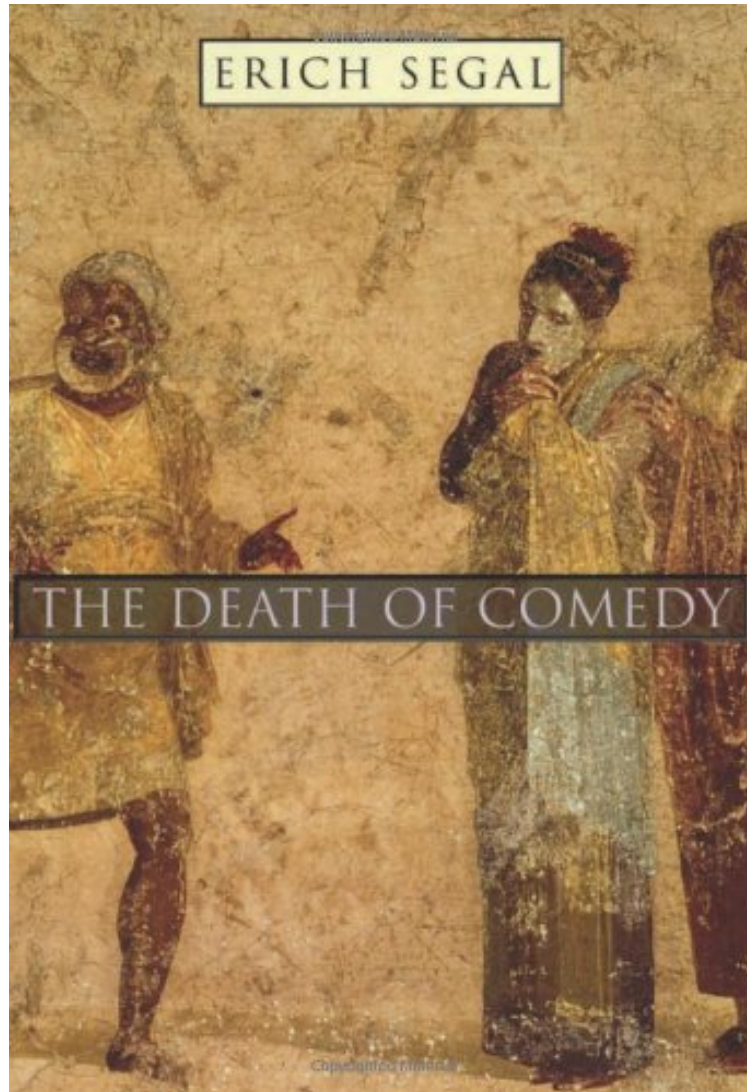


(Download pdf ebook) The Death of Comedy

## The Death of Comedy

*Erich Segal*

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#3147859 in Books Harvard University Press 2001-09-28 Original language: English PDF # 1 1.46 x 6.67 x 9.531, #File Name: 0674006437608 pages | File size: 65.Mb

**Erich Segal : The Death of Comedy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Death of Comedy:

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Question extreme reviewersBy A CustomerReaders considering themselves well-versed in a subject are often overly critical of works that sacrifice a little depth for breadth of discussion. When someone is attempting to cover such a broad topic as comedy, it is impossible to escape some generalization and sketchiness. This is the case with Segal's text. It makes concessions to space (I doubt a 10,000 page text would please many publishers) and to readers with little background (supplying needed summary and biographical

information). This background, including the authorial, increases one's understanding of the topic. Of course, analysis should move beyond this (as it does in Segal's work), but we shouldn't ignore these preliminaries completely just because we've learned of the 'biographical fallacy' in our introduction to literary criticism. If the reviewer from Oakland doesn't want this kind of text, perhaps he should check out some of Segal's scholarly articles, and perhaps he should give them more time and consideration than he did this book. Reading and judging a critical work of 600 pages within hours of receiving it might miss the bulk of its depth. A skim can pick out a lot of summary and background, can find plenty to criticize (especially if a mind is already made up after reading through the table of contents), but is likely to miss much of the worth. The same reviewer, quick to be critical, after calling the work flip and superficial, criticizes it again when it goes into greater depth concerning Roman comedy. Segal just can't win. So read Segal for your self. This book is interesting and informative, though it is unable to cover all or be without mistakes. It proves readable for a variety of backgrounds and is at least a good start on the subject. Fellow educators have recommended this text to me, and I would recommend it to others. 12 of 26 people found the following review helpful. The Death of Criticism By A Customer What a disappointment. I ordered this well-reviewed book from and just received it today. I was eager to read it, hoping for a well reasoned exegesis on the history of comedy, which is one of my favorite subjects. Instead it's a flip and superficial discussion of some famous comedies, heavy on the Roman side and hit-or-miss on comedy after that. Most essays seem to be plot summaries, heavily larded with quotations and not much else. The discussion of Moliere, for example, is scatter-shot, and unashamedly wallows in the biographical fallacy, offering cheap readings of the playwright as the protagonist of all his works (Moliere as Jourdain? as Tartuffe?). Cute chapter titles warn of the cliches that will be offered within. The translations of texts I'm familiar with, like "Se vuol ballare" from Mozart's \*The Marriage of Figaro\*, are sheer travesties of the originals. This from a classicist? Doesn't he know Italian? The varying conventions of comedy and what they imply for our humanity is such a fascinating and important subject matter. What a shame that Segal is completely unaware of the possibilities.

