

1973

## Beatrix Potter Through the Years

Carol Porter  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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## Beatrix Potter Through the Years

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### Abstract

The investigation into the life and work of Beatrix Potter was prompted by interest in and enjoyment of the work of this author. The Tale of Peter Rabbit was the real extent of the acquaintance with Beatrix Potter. Perhaps the appreciation of the art in this book was even more fundamental. A serious desire for children to be familiar with the original story rather than the reproductions was a factor in wanting to know more about this woman and more about what she had produced.

BEATRIX POTTER THROUGH THE YEARS

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A Research Paper  
Presented to the  
Faculty of the Library Science Department

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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Carol Porter

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Read and approved by

Mary Lou McGrew

Elizabeth Martin

Accepted by Department

Elizabeth Martin

Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
2. HER LIFE . . . . .	3
3. HER WRITING . . . . .	8
4. HER ART . . . . .	20
5. HER APPEAL . . . . .	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	31
APPENDIX . . . . .	33

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The investigation into the life and work of Beatrix Potter was prompted by interest in and enjoyment of the work of this author. The Tale of Peter Rabbit was the real extent of the acquaintance with Beatrix Potter. Perhaps the appreciation of the art in this book was even more fundamental. A serious desire for children to be familiar with the original story rather than the reproductions was a factor in wanting to know more about this woman and more about what she had produced.

Looking over libraries to see what other work was available was an awakening. Even in the most familiar libraries there were several titles already a part of the collections. Other libraries produced even more of the "little" books. The amount of wear shown on each book was startling and certainly proved these were being used by the library patrons. A glance into the card catalog, children's literature books, and other sources proved there was a wealth of material about Miss Potter's life and work.

The material reviewed provided an insight into her writing as well as her art work. Each new item reenforced the desire to locate more of The Peter Rabbit Books. Reading about the authentic location of backgrounds for each story would make a trip to the Lake District of England even more meaningful. The Horn Book, as well as several other magazines, has contributed much to inform the reader about

Beatrix Potter. Those interested in Miss Potter are indebted to Leslie Linder for work he has done to compile information. The Journal of Beatrix Potter, transcribed from a code which he managed to break, The History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter, along with The Art of Beatrix Potter present a very complete picture of this author-illustrator. Margaret Lanes's biography and the simple one done by Dorothy Aldis have been used by many for information. Nearly every book on children's literature acknowledges the part Beatrix Potter has contributed to this field. Last, but not least, a word about Beatrix Potter herself. She left careful notes with her material, thus providing a springboard for those who have compiled her memoirs.

## Chapter 2

### HER LIFE

Beatrice Potter was born July 28, 1866, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Potter, Number Two Bolton Gardens, London, England. Her family inherited a great deal of money and were considered to be a part of the moneyed middle-class. A textile industry founded by the father of Rupert Potter was the source of the inherited income that made it possible for the family to live so well. Mr. Potter had been trained to be a barrister but practiced only about a month. He was extremely interested in photography and this hobby occupied a great deal of his time.

The household ran on a very definite schedule. Mr. Potter went to his club at the same time each day. Mrs. Potter set off in her carriage to visit her friends at exactly the same time each day. Beatrice soon learned to look out the barred windows of the third floor nursery in order to observe the happenings of her family. She was always neatly dressed and well cared for by the servants. Her daily routine was never changed and her parents seemed to forget she lived in the same house. When she was five years old her brother Bertrem was born.

Mrs. Edmund Potter, the mother of Rupert, was a dominate personality and Beatrice was impressed by her. Beatrice would hide under the long fringed table cloth and listen to the tales her grandmother would tell. Later when she was invited to listen to her grandmother

she would record the stories in a secret code. The grandmother had been a Crompton and this was an important family in England. The Crompton character was said to be forceful, outspoken, and they possessed common sense. Beatrix admired these qualities and felt she had inherited them, "I am a believer in breed. I hold that a strongly marked personality can influence descendants for generations."<sup>1</sup>

The family was Puritan. They did not like the Stuart family, they abhorred Catholics, divine rights of kings, and oaths of allegiances. Church attendance was required but they only attended the Unitarian services when they were in agreement with the minister in charge. Life was so well organized in the Potter household that it was only expected that they would go to the southwest coast for a few weeks after Easter and a house would be rented in Scotland or the Lake District for the summer.

