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Beatrix Potter and The Tailor of Gloucester

by

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Introduction.

"There is a receptive impressionable quality of mind, whether young or old which we call child-like. A fresh, direct vision, a quickly stimulated imagination, a love of symbolic and typical form, with a touch of poetic suggestion, a delight in frank gay colour, and a sensitiveness to the variations of line and contrasts of form - these are some of the characteristics of the child, whether grown-up or not. Happy are they who remain children in these respects through life".[1]

Walter Crane.

Introduction

Beatrix Potter's stories and paintings appeal to this "child-like quality of mind" whether in the child or the grown-up. Crane could have been referring specifically to Potter's work, as all the characteristics are strongly present in her books and sketches.

In this thesis, I intend to examine Potter's work, focusing primarily on one of her books The Tailor of Gloucester. I will study her attention to detail, her ability to capture animal realism, whilst incorporating human traits, in her books. I will look at how she manages to make us part of the scene, integrating us into the story in question.

Her talent, both as writer and illustrator, will be examined, along with the magical charm and fairy tale quality that runs through her work.

Chapter One deals with Beatrix Potter's biography; her life story, her family, her animal collection, her properties and her publications.

Chapter Two looks at her interest in fairy tale and fantasy relevant to her own personal favourite book, The Tailor of Gloucester. Various theories and definitions of fairy tale and it's origins are examined in an effort to gain insight into what makes a good tale. Her childhood interest in fairy tales and influences are explored. The story that originally inspired The Tailor of Gloucester and her adaptation of the story for her tale will be discussed noting it's similarity to The Elves and The Shoemaker. The sources for her drawings for the book will also be dealt with.

Chapter Three deals with costume in The Tailor of Gloucester. It examines how Potter used clothing to give her characters a human dimension. Costume of the

eighteenth century, costume in The Tailor of Gloucester, and the original garments on which they are based, are also examined. It also deals with the interiors, furniture and ceramics present in the book.

Chapter Four looks at animal depiction, primarily mice because they are central characters in The Tailor. Black humour in her books is also examined, as are her animal studies and sketches. This chapter also looks at Potter's contemporaries and influences, comparing and contrasting their work, and thus putting into perspective Potter's own distinctive style.

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Plate 2: Snowy Street Scene, The Tailor of Gloucester.

Chapter One

Helen Beatrix Potter

My Grandmother says when it snows in Hertfordshire it lies all winter. Have you ever noticed what a peculiar blue the snow is during a winter frost? I know no colour like it except that milky lemon-blue which you find in the seed of wild balsam. At such times of frost and snow the two great cedars on the lawn look their best. The snow lies in wreaths on their broad outstretched arms, or melting, trickles down the dusty green bark with red stairs.[1]

Beatrix Potter.

Chapter One

Helen Beatrix Potter

As a child, Beatrix Potter made many visits to her grandparent's home, Camfield Place in Hertfordshire, as well as enjoying holidays in Scotland and The Lake District with her family. It was in these places that she studied nature and the world around her, recording everything she saw in her sketchbooks. These sketchbooks were also filled with observational studies of the menagerie of pets that she kept in her schoolroom in Bolton Gardens, London. Unknown to her at this young age, it was these drawings that would lead her on the pathway to being one of the most famous children's writers and illustrators that ever lived. There has been much non-contentious material written about Potter and her life. The main biographies that have contributed to my research are;

Beatrix Potter, 1866-1943: the artist and her world

by Taylor Whalley, Hobbs and Battrick,

Beatrix Potter's Art

by Anne Stevenson Hobbs, and

The art of Beatrix Potter

by Leslie Linder.

Unfortunately the bibliographical material is more narrative than analytical.

Helen Beatrix Potter was born on the 28th of July 1866 at Bolton gardens, London. She was the daughter of Rupert Potter and Helen Leech, a wealthy couple who had inherited money from the Lancashire cotton trade. She had little or no contact with other children apart from her younger brother Bertram, who was six years her junior, and so she stayed in her third floor nursery, day in and day out, writing, reading, learning and drawing. Because of their wealth, and their busy social diaries, Potter's parents, like other upper middle class families of the time, employed a nurse, Miss McKenzie who instilled in Potter a firm belief in witches and fairies.

Her love and interest in art came most likely from her father, who, himself, enjoyed photography, was friends with Sir John Millais, and was an admirer of Randolph Caldecott, collecting a number of his paintings. Caldecott is also said to have had an influence on Potter's work.

Potter often visited her grandmother in Camfield Place at weekends. The large garden and farmyard served as a great source for her work. Also, each year the family spent two weeks in April at a seaside hotel. Three months of the year were spent in a rented summer house in Scotland, and later, the Lake District. In the summer she drew, sketched and painted all she saw and even invented little picture stories at an early age. Bertram helped her to catch birds and small animals and they attempted to train them. It was especially in Dalguise, Scotland where she found her lasting love of nature.

At the age of twelve, her parents, realising their daughter's talents, employed an art tutor, Miss Cameron, who taught her for five years. Although she had her art, Potter was lonely. Close friendships in her teenage years were discouraged. When Bertram was sent to boarding school, the children's governess left, leaving Potter in the company of her animal friends in the school room. Lizards, frogs, newts, snakes, salamanders, rabbits, bats, hedgehogs and dormice formed her domestic "zoo". She recorded their measurements and even boiled them when they died so as she could study their skeletons on paper.

When Potter began to visit The Lake District in 1882, she met Vicar Rawnsley who was fighting to preserve it's beauty. The founder of the forerunner of the National Trust, he encouraged her interest in geology and archaeology, and taught her the importance of conservation.

Following the departure of her governess, Potter wished to continue her drawing. Her parents, however, wanted her academic education to develop, and so employed Miss Annie Carter to teach her German.

The two became the best of friends, and although now learning a new language, she never neglected her animals and painting.

> It is all the same, drawing, painting, modelling, the irresistible desire to copy any beautiful object which strikes the eye. Why cannot one be content to look at it? I cannot rest, I must draw, however poor the result, and when I have a bad time come over me, it is a stronger desire than ever and settles on the queerest things.[2]
>
> Beatrix Potter.

Drawing, to Potter, was as natural as breathing, and she could not resist recording whatever caught her eye, whether it was a series of pencil sketches of her hedgehog's head for The Tale of Mrs Tiggywinkle (*plate 3*)or a finished water-colour of an outdoor landscape in Lakefield, Sawrey or Fawe Park, Keswick, (*plate 4*) Benjamin bouncer, her first rabbit, served as an obliging model for Christmas cards, and these were printed by Hildesheimer and Faulkner in time for Christmas 1890.

Potter began to visit The Natural History Museum in London to record fossils and insects, while in The Lake District she enjoyed drawing fungi. She then started to study and cultivate her own spores and drew what she saw beneath the microscope. Although the majority of her time was occupied by her sketching and painting, she still found time to learn platinotype printing, and to learn Shakespeare by heart.

She showed a great interest in Annie Carter's children (now Annie Moore), sending them story letters, and visiting them when she could. One of the letters that she wrote for Noel Moore was The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter was determined to have this little book published, and when no publisher showed any interest she decided to have it done privately. Two hundred and fifty copies were printed. She sent Warne Ltd a copy and they responded positively, wanting colour drawings. Potter obliged and 8,000 copies were printed by Warne Ltd in 1902.

Next she had five hundred copies of The Tailor of Gloucester printed. Warne, again wanted it shortened and many of the rhymes taken out. In 1903 both this, and

Plate 3: Studies for Mrs Tiggywinkle.

Plate 4: Garden at Fawe Park, Keswick.

Unused Background for The Tale of Benjamin Bunny.

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin, were published by Warne, followed by The Tale of Benjamin Bunny in 1904, and The Tale of Mrs Tiggy Winkle and The Pie and The Patty-Pan in 1905.

By this time, Potter had bought two properties with her earnings, a field near Sawrey in The Lake District, and Hilltop, a farm also in Sawrey. She had become a close friend of Norman Warne, through her association with the company, and he proposed marriage in 1905. Tragically he died only three months after their engagement.
The Tale of Jeremy Fisher, The Story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit and The Story of Miss Moppet were all published a year later in 1906.
These years, from 1901 until 1913, when Potter was in her early forties, were the most productive of her life, as it was when she wrote most of her little books.

Although almost forty, Potter was still expected to holiday with her parents, and in 1909, perhaps in an attempt to establish some kind of independence, she bought a second farm in Sawrey; Castle Farm. In 1912 she married her property dealer, William Heelis, much to the disappointment of her parents. Her father died the following year, and Potter brought her mother to Sawrey, before the war began, later buying her a house in Windermere. Her publishers began to use the war as an excuse not to pay her and in 1917 Harold Warne was convicted of forgeries of £20,000. As Potter was one of their most profitable authors, she was asked to help. She agreed, and wrote Appley Dappley's Nursery Rhymes. In 1919 part of the money owed to her was paid in shares.

Potter was happily married. She was also involved in the village, establishing a nursing trust. Because she was now running the farm and looking after the animals, she had little time for new books, but she did manage to write The Tale of Johnny Town Mouse and Cecily Parsleys Nursery Rhymes, amongst others in the ensuing years.

Potter bought yet another farm, "Troutbeck Park" in 1924, and began to develop an interest in sheep breeding. Her health soon started to deteriorate; in April 1939, she had a hysterectomy, and in 1943, after having bad bronchitis, which affected her heart, she died. Her royalties and rights were left to Warne, while her farm and properties are now in the hands of The National Trust.

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1) Taylor, Judy

Beatrix Potter: artist, storyteller and countrywoman.

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Beatrix Potter 1866-1943. The artist and her world.

London: Warne and The National Trust, 1987. pg 16

Chapter Two

The Mice and The Tailor

I do not remember a time when I did not try to invent pictures and make fairy tales - amongst the wild flowers, the animals, trees and mosses and fungi - all the thousand common objects of the countryside; that pleasant unchanging world of realism and romance, which in our northern clime is stiffened by hard weather, a tough ancestry and the strength that comes from the hills.[1]

Helen Beatrix Potter.

Chapter Two

The Mice and The Tailor

Potter's love of fairy tale was no passing interest. She describes, according to Leslie Linder, in her coded journal, how she spent many hot summer days reading Chamber's Rhymes and Fairy tales, along with Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and Uncle Remus. The world of fairy and fantasy was the dominant characteristic of her writings and illustrations, and is evident in almost all of her work.

