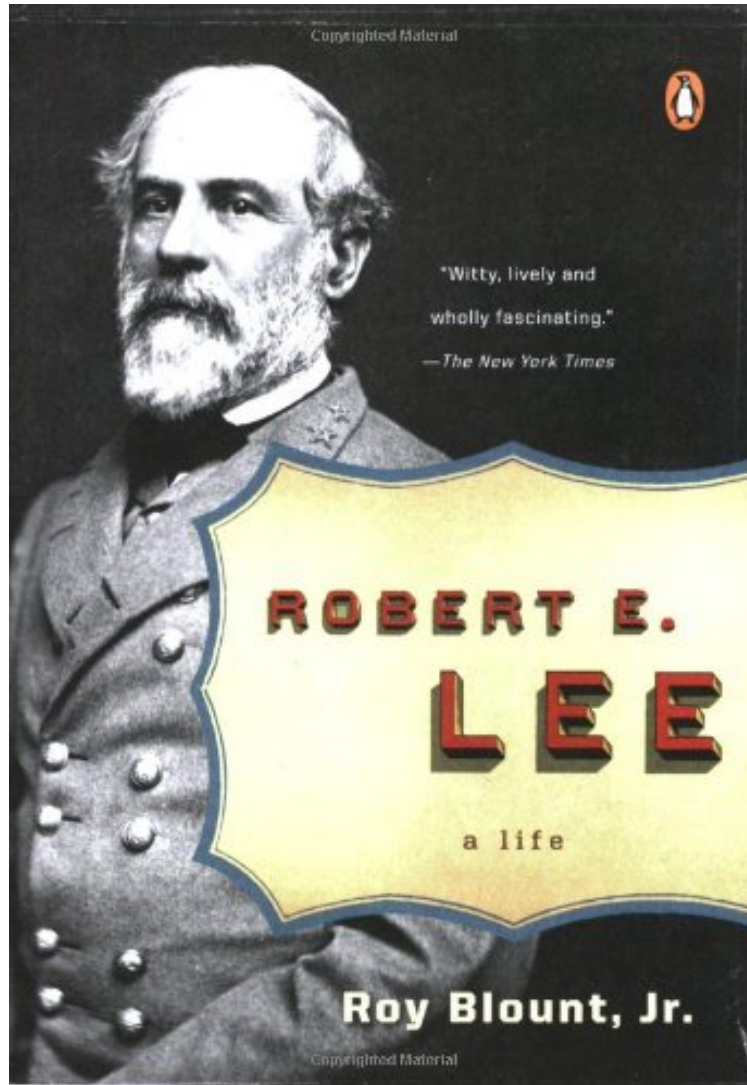


(Free download) Robert E. Lee: A Life (Penguin Lives Biographies)

## Robert E. Lee: A Life (Penguin Lives Biographies)

*Roy Blount Jr.*

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**Roy Blount Jr. : Robert E. Lee: A Life (Penguin Lives Biographies)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Robert E. Lee: A Life (Penguin Lives Biographies):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By kenneth e. corey This is a useful read in light of the recent Charlottesville, Virginia and Confederate monuments events. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Flawed but readable short life of Lee By Jordan M. Poss Roy Blount Jr.'s short biography of Robert E. Lee is an idiosyncratic book. It's broadly organized into two parts: a biography, running a brisk 160 pages, and a 45-page section of appendices. The biographical half of the book is good. Blount's account is readable and nicely summarizes