Beatrix was very shy, even tongue-tied but she was not bored. Trips to the Lake District and Scotland provided her with much material to enjoy when she returned to London. The time here was free and there was much to see and explore. She and her brother collected everything from plants and animals to dead birds, beetles, and caterpillars. If they could not save these any other way they would boil them and keep the bones. Beatrix took many things home to examine, draw, and paint. She observed as much as possible at home and many hours were spent sketching at the nearby Natural History Museum.

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Lane, The Tale of Beatrix Potter; A Biography (London: Fredrick Warne and Co., 1946), p. 13.



Even as Beatrix grew up her parents did not include her in their activities. They never seemed to think that she might be lonely, especially after her brother was old enough to be sent away to school. A description of her that would be typical is "she is remembered as unusually silent and old fashioned."<sup>2</sup>

Beatrix never attended school but a governess was employed to guide her education. This governess left when Beatrix was in her teens because she knew the girl was already ahead of her. Beatrix was glad she did not go to school because she felt they would have destroyed some of her originality. Miss Anne Carter became her governess when Beatrix was about seventeen. There was little difference in their ages and the two became dear friends even though Miss Carter did not stay long. It was to the children of this former governess Beatrix wrote letters full of stories and pictures which later became some of her famous books.

Association with the Frederick Warne Publishing Company brought about a warm relationship with the entire Warne family. It was the first time Beatrix had any insight into how close a family could be and how much happiness was involved. Norman Warne was not married and they became very close friends over the years. In 1905 he proposed to her. They both were nearly forty years old and very much suited in temperament. Her parents objected to this engagement because they considered the publishing business a trade and this was beneath them. She was very upset because she had never gone against her parent's

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<sup>2</sup>Lane, p. 28.

wishes before this time. It was a very difficult decision but she did decide that this was the future she wanted. She became engaged but her parents did not announce it and little was said about it. Norman became ill and by the time he went to the doctor he was beyond help. He died just before Christmas 1905.

Her relationship with Norman Warne had not been known by many and her grief was something she could not share. It was after this that she took the proceeds from the books she had sold and a legacy her aunt had left her and bought Hill Top Farm at Sawrey, a village in the Lake District. Because she was still an unmarried lady she was expected to remain with her family but she spent as much time as possible at the farm. In 1909 she added the neighboring farm, Castle Hill, to her holdings. She met William Heelis who was handling the transaction. They decided to marry but again her family opposed the idea. She had not been too well and did not really feel up to fighting the opposition of her parents. Her brother came home and gave her support when he announced that he had been married, for some time, to a farm girl and was very happy.

Her great interest in science was a matter which consumed a great deal of her time and energy. While still in her twenties she became interested in fungi and spent much time studying and drawing them. Her knowledge and theories on fungi led her to write a paper on the subject. She found it extremely difficult to interest anyone at the Kensington Museum or at the Royal Botanic Gardens in the topic. With the help of her uncle she did find someone to read a paper on the subject to the Linnean Society of London in 1897. She was not allowed to read it herself or even attend the meeting because it was for men

only. The paper was never published because she planned to work on it in greater detail. Much of the information on this topic was destroyed after her death but 272 fungi drawings are in the Armit Library, Ambleside. Her interest in this topic is even found in a picture letter written to a cousin in 1897 when she said, "I have been drawing funguses very hard, I think some day they will be put in a book (illustration of a book) but it will be dull one to read."<sup>3</sup>

Beatrix was nearly fifty years old when she married William Heelis in 1913. She was very happy but her life was changed completely. She became a farmer. During World War I she actually worked in the fields. Later she became interested in raising Herwick sheep. This was a subject upon which she became quite an authority and often other farmers sought her advice. Her father died the same year she was married and Mrs. Potter moved to the Lake District. Her mother lived to be 93 years old and this kept Beatrix busy too.

It was very important to Beatrix Potter that the Lake District be preserved and she spent much time and money on the project. She was so concerned about the future of this area that she spent most of her royalties on land. A total of 4,049 acres and 15 cottages were willed to the National Trust with the stipulation they be preserved.

In 1939 Beatrix became seriously ill and needed surgery. She carefully put all of her affairs in order considering every detail just as she did in her work. She did recover from the surgery and again worked very hard during World War II. Beatrix Potter was 73 years old when she died December 22, 1943.

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<sup>3</sup>Leslie Linder, A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter (London: Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd., 1971), p. 24.

