



The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic

By Joseph W. Meeker

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Since publication of the first edition more than twenty years ago, *The Comedy of Survival* has been credited as the founding work in the field of literary ecology, the study of relationships between the literary arts and scientific ecology. Here, Joseph Meeker expands upon his consideration of comedy and tragedy, not as dramatic motifs for humor and sadness but rather as forms of adaptive behavior in the natural world that either promote our survival (comedy) or estrange us from other life forms (tragedy).

In this third major edition of his classic work, Meeker examines the role of literature in shaping such behavior. Drawing upon centuries of western writing from Dante to Shakespeare to E. O. Wilson, he demonstrates the universality of comedy in both human and animal behavior and shows how the comic mode helps us to live in harmony with nature. Meeker then defines the tragic view of life, interweaving that behavior with exploitation of the environment. With imagination and flair, the author also introduces the idea of a play ethic, as opposed to a work ethic, and demonstrates the importance of play as a necessary and desirable component of the comic spirit.

Within a growing body of environmental literature dealing with spirituality, ethics, ecofeminism, nature writing, and alternative lifestyles, Meeker's is a one-of-a-kind book, combining elements of literary criticism, ethology, New Age thinking, and personal narrative. Full of provocative twists and turns, *The Comedy of Survival* is a book for literary critics, environmentalists, human ecologists, philosophers, and anthropologists. Many will find much to ponder in this clear explication of how we might become better stewards of the Earth.

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