



**‘A Strongly Marked Personality’:
The Discursive and Non-Discursive Posture of Beatrix
Potter**

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Abstract

Beatrix Potter is voornamelijk bekend om haar verhalen over het ondeugende konijn Peter Rabbit en zijn vrienden. Daarnaast heeft Potter veel geschreven over fungi. Er is echter nog niet veel onderzoek gedaan naar hoe zij zichzelf neerzette als een schrijfster. Er zijn genoeg biografieën over haar te vinden en collecties van door haar geschreven brieven gepubliceerd. In deze scriptie is onderzocht hoe Beatrix Potter zichzelf als auteur presenteert. De focus ligt hier op drie verschillende onderdelen: haar gedrag als auteur in het literaire veld, de persoon die naar voren komt in haar brieven en de schrijfster die spreekt in haar kinderverhalen. De theorie die in deze scriptie zowel als ordeningsmodel als analysemodel is gebruikt, is de theorie van Jérôme Meizoz. Hij noemt de houding en presentatie van de auteur het postuur en legt uit dat het postuur bepaald wordt door zowel de auteur als het publiek. Deze scriptie belicht echter één kant van dit verhaal: hoe Beatrix Potter haar postuur heeft geconstrueerd. Hoe wilde zij, bewust of onbewust, dat mensen haar zagen? In deze scriptie blijkt dat Potter, door middel van de toon die ze aanneemt in haar brieven, het weinige aantal officiële foto's en de stijl die ze gebruikt in haar verhalen, zichzelf presenteerde als een simpele natuur- en dierenliefhebber, met een macaber gevoel voor humor, die het publieke leven liever vermeed.

Keywords: Beatrix Potter, Peter Rabbit, posture, authorship, letters, children's literature, naturalism, Meizoz.

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Introduction

From an early age, Beatrix Potter was interested in becoming an author. She realised that in order for her to achieve her goals, she had “to take matters into her own hands” (Lear 90). Linda Lear wrote a biography on Beatrix Potter, in which she devotes a large part of her book to the start-up of Potter’s career. As Lear shows, Potter was encouraged by many of her family and friends, amongst whom her brother Bertram, to send the sketches of her beloved animals to a variety of publishers. Probably in the year 1889, she sent a few of her sketches to the publishing house Hildesheimer & Faulkner. They responded by sending her “an envelope with a cheque for £6 and the request to the ‘gentleman artist’ for more sketches” (90). The response she received already shows how much the literary market was then especially focused on and driven by male authors and artists. Potter needed to prove herself as a woman artist, but this did not stop her. She sent more sketches to different publishers, amongst whom Frederick Warne & Company, who would play an influential role later in Potter’s life (91). She sent the book which she is now most famous for, then titled *The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Mr. McGregor’s Garden*, to “at least six publishers” in 1900 (160). She had written the tale about the naughty rabbit in a letter to Noel Moore in 1893, who was the son of a former governess of Potter’s. However, Lear explains in her book *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius* that her manuscript was quickly returned by each of the six publishers she sent it to, including Frederick Warne & Company, who earlier had shown some interest in the sketches she had made and would consider a book if she ever desired to write one (161). Potter, however, did not give up. She “had very specific ideas about how she wanted her ‘little rabbit book’ to look and how much it should cost” (161). She also had the motivation and skills to turn her project into a success. She wanted to be emotionally and financially independent (148) and she was willing to spend all the time and energy she had to succeed as an author and illustrator of children’s books. The Victorian and Edwardian literary field was a competitive one (162), but Beatrix Potter “had emerged as a writer and artist who was not only expert in the art of story-telling and illustration”, but was also confident and skilled and knew how she wanted to market her books and sketches (148). She knew she was different from other colleagues in the literary field and that was one of the reasons why offers to publish her work were not satisfactory. So instead, Potter “decided to publish it herself – exactly as she wanted it” (163).

The growing market for books around 1900, particularly caused by the rise of mass-production, was an “important condition for writers to be able to establish their autonomy with respect to state and church”, according to Gisèle Sapiro (qtd in. Dorleijn et al. xi). More books could be published; more books were sold. Censorship by the state and church became increasingly impossible and authors instead could and had to rely on their own judgement of what would appeal to the larger masses. Dorleijn et al. explain that “authors began to present and organise themselves as professional and relatively independent ... players in the literary field and the market” (xi). The players in the literary market had to distinguish themselves from competitors to draw the attention of the larger audience. They were able to do so because the market had shaped itself into a “reliable and functioning context”, which meant that authors could depend on “material compensation” for the books they were able to have published (xii). Authors could instead focus on how they would market their work to gain more consumers. They could start thinking about how to make their books more appealing and how to make themselves more appealing. This concept of creating a self-image is called ‘posture’. It entails “the ways authors craft an image of themselves and try to impose that upon their audiences (not just the literary)” (xiv). This thesis means to look at how this concept is applicable to Beatrix Potter.

There are plenty of biographies on Beatrix Potter, identifying her as the creator of Peter Rabbit, her most famous work. She also wrote many other texts besides children’s literature, where she discusses plant life, since that was one of her many interests. She seemed to be particularly interested in fungi and mushrooms. Linda Lear wrote a few of these biographies and books about Beatrix Potter, focussing on the above-mentioned themes. Shelagh Squire discusses Beatrix Potter in connection to the concept of literary tourism in her texts. This is the extent of works about Beatrix Potter. They either focus on her life as a whole, her books and essays, or her love for and connection to nature. What is missing here is in-depth research of Potter’s posture. What traits that she possesses or ideals that she portrays can be connected to her posture as an author? Is it her love for nature and the countryside? Are those values present in her books and what does she do with them: does she emphasize or subvert them?

This thesis will have one main question: how does Beatrix Potter construct her discursive and non-discursive posture as an author? This question can be subcategorised in a number of different ones: What image does she construct of herself and does she follow the example of certain earlier authors? Is there a difference between the posture constructed in her fictional works (the children’s stories) and non-fictional works (letters)? Does the posture that

she constructs in her letters correspond with the posture that is created outside of her writing? The assumption is that Beatrix Potter's identity as an author derives from a few aspects: her love for nature, her aim to preserve, and her sense of humour.

To establish what posture Beatrix Potter constructs for herself and her audience, this thesis will use the theory by Jérôme Meizoz as theoretical framework. First of all because he seems to have a certain authority in the field that deals with the posture of an author in the literary field. He based his theory on that of Alain Viala, who defined posture as “‘façon d’occuper une position’ dans le champ” (qtd. in Meizoz 16), meaning the manner in which an author defines where he stands in the literary field. Viala mentions that there is not just one fixed position that an author can take, but that an author can choose between different options. He can manifest different postures throughout his career, but he can also stick to one posture, which is also known as the ‘hallmark’ of an author (Meizoz 83).

A term often connected to posture is *ethos*. Ethos is understood by Meizoz to be the “(general) way of being (of a) writer” (Meizoz 83). The ethos is inferred from within the text and is limited to text, which means it does not include anything outside the text, such as social behaviour. Ethos is the image that the writer creates of himself within any of his works and limited to these works (Meizoz par. 12-14). But posture is not just limited to the textual construction of the author, it also includes the social aspect. Any social dispositions of the author are termed the *habitus* of the author (par. 11). Meizoz leans in this aspect very much towards Viala's theory, which uses the same terminology. Meizoz, however, does introduce his own definition and division of posture. He defines posture as “a public self-image” (Meizoz 84). He mentions the Latin origin of the word, *persona*, which is the mask that actors used to wear on stage and which connects voice and “the social situation” (84). It is the image that the actor imposes on the audience watching the play; it is the image that an author imposes on his audience, both in and outside the text.

An important concept accompanying posture is singularity (Meizoz 18). Jeroen Dera describes in his essay (2012) that singularity is important, if the author wishes to maintain his position in the literary field and to be able to keep being competitive. It is what differentiates the author from other authors (463). Every author constructs or can be assigned a posture, whether they are aware of it or not (Meizoz 20). Often this posture is based on existing postures constructed by authors that a certain author admires (25). In the article “Modern Posterities of Posture” it is explained as follows: “an author is socialised in literary practice in reference to those impressive ancestors whose beliefs, motives, forms, and postures he borrows” (Meizoz 85). Here the theory of posture shows a certain duality. On the one hand

singularity is important. The author needs to construct a posture that is different from the postures of other authors. On the other hand the posture of an author is often based on existing postures of idols.

To continue with Meizoz's theory, he divides the author into three different characters: "la personne biographique, ... l'écrivain, ... [et] l'inscripteur" (Meizoz 43). L'inscripteur, or the scribe, can be seen as a parallel to the concept of ethos. It concerns everything connected with the text. La personne, or the author as a person, is connected to the term mentioned earlier, habitus, and is focused on the social behaviour of the author. L'écrivain, or the writer, is a concept that is more defined by the audience and the image they have of him. When these three characters are taken together, that is when one can speak of posture (Meizoz par. 21). What the division here shows, is that posture is a very interactive concept. It connects the image of the author in the text to the image of the author outside text and the image created by the author to the image confirmed by the audience. To put it into Meizoz's words: "la posture constitue ainsi un espace transitionnel entre l'individuel et le collectif" (27). Another aspect worth elaborating on is the image created by the author outside the text. Meizoz explains that here the focus is on behaviour in public, such as media appearances, speeches at literary awards, the literary awards the author wins, any biographies written on the author, responses to reviews and interviews, and public appearance (85).

This division will form the basis of how this thesis is divided. The first chapter will focus on the image of the author. This chapter is subdivided into four elements: photos, the appearance of her books, interviews, and pamphlets that Potter created. Biographies on Beatrix Potter are researched in this chapter to make the connection between Potter's posture and her day-to-day behaviour. The second chapter investigates the posture that Potter constructs outside her fiction. Here the letters that she wrote will be used to see what image she creates with respect to her friends, family and colleagues. The last chapter will look at the posture that is constructed in Beatrix Potter's works of fiction, with the focus on the twenty-one Peter Rabbit stories. These twenty-one tales are the best known of her work; her name is associated with and connected to *Peter Rabbit*, which means that these stories are used to identify who Beatrix Potter is. They can therefore be useful in identifying the posture that she constructed. One thing that might be problematic in the final chapter is that Meizoz's theory is not so easily applicable to fiction. With discourse he means mostly autobiographical writings (Meizoz 82). Fiction is much more complex: "l'on ne peut leur attribuer sans discussion une posture relevant de l'auteur puisqu'en quelque sorte l'auteur s'est diffracté en eux" (Meizoz 28). It is more logical to first establish what posture is created outside the fictional works and

then confirm this with the image created inside these works, instead of the other way round, which is why the Peter Rabbit stories are discussed in the final chapter. Furthermore, I will follow Dera's example and focus primarily on the style, themes, and intertextuality in these stories, instead of the personalities of the characters, which do not necessarily correspond to the personality of the author.

Researching the posture of Beatrix Potter is relevant because many people know who she is, but seem to take her for granted. Many people know her children's stories and the recent film about Beatrix Potter will have shown more of the author behind the tales, but this thesis will establish what is so significant about Beatrix Potter and her posture as an author. Furthermore, when people are asked why she features on lists of most famous British authors, the answer seems to be unclear. In the conclusion, therefore, this thesis will research what is so significant about Beatrix Potter and her posture as an author. Does she portray certain values that connect her to a national identity, and which may explain why she is featured in the above-mentioned list? Something which may be relevant here is whether Potter is a conservative or a progressive author.

Chapter 1
The Author
Non-Discursive Posture

Beatrix Potter's life is one defined by oppositions. She is known across the globe for her children's books, yet she never desired to be recognized, nor wanted anything to be published about her (Taylor 113). She strove to preserve the Lake District, yet welcomed tourists from everywhere to come and observe the beauties of the natural world, who with their enormous numbers could threaten it. Potter lived a reclusive life with her parents before she married William Heelis, but when she moved to the Lake District she started to participate in many social activities.

In her biography of the author, Judy Taylor portrays Potter as a strong-willed, down-to-earth person, who would avoid fuss at any time (137). The question is, however, how far Beatrix has contributed to the way she was and is perceived. Did she consciously create a posture as an author and, if so, does it differ from how she acts outside the literary world? Did she pose in a certain way for her official pictures? As what kind of author does she appear in the interviews that are conducted with her? Does the appearance of her books confirm how Potter wanted to be perceived? This chapter means to look at the non-discursive posture that Beatrix Potter, consciously or unconsciously, constructed. The expectation is that Beatrix Potter's non-discursive posture shows an author who wanted to be as far removed from the public sphere as possible. She did not like to be interviewed, which will affect the amount of material found on Potter. The limited amount official photographs and the plainness in the designs of her books will confirm the image of a simple author who wanted to avoid fuss.