## Chapter 3

### HER WRITING

Beatrix wrote many letters all through her life, letters to children with stories and pictures, letters to Norman Warne, business letters that developed into a warm friendship, and letters to members of the Warne family even after the death of Norman. Strangely enough she enjoyed her correspondence with American readers more than her associations with the people of England. She thought Americans had a better attitude toward children's literature. She welcomed American visitors but said the English were "very inquisitive and completely uninteresting."<sup>1</sup> She carried on correspondence with Anne Carroll Moore, Bertha Mahoney, and several other Americans and often provided them with material and information she would have refused people in similar positions in England.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was the first book published by Beatrix Potter and although not her best probably the most well-known. She had written this story to Noel Moore, son of her former governess, and eight years later asked if they still had this letter. They had saved it along with others that were to be used later.

Miss Potter was turned down by five or six publishers before she finally decided to publish it privately.

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Lane, The Tale of Beatrix Potter; A Biography (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1946), p. 129.

The form of the book was decided according to her idea of what a children's book should be--very small itself, little more than five inches by four, with only one or two simple sentences on each page, and a picture every time one turned over.<sup>2</sup>

The first edition was published December 16, 1901 with a total of 250 copies at a cost of eleven pounds for engraving and printing. Copies were given to her friends and the remainder sold for one and two pence a copy. Upon the instant success of the book she decided to publish another 200 copies. The Warne Publishing Company decided they would publish it but they wanted colored pictures. Originally the privately printed edition had 41 pictures but the Warne edition had 30 plus a frontispiece. It was published in October of 1902. She received a royalty of three pence per book. A price of one shilling was set and she was warned not to expect much profit. The book was reprinted several times and in the fall of 1907 some changes were made but the next edition was made from the original printing.

Peter Rabbit was a pet rabbit that had been purchased in Covent Garden and was a great source of amusement to her. The scenes in the book are of actual places. She had quite a problem drawing Mr. McGregor because animals and nature were her speciality. It is said that she was very creative in her writing but that she always needed a model for her drawing.<sup>3</sup>

While visiting a relative she heard a clever story about a tailor. It was the story of a waistcoat that had been only cut out when the tailor left on Friday night and was finished, except for one

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<sup>2</sup>Lane, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Rumer Godden, "Beatrix Potter," Horn Book, XLII (August, 1906), 395.

buttonhole, when he returned on Monday morning. This fairy-tale story interested her so much she went the next day to Gloucester and sketched pictures of the tailor shop and other places that would figure into the story. She found an excuse to visit a tailor shop so she could sketch additional scenes for her story. A story was prepared with water-color pictures and given to Freda Moore for Christmas. Again, she asked for the letter back and reworked it until it became The Tailor of Gloucester. This was privately printed and she sent a copy to Norman Warne. The privately printed edition was much longer than the one published by Warne in 1903. In 1947 the original manuscript was purchased by William McIntire Elkin and later was given to The Free Library of Philadelphia. The original book drawings are in the Tate Gallery.

The Tailor of Gloucester has been considered the favorite of Beatrix Potter. The text itself is longer than Peter Rabbit. The illustrations opposite each page of story are full of detail and much time can be spent looking and enjoying. Every time an illustration is studied more can be found to make a person realize how each exacting item was an important part of Beatrix Potter's work. This Christmas story is still a favorite and each year children come to appreciate that The Tailor of Gloucester was written by the author of Peter Rabbit.

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin was the next book and this was an immediate success. While in Lingholm in 1901 she sent a picture letter to Noel Moore which told about the adventures of Squirrel Nutkin. This picture letter is delightful, the pen and pencil sketches have enough life to add excitement to the wording. No child could help but be intrigued with this precious picture letter. Much of the scenery in the book was based on real places in the Lake District. Some time was

spent deciding what type of covering should be used on the deluxe edition. After much investigation a pansy flower design was selected for deluxe editions of both The Tailor of Gloucester and The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin. Beatrix Potter referred to these books as "bound in a flowered lavender chintz, very pretty."<sup>4</sup>

The Tale of Benjamin Bunny is a sequel to Peter Rabbit. Children will love the frontispiece showing the home of the Rabbit family with Mrs. Rabbit busily knitting. Miss Potter writes as if she were telling this story in person, she even explains that rabbit tobacco is "what we call lavender."<sup>5</sup> The rabbits in this book have their own personalities. The cat that goes to sleep upon the basket, and therefore holds Benjamin and Peter captive, is realistic enough to "pet." Children will be delighted when Peter gets home with his clothes after old Mr. Bunny jumps on the cat and locks him in the greenhouse.