What do we know about the origin and history of fairy tales? Both J.R.R Tolkien and Jack Zipes agree that there is no one true definition of fairy tales. Tolkien believes that "faerie" cannot be caught in a net of words, for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.[2] Zipes confirms this belief by writing;

> Inscribed in our minds, as children and then later as adults, is the impression that it is not important to know about the mysterious past of fairy tales, just as long as they are there and continue to be written. The past is mysterious. The history of the fairy tale for children is mystery.[3]

Zipes goes on to say, however, that fairy tale writers took traditional oral folk tales and changed them into "a discourse about mores, values and manners so that children would become civilised according to the social code of the time."[4] Writers interacted with each other, preserving their ideas regarding social conditions and conflicts in an underlying manner, through fairy tale.

Maria Tatar traces theories of polygenesis and monogenesis in her book The Hard Facts of the Grimms Fairy Tales. Two different ideas as to why there are similarities in fairy tales throughout the ages have emerged. Those who subscribe to the theory of monogenesis or diffusion believe that nothing new is ever discovered if it is possible to copy. Such folklorists think that fairy stories originated in one specific

place. German scholars of the nineteenth century, for example, believed that it was probably India that gave birth to the original tale or tales, which through oral word and literature, reached other far flung countries, altering slightly as they went, although the underlying structure of the stories was still present. Many folklorists, however, dispute this theory because where there are no evident connections between two regions, there are nonetheless similarities to be found in the tales from each place. Vladamir Propp was one such scholar who questioned the monogenesis theory.
He asks;

> How is one to explain the similarity of the tale about the frog queen in Russia, Germany, France, India, in America among the Indians, and in New Zealand, when the contact of peoples cannot be proven historically? [5]

Polygenesis was a more convincing theory to Propp. He looked to a psychological explanation, believing that the human mind needs no contact with external sources to conceive the universal fantasies embodied in fairy tales. Life experiences, therefore, must influence the folkloric imagination. The similarity of basic situations perhaps produces tales in different parts of the world which are very similar structurally.

According to Maria Tatar, those who subscribe to the theory of monogenesis repeatedly draw attention to the birth and evolution of tales (when, where and how they arose and developed), defenders of polygenesis, on the other hand, endorse the notion of spontaneous generation and focus on the meaning of tales. For the latter, the human psyche figures as the breeding ground for folklorestic plots, it needs no contact with external sources to conceive the universal fantasies embodied in fairy tales.[6]

Some critics believe that fairy tales translate the truths of life into concrete actions and images. They may refer to the highest hopes and the deepest fears of childhood, or they may preserve the fantasies and phobias of an earlier age. Critics have found an expression of regressive modes of thought in violent or savage events

depicted in fairy tales. Both these views suggest that fairy tales relate so closely to what we experience in life universally that they are alike all over the world. Vladamir Propp identified thirty-one functions in fairy tales ranging from "absentation and interdiction through various acts of villaining to the hero's final marriage and / or accession to the throne". All thirty-one functions are not obligatory, but they must stand in the sequence that Propp outlines. These functions are assigned to seven spheres of action designated by the following roles:

1 The villain
2 The donor (provider of magical agents)
3 The helper
4 The princess (or sought-for person) and her father
5 The dispatcher
6 The hero
7 The false hero

The number of characters in a tale, can, according to Propp, be reduced or expanded. One character may, in a particular tale, take on multiple roles. He recognises that in tales such as Hansel and Gretel, Snow White or Rumpelstiltskin, the crones begin as helper and end as villains. Also, several characters may be implicated in a single "sphere of action, that is, the hero may encounter a number of villains or helpers in his path. This theory of Propp's is known as the "morphology of the folktale".

Fantasy and fairy tale assumed great significance for Potter at an early age. Some of the preliminary drawings that she did at the age of nine, for example, depicted skating rabbits wearing bonnets and coats and carrying umbrellas *(plate 5)*. Perhaps these fantasies were a release from her lonely life, and she could fantasise about the animals, sporting clothes to appear almost human to her, giving her comfort. This solitude and loneliness encouraged her to spend more and more time drawing and studying her domestic "zoo".

Plate 5: Skating rabbits, aged 10.

Potter's most imaginative drawings date from the 1890's, the need for money being a prime incentive. She began to produce Christmas cards and moveable pictures for Hildesheimer and Faulkner publishers. Rabbits were the main subject matter of these cards, and along with the drawings she would do in future years for The Tale of Peter Rabbit, living in his country abode , she now painted his cousins in city scenes wearing coats, holding umbrellas and dressed for the winter snow. Although the clothes give the animals a human quality, they never lose their animal characteristics or appearances because of the precision and total awareness of nature from which they are drawn. The fantasy of animals doing everyday, human things runs throughout her series of little books. Mice play cards and read newspapers, a little hedgehog washes the laundry, a dog and cat serve customers in their shop, and a toad goes fishing.

Potter loved the idea of fairies, ghosts and enchantment. In Dalguise in Scotland, where she visited regularily as a child:

> Everything was romantic in my imagination. The woods were peopled by the mysterious good folk. The lords and ladies of the last century walked me along the overgrown paths.[7]

Along with the many books that she read of love and fantasy, her nanny enriched her with fabulous tales of fairies and knights, of princesses and witches. Her journal contains many references to magic and enchantment. She writes that the whole Scottish countryside belonged to the fairies: "singing and bobbing and dancing in the grass".[8]
Perhaps it was because of this fairy element, that The Tailor of Gloucester was her own personal favourite of her work.

The idea for this magical charming tale came when Potter visited a remote cousin, Caroline Hutton, who lived near Stroud in Gloucester, in 1894. Potter, now twenty-eight years of age, had not been away independently for five years, but this trip was to prove to be one of the most fruitful of her entire life. She sat enthralled as Caroline Hutton told her of a real life tailor who lived nearby.

Plate 6: Tailor and Simpkin with finished coat.

The Tailor of Gloucester.

Apparently, an exhausted tailor left his shop one evening, leaving behind an unfinished waistcoat which was cut out but not made up. The following Monday he returned to find it entirely finished except for one buttonhole. A note attached read: "No more twist" (thread). His two assistants, unbeknownst to him, had let themselves into his workshop over the weekend with a skeleton key and had worked on the coat for hours. The tailor could not believe his eyes when he saw the result, but his two kind assistants never breathed a word. The tailor then proceeded to hang up a sign reading; "Come to Prichard where the waistcoats are made at night by the fairies". Potter, charmed by these "fairies", decided to alter the story somewhat, replacing the "fairy" assistants with mice.

In Potter's book The Tailor of Gloucester, her tailor falls ill and thus fails to complete an outfit for The Mayor of Gloucester, who is to be wed on Christmas Day. He recovers some days later only to enter his workshop and find the entire waistcoat and coat finished.

Her sources for the drawings in this book are interesting. Although published at the beginning of this century, it is a book set in the eighteenth century, which is evident from the buildings, the interiors (although not the furniture and the ceramics) and especially the detailed costume. Potter drew the sheets for her wintry scenes in the book in the middle of the hot summer weather, adding the snowy rooftops and alleyways later. She made background paintings of interiors of cottages, of a tailor's workshop, an open fireplace, a bedroom and a dresser complete with crockery, along with many others.

So as to sketch a real-life tailor at work, she pulled a button off her coat one day in Chelsea and while the tailor was mending it she quickly drew some preliminary sketches. She copied the tailor's shop from a print of some old London houses, and she used the son of her uncle's coachman as a model for various positions she wanted for the tailor in the book. It was recently discovered that she drew from the eighteenth century costumes in The Victoria and Albert Museum, from original costumes on reserve there.

It is surprising to note that no researcher of Beatrix Potter or her work has ever observed The Tailor of Gloucester's uncanny and distinct resemblance to the Grimm Brother's The Elves and the Shoemaker, written in the early nineteenth century. The Grimm's story concerns a poor shoemaker who leaves his last pieces of leather cut out and ready to be made the next day. The following day he finds the shoes already made on the table, shining and beautifully finished. This continues to happen over and over again in the days following as the puzzled shoemaker and his wife begin to make some money. One night, around Christmas time, the shoemaker and his wife sit up and wait to see what happens. Hidden away, they witness two elves setting to work on the leather. The shoemaker's wife wishes to repay them in some way for their hard work so she sets about making them waistcoats, coats, pantaloons and two tiny pairs of shoes. The elves are overjoyed with their gifts, and they dance out of the house with glee, never to return again.

The similarities between the two stories are obvious, perhaps Potter subconsciously absorbed parts of "The Shoemaker" as a child, later incorporating them into the "Tailor" story. Both of these tales are set at Christmas time which itself creates a common Yuletide, magical atmosphere.

Potter rewrote other famous fairy tales, altering the story here and there. Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella are two such examples. She follows Perrault's seventeenth century version of Little Red Riding Hood where both the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood fall victims to the wolf. Potter alters parts of the original Cinderella also. In her version, Cinderella is the name by which the child is christened, rather than that adopted to her position as a kitchen maid. Also, Cinderella is told to leave the ball at a quarter to midnight on the second night. The coach is drawn by rabbits and not horses. Potter always adds a touch of originality into these tales.

Potter, along with The Tailor of Gloucester, wrote many other fairy tales, some of which were not published, such as The Fairy in the Oak and Llewellyns Well.

Although neither story contained illustrations, Potter has such a way with the language present in them that she creates imagery in the mind's eye, touching the hearts of both child and adult. Bruno Bettleheim believes that this is an essential quality of a true fairy tale.

> Fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to convey at the same time, overt and covert meanings - came to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult.[10]

Chapter Two (References)

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Tree and Leaf.
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3, 4 Zipes, Jack
Fairy tales and the Art of Subversion.
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9 Linder, Leslie
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The Uses of Enchantment: The meaning and importance of Fairy tales.
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Plate 7: Mrs Tiggywinkle the washerwoman.

Chapter Three

Costume

The difficulty of keeping Mrs Tiggy awake in an upright position was solved by making a dummy, which had the added advantage that it could be dressed up in petticoats and apron, which the real Mrs Tiggy had always refused to tolerate. The hedgehog drawings are turning out very comical. I have dressed up a cotton wool dummy figure for convenience of drawing the clothes.[1]

Beatrix Potter

Chapter Three

Costume

Beatrix Potter found that she could enhance her animal characters, and give them more of a personality, by dressing them; whether it was Ribby's humble apron and shawl (The Pie and The Patty Pan) or Jeremy Fisher's almost pompous outfit of tights, pumps, starched collar and bulging waistcoat. Margaret Lane's theory as to why Potter clad her characters is that "it lays emphasis not only on the differences between man and animals but on the similarities between us".[2] Although Potter's animals are dressed in human clothing and doing everyday human things, they are fundamentally realistic animal drawings, and one almost forgets that they are wearing clothes.