Jeroen Dera explains in his article that the posture that an author creates for himself is closely connected to the image that is passed on through different kinds of media (464). This means that authors can also make use of different media to construct and present their postures as an author. Jérôme Meizoz elaborates on this by saying that the construction of posture starts from the moment of the publication "and involves the very presentation of the book" (84). From this definition by Meizoz can be deduced that the process of constructing a non-discursive posture is mostly an aesthetic one. Not only the appearance of a book, but the appearance of the author as a whole can determine how the author is perceived. Meizoz gives suggestions as to what to focus on when studying the non-discursive posture of an author, such as aesthetic choices that the author makes and his public literary behaviour (23). However, Meizoz does note one important element that should not be excluded from studying

the posture of an author: the comparison with the real position that an author has in the literary field. Meizoz explains: “C’est pourquoi on ne peut se contenter de décrire les éléments les plus visibles ou cosmétiques d’une posture comme s’il s’agissait d’une mise en scène intentionnelle” (21). Meizoz explains here that it is important to look at the intentional and the unintentional behaviour of the author to get the complete picture of his posture. Probably because that will show what the author aspires to be and what he actually is. Meizoz notes that it is therefore important not to exclude the actions of the author as a public citizen from the analysis, because it is possible to make a connection between these actions and the behaviour of the author in the literary field (par. 11).

This chapter will focus on four aspects connected to the non-discursive posture of Beatrix Potter, following Meizoz’s specifications. The first part will look at photos taken of Beatrix Potter. Were there any official photos? If there were, how do these compare to other photos taken of Potter? The second part will look at the appearance of Beatrix Potter’s children’s stories. Was she actively involved in the aesthetic process of the publication of her books? To what extent did she strive to adapt the appearance of her books to suit her posture as an author? The third part will take a closer look at any interviews conducted with Beatrix Potter in literary magazines. As what kind of author does she appear in them? The final part will focus on the political pamphlets that Potter designed. Does she connect these to her authorship? Throughout this chapter the construction of Potter’s non-discursive posture will be connected to her behaviour and actions as a person. The focus will be on the activities she participated in and the goals she set for herself.

Photos

Beatrix Potter never had official photos accompanying her children’s books. She does, however, mention twice in her letters what sort of photos of her she would consider to have published publicly. The first instance was when Beatrice Webb was mistaken for Beatrix Potter. This annoyed Potter at a certain point (Taylor 111) because, even though she did not desire to be mentioned in newspapers, that did not mean she wanted others to receive acclaim for her work. The remedy that she thus came up with was to have a photo published of herself, only not with her husband, as was the case with the photo in the newspaper of Beatrice Webb, but with “a favourite pig or cow” (Taylor et al. 150). It would only be natural for Potter to be photographed with an animal, as from a young age she was always accompanied by pets that she and her brother used to buy or catch. She used to bring them on holidays or visits to friends and family, “the hedgehog in a basket and the rabbits and mice in

wooden boxes” (Taylor 66). The sight of Beatrix Potter with one of her animals was a frequent one. The photo that Potter mentions in the letter was not actually taken, but in a letter to her publisher she provided a drawing of what the photo would look like.



Fig. 1. Potter, Beatrix. 1924. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

The second instance is when Bertha Mahony Miller, editor of *The Horn Book*, wanted to publish a story by Potter in her magazine. She apparently asked for a picture of Potter to accompany this story. Normally Beatrix Potter would not go into such requests, but in a letter she answers that she has no objection to the photo being used (Potter 350). In this letter she is referring to a photo taken of her by an American visitor, Mr. Reginald Hart. This photo features her, the daughter of Mr. Hart, and her dog Chuleh.



Fig. 2. Beatrix Potter and Alison Hart, 1942. Taylor, Judy. *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller and Countrywoman*. London: Penguin, 2002. E-book.

In both these pictures Potter chooses to convey a certain image of herself. Both images feature an animal, putting the focus on her as an animal lover. The first image features a very happy looking Beatrix Potter. Judy Taylor describes the pig and Potter as “equally jovial and amazingly alike” (150). The second photo puts the emphasis more on the fact that Beatrix Potter loved to share her passion for animals with children and that children loved her. In her

letter to Mr. Hart, Potter explains why she is so fond of this picture. She mentions that Alison, his daughter, is a delightful child, and that the photograph frames Potter in a positive manner: “Its very good of my lace edged cap (which seems to have hitched forward over my nose) and not too bad of the old woman!” (Potter 345). She notes that she does not mind having her cap obscuring her face, which confirms her desire to not be recognised. Potter was almost always seen wearing a hat. A severe illness when she was young left her with bare patch on her head, which she therefore used to cover up with a hat or cap (Taylor 103). There is, however, a difference between these two pictures. In the image that Potter drew as a suggestion for a photograph, she is supposedly facing the camera and does not wear a hat. On the other hand, in the second picture she explains that she likes the fact that she is not completely recognisable. It could have been that the first image was meant ironically, since the photo was never actually taken and because Potter caricaturised herself almost as a pig.

To see whether Potter consciously wanted to create an a posture of herself as an author, it is useful to compare these two ‘official’ images to other photos taken of Beatrix Potter. In private photos, Beatrix Potter seemed to always have dressed quite plainly. Winifred Warne, a niece of Norman Warne, said that when Potter visited once, she “was dressed very severely in a dark coat and skirt, with a highly-polished brown leather belt and men’s shoes” (Taylor 68). The image that this description creates is one of a stern, serious woman. Potter did not seem very interested in her appearance, and probably also did not care to dress to suit other people. It is also peculiar that she wore men’s shoes. The following picture shows Potter’s clogs, which indeed seem to be men’s shoes.



Fig. 3. Beatrix Potter’s clogs. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

The fact that Potter wore men’s shoes, however, does not refer to some kind of feminist tendencies in her character. Potter definitely did not see herself as a feminist. She was too shy and too conservative to fight for social and political freedom, which were the main goals of

the 'New Woman' movement (Lear 138). She did, however, believe that women had the right to higher education (179).

The following photo shows Beatrix Potter together with Hardwicke Rawnsley and his son. Potter is dressed plainly in this picture as well. A simple dark vest, a plain skirt, and a hat with some embellishment, although limited to a fabric ribbon.



Fig. 4. Beatrix Potter with Hardwicke Rawnsley and son, 1885/1887. Lear, Linda. *Beatrix Potter: a Life in Nature*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008. Print.

The following photo is one of Potter with her favourite collie Kep. Again her outfit is simple. She seems to be wearing a coat and skirt, made from the same material, probably tweed. The only jewellery she seems to be wearing is a choker. Wearing jewellery is not very practical on a farm and that could be the reason why she did not wear more in this photo.



Fig. 5. Beatrix Potter and Kep. Lear, Linda. *Beatrix Potter: a Life in Nature*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008. Print.

However, the following photo proves that Potter did not fancy much embellishment. She appears to be wearing a similar outfit to the one in the previous photo, a simple, maybe somewhat darker, coat and skirt, and a blouse underneath. This is remarkable, since this photo was taken the day Beatrix Potter married William Heelis. This photo can be considered their wedding photo. The blouse does seem to be more delicate, featuring lace over the chest area, but otherwise her outfit lacks refinery. The only other decorative item in her entire outfit is her hat, which now, besides the ribbon, features some flowers. Lear explains that Potter “preferred tailored clothes without much ornamentation, and she was rarely without her large, black umbrella, though she could be properly suited out in fine fabrics, lace jabots and elaborate millinery if the occasion demanded” (172). That Potter could be dressed up, did not necessarily mean that she wanted to be, as this picture clearly shows.



Fig. 6. Beatrix Potter and William Heelis, 1913. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

As soon as Beatrix Potter moved to the Lake District she tried to change her demeanour from a London lady to a countrywoman. She worked as hard as she could to shed “the outward vestiges of her upper-middle-class upbringing” and to return to her “country credentials” (Lear 9), as both her parents came from the North country (Taylor 13). She wanted to be identified by her roots (Lear 9), not by where she had spent most of her childhood. The final photo of Potter was taken in 1935. By then she was 69 years old. Here she can be seen in the

outfit that she was most associated with. Mrs. Rhodes, her mother's cook, said about Beatrix that “[a]ll we associated her with were her clothes, or her wellingtons, ragged clothes – and her sheep” (Taylor 119).



Fig. 7. Beatrix Potter, 1935. Lear, Linda. *Beatrix Potter: a Life in Nature*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008. Print.

Beatrix Potter most often wore a Tweed jacket, assumed to be made from the wool from her Herdwick sheep. As always, a hat to cover her bald patch, and as Mrs. Rhodes mentioned, her wellingtons. She looked quite the farm lady.

Comparing these photos to those that can be considered her official photos, it is apparent that they are very similar. If Beatrix Potter agreed to have a photo published, she seems to have wanted to look the same as she did in daily life. If we consider the photo sent to *The Horn Book* as her official photo, then the posture that she creates of herself as an author is that of a plain farm lady. In this picture she wears the same simple clothes as she wears in her other pictures. Her feet are not visible, but there is hardly any doubt that she wore the same practical shoes when this picture was taken. Her head is covered by her cap and, like in many of her pictures, she is accompanied by an animal. That a child is present in her official photograph not only portrays Potter as a child lover, but also makes a connection between her and her children's books. The fact that Potter consciously chose to use the picture of her with a child, instead of a picture of her with an animal, is remarkable. Her connection to children is apparently a more important contributing factor in Potter's posture construction, than her

connection with animals. Overall, if we approach her photos from Meizoz's theory, it seems that Beatrix Potter's posture as an author is very much similar to the habitus of the author. The writer is the same as the person

Appearance of Books

Beatrix Potter became quite the professional author. She was interested and involved in every process of production. Taylor describes that: "Beatrix prepared her new manuscript in a lined exercise book, each page with a black-and-white pen-and-ink drawing facing the text and with a coloured illustration as a frontispiece (53-54). Beatrix Potter was also knowledgeable about the children's book market. Potter, for example, did not initially want her books to be entirely in colour, because colour would be expensive and her topics, bunnies and nature, would not yield interesting colours (55-56). She had done her research and was aware that not every child would be able to pay a high price for the booklets. Potter was involved in every aspect of production, from the first draft to the endpapers. She was involved in decisions made concerning the paper, the pictures, the endpapers and the bindings (61). Her books are, therefore, a useful tool to study the posture that Potter wanted to create for herself.

According to Judy Taylor, Beatrix Potter's interest in the natural world had started from a very early age and her holidays to Dalguise between 1871 and 1881 made her realize how delighted she was with "the wildlife about her" (25). The love she had for the natural world was something that she carried with her and used in the production of her children's books. Her privately printed first edition of *Peter Rabbit* looks as follows: "It was modestly produced, the light grey-green paper boards cut flush, the title and author printed in black and separated by a line drawing of four beribboned rabbits seated demurely in a semi-circle" (Taylor et al. 99). *Peter Rabbit* was simple and plain, as Potter intended it, since she supervised the production of the privately printed version herself. This corresponds with the pictures taken of Potter and with the description that Taylor gives of Potter wanting to avoid fuss. This is something that Potter carries through in the rest of her booklet. The drawings are simple black-and-white, "with the minimum use of line", no further embellishment, and the text perfectly balanced with the picture (Taylor et al. 99). It seems that Potter preferred a plain, simple design and that balance played an important role. The colours of the paper boards are natural and this is something that remains in the private edition, a reprint being printed in olive-green (101).

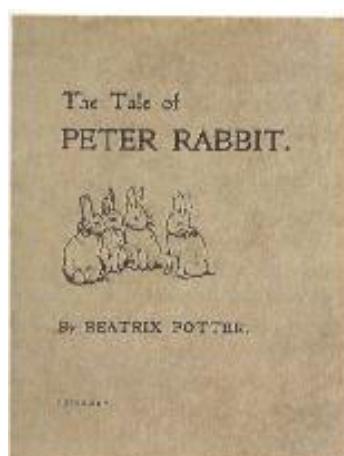


Fig. 8. Front cover private edition *Peter Rabbit*, 1901. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

When Beatrix Potter started to have her books published by Frederick Warne, her designs became slightly more elaborate. *Peter Rabbit*, *Tailor of Gloucester* and *Squirrel Nutkin* all had two editions, a paperbound and a clothbound version. Brown and green were chosen as the colours for the bindings (Taylor et al. 102), something which signals the continuing influence of Potter during the production, since it seems to continue the colour scheme used for her privately printed editions. The clothbound editions had become more elaborate, having a flower patterned cloth, something which Potter described as “rather quaint...like pansies” (qtd. in Taylor et al. 114). If the books had to become more elaborate, Potter made sure that they looked the way she wanted it. This pattern had, as a matter of fact, been chosen from a stack of samples that were sent from Potter’s own grandfather’s textile printing works (Taylor et al. 114). It seems that Potter wanted flowers, which corresponds with Potter’s fascination of the natural world. In the book of rhymes that she intended to publish in 1905, but which was eventually published in 1917 in a different layout, Potter included flower borders to accompany the rhymes. Here Potter seems to have copied the style of Hans Christian Andersen, Randolph Caldecott and Walter Crane used in their books (Taylor et al. 62; Potter 31). They all used borders, sometimes with flowers, in their designs. Potter had drawn, amongst others, borders consisting of daisies, clovers with grass, and button mushrooms, an example of which can be seen below (62).



