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Hannah Field

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A Few of the Author's Favorite Things: Clothes, Fetishism, and *The Tailor of Gloucester*

Hannah Field

I ought to make something good of the coat. I have been delighted to find that I may draw some most beautiful 18th Century clothes at the South Kensington Museum. I had been looking at them for a long time in an inconvenient dark corner of the Goldsmith's Court, but had no idea they could be taken out of the case. The clerk says I could have any article put on a table in one of the offices, which will be most convenient.

Beatrix Potter (qtd. in Lane, *Tale* 73–74)

It is well known that the cherry-colored coat, taffeta-lined waistcoat, and miniature mouse-dresses in Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester* are visual representations of real clothes. Indeed, many of the material objects that served as models for *Tailor's* textual world are still extant: as Judy Taylor and her co-authors joyously proclaim, "we are able to see the original costumes which she drew, together with her sketches and finished book pictures" at the Victoria and Albert Museum (110).¹ An exhibition in 2003 and 2004 allowed gallery-goers to do just that.² What has been less often remarked upon is the enraptured tone in which the "delighted" Potter wrote of drawing and poring over these "most beautiful" clothes "out of the case" in a 1903 letter to Norman Warne. The writer seems engaged in a personal and passionate relationship with the material object that colors *Tailor* as a book.

Significantly *Tailor's* current Warne dust jacket—along with sundry other promotional materials—records that the work was the author's "own favourite among her books."³ But the volume is in reality an unexpected, even anomalous, text in Potter's oeuvre, as readers' mixed responses to

it suggest. In contrast to the compact, child-friendly *Tale of Peter Rabbit*, the story's length was a problem for younger readers, although "'children of the right age—12'" enjoyed it (Linder, "Introduction" 8). Aptly, the book was complimented in a trade journal for tailors, and Potter called this review "one of the few compliments . . . that I value one halfpenny" (qtd. in Kutzer 11). *Tailor* was "most in request amongst old ladies" at public readings (Potter qtd. in Lane, *Magic Years* 117); apparently the author even subsequently admitted that her own favorite was "not everybody's book" (qtd. in Taylor et al. 163). The text seems to have elicited a mixture of resistance and partisan enthusiasm, this enthusiasm coming, somehow, from peculiar quarters: preadolescents, tailors, and old ladies rather than younger children.

Potter analysts identify many divergences from the other "little books." M. Daphne Kutzer's monograph, for example, names three principal points of departure: the human protagonist, the urban setting, and the specificity of its "historical moment" in "a recognizable Regency England" (11).⁴ Kutzer further identifies the book's illustrations as exceptional, "by far the most detailed and gorgeous of any to appear in her novels" (23). Like Kutzer, Taylor and her co-writers stress the exceptionality of the period setting, observing the "timelessness" of the rest of Potter's stories, while making a more general claim for *Tailor*'s status as "one of her more complicated tales" (108–9). Humphrey Carpenter unequivocally insists that the story "bears remarkably little resemblance in theme and style to the rest of her work" (283), while Katherine R. Chandler singles the volume out (along with *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse*) as categorically unlike the other stories, which she calls "ordinary narratives staged in ordinary settings, uncomplicated by magic or fairies or *deus ex machina* conclusions" (289).

Interestingly, another critic positions *Tailor* in somewhat uneasy relation to Potter's other stories via the very objects that I wish to discuss here: clothes. Carole Scott argues that clothes in Potter's writing usually "highlight the delicate interaction between animal nature and civilized behavior" and "direct our thoughts toward the relationship between the individual and the social world" (192). Clothes are frequently experienced as a restriction or "constraint" for Potter's animal characters (194). *Tailor* departs from this model, positively valuing the transformative power of clothing and, Scott suggests, the work of art: "Making . . . clothes is to wield the creative power of the artist to give shape to an inner vision and express it in forms to which society can respond" (198). Indeed, Scott goes so far as to declare that this strange book is "expressed entirely in the fabrication of clothing" (197).

