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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Dílo Beatrix Potterové z pohledu ekokritiky
Beatrix Potter's Work from the Perspective of Ecocriticism
Mikoláš Macháček

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, PhD.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis, titled “Beatrix Potter’s Work from the Perspective of Ecocriticism,” is supervised by PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, PhD., is a result of my own work and research, cited in the “Sources used” section. I further declare that this bachelor’s thesis has not been used to attain any other degree.

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá dílem Beatrix Potterové, britské autorky dětské literatury. Ústředním tématem jejího díla je příroda Jezerní oblasti (The Lake District) a postavy antropomorfních zvířat jako protagonistů. Tematizace přírody (fauny a flory) umožňuje využít k interpretaci ekokritiku, literární teorii, která se především zabývá životním prostředím, vztahem k němu a jeho vlivem na okolí, a nature writing, literární teorii, která se zabývá díly s přírodními tématy. Cílem této práce je analyzovat jednotlivé povídky ze zmíněného pohledu a zároveň zhodnotit přínos tohoto díla v rámci dětské literatury. Důraz je tedy kladen na vyobrazení přírody, jejího vlivu na postavy a jejich vztahu k ní.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Beatrix Potterová, ekokritika, nature writing (literatura tematizující přírodu), dětská literatura, příroda

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis focuses on the work of Beatrix Potter, an English author of children's literature. The central theme of her work is The Lake District area and the characters of anthropomorphic animals. The thematisation of nature (fauna and flora) facilitates to use for the interpretation of the tales ecocriticism, a literary theory focusing on the environment, the relationship to the environment and its influence on the environs; and nature writing, a literary theory dealing with literature with natural themes. This thesis aims to analyse individual tales from the aforementioned view and assess their merit to children's literature. The emphasis is put on the portrayal of nature, its influence on the characters, and their relationship to it.

KEYWORDS

Beatrix Potter, ecocriticism, nature writing, children's literature, nature

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1 Introduction

There might be no doubt that Beatrix Potter's tales may be regarded as one of the best instances of British children's literature. Her tale about a naughty rabbit Peter is the most famous story of hers. I dare say every child in the UK knows it or at least has heard of it. The situation in the Czech Republic, however, is different, here her stories do not have such a wide audience and reception. I was rather perplexed that my friends who study English as well did not hear about Potter or the stories. The idea of mine was that she is one of the most famous female English authors, but as it appears the reality is somewhat different.

The motivation behind this thesis has been pursuing me from the beginning of my university studies. Potter's work has always been close to me thanks to that her tales are almost exclusively set in nature or that she was always very close to nature and nature played a significant role in her life as well. So, the idea was that her work should be a theme of a thesis. As the name of the thesis, *Beatrix Potter's Work from the Perspective of Ecocriticism*, suggests the approach to it is environmental; this is thanks to the points that have already been mentioned (natural setting of tales, her life philosophy). To be more precise, Potter's tales are subjected to the literary scrutiny from the point of view of ecocriticism and nature writing. It was quite logical to have the work be analysed from the perspective of these two literary theories since nature plays such an integral and important part in the stories.

With this said, the aim of this thesis is to provide a concise look at Potter's work or at least to such an extent that is proportionate to the range of this writing. It tries to state whether her writing may be subjected to the interpretational practices of ecocriticism and nature writing. The construction of the thesis is rather simple and straightforward. Since the theme is environmental or natural if you will. This piece of writing opens with the presentation of the two literary theories – ecocriticism and nature writing. This is because it might seem that they work on the same basis, however, the reality is different. There are important points in which these two literary theories differ and how they approach the literary analysis of particular pieces of work. Another part of the thesis is a brief introduction to the children's literature since the tales at hand belong to canonical works of English children's literature. In this part, the focus is on the cross-section of the two literary theories and children's literature as well. Theoretical part finishes with the biography of Beatrix Potter focusing

on her writing and illustrating since illustrations are an integral and irreplaceable feature of Potter's tales and also children's literature.

The thesis continues then with the practical part which features respective analyses and interpretations of her tales. The analysis revolves around the interpretation of the environment, how the environment influences the characters of the tale, what kind of relationship the protagonists have to the environment, how the animal characters interact with the human characters, and lastly, the analysis mentions also the animal characters' portrayal. All of these aspects are closely connected to the ecocritical stance with the marginal part concerning the perspective of nature writing. One other aspect of the analysis has no connection to the environmental interpretation. Since it is children's literature, there is to be found a didactic point of some sort, and therefore, it should not be omitted from the analysis and rather have a distinct place in it. As mentioned, for the analysis to be as precise as possible not only did the text have to be regarded, but the illustrations as well since some texts do not feature as much text as it would be enough for the analysis to take place. Another reason for considering the illustrations is that they hold a substantial meaning of the tale, therefore, they need to be scrutinised together with the text.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Ecocriticism and Nature Writing: Drawing Differences

To begin with, there should be laid out differences (e.g. regarding style of analysis, approach, etc.) between ecocriticism and nature writing to illustrate how these two literary fields of study differ. To disambiguate, these titles will be used: *Ecocriticism* by Greg Garrard (2012), *Modern British Nature Writing, 1789 – 2020: Land Lines* by Will Abberley et al (2022) and *The Wild Isles: An Anthology of the Best British & Irish Nature Writing* by Patrick Barkham (2022).

First, there have to be set some basic distinctions for the reason that their names may imply that they work similarly. However, each revolves around different approaches to the literary interpretation. "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment ... it takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty and Fromm, XIX).

Contrarily, nature writing concerns itself with the content of the work, i.e., how an author chooses words for describing nature. Simply put, any title with a natural theme might be deemed as nature writing (Barkham, XI-XVI, Abberley, 1-8). So, ecocriticism analyses pieces of work from an environmental perspective, and nature writing states how authors work with nature inside writing. Other blatant distinctions may be the time when these fields of study were founded or where these literary theories originated.

Chronologically, nature writing comes first with the founding year 1789 and the book *The Natural History of Selborne* by Gilbert White, a British naturalist and author. (Barkham, XII). Conversely, ecocriticism is a much younger literary theory from the USA. It goes back to the last quarter of the previous century. Its beginnings relate to the essay *Literature and Ecology* by William Rueckert and the year 1978 and then with the effort of Cheryll Glofelty starting in 1989 (Branch and O'Grady). The foundation dates and places of origin may be easily put into, so to say, a simple equation to give a meaningful argument: nature writing is older, conservative, and prudent lit. theory (these qualities are often thought of when quintessentially describing the mentality of the British culture); ecocriticism, conversely, is younger, more radical, and progressive lit. theory – these qualities are often mentioned when describing the common mentality/philosophy of American society. Yet, sometimes it may seem that these literary theories overlap in many ways or could be regarded as similar or even identical. Nevertheless, it would be false to make such hasty conclusions, and therefore, there are subsequent chapters commenting on the differences or similarities.