Fig. 9, 10. Borders. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

Not only do these borders fit into the natural theme that is so pervasive in Potter's books and life, but they also fit into the scientific side of Potter. In these borders, as well as in the pictures, Potter could present herself as a scientific painter. Beatrix was, among other things, interested in fossils and fungi. Taylor explains that "she collected and drew them constantly in minute detail, characteristically becoming extremely knowledgeable on both subjects" (45). She closely observed every aspect and copied them precisely, something she was familiar with, as she also applied this to her drawings of animals. Fungi were not only present in her drawings, as was for example the case in the borders mentioned above, but by including fungi, and flowers, Potter could show her technical skills in drawing as realistically as possible.

The privately printed edition of *Peter Rabbit* was plain and simple, something which Potter tried and succeeded to continue in the other books published with Warne. She did not want her books to be overcrowded. When Norman Warne asked for more elaborate endpapers, Potter thought that when they would be repeated four times, they would look "rather heavy" for such a small book (Potter 36). She saw endpapers as something to rest the eye on, "like a plain mount for a framed drawing" (36). The way she explained it, as a calm between the cover and the content, creates the idea that Potter was always looking for some balance. Potter eventually agreed with Warne's idea, but she emphasized in her letter that she would have it small and light coloured (36). The search for balance returns over and over again in Potter's letters to her publishers. Taylor remarks that "Beatrix suggested she might add 'a line-work frame in pink or blue to the plater' of *The Tailor of Gloucester*, so that they matched in size the facing page of type" (Taylor ed. 39). Not only in the *Tailor*, but in her

other children's books as well, it is remarkable how the size of the text matches the size of the pictures and how well the balance is between both sides of a page.

Beatrix Potter did not much favour change. Rather she wanted to preserve, not just the way her books looked, but also the natural landscape. Early summer in 1905, Beatrix decided to purchase Hill Top farm in Near Sawrey in the Lake District, using all her savings and a small inheritance from her aunt (Taylor 75). The Lake District had also been a frequent holiday destination for Beatrix and her family. Taylor explains that Beatrix "loved the Lake District almost as much as her beloved Scotland" (76). Many of the sceneries of the Lake District feature in her children's stories and it was not long until she expressed her love for this part of the country in her quest for preservation. She re-established the Herdwick sheep breed, which is seen as the signature breed of the Lake District (77), she sat on a committee from 1909 onwards that was concerned with preserving footpaths, she protested against the hydroplanes that were flying over the lakes, she judged at local livestock shows (87-88), and felt the need to accommodate tourists in the Lake District (Lear 278). On top of that Beatrix purchased around 14 farms, including Hill Top (Hobbs par. 15). She donated most of these after her death to the National Trust. This passion for preservation is something that continued in the publishing of her books. In a letter to Howard Warne, she explains that she rather wanted to continue the same style throughout her series. She wanted the cover to look as much as possible like the one designed for *Peter Rabbit*, because she thought it would be safer and because it was such a success (Potter 94). Looking at the twenty-one tales, they indeed look very much alike. Even when Warne proposed to introduce a new series, starting with *The Tale of Mr. Tod*, Potter preferred to have as little change as possible (Taylor et al. 148).

In the book *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, all the children's books that Potter wrote are discussed, both content and appearance. What is remarkable is that the discussion of the appearance of the books gradually diminishes. This might either suggest that not much has changed or that Potter became less and less interested in the designs for her books. At a later age, Beatrix did start to lose her interest in her literary career. She became far more interested in her farm life and when she reached a riper age, she became weary with the deadlines and demands for new books (Lear 282).

In the design of her books, Beatrix Potter went for a simple, balanced, and natural look. Since Potter was much involved in every process of production, one can say that this is not just how she wanted her books to look, but how she wanted the results of her authorship to look. Indirectly the appearance of her books can be connected to Potter's posture. Her books are much in line with how Potter presented herself in her pictures: plain, simple, and

surrounded by nature. Meizoz would probably note that, to this extent, Beatrix Potter is successful in the construction of her posture. The photographs and the appearance of her books agree with each other.

Interviews

Beatrix Potter was willing and enthusiastic about promoting her work, but she would rather not be connected to it. Her work was to enter the public sphere, but Potter preferred to remain in her private one. She did not wish to read or respond to any of the critics that reviewed her work and had built a high “wall of defence against personal publicity and public acclaim” (Taylor 151). Because of this, an examination of the way she constructed posture in interviews is rather problematic. The *British Newspaper Archive* renders no interviews with Beatrix Potter, which is how she would probably have wanted it. Sources by Judy Taylor and Linda Lear do mention that Potter corresponded with *The Horn Book* and answered a letter with a request about more information on the roots of Peter Rabbit. In total she sent two letters to *The Horn Book* that contain information about her as an author. She did write more letters to Bertha Mahony Miller, editor of this magazine, and Potter did have other pieces published in *The Horn Book*, such as stories and essays, but these two letters can be considered the closest thing to interviews with her.

In a letter to her American friend Anne Carroll Moore, she writes that she received a letter for more information about her and her books. She mentions that she has “an intense dislike” to advertisement, and from the letter can be grasped that Potter would rather not answer it, were it not for the realisation that one day people would become curious who she was, which would mean that more and more requests for information would be sent and this would put Potter in the spotlight (Robinson par. 16). Via Warne, she sent a quick note to Miller, in which she explains that she is actually Mrs. William Heelis, describes where she lives, what profession her husband has, how old she is, and what her daily pursuits are as a farmer (par. 16). This piece being only one paragraph long, she seems to include only the bare necessities and puts the focus on her connection to the landscapes around her and the fact that she is happily married.

She does, however, follow up with a longer letter about her roots. In this letter, she puts the focus on her ancestors, who she describes as “obstinate, hard headed, matter of fact folk” (Robinson par. 17). She seems to identify herself with her ancestors and makes a connection with her own character because otherwise she would not have mentioned them in this letter. She places herself in a working-class background of weavers and yeomen (Smith

par. 2). Then she goes on to talk about her childhood influences. She describes having been taught about witches and fairies by a Scottish nurse, and vividly remembers events, places and feelings from when she was very young (par. 3). She also describes the problematic start-up of her career as an author and emphasizes that she mainly writes for her own pleasure (Robinson par. 17-18). This letter portrays Potter as a working-class author, who distances herself from her more middle to upper class upbringing. Her writing is driven by her own imagination, to suit her own pleasures, and not conform to those of her audience.

All in all, Beatrix Potter does not elaborate much on her personal life. When she talks about herself, she uses the name Mrs. William Heelis, creating the idea that Beatrix Potter and Mrs. Heelis are two different identities, operating in two different spheres. In Meizoz's terminology, Beatrix Potter is *l'écrivain* and Mrs. Heelis is *la personne*. Nonetheless, these two identities both contribute to the posture of Beatrix Potter. The fact that Potter never conducted any face-to-face interviews and that Mrs. Heelis only gives the minimum amount of information about her roots, creates the image of an introverted author, withdrawn from society, and mostly at home in her isolated cottage in the Lake District. She constructs the image of a hard-working author, but this work is only dedicated to her own pleasure, and not to pleasing the literary market.

Pamphlets

Beatrix Potter had experienced some trouble with her Peter Rabbit booklet: it had been copied and sold in America before she was able to establish its copyright. Potter had lost a large sum of royalties because of this. So when free trade and unfair copyrights became the topic of political discussion, Potter actively contributed to it (Lear 232). Beatrix Potter did not lead a very active political life. She seemed only to become politically active, when the matter was close to her heart. It is a tendency that can be frequently seen throughout her life. If a subject interested her, she invested all her time (and money) in succeeding.

Beatrix Potter made her voice known through posters and leaflets that she had drawn and printed herself (Taylor 82). She called these posters "Camberwell Beauties" (Taylor 107). These posters and pamphlet also contribute to the construction of Potter's posture, because they connect her to politics. Beatrix was not very politically active, which fits in with her desire to remain unknown, and which is probably the reason why she did not sign her pamphlets. Two pamphlets will be discussed here.



Fig. 11. Free Trade poster. Potter, Beatrix. *Beatrix Potter's Letters*. Ed. Judy Taylor. London: Penguin, 2012. E-book.

The first pamphlet features the Camberwell Wax Doll and would be very difficult to assign to Potter. The style of drawing is not much like the style of her children's books. It would be problematic to explain why this pamphlet says anything about Potter's posture, were it not for the fact that it was sent out together with this second pamphlet.



Fig. 12. Free Trade poster. Potter, Beatrix. *Beatrix Potter's Letters*. Ed. Judy Taylor. London: Penguin, 2012. E-book.

This pamphlet features a very recognisable Peter Rabbit, which means that if Peter Rabbit is concerned with anti free trade, then indirectly Beatrix Potter is connected to this cause as well. Both pamphlets condemn free trade, depicting dolls made in Germany.

Beatrix Potter stayed off the political grid, unless it was a topic that she felt strongly about. She did not always sign the posters and leaflets with her own name, probably wishing to stay anonymous or avoid it being associated with her children's books. This again confirms her desire to not be publicly known. However, in order for her to achieve anonymity, she should have done better than simply not signing her posters. Drawing a Peter Rabbit on a poster against free trade inevitably does drag the little rabbit, and Beatrix Potter, into politics. Either Potter did not think this through properly or she did want to construct a posture of herself as a politically active author.

Conclusion

Taylor notes that “the image of the prancing rabbit ... has come to stand for Beatrix Potter” (Taylor et al. 105). This is certainly true when looking at the photos of and books by Beatrix Potter. Both present her as an animal and nature lover. This is also the case in the interview, where Potter not only identifies with her hard-working ancestors, but where Potter also connects herself to the landscape around her.

The photos, books, interviews, and pamphlets all seem to be in agreement about the image that they sketch of Potter. Potter indeed did not like fuss, which is apparent from her simple way of dressing, the balance and simplicity in the designs of her books, the limited amount of interviews with Potter, and the minimal political involvement. That there is so little material on Potter does confirm the idea that Potter wanted to be removed from the public sphere as much as possible. The only official photo of her was published in a magazine in America instead of sent to one in England. The same has happened with the interviews conducted with Beatrix Potter, which were not real face-to-face interviews with a journalist asking a question and Potter answering it. The fact that the ‘interview’ was conducted with one letter forwarded to Potter and one letter answering it, must have been a comfort to Potter. That the letter came from the same, far-off American magazine as the picture was sent to seems to indicate that Potter preferred to tell something about herself to people she would probably never meet. That way she would not have to appear in person, retaining some sense of anonymity, and she would also not be confronted with the reaction of the interviewer. In conclusion, the posture that Beatrix Potter constructs in her photos, books, interviews, and pamphlets is that of a plain, introverted, hardworking, nature and animal loving, farm lady.

Chapter 2

The Person

Discursive External Posture

The Tale of Peter Rabbit was first written down in a letter to Noel Moore in 1893, the son of a former governess. The story in the letter did not have the same form and length as the story in the book that was published in 1901, but it shows that Potter's literary career almost certainly started with her letters. Potter wrote many letters during her lifetime. She started writing when she was just a little girl, sending her father letters about her adventures when she was on holiday. She wrote letters until just a few days before she died (Doran 1). Her letters included those sent to children of family and friends, her publishers, her friends and fans from both within and outside Britain, and the National Trust. These letters number around the thousands and more are being found every day.

This chapter will focus on one main question: How does Beatrix Potter present herself as an author within her letters? The matters that will be given attention are, for instance: What topics does she discuss the most, and does she therefore associate herself with the most? What is her tone of speech? What are her professional opinions? What do her letters look like? The expectation is that Beatrix presents herself as a nature-lover, who has a sense of humour, has a matter-of-fact approach to life. and favours private life above public life.