Following on from Scott's work, I posit that what is unusual about *Tailor*, that perhaps what the writer herself, as well as readers and critics, find mesmerizing or difficult about the book, is its constant, obsessive attention to material objects, expressly clothes. If this is the case, what might be the analytical key to such an obsession with clothing? One way to conceive of an important and lauded material object like the cherry-colored coat is through the idea of the fetish. Succinctly conveying the basic affective weight of fetishized objects—and the basic affective dynamic of *Tailor*—Patricia Spyer identifies the “passions, energies, and motivations with which, in the case of fetishism, things are so fiercely invested” (5). Potter's book, I would argue, is fetishistic in multiple ways, its love of the object diffused across author, text, language, character, illustration, and countless other aspects of the whole. It is not an exaggeration to say that clothing, and clothing as fetish more particularly, determines every dimension of *Tailor*. However, as William Pietz observes, the concept of the fetish brings with it a caveat of perhaps irresolvable complexity and multivalence: Pietz asserts that the very word “embarrasses” theoretical attempts “to contain and control its sense” (“Problem I” 5). Consequently, this paper's attempt to map certain theories of fetishism onto *Tailor*'s clothing mania takes a sort of survey approach to the slippery domain of the fetish.

Pietz is as good a theorist to begin with as any. In a seminal series of articles, he removes the fetish from its classical contexts—namely Freudian and Marxian—to reposition the concept in terms of anthropology and cross-cultural contact. His historical argument proposes four main characteristics for the fetish, three of which seem relevant to *Tailor*.⁵ The first essential property is “irreducible materiality,” the fetish's “status as a material embodiment” (“Problem I” 7); in other words, the fetish is an inalienably material object. We may apply this to *Tailor* by noting the lengthy descriptions of clothing throughout the book, which provide a detailed anatomy of the material properties of the objects at hand (“a coat of cherry-coloured corded silk embroidered with pansies and roses . . .” [8] and so on; I discuss such descriptions below), as well as the illustrations, many of fabric and clothing, that Kutzer finds so detailed and gorgeous.

Secondly, Pietz argues that the fetish pertains to social value, with “certain material objects [functioning] as the loci of fixed structures of the inscription, displacement, reversal, and overestimation of value” (“Problem I” 9). By this Pietz refers, among other things, to the impossibility of comprehending another individual's fetish: to the non- or anti-fetishist, the value ascribed to the fetish-object may seem in excess of that object's properties. Here we find echoes of the dynamic between the eponymous tailor of Gloucester and his (distinctly unhelpful) animal helper, the cat Simpkin. The tailor can be read as a textbook fetishist: obsessed with cloth-

ing, he focuses continually upon the properties of the cherry-colored coat, and upon the sewing thereof, with an intensity that drives him to illness. Simpkin, on the other hand, denies the coat's status as symbolic anchor of the book by pettily hiding the twist. Indeed, the attitude of these two characters to the twist—feverish and fixated on the tailor's part, jeering (or "miaw-ger-r-w-s-s-ch-ing," to use Potter's onomatopoeic term) and disdainful on Simpkin's—are a microcosm of opposing social valuations of the object.

Finally, the fetish possesses a dimension of "personal individuality" as "an object established in an intense relation to and with power over the desires, actions, health and self-identity of individuals whose personhood is conceived as inseparable from their bodies" ("Problem I" 10). In other words, the fetish "[subjects] the human body . . . to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments" ("Problem II" 10). The tailor's illness, caused by the loss of the cherry-colored twist, is the readiest example of this, as the thread occupies such an important position in his life that it directly affects his body: "the poor old tailor was very ill with a fever . . . and still in his dreams he mumbled—'No more twist! no more twist!'" (32). A series of lovely puns even position the tailor as an effect of the fabric he sews: he is "thread-bare," "worn to a ravelling," "undone," and his fortune is "to be cut bias" (8, 16, 27, 19). Instead of being constituted by an internal property, the tailor's existence is therefore determined by a sartorial object that, in Pietz's phrase, "functions as controlling organ." The importance accorded to clothing here displays something of what Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass identify as a fundamental tension in the human relationship with clothing: clothes are conceived as "a superfluity that has the power to constitute an essence" (3). The line between the tailor as subject and clothing as object, between the contemplation of one's life and the contemplation of a coat, is effaced.

