Comedy: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Matthew Bevis
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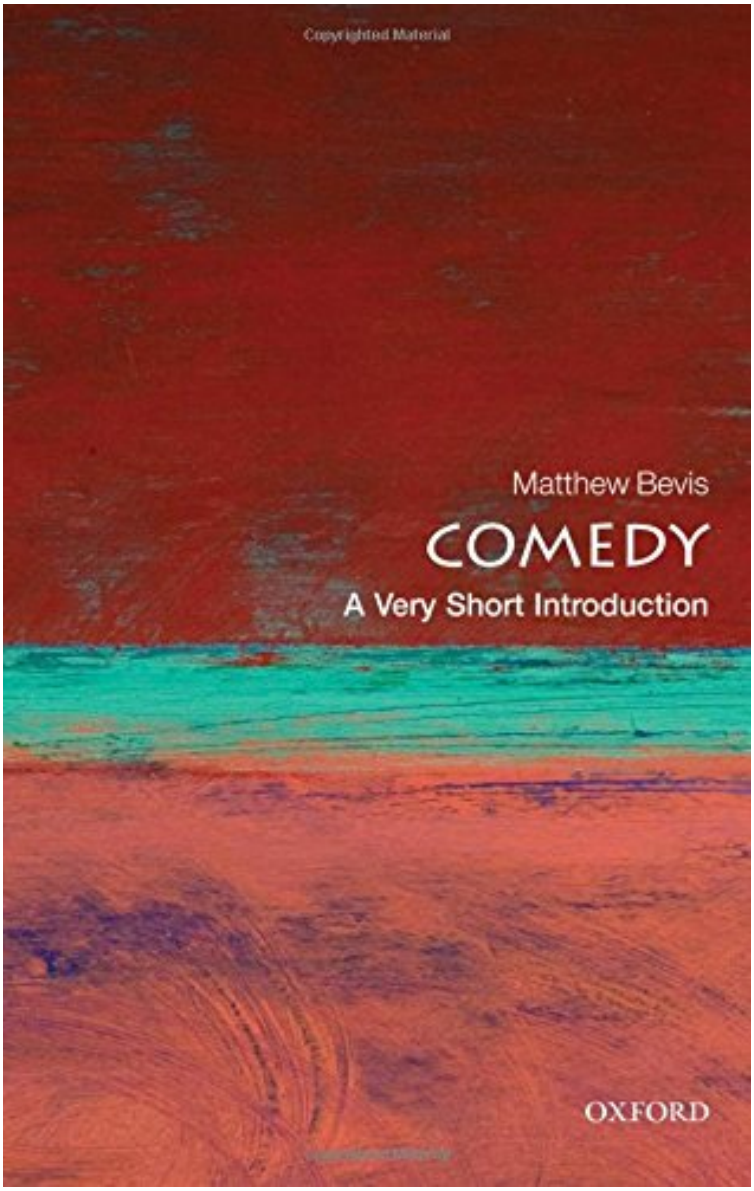

#293161 in Books imusti 2013-02-07Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 4.40 x .50 x 6.70l, .22 #File Name: 0199601712168 pagesOxford University Press, USA | File size: 51.Mb

Matthew Bevis : Comedy: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Comedy: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Quick readBy purbearThis is a great introduction to comedy and laughter studies. The author uses both important historical examples and current examples from popular culture. It is