Meizoz certainly sees letters as a means of investigating the posture of an author. He explains that posture can be studied from the periphery of the text; the *paratext* which includes the presentation of the author inside the book, any bibliographical mentions in the book, and/or photos of the author that are included; and *epitext*, which includes interviews with the author, letters to other authors, and any entries in literary journals (par. 5). The previous chapter has already dealt with the non-discursive posture of the author, in which a large part of the paratext, such as official photos and the presentation of the book, as well as a part of the epitext, namely interviews with Potter, have been discussed. This chapter will focus on the letters that Potter wrote. In this instance the focus will not solely be on those written to other authors, but also to fans, friends, publishers, and the National Trust. These groups of people are part of the literary field that Potter manifests herself in because they are not just part of her audience, but also contribute to the image that Potter creates of herself and is perceived by others. One approach that Meizoz takes to study the posture of the author, and which will be also used in this chapter, is to look at the narrative tone of a text. Meizoz explains that every narrative tone, from humour to irony, from modesty to arrogance, can be

rhetorically coded and produces a certain image of the fictional speaker (29). The fictional posture of Potter will be discussed in the next chapter, but the same technique can be used in Potter's letters to produce an image of the non-fictional speaker, in this case Beatrix Potter.

This chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part will look at the letters Beatrix Potter wrote to children and will focus on the content of the letters, the appearance of the letters, the use of language, and the narrative tone. The second part will discuss the professional letters that Potter wrote, namely those directed at publishers, the National Trust, and any sent to journals and newspapers. This part will be subdivided into the same sub-elements, apart from the appearance of the letters, as the secondary source referenced for these letters does not include a description. The third part will deal with the letters that Beatrix Potter wrote to friends and fans. Beatrix wrote over a thousand letters during her life, so an inclusion of all letters would have meant that research would become too extensive and would prevent in-depth discussion. The number of letters discussed in this chapter has therefore been limited to around 400, selected by Judy Taylor in her book *Beatrix Potter's Letters*. This still seems a large number of letters, but the variety in length and kind have made studying these letters easier. Some of the letters that Potter wrote are at least one page long. These are the letters from which a clear image of Potter can be formed. Other letters are smaller, such as those written to children. Sometimes, Potter's letters contain just one or two lines. Potter's letters vary in content as well. The letters written to children are often about animals. Letters to Potter's publisher are more formal and are mostly about the appearance of her books. Letters to fellow farmers say more about livestock and farming arrangements. Nevertheless, all these letters show different facets of Potter's character and construct Potter's posture in different ways.

Letters to Children

The letters that Beatrix Potter wrote to the children of family and friends vary in length and content. This is particularly apparent when comparing letters she wrote during her younger years with those she wrote when she was well into her fifties and sixties. This part will take a closer look at a few of those letters to discuss some of the overall themes that are present, and to see how Potter presents herself to these children and how this might have changed.

One of the first letters that Taylor includes in her book is a letter written to Noel Moore in 1892. It is not the letter containing the first draft of the Peter Rabbit story, which was written in 1893. In 1893 Noel Moore was five years old (Taylor 13), which means that he must have been four when he received this letter from Potter. Potter shows in this letter that

she was able to write in such a way as to make it suitable and accessible for a child. She often writes in her letters about her journeys, such as in this letter, where she mentions: “I have come a very long way in a puf-puff to a place in Cornwall, where it is very hot, and there are palm trees in the gardens & camellias & rhodendrons in flower which are very pretty” (Potter 13). Noel would probably not have been able to read the letter himself, and would certainly not have had a very extensive vocabulary, being 4 years old. Potter made her story more understandable, by referring to the train as *puf-puff*, and accompanying it with a drawing of a train.

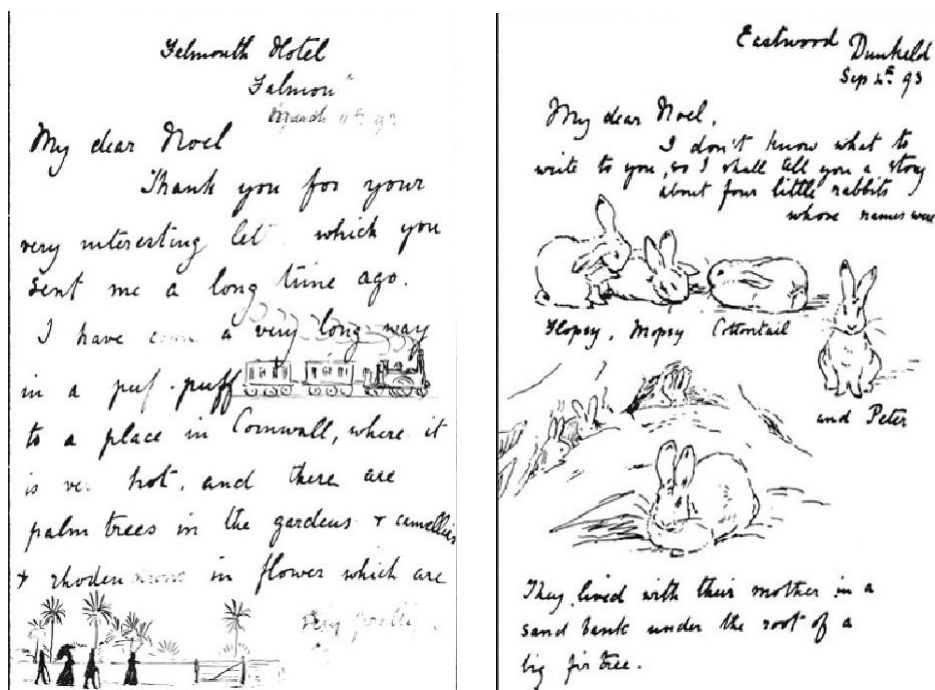


Fig. 13, 14. Letters to Noel Moore, 1892/1893. Potter, Beatrix. *Beatrix Potter's Letters*. Ed. Judy Taylor. London: Penguin, 2012. E-book.

Most of the earlier letters that Potter wrote to children, and that are included in Taylor's book, are accompanied by pictures. This letter contains pictures of things Potter saw during her journey, such as the palm trees she describes, boats, and animals (13). The signature letter about Peter Rabbit is accompanied by sketches of rabbits (15), and the letter to Marjorie Moore, written in 1900, has sketches that portray Potter herself, arguing with a publisher. It seems that Potter adapted her letters to suit her audience, showing on the one hand that she was very knowledgeable about society, but on the other hand associating herself with the hobby that would later on be her profession. She seemed to present herself as an illustrator.

What Beatrix Potter also often writes about in her letters to children are animals and other features of nature. In the letter to Noel Moore from 1893, she describes her surroundings, with the palm trees and the camellias (13). In another letter to Noel Moore from 1895, she writes about the sparrows she feeds every morning and her pet rabbit Peter, who she describes as lazy. One of the remarkable features of her descriptions of animals is that she often describes their personality as well. In this letter, she not only describes Peter as lazy, but also as naughty (15). She makes a connection between the natural world and the fantasy world, beginning with a description of the animal, then giving it a character, and in the end painting a fantastical scene. In this case, her description of Peter ends with a drawing of Rabbits throwing snowballs at each other (15). A letter to Freda Moore contains a short bit on how Peter must be very hot with his thick fur, and Potter imagines he would be more comfortable if he had a “little coat which would take off” (20). Again a normal, natural situation is connected to Potter’s imagination. Potter would probably have known that a lot of animals shed their fur in warmer weather to cool off, having studied animals from when she was young. Instead she makes the suggestion that it would be easier for animals to wear coats, which could be easily taken off. This connection between her fascination for the natural world and her imagination is later on also used by Potter to identify herself as an author. In a letter to Winifred Warne in 1905, the niece of Norman Warne, she identifies herself as the “Peter Rabbit Lady” (75). Here she connects herself to her books, and indirectly to rabbits and the natural world.

Nature is also a topic where Potter’s macabre sense of humour and matter-of-fact approach to life have a tendency to manifest itself. In a letter to Freda Moore of 1898, Potter writes about a jack daw, her brother’s bird, and how he when he is let loose collects items from the fireplace. Potter then comments: “it will be very awkward when the fire is lighted” (20). *Awkward* does not seem to be the right choice of words to use in a situation which could have lead to the death of the bird. In a letter to Tom Harding from 1917, she describes quite elaborately how one of her ducks, Semolina, was only able to hatch two of her eggs. She then explains that she named the two children Tapioca and Sago. The thing she says immediately after that is: “We have eaten Sago” (165). Again this seems quite indelicate. She does follow up on this with an explanation by saying that she did not like it, and that “the stuffing disagreed with [her] conscience”, but that father and son had been fighting (165). It would be expected that she would not do something similar again, and that she would not eat one of her own animals again. However, straight afterwards, she describes the amount of rabbits that she possesses, including race (Belgians), and mentioning her pets Old Benjamin and Cottontail,

followed by: “but I’m afraid we do have rabbit pies of the young ones” (165). On the other hand, Linda Doran remarks that it is these letters where Potter’s “superb sense of fun” comes across (2). She alludes here to the mini-letters that Potter wrote to children, from the perspective of some of her most famous characters: “These letters were written on very small pieces of paper, folded even smaller and some put into small mailbags or red post boxes that Beatrix made herself” (2). It seems Potter put a lot of effort into making her letters appealing to the children, at the same time keeping her stories alive and the children interested. Perhaps Potter’s morbid utterances about the death of some of her animals might not have been meant as such. Perhaps she wanted to teach these children that death is a part of life as well. This can be confirmed by an example from another letter. In this letter, written to Marjorie Moore in 1900, Potter also tries to teach Marjorie that “[t]he publisher is a gentleman who prints books” (21). In this case, Potter seems to present herself as a teacher.

Beatrix Potter keeps her opinion mostly to herself in her letters to children. However, sometimes Potter’s feelings or thoughts seem to seep through. In the same letter to Marjorie Moore, right after the explanation of what a publisher is, Potter remarks that “he wants a bigger book than he has got enough money to pay for!” (21). Potter clearly disagrees with the ideas that the publisher suggested for her book. Afterwards, she talks about herself in the third person, and writes: “she thinks little rabbits cannot afford to spend 6 shillings on one book, and would never buy it” (21). She describes herself as an author who is concerned about her audience, stands up for people with a lower income, and at the same time as an author who knows how to market her books to get a profit. In letters written quite a while later, Potter expresses more and more her opinions. In a letter written to Denys Lawson in 1916, she expresses that her concern for children has lessened, and actually starts to find them more disagreeable: “I wonder how many tiresome unknown children have bothered me with birthday books, and letters wanting answers ... not more than one in twenty ever writes again to say ‘Thank you’” (152). She portrays children as demanding and seems to find the letters that she receives from them quite a bother.

In later letters, Beatrix still writes about her day to day business. In a letter to Louisa Ferguson of 1910, she even talks about how she is politically active at the moment, and writes that she has stiff fingers because of drawing so many posters on account of an election (106). In these letters, Potter also presents herself a more moody person: “I can not write if I am out of humour” (224). Her mood determines if she is able to write or not, and she felt that she needed to explain this in a letter to a child.

There seems to be a shift in how Beatrix Potter portrays herself in letters written to children. Her earlier letters render an image of Potter as a nature lover, a person attached and adapted to children, and with a matter-of-fact sense of humour. This shifts when later letters portray Potter as a more opinionated person, less attached to children, and more concerned with her own feelings. This is emphasized by the appearance of these letters, which in the beginning are ‘fun’, miniaturized, and accompanied by pictures, but in the end contain hardly any drawings and sketches. If we take Viala into account here, and in particular his conception that an author has different options when it comes to constructing a posture, it seems that Potter, at least in her letters to children, does not have a hallmark. The overall tone in her letters changes. Her earlier letters are more light-hearted and fun, whereas later letters show a more bitter, opinionated author.

Professional Letters

Some of the children’s letters have been produced in facsimile in Taylor’s book, which is why the appearance of the letters is also looked at when investigating Potter’s posture. However, this is not the case with any of the professional letters that Potter wrote; they have all been transcribed. This section will look at the letters that Beatrix Potter wrote to her publishers, the National Trust, and any letters to newspapers and magazines that are included in Taylor’s collection.