A number of fetish theorists provide illuminating ideas about *Tailor's* unusual style, particularly the defining modes of its clothes descriptions: lists, "piled up adjectives,"⁶ and exaggerated tone. Different critics diverge as to the defining characteristics of the verbal fetish; nonetheless, all the conceptions reviewed here position *Tailor* as a linguistically, formally, fetishistic book. Emily Apter provides a succinct diagnosis of what she dubs "rhetorical fetishism" in her book on nineteenth-century French realism, pointing to "the taste for epithet, mannered syntax, and tropes of hyperbole and accumulation" as signal features of the style (68). Adela Pinch's formula is similarly evocative: the fetishistic writer employs "sheer verbal excessiveness" as "a substitute for the thing itself" (137). With Apter's rhetorical fetishism and Pinch's "sheer verbal excessiveness" as

guidelines, *Tailor's* nomenclature of fashion helps establish clothing as a linguistic fetish.

Terms for fabric consume the first pages of *Tailor*: “paduasoy and taffeta,” “pompadour, and lute-string,” as well as “gauze and green worsted chenille” (7–10). The variants on these themes in different editions are even more exhaustive, with the privately printed edition employing “pink persian” and “velvet brocaded with silver” (124).⁷ According to Leslie Linder, Potter included a glossary with Freda Moore’s version of *Tailor* that augmented the textual enthusiasm for clothing terminology. Linder provides one entry: “Robins = Robings, old fashioned name for Trimmings—Hogarth’s lady in frontispiece would wear a sacque trimmed with Gauze and Robins. She also wears a hoop or crinoline” (Potter qtd. in Linder, *History* 113). The tautological logic of this gloss produces several terms (robings, trimmings, gauze) to explicate one word. Moreover, although some of these terms may be unfamiliar to contemporary readers, it is probable that a large proportion of the Edwardian audience for the book—think of the “old ladies” who demanded it at public readings or the tailors whose specialist interest was presumed in the trade journal review—would be familiar with “Robins.” In this context, rather than representing an explanation that the reader needs, Potter’s glossary adds a further dimension of pleasure in the fabric-object, a verbal play with its evocation and description, to *Tailor*. The fetishistic tendency is never to be done with the object: its qualities are always captured inadequately and require constant re-enumeration. Substituting “sheer verbal excessiveness” (these multiple terms) for “the thing itself” (the clothes), Potter’s glossary evokes Pinch’s theory of the verbal fetish.

What of the fabrics themselves? Potter seems to pair opposing textiles with one another, thus sensuously emphasizing the texture, sound, drape, and absorption or reflection of color offered by different types of cloth. Take “velvet brocaded with silver”: the dull pile of velvet contrasts with the metallic, reflective thread used to decorate it. Similarly, the *OED* describes paduasoy as “strong corded or gros-grain silk fabric,” its corrugated texture notably different to the smooth gloss of taffeta, while the diaphanousness of gauze and the hardness of worsted chenille produce a yet more striking comparison. In each pair the noise the fabrics might make when worked, worn, or caressed—the rustle or otherwise—is also at stake. *Tailor* powerfully invokes the object by matching fabrics with sensory and tactile associations that contrast—if only to the “in-the-know” clothing devotee.

A further facet of *Tailor's* verbal attention to clothing is the extensive use of lists, which corresponds to the accumulation noticed by Apter. The

cherry-colored coat, a narrative linchpin, takes the form of a list of its properties before it is shown in the illustrations. Potter describes “a coat—a coat of cherry-coloured corded silk embroidered with pansies and roses, and a cream-coloured satin waistcoat—trimmed with gauze and green worsted chenille” (8–10). The syntax of this description is telling: the coat interrupts its own narrative, setting an ever-proliferating account of its features off from the rest of the text with dashes. In fact, descriptions of clothing in *Tailor* always refuse to be done with absolutely. Other catalogs recite “peach-coloured satin—tambour stitch and rose-buds in beautiful floss silk” (23) and, on one of the final pages, “roses and pansies upon the facings [of the coat] . . . and the waistcoat . . . worked with poppies and corn-flowers” (54). These descriptions are formally excessive, favoring double-barreled words and quantitative redundancy: any one of the flowers registered in the last quotation could be omitted with little qualitative effect on the whole, for example. This lack of moderation recalls Apter and Pinch once more, and the pictures serve to heighten this effect: in another redundancy, detailed descriptions of clothing are matched with detailed illustrations.

