THE CULTURAL VALUES OF LITERARY TOURISM

Shelagh J. Squire
University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract: Literary tourism is defined and its social and cultural meanings explored through a case study of visitors to the Lake District home of English children's writer Beatrix Potter. Johnson's circuits of culture diagram conceptualizes cultural production and consumption theoretically and is applied to literary tourism. Emphasizing consumers of the touristic experience, qualitative methods are used to assess how people were interpreting the literary place. As a form of cultural communication, this kind of tourism is not only about Beatrix Potter. Rather, the author has been appropriated symbolically as an expression of values for childhood, countryside, authenticity, and heritage preservation. Keywords: literary tourism, cultural studies, heritage, authenticity, meanings and values, rural, urban, Beatrix Potter.

Résumé: Les valeurs culturelles du tourisme littéraire. On définit le tourisme littéraire et examine ses significations sociale et culturelle par moyen d'une étude de cas des visiteurs à la maison, dans la région des lacs, de l'Anglaise Beatrix Potter, auteur de livres d'enfants. Le Modèle de Johnson des circuits de culture, qui conceptualise théoriquement la production et la consommation de la culture, est appliqué au tourisme littéraire. Par des méthodes qualitatives, on examine comment les consommateurs de l'expérience touristique interprètent l'endroit littéraire. Dans ce genre de tourisme, comme forme de communication culturelle, il ne s'agit pas seulement de Beatrix Potter. Cet écrivain devient plutôt un symbole pour exprimer les valeurs de l'enfance, la campagne, l'authenticité et la conservation du patrimoine. Mots-clés: tourisme littéraire, études culturelles, patrimoine, l'authenticité, signification et valeurs, rural, urbain, Beatrix Potter.

INTRODUCTION

In Britain, heritage tourism is a lucrative and rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry. Heritage sites are assiduously promoted and, for overseas travelers particularly, "Old England" has inordinate appeal. While heritage is valued, the meanings of heritage experiences for visitors are less easy to document. Questions of culture and context have become increasingly important in all kinds of social, political,
and economic analyses. In the case of tourism, where communities may adopt new images and identities to stimulate economic development, it is crucial to understand how these meanings may be constructed, communicated, and interpreted. This paper focuses on literary tourism or places celebrated for associations with books or authors. Shakespeare's Stratford, the Brontë's Yorkshire, Hardy's Dorset, and more recently Catherine Cookson's country are all examples of places and/or regions profiting from particular literary associations. Part of the expanding heritage industry, this kind of activity highlights some of the wider links between tourism, culture, and society.

People use tourism experiences to negotiate and redefine other social and cultural values. The empirical material discussed here is drawn from a study of the tourism industry inspired by the Beatrix Potter heritage in the English Lake District (Squire 1992a). Interest in Beatrix Potter not only reflects the popularity of her children's stories and illustrations, many of which were set at Hill Top Farm in the village of Near Sawrey (Figure 1). Rather, Potter also proved to be a catalyst for people to talk about a range of social and cultural issues, including ideas of childhood, cityscape and countryside, and authenticity and heritage preservation. Thus, literary tourism is not simply a function of "literary" influences. As this Beatrix Potter case study illustrates, it is a medium through which a range of cultural meanings and values may be communicated.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Cultural studies research offers a useful way of conceptualizing tourism and tourist experiences. All experiences involve meaning and, similarly, form part of wider processes of cultural production and consumption. A concern with "how social meanings are made" (Corner 1986:61) recurs in the cultural studies literature. But how such meanings may be forged through tourism, and links between tourist activities and wider social structures, are frequently overlooked.

Summarizing trends in cultural studies research, Johnson comments that "we must not limit ourselves to [the analysis of] particular kinds of text, or specialized practice or institutional site. All social practises can be looked at from a cultural point of view" (1986:282–283). This argument formed a basis for Johnson’s "circuits of culture" diagram (Figure 2). Originally developed to synthesize trends in cultural studies research and to identify new research directions, this framework has a range of possible applications. One of these applications lies in developing understandings of the cultural meanings of tourism and tourist experiences.

Through the circuits of culture diagram, Johnson explored theoretical relationships between cultural production and consumption and some of these arguments can easily be adapted to considerations of tourism. The cultural significance of tourism is premised on understanding its role and function in everyday life, and developing an appreciation of how meanings are created, communicated, and interpreted both spatially and temporally. Cultural communication and transformation are an integral part of the Beatrix Potter-inspired tour-
ism industry. As such, the circuits of culture framework suggest a means of conjoining theoretical perspectives with empirical findings to delineate the different dimensions of this kind of touristic experience, while also linking these interpretations with wider social and cultural structures.

