

= The Story of Miss Moppet =

The Story of Miss Moppet is a tale about teasing , featuring a kitten and a mouse , that was written and illustrated by Beatrix Potter . It was published by Frederick Warne & Co for the 1906 Christmas season . Potter was born in London in 1866 , and between 1902 and 1905 published a series of small format children 's books with Warne . In 1906 , she experimented with an atypical panorama design for Miss Moppet , which booksellers disliked ; the story was reprinted in 1916 in small book format .

Miss Moppet , the story 's eponymous main character , is a kitten teased by a mouse . While pursuing him she bumps her head on a cupboard . She then wraps a duster about her head , and sits before the fire " looking very ill " . The curious mouse creeps closer , is captured , " and because the Mouse has teased Miss Moppet ? Miss Moppet thinks she will tease the Mouse ; which is not at all nice of Miss Moppet " . She ties him up in the duster and tosses him about . However , the mouse makes his escape , and once safely out of reach , dances a jig atop the cupboard .

Although , critically , The Story of Miss Moppet is considered one of Potter 's lesser efforts , for young children it is valued as an introduction to books in general , and to the world of Peter Rabbit . The character of Miss Moppet was released as a porcelain figurine in 1954 and a plush toy in 1973 . The book has been published in a Braille version , translated into seven languages , and was released in an electronic format in 2005 . First editions in the original format are available through antiquarian booksellers .

= = Background = =

Helen Beatrix Potter was born on July 28 1866 to barrister Rupert William Potter and his wife Helen (Leech) Potter in London . She was educated by governesses and tutors , and passed a quiet 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 holidays in Scotland , the Lake District , and Camfield Place , the Hertfordshire home of her paternal grandparents .

Potter 's adolescence was as quiet as her childhood . She matured into a spinsterish young woman whose parents groomed her to be a permanent resident and housekeeper in their home . She continued to paint and draw , and experienced her first professional artistic success in 1890 when she sold six illustrations of her pet rabbit to a greeting card publisher . She hoped to lead a useful life independent of her parents , and tentatively considered a career in mycology , but the all @-@ male scientific community regarded her as nothing more than an amateur and she abandoned fungi .

In 1900 , Potter revised a tale that she had written for a child in 1893 , fashioning it into a dummy book similar to the size and style of Helen Bannerman 's The Story of Little Black Sambo . Unable to find a buyer for her book , partially because the children 's book market of the time depended on brightly coloured illustrations unlike Potter 's line drawings , she decided to publish it privately in December 1901 . Frederick Warne & Co had once rejected the tale but , to maintain their position in the small format children 's book market , reconsidered and accepted the " bunny book " (as the firm called it) following the recommendation of their prominent children 's book artist L. Leslie Brooke . Potter agreed to colour her pen and ink illustrations according to Warne 's requirements , and she suggested Warne use the new Hentschel three @-@ colour printing technique in the printing process for The Tale of Peter Rabbit .

Potter continued to publish children 's books with Warne , and by 1905 she found herself financially independent . Her books were selling well , and her income , combined with a small inheritance , allowed her to buy Hill Top , a farm of 34 acres (14 ha) at Near Sawrey in the Lake District in July of that year . When her longtime editor and fiancé Norman Warne died a few weeks after their secret engagement , she became depressed , but went on to devote herself to her stories .

= = Development and publication = =

In 1906 , as Potter was finishing *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* , she considered developing books for a younger audience . Three stories were the result : *The Story of Miss Moppet* , *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit* and *The Sly Old Cat* . Inspired by George Cruikshank 's illustrations , she intended to have the stories published in " panoramic format in the style of Cruikshank 's *Comic Alphabet* " , as explained by Taylor . The panorama format consisted of " long strips of paper , on which the individual pages of pictures and text were arranged in order from left to right . "

Potter was at Hill Top in July 1906 during the development of *Miss Moppet* , and the kitten she borrowed as a model from a mason from Windermere was a difficult subject . " [A] n exasperating model , " Potter wrote , " I have borrowed a Kitten and I am rather glad of the opportunity of working at the drawings . It is very young and pretty and a most fearful pickle . " Biographer Linda Lear explains that " pickle " was a word Potter used to describe " free @-@ thinking exuberant people , like her cousin Caroline , or mischievous kittens and small children . " Potter used the same drawings of the kitten as a model for her next book , *The Tale of Tom Kitten* , which she dedicated in 1907 " to all Pickles ? especially those that get upon my garden wall " . *Miss Moppet* is one of *Tom Kitten* 's sisters , and appears as a character in both books featuring him : *The Tale of Tom Kitten* and *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers or The Roly @-@ Poly Pudding* (1908) .

Potter was an admirer of American author Joel Chandler Harris and created a series of plates in the 1890s for his *Uncle Remus* stories , possibly in an attempt to find career direction . So deep was her admiration , Lear speculates the scene of *Miss Moppet* wrapping her head in the duster comes from a similar scene in an *Uncle Remus* tale in which Br 'er Fox " feigns illness in a rocking chair , wrapped up with flannel " . Potter was modeling her sketches from a young kitten and , wanting not to show cruelty , she wrote of the kitten : " She should catch him by the tail / less unpleasant " . Children 's literature scholar Peter Hunt writes that Potter was careful to protect her young audience from graphic details and she refused to depict death in her stories .