So far, I have discussed *Tailor*'s claims to be read in terms of formal or rhetorical fetishism via a number of contemporary theorists of the fetish. But the importance of objects in *Tailor* also recalls a more classical pole of fetish theory: commodity fetishism in Marx's *Capital*. Marx defines commodities as “social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses” (104) and subsequently makes an incendiary “analogy” about the “fantastic form of a relation between things” that capitalism depends on; in order to comprehend the commodity,

[W]e must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities. (105)

This complicated comparison, positing consumerist capitalism as a form of religion to its adherents, needs further explanation. Following on from Marx, Pietz glosses commodity fetishism as the process by which “material objects turned into commodities conceal exploitative social relations” (“Problem I” 9). The relationship between labour, use-value, exchange-value, and the material product is mystified, and consequently the object is converted into a commodity fetish: a usable, consumable, emotionally satisfying, status-enhancing item that masks the ingenious and costly conditions of its production by human labor and (unsustainable) resources.

Peter Stallybrass takes issue with the standard reading of Marx's commodity fetish as an anti-object concept. Fittingly enough in this context, a discussion of *Tailor* and its cherry-colored coat, Stallybrass produces his argument via a particular and important object, namely, Marx's overcoat. Marx frequently pawned this coat as he wrote *Capital*, and Stallybrass evocatively uses these trips to the pawnshop to suggest, for Marx personally and in Marx's writings, the crucial demarcations between different sorts of object. Succinctly, this can be seen as the opposition between the commodity, that "evacuated nonobject that [is] the site of exchange," and the fetish or "animized object of human labor and love" ("Marx's Coat" 186).⁸ Potter's illustrations, rather than her language, shed light on the book's Marxian dialogue about labor and the objects it produces. *Tailor* engages with the distinction between the commodity and the fetish as Stallybrass perceives it, insisting upon the cherry-colored coat as an "animized object of human labor and love" rather than an "evacuated nonobject" or "site of exchange." For the book absolutely refuses to obscure the coat's origins in the tailor's work and affection; instead, it constructs an entire narrative from it. As such, Potter's work strategically resists the mystification of the commodity in order to accord objects a different role.

The characterization of the mayor is a case in point, as the frontispiece attests. This illustration, modeled on a section of Hogarth's 1738 engraving *Noon* and originally intended for the first page opening, is the only representation of the mayor's wedding.⁹ Its placement opposite the title page in the 2002 Warne edition has several odd effects. The painting bears considerable weight as the first proper image provided for the reader. Nonetheless, the frontispiece barely introduces the story's main concerns; instead, the image abortively signals a story about love, marriage in general, and the marriage of two rich people in particular. Two human figures, one male and one female, are depicted, coded as a romantic couple by their closeness and the lines of their gaze. Both wear sumptuous and richly hued garments that lack detail when compared to the remainder of the book's illustrations. An indistinct crowd appears behind the pair.¹⁰ The married couple is centralized and viewed clearly, the woman front-on and the man in profile.

The image suggests the importance of a central couple who must be considered in isolation and whose finery proclaims their importance. However, this is the first and only time that the mayor and his wife appear in person in *Tailor*. Although their union is repeatedly referenced by the narrative ("the Mayor of Gloucester is to be married on Christmas Day" [19], et passim), the action proper obfuscates the marriage. The story skips from the completed wedding clothes, "the most beautifullest

coat and embroidered satin waistcoat that ever were worn by a Mayor of Gloucester,” to the tailor’s subsequent good fortune, without actually narrating the mayor’s wearing of the fêted garments (52–54). As Kutzer observes, the mayor is usually represented by the synecdochal “empty coat” that the tailor crafts for him (19), presumably because the coat is the book’s true subject. To use Apter’s seemingly tailor-made phrase, the book “privileg[es] the sartorial part over the living whole” (84); the coat, not its wearer, is the narrative focus. By depicting the mayor and his bride in the frontispiece but never introducing them into the main portion of the book, Potter makes a tacit value judgment. *Tailor*’s interests are atypical, excluding love and marriage in favor of a tailor, a band of grateful mice, a cat, and a catalogue of lustrous objects.