Circuits of culture offers a way of conceptualizing processes of cultural communication, not as a result of the influence of a single creative subjective, but as embedded within complex and collective patterns of social interaction. Johnson maintained that from an initial point of production, meaning is transformed at each point along the circuit of culture. Changes in meaning are then expressed through changes in material form. Burgess, for example, adopted this framework to study environmental meanings in the mass media, arguing that "media com-
munications may be theorized as a circuit of cultural forms through which meanings are encoded by specialist groups of producers and decoded in many different ways by the groups who constitute the audiences for those products" (1990:139–140). Similar arguments can be advanced for tourism. Different groups of producers and audiences are also involved in tourism, and it is similarly premised on different meanings, created and interpreted over time and in diverse contexts.

Literary tourism has been noted by a number of writers (Butler 1985, 1986; Curtis 1981, 1985; Lowenthal and Prince 1965; Newby 1981; Pocock 1982, 1987; Ousby 1990; Squire 1988, 1990, 1992b; Zaring 1977). Both theoretically and empirically, however, there remains wide scope for further analysis. The circuits of culture diagram offers a way of beginning to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how such heritage experiences may be represented and interpreted.

The relationship between cultural production and consumption from which circuits of culture is derived is also integral to processes of literary tourism. Although an author produces a book, textual creation is always subject to conditions (the publishing business, for example) and it, thereby, involves various kinds of transformation. Linguistically and visually, the text becomes part of a wider symbolic system, read by different audiences who make sense of it in different ways. Influenced by such varied factors as gender, class, and ethnicity, textual
meanings are incorporated into lived cultures or everyday life. These meanings foster new moments of production. An author’s popularity may create interest in particular places and when a tourist business is developed, new textual forms (advertising, for example) are created and are in turn the subject of new readings.

In the circuits of culture argument, Johnson has also distinguished between public representations and private lives, maintaining that “cultural production is often . . . a process of rendering public a private-action. Cultural consumption is always a process of rendering private again” (1986:286). Once published, a novel becomes public property. But when people incorporate literary meanings into their own lives, the book again fulfills a private function. Similarly, when a literary setting is developed for tourism, the private becomes an object of public scrutiny. As visitors make sense of their encounters with literary places, private meanings are likely to interact with public forms and images.

This diagram suggests how the interrelationships between tourism, culture, and society might be conceptualized. At the same time, though, links can also be drawn between Johnson’s approach and ongoing research in tourism studies. Inspired by MacCannell’s pioneering work (1973, 1976), Cohen’s (1988a, 1988b, 1989) continuing analyses of the meanings of authenticity, and the material and symbolic contexts within which these meanings are produced, set important precedents for arguments developed here. Uzzell (1984), Bennett (1986), and Shields (1990) also ground their textual interpretations in the social and cultural context of tourism development, while a prevailing theme in Urry’s recent work (1988, 1990) is the changing “tourist gaze”; locating “particular tourist practises . . . through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practises” (1990:1–2).

In much of this work, however, the focus has more frequently been on producers of the touristic experience than on its consumers. Little empirical research has considered visitors, focusing on the cultural meanings and values that they associate with their activities. With few exceptions, the analyst has typically mediated and redefined how visitors’ experiences are constructed and communicated. As expressed in their own words, the voices of “ordinary” visitors are rarely heard. In beginning to address such issues, this paper considers the consumers of a particular heritage experience: literary tourists in Beatrix Potter’s Lake District. It explores how these visitors were using the touristic experience not only to connect with elements of “literary” heritage, but also (and often more importantly) as a way of mediating other social and cultural values. By adopting the circuits of culture framework, premised on this idea of cultural transformation and the varied textual readings of different consumers, the paper also attempts to situate such tourism experiences within a context of wider discussions about culture and society.

BEATRIX POTTER TOURISM

In the United Kingdom, literary heritage is widely promoted. The British Tourist Authority has published maps of “Literary Britain”
and places like Shakespeare's Stratford and the Brontë's Yorkshire are recognized internationally. The English Lake District particularly has a long association with writers and artists. Epitomized in the popular imagination by Wordsworth and the Romantic Movement, this tradition is also embodied by Ruskin, De Quincey, and latterly Arthur Ransome, and contemporary novelist Melvyn Bragg. Beatrix Potter can also be added to this list.