In a grand tour of comic theater over the centuries, Erich Segal traces the evolution of the classical form from its early origins in a misogynistic quip by the sixth-century B.C. Susarion, through countless weddings and happy endings, to the exasperated monosyllables of Samuel Beckett. With fitting wit, profound erudition lightly worn, and instructive examples from the mildly amusing to the uproarious, his book fully illustrates comedy's glorious life cycle from its first breath to its death in the Theater of the Absurd. An exploration of various landmarks in the history of a genre that flourished almost unchanged for two millennia, *The Death of Comedy* revisits the obscenities and raucous twists of Aristophanes, the neighborly pleasantries of Menander, the tomfoolery and farce of Plautus. Segal shows how the ribaldry of foiled adultery, a staple of Roman comedy, reappears in force on the stages of Restoration England. And he gives us a closer look at the schadenfreude--delight in someone else's misfortune--that marks Machiavelli's and Marlowe's works. At every turn in Segal's analysis--from Shakespeare to Moliere to Shaw--another facet of the comic art emerges, until finally, he argues, "the head conquers and the heart dies": Letting the intellect take the lead, Cocteau, Ionesco, and Beckett smother comedy as we know it. The book is a tour de force, a sweeping panorama of the art and history of comedy, as insightful as it is delightful to read.

From Library Journal Respected classics scholar and popular novelist Segal (*Love Story*, etc.) here presents the culmination of work begun in 1968 with *Roman Laughter*, a discussion of Plautus as a writer of festive comedy. Segal surveys the history of classical drama from its origin to its "death" at the hands of Samuel Beckett. Over half the book is a study of Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus, and Terence, with a lengthy aside on Euripides. Segal then examines a selection of plays that followed classical models of structure and theme through Machiavelli, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Moliere, Jonson, and Wycherley. He argues that the thread of classical comedy reached its climax with Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* and then declined as language failed and theme and structure disintegrated, ending with the silence of Beckett. This academic monograph is readable, erudite, and witty. Segal is a wonderful companion with whom to read these plays. Enthusiastically recommended. Thomas E. Luddy, Salem State Coll., MA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Segal lives a double life. He is the author of the weepy best-seller *Love Story* (1970) and similar popular novels, and he is a professor of classics who has taught at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and, most recently, Wolfson College. His new study of comedy in the Western theater displays the strengths he has built in both the arenas in which he competes. His scholarship is impressive: he manages to discuss in detail works by every major comic writer from Aristophanes and Plautus to Ionesco and Beckett. He is especially good on the Greek and Roman comic playwrights, and he spends at least half the book on those influential but, to the modern reader, lesser-known writers. Flexing his pop novelist's muscles, Segal conveys his ideas in clean, graceful, witty, and, above all, highly accessible prose. You don't need a Ph.D. from Harvard to understand him, and you don't need to fully accept his thesis that traditional comedy "died" or perhaps was killed by the modernist writers to enjoy and be enlightened by this lively book. Jack Helbig Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Explaining and analyzing comedy is a thankless task; humor either flies or it falls, and most theatergoers do not require a more experienced hand to guide them in their responses. Given these exigencies, Segal's interpretive achievements soar in a

