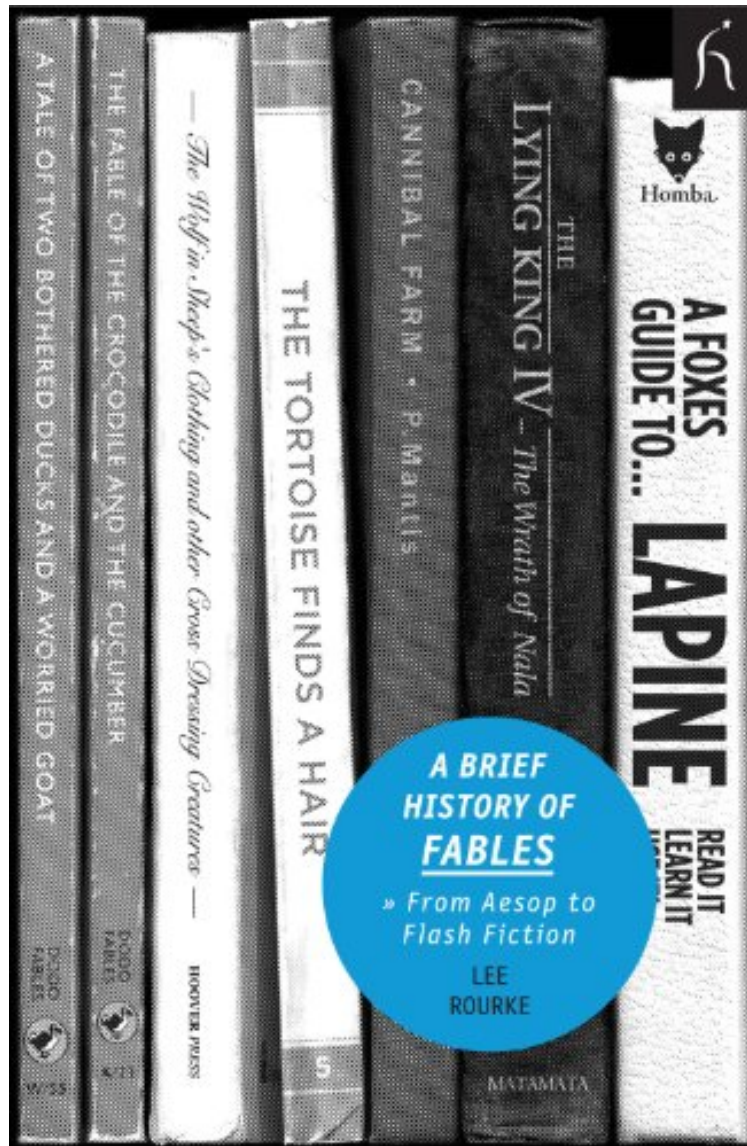


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## A Brief History of Fables: From Aesop to Flash Fiction (Brief Histories)

Lee Rourke

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Lee Rourke : A Brief History of Fables: From Aesop to Flash Fiction (Brief Histories) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Brief History of Fables: From Aesop to Flash Fiction (Brief Histories):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Tortoise the Easter Bunny ?By Velomoon"For in the beginning