Miss Potter had The Tale of Two Bad Mice ready for publication at the same time as Benjamin Bunny. Norman Warne provided help with this book by supplying photographs, dolls, and other artifacts needed for the pictures to be completed. The mice, Tom Thumb, and his wife Hunca Munca, enjoy making a terrible disaster of everything in the doll house and finally steal the pillow because Hunca Munca is in need of one. The illustrations of Hunca Munca using the objects taken from the doll house are so very characteristic of Beatrix Potter's style that they

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<sup>4</sup>Leslie Linder, A History of the Writing of Beatrix Potter (London: Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd., 1971), p. 140.

<sup>5</sup>Beatrix Potter, The Tale of Benjamin Bunny (New York: Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd., 1904), p. 13.

could be used as examples of her art work, but they will be appreciated for the visuals they make in the story.

The books she wrote during the first eight years after she purchased Hill Top Farm are considered her best. At least six of these are about Hill Top and Sawrey. The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle was her sixth book. A pet hedgehog was the main character and the story was based on old Kitty MacDonald, the washerwoman at Dalguise where the Potter family spent many summers. The Pie and the Patty-Pan is a story with Sawrey as the location while Jemima Puddle was a real duck who lived at Hill Top Farm and appears in The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. Ginger and Pickles is about a little shop in Sawrey and The Tale of Mrs. Tittle-Mouse is a woodmouse and her friends. The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher was that of a frog and it was based on a picture letter written to Eric Moore.

In the book The Tale of Mr. Tod the fox and the badger are villains. Other characters in this book include some met in earlier books such as Benjamin Bunny, his wife Flopsy, Peter Rabbit, Cottontail, and Benjamin's father Mr. Benjamin Bouncer. The suspense is exciting and these animals are so full of human behavior characteristics. The Tale of Pigling Bland was published in 1913 and is the story of some pigs with simple yet detailed pen and ink sketches as well as the usual colored pictures. The names are so appropriate; Auntie Pettitoes, the girl pigs; Cross-patch, Such-such, Yock-yock, and Spot, the boy pigs; Alexander, Pigling-Bland, Chin-Chin, and Stumpy, plus the female pig, Pig-wig. The fact Chin-Chin ate the soap and is in bad favor brings to mind Peter Rabbit being in disgrace with his mother. These pigs enjoyed disrupting the garden as Peter did Mr. McGregor's. The book The Tale of



Pigling Bland published in 1913 was her last book in her best manner.<sup>6</sup>

Miss Moppet and A Fierce Bad Rabbit appeared in unusual format.

Each "book" was a neat cloth wallet, Miss Moppet grey, A Fierce Bad Rabbit green, with a tuck in-flap. When opened, the "book" appears as a long strip of alternate text and pictures, folded concertinawise and reinforced by linen backing.<sup>7</sup>

This change in format again pointed up the fact that Beatrix Potter was a very creative person. These books were later produced in the same size all other books were made. The miniature letters she wrote to the children of her friends are another example of her ability to create something different. These little letters were written as if one character was writing to another; complete with misspelled words and other devices to make them delightful. The delivery of these in special mail pouches or tiny tin mail boxes added to the impact upon the lucky child who received them.

A great variety of writing was done by this lady. She wrote and rewrote fairy-tales, had articles published in newspapers, did a little political writing and drawing, produced some painting books, made a couple stories into plays, and illustrated The Peter Rabbit Music Books composed by Christopher Le Fleming.

The book characters, familiar by this time, were used in the Peter Rabbit's Painting Book. The format was such that two pictures of each subject were included, a colored print and one to be painted. She even had an introduction with suggested colors to buy and simple advice

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<sup>6</sup>Marcus Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers (London: The Library Association, 1962), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup>Marcus Crouch, Beatrix Potter: A Walch Monography (New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1961), p. 36.

about how to mix colors. Later this painting book was made into two painting books, one published in 1917 and the second was not marketed until 1925. There was a great demand for these painting books of favorite characters. This brings to mind the fact that the same thing has been done today with popular book characters.

Of special interest was the section in the book The History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter by Leslie Linder on plays. Miss Potter did begin to write The Tale of Peter Rabbit into play form but never finished the project. Over the years The Tailor of Gloucester and Ginger and Pickles were written into plays by E. Harcourt Williams. The Roly-Poly Pudding was adapted by Theron Butterworth and Squirrel Nutkin was written into a play by Miss Potter herself. As late as 1967 Christopher Le Fleming, who had written the music for the Peter Rabbit Music Books, published Squirrel Nutkin, a children's play adapted by Beatrix Potter from her original story, music adapted from Traditional Tunes by Christopher Le Fleming.