Beatrix Potter’s letters to her publishers again portray her as someone obsessed with nature and animals. Her letters start out formal, asking about the proofs of her books and changes to be made, but letters from around 1903 onwards start to show signs of her deep-rooted interest in animals. A letter to Norman Warne in 1903 contains a section in which Potter explains an “instance of rabbit ferocity” (43). In this instance, where her rabbit had bitten her, she also shows her sense of humour, explaining that the “friendship is at present restored with scented soap!” (43). In another letter from 1903, Potter asks Warne to make a house for her mouse Hunca Munca (45). Later letters contain more and more information about Potter’s natural life as she started to mention her farming experiences, for example how she had bought a cow “from another old woman” (100). She not only identified herself as an old woman at the age of 40, but she also wanted to identify herself with farm life, suggesting that one of Fruing’s children might take a photo of her with the pigs to use as an official photograph (189). At some point, she even presents herself as superior to farmers. She explains in a letter to Mr. Alexander McKay, her publisher in Philadelphia, that she is the only person who could write a sufficient account on sheep. The reasons she gives for this is that

she not only knows sheep and the fells like a farmer and shepherd, but that she would be able to do so because she is more articulate than the Herdwick farmers (225). She is presenting these farmers as simple folk, whom she surpasses in her knowledge and skill, but she identifies herself with them at the same time, be it in a superior way.

Potter herself seems conflicted concerning the degree of literary success she has achieved. On the one hand she presents herself as very knowledgeable about the market and very humble towards the prospect of her sales. In a letter to F. Warne & Co, she writes: “I should like to take the opportunity of saying that I shall not be surprised or disappointed to hear that the figures work out badly for the first edition of Peter rabbit” (26). She rather seems to be writing because it amuses her (23). This can also be perceived in an earlier letter to William Thiselton-Dyer of Kew Gardens, where she is concerned about Mr. Masee’s reaction to her research of fungi because she “is afraid [she has] rather contradicted him” (17). Potter did not seem to think very highly of her own work. She hoped that her books would not be seen as silly (33) and was often very much surprised by her sales: “what an appalling quantity of Peter” (44). In her letters, Potter did not show a very high esteem of herself either, claiming that the success of *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* had to be owing to the marketing strategies of Norman Warne (51). On top of that, the comparison made in an article by Janet Adam Smith between Potter and artists such as Blake, Palmer, Constable, Bewick and Caldecott, Potter does away with, saying it is “silliness” (347).

On the other hand, Beatrix Potter also appears to be quite aware of her success, making her humble responses in her letters seem like a pretence. In the same letter to Thiselton-Dyer, she seems to be aware of the consequences and worth of her research. She appears to threaten Thiselton-Dyer to take up her research, saying: “the things exist, and will be all done by the Germans” (17). In other words, he would do better to recognize her research and continue with it or the Germans will claim this success as theirs. She almost seems to brag when she mentions in a letter to Warne that Arthur Conan Doyle has bought a copy of her book for his children (26). Furthermore, when Sanderson, a wallpaper firm, declines her designs for wallpaper, she remarks that her books, which contain the same designs, have actually sold “pretty well” (65). If Potter was trying to present herself as a humble author, this does not come across in using such a defence.

Besides her expression of dubious humility, Potter’s quirky character and macabre sense of humour are also apparent in her professional letters. Her letters to children are not always neatly written and contain many spelling mistakes, such as ‘rhodendrons’ (13). In a letter to her publisher, she expresses that she is aware of this, apologizing for the untidiness

(of her letter, or the progress of her new book, this is left unclear) (37). Potter is aware of her inability to spell. In a letter to Howard Warne from 1908 she writes: “Queer thing it is that I cannot spell chimney; I trust it is not a sign of incipient lunacy!” (99) The odd thing is that in this letter chimney is spelled correctly. Potter also sometimes comes across as a little insensitive, just as in her children’s letters when mentioning the death of her animals. In this case, however, it concerns her family. When her father is ill, she writes: “He may last a good while, but it is scarcely to be wished” (141). She must have meant that she did not want her father to suffer, but it looks as if she only wishes her father would die sooner. Something similar can be deduced from a letter to McKay in 1932. Potter wishes him merry Christmas, but notes that she will not have one, as her mother “is refusing to die” (259). On top of that, when a nephew of Mr. Heelis is fighting in the war, she quite unfeelingly remarks that he was “enjoying the bombardment when last heard of” (144). The same goes for her animals: “I haven’t much pity for poaching cats myself” (141). Either she approaches death as a normal part of life, or she does not want to portray herself as an emotional person in her letters and chooses not to include her personal feelings in them. Potter also seems to come across as a bit quirky when she sometimes suddenly mentions health problems in her letters, which in some cases are not always the most appropriate to mention, such as indigestion or losing teeth (134).

The neglect of emotion in her letters may be due to the fact that she wanted to share as little of her life as possible with others, certainly her business partners. She wanted as little to do with public life as she could. Judy Taylor explains that Fruing Warne, Potter’s publisher, sent her all requests for interviews and invitations for public performances, but that Potter “[m]uch against personal publicity ... always refused” (185). Potter never wanted to be interviewed, but also never wanted to interview others. For example, she refused to interview the tailor on whom the *Tailor of Gloucester* was based after he had found out what had happened to the waistcoat (39). It was found out that a couple of employees working for the original tailor had finished the coat for him. Perhaps Potter liked the idea of mystery, of not knowing who had finished the waistcoat. She also expressed in her letters that she was not interested in reviews. In a letter to Harold Warne she writes: “When a thing is once printed I dismiss it from my dreams! I don’t care what becomes of the reviewers” (99). In one instance, however, she receives a letter from an American journalist to which she decided to respond because it amused her, even including her own address, which is not what she would usually do (305). A comment that often returns in her letters is that she does not care a “tuppenny-button” for the public, and remarks that that is how she was able to continue writing (127).

However, on some occasions she does ask about certain reviews: “I should be grateful if anyone could find time to write me a line how the ‘Tailor’ is going on?” (43), “Did you see that most amusing review in last Friday’s Literary Sup. of the Times?” (60). She does seem to be curious about how her books are faring, but at the same time she does not want to know: “I think it is a mistake to attend to them at all” (60). Potter also did not want to associate her work and herself with her political opinions. In a letter to Harold Warne from 1910, she writes that she rather not connect Peter Rabbit to letters sent to the Times or pamphlets, because it would be too much like advertisement and she did not want to drag her books into her political life (107). One letter to the *Times* Potter signed with “A Woman Farmer” (147) indicates Beatrix Potter very much wanted to stay unknown personally as well as politically. When Mrs. S. Webb was mistaken for Beatrix Potter (because they had the same maiden name), Beatrix did not mind and rather preferred that to being recognized. She only took action when it got out of hand (201). She does often mention in her letters how her home situation is faring, such as family matters, illnesses, or problems with servants, but she did not often go into much detail. This information was limited to letters sent to her publisher, who she had by then come to know much better. An example of this is that she would rather not talk to Harold Warne about her engagement to his brother (74). She also wanted to make sure that her donations to the National Trust remained anonymous (257) and overall she was “not sorry to find [herself] so completely unknown” (124). In a letter to Mrs. Choyce, who would become an employee to Potter, she described herself as a total abstainer from public life (148).

That Beatrix Potter preferred private life did not mean that she did not participate in charity work. In her letters, she presented herself as a real do-gooder. In a letter to Mr. Hamer, a head of the National Trust, she wrote that it was her dream that every corner of the district would be a part of one huge reservation (213). One of the things she did to achieve this was writing a letter to *County Life* to complain about the nuisance caused by the Hydroplanes flying over the lake (124). In another letter to Miss Mahony, editor of the magazine *The Horn Book*, Potter would speak of herself in the third person and write: “‘Beatrix Potter’ has very much at heart an appeal to raise a fund to save a strip of foreshore woodland and meadow, near Windermere Ferry, from imminent [sic] risk of disfigurement by extensive building and town extension” (218). By using the third person, Potter makes it sound like she is a proper authority, proving that she wants this quest of hers to draw as much attention as possible, proving that she, as an author, wants to be associated with preservation work. In her letters to the National Trust Potter again portrays herself as an advisor and an authority, giving advice

on how the landscape can best be preserved, writing from first-hand experience (286). Other charitable behaviour that Potter describes in her letters is when she announces to Fruing Warne that she wishes to have her books adapted for blind children (187). She even goes closer to home and helps Fruing Warne and his wife when they have gotten into financial trouble because of a scandal involving Harold Warne. “Let her use any profit for Christmas presents”, is what Potter writes to Warne, suggesting that they keep the profit of the board game for which his wife has thought up the rules (160).

Later letters prove, just as the ones written to children, that Potter’s character slightly changed. She expresses her opinions more often, has got a slightly bitter outlook to life, voices her yearning for the past, and even makes some pronounced statements about the position of women. The following extract proves that Potter has become tired of her literary life:

You do not realize that I have become more – rather than less obstinate as I grow older; and that you have no lever to make use of with me; ... nothing else would induce me to go on at all. You see I am not short of money. I never have cared tuppence either for popularity or for the modern child; they are pampered & spoilt with too many toys & books. (177)

The humble countenance that Potter tried to assign herself in earlier letters has faded completely. It seems that Potter has become sick of being demanded to write more books and she also expresses here that she favours the old-fashioned child to the modern one. Her yearning for the old-fashioned is also presented in another letter to Fruing Warne, where she compliments him on his “respectable old fashioned nice sort” of books (164). She is also not afraid to express what she thinks. In one letter to Warne, she calls the government officials idiots (167) and in another she makes the indirect assumption that all Americans are uneducated and illiterate (187).

Beatrix Potter also expresses some of her opinions concerning the position of women. In a letter from 1904 to Norman Warne, she writes that she was concerned about another woman who had drawn and published a book, but that hers did not sell (48). It seems that here she voices an indirect concern about her own position in the literary field. In another letter to Norman Warne, she explains that she desires to sponsor one of the Moore girls so that she would be able to go to college (49). It appears that Potter was very much in favour of education for women. Potter clearly wants a better position for women. She mocks some of the old proverbs, such as “a spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree – the more you beat them the better they be,” in a letter to Warne (71). In this letter, she describes she is not able to get on

with her work and comically refers to this proverb. She does, however, not perceive herself as a feminist. She is offended when Janet Adam Smith addressed her letter to Miss Potter while she was already married to William Heelis, proving that she valued the idea of marriage (347). In a letter to Mrs. Miller from 1943, she even expresses her disapproval with some of the women of her time saying that “the majority of the young ones are going through a horrid phase; but I think it is a phase, and that there will be a reaction of common sense and decency; though it may take another generation to achieve it” (354).

In her letters to her publishers, the National Trust and newspapers and magazines, Beatrix Potter presents herself as a real nature enthusiast, proven by the amount of times she writes about her animals, her farm, or her preservation efforts. She tries to present herself as a very humble author saying that she rather not do any interviews, but she seems to be aware of how much her books are valued in the meantime. Meizoz would note that the posture that Potter tries to construct for herself, as a humble author, is not successful, as Potter is not consistent in this stance and other situations often betray an air of superiority. However, since much of her income is given to charity, she can hardly be called arrogant. Potter does prefer, however, to remain as unknown as possible so any donations to the National Trust, and any political letters and pamphlets written by her, are anonymous. Just like in the letters to children, the overall tone of them changes over the years. Potter’s often awkward sense of humour turns into a sense of bitterness. The way she portrays herself remained consistent in her letters similar to the description of her fairyland: “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” (Potter 321).

Letters to Friends and Fans

The friends and fans that Beatrix Potter most often wrote to were either neighbours, farmhands, former governesses, or Americans. Overall these letters are similar to those written to children and to professionals, such as that nature and animals are an often recurring topic. There is, however, a difference in the overall tone and some of the contents of these letters.

Potter’s letters to friends and fans start out on a merrier note. Potter seems to express more of her fun side, such as when she describes the atmosphere of Sawrey to Millie Warne after she had just moved there: “There are several rows going on! but I am not in any of them at present – though much inclined! I think I shall attack the county council about manure” (86). Potter almost presents these arguments as a type of game, where she has to decide what

move to make next. On top of that, manure seems hardly a topic worth arguing about. Her sense of humour is also present when she explains that she has fallen through the ceiling, which caused her to be much amused (86). Even at the end, Potter presents herself as a very spirited woman, writing that she still had some kick in her (355).

Beatrix Potter was unwilling to go into any requests from journalists, but she was never shy to answer letters from fans. Taylor notes that Potter answered most of them, or at least tried to, but she paid particular attention to those letters coming from overseas (105). All the letters that she received would actually tire her: “There have been so many Christmas cards from unknown infants this year, thank goodness! they are very kindly meant but rather a nuisance” (93). It would appear that she loved receiving letters from friends and children, but that she still favoured some peace and quiet.