2.1.1 Ecocriticism

This subchapter sets out to clarify fundamental notions of ecocriticism and how the ecocritical theory may be applied. As it was mentioned, ecocriticism analyses pieces with an environmental (or natural) theme. Its focus is the relationship between the literature and the physical (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 2nd ed. 1-17, *Ecocriticism* 3rd ed. 1-18). However, this is a very loose explanation. This literary theory also works with political speeches, music, art, filmography, or even the portrayal of nature in Google Earth (Garrard, cover of *Ecocriticism* 2nd ed.). The depiction or interpretation of the environment, or the described relationship between the written and the physical are crucial regarding ecocriticism and its understanding. Yet, to understand how subscribers to

ecocritical theory approach particular pieces of various characters, another definition may be introduced:

Ecocriticism undertakes rhetorical readings of environmental discourses. The field of environmental communication is similar, but uses social science methods to analyse discourses, represented by large data sets, at a broad scale, whereas ecocriticism uses literary critical methods, typically close analysis of small numbers of examples. Today, some ecocritics combine both methods. (Garrard, 6)

Now, how do the ecocritics get their message across? As many contributors might say: “Ecocritics strive to raise awareness and interest in the public, in order to show society that there may be a need for steps and precautions that could protect and preserve the environment” (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 2nd ed. 1-17, *Ecocriticism* 3rd ed. 1-18). In other words, they try to communicate their stance on such actions in a way these actions might be done since it is generally recognised that resources on the planet are not limitless. In their work, they pose questions, trigger concern, or raise attention if we, the society inhabiting the planet, are fully aware of the consequences done to the environment, and responsible for them (Garrard, 18-36). With this said, various groups of ecocritics embrace various approaches. They subject the approach to their stance and beliefs; this means that they are “guided” by, e.g., philosophical and/or political convictions. It should be noted that these groups have changed and developed throughout time – it is only logical – because people are changing, learning, and adapting as well. These social factors influence respective approaches to the subject, e.g., *Cornucopia* is described as somewhat contradicting – environmental as well as anti-environmental. Those who subscribe to the cornucopian philosophy look at the ecological problem from the point of view of capitalist economics, i.e., they say that economic growth can provide solutions to the burning environmental issues. On the other hand, dissenters might argue that this take-on is a bit hypocritical and does not bring viable solutions (Garrard, 18-21). There are, of course, other ecocriticism-members subscribing to the alternative philosophies; and it should be said that their views are changing and developing as society moves (culturally, socially, or morally) forward. In conclusion, it should not be omitted that there are ecocritics who are divided if they should subscribe to only one approach.

2.1.2 Nature Writing

Nature writing may be defined as a literary theory that is focused on nature presentation which is deemed literary. It uses a speculative personal voice, presented in the form of (non)fiction. Its philosophical assumptions tend to be pastoral or romantic, and it strives to present modern or even ecological sensibility that often might be subjected to a preservationist agenda (Nordquist thoughtco.com).

As mentioned earlier, the beginnings of nature writing are connected to Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* published in 1789. However, Patrick Barkham writes in *The Wild Isles: An Anthology of the Best British & Irish Nature Writing* (2022) that nature writing might have started even earlier, e.g., in Anglo-Saxon literature, but the most notable may be Romanticism when the authors worked with nature in their works extensively. Romantic writers had the nonhuman environment as the leading theme. They saw in nature a place for self-discovery, personal growth, awe, appreciation, and wonder. They began to retreat to nature to draw inspiration; works of British Romantic authors, such as S. T. Coleridge or W. Wordsworth, have these notions blatantly present in their pieces of poetry (Barkham, XIII). All this paved the way for subsequent authors and Beatrix Potter as well. Today the topics of nature writing have changed – books reflect the crisis of the environment, extinction of species, etc. (Barkham, XI-XVI). Presently, contemporary authors subscribing to nature writing theory address original ideas and also work with, for instance, burning environmental or (natural) issues in their pieces of writing.

Delving into the themes of ecocriticism/nature writing, this piece of writing suggests that the most prominent ones are the relationship between human and physical environment/nature. This is central to everything in these theories. Nonetheless, what are the other possible themes? In ecocriticism it is, for example, how society treats nature; in nature writing, it is how authors portray the natural or how they work with animals in the plot. For this thesis, the important ones are the author's treatment and portrayal of the natural and animals in the story.

2.2 Children's Literature

Children's literature may be difficult to characterise. But to understand this literary area, characterisation is important. As Peter Hunt suggests: "Children's literature seems ... to be a simple idea: books written for children, books read by children" (4). However, it is not as straightforward

as it may appear. So, this chapter will try to draw these characteristics in more detail and for that these titles will be used: *An Introduction to Children's Literature* by Peter Hunt (1994), *Written for Children: An Outline of English-language Children's Literature* by John Rowe Townsend (2003) and *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction* by Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella (2013).

To elaborate on the characterisation, some of the typical features may be introduced here: authors are usually adults, the predominant audience is children, and one of its purposes is to educate. There are certainly other qualities, e.g., illustrations and simple language (Hunt, 1-11). To have a concise idea, there should be mentioned one other aspect: the time of foundation. Hunt offers a viewpoint that instead of "seeing the 'epicentre' of children's literature as about 1850, the point at which books began to move from didactic to recreational, we should move it on about a hundred years. By 1950 children's literature was established as a distinctive area..." (9). Simultaneously, the other aspects (audience, purpose, illustrations, and language) should be commented on in more detail.

First, the audience is children; this may tell even more than one would suppose. Two viewpoints to make the case may be presented (*literary*: juveniles are developing readers and *social*: they are members of the society who mature). Thinking of the reader is an important and integral part of the writing process. In this case, authors bear in mind that the works they produce need to be appropriately constructed. This point leads to the second aspect (purpose): these texts are, in their basis, meant as, for instance, a medium for teaching, widening horizons and processes of such character. This is reinforced by the last two mentioned aspects (illustrations and simple language). Pictures play a necessary role when the texts are being read since they provide a guiding element for the audience, in this case usually children. This may be logically explained: juveniles do not have a well-developed imagination; therefore, pictures are present to help them understand the meaning of the text. The texts are made of language: the words used in the writing are made of simple language for the following reasons: kids do not possess the ability to comprehend abstract, yet; simplicity of vocabulary is chosen for the reason that advanced words can be explained through simpler ones. To conclude, all these aspects should be borne in mind when authors construct plots of the books or literary critics analyse the pieces of children's literature.¹

¹ This chapter is based on the titles mentioned in the opening paragraph: *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Hintz and Tribunella, 1-11), *Written for Children: An Outline of English-language*

2.2.1 Children's Literature and Ecocriticism, Nature Writing

Potter's literary work may be subjected to the ecocritical/nature writing theory for the reason that her tales are a germane instance of how an author works with a nonhuman environment. The writing is dedicated to animals and the countryside. Moreover, her life conviction went hand in hand with her writing, to be clearer, she felt strongly about protecting and preserving the landscape (McGrady, 9). Her attentive and protective approach is imprinted and reflected in her tales. Her protagonists are not only animals, but also the setting of the stories is in the English countryside (in the Lake District area). With this mentioned, Potter's fiction illustrates the cross-section of children's literature and ecocriticism or writing for children and nature writing. Her writing may be easily subjected to the practices of ecocriticism/nature writing thanks to the explicit features of the nonhuman environment, animals as the protagonists, or her personal approach to preserving the natural heritage of the Lake District.

With this mentioned, children's literature may offer titles that work with natural topics. However, with the resources that were available, there was only one anthology that featured such analysis: *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) with the chapter *Environmental Writing for Children* by Lawrence Buell. This close scrutiny of pieces of children's literature also focuses on writings featuring the physical environment as a theme before the Enlightenment; the chapter predominantly mentioned Western literary tradition – according to the author, it is not comprehensible or extensive expertise on this topic (Buell, 410).

To move on, there could be named pieces of works (from the times before Beatrix Potter) that explicitly mention natural/environmental topics (myths, legends, fables, or fairy tales). This literary fiction was, at first, passed on orally, and consequently through written records. Here are some generally well-known examples: fables by Aesop, Grimm's tales – with the example of *The Little Red Riding Hood* (1812) – English-written literature, such as Potter's contemporaries, might offer *The Jungle Books* (1894) by R. Kipling, and *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) by A. A. Milne.