A simple play of The Tale of Peter Rabbit was located in a kindergarten music book and was produced by two sixth grade boys at Cooper Elementary School, Fort Dodge, Iowa. This experience was one of the things these children will remember from their elementary school days. The boys spent a great deal of effort preparing a "problem kindergarten boy" for the leading role. The entire production provided art, music, and literature experiences for the kindergarten children who followed the suggestions of the directors.

The appearance of this play in an American song book<sup>8</sup> is one example of the many Peter Rabbits that have been produced in America because the copyright was never safeguarded in the United States. Many editions have been printed without the original illustrations or the story has been retold. It is appalling to know some kindergarten-primary teachers feel they must have a book with big pictures. Sharing the real Peter Rabbit with the same group of children is a rewarding experience. Children are very hard to "fool." The copyright for other books done by Miss Potter was taken care of when they were first published, and some were held back in England so they would appear at the same time in both countries.

Fairy-tales were a part of Beatrix Potter's life. She read many and drew illustrations for some, but these were never published. The Fairy Oak Tree was a fairy tale she wrote in 1911 and when she wrote The Fairy Caravan it became the last chapter of that book. Students in literature classes should study the stories of Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella that she rewrote. The rhyme sung by the woodcutters reminds of the rhymes included in other of her work. The Cinderella is much longer than the one we know and a comparison would be of value when studying the difference in the same fairy-tale. Details of scenery, both the architecture and nature are typical of the work produced by Beatrix Potter.

Many famous people have written about the work of Beatrix Potter. Statements that describe her work have been written by people who also

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<sup>8</sup>Lorrain Watters, "The Tale of Peter Rabbit, adapted from Beatrix Potter's story by L. E. Watters," The Magic of Music, Kindergarten (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1965), pp. 163-175.

produce material for children. These are sincere tributes that come from outstanding people in the field of children's literature. One good description is as follows:

Simplicity does not mean short blunt sentences, and it does not mean short blunt words. The opening of Peter Rabbit is simple not basic. In her books, if Beatrix Potter wanted to use a long or unfamiliar word she did.<sup>9</sup>

This is evident in several of her books. As they are being read to children it is wise to have consulted a dictionary for some of the words are not commonly used today. Children are eager to hear new words and often ask for the meanings. Miss Potter uses words that fit the situation without "writing down" to her readers.

The following statement is certainly a true one:

There are only too many writers who think they can do as well as Beatrix Potter did by dressing up a rabbit and calling her Mrs. Bunny. So long as a rabbit behaves like a rabbit, I see no reason why she would not have human attributes as well as human names; but the very word "bunny" has picked up a sentimental connotation since the days of Benjamin Bunny and his uncompromising papa.<sup>10</sup>

Beatrix Potter is careful to make her animals alive. They do wear human clothes and behave in human ways but the animals are not caricatures of human beings. She uses her scientific knowledge to make them authentic.

Beatrix Potter has said, "I am very slow about making up my mind about things. It takes years for an idea to take shape."<sup>11</sup> After reading The History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter the length of time required to complete a work is certainly noticeable. Many of the stories were

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<sup>9</sup>Margery Fisher, Intent Upon Reading; A Critical Appraisal of Modern Fiction for Children (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1961), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup>Fisher, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Beatrix Potter, The Art of Beatrix Potter; With an Appreciation by Anne Carroll Moore (London: Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd., 1955), p. 24.

written as picture-letters years before they were printed as books. Certainly the correspondence that has been found regarding each book before it was published was lengthy and detailed just so typical of her writings.

A couple of additional statements she has made are very good analysis of her work.

In describing her method of writing Beatrix Potter told Mrs. Bertha Mahony Miller, "I have just made stories to please myself because I never grew up" . . . I think I enjoy writing carefully because I enjoy my writing, and enjoy taking pains over it!<sup>12</sup>

In speaking of her children's books she said, "I think the greatest point in writing for children is to have something to say and to say it in simple direct language."<sup>13</sup>

The stories are subjects that appeal to children. They contain hazards, danger, and near tragedy which also appeal to children, yet they end in a happy way. Each different book that is read bring the suspense and drama into the story and the excitement is always present. A very brief summary of her work can be found in this statement below:

Her miniature stories are nearly always constructed with great skill, and she is a master of an indestructible prose style. It would be quite impossible to paraphrase one of her stories, so precise is the use of every word and phrase.<sup>14</sup>

Maurice Sendak, defending Peter Rabbit, finds it difficult to put the story into a literary category. His explanation of his problem not only fits the problem at hand but would also be applicable to other books written by Beatrix Potter.