Ten thousand copies of *The Story of Miss Moppet* were released in a panorama format priced at a shilling in November 1906 , and another 10 @,@ 000 copies in December 1906 . There were no subsequent printings in the panorama format . The strip folded accordion @-@ fashion into a grey cloth wallet measuring 108 by 89 millimetres (4 @.@ 3 in × 3 @.@ 5 in) . When opened , the panorama strip measured 108 by 2 @,@ 492 millimetres (4 @.@ 3 in × 98 @.@ 1 in) . As Lear writes , Potter " experimented with a panorama format of fourteen pictures on one long strip of paper which folded into a wallet tied with a ribbon " . Lear explains that the format " although popular with readers was ultimately unsuccessful , because shopkeepers found them difficult to keep folded " . Potter referred to this fact late in life when she said , " *Bad Rabbit* and *Moppet* were originally printed on long strips ? The shops sensibly refused to stock them because they got unrolled and so bad to fold up again " . MacDonald points out that the fragile panorama format was inappropriate for very young children .

Twenty thousand copies of *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit* were published in panorama format in November and December 1906 in exactly the same measurements as *Miss Moppet* . Both were later published in a small book 122 by 103 millimetres (4 @.@ 8 in × 4 @.@ 1 in) format . *The Sly Old Cat* was scheduled for publication in 1907 but fell victim to the pressures exerted by booksellers . It was set aside , but was proposed for publication in 1916 as *The Story of the Sly Old Cat* . Potter 's eyesight was failing and she refused to develop it . The story was published in book format with Potter 's 1906 rough sketches for the first time in 1971 . It is not included in the standard 23 @-@ volume *Peter Rabbit* library .

By 1916 *Frederick Warne & Co* had discontinued *Miss Moppet* in its panorama format , and republished the story in a book format that year . Potter illustrated a frontispiece of the kitten and mouse seated in profile , and a title page vignette of a mouse on all fours facing the reader for the book format . At 113 by 92 millimetres (4 @.@ 4 by 3 @.@ 6 in) , the book 's dimensions were smaller than other *Peter Rabbit* books . In 1917 , she suggested to her publisher that *Appley Dapply 's Nursery Rhymes* be published in the smaller *Miss Moppet* format .

= = Plot = =

The tale opens with an illustration of a wide @-@ eyed kitten : " This is a Pussy called Miss Moppet , she thinks she has heard a mouse ! " The following illustration depicts a mouse wearing a pink bowtie and green jacket " peeping out behind the cupboard , and making fun of Miss Moppet . He is not afraid of a kitten . " Miss Moppet darts at him , but misses and bumps her head on the cupboard . She hits the cupboard very hard and rubs her nose . The mouse scurries to the top of the cupboard and watches her .

Miss Moppet ties a duster about her head and sits before the fire on a red hassock . The mouse 's curiosity is piqued ; he thinks she looks very ill and comes sliding down the bell @-@ pull . " Miss Moppet looks worse and worse . " The mouse creeps nearer . Miss Moppet holds her head in her paws and peeks at the mouse through a hole in the duster . " The Mouse comes very close . " Miss Moppet jumps and snags him by the tail .

" And because the Mouse has teased Miss Moppet ? Miss Moppet thinks she will tease the Mouse ; which is not at all nice of Miss Moppet . " The kitten ties the mouse up in the duster then tosses it about like a ball . The mouse peeks from the hole in the duster . In the last illustration but one , Miss Moppet is seated upright on her rump and staring at the reader . The duster lies opened and empty in her paws . " She forgot about that hole in the duster " , and the mouse has escaped . He dances a jig safely out of Miss Moppet 's reach atop the cupboard .

= = Scholarly commentaries = =

James M. Redfield , a classics professor at the University of Chicago , in his article " An Aristotelian Analysis of Miss Moppet " finds the story follows the tenets of Aristotle 's Poetics , with a definite beginning (the unsuccessful attempt to catch the mouse) , middle (Miss Moppet pretending to be hurt and catching the mouse) , and end (Miss Moppet teasing the mouse and his escape) . Redfield notes that Potter makes the outcome of the plot uncertain and creates parity between the characters , which are naturally predator and prey ; Potter makes Miss Moppet " young , inexperienced , female , and a pet " , while the mouse is " mature , courageous , male , and independent " . Redfield praises Potter 's skill as an author ; she uses the hole in the duster twice ? to allow Miss Moppet to catch the mouse , but then for him to escape her ? and uses phrases particularly suited for a parent to read aloud to a child (" This is the mouse ... ") . Redfield concludes that while teasing is bad in the story ? dangerous for the mouse , and cruel for the cat ? Potter herself teases the reader in a good way , showing " us that teasing is a kind of loving when it is a kind of teaching . The poet plays with us , and by taking us through an unreal experience , teaches us what it is to live in the real world . "

In her essay " Thoroughly Post @-@ Victorian , Pre @-@ Modern Beatrix " professor of English Katherine Chandler points out that Potter , unlike most Victorian writers of children 's books , wrote original stories based on the realism of animal behaviour . Chandler notes that Potter avoids moralizing in her tales , making Miss Moppet nothing more than a story describing the natural behaviour of kittens . Potter 's anthropomorphized animals are in fact slightly naughty , yet in their naughtiness the punishment is never the moral of the tale . At the end of Miss Moppet , the kitten is not punished and the mouse dances on the cupboard . This leads Chandler to quote literary scholar of modernism Humphrey Carpenter , " there is nothing in [Potter 's] work that resembles the moral tale . In fact it might be argued that she is writing something pretty close to a series of immoral tales " . In addition Chandler notes that Potter 's economic use of prose presages modernism , comparing her writing to that of Ernest Hemingway .