The continuities between this picture and what follows are even more vital than the departures. The picture contains two analogues for the book’s chief characters: a human figure, who *might* represent the tailor, exits the right-hand side of the picture, while a tortoiseshell cat, a substitute for Simpkin, sits on a wall in the background, apparently contemplating the mayor and his wife. The human figure, partially obscured, leaves only elements of his costume visible within the frame—the hem and arm of his green coat, the end of his walking stick. This fragmentary depiction is characteristic of *Tailor*’s treatment of the human: as Taylor and her co-contributors observe, “we never see the tailor in too much detail” due to Potter’s problems with human figure drawing (111). By adding this figure to *Noon*, Potter establishes the aesthetic of the rest of her book: the human is always in danger of disappearing from the frame, subsumed by sartorial accoutrements.

The appearance of the tailor and Simpkin, or their symbolic representatives, at the mayor’s wedding can be compellingly read in terms of a failed or incomplete transformation of fetish-object into commodity fetish. Indeed, the differences between these figures and the tailor or Simpkin (the tailor wears a brown, not green, coat throughout the book, and Simpkin is a tabby cat rather than a tortoiseshell) suggest that whether or not these figures are actually present, they are inescapable around Gloucester. Rather than wearing the coat in ignorance of the labor it took to produce it, rather than receiving the coat in exchange for the money he paid the tailor, the mayor’s wedding day is co-opted by the individuals who constructed his clothes and who still hold claim to them. The tailor figure, striding out of the right-hand frame of the picture and into his story, usurps the mayor as central character: the coat is inalienable from the tailor’s labor and his fetishistic love for it. It is this love, and this work, that *Tailor* is concerned with.

Tailor's mice occupy an interesting position in relation to the object, the fetish, and the textual depiction of work; along with the tailor, they are the characters who most directly ensure the production of the coat. Kutzer, who reads *Tailor's* moral as (crudely) "hard work will raise the status of the working classes," makes a critical point: the mayor's "splendor, symbolized by the coat, is entirely dependent not only upon the poor tailor but upon the largely unseen and usually despised mice of the city" (19). The mice exist in secret passageways "behind the wooden wainscots of all the old houses in Gloucester" (*Tailor* 15), inhabiting what Jerry Griswold calls "an alternate cosmos of encyclopedic completeness" (58). The mice's unseen-ness, along with their integral role in finishing the coat, presents them as members of an oppressed and unappreciated group upon which much depends, just like the tailor and just like the invisible laborers whose work, transformed into commodities, becomes fetishized in Marxist theory.

Two matched illustrations mid-way through the tale overtly link the mice to objects. These two portraits show mice who have been freed from Simpkin's tea-cup traps by the tailor (22, 25). Both pictures have shallow planes; their backgrounds are pale, with only slight shadows to suggest depth. Each presents only two components: a well-dressed mouse and a tea-cup. Mice and tea-cups are linked by complementary and contrasting colors: the lady mouse's quilted petticoat, which is revealed as she curtseys, is the same crimson as the floral pattern on the rim and sides of her cup; her apron is the same crisp white. The gentleman mouse's cerulean coat and white ruff contrast with the tea-cup he bows in front of, but the shades of the tricorne hat he holds under his arm echo the rust and gold teardrop design on the pottery. These images represent an accordance, and to some degree an equivalence, between the mice and the objects they pose with.

This concern is reiterated by a series of illustrations of fabric in which the mice are further connected to objects, to the material world. These four images, focused entirely on the gorgeous details of a piece of fabric, are the most visually evocative case of *Tailor's* clothing fetishism. Each example provides visual support to the book's fetishistic literary mode while also showing that textiles in *Tailor* are always, even at their most beautifully fetishized, connected to the work that has produced them.

The first and second fabric illustrations are similar. In the first (see fig. 1), a piece of richly embroidered turquoise cloth serves as the backdrop for an exquisitely attired lady mouse (10).¹¹ Fabric forms the chief surface of the image and comprises the largest area, although the figure of the mouse is centralized. A rent in the cloth, through which another mouse peeps, evokes



Figure 1. Mob-capped mouse, from *The Tailor of Gloucester* by Beatrix Potter. (Copyright Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002. Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.)

a space beyond the surface of the tapestry. As Lissa Paul observes, “You have to look closely to see the eyes because they appear to be almost part of the pattern” (64). The image, then, represents a surface that luxuriates in fabric and augments the textual fetishism with a visual depiction of how the inanimate might subsume the animate: the mouse in the background is “almost part of the pattern.” Yet it is this background mouse who is the core of the image’s importance where the commodity fetish is concerned: even as the narcissistic lady-mouse, with her hand-mirror, revels in the beauty of her clothes, another figure, a “worker-mouse” who is almost but not quite assumed into the magic of the fabric, is revealed.