Children's Literature (Townsend, XI-11), and *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Hunt, 1-26). For further reading, see also the remaining chapters.

Another point of view that might be applied is that featuring this theme has a didactic function. From a historical standpoint, fables were meant as cautionary tales with a moral lesson and children's writing may also be counted among the educational literature. From reading or listening to these tales, children obtain new information, knowledge, or experience; these may help them navigate their lives with less effort and integrate into society in an adequate (social, cultural, or psychological) manner. The authors of *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction* (2013) explain this phenomenon:

In addition to being complex, children's literature is a key site for transmitting values and educating children. This fact makes it especially important – it has a profound impact on socialization and society. By better understanding the texts produced and given to children, we gain a stronger understanding of the broader culture in which we live. (Hintz and Tribunella, 8)

Additionally, if Potter's tale, *The Tale of Peter the Rabbit* (1902), were used as an example, Buell suggests that it is an allegorical story of a small boy who is mischievous and thanks to his naughty behaviour, learns a lesson. He should be more cautious and well-behaved after his dangerous visit to Mr. McGregor's garden (Buell and Garrard, 411). There may be mentioned other titles subjected to such an analysis. However, this piece of writing solely focuses on the work of Beatrix Potter, and therefore, only Potter's titles will be subjected to such close scrutiny.

2.3 Beatrix Potter

Beatrix Potter's legacy is compactly summarised in *The Art of Beatrix Potter: Sketches, Paintings, and Illustrations* (2016) by Emily Zach where Steven Heller writes this:

Beatrix Potter has been the subject of numerous biographies and websites, a teleplay, and a recent biopic, but until now, she has not received nearly enough praise as an artist whose drawings and watercolors set the standard for enchantment and sophistication in illustrated storybooks – to say nothing of her particular contributions to naturalist art. (Heller and Zach, 6)

Not only is her legacy in writing, but also in illustrations. She drew exquisite illustrations for her books, and the illustrations play a crucial role in writing for children. Illustrations are, so to say,

guidelines for kids to understand the world better and have an idea about what the author writes. Potter's illustrations are an apt example of this because she kept her heroes true to the image with a small tinge of fairytale-like.

Nonetheless, this chapter focuses on the profile of Beatrix Potter, in order to present a closer look at her lifetime work, which may be subjected to the literary theories of ecocriticism and nature writing. The main materials used here are *The Art of Beatrix Potter: Sketches, Paintings, and Illustrations* (2016) by Emily Zach, *Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature* (2021) by Annemarie Bilclough, *The Story of Beatrix Potter: Her Enchanting Work and Surprising Life* (2021) by Sarah Gristwood, and *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (2008) by Linda Lear.

2.3.1 Education, Drawing and Painting Influence

Beatrix Potter was born in 1866 to a family of Rupert, a barrister, and Helen Potter, a housewife, in Kensington, London. She spent the first half of her life there. The area of Kensington was, at that time, a developing town quarter intended to attract wealthy middle classes. It was a district benefiting from a major cultural centre nearby called "Albertopolis", a cluster of schools and museums established to advance art, design, and science (Bilclough, 22-23). These surroundings played an important role in Beatrix's formative years, as well as her governesses, family connections, and relatives. She was homeschooled, as it was common for girls in the Victorian era. Drawing and painting were supported by schooling from her governess Miss Hammond, and subsequently by others. Her art influences were her mother, a proficient landscape watercolourist; father, who had a sketchbook with illustration copies and with whom she and her brother Bertram went into nature to watch birds and draw them; and Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais who encouraged her to pursue drawing. Conclusively, it could be said that these people were the most influential in cultivating her artistic expression.

Beatrix did not like her life in London. She complained about the house and the environment around her, on the contrary, she loved nature. Thanks to the family's travels and stays in leased houses or with her relatives, she was able to spend time in the green and attract herself with activities close to her heart – such as poking about woods and quarries or hunting for fossils. One place of significance was Dalguise House in Perthshire which Potters leased for over a decade. This house

played an important role in her formative years. Then they moved to the Lake District (to the residence of Wray Castle). Beatrix did not take the moving well and was disappointed not to be returning to Dalguise. She did not favour the area at first. Her own words were: “Do not care for the Peaks, a poor starved country, extraordinary number of dead sheep.” (Journal, 20 April 1886). However, she began to gradually grow fond of the vicinity (Bilclough, 43-45).

Focusing on the naturalist influences, Beatrix and her brother Bertram had in their London house a schoolroom which was like a “nature sanctuary” to them. They kept their pets, fossils, rocks, etc. there. In the course of time, the Potters had different pets; as a family they owned dogs, Beatrix had rabbits, mice, and a frog, and Bertram had a bat and presumably salamanders. She drew inspiration for her drawings from the pets and collectables in the schoolroom. Some of the pets were also an inspiration for her book heroes, e.g., a rabbit called Benjamin H. Bouncer. Not only was she inspired by their appearance, but she also studied their behaviour. When their pets died, Beatrix and Bertram dissected them, then added them to the taxidermic collection which was a part of all the other collectables.

Beatrix did not draw inspiration from fauna only, but she also found influential flora, fungi, fossils, or archaeological digs. When speaking about flora, she extolled Jemima Blackburn, a Scottish naturalist. Blackburn’s illustrations had a durable impact on Beatrix and meeting with her was a striking moment. Moreover, she was very fond of mycology, and this interest led her to Charles McIntosh, a postman and an expert in ferns and mosses, also interested in mycology. They exchanged letters about mushrooms. McIntosh sent her samples and Potter made them into drawings. Then she described them, even with little scientific knowledge, e.g., like this “spluttered candle” (appearance) or “exactly like a dead sheep” (smell). Their penmanship directed her, thanks to McIntosh’s insight, into appropriate reading. He also suggested presenting her drawings more scientifically. As Annemarie Bilclough says:

Just as Potter was a master of bringing the real world into the imaginative one, she also took fantasy into real life, whether she was explaining the miniature pony tracks seen in the ‘green & blue hills’ above her sheep farm at Troutbeck with reference to fairies, or describing ‘the myriads of fairy fungi that start into life in autumn woods’ at the same time engaging in a scientific study of mycelium. (Bilclough, 83)

Beatrix was able to enjoy her passion as an amateur scientist as well as keep cultivating her illustrating skills. It may be said that she found an equilibrium between these two and was able to pursue both.

2.3.2. Storytelling

Potter started her storytelling around the year 1892 with illustrated letters to the children of her governess Annie Moore. However, her writing commenced before that. The beginnings are connected to hymns and romantic descriptions; and in 1881 she began to write a journal recording holidays, impressions of people and pets, and snippets of overheard conversations (Laws and Bilclough, 96). The letters at first portrayed everyday moments, later on featured the stories and “in 1900 Annie Moore suggested to Potter that her letters might contain ideas for several children’s books” (Wells and Bilclough, 104).

Beatrix’s first book was *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. The road to publication was not easy because many publishers refused to print it the way she requested. Eventually, she published it herself in 1901 with black and white illustrations, and by October 1902 it had been published in colour by Frederick Warne & Co. Potter kept close attention to the production and worked on the publishing with Norman Warne as the editor. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was immensely successful – by the end of the year 1902, there were 28 000 copies printed and within a year a sixth printing was commenced. With this tremendous advancement, unauthorised copies were being published in America. Despite the situation across the ocean, Beatrix continued to write and illustrate other tales in the next years. Ultimately, all 23 tales were issued in a uniform binding as *The Original Peter Rabbit Books*.