Potter's most detailed and exquisite use of costume and embroidery is seen in The Tailor of Gloucester. All the garments in the book; except the magical cherry-coloured coat, have been identified as articles housed on reserve in The Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Potter made regular visits to the museum, then known as The South Kensington Museum, to make research drawings and sketches for this book. She wrote to Warne:

> I have been delighted to find I may draw some most beautiful eighteenth century clothes at the South Kensington Museum. I had been looking at them for a long time in an inconvenient dark corner of the Goldsmith's Court, but had no idea they could be taken out of the case. The clerk says I could have any put on a table in one of the offices, which will be most convenient.[3]

Much eighteenth century costume was elaborate and elegant, with great emphasis on detail. The typical English lady of the time (*plate 8*) wore a corset trimmed with lace and ribbons with an overskirt attached to it and pulled up on each side to increase the volume of the panniers. The underskirt, which was usually in a different colour, often had ribbons, frills and gathered lace, was an intrinsic part of the

Plate 8: Eighteenth century lady.

costume and was meant to be seen. A hooped skirt was also worn. These were round in shape at the beginning of the century, then gradually, the oval shape was introduced.

The opening of the bodice was filled in with a decorative stomacher, also heavily covered with ribbon and lace. Sleeves, usually ending just above the elbow, were straight and close-fitting with small winged cuffs. Otherwise, sleeves had ruffles. Long elbow-length gloves were usually worn, as were mob caps or pinners - lace bordered caps worn on the crown of the head. The lappets of the cap were sometimes turned up and pinned with a brooch or a jewelled hat ornament. Brocade and velvet fabrics were popular, as were lighter materials such as camelot (silk cloth and cotton mix). The grisette - a silk and grey cotton was the favourite material of the working class.

Potter's lady mice in The Tailor of Gloucester wear beautiful gowns from the eighteenth century. On page two of the book, there sits a little lady mouse (*plate 9*), clutching a mirror in an outfiit which is a replica of one housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum today.

> The original is a beige silk with a figured ground of curled feathers also brocaded in green and yellow silk with silver gilt thread. Interspersed with these are various printed flowers, including lilies, irises, hyacinths, violas and roses. Small leaves embroidered in blue silk are scattered across the entire surface.[4]

The mouse is wearing this "pet-en-l'air" or morning dress with matching outer petticoat. The jacket has no front fastenings. She wears a lace stomacher which is shaped like an inverted triangle and fills the gap from bosom to waist. It could be pinned, hooked or tied to the inside of the dress. The mob cap, incidentally, is dated to the early nineteenth century.

This lady mouse sits on the fabrics of a French court dress coat, of silk velvet embroidered in silver thread, sequins, tinsel and pastes. The colour of the coat is,

Plate 9: Lady Mouse in "pet-en-l'air".

The Tailor of Gloucester.

according to Avril Hart, (an expert in Potter's use of costume), much greener than that of the coat in the illustration as the velvet has faded over the years. When Potter drew the coat in 1903 it was a turquoise blue colour, which can now only be seen in the seams.

The other important lady mouse in this book can be seen on page twenty-four. (*plate 10*) She curtsies humbly in front of a teacup, wearing an open printed cotton gown, a red silk quilted petticoat, an apron, a fichu at her neck (a triangular shaped scarf of fine linen, or muslin, worn at the neck and covering the bosom). The open gown is a full length dress with fitted bodice and the skirt is open from the waist to the hem, revealing the petticoat. Mob caps, made of linen or muslin, had a crown decorated with a frilled edge, and were tied under the chin.

A typical eighteenth century outfit for a male of the time (*plate 11*), would have consisted of a coat made of fine-faced cloth, close-fitting and single breasted. It would have been of mid-calf length. Sleeves were long and narrow and the lace or the shirt peeped out below a cuff of velvet which usually accompanied a straight, doubled velvet collar. The shirt and cravat were usually made of lawn. A buttoned sleeveless waistcoat ended in two rounded points at the waist. Knee breeches were made of nankeen cloth or velvet, and stockings of light coloured silk. Accessories included flat-soled shoes with gold buckles and a tricorne often trimmed with lace rosettes and edged with gold braid. Some were made of felt and had little brims.

Potter's gentleman mouse on page twenty-seven (*plate 12*), is dressed in the style of eighteenth century court dress, with a tricorne hat held under his left arm, but with certain nineteenth century features such as the lace jabot (neckcloth). The tip of a black ribbon seen over his shoulder is a bow stitched to the back of the coat collar, representing an eighteenth century bag wig. Court dress coats retained these black bows. The mouse does not wear a shirt, but has lace ruffles which would be attached to it if he was wearing one.

Plate 10: Curtseying Lady Mouse.

The Tailor of Gloucester.

Plate 11: Eighteenth century gentleman.

Plate 12: Bowing Gentleman Mouse.

The Tailor of Gloucester.

Potter's attention to detail is evident in her close-up drawings of the embroidered waistcoat and the coat on page fifty-seven and fifty-eight respectively. The waistcoat (*plate 13*) from The South Kensington Museum was one of ivory satin embroidered in coloured silks - it's front edges laid with cotton net and edged with chenille. It originally formed part of a full dress suit. From the 1770's mens full dress evolved into a specific style, comprising of matching coloured coat and breeches with an elaborately embroidered white silk waistcoat. Coat and breeches were of plain or finely figured silks, velvet, or fine wool; the contrasting white silk waistcoat was richly embroidered, in a design repeated along the coat's front and back pleats, around the cuffs and pockets and on the knee-bands of the breeches.

The detail of the full dress coat on page fifty-eight (*plate 14*), is from an English blue silk coat from 1800, embroidered in coloured silks. It is also used as a background on page thirty-five and again on page fifty-five where it is laid flat on the tailor's workbench. This coat, and some of the other clothes, drawn by Beatrix Potter can be identified hanging up in the tailor's shop on page fifteen. In the illustration the coat is cherry-coloured and the detail of the cuff is clear enough to show the quality of the silk. The lace ruffle would have been a nineteenth century addition. Sleeve ruffles were always attached to the shirt cuffs, not to the coat cuffs.

While Potter dressed most of the characters in her other books, they did not wear clothes that were as detailed and as beautifully drawn as the costumes in The Tailor of Gloucester. Take, for example, Tale of Peter Rabbit, although the story itsef revolves around the young rabbit losing his shoes and "his blue jacket with brass buttons quite new", the clothes themselves are plain and non-descript. The light blue jacket has no pattern, frills or embroidery. Nor can we tell what fabric it is made of. Peter's cousin Benjamin wears an identical brown jacket in the Tale of Benjamin Bunny; simple, plain and without shape.

Jemima Puddleduck wears but a simple poke-bonnet and shawl, Tom Kitten is in a two-piece, blue trouser suit, while Squirrel Nutkin and his friends remain unclad. Potter dresses some of the animals characteristically to give us a sense of who they are

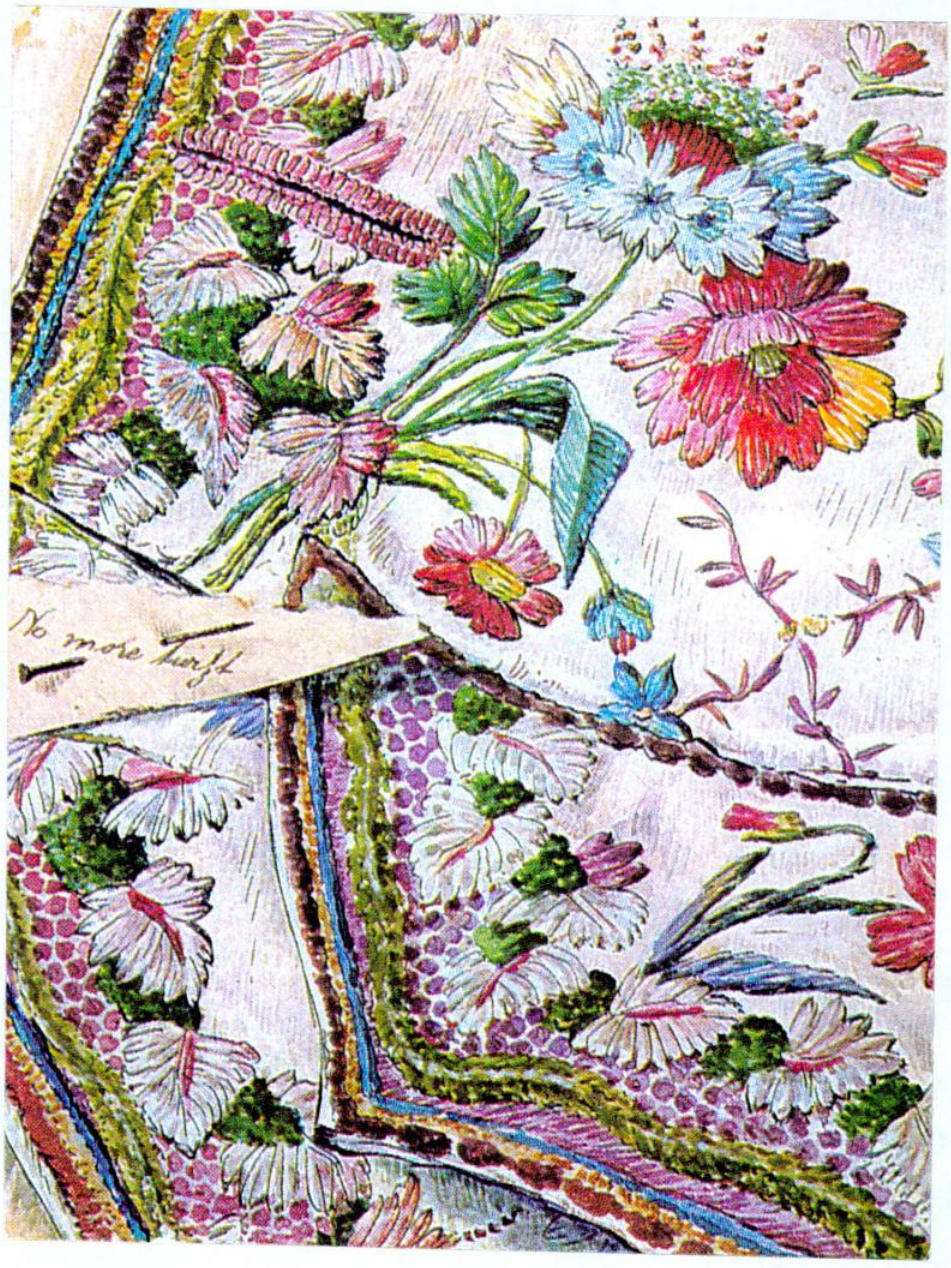

Plate 13: Detail of Embroidered Waistcoat.

The Tailor of Gloucester.

Plate 14: "Cherry coloured coat".