In the second picture (see fig. 2), a mouse appears on the surface of a piece of fabric, this time threading a needle in order to finish his or her sewing. Two other mice, one clasping the omnipresent cherry-colored twist, crawl out from under a wooden wainscot in the background of the image (33). Around three-quarters of the picture-plane is occupied by two lengths of embroidered fabric, one jade green with large chartreuse blooms, the other white with delicate floral detailing. Here the relation between the beautiful object and the labor that produces it is literally foregrounded: the picture lovingly details the cloth with a fetishistic attention to detail but



Figure 2. Mouse sewing, from *The Tailor of Gloucester* by Beatrix Potter. (Copyright Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002. Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.)

also depicts the work that goes into this cloth, the tiny stitches that make up the embroidery, through the mouse in the center of the picture.

The third illustration is the loveliest, most unusual, and most fetishistic in *Tailor* (55). Coinciding with the climactic appearance of the finished coat, the picture exclusively depicts the embroidered surface of the wedding waistcoat (see fig. 3). The amount of detail lavished on the pattern is extraordinary: the flowers simultaneously look stitched, an effect produced by striations on the petals, and meticulously painted, with subtle shading. The palette is varied and rich, ranging from pastel blues and pinks to bright crimson and gold. A very small area is left plain; only slivers of cream in the top and bottom left-hand corners of the frame are not patterned. The usual cues to reading an image that picture books provide, what Perry Nodelman has called the “network of conventions and assumptions . . . about visual and verbal representations and about the real objects they represent” (72), are absent. This watercolor luxuriates in the beauty of cloth, which is its only subject. Potter forces the viewer to navigate the picture-plane via sartorial signs: the shape at bottom right resembles a fob watch pocket, the striations signify stitches, and so on.



Figure 3. Embroidered fabric, from *The Tailor of Gloucester* by Beatrix Potter. (Copyright Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002. Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.)

All of this pleasure in the material object, in the minutiae of the finished coat, may initially seem to mystify the labor of the mice, who do not appear in this picture. However, the mice are rendered a present absence through the note attached to the unfinished button-hole by a pin in a textile/textual *trompe l'œil*. The note reads “no more twist” and draws attention to the process of constructing clothes by exhibiting the incomplete coat. Thus this picture generates two impulses in relation to the object. On the one hand, the viewer is encouraged to fetishize the coat by sensually enjoying its properties (the incomparable colors and shapes) for themselves in a manner that does not partake of the coat’s history within the book. On the other hand, the note with its tiny handwriting leaves a trace on the object that reminds the spectator of the way the object was produced and what it depends upon. The picture of the coat zeroes in on the material object in a loving, fetishizing way only to pull back and reveal how the object was constituted.

Finally, the last image in the book integrates animate and inanimate components in a harmonious, playful fashion (56). Instead of forcing the viewer into an ambiguous and mystifying relation with the piece of fabric,

Potter allows a less synecdochal depiction of clothes. The garment is a coat (evidently the ubiquitous cherry-colored one), its pocket, buttons, and lace-edged sleeve presented in transparent relation to one another (see fig 4). Although the coat is not shown in its entirety, it is less abstracted from a wearable context than the draperies in the earlier fabric-focused pictures. Once again, the mice appear; in this image, however, they nestle in the folds of the fabric or finish off a button-hole. They simultaneously take pleasure in the object (one mouse peeps from a deep, dark, comfortable-looking spot under the sleeve) while also constructing it in a utopian vision of labor integrated with the pleasures of fetishism and the material object.