Illustrations accompanying the stories are an inseparable and integral part of the writing. According to Wells, she collected fragments of landscapes or buildings to put in her books. These places turned out to be an inspiration for the setting of the tales, e.g., “Jemima Puddle-Duck, Tom Kitten and Samuel Whiskers [live] in the village of Sawrey” (Wells and Bilclough, 113). Potter was not able to draw the human figure, and therefore, people make unconvincing appearances in her storytelling. Conversely, animals are a perfect work of art thanks to her approach to drawing them – which is copying the animals rather than envisioning them in her own manner.

When reading the books, the stories should be read aloud because the text works with the illustrations hand in hand and it makes the experience livelier. The illustrations are an important element in the sense that they provide the reader with visual guidance. However, sometimes the text does not correspond to the drawing which lures the reader into the creative process. Beatrix cultivates the sound and rhythm of poetry in her prose, e.g., alliteration and assonance are present. She works with the textual as well: punctuation helps with the pacing, there are made-up words, and difficult words are explained in narration; she also works with the lexical and syntactical aspects of a language to reinforce the comprehension of the text for juveniles – as it was mentioned earlier, these are quintessential qualities of children’s literature.²

Conclusively, writing and illustrating stories occupied Potter for some time. Had it not been for this, she would have pursued a different career altogether. Professor Richard Fortey says that if she had followed the path of a mycologist, she would have become a pioneer scientist, but at this time women were not allowed to publicly present their work (90).

2.3.3. The Lake District

Beatrix Potter’s first coming to the Lake District was not of direct liking. As mentioned earlier, her love for this place came later. In 1905 she purchased Hill Top Farm and started her life by the Lakes. In time, more land came into her ownership and was managed by William Heelis (from the local solicitor firm W.H. Heelis & Son). Their cooperation grew into something more private and intimate, and in 1913 William Heelis married Beatrix Potter. Then they moved into Castle Cottage, an adjacent farmhouse to Hill Top, with the hope that Hill Top would become National Trust’s property. Yet, William Heelis was not the first partner of (then) Mrs Heelis. Beatrix had gone through a similar relationship with Norman Warne. At first, they had been business partners and exchanged letters only concerning publishing; but in time, their relationship had grown into something more profound – and in 1906, Norman proposed to her in a letter. Unfortunately, they never got married because of Norman’s terminal illness. Beatrix bore the death of her fiancé badly.

² The chapter *Storytelling* uses ideas from these titles: *Reading Children’s Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Hintz and Tribunella, 1-11), *Written for Children: An Outline of English-language Children’s Literature* (Townsend, XI-11), and *An Introduction to Children’s Literature* (Hunt, 1-26). For further reading, see also the remaining chapters.

She sought consolation in writing, and the only person with whom she shared her feelings was Norman's sister, Millie.

Being in the Lake District, Potter realised that this landscape needs protection. Her undertaking in protecting it was supported by Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, a vicar at Wray. Together they shared interests and a common ambition to preserve this area. Rawnsley was enthusiastic in his attempts to maintain the pristine tone of the landscape in the "District" area. Nonetheless, Beatrix concluded that the best way to protect the Lake District is through ownership of the land. Together with Rawnsley, Sir Robert Hunter, a solicitor, and Octavia Hill, a social reformer, they formed a new organisation, "The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty" (in the year 1895). By 1899 National Trust was becoming established and had an acquisition of several properties. With the National Trust Act of 1907, the Trust was able to declare land inalienable, therefore ensuring its lasting protection.

As a landowner, Potter increased the land she owned in the area and became more involved in the Trust's efforts. With her husband (Mr Heelis), they regularly attended property auctions and bought buildings. Moreover, in 1924 she purchased Troutbeck Park Farm on the opposite of Windermere. With this asset, her shepherding era came. Beatrix grew Herdwick sheep and needed experienced help and it came from Tom Storey. Together they set their effort on improving the farm and the health of the stock because it was riddled with sheep fluke. They succeeded and this unexpected success led them to participate in cups (moreover, Potter's sheep were highly prized and won several trophies).

In the 1930s, Potter made her biggest step in preserving the Lake District – she acquired James Marshall's Monk Coniston estate, 5000 acres of prime Lakeland landscape, including several farms and the famed beauty spot Tarn Hows (MacFarlane and Bilclough, 160). Then she made the decision to offer half of the estate to the Trust and the other half would be left to the Trust in her will. This was a pivotal moment in the conservation of the Lake District.

Until 1936, she was a manager of these estates. When she retired, Bruce Thompson took over Potter's position in the Trust. He had a difficult job to follow in her steps. Despite her retirement, Potter remained a helping hand and was there to give advice. Thanks to her work in preservation, the Lake District was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2017. As Liz Hunter

MacFarlane aptly comments: “Beatrix Potter was the right person, in the right place, at the right time” (165).

3 Practical Part

In the practical part, the analysis will revolve mainly around three points. Them being as follows: the interpretation of the relationship of the animal actors to the environment in which they find themselves, the interpretation of the relationship/interaction of animal characters between themselves and with the human characters, and lastly how the stories contribute to the understanding of relationships of animate agents and their environment by children. All these aspects accentuate and reflect the ecocritical perspective. It might be granted that the animal characters are anthropomorphised and that it might confuse the children and show them an inaccurate image of them, however, Potter’s illustrations if nothing present the animals true to their real image.

Since the interpretation deals predominantly with the environment it might be beneficial to introduce a basic typology of environments presented in Beatrix Potter’s tales. The most prominent ones are these, namely, *natural world*, *semi-natural world*, and *countryside/urban setting*. Each type is populated by different types of animals ranging from *wild animals*, *domesticated animals*, and *pets*. The basic typology is important for individual interpretations since based on each environment different analyses will be done.

3.1 *The Tailor of Gloucester*

The Tailor of Gloucester (1903) might be considered a unique story or even an exception. It is for the following reason: the story does not take place in a nonhuman environment. Potter takes us to the town of Gloucester where on Christmas Eve something magical happens. Little mice help the tailor who lies down with a fever finish the coat for the mayor. Now, what is the ecocritical reading of this story? For that, a close interpretation of the environment is needed. The environment described in the tale may be divided into two levels – human town and the secret passages that connect all the houses in town through which the mice run. The tale’s interpretation will lie in the relationship of the animals to the environment they live and the relationship between animals and people.

Firstly, let us have a look at the mice, the leading animal characters of the story. From the plot's point of view, they are an indispensable part of the tale as well as the tailor. Nevertheless, the character of the tailor will be commented on later. As it was mentioned, there are two types of environments – town and secret passages – and the mice dwell in both. Their relationship to the environment is dependent on human activity since they live in town and travel through secret passages in houses. It could be said that without people the mice would perish. This point leads to the latter aspect of the interpretation, that is, the relationship between animals and people. Regarding this tale, these two aspects of the interpretation are heavily intertwined. Nonetheless, in *The Tailor of Gloucester* (1903) the animal – human interaction is frequent and integral to the plot. The rodents live off the snippets of fabric and clothes from the tailor's workshop which they then fashion into clothes. Similarly, we could presume that the mice live off the food scraps of the citizens. This presumption could be easily explained: mice are synanthropic species. Their proximity to people benefits them – they can find food scraps as a source of food.