In her letters to her friends, Beatrix Potter would also be more open about her feelings. Her letters show that she was often more affected by the loss of a child or animal than that of an adult (117), but when the wife of her dear friend Canon Rawnsley had died, she expressed her sincere feelings by saying that “that was the real – the cruellest death – death in life” (154). Rawnsley’s wife had had a long death bed, and this was something that Potter apparently could not bear. In her letters, Potter appears to have always been very busy, so being affected by an illness that prevented her from doing anything would most likely have been her worst nightmare. In a letter to Joseph Moscrop, she even writes that she would rather keep on going till she dropped (248).

In her letters to friends and fans, Potter also presents herself as a romantic, yearning for the past. In a letter to Sylvie Heelis from 1921, she writes that she believed in fairies and considers herself to be a fan of the “pleasantly old fashioned sort” (190). She also describes herself as a child who has never grown up (190). In her correspondence with friends, Potter notably seems to favour Americans above Englishmen, in contrast with the professional letters, because the New Englanders that visited her were the ones who shared her romantic yearning for the past: “[they] appreciate the memories of old times, the simple country pleasures, - the homely beauty of the old farm house, the sublime beauty of the silent lonely hills – and – blessed folk” (220). Potter describes the English as too matter-of-fact and obtrusive (220).

In later letters, Potter also does appear to have become more bitter, but to a lesser degree than in the other categories. Her yearning for the past is much more profound. In letters to Caroline Clark, she expresses her love for old furniture (276) or her fascination with old, folkloric myths, such as about the monster of Loch Ness (267). She does, however, show

her discontent as well. She remarks to Mrs. Coolidge in 1932 that the world is changing too fast and that she disagrees with changes such as free education (256). One of the reasons that she strongly disagrees with free education is because the quality of education might decline and would lead to children becoming more disagreeable: “The samples of modern child that emerges from the hotels are positively indecent” (182). Potter would also complain that there were too many immigrants in her country, blaming the government for being “too easy” (313). However, in these letters, Potter does not describe herself to be as bitter about it as in her other letters. She claims that “the mountains & fells and green land of pleasant England will survive her smoky towns & ugly suburbs” (315) and she expressed to Nora Burt that she would always be grinning, no matter what (250).

Overall, Beatrix Potter seems to be more of an optimist in her letters to friends and fans. The tone of her letters does betray bitterness as she gets older, but Potter seems to surpass that. Just as in her letters to professionals, she shows that she never wanted fame as a letter to Millie Warne shows where Potter exclaims: “we shall ‘get a name for pigs’. Such is fame!” (78). She valued her animals far more above her fame as an author. These letters present Potter as a more open author than the letters in the other categories. Potter seems to be more willing to correspond with fans than with journalists and is more open about her feelings.

Conclusion

Beatrix Potter’s discursive, external posture is quite consistent throughout her letters. When it comes to the content of her letters, they reveal a natural world enthusiast. Potter presents herself also as a conservative author, focussing on her yearning for the past, her fascination for old furniture, and her liking for old-fashioned books. The tone in her letters reveals a fun, opinionated, matter-of-fact author, but this tone is not consistent. Her later letters are more bitter. It would seem that, if we look at Meizoz’s and Viala’s theory, Potter’s posture as an author shifts here from a fun, child-loving one to a bitter, self-centred one. This could also be due to the fact that Potter may have presented herself differently to her different audiences. She seems to present herself as child-loving author in the letters to her fan children, but her personal letters to her friends allow her to be more honest. It appears that she displays different kinds of postures to different audiences. Meizoz’s theory, on this topic of researching letters in particular, shows some shortcomings. Meizoz explains that researching letters can shed light on what posture an author creates for himself and he mentions that one thing to focus on is the tone of those letters. What Meizoz’s approach lacks is a method of

analysis. What elements can be focused on to say something meaningful about posture, besides the tone of the letters? It is for this reason that this chapter and the following one had to depend on original topics for analysis. In addition, this chapter does not mention much other secondary literature because there are not any sources that look critically at Beatrix Potter's letters and research them. The only sources found that contain letters written by Potter are collections or bundles. For this reason, the discussion of Potter's letters in this chapter stands on its own.

Chapter 3
The Scribe
Discursive Internal Posture

In her book *Beatrix Potter: Writing in Code*, M. Daphne Kutzer (2003) treats all the tales written by Beatrix Potter in the social and political context of Potter's time, the context of her letters, and her journal. She notes that Potter voices her "concerns about manners, social unrest, and the subtleties of social hierarchy" in her tales (3). Just as Potter's journal was coded, Potter's books can be seen as a codification of her "restlessness and rebelliousness about social propriety and domesticity" (3). Kutzer explains that Potter voices her complaints and her desire to express herself throughout her work (11). This chapter looks at how Potter expressed herself in her tales. Instead of placing her tales in the context of her letters and her journal, this chapter will solely focus on her fictional work to see how Potter constructed her posture as an author. The scope of this research is limited to the twenty-one tales published in the United Kingdom. Potter's collections of nursery rhymes, *The Fairy Caravan*, and unpublished tales are excluded to enable this chapter to have an in-depth discussion of several of her twenty-one tales.

The question this chapter will focus on is how Beatrix Potter constructed her posture as an author in her twenty-one tales. In relation to this question; What are the main concerns in her stories? What does Potter focus on? Does she include any references to other literary and artistic works and what do those references tell about her? What style of writing and drawing does Potter use in her works? Are there any remarkable linguistic characteristics? What is the overall tone of her stories?

Jérôme Meizoz states that an author constructs an image of himself or herself in a text that is different from the image that an author creates as a person or in his or her biographies (28). Meizoz explains that a text is a creation of the imagination and can therefore be a platform for the author to show which position he or she occupies or would like to occupy in the literary field (31). Meizoz describes it as a space where artistic possibilities can be used to construct posture (31). The author can thus not only use imagination as a tool to construct a story, but also as a tool to construct a posture. Jeroen Dera remarks that it is more difficult to extract the image that an author creates for himself or herself from fictional works than from autobiographical works or interviews (464). On the other hand, the twenty-one tales written by Beatrix Potter can be partly considered autobiographical in that they are set in landscapes and places with which Potter was familiar, and because some of the characters are inspired by

people that Potter knew. Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle for example, was based on Scottish washerwoman Kitty McDonald (Taylor et al. 121). The events in the tales, however, are in no way related to Potter's life, which is why these stories cannot be approached as autobiographies. Nonetheless, this chapter will focus on the narrative tone among other things. Furthermore, in Meizoz's theory, style also plays an important role. Meizoz states that the author's image is expressed by tone, but can be broken down into an individual style (par. 21). According to Meizoz, tone, style and subject matter of the stories are complementary in the construction of posture in fictional works (par. 23). However, Meizoz does not further distinguish between elements in these categories. He gives no further subdivision within these categories of elements that are important to look at and can contribute to the analysis of posture. It is, therefore, that in this chapter the analysis of tone and style, and the analysis of posture in general, is based upon what other secondary sources pay attention to and what the reading of the texts suggested.

This chapter will first deal with the content of the twenty-one tales will be discussed. Who are the main protagonist? Where are the stories set? What does Potter seem to pay special attention to? This part is subdivided into three elements that seem to characterize Potter the most: nature, her sense for detail and intertextual references. Secondly, it will focus on Potter's style. Taylor et al. remarks that Potter "was always aware of sound and rhythm" and that she paid much attention to pacing and balance (107). This second section will mainly pay attention to Potter's use of language and any remarkable linguistic elements. The third section will discuss the tone in Potter's tales. How does she narrate her stories? How present or distant is the narrator and from what perspective are the tragedies and adventures that befall the characters viewed?

Content

Nature

Beatrix Potter continues to show her love for nature in her tales as she did in her non-discursive behaviour and letters. What better way to show her attraction to animals and landscapes than making it the subject of her tales? The main characters of her stories are rabbits, ducks, mice, and other animals present in or around a farm, linking her tales to her life as a farmer. What further confirms Potter's fascination with animals is her accuracy in drawing them. Taylor et al. note that Potter's tales are characterized by "careful naturalistic observation" (127). Potter not only portrays herself as an enthusiast of nature by correctly

drawing animals, but also by correctly copying their behaviour. The following picture gives an example of Potter's naturalistic observation.



Fig. 15. Peter Rabbit, 1902. Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Katie Mullins describes in her essay “Crossing Boundaries and Forming Identity in Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*” that “Peter is pictured as a feral rabbit in a natural pose ... distinctly rabbit like in posture and expression” (6). Potter clearly seems to want to portray Peter as naturalistic as possible. Peter is, of course, not always completely rabbit-like, wearing clothing in other instances. It is here that Potter seems to present herself as some sort of teacher. Carole Scott explains that Potter dressed her animals not only to show the difference between animal and human behaviour, but also to show the similarities between animal and human nature (qtd. in Mullins 3). It is when Peter is wearing clothes that the similarities between animals and humans are stressed, but “when the animals revert to the wild all clothes are shed” (Taylor et al. 134).

Another way that Potter not only shows her love for nature, but her simple, down-to-earth and close-to-home personality, is by eternalizing the landscapes that she loves and is familiar with. Taylor et al. note that at least a quarter of the animal stories take place in or around Sawrey (131). *Squirrel Nutkin* is set around Derwentwater (111), *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* is set in the Newlands Valley, *Tom Kitten* takes place around Hill Top (131), etc. Potter copies these scenes completely in her tales and these landscapes can be recognised when compared with the originals. Potter must clearly have had a fascination for these

settings if she wanted to include them in her tales and show them to her readers. Another element that shows Potter love for and knowledge of nature is the mention of specific herbal properties (Taylor et al. 85). Peter Rabbit's mother gives Peter camomile tea, which eases insomnia and has other health-related benefits. Potter presents herself this way as knowledgeable on all natural matters.

Beatrix Potter portrays herself as a naturalistic writer. She does this not only by making animals the protagonists of her tales and including the landscapes that she admires as backgrounds in her books, but also by drawing these same things in much detail. On top of that she presents herself as knowledgeable about the effects of herbs and spices.

Sense for Detail

The Tailor of Gloucester, which was Beatrix Potter's favourite tale, shows her sense for detail not only in the portrayal of her animals, but also in the design for their surroundings. Potter had become an avid collector of pottery, china, and furniture: "Over the years she had collected pottery and china and she had some fine examples in cabinets there. She also collected furniture, about which she was very knowledgeable" (Taylor 114). This love for collecting, in particular china, is included in the tale of the tailor.



Fig. 16, 17. China in *The Tailor*, 1903. Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Potter includes china in her story, assigning it a crucial role to it, namely the hiding-place for the mice that Simpkin has captured. In figure 16 and 17, Potter reproduces several items of china with much detail, drawing the decoration, giving it a prominent role in the drawing, which eventually draws the attention away from the mouse to the teacup. The

amount of detail is remarkable, not just in *The Tailor of Gloucester*, but in other tales as well. Taylor et al. note about *Ginger and Pickles* that “the detailing is done with obvious enjoyment” (142).

This can certainly be observed from the following picture from *The Tailor*.



Fig. 18. Waistcoat in *The Tailor*, 1903. Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

This picture shows the waistcoat that is the subject of the entire tale. It shows the almost completed garment and it is the embroidery that draws the attention. Potter has drawn this picture from a zoomed-in perspective, putting the focus on only a part of garment. Potter already seems to signal that it is the small details that matter the most. It appears as if Potter wanted to draw every stitch and the picture certainly looks like it is embossed.

In her essay “A Few of the Author’s Favorite Things: Clothes, Fetishism, and *The Tailor of Gloucester*,” Hannah Field voices the idea that Potter might have had some sort of fetishism for clothes. She notes that the tale about the tailor can be considered a tale about fetishism, not only because Potter presents herself as very knowledgeable about clothing (21), but also because of her “obsessive attention to material objects” (19), which is peculiar as Potter never seemed to mind how she dressed. This is not something that is restricted to just *The Tailor*. In *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*, the guests of the frog are described by what they are wearing. In *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*, clothes pay an important role because that is how Lucie met the hedgehog. The trouble in *Tom Kitten* is caused by the fact that the kittens lose their clothes. It seems an important characteristic overall that the animals wear clothes. Field states that Potter’s “personal and passionate relationship with the material

object” is what can be traced in *The Tailor*, but it can certainly also be traced in the image of the author.