Lee's life, beginning with the legacy of his wastrel father, a one-time comrade-in-arms and friend of George Washington. Blount depicts Lee's father casting a shadow over the entirety of Lee's life, a point explored by other biographers but made central to the story here. Blount even ascribes to Lee an oedipal complex at least twice--about which more shortly. Blount moves quickly through the early stages of Lee's life: the difficult circumstances of his youth, his time as a cadet and young Army officer, the Mexican War and his tenure as commandant of West Point. The longest section, as in most Lee bios, is that on the Civil War. This section is very good given its brevity. Given the constraints of space and a general readership, Blount has to pick and choose and--mostly--chooses well. He avoids bogging down in the nitty gritty of the Civil War campaigns and includes a lot of telling personal details throughout--Lee's heart problems, his pet chicken, his self-abnegation, his platonic fondness for ladies, his affection for his children and his concern for their discipline and morality--drawing a decent sketch of Lee as a man. The book is writerly; Blount's interests as a writer and raconteur peek through in a lot of odd ways, including numerous references to Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren and a meditation on Lee's spelling. Blount may be no historian but the book is, again, readable, often witty, and only occasionally marred by errors of fact. As just one example, Blount blunders in describing the Battle of Antietam as "the war's bloodiest" battle (105). That dubious distinction belongs to the three-day Battle of Gettysburg; Antietam was the bloodiest single day of the war. An understandable slip, but a slip nonetheless. The book has two serious flaws. The first is Blount's endless psychoanalysis of Lee. And I use "psychoanalysis" deliberately; Blount drags a lot of outdated Freudian theory into the scene to try to make sense of the unknowable Lee. Blount winks at it several times, suggesting to the reader that he finds what he's writing faintly ridiculous, but he writes it anyway. The most ludicrous moment comes in Blount's rumination on how Lee came to lose at Gettysburg: "[Union General] Meade's headquarters was a thousand yards or so from the Baltimore Pike. Lee's was about the same distance from the Mummasburg Road. When Light-Horse Harry Lee was just about Lee's age at Gettysburg, he came to grief in Baltimore. It was a man known to history only as 'a giant of a man named Mumma' who tried to cut off his nose. 'Maybe something in Harry's son decided, this is the place. To win his war or lose it, to resolve his oedipal conflict or not'" (132). Fortunately this kind of thing is sparse within the body of the biography itself, but its presence is silly and pulls the narrative up short whenever it intrudes. Tied to the psychoanalytic strains of the biography are the strangest parts of the book, the three appendices that make up the last forty pages. These three sections are independent essays on different facets of Lee's personality and are of wildly varying quality. The second, "Lee's Humor," is full of personal tidbits that could have been sprinkled into the narrative--or excised entirely without damaging the book. It shows a more human side of Lee, a man capable of joking and acting silly with his family. The third, "Lee's Attitude Toward Slavery," is essential to understanding the man and it makes no sense to have affixed it as an appendix. This is material that should have been incorporated into the main text. But the most idiosyncratic, ridiculous passages of the entire book are in the first appendix, "Speculation." Much of it is taken up with idle conjecture. Lee had small feet, Blount notes. He liked it when his children tickled them. He requested fresh socks a lot in letters. Could it be, Blount suggests, and one involuntarily imagines a wry grin, that Lee had a foot fetish? Could it have been an oedipal thing too? "Robert was presumably pleased to ease his mother's aches by massage" (167). Blount brings in the psychology of "gifted children," titters over the contents of a Richmond prostitute's diary, compares Lee to other "mother's boys" like Elvis, rates actors who have depicted Lee on film, and ponders how other men's admiration of Lee's looks affected him as "a young heterosexual man" (181). It's a freeform dump of non-information that offers next to nothing beyond prurient leering at a dead icon. That's my deepest reservation--the psychologizing and the rambling appendices detract from this otherwise fun and engaging short biography. When Blount rises to the level of his subject, the book is excellent. Some of the discursive passages provide enlightening new angles from which to view Lee. But the book's flaws don't recommend it. Recommended only to those already familiar with Lee and seeking a little distraction.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent short biography of Lee