With this said, the interpretation should also move to the other animal actor in the story, the tailor's cat Simpkin, because he plays an important role in the plot line. When the exhausted tailor returns home from the workshop, he sends Simpkin to run errands. As he is waiting for him³ to return, he hears little noises coming from the dresser. There he finds a mouse trapped under a teacup. Then he frees another mouse from another teacup. As soon as Simpkin comes back, he finds out that all the mice are gone which makes him outraged. As the story progresses, Simpkin goes looking after the mice and to his surprise he finds them in the workshop finishing the mayor's coat. The mice's doing may be explained as a sign of gratitude for their rescue. So, let us consider that if it were not for Simpkin, the tailor would never deliver the coat. This might imply that the mice are not the central animal characters in the story, but Simpkin is.

The ecocritical reading suggests that the characters of the story create a distinct ecosystem. As it was pointed out, the tailor and mice constitute a relationship which in its basis might be deemed an ecosystem. The same can be stated about the tailor and Simpkin or Simpkin and the mice. It shows that it is natural that interaction between people and animals creates an ecosystem of some kind. Each ecosystem has its rules and implications, e.g., the mice are inferior to the tailor and dependent

³ The masculine gender for the cat is chosen intentionally since the illustrations imply that Simpkin is a tom cat. Another reason for that is that the masculine gender works better with the anthropomorphism.

on him and the same can be said about Simpkin and how he relates to the tailor. As listed earlier, there are three ecosystems to be found and all share the same trait, that is, superior – inferior. The tailor is always at its top and then the hierarchy continues with Simpkin and then the mice. There is as well a fourth ecosystem to be mentioned, namely, tailor – Simpkin – mice. Each of the members behaves accordingly to their nature: the tailor behaves as a human and Simpkin and mice wander between human and animal qualities. This wandering is reinforced with the anthropomorphism – walking on hind legs wearing clothes. However, the important ecocritical takeaway is that, besides the human nature of the animals thanks to the anthropomorphism, is that the story portrays the animal ecosystem in its purest form: cat is a natural predator, and mice are its prey. It might be granted that the means which Simpkin uses to catch the mice are somewhat unconventional for a cat, but it shows his true nature.

So, what is the didactic takeaway for the children? The children may realise thanks to the story that if someone helps us, we should repay them in an equal manner. How this moral lesson can be concretely applied to the tale? When the tailor is waiting for Simpkin's return, he frees the trapped mice. This act of kindness brings him unprecedented help from the rodents. It might be inferred that if the mice help the tailor deliver the coat, they can expect reciprocal and continuing favours from him; with the favours being: free snippets of fabric or possible food scraps. The ecocritical takeaway here is that thanks to tailor's rescue of the mice the ecosystem is saved and can continue – the mice have a space to live in and Simpkin has a possible source of food.

3.2 The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin

This story tells of an impertinent squirrel and his punishment for his behaviour. Potter invites the reader into the Lake District area on the shores of a lake and on an island abounding with nuts with the plot heavily revolving around gathering nuts. Illustrations, as always, accompany the text and play an important role in it. If the focus were to move to them, there might be some interesting ecocritical implications. As mentioned, the tale is set in the Lake District, namely, at a lake and on a forested island. The whereabouts show how familiar Potter was with the natural habitats of wild animals. She set her heroes (an owl and squirrels) into their natural habitat, a forest. However, illustrations concerned, Potter portrayed the Lake District stylised according to her approach to illustrations. The place still bears a resemblance to the actual place, but it has that typical tinge of fairytale-like.

Let us move the focus to the tale's characters: Old Brown (the owl) and squirrels. What might be interesting about them is that they engage in a somewhat hierarchised relationship. In nature, we find that owls are superior to squirrels. This is for one simple reason only: owls are birds of prey and hunt smaller rodents, including squirrels, as prey. It might be presumed that Potter did not want to feature Old Brown as a killer, so, she instead made him a guardian of the island. So, he is still above the squirrels. However, the reader still learns what an owl's diet consists of since the squirrels bring offerings to Old Brown in exchange for collecting the nuts. Moreover, not only does the position of Old Brown as a guardian of the island have a figurative meaning, but it also has a literal one. It is the task of the guardian to look after something and take care of it and here the parallel to Potter's life can be made. Potter's whole life effort was to protect and preserve nature and it might be contemplated that the character of Old Brown was intended to fulfil the same task.

What kind of moral lesson do the juveniles learn from reading this tale? As it was already mentioned, nothing is earned without any effort and things (in the case of *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* nuts) should not be taken for granted. Similarly, the ecocritical takeaway of the story is based on this notion. To be able to collect or harvest any fruit, there needs to be a place to grow it. Also, there has to be someone who is responsible for the care of the place. It is well established that if no one looks after or takes care of crops, a field, or an orchard, there will not be any fruit to harvest. The natural way of things demands some sort of reciprocity to remain in equilibrium. Another takeaway point might be that if anyone behaves relentlessly irreverent, naughty and without respect for others, they be punished sooner or later.

3.3 *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*

The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck (1908) is the only of Potter's tales which features a bird as a main character. The reader is taken to a farm inspired by Hill Top and its surroundings where a naïve duck wishes to hatch her eggs. She tries to hatch the eggs at the farm, but they are always found and taken away from her. So, she decides to lay them off the farm. When searching for a nesting place, she comes across a foxy gentleman (the character of Mr. Tod) who is very polite and eager to help her find it. He shows her in his summer house and says that she can take all the time she needs for the hatching. Jemima does not pay attention to the fact that she is in the presence of a fox, a natural predator of ducks. So, are we to understand that foxes build summerhouses in the wild? The obvious answer is no – the summerhouse is introduced here only as a part of the

anthropomorphism which is a key element of Potter's writing. It underscores the polite nature of Mr. Tod that he offers a place for Jemima to hatch her eggs and emphasises the foxy attitude to snatch the eggs.

If we attempt the ecocritical interpretation, we focus on two levels since the tale features a human environment and a nonhuman one. The cultivated environment is presented by a farm, a garden, and a barn. Whereas the nonhuman environment is portrayed by the farm's surroundings and wood. The interesting point about these two environments is how they influence the portrayal of Jemima Puddle-Duck. If she finds herself at the farm, Potter pictures Jemima as a common domestic duck – white plumage, yellow legs – whereas when she leaves the farm she is wearing a pink shawl and a blue bonnet. It raises the question: why is not Jemima portrayed consistently? Simply put, for the anthropomorphism to work the character is depicted as a person. When at the farm, she is a common duck, but when she leaves the farm, she is portrayed as a lady. Moreover, the environment is important for the ecocritical reading of the story because it shows where the animals live. As a domestic animal, Jemima lives at the farm and Mr. Tod in the forest. The interesting point about Mr. Tod is that Potter made him have a house near the farm. This feature substantiates that foxes are to be found near the human environment to hunt for food. It is quite common that foxes snatch eggs from coops or hunt fowl.

Concerning the other part of the interpretation, this story features quite noticeable human-animal interaction. However, it is not explicitly introduced through the text, but the illustrations are the key element for commenting on the interpretation of the relationships. Potter's illustrations picture the relationship between people and animals ordinarily for a farm's environment: a lady feeds the poultry and a farmer's son picks up eggs which Jemima hid to hatch. These actions are nothing if not common for the countryside, let alone, a farm environment. Moreover, the story may offer another interpretation; however, in order to do that the animal protagonists would have to be considered people. To reinforce this statement, the illustrations are a strong element – a duck wearing a shawl and a bonnet and a fox wearing a coat, a waistcoat and trousers. Another point to make the case is the anthropomorphism – Jemima and Mr. Tod are having a very polite conversation and behave deferentially to one another. So, it might be presumed that the right way to approach a stranger is only with polite manners.