work both accessible and informative. Offering a sweeping tour of comic theater from the Greeks to Beckett, he argues wistfully that the dour Irishman killed off the swell old stuff of life and laughter, in which plots ended right where they should in the joys of marriage and home. The lay reader...will find much to enjoy in a genial perusal of western civilization's funniest theatrical moments. Then ample quotations provide a gut-busting overview of theater at its hilarious best. If only every writer so smart were so engaging. (Kirkus s 2001-07-01)[Erich Segal's] new study of comedy in the Western theater displays the strengths he has built in both the arenas in which he competes. His scholarship is impressive: he manages to discuss in detail works by every major comic writer from Aristophanes and Plautus to Ionesco and Beckett. He is especially good on the Greek and Roman comic playwrights, and he spends at least half the book on those influential but, to the modern reader, lesser-known writers. Flexing his pop novelist's muscles, Segal conveys his ideas in clean, graceful, witty, and above all, highly accessible prose. You don't need a Ph.D. from Harvard to understand him, and you don't need to fully accept his thesis that traditional comedy 'died' or perhaps was killed by the modernist writers to enjoy and be enlightened by this lively book. (Jack Helbig Booklist 2001-08-01)This academic monograph is readable, erudite, and witty. Segal is a wonderful companion with whom to read these plays. Enthusiastically recommended. (Thomas E. Luddy Library Journal 2001-08-01)[Segal's] hearty, sprawling book...puts all his skills as a popular novelist, screenwriter and professor of classics to work on surveying the evolution of comic drama in the West. From the ancient Greek countryside to the theater of the absurd, it's a story of general decline punctuated by brilliance, and it ends with a startling obituary. Comedy is dead, Segal says, weakened as early as Aristophanes and finally murdered in modernity by the likes of George Bernard Shaw, Eugne Ionesco and Samuel Beckett...He's generous with information about theaters and stagecraft, and his original translations capture the human appetite for carnival so dynamically they practically pop off the stage. (Joy Connolly New York Times Book 2001-10-28)The Death of Comedy is not...a dry treatise on things you should read, whether you think they are funny or not. Throughout, it is punctuated with astute comparisons to contemporary situations and with wonderfully earthy translations, in particular of Aristophanes. Segal renders the Greek so frankly that, perhaps for the first time, readers will see why they should have laughed at Aristophanes when they were forced to read him in that archly fussy translation dated 1901. (Jonathan S. Perry Washington Post 2001-12-16)Erich Segal's survey of comedies from A to B (that is, from Aristophanes to Samuel Beckett) is a comic parallel to George Steiner's The Death of Tragedy, an equally virtuosic and wide-ranging study...Like Steiner, Segal writes with such enthusiastic brilliance that I am left rushing off to read plays I have never quite got round to reading and to reread dozens of others I thought I knew, to discover, in the light of what he says. I hardly knew them. (Peter Holland Jewish Chronicle 2001-12-14)The book is engagingly written and spiced with clever translations and observations; Segal enjoys the theater and has read widely...[T]he book offers detailed plot summaries that will serve the general reader as an entertaining guide to the treasures and pleasures of a great tradition. Unusual in surveying the genre of comedy on so broad a canvas, the book is recommended for readers at all levels. (D. Konstan Choice 2002-03-01)Simply as history of the genre, [The Death of Comedy's] unique importance is its centering of the story in antiquity rather than after, and its convincing demonstration that the longer history of comedy is a series of responses to a poetics of comic drama, the lines of which were determined in the ancient world...[T]he writing fizzes, the translations are uniformly wonderful and the deep foundations of learning on which the whole project is built are discreetly cupboarded away in a hundred or so pages of endnotes. It is, in more than one sense, a personal history, the record of a lifelong project of investigation into how the popular can be serious, the classicist an entertainer--and in both cases and more importantly still, vice versa. (Nick Lowe Times Literary Supplement 2002-04-19)Segal's fluent and appealing style is again evident in The Death of Comedy...Segal's style of writing is lively and entertaining. He wears his erudition lightly but the solid substratum of the wealth of references to sources ancient and modern is contained in the endnotes...[The Death of Comedy] provides a valuable and sprightly introduction to and overview of the subject. (Betine van Zyl Smit Scholia s 2003-01-01)This is a very grand survey of theatrical comedy from genesis to alleged nemesis, that is, from Aristophanes to Samuel Beckett. It is a huge, witty, learned and frequently engaging global tour of the genre, with numerous wise, or wise-ish, stopovers at most of the major comic sites between origin and suggested meltdown. (Valentine Cunningham Times Higher Education Supplement 2002-11-15)Segal tells a cracking good story, a wondrous tale of comedy's life from its birth in the night of chaos B.A. (Before Aristophanes) to its recent death...Enjoyable and thought-provoking. (Alison Sharrock Journal of Hellenic Studies)Erich Segal's book The Death of Comedy is without a doubt the most comprehensive treatise to have been published for many a year about this marvelous genre. (Yitzhak Laor Haaretz 2004-02-04)