Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Lion Classic Aesop's Fables by Margaret McAlister", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/167. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Margaret McAlister

The Lion Classic Aesop's Fables

United Kingdom

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables Greek History





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Lion Classic Aesop's Fables
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Details	Margaret McAlister, Amanda Hall, ill., *The Lion Classic Aesop's Fables*. Oxford: Lion Hudson Plc, 2011, 27 pp.
ISBN	9780745962009
Genre	Fables
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Margaret McAlister (Author)

Margaret McAlister is a British children's author from the North East of England. Her publications tend to focus on historical and fantasy themes. Her publications include *High Crag Linn* (Lion Children's Books, 2007), *Women of the Bible* (Lion Children's Books, 2013), and the *Mistmantle Chronicles* series (Bloomsbury).

Source:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Fables attributed to Aesop were collated in antiquity by Demetrius of Phaleron, c. 300BCE (Diogenes Laertius, 5.80), and passed on through various retellings in antiquity and the medieval, early modern, and modern periods. In this collection of retellings by Margaret McAllister, it is explicitly stated in the inside cover that the stories "provide a cautionary moral to help young listeners grow clever and wise." This emphasis on morality and personal development is in-keeping with the publishing house's mission statement to publish "quality literature, worldwide, which is true to the Christian faith" (see here, accessed: July 31, 2018). The first page of the book offers space to fill out who the book is 'To' and 'From', indicating that the book was envisaged as a book that would be bought as a gift for a child.

The stories included are:

- *The Lion and the Mouse*;
- *The Hare and the Tortoise*;
- *The Frogs who asked for a King*;
- *The Milkmaid and her Pail*;
- *The Fox and the Crow*;
- *The Dog in the Manger*;
- *The Jay and the Peacocks*;
- *The Father and his Daughters*;
- *The Lioness*;
- *Belling the Cat*;
- *The Lark and her Young*;
- *The Miser and his Gold*;
- *The Fox and the Crane*;
- *The Donkey and her Shadow*;
- *The Silkworm and her Spider*;
- *The Clown and the Countryman*;
- *Androcles and the Lion*;
- *The Monkey and the Dolphin*;
- *The Swallow and the Other Birds*;
- *The North Wind and the Sun*;
- *The Fox and the Leopard*;
- *The Ant and the Grasshopper*;
- *The Stag at the Pool*;
- *The Fox and the Grapes*;
- *The Lion, The Fox, and the Beasts*;

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- *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*;
- *The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs*;
- *The Boy who Cried Wolf*;
- *Aesop and Me*;
- *Aunt Isa's Bookshelf*.

The title to each story is accompanied by a section illustration of a plant found in Greece, including olives, vines, figs, and pine. Each has at least a half-page illustration, and many have a full-page illustration and further small pictures. The stories all conclude with an explicitly stated moral in a decorative text box; this follows the medieval tradition of applying moral epilogues to the fables.

Analysis

The book's title page expresses the connection between antiquity and the contents through an illustration of Aesop, seated on an ancient-style chair dressed in a white tunic with bare feet, sitting under a vine tree, writing, in front of some white classical architecture. He is surrounded by several of the animals from the fables: cat and mouse at his side, tortoise before him, and chicken, goose, fox, wolf and lion around him. Nonetheless, as there is no introduction to the collection, child readers may miss the significance of this illustration; however, if they are able to decipher the signifiers of antiquity (e.g. tunic, architecture, writing on a scroll), they may understand the implication that the writer depicted is the writer of the stories. At the end of the collection, a section called *Aesop and Me* offers a very thoughtful discussion of how the book came about. It summarises some of the traditions about Aesop, and explains that many people have retold their own versions of the stories "ever since Aesop's time." Margaret McAllister then explains that when she came to write her versions, "I began with a good look at the collection," (although no information on the edition used is offered). She remarks on her surprise that there were so many Aesop's Fables, and that a choice had to be made about which to include. She also describes the process of discovering that many of the traditional tales known to her are Aesop's Fables. On style, the author explains her preference for telling some of the stories as funny stories. The discussion then moves on to content, helping readers to understand the morals behind the stories, acknowledging that the stories depict a harsh world, and asserting that although "Life is easier now than it was in ancient Greece," the life lessons that the stories offer "are still worth knowing." Readers are invited to consider

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if they know characters like some of those in the stories, bringing the morals right into the readers' lived experience. McAllister ends with reference to *The Lion and the Mouse*, noting that even though you the reader may be small, "*you* count, *you* matter, *you* can do great things." The stories' survival from antiquity is thereby brought to act as a testament to the value of the stories while they are also explicitly linked to the experience of coping with life in the modern world. The final section, *Aunt Isa's Bookshelf*, then extends this encouragement to think of the stories as having enduring appeal by capturing the author's own experience of encountering the stories as a child and her determination (now fulfilled) to produce a more visually appealing edition of the Fables. "Look out for wolves," it cautions, again inviting the reader (albeit humorously) to apply the lessons of the stories to their own lives.

The book's illustrations place the stories in a range of periods and places. The opening story, *The Lion and the Mouse*, includes an illustration with a small detail of ancient hunters, as indicated by their tunics, sandals, and spears. *Androcles and the Lion* is set in an explicitly ancient context, with Androcles depicted in an ancient-style tunic, and an illustration of the amphitheatre. By contrast, *The Milkmaid and her Pail* and several other stories are set in the early modern period, as indicated by reference to a 'little bonnet' and an illustration featuring non-ancient dresses and shoes. Architecture and clothing in the illustrations are the key means by which this period is evoked. None of the stories is set in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Architecture, clothing, and emphasis on deep green landscapes situate most of the stories in Northern Europe. *The Donkey and her Shadow* is the exception to this, with the illustration suggesting an early modern Near Eastern setting, as indicated by the characters' clothing. There is nothing in the text that places the story anywhere, in particular, making it unclear if this setting was the choice of the author or the illustrator. The combination of different yet not modern periods conveys a sense of the stories as traditional but essentially timeless.

Aesop Aesop’s Fables Greek History

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Gaining understanding Morality

Further Reading

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