Didactically, the story is very straightforward. Firstly, people should not be deceived by the looks and behaviour of strangers. Jemima is as naïve as it gets. Her behaviour is somewhat ridiculous: being tricked into accompanying a fox and nesting in his summer house. Nonetheless, it should be granted to Jemima that she might have never seen a fox before, so, she could confuse Mr. Tod with a dog. Secondly, people should not brag about their capabilities if they cannot keep their word. To comment on that, Jemima is very resolute that she will hatch her own eggs even though she is dissuaded and questioned by her sister-in-law Rebecca Puddle-Duck. Eventually, only four of her eight eggs hatch. Therefore one should not think too high and much of oneself and boast about their intentions. In conclusion, it seems that *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* is one of high moral merit and may show children that tales are not only about good qualities. Concerning the ecocritical takeaway, children learn about the farm's environment and the behaviour of foxes. To be more specific, foxes as beasts of prey find either their food in the forest or raid farms to snatch eggs or kill poultry.

3.4 *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*

Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle is a lady hedgehog whose character was inspired by Kitty McDonald, a Scottish washerwoman (Potter 85). Besides Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle the story revolves around a little girl Lucie who meets Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle when looking for her lost garments. The inspiration for the lady hedgehog did not end for Potter in attributing her just the looks of Kitty McDonald, but as well the occupation of a washerwoman. In this manner, her qualities are rather apt – she is very polite and well-mannered – quite typical of someone who works as a housemaid in England in the 20th century. To illustrate this statement, a passage from the tale might be used as a guiding element: “Who are you?” said Lucie. “Have you seen my pocket-handkins?” The little person made a bob-curtsey – “Oh yes, if you please'm; my name is Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle; oh yes if you please'm, I'm an excellent clear-starcher!” (Potter 91). The way Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle talks might have no meaning for the children's readers. Moreover, it might hinder the intelligibility for the juveniles. However, if we have a look at an adult reader, her speaking manner now gains a certain value. We might assume that Potter wanted her character to be as realistic as she can be, so, she made Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle speak the way she does.

There are two different settings, similarly to *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (1908), namely, human and nonhuman environment. The reader is introduced to a farm called Little-town and the

surrounding hills and a valley. However, the importance of the environment in this tale lies in the home of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle (she lives in the hills in one room, a kitchen, carved into a rock). As a washerwoman, she has a very clean kitchen furnished with every tool and furniture one would expect a washerwoman to have and need. With this said, it appositely bridges the interpretation from the environment to the interaction (animal – human). The relationship between Lucie and Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle might be described in three similar ways: granddaughter – grandmother, little girl – governess, and little girl – servant. In all three instances, the interaction is educative – Lucie goes through all the clothes which Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle washes and asks her to whom each belongs. What is interesting here is that all the pieces of garments are only figuratively repurposed parts of animal bodies, for example, yellow stockings as hen legs, red tail-coat with no tale belonging to squirrel Nutkin, or woolly coats belonging to little lambs. This aspect of the tale might give the readers a false image of animals. There is no way that animals take off their body parts as pieces of garment. Since Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle is a washerwoman, her occupation is to wash clothes. For the story to work, Potter used distinctive animal body parts as pieces of garment which gives the tale a tinge of fairytale-like atmosphere.

From the ecocritical point of view, the repurposing of animal parts might be considered somewhat far-fetched, nevertheless, it shows what kind of distinctive body parts each animal has that are to be first recognised when the animal is spotted. However, there is another point that needs to be addressed and that is the dichotomy between anthropomorphism and the wild nature of the animals. As long as Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle wears clothes she behaves human – speaks and walks on hind legs – but the moment she loses the clothes, she returns to her animal state. Subjecting animals to this dichotomy seems to be a distinctive feature of Potter’s writing.

How might the children understand this story? Firstly, from the beginning of the story, the reader knows that Lucie loses her things quite regularly. So, in the story she finds her lost handkerchiefs and a pinny only thanks to Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle. The takeaway here is that the children should look after their possessions and be aware of where they left them or put them. Another point may be that there is always someone (in this case parents or older siblings) who looks after, or more precisely, knows where the belongings of their children/younger siblings are and may help them find them when they are looking for them.

3.5 *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse*

In this tale, Potter recounts a story about an anxiously tidy mouse and her uninvited guests in her home in the sandy bank under a hedge. Mrs. Thomasina Tittlemouse, the protagonist, is very protective of her living space and does not take uninvited guests well, even more so when they are not tidy and soil her tidy home. So, she is surprised to find one of her storerooms rebuilt into a bee's nest. If only there was someone to help her get rid of the bees, then she thinks of Mr. Jackson, a stout frog gentleman, however, Mr. Jackson is not as tidy as Thomasina and is always wet and therefore leaves wet footmarks. They are something Thomasina does not wish for. To her surprise, when she returns to the kitchen, Mr. Jackson is there drying his feet on the fender.

The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse (1910) does not feature any people in the storyline, so instead, it employs anthropomorphised animal protagonists. Anthropomorphism may take place since the characters are being addressed as people – Mrs. Tittlemouse, Mr. Jackson, or Mother Ladybird – and it emphasises the fairytale-like atmosphere of the tale. At first sight, there is not anything special about the interaction between the characters and even after a scrutiny nothing substantially extraordinary may be found. Instead, the focus might be moved to the personality of Thomasina Tittlemouse. As mentioned, she is anxiously tidy and even in a way conservative in her ways. Her traits cause her more problems than help her since she lives in a sandy bank under a hedge, many intruders get to walk around her home. Every time she comes across someone she behaves rather rudely and forces them out because she does not like her clean passages and rooms getting dirty. It can seem that her behaviour might be in the way of befriending anyone, nevertheless, she has many mouse companions and there is also the character of Mr. Jackson. Even though Thomasina might come across as rude or abrupt, she is in her heart very warm and polite mouse.

With this said, this time the interpretation of the environment might be conceived differently than the ones already mentioned. This is thanks to the fact that in this story the human and nonhuman environment merge into one, the house of Mrs. Tittlemouse. The description of the house is done more precisely through illustrations than through the text. The pictures show that her house is not much different from small houses in the English countryside – there is a kitchen, a bedroom, larders, and storerooms. Potter had to, however, adapt Thomasina's den to the anthropomorphic nature of the tale – naturally, it features a number of rooms and passages which are repurposed to

have a rural appearance. This is a typical feature of Potter's tales – she conceived individual settings of the tales to suit the plotlines and primarily the characters.

Another ecocritical point of interpretation in the story are the animal protagonists. This time the focus should not be only on vertebrae but also on invertebrates. Beginning with the mammals, Potter pictures Mrs. Tittlemouse and Mr. Jackson as human beings – they walk on hind legs, talk and wear clothes. As always, anthropomorphism takes place since it is a children's story and human qualities are somewhat integral to the story's plotline to be believable. Moving on to invertebrate characters, the reader comes across a ladybird, spider, and bees. What might be considered an interesting fact is that Potter illustrates the ladybird and spider as somewhat anthropomorphised – the ladybug has a human face, and the spider carries an umbrella. They also possess the faculty of speech. All these qualities and features might give children a false impression of the actual animals; it may be granted to Potter that her animal characters are always anatomically correct which could be considered the most important trait of the stories, nevertheless, the anthropomorphic qualities might confuse the little readers and they might be then under the false impression that animals live and behave that way in nature. The only exception in the story are the bees – they are not anthropomorphically depicted, so they cannot speak, and they do not wear any clothes. They are, as always, anatomically true to reality. However, a question arises as to why they are not anthropomorphic. It is odd, if anything, that Potter decided not to lend human qualities to bees, but maybe the reason behind that is that it is the only way for the story to work because they are portrayed as intruders, and Mrs. Tittlemouse would like to get rid of them.

