

Sarah Mook Poetry Contest 2017, Grades 6-8, Second place, “Ode to Beatrix Potter”

The books of Beatrix Potter are beloved by children and adults. Even though the stories’ adventurous animals—as in *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, and thirty others—fill the pages of Potter's books, her art in the books is also exceptional. This second place poem, which is an ode to author and artist, cleverly focuses more on her art instead of the stories. In eight sections, the poem captures Potter’s physical description, her love of art, and her artistic talent. To do so, the writer uses excellent diction and line breaks, and a pleasing rhythm.

The opening of the poem introduces the reader to Potter as she paints:

Your fingers
brush watercolors of:
rabbits,
hedgehogs,
mice,
ducks—
each character with its own curious tale
its own sense of adventure.

Potter’s watercolor artwork of these animals “absorbs” the speaker, in fact it “teleports me into the gorgeous landscape / of your vision.” I like how each animal represents a Potter book and has its own line as if to give them individual space and consideration. I also appreciate the specific, surprising verbs “absorbs,” and “teleports.”

The third section extols the virtues of Potter’s artwork. The pages are “beautiful” and the artwork “exquisite” as they capture “nature at its finest.” The speaker acknowledges that the tales are “relaxing as a lullaby.” It is then that the speaker imagines Potter as an artist painting in the woods as she observes the forest:

In my mind I see you
perched in the woods,
paintbrush in hand.
Your easel holds paper
you’ve covered in colors:
green tree tops,
rushing blue rivers,
the flash of a red fox.

I especially appreciate the visual verb “perched,” the sound of “covered in colors,” and the on-spot description of “the flash of a red fox.” Note the use of alliteration with the ‘c’ and ‘f’ sounds above, and in the lines “green tree tops,” and “rushing blue rivers.” The writer uses excellent line breaks; they highlight each item by separating it and yet connecting them as a whole, giving the poem a pleasing rhythm.

Next the speaker describes the artist herself with “sun-streaked hair / drawn in a messy bun” whose “round, brown eyes” are “focused” on “each detail of the beauty / that surrounds [her].” The painter then “stroke[s] the brush upon the paper / once more / before folding up [her] work, / hustling home through the woods.” The verb “hustling” is well chosen.

Effective characterization in poetry should be focused in a few lines—on an image, or in an inventive use of figurative language. The poet’s characterization of Potter fulfills that directive. All we know is the color and shape of her eyes, the color, shape and condition of her hair, her intent to focus on the art, and her movement home. Yet, it is enough to give us a vivid picture of the artist.

The poem ends with admiration from the speaker concerning Potter’s art. The world she created is a world the speaker wishes “we lived in,” one that is “happy and cheerful.” The poem concludes with the hope that “someday our earth will become / a planet of your stories.”

The poet uses excellent control of language in this tribute to a cherished children’s book author. In this respectful visit to Beatrix Potter’s works, this talented poet chooses to concentrate mostly on Potter’s art and not the stories themselves, a welcome choice.

Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!

Marie Kane
Final Judge
Sarah Mook Poetry Contest, 2017
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