Ruth K. MacDonald , English and children 's literature professor at New Mexico State University , agrees , writing in Beatrix Potter that Miss Moppet demonstrates Potter 's ability to pare text and illustrations to essentials noting that she worked best with more complicated plots , more complicated characters , and stories with specific settings rather than generalized backgrounds . Miss Moppet is a vignette , she indicates , rather than the typical Potter tale of causality , extended plot , and variety of character , and depends upon the archetypal animosity between cat and mouse with the cat being the dominant character .

Miss Moppet was more successful than its companion piece *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit* according to M. Daphne Kutzer , an English professor at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh and author of *Beatrix Potter : Writing in Code* (2003) . Kutzer writes : " the illustrations are more fluid and the storyline more humorous and less moralistic " . Potter was never at her best when writing for a clearly defined audience , Kutzer observes , and in writing a Victorian moral tale about teasing , Potter failed to completely engage the reader 's imagination in either the story or the illustrations . Though , as MacDonald notes , Miss Moppet remains in the Potter canon , and serves as a good initial approach to Potter 's literature .

= = Merchandise = =

Potter asserted her tales would one day be nursery classics , and part of the " longevity of her books comes from strategy " , writes Potter biographer Ruth MacDonald . She was the first to exploit the commercial possibilities of her characters and tales ; between 1903 and 1905 these included a Peter Rabbit stuffed toy , an unpublished board game , and nursery wallpaper . Similar " side @-@ shows " (as she termed the ancillary merchandise) were produced throughout her life . For a number of years Potter designed Christmas cards with characters from her books that were sold to raise money for charities .

Potter died on December 22 , 1943 , and left her home and the original illustrations for almost all of her books , including Miss Moppet , to the National Trust . Hilltop was opened to visitors in 1946 , and displayed her original artwork there until 1985 . After Potter 's death , Frederick Warne & Co granted licences to various firms for the production of merchandise based on her characters . Beswick Pottery of Longton , Staffordshire released a porcelain figurine of Miss Moppet in 1954 ; the firm was eventually acquired by Royal Doulton which continued to issue the figurine under the " Royal Albert " brand until it was discontinued in 2002 . From 1980 to 1995 when it went out of business , Schmid & Co. of Toronto and Randolph , Massachusetts produced a Miss Moppet music box figurine . From 1983 to 1991 , Schmid distributed two Miss Moppet Christmas ornaments (3 and 1 @.@ 5 inches (76 and 38 mm) tall) , made by the Italian firm ANRI . Stuffed toy manufacturers requested licensing for Potter 's figures early in the 20th century ; however she refused to grant permission , having been disappointed with the quality of the proposed stuffed toys . Frederick Warne & Co retained rights to all Potter merchandise and in 1973 granted a license to the Eden Toys company of Jersey City , New Jersey to manufacture stuffed animals based on Potter 's characters . Beginning in 1975 these included a plush Miss Moppet , which was discontinued in 2001 when Eden Toys went out of business .

= = Reprints and translations = =

As of 2010 , all 23 of Potter 's small format books , including Miss Moppet , remain in print , and are available as a complete set in a presentation box . A 400 @-@ page omnibus edition is also available , as is an electronic format , released in 2005 . First edition and early edition Potter books are offered by antiquarian booksellers .

Although sold to Penguin Books in 1984 , Frederick Warne & Co remained a subsidiary company and continues to publish Potter 's books . A 2002 *Publishers Weekly* article , written for the centennial of the publication of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* , reported that Potter was considered one of the most popular classic writers , that anniversary editions of her work were published in 1993 and 2002 , and the artwork has been " re @-@ scanned to make the illustrations look fresher and brighter " . The Frederick Warne name still appears on editions of Potter 's books in English .

Languages that Miss Moppet has been translated into include Chinese , French , German , Italian , Japanese , Spanish , and Vietnamese , and a Braille edition in English has been prepared . Miss Moppet was parodied by Nicholas Garland in a political cartoon in the 11 June 1976 issue of the *New Statesman* . Margaret Thatcher had lost a motion of no confidence in the government of Prime Minister James Callaghan , and Garland 's cartoon copied the text and parodied four panels of the story , with Callaghan as the mouse who escapes Thatcher the kitten . In 1986 , MacDonald

observed that Potter 's books had become a " traditional part of childhood in most only English @-@ speaking countries and in many of the countries into whose languages Potter 's books have been translated " .