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Beatrix Potter: the Golden Girl of Illustration

Beatrix Potter was an influential illustrator during the Golden Age of Illustration, which took place from the 1880’s until the roaring twenties of the 20th century. She is best known for her work on *Peter Rabbit*, a children’s book that she wrote, illustrated, and published in 1902. Over the course of her career, she published 30 children’s books, 23 of which she is well-known for. Major hallmarks of her style are the use of pastel colors, color washes, delicate linework, and impossible, but charming settings.



The Mice Stitching Button-Holes, 1902, Beatrix Potter.

The Golden Age of illustration was characterized by the wealth of illustrations being presented in American magazines and periodicals, enriching the public with front-cover paintings and drawings that inspired and amassed a large audience. Illustrators from this time period were very influential and changed the art landscape today by popularizing the use of illustration in media to convey political topics, tell stories, and comment on pop culture.

Potter was inspired by two main art movements: Naturalism and fantasy. Naturalism is a genre, or art movement, that emerged in the 19th century, characterized by the intention of capturing real people in real scenery. Potter began her career in illustration as a botanist, so her knowledge on flora and fauna served to aid her in creating realistic, detailed pieces of landscapes. Naturalism tends to contain themes of nature and focuses on rendering the world around the artist as they see it.

While it does frequently contain themes of nature as well, fantastical art (or the Fantasy art movement), aims to represent supernatural or impossible themes, settings, ideas, and scenarios. Potter's work consistently aims to personify animals and create fantastical scenarios. She chose to use her own house, Top Hill, as an inspiration for background frames within *Peter Rabbit*, as well as with other works. Her combination of the two movements blends the impractical with the practical beauty of the world, creating a unique and child-like perspective. This concept is one she demonstrates often, as she states: "I remember I used to half believe and wholly play with fairies when I was a child. What heaven can be more real than to retain the spirit-world of childhood, tempered and balanced by knowledge and common-sense..."

The traditional medium used by him or her – think about their process (To the best of your ability at this time, describe the process that might have been used to create this work. An

Internet search will often reveal videos or information on styles and techniques used by well-known contemporary illustrators.)

Potter is best known for using watercolors, oil paints, and graphite for her illustrations. At the beginning of her career, she used a noticeable dry-brushing technique, but as she developed her art, her use of paint became cohesive and fluid. She would add on the delicate linework afterwards, creating the illusion of barely visible pencil marks that serve more to suggest an image rather than having a holding line act as a visual border.

Peter Rabbit, Mice Stitching Button-Holes, and countless other artworks of Beatrix Potters' serve to capture the curious and innocent nature of childhood magic by blending fantasy and naturalism. Her frequent use of pastel watercolors, delicate linework, flora and bright scenery help make her illustrations very successful. The message being delivered is to rekindle your own child-like wonder, because looking at the world in a different way can be the first step to creating fantastic art.