What is remarkable is that Potter’s detailed approach to her tales, in particular the focus on clothing, is used as an identity marker. Scott notes that clothes are often seen as a restriction for the animal protagonists in Potter’s tales (qtd. in Field 18). Peter Rabbit loses his clothes, just as Tom Kitten and his sisters lose theirs. This concept is researched in Katie Mullin’s essay (2009). She explains that the fact that Peter Rabbit loses his clothes and wants to get them back can be seen as a quest for the search for Peter’s identity (4). The saying ‘fine feathers make fine birds’ seems appropriate here.

Beatrix Potter’s detailed descriptions and drawings take a turn for the perfectionistic. She seems to describe and draw particularly china and clothing as often, obsessively, and as detailed as possible. Besides that, Potter presents clothing as an identity marker, characterizing and humanising not only her characters, but indirectly herself as well. If Potter includes elements from her own life in her tales, such as hobbies and fascinations, then her tales can be used to identify the author’s posture. Meizoz explains that everything that an author includes or excludes from his or her work contributes to the construction of posture: “topics chosen, style of writing the public position taken in issues of literature or any other field, statements, etc. ... what the author allows to be seen” (qtd. in Anghelescu 17). If Potter presents clothing as an identifying factor, then she indirectly seems to say that how she dresses is also how she wants to be perceived.

Intertextual References

Beatrix Potter copies, parodies, and references other artists and writers in her work. These references can be used to say something about the posture that Potter wanted to construct. Which authors and artists did she copy and who did she want to identify with indirectly? Which artists did she choose to parody, giving expression to her position in that way?

In a letter, Beatrix Potter writes from an early age that she was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, especially by their “meticulous copying of flowers & plants etc” (347). Potter certainly considered and presented herself as a student of their school. Her drawings are based on sketches she made of her animals, her surroundings, and items belonging to friends and family, such as the doll’s house on which the one in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* was based (Potter 70).

Another element present in her tales is Potter’s fascination with fables, fairy tales, rhymes, and riddles (Kutzer 7). At least six of Potter’s stories contain one of the above

mentioned genres (Taylor et al. 59). Beatrix Potter made her own version of Cinderella (61), but there are certain less obvious examples of Potter's love for fairy tales. Taylor et al. note that the mice in *The Tailor of Gloucester* are very similar to fairies (60). The fact that animals wear clothes and are humanized in a way is reminiscent of Aesop, such as Tod, who could just as well have stepped straight out of *The Fox and the Crow* (65). Many of Potter's tales also start with 'Once upon a time,' the trademark beginning of a classic fairy tale.

Potter's tales also contain elements coming from contemporary authors, such as Lewis Carroll and Randolph Caldecott. *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* is very similar to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Taylor et al. 121). Alice follows a white rabbit down a rabbit hole, which is similar to how Lucie follows a 'white' handkerchief until she encounters a door in a hill, leading to Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle's abode (Potter 89). The endings are also very similar. Alice wakes up from a dream, realizing that it was all her imagination. In the end of Potter's tale, the following is said: "Now some people say that little Lucie had been asleep upon the stile" (100). Both characters wake up at the end of the stories and realize they have been dreaming all along. These references to *Alice in Wonderland* are not limited to *Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*. In *Squirrel Nutkin*, Nutkin at one point cites a riddle about Humpty Dumpty, who is a character in Carroll's story (32), and Potter used adjectives such as *fatterer*, which looks similar to and is as ungrammatical as *curiouser*. A bit of Caldecott is present in Potter's tales, but more indirectly in Potter's style of writing. Not only did Potter copy Caldecott's use of borders (Potter 31), but her "rhythmic narrative flow" is also reminiscent of him (Taylor et al. 130).

There are other, less frequent, references to contemporary authors and artists. Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb are the names of Potter's mice, in real life and in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*. These mice are named after Henry Fielding's "equally satirical" characters (Taylor et al. 119). The frontispiece used for *The Tailor of Gloucester* is copied after William Hogarth's print "Noon" (109). These instances clearly show that Potter was not only a reader and admirer of these artists and authors. What is more, if we take Meizoz's explanation into account that everything that is included in the author's work can say something about his/her posture, this can be taken to mean that she wanted to be associated with these people by including and referencing them in her tales.

Beatrix Potter not only mimics artist, but also parodies some works. The picture where Peter is locked outside the door and cannot return home has by Margaret Lane been identified as a parody of the painting *Love Locked Out* (Taylor et al. 100).



Fig. 19, 20. Potter, Beatrix. 1902; Merritt, Anna Lea. *Love Locked Out*. 1890. Taylor, Judy, et al. *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and her World*. London: Penguin, 1995. Print.

What is so remarkable is that the latter is a painting of a nude and that it is the first painting bought into the Chantrey Bequest by a woman. The President of the Royal Society of British Artists had said that it was the first time that “the fact that women can paint pictures” was recognized (100). By copying this picture, Potter not only seems to state that she is also a woman who is able to paint pictures, but also seems to ridicule the fuss made about this painting by putting an adapted version of this nude into a children’s book. Potter parodies another artist in *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*, in which Duchess is painted on a red cushion, looking for Ribby’s pie. This picture is copied from the painting by Briton Rivière, titled *Cupboard Love* (125). The overly dramatic element again seems to be ridiculed here by Potter.

Beatrix Potter seems to make use of references to other artists and authors to position herself in the literary field. According to Meizoz, the posture that an author creates for himself is often based on that of previous authors or idols (25). In particular, authors have the tendency to copy the posture of an author he or she admires. Meizoz states that, aside from copying the idols’ posture, the motives, forms and beliefs of an author are paralleled after those of the author he or she is copying (85). By referencing and copying characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelites, she seems to say she belongs to that group, or at least considers herself a follower and admirer. Potter places herself firmly in the canon of children’s books by using elements used by popular children’s authors like Caldecott, but Lewis Carroll as well. Linda Lear mentions in her book that Potter became absorbed with the drawings by Tenniel (34), which further confirms Meizoz’s idea that authors copy ancestors they admire. By parodying

dramatic works of art, Potter seems to confirm her dislike for fuss, being established as a characteristic of Potter in earlier chapters.

Style

Beatrix Potter paid much attention to how she wanted the words to look and be read on the page. Her letters to her editors show many alterations and much discussion about which word would be appropriate. Potter “rewrote and redrew indefatigably ... suiting tone of voice to character and choosing the exact word and the right pictorial detail” (Taylor et al. 107). This part of the chapter will pay attention to a few, mostly linguistic, details that show the style of writing of Potter, and the posture she indirectly created in her books: use of italics, ungrammaticality, and onomatopoeia.

In Potter’s tales, italics are used for multiple reasons. One of the reasons is to put emphasis on important words and guide the reader: “Which way are *you* going, Mr. Pig?” (Potter 300). She would also use italics to signal more difficult words, almost commanding the reader to pay extra attention to the pronunciation. A third reason why Potter uses italics is to emphasize the drama (Taylor et al. 114). This is particularly the case in *Squirrel Nutkin*, when Old Brown the Owl has taken Nutkin, after which Potter reveals: “*But Nutkin was in his waist-coat pocket!*” (Potter 34). Another instance where italics are used to emphasize the situation is when Peter and Benjamin are trapped beneath the basket for “*five hours.*” This is even followed by an asterix to further let that message sink in (Potter 65). In *Squirrel Nutkin* there is another element that is emphasized in italics: the riddles. The riddles themselves are not written in italics, but are set apart from the text in another way. However, the answers to the riddles are hidden in italics within the text (Taylor et al. 112). All these uses for italics show that Potter has not only written stories for children, but has actively taken these children into consideration during her writing process. Taylor et al. places Beatrix Potter in the tradition of oral storytelling, not only because of the alliteration, repetition, and simplicity (107), but also because the italics seem to signal what the reader has to pay special attention to. In this case, it would be the mother who is being told by Potter where to put the emphasis on in the sentence, as it is most likely meant for bedtime reading. Potter presents herself here as some kind of teacher or guide, and, if we apply Meizoz’s idea here that every stylistic decision an author makes contributes to his or her construction of posture, then Potter presents herself also as an oral storyteller.

In a few of Potter’s tales, ungrammatical words and combinations can be found, such as *fatterer* or *little small*. It is not because Potter wanted to lower her use of language to the

level of that of a child. In fact, Potter was rather fond of the concept of “mot juste” (Taylor et al. 135). Potter looked for “fine-sounding” and expressive, or piled up adjectives (135). Potter wanted to write her books to children in a simple language (107), but she seemed to value the aesthetic aspect as well.

This drive for aesthetic perfection is what also plays a part in the next element: the use of onomatopoeia. Potter wanted to portray her animals as naturalistic as possible, which also meant that the sounds they make and the overall sounds of nature had to be as precise and correct as possible. The jumping of a rabbit is portrayed by “lippity – lippity” (Potter 16), *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* features all kind of sounds that can be associated with water: “slippy-sloppy,” “splashing,” “macintosh,” and “galoshes” (121-122). Not only do the last two words occur on the same page and rhyme, showing that Potter considered the sound of sentences, but all of these words contain an ‘s’ or ‘sh’ sound which is often used and associated with the sound that water makes. Furthermore, Jemima Puddle-Duck does not seem to be able to talk at all. The only sound that she makes is “quack” (164).

Potter uses onomatopoeia not only when it concerns animals, but also when she writes about items. Field explains that the tale of the tailor “powerfully invokes the object by matching fabrics with sensory and tactile associations that contrast” (21). Potter seems to have wanted to describe items in all its dimensions, including sound. The following extract comes from *The Tailor*: “when gentlemen wore ruffles, and gold-laced waistcoats of paduasoy and taffeta.” *Paduasoy* and *taffeta* seem to be opposites in sound, which at the same time complement each other. *Paduasoy* sounds velvety and soft, which is a rich strong silk fabric. *Taffeta* contains sharper and stronger sounds, which turns out to be a crisp plain-weave silk. *Paduasoy* not only sounds more refined, but is indeed more refined. Beatrix Potter could have saved herself some trouble by not including these words in her tales; children would most likely not understand them. This means that Potter did not include them for the children, but for overall stylistic perfection. She could have included them to teach children new words, but since apparently the largest part of the audience for this book were tailors and old ladies (Field 21), it seems that she included them for her own pleasure, and to prove herself knowledgeable on subjects that she was interested in. Again there seems to be a perfectionist tendency in Potter’s work, a passion for detail and correctness.

Potter presents herself also as an aesthetic in her tales. Taylor et al. note that Potter often used “unconventional, incantatory words” and that pairs of words were sought to complement each other or that they could be rhythmically matched (135). They also comments that “[t]here is something greatly satisfying about the very sound of ‘Flopsy

Bunnies' and in this book [*The Tale of The Flopsy Bunnies*] Beatrix used the sound of words to great effect" (139). But Potter not only strove for aesthetic perfection, although that does seem to be the case in most of her tales. Potter also used sound in word jokes, such as the following: "This is a tale about a tail – a tail that belonged to a little red squirrel, and his name was Nutkin" (Potter 23). *Tale* and *tail* sound the same when pronounced, again confirming Potter's identification with an oral storyteller. She put in a pause on purpose to let her little word joke sink in.

Beatrix Potter's style of writing is very simple and plain, as she intended, but it also is very perfectionist. Potter paid much attention to the right choice of words, making sure that the sound would complement the item spoken of. Potter wanted the complete picture and this shows that she had much passion for her work. However, Potter also took her readers into consideration, guiding them through the tale and emphasizing words that deserve extra attention.

Tone

The tone of Beatrix Potter's letters is continued in her tales. She presents herself as a matter-of-fact author, with a somewhat macabre sense of humour. Kutzer describes Potter as an author who is serious in her tales, has respect for children, does not sound condescending, and narrates with an ironic tone and sharp wit (2). Another element that is present in Potter's tales is balance, which fits in with how she presents herself as an author. Her tales show a balance between "gravity" and "light relief" (Taylor et al. 108). This part of the chapter will first look how this is achieved in her writings and then in her drawings.