easy to read and serves as a great reference.1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. thoughtful and filled with examples.By BenThis book was hard to understand unless a person is familiar with lots of different comic references. I could easily see the point in parts from movies I have watched but not from references I was unfamiliar with such as Greek comedy ect.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Could have been great -- grating, instead (3.33 stars)By A. J. SutterThis book has some excellent aspects and some major drawbacks. Its best features are a very broad coverage of topics relating to comedy throughout history, and almost 20 pages of references and recommendations for further reading. The author's (MB's) juxtapositions of works from different periods and genres is sometimes very stimulating.MB's style, though is too clever by way more than half: it's a constant patter of allusions, quips, gratuitous references and supposed insights that too often dazzle rather than inform. E.g., MB mentions "a confederacy of dunces" in the context of a Shakespeare character (@67): the phrase comes from Swift or, if you prefer, J.K. Toole, neither of whom are discussed there at all -- it's just a gratuitous wink. Or: "When Mark Twain noted that `reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated,' he hit upon a good epitaph for comedy, for the mode suggests that death as the final outcome is itself something of an exaggeration" (@109-110). What does this mean, exactly? If it's comedy's epitaph, that means that comedy itself could die, an eventuality that even MB never suggests; but if it were to die, there wouldn't be any exaggeration. And why bring up epitaphs at all?: Twain's epitaph is something else entirely, and rather sentimental. MB's brilliant glibness too often dissolves into non sequitur or other sorts of thought-eddy that distract the reader; page after page of these rococo touches gets old very quickly.The book's other disturbing feature is that MB's taste in comedy evidently runs to the sadistic. The mild family sitcoms of the US Baby Boom years, or the animal-loving antics of films like "Fierce Creatures" (to say nothing of the pleasant plotless meanderings of much Japanese TV comedy) don't seem to be on his radar. Maybe the tortures inflicted in Voltaire's "Candide" are an important aspect of that tale's message (@83), but it's a bit much to be told that Jonathan's Swift's cruel joke about a flayed woman is "gorgeous" (@99). Similarly, after quoting an Evelyn Waugh passage mentioning how a caged fox had been killed in a British private club by being pelted with champagne bottles, MB notes, "This is more vertiginously, comically delightful than just a satire on the bottle-throwers (satire is often a way of saying that you care, but in Waugh's fiction caring itself is satirized)." (@89). I can imagine the expression on fictional detective Inspector Lewis's face were he to read that while investigating MB, who teaches within Lewis's jurisdiction at Oxford -- and I'd agree with the policeman.The book has quite a few jokes and quotes with four-letter words and/or sexual overtones, so if that would bother you, be warned. (Not that it affects my rating: I thought the funniest joke in the book was an almost-unquotable one-liner from Sarah Silverman, who BTW is also mentioned often in Oxford's VSI on Humour.) This has many ingredients of an excellent book, but sadly after the first few pages it becomes unpleasant to read. Traditional British understatement would have been much more effective.

To consider comedy in its many incarnations is to raise diverse but related questions: what, for instance, is humour, and how may it be used (or abused)? When do we laugh, and why? What is it that writers and speakers enjoy - and risk - when they tell a joke, indulge in bathos, talk nonsense, or encourage irony?This Very Short Introduction explores comedy both as a literary genre, and as a range of non-literary phenomena, experiences and events. Matthew Bevis studies the classics of comic drama, prose fiction and poetry, alongside forms of pantomime, comic opera, silent cinema, popular music, Broadway shows, music-hall, stand-up and circus acts, rom-coms, sketch shows, sit-coms, caricatures, and cartoons.Taking in scenes from Aristophanes to The Office, from the Roman Saturnalia to Groundhog Day, Bevis also considers comic theory from Aristotle to Freud and beyond, tracing how comic achievements have resisted as well as confirmed theory across the ages.This book takes comedy seriously without taking it solemnly, and offers an engaging study of the comic spirit which lies at the heart of our shared social and cultural life.

Bevis shows there's no iron rule that a book on comedy can't be entertaining * Independent i * Insightful, witty and impressively wide-ranging throughout * Times Literary Supplement *About the AuthorMatthew Bevis is a Fellow in English at Keble College, University of Oxford. His publications include Lives of Victorian Literary Figures: Tennyson (Pickering Chatto, 2003), Some Versions of Empson, ed. (OUP, 2007), and The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce (OUP, 2007). He was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize for his research in 2007.