The Tailor of Gloucester.

and what they do. Mrs Tiggywinkle, the hedgehog washerwoman, wears a fresh cotton petticoat, white apron and a mob cap with her prickles poking through. Her humble dress confirms her status. Mr Jeremy Fisher, however, has an air of prosperity about him; his floral waistcoat, his breeches which reflect his skin-pattern, and his rich red velvet coat, combined with his aloof personality portray him as a member of the upper class animal society.

Potter's Portfolios:

After a visit to The Archive of Art and Design, Olympia, London, to meet Anne Hobbs, an expert and author on Beatrix Potter, it became increasingly apparent to me that Potter did, indeed have a keen interest in fabric, stitching and pattern. In addition, it was very interesting to see Potter's homemade portfolios (*plate 15*). Ranging in size, they were made fron hard cardboard and covered both inside and out with fabrics of various patterning and colours. Most were cotton, brushed cotton, and linen. These off cuts of fabric came from the calico printworks of Dinting Vale, Glossop, originally owned by her Grandfather, including some liberty-style and art-nouveau patterning.

On some of these portfolios, she used a patchwork of various fabrics; she also used fabric on the inside as a sort of envelope to protect her work. Often she would use a variety of colours of the same patterned fabric together to cover one portfolio, whether in patchwork or just side by side. They each had a ribbon tie for closing. The stitching was tiny and extremely precise, and was more than likely done by hand.

Some of the scraps she used were surprisingly gaudy for someone who used such delicate watercolours in her books. One interesting folder consisted of a brown and white checked gingham with a leaf/plaid patterned cotton in two different colours; a dark red and a lighter pink and green. The motifs on the fabrics she used were small; usually tiny florals or oriental patterns. It was obvious from her painting also that she enjoyed detail and working in a small scale.

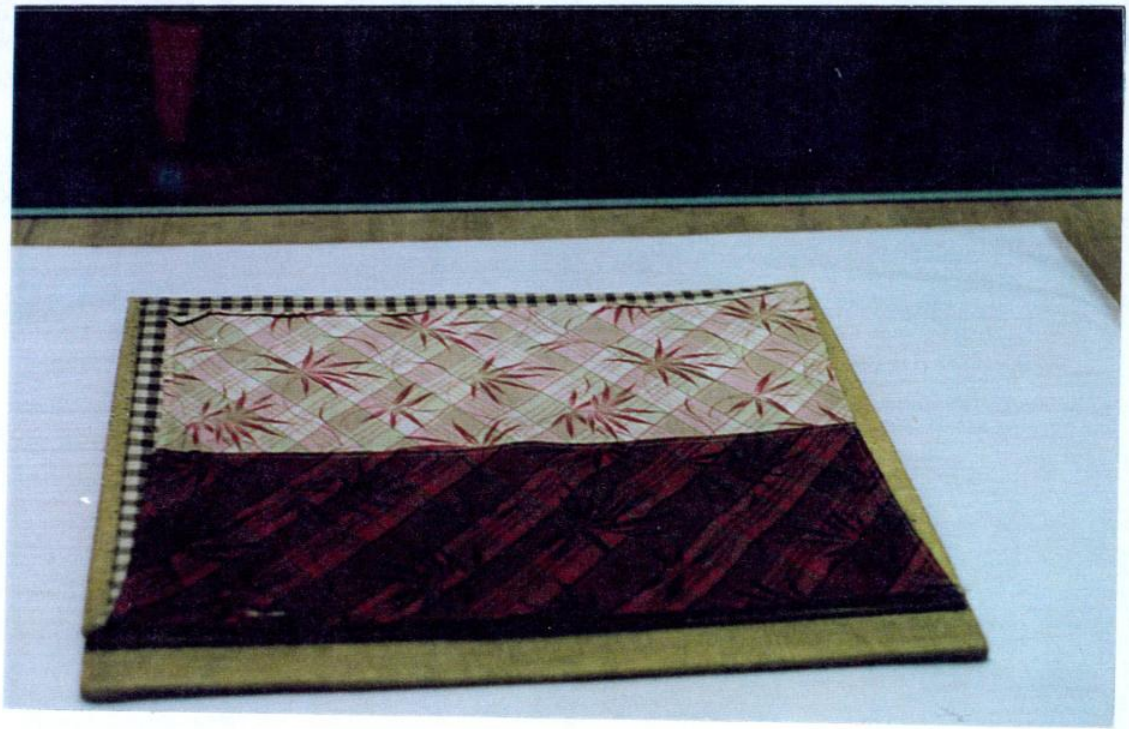

Plate 15: Potter's homemade fabric portfolios.

Anne Hobbs showed me two books which Potter had covered in fabric from her Grandfather's factory (*plate 16*). One copy of The Tailor of Gloucester and one of The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin were bound in this de-luxe printed cotton fabric. In a letter to Norman Warne in 1903 she mentioned this fabric;

> I am posting back the patterns...I had overlooked those in the small packet, they are rather quaint, especially one like pansies.[5]

Interiors and furniture:

As much as Potter had a marvellous talent for capturing objects both alive and natural, and had a great eye for detail, she was also a superb artist of interiors and furniture as is evident in The Tailor of Gloucester. She manages to draw the interiors of her characters' abodes in such a way as to incorporate the reader into the scene, whether it is in The Tailor's kitchen or Mrs Tittlemouse's underground home. We can almost feel the warmth of Mrs Tiggywinkle's stove, or feel the breeze coming in through Timmy Willie's nest (The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse). Each home corresponds to it's inhabitants personality.

> Beatrix Potter's interiors - nearly all cave-like in feeling if not actually so in their moulded surfaces - are designed to meet the need of the individual, and each room is tailored to it's function, the group of rooms responding to their contest in the environment.[8]

Potter loved old houses and furniture. She wrote in 1884; "If ever I had a home I would have old furniture, oak in the diningroom." In The Tailor of Gloucester, she draws each item of furniture with such precision that it is surprising that more objects have not been identified with their original pieces. We can, however, identify the fireplace in the kitchen as belonging to Melford Hall, Suffolk. On the 13th of April 1903 she wrote to Norman Warne, informing him that during her stay in Melford Hall that week, "I have been able to draw an old fashioned fireplace here, very suitable for the tailor's kitchen".

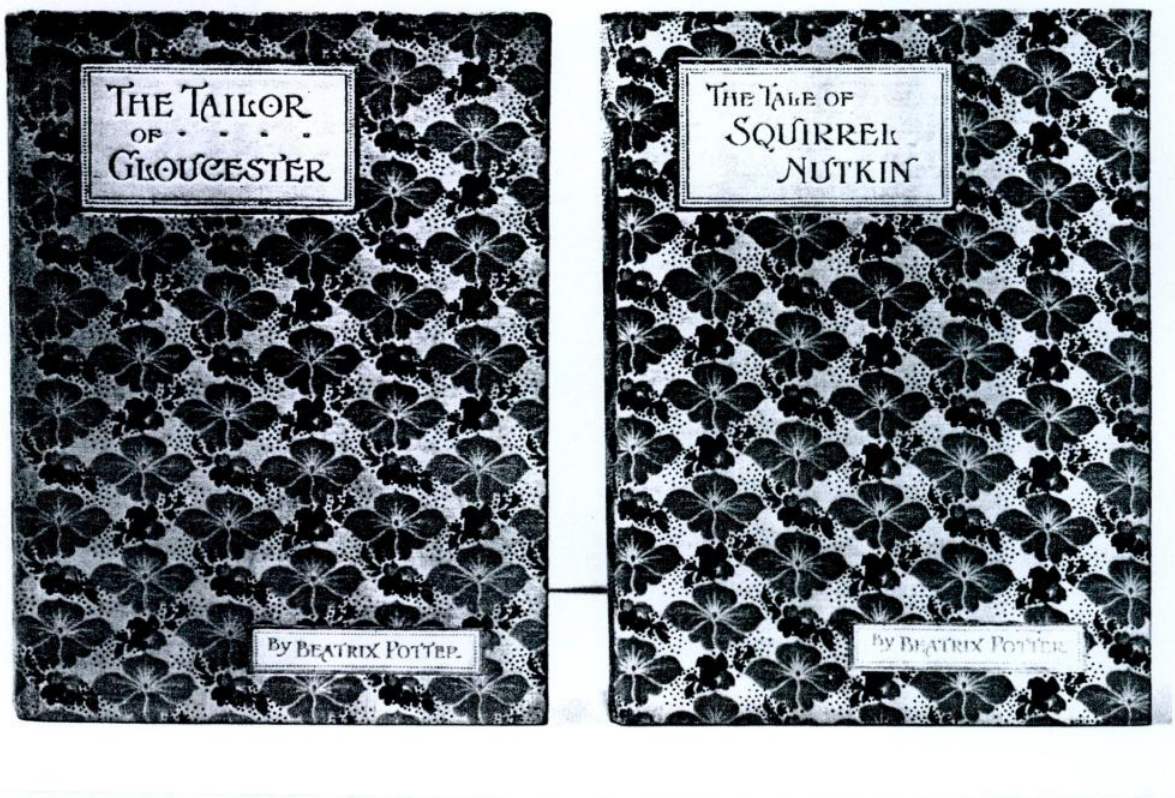

Plate 16: Potter's fabric covered books.

Although Potter made sketches of chairs from Melford Hall, she used sketches from a house at Fawe Park, Keswick, for her "Tailor" drawings. It is interesting to note also, the sketch of a chair made at Winchelsea, and the chair that the tailor sits slumped in on page twenty of the book (*plate 17 + 18*). They are identical in every way, even down to the angle that they are positioned at. This, surely, must be the very same chair.

Beatrix Potter drew the interior of many of the houses of family and friends, whether large manors like Melford Hall, or her uncle's house at Gwaynynog near Denbeigh, Wales. This was a very old, modest house dating back to 1571, with a black and white front, uneven beams and long passages, furnished in perfect taste. The kitchen of this house is very similar to the tailor's kitchen with it's dresser and grandfather clock (*plate 19*), but she actually visited Harescombe Grange, Gloucester, or a local cottage to sketch this dresser.

Potter borrowed the china from the cobbler's wife in Sawrey. Most is English bone china. The handle-less cup in the illustration for the lady-mouse dates from 1800-1810 and has pure coloured decoration popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as does the tea bowl which is part of the same set, on page nineteen, where Simpkin has just trapped a mouse (*plate 20*). The cup used in the gentleman mouse illustration is English lustreware (1800-1830). This distinctive design became known as "The London Shape", and was an elegant style intended for the top end of the market. Most of the furniture and ceramics that appear in the book are from the nineteenth century and the combination of this and the eighteenth century costume in a book is both unusual and unique to Potter.