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<sup>12</sup>Linder, Writings, p. xxv.

<sup>13</sup>Linder, Writings, p. xxv.

<sup>14</sup>Crouch, Treasure Seekers, p. 26.

Peter Rabbit, in its perfect tinyness, transcends all arbitrary categories. It is obviously no more a fact book about habits of rabbits than it is a purely fantastical tale. It demonstrates that fantasy cannot be completely divorced from reality; that fantasy heightens sometimes simplifies, and contributes new insights into that reality.<sup>15</sup>

The words Peter Rabbit and the word rabbit could be changed to Squirrel Nutkin or any other of the characters in the many tales written by Miss Potter, and the excellent quotation of Maurice Sendak would serve the same purpose.

The length of these "little" books is one of the most startling things to come of interest. True they are small in shape but most have many pages of text as well as the numerous illustrations.

The Fairy Caravan, Little Pig Robinson, and Sister Anne were written for the American readers. These were done in the later part of her life and the quality is not present that appeared in her earlier days. The Fairy Caravan is probably of more interest to adults but the story could be read as short stories. It is really the longest book she ever produced and was done at the request of David McKay of the McKay Publishing Company. She sent a copy to the McKay children with notes written in the margins explaining what things were a part of her life in the Lake District.

A journal was written by Beatrix Potter covering the years 1881-1897. She wrote this in a secret code and in 1958 Leslie Linder discovered the key to the code. This journal was published and contains much information. It could be used by a student of history because it

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<sup>15</sup>Maurice Sendak, "The Aliveness of Peter Rabbit," Wilson Library Bulletin, XL (December, 1965) (Paper delivered at the AASL-NEA Book and Author Luncheon, New York City, June, 1965), p. 348.

tells of many social happenings during this period. Detailed descriptions of the homes, how they were furnished, every day happenings in London, and other places the family visited are carefully recorded. The journal would be of value to those interested in science because it contains the observations she made about this topic which was of great interest to her. Finally, a careful reading of it would give much information about Beatrix Potter herself, her family, her interests, and her life during this period of time. The quotation below summarizes her work in general.

The journal shows how her writing matured as she passed from girlhood to womanhood and brings out her powers of observation, her shrewd judgement of human character, her love of animals and her appreciation of nature and art.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Leslie Linder, "Beatrix Potter's Code Writing," Horn Book XXXIX (April, 1963), 155.

## Chapter 4

### HER ART

Critics have said Beatrix Potter never drew in a childish manner even though she began drawing when she was about nine years old. Detail was of vital importance to her. The illustrations depict real places and she spent a great deal of time working on them to make them true in every detail. She makes her descriptions take place in her illustrations as well as in her text.

She began drawing when she was very young. Drawing was one of the accepted things that girls of the this era were allowed to do so it was well accepted by her family. A Miss Cameron gave her some lessons from November 1878 through May 1883 and Beatrix said, "I have reason to be grateful to her ---- I have learnt from her freehand, model, geometry, and perspective and a little water colour flower painting."<sup>1</sup>

Beatrix was a very creative person but she needed a model for each thing she drew, if it were a dish she needed a sample to look at for the details that were so important to her. The animals she put into her stories were drawn from pets that she had owned and she placed these into backgrounds she sketched on her many vacation trips with the family. The amount of detail work in a picture is unbelievable but make each one the kind of picture that can be examined at length.

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie Linder, "Beatrix Potter's Code Writing," Horn Book XXXIX (April, 1966), 151.



In 1890 some Christmas notes were designed and sold by Miss Potter and as a result "she was so pleased she gave her rabbit model, Benjamin Bounncer, a cupful of hemp seeds as a reward. When she tried to use him as a model the next morning she found him practically intoxicated and unmanageable."<sup>2</sup> Another early bit of work done by her was a set of colored pictures to illustrate the verse in the book A Happy Pair by Frederic E. Weatherly published in Germany.

The illustrations in The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies brings to mind pictures done by Tasha Tudor. Here we see tiny detail and delicate colors creating a story that could almost be told without words. Mr. McGregor is again the villian and Mrs. Flopsy Bunny misses her children just in time. The curiosity of the Bunny family is somewhat suspenseful when they follow Mr. McGregor home and witness the quarrel between this farmer and his wife. The illustrations Thomasina Tittlemouse (who saved the bunnies by nibbling through the sack) in her rabbit wool cloak, hood, muff, and warm mittens provides a precious ending for this story.