In line with its object-oriented narrative and its object-oriented form, *Tailor* also provides an object-oriented resolution for its main characters. As I have previously observed, the tailor and Simpkin occupy different ends on a spectrum of attitudes to the material object. The conflict between Simpkin and the tailor, with the tailor falling into a fever when Simpkin hides the twist, implies the disastrous irreconcilability of their belief-systems. However, the pleasurable narrative conclusion reconciles Simpkin and the tailor, and it does so through the mice. Simpkin is transformed into “the repentant Simpkin” (48) by the mice and their industry. This *volte-face* depicts Simpkin contemplating the material object in quite different ways from those to which he is accustomed: “Simpkin went on tip-toe and took a little parcel of silk out of the tea-pot, and looked at it in the moonlight; and he felt quite ashamed of his badness compared with those good little mice” (48). Here the twist becomes a material reminder of something important rather than a triviality. Simpkin’s metamorphosis depends not just upon emotion but also on fetishism: he must learn to appreciate the twist, that “little parcel of silk.” The tailor must move in the opposite direction; the cherry-colored coat that has preoccupied him through *Tailor*’s pages must become only the first in a series of “the most wonderful waistcoats” fabricated throughout his subsequent illustrious career (54). Fittingly, the book depends upon the loving, productive interaction of disparate subjects—the tailor, Simpkin, the mice—and fetishized objects for its happy ending.

And what of Potter herself, sketching those “most beautiful 18th Century clothes” at the South Kensington Museum and then offering them up to her readers so exhaustively in *The Tailor of Gloucester*? In a journal entry dated October 4, 1884, Potter rues: “It is all the same, drawing, painting, modelling, the irresistible desire to copy any beautiful object which strikes the eye. Why cannot one be content to look at it?” (106). *Tailor* answers this question: Potter’s meticulous copying and cataloging of such items has preserved them as beloved fetish-objects within *Tailor*’s narrative,



Figure 4. Final illustration, from *The Tailor of Gloucester* by Beatrix Potter. (Copyright Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002. Reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.)

the sort of “animized object of labor and love” that Stallybrass sees as so antithetical to the commodity fetish. The garments thus belong in the end to the readers, both adult and child, of the book, a book which in itself has become a readerly fetish.

Hannah Field is currently undertaking D. Phil. study at the University of Oxford on a Clarendon Fund Scholarship. Her doctoral project examines the history of the book and movable format works for children. This article is a revised version of the first chapter of her master of arts thesis, completed at the University of Auckland in 2007.

Notes

¹Taylor and her co-writers note that all of the clothes except the cherry-colored coat have been found in the eighteenth-century clothing collection at the V&A; they speculate that Potter may have changed the color of a coat in the museum’s collection for her story (110).

²The exhibition, "When Gentlemen Wore Ruffles, and Gold-Lace Waistcoats," ran from October 20, 2003 to January 12, 2004 and was curated by Emma Laws.

³The statement is often cited in the critical literature, too; see, for example, Griswold 58; Kutzer 23; Lane, *Magic Years* 105; Scott 197.

⁴Kutzer's mention of a Regency setting is confusing, if we align the Regency period with the rule of George IV (at first as Prince Regent) from 1810 to his death in 1830. Potter's reference to the "18th Century clothes" that were models for *Tailor's* costumes in the epigraph to this article and her use of Hogarth's 1738 engraving *Noon* as a model for the frontispiece (see Linder, "Introduction" 113) point to a 1700s setting rather than an 1800s one. I do not understand why Kutzer defines her own Regency as 1785 to 1800 (14).

⁵The other definitive property of the fetish that Pietz canvases is its "fixation or inscription of a uniquely originating event that has brought together previously heterogenous [sic] elements into a novel entity"; these "elements" include "desires and beliefs and narrative structures" as well as material properties ("Problem I" 7).

⁶This is a phrase used by Taylor and her co-authors to stress Potter's general stylistic uniqueness (135).

⁷Here I refer to the privately printed edition (the book's second version) as distinct from the manuscript and final editions. Unless otherwise stated, I discuss the third version of *Tailor*, originally published in 1903 and republished by Warne in 2002.

⁸Elaine Freedgood also draws attention to this idea of Stallybrass', but she finds it in another of his works. Freedgood further traces the commodity/fetish opposition to Georges Lukács (160,n8).

⁹The allusion to *Noon* in this painting has been observed by a number of critics (see, for example, Lane, *Magic Years* 108), and Potter herself calls the mayor's bride "Hogarth's lady" in Freda Moore's version of *Tailor* (qtd. in Linder, *History* 113).

¹⁰It is difficult to tell whether the haziness of the watercolor relates to a conscious decision on Potter's part or to a problem with the reproduction. *Tailor's* front matter notes that the original to this illustration has been lost, so a first edition has been reproduced.

¹¹Lissa Paul parallels this illustration with John Everett Millais' painting *Cherry Ripe* (1879). See Paul 64–69.

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