of Literature is the myth, and in the end as well." Jorge Luis Borges. In the introduction to this book it states that it is "a brief history of fables and, in particular, their literary influence in popular culture throughout the ages" and that as part of the brief histories series, Lee Rourke has set out to "briefly chart the popular Aesopic fable's literary heritage" as he, the writer, sees it, taking as his starting point "Aesop's ancient oral and mimetic roots, to its myriad stylistic and symbolic influences in the burgeoning age of flash fiction and the internet". Aesop's life is like Homer's, obscured by myth and rumour, what is known would make a fantastic tale of its own. Thought to have been born around 620 BC and rising from slave to become a courtier to the King of Babylon, famous throughout the land for his great wit as a speaker and storyteller. His fables were used as common currency, passing from individual to individual country to country, becoming the moral and philosophical guidance of the people. This didn't last as Aesop offended the citizens of Delphi so much that they decided to kill him, first by framing him, they then executed him by chucking him off a cliff, although this came back on them, as they were met with a series of awful calamities, that at the time were recorded as "the blood of Aesop". After this event a statue was erected in Athens, to honour him, sculpted by one of the foremost artists of this period (Lysippus), an event recorded by Phaedrus in verse "The Athenians erected a large statue of Aesop, and placed him, though a slave, on a lasting pedestal, to show that the way to honour lies open indifferently to all." (Phaedrus, Thrace of Macedonia {trans unknown}) At the time of his death, Aesop's fables were so thoroughly embedded in both Greek and Roman society, that his influence can be seen in the works of Plato and Socrates, in fact Lee Rourke goes on to state that we can place Aesop in a contrasting relationship to the likes of Socrates, placing Aesop in the role of the "first real public anti-hero as an anti-philosopher par excellence" stating that where Socrates went on to preach the mantra "Know Thyself" it was Aesop who first preached the contrary philosophy of "No", posing the question of what can we really know, or if we have any real knowledge of our own, this he did through his use of analogy (an important tool in the history of Philosophy) for example: This tale from the "Life of Aesop" of when his master sends him to inspect the baths. "While Aesop is on his way there, he runs into a government official, who asks Aesop where he is going. Aesop says simply, "I don't know." This infuriates the official, who insists on knowing where Aesop is going. Aesop still refuses to answer the question, saying only, "I don't know." The official, completely enraged, orders that Aesop be arrested and taken to jail. At this point, Aesop explains: "You see that my answer was correct; I did not know that I was going to jail!" The government official is so startled by Aesop's display of wisdom that he lets him go." In this one analogy Aesop turns around the famous motto\* of "Know Thyself" and replaces it with the motto of "I don't know!" and thus escaping the philosophical trap of supposing to understand all, replacing it with the idea that "For all our plans and purposes, do we really know where we are going...?". This motto is just one of the strands that "A Brief History of Fables" unpicks, as it traces the route these tales have taken us on, tracking them through their various translations (whether cultural, language or religious), from the Greek and Roman world through the cultures of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, through writers such as Phaedrus, Plutarch, Marie De France, and onto Rumi \*\*, William Caxton, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce and Jorge Luis Borges right up to the present day. This brings us to the second part of the title "Flash Fiction", and this is where Lee Rourke, ties all his strands together by stating that "It seems to me that in flash fiction we have come full circle and, once again, in one of our most modern forms of literature, the oldest of influences looms large - enlivening it in a modern context". He goes on to cite the work of writers such as Tania Hershman, Shane Jones, Blake Butler and Joseph Young demonstrating how their microfictions distillate the essence of Aesop how in their linguistic mythic properties we can trace this process back to the original fables. By focusing on the works of these present day writers he shows how Aesop's fables have surfaced time and time again, from Aesop's tortoise and hare, via Plato's socio-political works and the later ribald medieval tales, to Kafka's anthropomorphism, to present-day authors work, such as Blake Butler's "Scorch Atlas", Shane Jones's "Light Boxes" or Joseph Young's "Easter Rabbit". A Brief History of Fables offers a bold take on the new face of literature. I'll leave the last word to the Author, Lee Rourke: "This book is in no way an instruction manual. Nor is it a work of critical theory. It is a celebration of a particular history of literary communication in all its glorious phases, a celebration of literature and one of its myriad interpolations. And finally, if that doesn't grab you, just think of it as a signpost to another world: a wonderful, fabulous, mindbogglingly brilliant world of infinite possibilities."

Discussing rising stars of contemporary fiction including Jonathan Lethem in addition to cherished classics including Aesop and Kafka, this groundbreaking work outlines the reemerging significance of fables in modern culture. From the earliest of classical narratives to modern day e-zines, literary works have long been turned to political, didactic, and symbolic ends. Tracing the long history of a form currently enjoying a resurgence online and in the works of some of the most talented young authors in print, author and literary critic Rourke here considers the permutations of the form. From Aesop's tortoise and hare and Plato's socio-political works to Kafka's anthropomorphism and present-day authors such as Blake Butler, Joseph Young, Shane Jones, and Jonathan Lethem, this book explores an emergence from modernism and how, in its aftermath, fable's briefest of narratives given the most expansive of significations have gained in popularity. From readers interested in learning more about well-loved fairytales to those considering the hot topic of post-postmodernism, here is a bold take on a new face of literature everyone is sure to enjoy.

About the Author Lee Rourke is the author of *The Canal* and a collection of short stories, *Everyday*. He is a literary critic for such publications as the *Guardian*, the *London of Books*, and the *Observer*, and reviews editor for *3:AM Magazine*.