

Beatrix Potter

Potter was born into a wealthy London family who lived in Bolton Gardens, Kesington. They were very controlling and restrictive. Horrified of their humble class origins in trade, the Potters did not let Beatrix socialize. She was educated at home, studying books, music and watercolour painting. She was a gifted watercolour painter and felt attracted to nature and animals. During her holidays in the Scottish country side and the Lake District she sketched flowers, mushrooms and rabbits, and later in her life when she became a farmer, cows, pigs and sheep. She kept two rabbits as her pets, Peter Piper and Benjamin Bounce. Her interests were more scientific than artistic at the beginning, she had a theory about fungi, but the science world was close to women at that time and had to content herself with illustrating works of natural history.



During her youth (1866-1897), she tried to make a living for herself and gain independence from her family by illustrating books and making commercial cards. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, her first work, was rejected by many publishers, so she had it printed privately. A first edition appeared in 1901 and sold so well that she paid for another edition only two months later. One of the publishers who had rejected her offered then to do the book if she would do the illustrations in watercolour instead of black and white. Her career as a children's author was launched. Peter Rabbit was followed by some sequels featuring Peter –*Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, *Tale of Mr Tod*, and *Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies*–, and was the first in a series of twenty-three Peter Rabbit books including *The Tailor of Gloucester*, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*, *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse*, *Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes*, or *Cecily Parsley Nursery Rhymes*. After 1913, there was a decline in her literary output because she became involved in farming and local politics in the Lake District. With the money she had made from her writing she bought many acres of land in the Lake District to prevent them from being developed –tourism, industry- and eventually donated it to the National Trust.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was created from an illustrated letter that Beatrix Potter had sent to four-year-old Noel Moore, one of the children of her last governess, The letter began as follows: “I don't know what to write to you so I shall tell you the story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter. They lived with their mother in a sand bar under the root of a big fir tree” (1893). Annie Moore suggested that she could turn the letters into books, which she did, borrowing the letters back and reworking them.

The Peter Rabbit books are child-size. Potter's biographer, Margaret Lane, writes that “the form of the book was decided according to her ideas of what a small

child's book should be –very small itself with only one or two simple sentences on each page, and a picture every time one turned over”. Unity of proportion runs through these tiny books: small characters move in a small world through a plot which comes full circle in a short amount of time. Furthermore, in her language and in her illustrations, Potter advances her story in small units and uses small details. The simple plot of *Peter Rabbit* is predictable but exciting. It has the typical circular structure of children's stories, Peter, a child rabbit, moves from the security of home to the danger of the unfamiliar, before arriving home again. For over half of the book, Potter puts Peter into trouble and gets him out of it again. His venture into the garden is a venture into experience.

Potter is a central figure in the development of the modern picture book. Her text and illustrations are mutually dependent, and the latter enhance the former. After receiving a copy of Dr Seuss's first book *And to Think that I saw it on Mulberry Street* (1937), she called the book “the cleverest book I have met with for many years. The swing and merriment of the pictures and the natural truthful simplicity of the untruthfulness. I think my own success was largely due to straight forward lying, spontaneous natural bare-faced! Too many story books for children are condescending, self-conscious inventions”.

Some critics have seen the rabbit books as a reflection of Potter's own struggles with her parents and the constraints of Victorian-Edwardian society. Other critics have seen social themes in some of her works, especially *The Tailor of Gloucester* and *Squirrel Nutkin*. Potter was writing at a time of social unrest in England –Irish nationalism, working class gaining political franchise, labour unions, women's movement. She nearly always writes of a male protagonist. When there are female protagonists –*Jemima Puddleduck*, *Mrs Tiggy-Winkle*, *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*– she often criticizes traditional womanhood, but her rebels tend to fail. The successful rebels are the males, with whom she identified.

Contemporary children's encounters with stories are often filtered through commodities, adaptations, merchandising that grow around a popular text or author and that are known as the *post-text*. Beatrix Potter and her rabbit books have generated a great post-text, beyond anything she might have imagined, although the truth is that Potter herself was the first to see the commercial possibilities of her books. Eager to become independent from her constricting family, she became a business woman. She registered a patent on a Peter Rabbit doll in 1903 and made copyright arrangements for games (“I think it is a game that children might find exiting if they were fond of the book”), more dolls, wall paper and china. Beatrix Potter merchandising was in full swing in 1908. She also allowed her characters to be used for charities.

Bibliography and works consulted

Eastman, Jackie. "Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*: A Small Masterpiece". *Touchstones* vol. 3. 100-106.

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Kutzner, Daphne. *Beatrix Potter: Writing in Code*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Picture: "Beatrix Potter Plaque". (c) Leo Reynolds, 2007. In flickr, with cc licence.

Beatrix Potter was a writer, illustrator and conservationist. She is best remembered for her best-selling children's books, such as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Stories that combined her love for both animals and the English countryside. In her later life, she bought a substantial amount of land in the Lake District and on her death donated it to the National Trust, helping to preserve a significant part of the Lake District national park. Short bio Beatrix Potter. Beatrix Potter (28 July 1866 – 22 December 1943). Beatrix was born in Kensington, London to middle-class, Unitarian parents. Her father Buy Beatrix Potter Coins and get the best deals at the lowest prices on eBay! Great Savings & Free Delivery / Collection on many items. {"modules": ["unloadOptimization","bandwidthDetection"],"unloadOptimization":{"browsers":{"Firefox":true,"Chrome":true}),"bandwidthDetection":{"url":"https://ir.ebaystatic.com/cr/v/c1/thirtysevens.jpg","maxViews":4,"imgSize":37,"expiry":300000,"timeout":250}}. There seems to be a problem serving the request at this time. FREE Beatrix Potter 9-Week Unit Study - Homeschool Giveaways. Facebook Twitter Pinterest Are you interested in incorporating poetry into your homeschool? This 9-week unit study on Helen Beatrix Potter provides you with an easy way to do just that! Many families love and cherish the Beatrix Potter stories and nursery rhymes so we put together this free poetry unit study for our subscribers! This 9-week Read More. Art Inspiration Beatrice Potter Potter Animal Paintings Beatrix Potter Illustrations Art Woodland Illustration Illustration Art Illustration. V&A - Beatrix Potter. The V&A is a