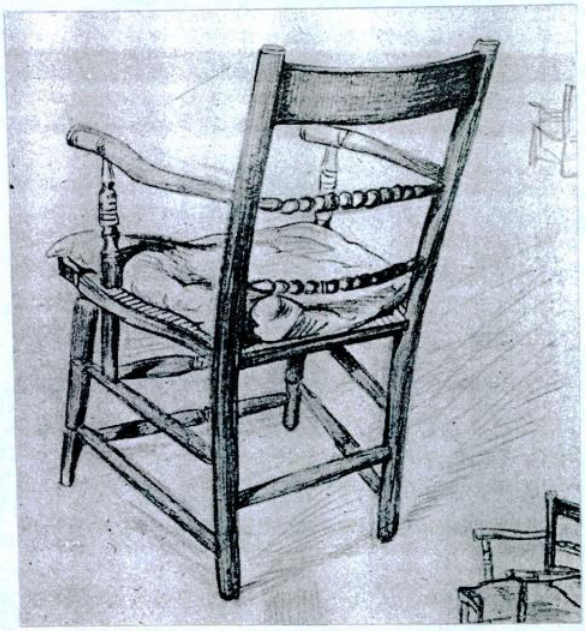

Plate 17:

Winchelsea

Chair Sketch

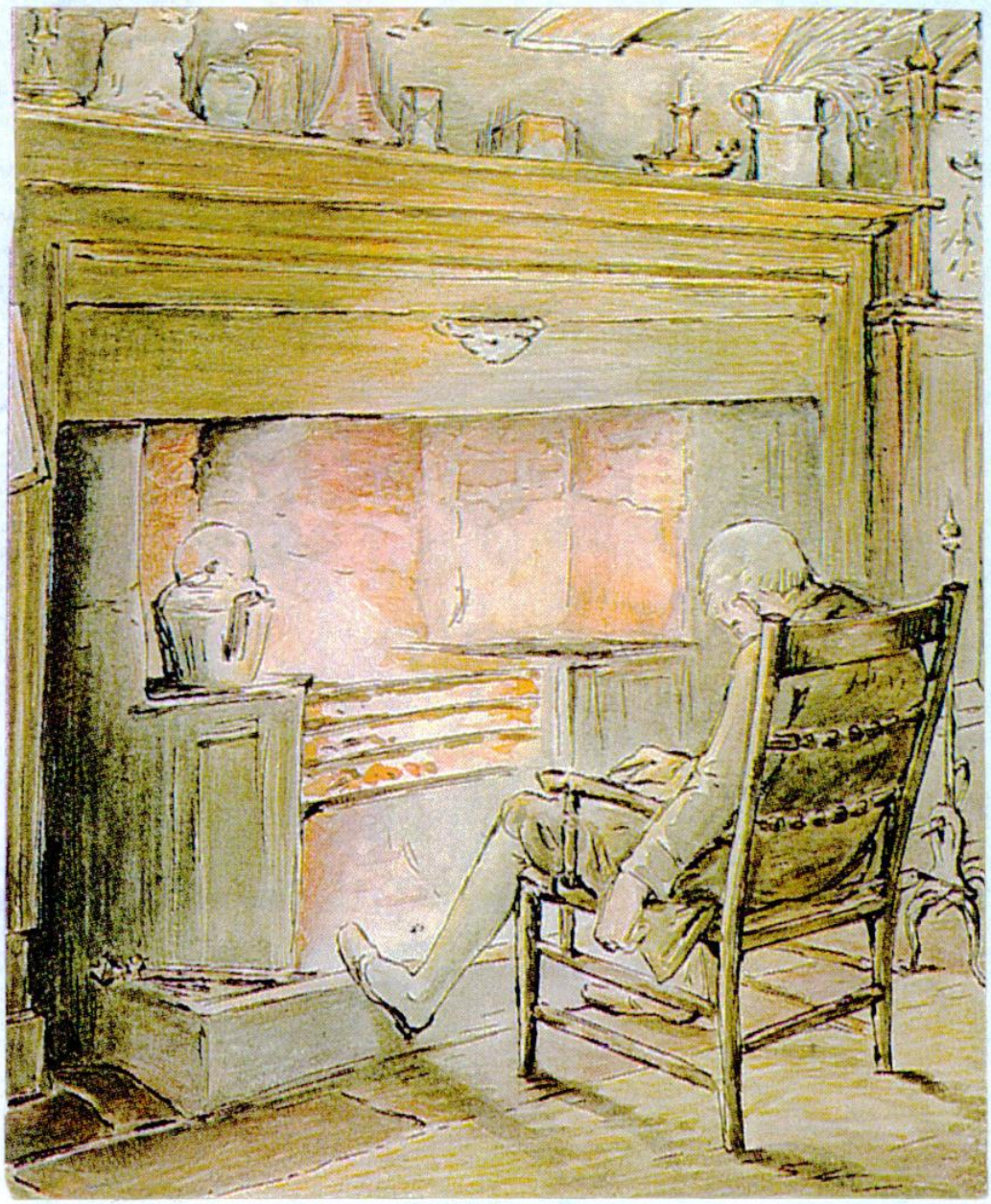

Plate 18:

Tailor at the hearth,

<u>The Tailor of Gloucester.</u>

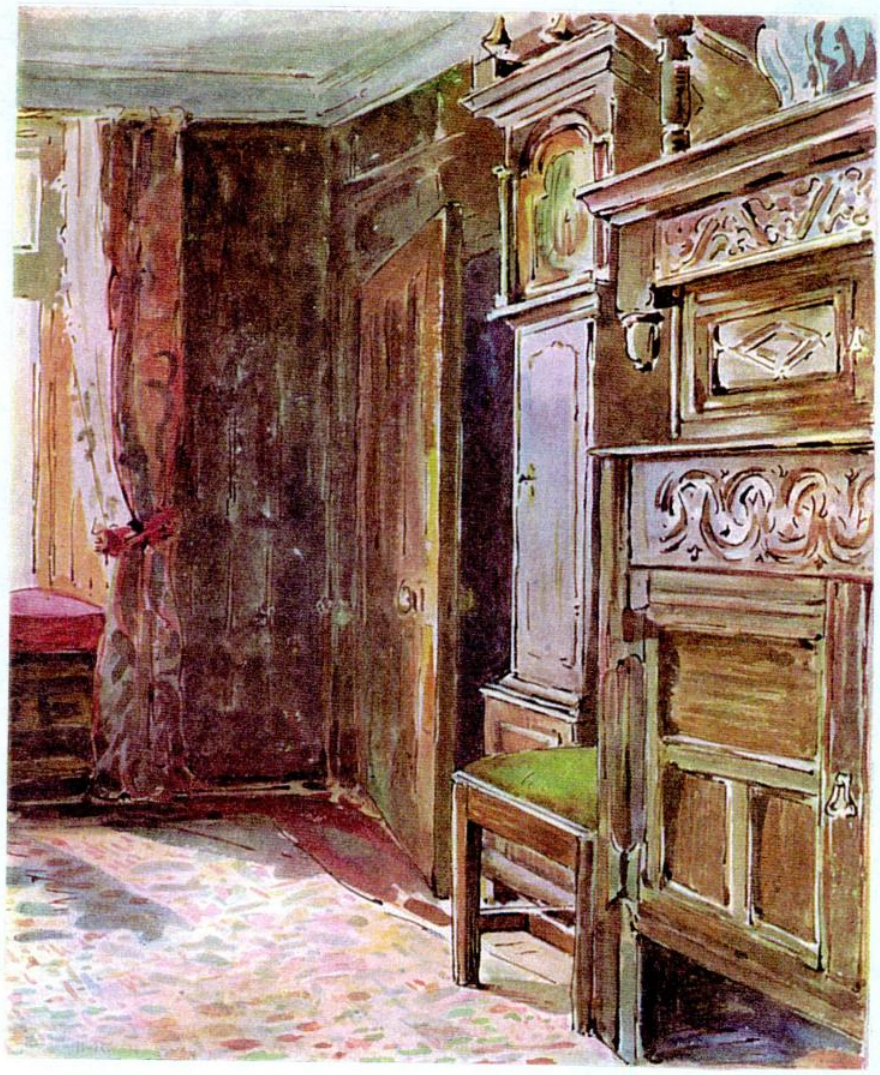

Plate 19: Kitchen, Gwaynynog, Denbeigh, Wales.

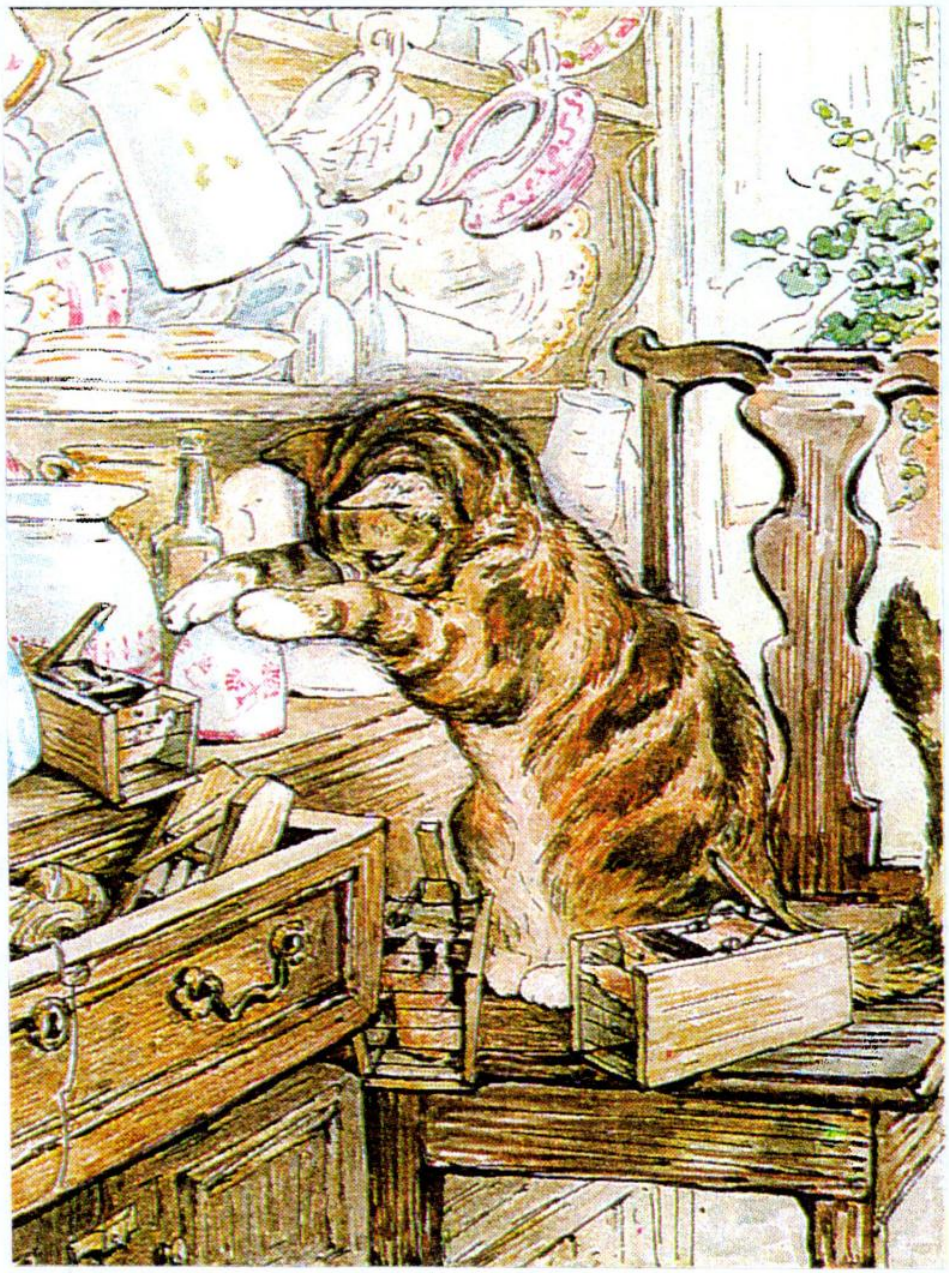

Plate 20: Simpkin traps a mouse.