The most evident ecocritical implication of the story is that the setting portrays the animal characters' natural habitats. The mouse lives in a sandy bank in a den, the bees repurpose one of the den's rooms into their beehive. The other invertebrates are spotted running across the mouse den and the character of Mr. Jackson, the frog, finds himself paying a visit to Mrs. Tittlemouse. This might be somewhat unnatural, however, it shows that some wild animals can venture into the shelters of other wild animals. Moreover, what might be the other takeaway? There are two ways to look at this story – a positive and a negative one. Starting with the positive, Mrs. Tittlemouse is a very tidy mouse and looks after her house very carefully. However, this quality has also a downside. She is always cleaning, does not welcome gladly guests that might soil her home and might be a little too overprotective of her home. So, this story can show children two things, on the

one hand, they should be tidy and look after their possessions and, on the other hand, being too tidy might cause unexpected problems. Lastly, one rather interesting remark is that the character of Mrs. Tittlemouse might be taken from the psychological point of view as obsessive or suffering from OCD since she has to clean almost anything that she finds dirty.

3.6 The Tale of Two Bad Mice

The name of this short story is rather self-explanatory. There are two mice, Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb, who are bad and get into mischief. The interesting point about this tale is that it takes place indoors which is an unusual environment for Potter's tales, moreover, predominantly in a doll's house. The other point worth mentioning is that apart from animal characters the story features two anthropomorphic dolls, Lucinda and Jane.

From the point of view of the environment, this story might be perceived differently than the others. There is no specific mention of an outdoor (nonhuman) environment, however, if a rather radical shift were made, the nursery could be regarded as an outdoor environment. So, then there would be a dichotomy between the nursery and the doll's house. These two locations might be difficult to interpret from the ecocritical point of view since they have no particular connection to the natural. However, the radical shift might benefit the interpretation and offer interesting points. As one would suppose, Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb are ordinary house mice – they live in a house (human environment) and their habitat is inside a wall – this is somewhat stereotypical envisioning of mouse habitat – and they come out only if there is no one around. They are particularly curious because once Lucinda and Jane leave, they are right away searching around the doll's house. Unfortunately, when they find food, to their surprise, it is only plaster food and since they cannot eat it, they go about the house and either damage the furnishings or take it with them to their shelter. However, the storyline implies that they feel guilty about their behaviour and want to do also good, so, they sneak into the house and leave a crooked sixpence as compensation and every morning hereafter Hunca Munca sweeps the house before anyone is awake.

Regarding the literary interpretations, the environment presented here does not possess any significance to the ecocritical study. The reader is introduced only to a human indoor environment, nonetheless, if the rather radical shift were applied, the interpretation, as mentioned, could be intriguing. Let us think of the nursery as a nonhuman environment and the doll's house as a human environment. This unusual made-up dichotomy might be quite difficult to comment on for the

reason that neither the story nor the illustrations could help to raise any points directly concerning the interpretation of the natural character of the environment. Nevertheless, let us not forget that the interpretation could be reinforced with the characters of the mice because they lend the environment the nonhuman aspect. So, the nursery could be thought of as a perilous nonhuman environment which would be its natural quality, especially for mice, since there might be cat or mouse traps. In that case, the only shelter may be found in the den or the dolls' house. Equivalently, it might be said that the interpretation of the environment could be omitted since the interpretation is only fabricated and not directly based on the text or illustrations.

However, there are points to be addressed: the dolls' relationship and the mice's relationship to the environment. The dolls' relationship to the environment might be described as hearty, even ardent. They look after it and above all care for it. This behaviour may be illustrated by their calling the policeman doll when their house was raided. This is a parallel to the Potter's own life since her life philosophy was to protect and preserve environment. So, it might be said that this story bears the typical feature of her stories. The implication is that it is essential to look after and care for the environment we live in. Concerning the mice, they might be described as somewhat reluctant/hesitant to care for the environment. Their behaviour may be substantiated by the raiding of the doll's house and the consequent damaging or stealing of furnishings. The dichotomy of the relationship works hand in hand with the name of the tale, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*. However, eventually, even one of the mice shows a change in her character and begins to look after the environment, namely, the doll's house.

Another ecocritical point of the story is how the plaster food is treated. The moment the mice realise they cannot feed off the artificial food, they start to raid. This behaviour shows that all organisms need to be fed. Since the animals at hand are mice, which are regarded as synanthropic species, it is somewhat logical that they try to find the source of food in proximity to their den. Consequently, the behaviour also draws the ecocritical implication of the story that all living beings need food to live. If they do not eat, they might start to behave erratically or unexpectedly. This consequence is reinforced by the raiding of the house.

The didactic reading of this story is rather straightforward with the important takeaway point being how Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb behave. It should be clear that it is wrong to break into someone's house and, in this case, steal things. Nevertheless, should one think of mice as robbers?

It might be false to make such a conclusion. It is the natural way of things that mice live alongside humans and live off their food – they are synanthropic species. So, the point here is that the mice should not damage the dolls' possessions after they are displeased with the plaster food, and it is only right that Hunca Munca starts to sweep the dolls' house as a sign of guilt.

3.7 *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*

In *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* (1906), Potter takes the reader to a water environment where the protagonists are amphibians, a frog and a newt, and a reptile, a tortoise. The choice of characters works hand in hand with the choice of the setting that means that the reader finds themselves in the house of Mr. Jeremy Fisher and at a pond where he goes fishing. As he is fishing, a big trout attacks and draws him into the water.

Ecocritically, this story possesses interesting points to comment on. Let us begin with the character of Mr. Jeremy Fisher who in his anthropomorphic nature behaves like a gentleman. However, the moment he loses his socks and shoes, he returns to the animal nature of a frog. It is as if, thanks to this change, he is able to save himself from the trout. It seems that the wild nature poses a threat to Jeremy and only by being a part of it can he escape. Another point is the stylised food which Mr. Jeremy Fisher prepares for his visitors. He serves a roasted grasshopper with ladybird sauce. Potter wanted to show that amphibians and reptiles as well feed off invertebrates, but since it is a children's story, she needed the insects to be part of the anthropomorphic setting of the tale. With these points made, the focus should be moved to the environment and the creatures which inhabit it.

This story is no exception to Potter's quintessential feature of her story writing. This means that the choice of setting works hand in hand with the choice of animal characters. The reader finds themselves at a pond, a water area, where they come across all sorts of water animals: a frog, a water-beetle, muskrats, a stickleback, a trout, and other fish. If the focus should stay on the environment, the illustrations might be of benefit. Potter portrays the water environment as realistically as possible with the tinge of a fairytale-like. Moreover, this time, the illustrations also possess something else of worth for the ecocritical interpretation, namely, the movement of the animals. It might be said that capturing movement on paper could be difficult, however, Potter was able to capture the motion thanks to her exceptional art skills. It seems that the moves of Mr. Jeremy Fisher, the trout, or other water creatures are as lifelike as they can get. Back to the environment,

Potter's illustrations portray it this time with exceptional accuracy. Not only is the fauna depicted as realistically as possible but the flora as well. The pictures of water lilies, water grasses and other plants are rather exquisite and help to complete the scene for the reader.

What are the ecocritical implications? *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* presents a perfect example of a water environment with all the properties it might be expected. As mentioned before, the reader comes across all sorts of water animals: invertebrates, different fish, an amphibian, mammals; and last but not least, there are water plants. All this might give a comprehensive impression of how such an environment looks like in real nature.