By John A. La Boone III

This book is highly readable and fascinating in its insights. For a short biography, it is packed with information that one would not find in a more encyclopedia-type treatment. Blount's narrative style flows nicely and he includes enough humor to make the book sparkle. In fact there is a section at the end just on Lee's humor. Blount does a good job of explaining Lee's upbringing, marriage and early adult life, and especially his relationships with other people, both in and out of the military. By the time we get to the Lee's leadership in the Civil War, a great deal of his behavior and decision-making becomes clearer. Blount pays appropriate attention to Lee's considerable talents and achievements but also goes into the famous man's shortcomings and personality quirks. The result is a believable picture of Lee that is, like with all other great people, a mixture of amazing abilities and personal failures. Along the way, Blount gives some fascinating vignettes of other memorable people such as JEB Stuart, US Grant, Stonewall Jackson, Lee's children and especially Lee's father Light Horse Harry Lee. I wish the book had told a bit more about Lee's life after the Civil War but to keep within the length limits of the short biography series, I'm sure that wasn't possible. It does give some interesting information on that five-year period, though. I enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Lee, the Civil War or the psychology of notable people under great historical pressures.

A “witty, lively and wholly fascinating” (The New York Times) portrait of an iconic Southern hero With lively storytelling and full-hearted Southern directness, Roy Blount, Jr., presents a unique portrait of Robert E. Lee. Fascinated by the qualities that made Lee such a charismatic, though reluctant, leader, Blount vividly conveys Lee’s audacity and uncanny successes in battle, as well as his humility, his quirky sense of humor, and the sorrowful sense of responsibility he felt for his outnumbered, half-starved army. The first concise biography of this American legend, Robert E. Lee will appeal to history and military buffs, students of Southern culture, and every reader curious about the makeup of a man who has become an American icon.

From Publishers Weekly This concise Penguin Life biography can be compared to the Confederate general's Civil War career: valiant, honorable and surprisingly successful with limited resources. Blount, a humorist with 12 books to his credit, avoids hagiography, debunking and psychobiography (except in speculation largely relegated to Appendix 1). Writing from the perspective of his Southern heritage, Blount exhibits apposite insight and detachment, instantly recognizing anything that has ever been used as a club for beating the South. As to the actual narrative, he is vividly detailed about Lee's disastrous childhood, which led to his famous self-control. The description of his Civil War career supports Grant's verdict of Lee as lucky on the offensive but really formidable only on the defensive, and avoids jargon that might make the military passages inaccessible to the lay reader. The chapter on the postwar Lee is perhaps the most moving part of the book, since it is in that period that the ailing general shows his best self: advocating North-South reconciliation, refusing lucrative commercial offers, and reviving Washington College (now Washington-Lee University) as its President. This effort is not equal to Emory Thomas's work, the best one-volume coverage of a subject who inspired Douglas Southall Freeman to four. But as a literate and balanced introduction to a subject whose complexity too many current writers avoid, this book deserves a most respectable ranking among today's Civil War literature. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal Adult/High School-At first glance, Blount, a humorist and journalist, would seem a rather unusual person to write a biography of one of America's most famous generals, possibly the most mythologized Southerner ever. The author is neither a political writer nor a historical biographer, and that is what makes his unexpected meeting with Lee such a good one. He examines his subject as a fellow Southerner-not as a Civil War figure or symbol-and seeks neither to praise nor denounce. He offers a gripping tale of a man who had to deal with the reality of being the Southerner he was and who met what came his way. The book will not answer all the questions readers might have about Lee, but it is thoroughly enjoyable and engaging. Ted Westervelt, Library of Congress, Washington, DC Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Civil war aficionados and military buffs will appreciate this latest biography--part of the Penguin Lives series--on the famous Southern general admired for his military leadership but also scorned for defending the Confederacy. Blount's concise writing keeps his biography trim and succinct, and his admiration for the subject allows for enjoyable reading. Lee's troops are said to have had a godlike image of their general, and Blount continues to keep that image alive by ending the biography with "None of his [Lee's] daughters ever married"--the implication being that no one could live up to the charisma, intelligence, and charm of their father. Lee fought for the South, but he also believed in a "gradual emancipation" of the slaves. These complexities are what make him so compelling to study. This is an excellent and well-researched introduction of this hesitant leader. Michelle Kaske Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved