

= The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse =

The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse is a children 's book written and illustrated by Beatrix Potter , and published by Frederick Warne & Co. in 1910 . The tale is about housekeeping and insect pests in the home , and reflects Potter 's own sense of tidiness and her abhorrence of insect infestations . The character of Mrs. Tittlemouse debuted in 1909 in a small but crucial role in The Tale of The Flopsy Bunnies , and Potter decided to give her a tale of her own the following year . Her meticulous illustrations of the insects may have been drawn for their own sake , or to provoke horror and disgust in her juvenile readers . 25 @, @ 000 copies of the tale were initially released in July 1910 and another 15 @, @ 000 between November 1910 and November 1911 in Potter 's typical small book format .

Mrs. Tittlemouse is a woodmouse who lives in a " funny house " of long passages and storerooms beneath a hedge . Her efforts to keep her dwelling tidy are thwarted by insect and arachnid intruders who create all sorts of messes about the place : a lost beetle leaves dirty footprints in a passage and a spider inquiring after Miss Muffet leaves bits of cobweb here and there . Her toad neighbour Mr. Jackson lets himself into her parlour , stays for dinner , and searches her storerooms for honey but leaves a mess behind . Poor Mrs. Tittlemouse wonders if her home will ever be tidy again , but after a good night 's sleep , she gives her house a fortnight 's spring cleaning , polishes her little tin spoons , and holds a party for her friends .

Potter 's life had become complicated with the demands of ageing parents and the business of operating a farm before the composition of Mrs. Tittlemouse , and , as a consequence , her literary and artistic productivity began a decline following the tale 's publication . She continued to publish sporadically but much of her work was drawn from decades @-@ old concepts and illustrations . Mrs. Tittlemouse marks the end of her two books a year output for Warnes . Scholars find the book 's depictions of the insects its great attraction . One critic finds a " nightmarish quality " in the tale reflected in Mrs. Tittlemouse 's almost endless war waged against insect pests . Characters from the tale have been modelled as porcelain figurines by Beswick Pottery beginning in 1948 , and the mouse 's image appeared on a Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin in 1955 . Other merchandise has been marketed depicting Mrs. Tittlemouse and her friends . Mrs. Tittlemouse was a character in a 1971 ballet film and her tale was adapted to an animated television series in 1992 .

= = Plot = =

Mrs. Tittlemouse is a tale in which no humans play a part and one in which events are treated as though they have occurred since time immemorial and far from human observance . It is a simple story , and one likely to appeal to young children .

Mrs. Tittlemouse is a " most terribly tidy little mouse always sweeping and dusting the soft sandy floors " in the " yards and yards " of passages and storerooms , nut @-@ cellars , and seed @-@ cellars in her " funny house " amongst the roots of a hedge . She has a kitchen , a parlour , a pantry , a larder , and a bedroom where she keeps her dust @-@ pan and brush next to her little box bed . She tries to keep her house tidy , but insect intruders leave dirty footprints on the floors and all sorts of messes about the place .

A beetle is shooed away , a ladybird is exorcised with " Fly away home ! Your house is on fire ! " , and a spider inquiring after Miss Muffet is turned away with little ceremony . In a distant passage , Mrs. Tittlemouse meets Babbitty Bumble , a bumble bee who has taken up residence with three or four other bees in one of the empty storerooms . Mrs. Tittlemouse tries to pull out their nest but they buzz fiercely at her , and she retreats to deal with the matter after dinner .

In her parlour , she finds her toad neighbour Mr. Jackson sitting before the fire in her rocking chair . Mr. Jackson lives in " a drain below the hedge , in a very dirty wet ditch " . His coat tails drip with water and he leaves wet footmarks on Mrs. Tittlemouse 's parlour floor . She follows him about with a mop and dish @-@ cloth .

Mrs. Tittlemouse allows Mr. Jackson to stay for dinner , but the food is not to his pleasing , and he rummages about the cupboard searching for the honey he can smell . He discovers a butterfly in the

sugar bowl , but when he finds the bees , he makes a big mess pulling out their nest . Mrs. Tittlemouse fears she " shall go distracted " as a result of the turmoil and takes refuge in the nut @-@ cellar . When she finally ventures forth , she discovers everybody has left but her house is a mess . She takes some moss , beeswax , and twigs to partly close up her front door to keep Mr. Jackson out . Exhausted , she goes to bed wondering if her house will ever be tidy again .

The fastidious little mouse spends a fortnight spring cleaning . She rubs the furniture with beeswax and polishes her little tin spoons , then holds a party for five other little wood @-@ mice wearing their Regency finery . Mr. Jackson attends but is forced to sit outside because Mrs. Tittlemouse has narrowed her door . He takes no offence at being excluded from the parlour . Acorn @-@ cupfuls of honeydew are passed through the window to him and he toasts Mrs. Tittlemouse 's good health .

= = Background = =

Helen Beatrix Potter was born on July 28 , 1866 in London to barrister Rupert William Potter and his wife Helen (Leech) Potter . She was educated by governesses and tutors , and passed a quiet and solitary childhood reading , painting , drawing , tending a nursery menagerie of small animals , and visiting museums and art exhibitions . Her interests in the natural world and country life were nurtured with holiday trips to Scotland , the English Lake District , and Camfield Place , the Hertfordshire home of her paternal grandparents .

Potter 's adolescence was a quiet as her childhood . She grew into a spinsterish young woman whose parents groomed her to be a permanent resident and housekeeper in their home . She wanted to lead a useful life independent of her parents and considered a career in mycology , but the all @-@ male scientific community regarded her as an amateur and she abandoned fungi . She continued to paint and draw , and experienced her first professional artistic success in 1890 when she sold six designs of humanised animals to a greeting card publisher .

In 1900 , Potter revised a tale about a rabbit named Peter she had written for a child in 1893 , and prepared a dummy book of it in imitation of Helen Bannerman 's 1889 best @-@ seller The Story of Little Black Sambo . Unable to find a buyer , she published the book for family and friends at her own expense in December 1901 . Frederick Warne & Co. had earlier rejected the tale , but , anxious to compete in the booming small format children 's book market , reconsidered and accepted it following the recommendation of their prominent children 's book artist L. Leslie Brooke . Potter agreed to colour the pen and ink illustrations of the private edition , and chose the then @-@ new Hentschel three @-@ colour process for reproducing her watercolours . On October 2 , 1902 The Tale of Peter Rabbit was released .

Potter continued to publish children 's books with Warnes and used her sales profits and a small legacy from an aunt to buy Hill Top , a working farm of 34 acres (13 @.@ 85 ha) in the Lake District in July 1905 . On August 25 , Potter 's fiancé and editor Norman Warne died suddenly ; she became very depressed and was ill for many weeks , but rallied to complete the last few tales she had planned or discussed with him .

= = Development and publication = =

In the years following Warne 's death and the purchase of Hill Top , Potter produced tales and illustrations inspired by her farm , its woodland surroundings , and nearby villages . She provided Warnes with two books per annum , but , by 1910 , she was juggling the demands of ageing parents with the business of operating Hill Top , and , as a result , her literary and artistic productivity began to decline . She published only one book in 1910 , The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse , and wrote to a friend on New Year 's Day 1911 :

I did not succeed in finishing more than one book last year ... I find it very difficult lately to get the drawings done . I do not seem to be able to go into the country for a long enough time to do a sufficient amount of sketching and when I was at Bowness last summer I spent most of my time upon the road going backwards & forwards to the farm ? which was amusing , but not satisfactory for work .

Mrs. Tittlemouse actually made her debut in 1909 in Potter 's The Tale of The Flopsy Bunnies where she rescued the six children of Benjamin and Flopsy Bunny from Mr. McGregor 's grasp and was rewarded for her heroism with a quantity of rabbit wool at Christmas . In the last illustration , she is wearing a cloak and hood , and a muff and mittens fashioned from the wool . Mrs. Tittlemouse is a key (not a central) character in the tale , but a character incompletely personified , and one whose story Potter chose to develop in 1910 .

Potter was an unsentimental naturalist who thought no creature either good or bad , and had no qualms describing earwigs in Mrs. Tittlemouse 's passage or woodlice in her pantry . Her publisher Harold Warne however had different ideas about what was appropriate for a children 's book . He had become accustomed to Potter 's unusual choice of animal subjects through the years , but , ever sensitive to public reaction , thought she had gone a bit too far in Mrs. Tittlemouse with the earwig and the woodlice . The earwig was , at his behest , transmogrified into a beetle and the woodlice into " creepy @-@ crawly people " hiding in Mrs. Tittlemouse 's plate rack . " I can alter the text , when I get the proofs , " she wrote , " and will erase the offensive word ' wood @-@ lice ' ! " Potter argued for the generic term " slaters " for the woodlice , but was overruled . It was decided that an illustration of a centipede (Miss Maggie Manylegs) would be withdrawn and replaced with a butterfly .

Potter usually tested a new work on an audience by writing the tale into an exercise book , pasting a few watercolour or pen and ink illustrations into the volume , and presenting the whole as a gift to a child . In the case of Mrs. Tittlemouse , Potter wrote the tale in a small leather @-@ covered notebook 150 by 85 millimetres (5 @. @ 9 in x 3 @. @ 3 in) with twenty @-@ one pages of text and eight watercolours as a New Year 's gift for Warne 's youngest daughter , Nellie . Its inscription read , " For Nellie with love and best wishes for A Happy New Year . Jan. 1 . 1910 " .

The family called it " Nellie 's little book " and , when the book was published with twenty @-@ six colour pictures , the dedication remained the same . 25 @, @ 000 copies of The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse were released in July 1910 and available in a 138 by 104 millimetres (5 @. @ 4 in x 4 @. @ 1 in) small book format in either blue @-@ grey or buff paper boards at 1 / - or decorated cloth at 1 / 6 . 10 @, @ 000 copies were released in November 1910 and another 5 @, @ 000 copies in November 1911 . Potter was pleased with the bound copies she received . " The buff is the prettiest colour , though it may not keep so clean " , she wrote to Warnes , " I think it should prove popular with little girls . " Her father wrote to the Warne children that his daughter 's sense of humour was ever @-@ fresh and never dull .

Potter intended to follow Mrs. Tittlemouse with a tale about a pig in a large format book similar to the original Ginger and Pickles . On one occasion , she passed an hour sketching inside the pig sty at Hill Top while the pig nibbled at her boots . She abandoned the pig book after fruitless attempts to make progress on it , and , instead , occupied the winter of 1910 ? 11 with supervising the production of Peter Rabbit 's Painting Book , and the composition of The Tale of Timmy Tiptoes .

Almost sixty years after the publication of Mrs. Tittlemouse , the character appeared in the 1971 Royal Ballet film , The Tales of Beatrix Potter , and , in 1992 , her tale and The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies were integrated into a single animated episode for the BBC series , The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends .

= = Illustrations = =

Mrs. Tittlemouse called upon Potter 's keen observation of insects , arachnids , and amphibians , and her youthful experience drawing them . Their depictions in text and illustration reflect her understanding of insect anatomy , colouration , and behaviour ; they are rendered with accuracy , humour , and true to their individual natures ? she knew that toads only seek water during the spawning season , for example , and that they can smell honey . The spider and the butterfly are very much like those she drew from microscopic studies in the 1890s .

Potter 's source for the wildlife and the insect drawings in Mrs. Tittlemouse were those she had executed in her early adulthood , either directly from nature or by observing specimens in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum . The interest in the book 's illustrations lies in the

microscopic accuracy of the insects rather than in any human qualities exhibited by Mrs. Tittlemouse or Mr. Jackson . Potter is uncharacteristically careless in the depiction of the insects however . They appear to be drawn for their own sake , or seem to be out of scale with the heroine , or to change scale without reason . The ladybird seems larger than Mrs. Tittlemouse , and the spider appears first larger than Mrs. Tittlemouse in one picture and then smaller in another . The bees are sometimes out of scale with both the toad and the mouse .

The nature artist and the fantasy artist in Potter are at odds : the mouse , the toad , and the insects share the same habitat but there seems no logical reason for the mouse and the toad to be humanised while the insects remain their natural selves . Logically , they should be humanised , too . While the toad is an invader like the insects , he does Mrs. Tittlemouse the service of ridding her house of the bees yet is inexplicably excluded from the party , an affront to the reader 's sense of social right and wrong . It is possible Potter 's carelessness in the details of Mrs. Tittlemouse can be attributed to a desire on her part to simply display her ability to draw from nature or to her interest in book production being supplanted by a growing interest in farming and local life and politics in Sawrey .

= = Scholarly commentaries = =

Ruth K. MacDonald of the New Mexico State University writes in *Beatrix Potter* (1986) that the tale is about housekeeping and dealing with insect pests in the home , and points out that it reflects Potter 's pride and pleasure in keeping her house at Hill Top tidy . Tales about humanised mice came easily to Potter , but , unlike the urban mice in *The Tailor of Gloucester* and *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* , Mrs. Tittlemouse is a country mouse living beneath a hedge somewhere near Potter 's Sawrey . With its narrow passages , small rooms , low ceilings , and well @-@ stocked storerooms , Mrs. Tittlemouse 's dwelling is similar to Potter 's own at Hill Top . The author 's obvious approval of Mrs. Tittlemouse 's fastidious housekeeping has its source in her own pleasure in keeping her farmhouse neat , and (like Mrs. Tittlemouse) in being the mistress of her domain . Mrs. Tittlemouse 's abhorrence of insect pests reflects Potter 's own , but the artist in Potter preserves their beauty in the illustrations ? she does not censor their antennae or their groping limbs . Potter thought girls would like the tale best , and would experience the same sort of reaction to insect pests she did ? to wit , complete horror and disgust .

M. Daphne Kutzer , Professor of English at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh and author of *Beatrix Potter : Writing in Code* (2003) , points out that the tale is a comic one taking place completely indoors and one with an obvious anxiety about dirt . There is not the sort of revelry one would expect in a tale about a miniature household but rather a " desperate sense " of wanting to keep that household free of invaders and unwanted outsiders . *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* is another tale about a miniature household , but there Potter is on the side of the invading two bad mice . Mrs. Tittlemouse is concerned as much about middle class proprieties as the dolls Lucinda and Jane in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* but , in *Mrs. Tittlemouse* , Potter is on the side of the invaded rather than the invaders , who are purely animals with no human characteristics .

Kutzer attributes some of the tale 's anxiety to Potter 's own unhappiness over her fame as a writer and the intrusiveness of visitors at Hill Top who assumed a presumptuous familiarity with the author or regarded her as nothing more than an exhibit for the tourist to take in . Potter was proprietary over Hill Top and jealously guarded it to and for herself and some of this jealousy is projected onto Mrs. Tittlemouse 's anxiety about the sanctity of her home . She is not a recluse ? she invites her friends to a party ? but like Potter she needs to be in complete control .

Kutzer thinks the tale has a " nightmarish quality " . Poor Mrs. Tittlemouse cannot keep one step ahead of the various intruders . Although the house is her own , she has no control over who inhabits it : she finds bees nesting in an empty storeroom and woodlice hiding in the plate rack . She is trapped in her own home , her hours occupied with fighting off invaders from without to the point where she is sure she will " go distracted " . Although Mr. Jackson drives the unwanted intruders away , he leaves behind a mess of honey smears , moss , thistledown , and dirty footprints that Mrs. Tittlemouse invests two weeks of her life into cleaning up .

= = Merchandise = =

Potter asserted her tales would one day be nursery classics , and part of the process in making them so was marketing strategy . She was the first to exploit the commercial possibilities of her characters and tales with spinoffs such as a Peter Rabbit doll , an unpublished Peter Rabbit board game , and a Peter Rabbit nursery wallpaper between 1903 and 1905 . Similar " side @-@ shows " (as she termed the ancillary merchandise) were produced over the following two decades .

In 1947 , Frederick Warne & Co. gave the John Beswick Factory of Longton , Staffordshire rights and licences to produce the Potter characters in porcelain . Mrs. Tittlemouse was among the first ten Beswick figurines produced in 1948 , and was followed by Mr. Jackson in 1974 , Mother Lady Bird in 1989 , Babbitty Bumble in 1989 , and another Mrs. Tittlemouse in 2000 . A Mrs. Tittlemouse embossed plate was produced between 1982 and 1984 .

Mrs. Tittlemouse appeared on the lid of a Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin in 1955 , and in 1973 , The Eden Toy Company of New York became the first and only American company to be granted licensing rights to manufacture stuffed Beatrix Potter characters in plush . Mrs. Tittlemouse was released in 1975 . In 1975 , Crummles of Poole , Dorset began manufacturing Beatrix Potter enamelled boxes , and eventually released a 32 millimetres (1 @.@ 3 in) diameter enamelled box depicting Babbitty Bumble and Mrs. Tittlemouse holding her book .

In 1977 , Schmid & Co. of Toronto and Randolph , Massachusetts was granted licensing rights to Beatrix Potter , and produced a Mrs. Tittlemouse music box playing " It 's a Small World " the same year . A Mr. Jackson flat ceramic Christmas ornament followed in 1984 , and a hanging ornament depicting Mrs. Tittlemouse in her little box bed in 1987 .

= = Reprints and translations = =

As of 2010 , all 23 of Potter 's small format books remain in print , and are available as complete sets in presentation boxes . A 400 @-@ page omnibus edition is also available . First editions , early reprints , and limited edition facsimiles of the Mrs. Tittlemouse manuscript are available through antiquarian booksellers .

The English language editions of Potter 's books still bore the Frederick Warne imprint in 2010 , despite the company being sold to Penguin Books in 1983 . In 1985 Penguin remade the book 's printing plates from new photographs of the original drawings , and in 1987 released the entire collection as The Original and Authorized Edition .

Potter 's books have been translated into almost 30 languages , including Greek and Russian . The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse was translated into Afrikaans in 1930 as Die Verhaal van Mevrouw Piekfyn and into Dutch in 1970 as Het Verhaal die Minetje Miezemuis . Under licence to Fukuinkan @-@ Shoten of Tokyo , in the 1970s The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse and 11 other stories were released in Japanese . In 1986 , MacDonald observed that the Potter books had become a traditional part of childhood in both English @-@ speaking lands and those in which the books had been translated .