

**Miss Potter. A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor
(Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Touchstone. Reprinted with permission.)**

“Once upon a time there were four little rabbits, and their names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail and Peter. They lived with their mother in a sand-bank, underneath the root of a very big fir tree. “Now, my dears,” said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, “You may go into the fields or down the lane, but don’t go into Mr. McGregor’s garden.””

So begins the children’s classic, *The Tales of Peter Rabbit*. It was written by children’s author, Beatrix Potter, who went on to write and illustrate 22 more, including children’s favourite’s like *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies* and *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse*.

Miss Potter the movie brings to cinematic life the author’s tale. To summarise the plot;

“Once upon a time there was an author, and her name was Miss Potter. She lived with her mother in a home in London, underneath the shadow of overly protective parents. As a young woman, she was told one morning, “You may go into tea parties and (be chaperoned) down the lane with eligible young bachelors, but don’t go into the garden that is commercial book publishing.”

Such is the movie tale of Miss Potter and her search for artistic recognition and freedom in love. It is a heart-warming film, about those human qualities of imagination, courage and determination.

Some of the characters in the *Miss Potter* movie are truly magical. Peter Rabbit, the Flopsy Bunnies and Mrs Tittlemouse, all step off the page and shine onto the cinematic screen through the clever use of animation. It is a vivid insight into the imaginative world of an artist.

While the Potter animals out shine their already famous history, sadly, both leading actors seem unable to break free of theirs. It is hard to get beyond Renee Zellweger as a pouting Bridget Jones or Ewan McGregor, as a strangely stiff Obi-Wan Kenobi (in the first three episodes of Star Wars).

Miss Potter continues the Hollywood trend of making a misnomer of the term “historical movie.” When Hollywood makes movies, whether *Miss Potter* or *Shakespeare in Love*, a whole generation find their view of history formed by the talents of director (Chris Noonan), screen writer (Richard Maltby) and actors. Such is the power of film in our culture today.

Perhaps this is why the movie themes of woman seeking personal fulfilment, or the fight for environmental conservation, sound so decidedly contemporary. In real life, Beatrix used her book royalties to buy over 4,000 acres of land in the Lake District. Thus the real life Beatrix Potter left not just a literary legacy, but a landed legacy, that has conserved the beauty of the Lake District. But a film is never real life and a probing of Beatrix Potter the real person is traded for the romantic autumnal colours of the Lake District.

While never a great movie, *Miss Potter* works as a warmly human movie and an evening well spent.

499 words.

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