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Chapter Four

The animal story's invitation to pleasure is invariably an invitation to a subversive pleasure. It is the simple fact that everyone, including quite young children, knows that animals don't really talk, which prompts such genuine delight in the anamolous convention of the talking animal.(1)

Steve Baker.

This "genuine delight" is experienced in The Tailor of Gloucester, as the mice express themselves in a human manner, singing, talking, dancing and wearing clothes. It is the combination of the human link, and the retention of the animal form that gives the story a sense of magic.

The mice, who are the main characters of the story, are exquisitely drawn, both collectively and individually. The scene depicting the mouse trying on the waistcoat (*plate 21*), is particularly charming. The model mouse stands proudly, his head high, as the rest of the mice look on intently. One mouse holds the coat to be tried on next, another has a pin cushion, and yet another, holding a mirror and a tape measure, leans forward with keen interest. The lady mouse on page twelve is magnificently dressed. One can see the tiny hairs on her head, her long thin whiskers and shiny beady eyes; as well as her little ears and tiny claws. These fascinating little details could easily be missed as they are so tiny.

The curtseying mouse and gentleman mouse on pages twenty-four and twenty-seven respectively are delicately painted, although the male may have lost some of the sensitivity around the head area. His eyes are very small and close to the nose. Another group painting shows five little mice busily sewing for the tailor. They seem happy and content, and their beady eyes make them appear alert, while the light from the candle creates a cheerful warm glow in the mousehole. Mice and other rodents appear in many of Potter's books such as The Tale of Two Bad Mice and The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse, but none of the drawings match the precision and care of the mouse drawings in The Tailor of Gloucester. Take, for example, the scene with Hunca Munca and his wife peeping out into the nursery in The Tale of Two Bad Mice, *(plate 22)*, Victims of a monochromatic painting, they have lost their definition. Little care seems to have been taken in drawing their faces. Their ears appear to be joined together, while their snouts are of strange shape. The Tailor of Gloucester drawings are undoubtedly amongst the best animal drawings that Potter ever painted.

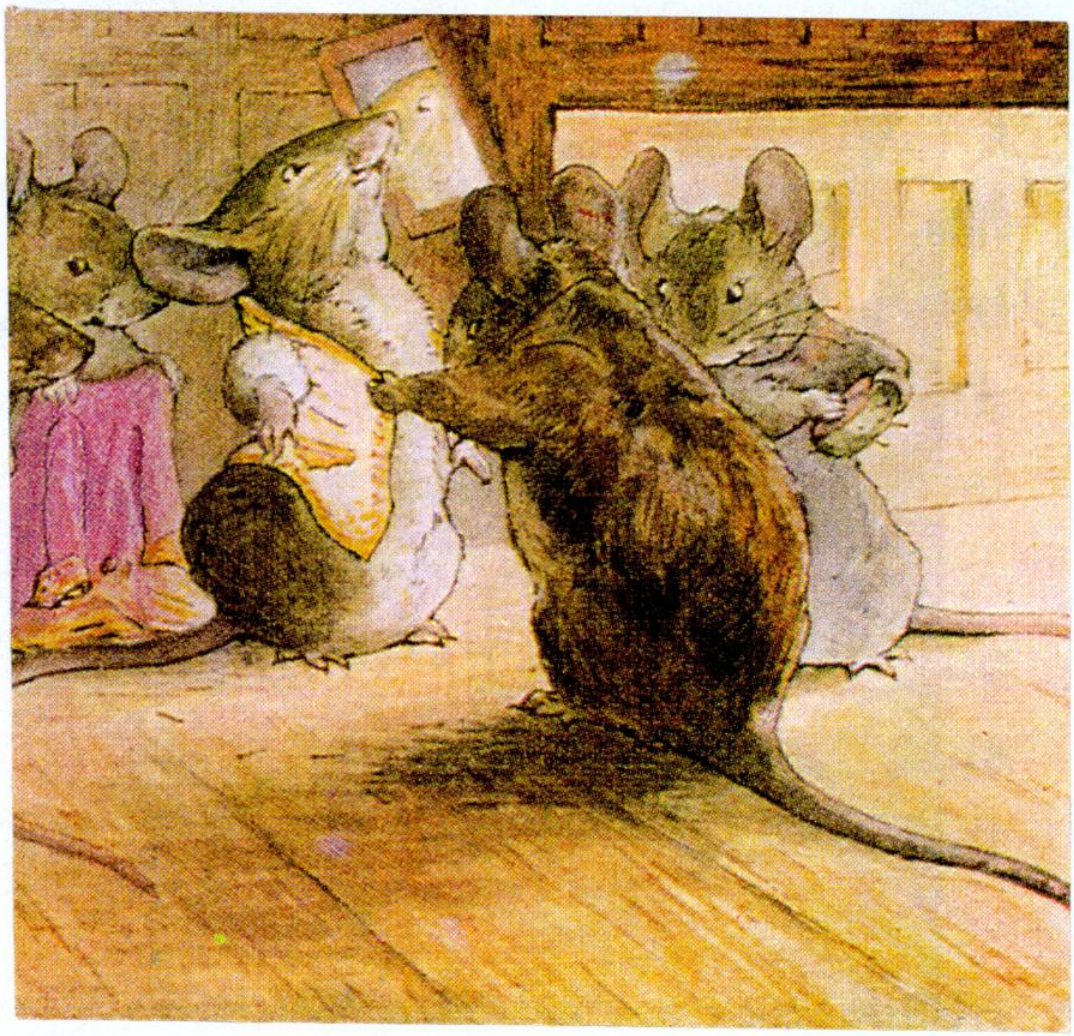

Plate 21: Mouse trying on waistcoat.

The Tailor of Gloucester.

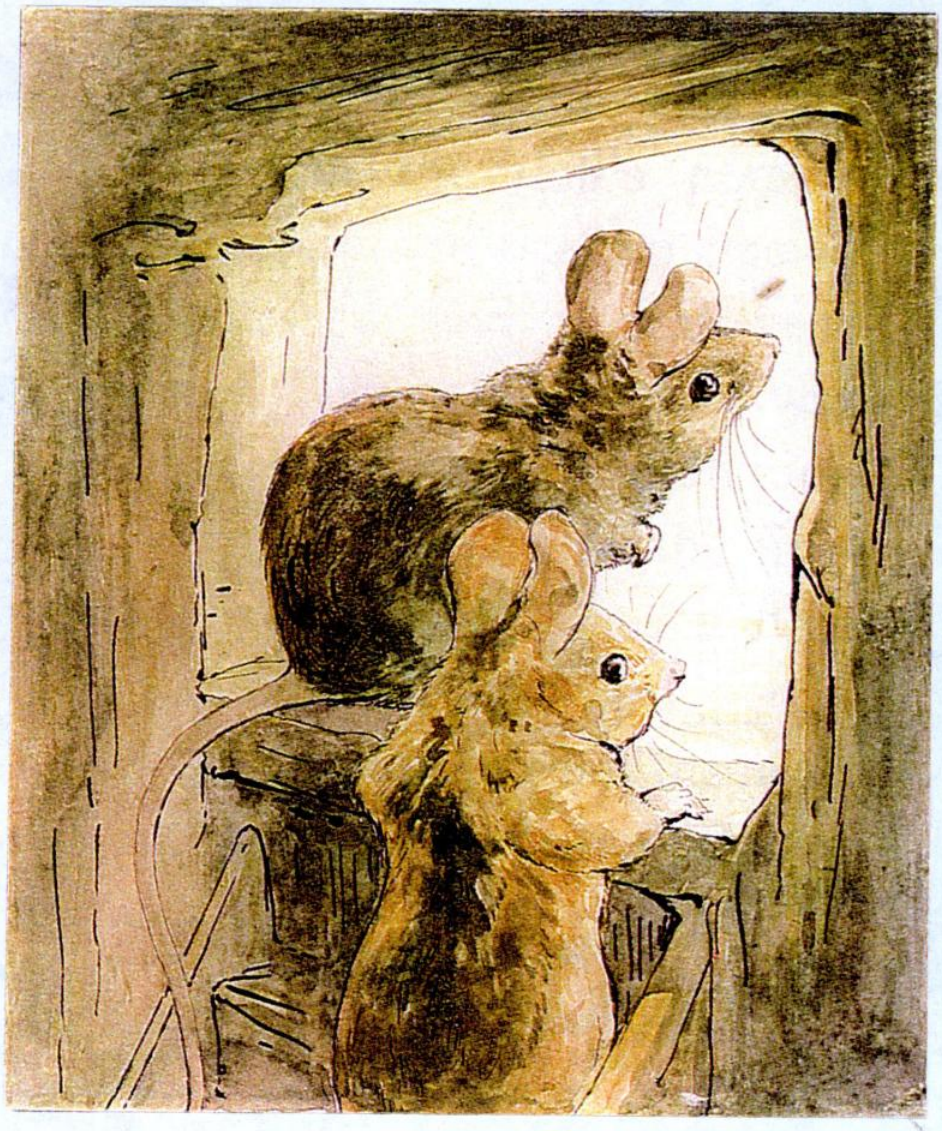

Plate 22: Hunca Munca and his mouse spouse.

The Tale of Two Bad Mice.