In the story, The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck, Miss Potter again shows her ability to produce fine details, the feathers on the rooster, the design on the garden gate, the bushy tail of the fox, the fluffy feathers in the shed of the gentleman, and even the chain on the door being pulled open by the beautiful collie Kep.

The Art of Beatrix Potter, compiled by Leslie Linder with the help of W. A. Herring, a long time employee of the Frederick Warne Company, was published in 1955. The appreciation was written by Anne

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<sup>2</sup>Naomi Gilpatrick, "The Secret Life of Beatrix Potter," Natural History, LXXXI (October, 1972), 95.

Carroll Moore and is truly a tribute to this excellent author-illustrator. Some of her very early work is included and many are labeled complete with her age at the time the illustrations were made. There are house interiors, houses, village scenes and landscapes, plus gardens, plant studies, and still life. One section is devoted to animal studies and another is to imaginary happenings in the animal world. The work includes black and white as well as color pictures. Hours could be spent enjoying, digesting, and investigating the section of early ideas and the pictures that were made for her books. Some of these are found in the finished products but others were not included and are worth investigation. These photographs of the originals are somewhat sharper than those in the published story books.

The material Beatrix Potter produced over the years have been well preserved. She had carefully labeled her work and made notes, again in detail, which was so typical of her. This has aided those who have researched her life and work. The Free Library of Philadelphia owns some of her original manuscripts along with a few original illustrations. Other work she has done will be found "in Hill Top Farm, just across the road from Castle Cottage, the original illustration of almost all the books are now displayed."<sup>3</sup>

The illustrations on the next few pages have been taken from The Tale of Peter Rabbit and have been chosen as representative of her art.

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<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth H. Stevens, "A Visit to Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle," Horn Book, XXXIV (April, 1958), 136.



15

Here we see Mrs. Rabbit going through the woods, basket on one arm with an umbrella in hand. The little bonnet as well as the rest of her attire just seem to fit this animal character.

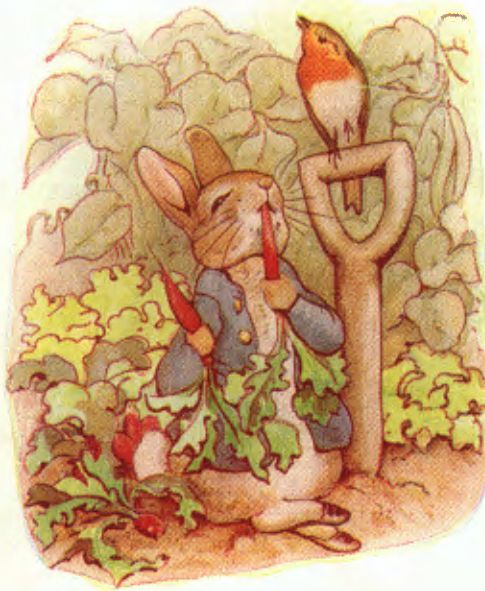




51

A viewer can almost feel Peter Rabbit squeezing under the gate.





20

The look of joy as Peter eats the garden vegetables is "funny" but not distorted to produce this effect.





28

Much detail can be found in this picture. The bird almost seems to be investigating the lost shoe. The cabbage plants are so very true to life that they could be photographs and even the tiny fallen leaves contribute to the total impression.

## Chapter 5

### HER APPEAL

The work of Beatrix Potter has lived for all these years. A look at the Potter collection in most children's libraries shows them to be quite worn and a glance through circulation finds many are checked out. Much has been written about the lasting appeal of these little books and each of the statements below points out valuable thoughts on the subject.

No matter how we may scrutinise the Peter Rabbit books, seeking to "explain" their universal appeal, the facts of the appeal is unquestionable.<sup>1</sup>

Sanderson found her frieze design "old fashioned" fifty years ago but present-day versions continue to sell and presumably will continue forever and ever.<sup>2</sup>

The Beatrix Potter books continue to exact the homage, not only of children and their parents, but of makers of picture books for the very young.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Rabbit and his friends are so eternally youthful that it is difficult to realize that their creator was born a hundred years ago. All over the world this year tribute is being paid to Beatrix Potter, who discovered a world of morning freshness, a world she was able to transmit to others enriching childhood forever.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie Linder, The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881-1897 (London: Frederick Warne and Co., Ltd., 1966), 95.