4 Conclusion

The primary aim of this bachelor's thesis was to illustrate how Beatrix Potter's work may be subjected to practices of two environmental literary theories, namely, ecocriticism and nature writing. Such an interpretation may have been done thanks to the fact that Potter's tales feature the aspect of nature as a leading theme. However, this feature did not play the only important role in the respective interpretations of the tales. There were other motifs which also pervade the tales, such as protection and preservation of the environment and anthropomorphism.

Furthermore, the motif of protection and preservation is strongly present in the majority of the tales. This feature is connected to Beatrix Potter's life philosophy of looking after and caring for the environment to preserve it. From a young age, she had a close relationship with nature, was intrigued by it, and studied it. Her activity in nature conservation then mirrors in the tales and she lent her animal heroes qualities that stem from her character and made them cautious and protective of their surroundings. Nevertheless, it might seem that this bachelor's thesis favoured the ecocritical stance more than the one of nature writing. This is for one reason, which is that works falling under nature writing have one thing in common, and that is that they feature nature as a leading theme. It seemed unnecessary to comment on such a blatantly obvious fact, and therefore, it is only mentioned here as a part of the findings. On the other hand, the ecocritical interpretation held more interesting points that needed to be mentioned which were the relationship between the characters and the environment, the interaction between animals and people, and lastly the portrayal of animals.

By and large, Potter's approach to these aspects may be described as realistic with a tinge of fairytale-like thanks to the fact that children are the primary audience. If it were to be commented on the respective points, the tales portray the animal characters true to their actual image even when they have anthropomorphic qualities, so, it does not hinder their perception of wild animals. It could be said that Potter's experience as a naturalist and her professional approach to illustration resulted in a combination that can be bested only with difficulty. Regarding the interaction, the stories present the reality as it is: when the reader encounters the animals portrayed as wild, the people's behaviour toward them bears no difference to reality; the only change occurs when they are anthropomorphic, the interaction becomes then human-like. Last but not least, the relationship between animals and the environment is heavily influenced by Potter's personal attitude to nature. The animal characters are well aware of their behaviour and know that if they want to continue living in nature, they need to protect and preserve it. It seems that Potter also wanted to pass her approach towards nature onto other generations. Hence, it seemed appropriate to write children's stories, however, as was mentioned earlier, the publication of these stories would not have started without the impulse of her former governess, Anne Moore. All in all, Potter's work has many ecocritical implications that are either obvious in the first reading or that will emerge in the subsequent readings. Furthermore, her tales present an exceptional endeavour in naturalist literature that might not have a parallel.

The figure of Beatrix Potter possesses tremendous cultural and literary value. In spite of the time in which she was born, she surpassed every expectation that there may have been. If it had not been for the Victorian period, she would have become a distinguished mycologist, but women at that time were not offered scientific positions. So, it might be said that thanks to this turn of events, the literary world received an exceptional author of children's literature whose work will continue to influence generations. Her tales have something that can speak almost to anyone and not only to children.

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Source of Appendices 1-7: Potter, Beatrix. *The Complete Tales*. Warne, 2006.

7 Appendices

But the key was under the
tailor's pillow; he could not get in.
The little mice only laughed,
and tried another tune —

“Three little mice sat down to spin,
Pussy passed by and she peeped in.
What are you at, my fine little men?
Making coats for gentlemen.
Shall I come in and cut off your
threads?
Oh, no, Miss Pussy, you'd bite off
our heads!”



“Mew! Mew!” cried Simpkin.
“Hey diddle dinketty?” answered
the little mice —

“Hey diddle dinketty, poppetty pet!
The merchants of London they
wear scarlet;
Silk in the collar, and gold in the
hem,
So merrily march the merchantmen!”



They clicked their thimbles to
mark the time, but none of the
songs pleased Simpkin; he
sniffed and mewed at the door
of the shop.

“And then I bought
A pipkin and a popkin,
A slipkin and a slopkin,
All for one farthing —

and upon the kitchen dresser!”
added the rude little mice.



On the fourth day the squirrels brought a present of six fat beetles, which were as good as plums in *plum-pudding* for Old Brown. Each beetle was wrapped up carefully in a dock-leaf, fastened with a pine-needle pin.

But Nutkin sang as rudely as ever —

“Old Mr. B! Riddle-me-ree!
flour of England, fruit of Spain,
Met together in a shower of rain;
Put in a bag tied round with a string,
If you'll tell me this riddle, I'll give you a ring!”



Which was ridiculous of Nutkin, because he had not got any ring to give to Old Brown.

The other squirrels hunted up and down the nut bushes; but Nutkin gathered robin's pin-cushions off a briar bush, and stuck them full of pine-needle pins.

She rather fancied a tree-stump amongst some tall fox-gloves.
But — seated upon the stump, she was startled to find an
elegantly dressed gentleman reading a newspaper.



He had black prick ears and
sandy-coloured whiskers.

“Quack?” said Jemima
Puddle-duck, with her head
and her bonnet on one side —
“Quack?”

The gentleman raised his
eyes above his newspaper and
looked curiously at Jemima —

“Madam, have you lost your
way?” said he. He had a long
bushy tail which he was sitting

upon, as the stump was somewhat damp.

Jemima thought him
mighty civil and handsome.
She explained that she had
not lost her way, but that
she was trying to find a
convenient dry nesting-
place.

“Ah! is that so? indeed!”
said the gentleman with
sandy whiskers, looking
curiously at Jemima. He
folded up the newspaper, and
put it in his coat-tail pocket.

Jemima complained of the
superfluous hen.

“Indeed? how interesting!”



“There’s one of my pocket-handkins!” cried Lucie —
“and there’s my pinny!”

Mrs. Tiggy-winkle ironed it, and goffered it, and shook out the frills.

“Oh that *is* lovely!” said Lucie.



“And what are those long yellow things with fingers like gloves?”

“Oh, that’s a pair of stockings belonging to Sally Henny-penny — look how she’s worn the heels out with scratching in the yard! She’ll very soon go barefoot!” said Mrs. Tiggy-winkle.



And one day a little old woman ran up and down in a red spotty cloak.

"Your house is on fire,
Mother Ladybird! Fly away
home to your children!"



Mrs. Tittlemouse was a most terribly tidy particular little mouse, always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors.

Sometimes a beetle lost its way in the passages.

"Shuh! shuh! little dirty feet!" said Mrs. Tittlemouse, clattering her dust-pan.



Another day, a big fat spider came in to shelter from the rain.
"Beg pardon, is this not Miss Muffet's?"

"Go away, you bold bad spider!
Leaving ends of cobweb all over
my nice clean house!"



Hunca Munca tried every tin spoon in turn; the fish was glued to the dish.

Then Tom Thumb lost his temper. He put the ham in the middle of the floor, and hit it with the tongs and with the shovel — bang, bang, smash, smash!

The ham flew all into pieces, for underneath the shiny paint it was made of nothing but plaster!

Appendix no. 6

— sucking his sore fingers and peering down into the water — a *much* worse thing happened; a really *frightful* thing it would have been, if Mr. Jeremy had not been wearing a macintosh!



A great big enormous trout came up — ker-pflop-p-p-p! with a splash —



— and it seized Mr. Jeremy with a snap, “Ow! Ow! Ow!” — and then it turned and dived down to the bottom of the pond!

But the trout was so displeased with the taste of the macintosh, that in less than half a minute it spat him out again; and the only thing it swallowed was Mr. Jeremy’s goloshes.