Although most of Potter's stories and paintings are, according to Judy Taylor, drawn by an "artist whose delicate line and fastidious sense of colour and design brought her lasting fame",[4] a closer study reveals disturbingly evil, sadistic, and even violent aspects to her characterisations, despite the delicate appearance of her work. John McOwen has noted this vein of black humour running through some of her books. He writes of the "macabre touch" of The Tale of Jemima Puddleduck where the "gentleman with the sandy whiskers", a shy fox, sends Jemima to the farm to collect the herbs with which he intends to stuff her.

Even in her first and most well-known little book The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Peter's mother warns him of the danger of going into Mr McGregor's garden. "Your father had an accident there; he was put into a pie by Mrs McGregor". In Potter's original edition, she had illustrated Mrs McGregor making a rabbit pie *(plate23),* but Warne refused to include it for obvious reasons.

In The Roly-Poly Pudding, Tom Kitten is rolled up in pastry by two rats who intend to kill him *(plate 24).* The Tale of Two Bad Mice tells of two mice who break into a doll's house and destroy everything inside. This, sometimes "dark" side to her books is counteracted by the charming storytelling prose and pretty watercolours. McEwen believes, however, that Potter's tales resurrect deep-rooted phobias in her readers. Many adults who read them as children admit to a lingering fear of certain pictures an descriptions for the rest of their lives.(6).

Acuteness of observation combined with this humour, whether black or otherwise, is the charm of Potter's art. Each of her tales is born from the personality of the individual animal character it depicts. Her hedgehogs are busy creatures, scuttling and scurrying about, so Potter makes her hedgehog a washerwoman, fat and round as washerwomen stereotypically are. While her mice are mischievous, Potter's rats are sinister, (The Roly-Poly Pudding). Samuel Whiskers, a big old rat, and his thin, evil wife roll Tom Kittten into a pie. John McEwen calls this "one of the most disturbing images in all children's literature".(7)

Plate 23:

Two drawings omitted from

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Warne.

Plate 24:

From the Roly-Poly Pudding.

Almost all of Potter's animal pictures were drawn from life, and both her sketches and finished pieces are artistically drawn, right down to the smallest of details. She had many opportunities to study the animals that she kept in her nursery, including Mrs Mouse, Punch the Frog, Lord and Lady Salisbury the snails, and Sally the newt. Everyday she noticed similarities between humans and animals. According to Leslie Linder, Potter noted in her coded journal, "How amusing Aunt Harriet is, she is more like a weasel than ever".[8]

Of all her pets, her rabbits, Benjamin Bunny and Peter Rabbit meant the most to her. She constantly drew quick sketches of them in different positions, close-ups of their heads, legs and tails *(plate 25)*. She needed to learn as much about their structure as possible and had a hunger to record everything about them on paper. In August 1890, she quickly sketched Benjamin Bunny's head in pencil, capturing his rabbit features from every angle.

She was also extremely fond of her mice, Hunca Munca being her favourite. Her studies of mice dancing *(plate 26)*, were most likely studies for the mouse party in The Tale of Mrs Tittlemouse, and they almost appear to dance off the page, although they are only very quick, impulsive, line drawings. She even included some tiny paw studies on this page. Her studies of cats and kittens, which probably contributed to the finished drawings of Simpkin, Tom Kitten, and others, capture the essence of feline characteristics; laziness, shyness, sleekness and aloofness *(plate27)*.

Along with cats, rabbits and mice, Potter did hundreds of other animal studies including squirrels, rats, guinea pigs, horses, cows, sheep, hens, gazelles and lizards. These studies show that Potter was evidently not just an accomplished illustrator, but a superb artist. Each page of animal drawings holds great appeal, whether it is due to their sketchiness, the sometimes quick, lively lines used, the studying of the chosen animal from every possible angle, or her ability to capture each one in an almost tangible way. It may even be argued that her sketches are even more splendid than her illustrations.

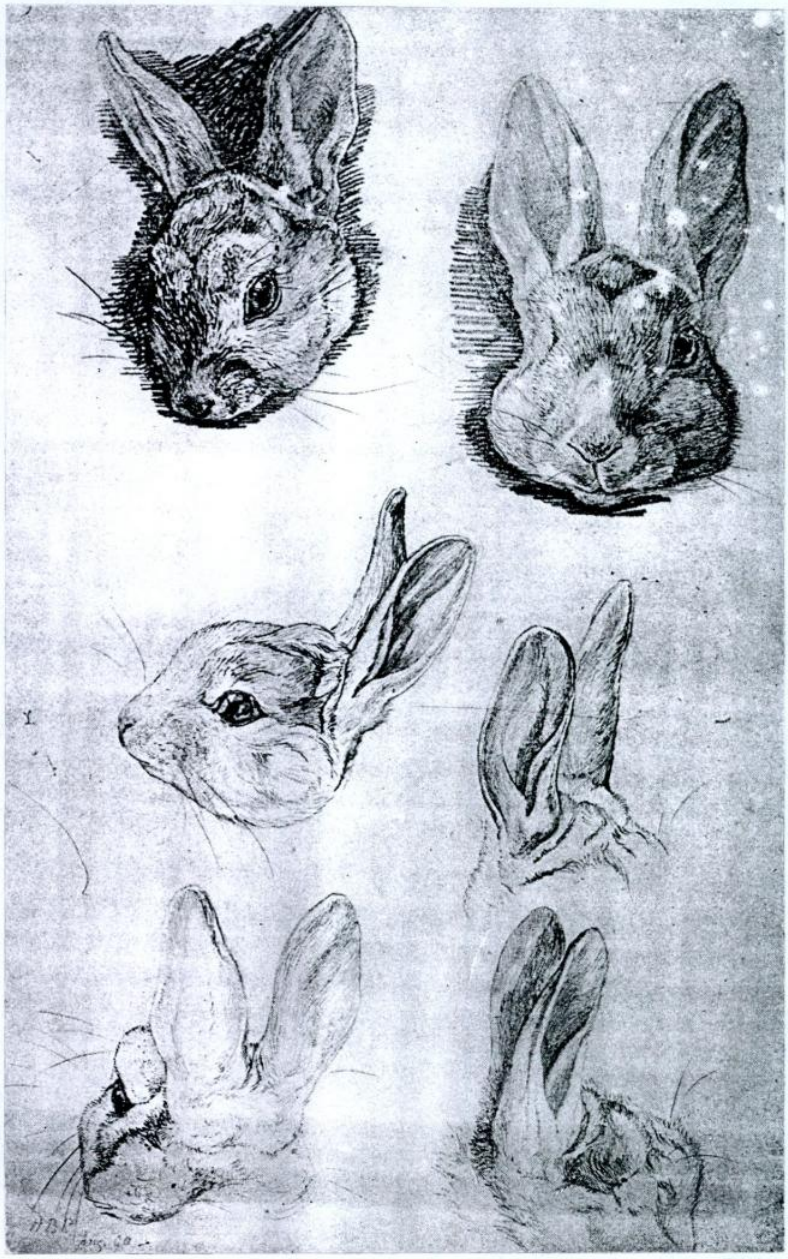

Plate 25: Rabbit sketches, August 1890.

Plate 26: Mice sketches.

Plate 27: Cat sketches.

Potter's Contemporaries and Influences:

Illustration of children's books in the centuries prior to Beatrix Potter's work was not seen until the fifteenth century. Bestiaries (animal stories) have, however, been around since the fifth century. These combined Aesop's fables with natural history and were used by monks to teach spiritual truths.

Beatrix Potter's contemporary illustrators who included Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Arthur Rackham and Ernest Griset, were also fascinated with animals and each enjoyed drawing them in a unique style.

According to Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, Potter was interested in both Cranes and Caldecott's work although it was Caldecott's style that had the most influence on her own work. "She carried on to the next century the tradition of illustration set in a somewhat idealised and idyllic countryside".[9]

Sir Randolph Caldecott was greatly admired by Potter's father who owned several of his paintings, including two from his series A Frog He Would A-Wooing Go. In Potter's drawings for The Tale of Jeremy Fisher, (*plate 29*) both frogs wear almost identical costumes - collar, waistcoat, and tails, but Caldecott's frog seems somewhat stiff in comparison with Jeremy Fisher, which is an unusual complaint of his work.

Working at the height of Victorian Industrialisation, Caldecott's inspirations came primarilyfrom nature and eighteenth century England. His skill lay in translating scenes of people, animals and everyday events into drawings which were both humorous and lively. Early in 1878, he began his illustrations for some of the better known nursrey rhymes. He had, like Potter, a natural affinity for illustrating animals; horses being his prime subject. His paintings and drawings hold a sense of joy, often depicting crowds waving, cheering, and dancing. Caldecott, again like Potter, made quick brush and ink drawings to maintain the spontaneity associated with them. He would often study and make drawings from live specimens and skeletons, stufffed

Plate 28:

A Frog He Would a-Wooing Go, (1883)

Sir Randolph Caldecott.

Plate 29:

Mr Jeremy Fisher.

The Tale of Jeremy Fisher.

animals and casts in The British Museum in order to study animal gestures and movement. Sometimes there are obvious references to Caldecott in Potter's work, but at other times it is just their handling of colour and composition that is similar.

While Caldecott and Potter used clear, light-toned palettes, Walter Crane worked with brighter, bolder colour, decorating every part of the page. In 1865, Walter Crane produced nursery books and the first toy books including The House that Jack Built. These designs were influenced by Crane's study of some Japanese prints shown to him by a naval friend. He wrote:

Their treatment, in definite block outline, and flat, brilliant, as well as delicate colours, struck me at once and I endeavoured to apply these methods to the modern fanciful and humorous subjects of children toybooks and the methods of wood engraving and machine printing.

Thus, because of these procedures, Crane's work tended to be much more stiff and stylised than Potter's or Caldecott's.

A driving force behind the Arts and Craft Movement, Crane was also a textile designer and produced tiles, stained glass and ceramics. He had so many styles of work, that one might believe that it was the work of a number of artists. Animals were not always a source, but when they were, they lacked life and were usually stylised and unrealistic. Take, for example, This Little Pig went to the Market. (1969) (Plate 30), a crude and almost frightening print of a dressed pig, complete with hair, glasses and hoof shoes. Compare this with Potter's Little Pig Robinson (Plate 31), daintily dressed, (although male), in white and blue striped outfit, and interestingly, also carrying a basket full of food. Although the subjects are the same two artists' approached are rather different.

Ernerst Griset loved animals, and this was evident in his life long career producing two very different types of work. Griset firstly produced straight forward naturalistic studies of various species which are brilliantly observed and full of life, but he also produced grotesque, fantastical, illustrations of animals in human guise behaving in a human manner. Although Griset was ideally suited to this form of illustration, these drawings were, unlike Potter's, aimed at the adult market; sometimes having satirical or political undertones, His Saturday Night Series (Plate 32), depicts

Plate 30: "This Little Pig went to market", (1869).