<sup>2</sup>Marcus Crouch, Beatrix Potter; A Walch Monography (New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1961), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Marcus Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers (London: The Library Association, 1962), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen Shaffer, "Beatrix Potter Lives in Philadelphia's Free Library," Horn Book, XLII (August, 1966), 405.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit has been on the list of best selling children's books - every year since its appearance 70 years ago.<sup>5</sup>

The little books produced for children are still published in the same format which they first appeared. First editions are rare because they have been read and reread by the children. Even today the sale is large because the great usage demands constant replacement.

Ann Carroll Moore underlines the lasting appeal of The Tailor of Gloucester in the appreciation she wrote for The Art of Beatrix Potter when she says, "I have continued to read it every Christmas since then and it has lost none of its freshness as a work of art or as a Christmas story."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore she says, "The Art of Beatrix Potter is a revelation of hidden sources of her power as a creator of children's books of great originality and timeless value."<sup>7</sup>

There was a demand for these books to be translated into foreign languages. In 1912 The Tale of Peter Rabbit and The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck were translated into Dutch. Very soon after the books were published there was discussion about the translation of them into French and German but nothing was done about it. There was quite a bit of correspondence between the author and the publisher regarding this and when a kindergarten teacher from France urged this be done it was again discussed and yet they were not actually translated until about 1921. They now have been translated into French, Dutch, Welsh, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish, German, Italian, African, and Danish. Some of the stories have even been translated into Latin and used for teaching.

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<sup>5</sup>Naomi Gilpatrick, "The Secret Life of Beatrix Potter," Natural History, LXXXI (October, 1972), 95.

<sup>6</sup>Beatrix Potter, The Art of Beatrix Potter; With an Appreciation by Anne Carroll Moore (London: Frederick Warne and Co., Ltd., 1955), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Potter, The Art, p. 9.



During 1970 and 1971 some books were produced in braille and The Journal of Beatrix Potter was tape recorded by the British Talking Book Service. The introduction of the i.t.a. (initial teaching alphabet) into the education world brought about the need for the stories to be translated into i.t.a. so in 1965 and 1966 ten of these were done for those children being taught this method of reading.

Evidence of the popularity of these books and their characters is in the number of Peter Rabbit objects, in addition to the books, the Warne Company has on the market. Enlarged pictures from the stories, Peter Rabbit race games, and jig-saw puzzles can be purchased. Since 1948 John Bestwick, Ltd. of Longton has made plates, mugs, and other dishes for the small child. Also available from the same company are a series of bone-china figures "which are perhaps the most satisfactory of the characters in three dimensions."<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, The Peter Rabbit books have found a place in the world of children's literature and will continue to live for generations to come. Beatrix Potter found pleasure in her early life by creating the stories that would delight children. The stories seemed to have taken the place of a happy family relationship and friendships. She never was at a loss with children but was not able to relate to adults in the same manner. Even though she did spend a lonely life she was never bored and filled many hours producing materials children have loved. There is a universal quality about them that will live for many years and they are not dated in any way. It is unfortunate that youngsters have not been introduced to more of these delightful stories but as the number of elementary school

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<sup>8</sup>Crouch, Beatrix Potter, p. 57.

libraries grow perhaps more will be included in the collections and will become favorites along with The Tale of Peter Rabbit.

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APPENDIX

A LIST OF BOOKS WRITTEN BY BEATRIX POTTER\*

✓The Tale of Peter Rabbit.....	1902
✓The Tailor of Gloucester.....	1902
The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin.....	1903
✓The Tale of Benjamin Bunny.....	1904
✓The Tale of Two Bad Mice.....	1904
✓The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle.....	1905
✓The Pie and the Patty Pan.....	1905
✓The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher.....	1906
✓The Story of Miss Moppet.....	1906
✓The Fierce Bad Rabbit.....	1907
✓The Tale of Tom Kitten.....	1907
✓The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck.....	1908
The Roly-Poly Pudding.....	1908
✓The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies.....	1909
Ginger and Pickles.....	1909
The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse.....	1910
Peter Rabbit's Painting Book	
✓The Tale of Timmy Tiptoes.....	1911
✓The Tale of Mr. Tod.....	1912
✓The Tale of Pigling Bland.....	1913
✓Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes.....	1917
Tom Kitten's Painting Book.....	1917
The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse.....	1918
✓Cecily Parsley's Nursery Rhymes.....	1922
Jemima Puddle-Duck's Painting Book.....	1925
The Fairy Caravan.....	1929
✓The Tale of Little Pig Robinson.....	1930
Sister Ann.....	1932
✓Wag-by-Wall.....	1944
The Tale of the Faithful Dove.....	1956
The Sly Old Cat.....	1971

\*A check indicates stories read for this project.