



Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

Annabel Patterson

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In this imaginative and illuminating work, Annabel Patterson traces the origins and meanings of the Aesopian fable, as well as its function in Renaissance culture and subsequently. She shows how the fable worked as a medium of political analysis and communication, especially from or on behalf of the politically powerless.

Patterson begins with an analysis of the legendary *Life* of Aesop, its cultural history and philosophical implications, a topic that involves such widely separated figures as La Fontaine, Hegel, and Vygotsky. The myth's origin is recovered here in the saving myth of Aesop the Ethiopian, black, ugly, who began as a slave but become both free and influential, a source of political wisdom. She then traces the early modern history of the fable from Caxton, Lydgate, and Henryson through the eighteenth century, focusing on such figures as Spenser, Sidney, Lyly, Shakespeare, and Milton, as well as the lesser-known John Ogilby, Sir Roger L'Estrange, and Samuel Croxall.

Patterson discusses the famous fable of *The Belly and the Members*, which, because it articulated in symbolic terms some of the most intransigent problems in political philosophy and practice, was still going strong as a symbolic text in the mid-nineteenth century, where it was focused on industrial relations by Karl Marx and by George Eliot against electoral reform.

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