Walter Crane.

Plate 31: Little Pig Robinson,

The Tale of Little Pig Robinson.

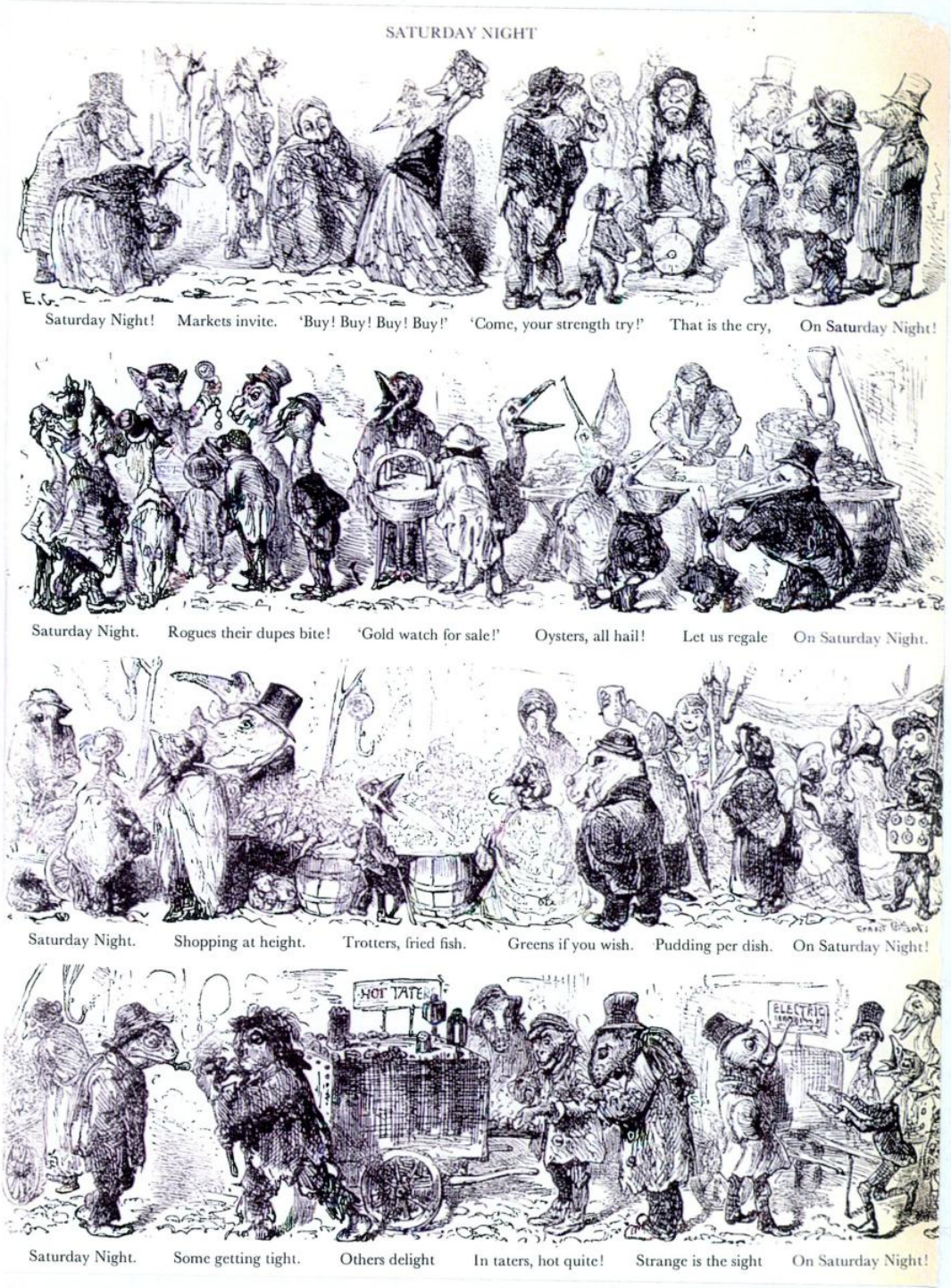

Plate 32: "Saturday Night",

Ernest Griset.

the streets of Victorian London crowded with various stalls selling oysters and hot potatoes, rogues and shifty salesmen, housewives and children, all transformed into strange animals and birds.

Apart from this fantastic style, Griset was a master of realism regarding the animal kingdom. He did a series of drawings in the zoological gardens, London, some of the most charming being of Jumbo the elephant, (*plate 33*), who apparently, eventually savaged his keeper. While the human figures appear stagnant and unrealistic, the elephant is captured with great accuracy. Each furrow on his skin can be seen, creating wonderful texture. As well as pencil and ink drawings, Griset, like Potter, used a lot of watercolour.

Arthur Rackham, who was prominent in the early twentieth century, used a variety of techniques such as silhouette, woodcuts, watercolours and line drawings. His work was very versatile and his subject matter was mainly animals and fairies. His paintings always have a magical, mystical, and often eerie quality and, like Potter, he manages to make us feel involved in the particular scene. He is perhaps, most famous for some of his Alice in Wonderland paintings (*plate 34*). Potter also painted Lewis Carroll's writings but her drawings are much smaller and more intricit than Rackham's. Storks, weasels, mice, crabs, even the extinct dodo, are all present in his work, their eyes gleaming to add to the sense of fairytale.

Even in this story, there is a slightly sinister, threatening atmosphere present.

Potter's contemporaries each had a natural affinity for the animal subject, although each dealt with them in a unique and different way. Potter interpretated them using delicate watercolours and pretty scenes, while others portrayed their animals in a weird, dreamlike, almost evil manner; sometimes not intended for children's comsumption. Children have, however, been reading Potter's books for almost one hundred years, and despite strong competition, she still remains one of the best loved children's writers and illustrators that ever lived.

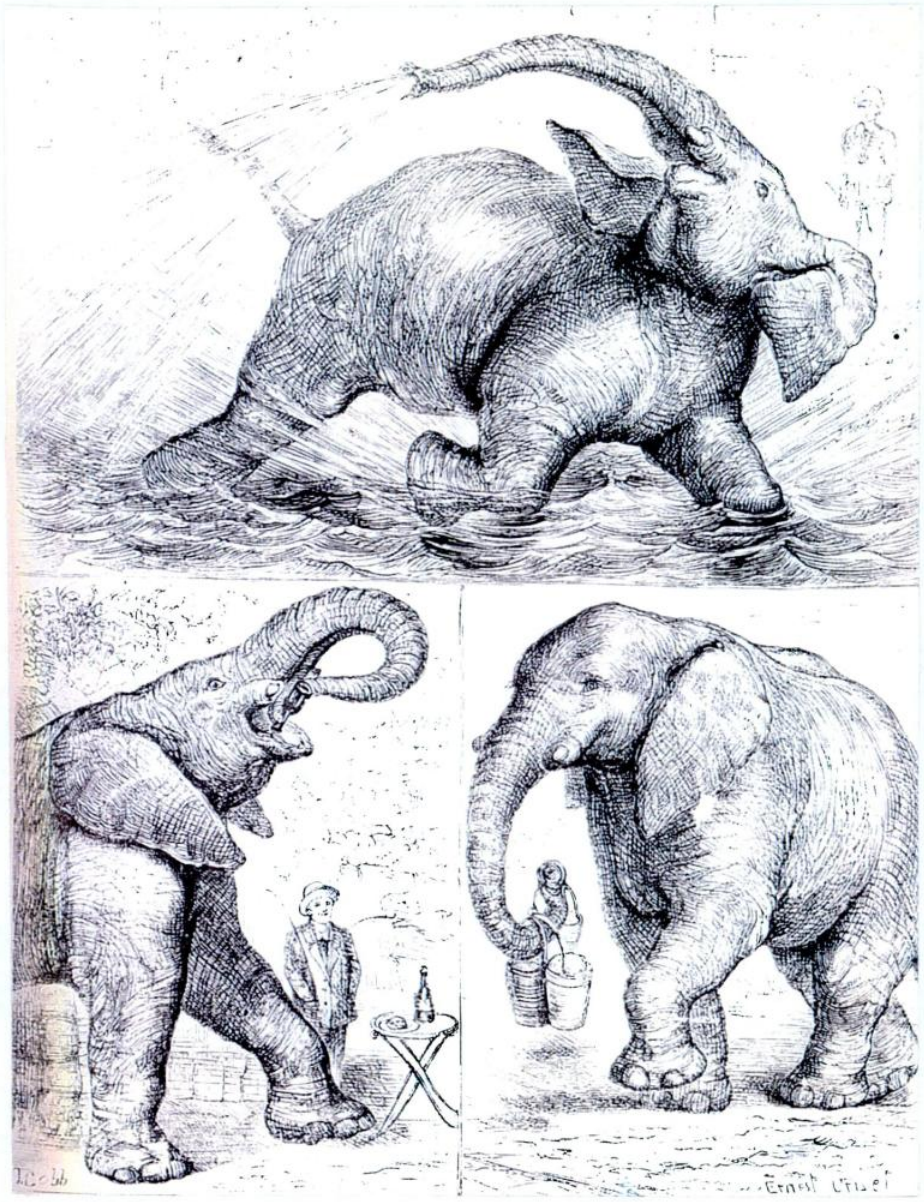

Plate 33: "Scenes in the Life of Jumbo",

Ernest Griset.

Plate 34: A Scene from Alice in Wonderland.

Arthur Rackham.

Conclusion

In the time of swords and periwigs and full-skirted coats with flowered lappets - when gentlemen wore ruffles and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta - there lived a tailor in Gloucester.[1]

Conclusion

Beatrix Potter's book The Tailor of Gloucester, carries the most intrinsic fairy-tale charm of all her books, each being a superior example of perfect unison between word and picture. Her stories are neatly constructed, and are evidence of her shrewd sense of observation of animal behaviour.

The illustrations in The Tailor of Gloucester, so beautifully drawn, and delicately coloured show a natural affinity for wildlife, landscape, costume and interiors. Each scene tells a story with information Potter gathered from everyday familiarities, whether it is a tailor sewing busily in his workshop, or the snowy streets of Gloucester. Her fantastic imagery of mice sewing and wearing beautifully embroidered clothes came from rough mice sketches and accurate detail drawings of real costume.

Years of intensive study of animals and wildlife, beginning at a very young age, went into making The Tailor of Gloucester and her other books for children, and Potter outshines her contemporaries in their charm and appeal.

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The Tale of BenjaminBunny	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 Jeremy Fisher	1906
The story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit	1906
The Story of Miss Moppet	1906
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
The Tale of Mr Tod	1912
The Tale of Pigling Bland	1913
The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse	1918
Cecily Parsley's Nursery Rhymes	1922
The Tale of Little Pig Robinson	1930