Beatrix Potter is very matter-of-fact in her approach to the fate of the animals. This is also part of her presentation as a naturalist. Potter "saw the natural world quite un sentimentally, and there were no 'good' or 'bad' creatures for her" (Taylor et al. 143). This is also present in her attitude towards bad behaviour; there are often consequences to the actions of the naughty animals. Potter did not, however, seem to care much about how the animals feel in the tales. In *Peter Rabbit*, the story starts with his mother saying that his father was put in a pie by the farmer's wife (9). This is already a harsh way to say that rabbits are often killed and eaten. It also indicates that if you get caught after doing something naughty, there will be consequences. The same is the case in *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, where after Nutkin is caught by the owl, the owl intends to "skin him" (35). Again, this is quite harsh to mention in tales intended for children, but Potter, in her explanations, betrays no emotions. *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit* has a similar element. Potter announces: "This

is a man with a gun” (135), which to a very young child, for which Potter intended this story (133), seems just a normal explanation of what the picture shows. To an older reader this feels like the approach of doom: the bad rabbit is going to be killed and it does not look pretty. However, Potter did try to “avoid painful pictures” (Taylor et al. 128). The endings are never as dramatic as they seem. Nutkin only loses his tail, Peter Rabbit is never caught by McGregor, and the bad rabbit in *A Fierce Bad Rabbit* is not killed, but only loses its whiskers and its tail. *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* has the same satirical, ironic undertone. The fox tells Jemima to gather all kinds of herbs for dinner. To children this may not have been remarkable, but adults would probably recognize these ingredients as used for duck-stuffing (Taylor et al. 134). The feathers that form Jemima’s nest should also have warned her of potential danger, as they most likely come from previous victims of the fox, but Jemima seems to be a dumb-witted lady.

In her tales, “[p]ursuer and pursued, eating and being eaten ... were realities which Beatrix could not hide but softened with humour, keeping the violence off-stage” (Taylor et al. 151). Potter particularly approaches the characters with much humour. In *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, Potter describes Lucinda and Jane as passive people, not ordering meals or not cooking, but then again they are only dolls (71).

Potter also uses humour to make fun of society and manners, which Kutzer noted as well. In *The Tale of The Pie and The Patty-Pan*, this idea is present in the following extract:

“Oh, what lovely flowers! Yes, it is mouse and bacon!”

“Do not talk about food, my dear Ribby,” said Duchess; “what a lovely white tea-cloth! ... Is it done to a turn? Is it still in the oven?” (Potter 111).

Duchess clearly does not want to draw attention to the fact that she tried to change the pies and sets the rules for conversation by saying she does not want to talk about food. However, soon after this she breaks her own rule, proving how fragile the concept of propriety is. Another ridiculous occasion occurs on the following page, where Duchess wants to show off her skill of carrying a piece of sugar on her nose (112). In Victorian society, people often showed off their instrumental skills during parties, playing a piece on the piano, for example. This entire concept is ridiculed when it is copied into an animal story, where balancing a lump on your nose hardly seems an accomplishment.

Potter also uses humour to explain natural phenomena. In *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, for example, a picture shows ducks ducking their heads into the water (158). This action is not limited to her books, ducks duck their heads all the time. Normally, the purpose of this movement is to catch food. Potter, however, gives the explanation that it is the Puddle-Duck

family, looking for the lost clothes of Tom Kitten and his sisters (158). Here, Potter makes a natural situation a bit more magical and ridiculous.

Potter also uses humour in her drawings and pictures accompanying the stories. The picture of the squirrels presenting pudding to Old Brown hardly makes sense, since it takes place in the middle of the woods. How would either the squirrels or Old Brown have been able to obtain such a plate as is portrayed in the picture?



Fig. 21. Squirrels and plate, 1903. Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

The facial expressions of a few of the characters also add a satirical and humorous element to the stories. In *The Tailor of Gloucester*, Simpkin has a smug look, which seems to indicate that even though he pretends to be sorry for his behaviour, as is indicated in the text (50), he really does not seem to care one bit. The picture in which the fox locks in Jemima, shows him winking, as if he is telling some inside joke (165).



Fig. 22, 23. Simpkin, 1903. Fox, 1908. Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Pictures are also often used by Potter to give some extra, mostly humorous, information about the plot. The nurse in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* says she is going to set a trap, but the accompanying picture shows Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca warning their children about these traps (83), indicating that the whole idea the nurse thought up will have no effect. In *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit*, the description of the rabbit and the picture accompanying it do not add up. The description paints the image of a savage beast, but the drawing shows not such a savage animal. The discrepancy makes the story a bit ridiculous.

In a picture in *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*, Potter has drawn herself, looking at the scene developing before her, “with some amusement one suspects” (Taylor et al. 137). This humorous, satirical tone is certainly present in all of Potter’s tales. Potter has written the tales mostly for her own amusement, but at the same time the tales are very unsentimental. Potter presents suffering and loss as a daily part of life and seems to teach her readers that every action has consequences.

Conclusion

The posture that Beatrix Potter constructs for herself in her twenty-one tales is first of all one of a nature enthusiast. This was already established in her non-discursive behaviour and her letters, but her tales add the aspect of perfectionism. In her letters, Beatrix Potter is not always grammatical, which can hardly be called perfectionist. This is also the case in her tales, but this seemed to have been Potter’s intention. In her tales, Potter seems to pay more attention to detail, focussing not only on the written word, but also paying attention to sound, indicating that she intended her stories to be read out loud. The attention to detail places Potter in the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelites, but Potter also presents herself as a storyteller and children’s author. It may be said that Potter added these influences of riddles, rhymes, and fairy tales so that one day her works would be considered classics. Furthermore, Potter continues her matter-of-fact and humorous tone that is also present in her letters.

Conclusion

The question that this thesis focussed on is: how does Beatrix Potter construct her discursive and non-discursive posture as an author? Beatrix Potter's posture construction can be described as follows. Potter uses the limited number of photos and interviews, her letters, and her books to present herself as an author who loves nature and animals to such an extent that she strives to preserve these in and outside her work, has a quirky, sometimes macabre, sense of humour, and a matter-of-fact attitude to life.

Jérôme Meizoz would have probably noted that Beatrix Potter's posture in her non-discursive and discursive behaviour nicely overlap and complement each other. The first chapter on Beatrix Potter's non-discursive posture has established that she is very much a private author, almost like a secluded hermit. The lack of material on Potter confirms this idea: only one official photograph and the two letters written to *The Horn Book*, which can be the only things considered close enough to an interview with the author. The first chapter also shows that Potter wanted to be associated with nature and animals, suggesting them as elements to be included in official press pictures, but also including these topics in the designs for her books. Even though Potter wanted to stay outside the public sphere, and particularly did not want to mix her career as an author and her tales in political discussion, elements of her tales appear in pamphlets against free trade.

The letters that Beatrix Potter wrote show more of her character, ideas, and opinions. It is remarkable that Potter did write letters to fans, whereas she specifically asked her publisher not to forward any letters from journalists. She did not want to emotionally open up to critics, but she apparently did not mind opening up to fans. In letters concerning the latter, a quirky personality comes across. Again her love for nature, farming and animals play an important role, but specifically in the department of animals she appears a bit unfeeling. She does not seem to have any trouble with introducing her pets and animals to her readers, to then kill them off. In her letters, Potter does not present herself as an emotional person in general, but shows to have a very matter-of-fact approach to life. Death is part of life and Potter would rather die quickly than suffer. This attitude of a very active and spirited person also something that defines her as an author. The letters show a very knowledgeable and interested author who strives for perfection and preservation. She did not like to enter the public sphere, but was certainly not shy to make her opinion known about a cause she felt passionate about.

Passion also plays an important role in her tales. Her stories not only show a passion for detail, but a passion for perfection. Her drawings and descriptions of animals and sounds had to be as biologically correct as possible. Her enthusiasm for nature also plays an important role, taking preservation to its extremes. The landscapes with which Potter fell in love and wanted to preserve, as can be noticed in her letters, are copied in her books. Potter almost seems to say that if she herself cannot preserve her landscapes against the rise of the industries, or against the coming of time, then her drawings will have to. In her twenty-one tales, Potter's quirky character can be perceived to further extent. Not only does Potter parody certain dramatic works of art, but her playing with words and funny drawings give a certain character to her stories and her posture as an author. Furthermore, Potter presents herself as a storyteller for children, helping children with the pronunciation of words and the explanation of riddles, but also by placing herself in the canon of children's literature by referencing works such as by Caldecott and Carroll.

Meizoz's theory on posture clearly defines what elements have to be researched to get a good idea of what an author's posture is: letters, public literary behaviour, in-depth discussion of works. This thesis, however, has brought to light a gap in Meizoz's theory. His theory is limited to the idea that posture can be researched in these categories. This theory is not the appropriate tool for analysis, because it does not go in-depth on what elements can be used to say something useful about posture. Meizoz states that, for example, interviews can be studied to determine what position an author takes in the literary field, but he does not specify what elements of an interview one should pay attention to. That is why the analysis in this thesis is based on a self-devised subdivision of tone, style, and content.

Furthermore, what seems to affect every research into posture is that posture is, as Meizoz explained, a corporation between construction and perception. Meizoz states that in order to measure the success of establishing a posture in the literary field, one also has to take the perception of the audience into account. Do the audience perceive a posture that was intended as such by the author? This thesis focused solely on what posture Potter constructed, not how her audience perceived her. This can be a nice topic for further research: Was Beatrix Potter's unconscious construction of her posture a success? How did people in her time perceive her? And how do people see her now? Future research could compare the perception of her posture then with how Potter is perceived now to see if there have been any changes. Research could also look at what Potter says about her position as an author in the literary field in her private journal. Did she intend to come across as she seems to come across in her non-discursive and discursive behaviour?

Another possible topic for future research is whether Potter presented herself as a conservative or a progressive author. From the information that has been gathered so far, Potter seems to lean in the direction of conservative in that she strove for preservation and was against free trade. There is, however, an article by Katherine Chandler which argues otherwise. In her article “Thoroughly Post-Victorian, Pre-Modern Beatrix,” Chandler researches whether Potter’s work can be considered Victorian, thus traditional, or Modern. On the one hand, she sees Potter as traditional because of the Victorian clothing, the element of domesticity, and the presence of a moral (288). On the other hand, she mentions many elements that could categorize Potter as modern, such as the lack of emotion, magic or moral, the simplicity and openness, the sparse text and irony, and the focus on anti-heroes (289-301).

The drawings and paintings that Potter drew seem to give a traditional perspective on life, as they portray traditional gender roles and themes. Potter gives a clear presentation of sex distinction (Taylor et al. 102). In *Peter Rabbit*, Peter and his sisters are identified by their coats: Peter wears a blue jackets, the girls red ones (Potter 9). Gender roles are also mostly traditional. Most of the woman are portrayed around the home, besides from Peter’s mom, who has to make a living because Peter’s dad is dead, and Jemima Puddle-Duck. Potter seems to assign some value to domesticity. This is also apparent in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, where Hunca Munca is the one who thinks of home and, rather than smashing every item in the doll’s house, decides to take them with her (Potter 79).

Humphrey Carpenter states that there are some subversive elements in Potter’s tales (qtd. in Kutzer 2). Beatrix Potter mocks Victorian society. An example is *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, where apparently, according to Mrs. Tabitha, the only difference between what is respectable and what is disrespectable, or between what is human and what is animal, is that the first walk on their hind legs (151). *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse*, as a whole, is a satire on human society and Victorian society (Taylor et al. 158).

Chandler seems to lean in the direction of Potter as a modern author, but it can hardly be true that she wished to present herself as such. Her tales may focus on anti-heroes, but Potter might just as well have decided on this to teach children a lesson. The fact that her tales are very simple, may be due to their being aimed at children. The presence of irony could be linked to Potter’s explanation in her letters that she mainly wrote for her own pleasure. Potter’s letters show an author who is very conservative, so if Potter wanted to construct a successful posture as an author, she would have to have her tales confirm this position. Much can be said for Chandler’s theory, but she seems to have based her conclusions on a retrospective comparison of Potter’s tales with modern works of literature and Victorian

works of literature. If one wanted to research the posture that Potter constructed for herself, this is not the right approach, since she would not have had this material for comparison herself. It makes more sense to study the construction of posture by focussing on Potter's works alone.

Future research could also take the spectrum of Englishness and Britishness into account. Beatrix Potter features on lists of famous British people, an example being the one on Biography.com. But why is she presented as a famous British person? Why British in particular, and not English? What traits that she possesses or ideals that she portrays connect her to this nationality or regionality? Does she portray certain British or English values, and if so, which ones? Further research could study how the English and British national identity can be connected to posture theory. Furthermore, the recent referendum for Scottish independence has put the difference between being English and being British in the spotlight. It is therefore relevant to research what it means to be English or British. Through discussing a famous author, this debate can be approached from a different angle.

What this thesis has established is that there are more perspectives from which Beatrix Potter can be studied. This thesis has looked at her letters, her non-discursive behaviour, and her tales. Taking Meizoz's theory in mind, it seems that getting a complete picture of an author demands research into every aspect of the literary field and from every player's perspective. Studying the posture of an author, such as that of Beatrix Potter, transcends objective study, since it requires the perspective of the reader as well. The same can also be said of this thesis, which approaches the posture of Potter from the perspective of the researcher. Although Beatrix Potter preferred to shut out the public eye, she has provided insight into her life as an author.

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