Born in London in 1866, Beatrix Potter became attached to the north of England through family holidays. With the success of her first book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in 1902, she invested royalty earnings in a farm property in the Lake District village of Sawrey. Hill Top Farm and the cottages and gardens nearby were subsequently incorporated into her illustrated anthropomorphic stories for children (Taylor 1987, 1988). In later life, Potter moved to the Lake District permanently, becoming a full-time farmer and ardent countryside conservationist. When she died in 1943, she bequeathed her by then substantial property holdings to the National Trust, a private charity and nonprofit conservation organization formed at the end of the 19th century. Today, the National Trust is a major player in Britain's heritage and conservation movement. Its growing membership testifies to public support for its aims. Subsumed within a complex organizational framework, a network of regional and local groups ensures that the Trust wields a powerful role at all levels where decisions about heritage preservation are made (cf. Wright 1987:48-56). Hill Top Farm remains in the care of the National Trust and, preserved exactly as Beatrix Potter left it, is open to the public as a commemorative museum.

Potter's books won her international acclaim and today, this legacy fuels a thriving economic enterprise. Translated into numerous languages, the majority of her stories remain in print, the animal characters are featured on a range of souvenir merchandise and are also used to advertise other commercial products. In the United States, for instance, the "Peter Rabbit" theme has even been appropriated by McDonald's Restaurants (Morse 1991). Correspondingly, Potter's continued popularity is reflected in touristic visits to the Lake District.

Novelist Margaret Drabble has described Beatrix Potter's books as "open[ing] a window into an imaginative world which does not fade with childhood" (1987:265). Yet, as Potter's work imitated life, and because the places she drew and wrote about have been preserved, this imaginative world can be recovered through tourism. This tourism business is centered at Hill Top Farm, the place most closely associated with Potter's life and work, but other attractions have also been developed: self-guided walks, an art gallery, multi-dimensional exhibition, and (under the auspices of local tour operators) Potter inspired excursions and theme holidays.

Although Beatrix Potter is indelibly associated with childhood, these attractions cater primarily to an adult market. At Hill Top, parents complained that there was little to interest children and as tourists, children's experiences were naturally much different from those of adults. For one small boy, the most memorable part of the visit was the ice cream at lunch, while other children searched fruitlessly for
Potter's animal characters. This kind of heritage experience was thus a fundamentally adult concept and Potter's links to childhood reflect the attitudes and values of this adult audience. These are the people who buy the books and merchandise and, ultimately, participate in literary tourism.

Considering the social and cultural meanings of this kind of experience raises questions about methodology. In particular, it highlights the need to pay greater attention to more interpretative approaches, exploring everyday life as individuals themselves experience and explain it (Burgess, Limb and Harrison 1988a; 1988b). Proposals for qualitative analyses in tourism have come from various quarters (Albers and James 1988; Buck 1977, 1978; Cohen 1989; Hartmann 1988; Pearce 1990; Urry 1990; Uzzell 1984). There is great potential, however, to further explore qualitative research agendas, allowing tourists as consumers to describe, in relatively unstructured ways, their impressions and understandings of products and activities.

The findings discussed here are based on random interviews with 626 adult visitors at Hill Top Farm, involving a combination of pre-coded and open-ended queries. While the pre-coded questions facilitated rapid data collection and analysis, more interpretive techniques enabled participants to describe in their own words, and with minimal prompting from the researcher, site impressions, and the visit's interest or importance. This strategy was complemented by four small in-depth discussion groups. Participants were recruited from the British and overseas members of the Beatrix Potter Society visiting the Lake District for a conference in July 1990. Based in London and founded in 1980, the Beatrix Potter Society has over 800 members worldwide, many of whom are American. To preserve anonymity, the names of all group members have been changed. Widely used in market research, groups such as these “provide an essentially social context . . . oblige[ing] participants to take account of other people's views in framing their own responses” (Hedges 1985:72). Correspondingly, they proved useful in developing an understanding of tourism's social and cultural meanings.

Used together, qualitative and quantitative approaches can highlight different facets of the same problem (McCracken 1988; Morgan 1988). In the present case, integrating different methodologies and coding the qualitative material around sets of narrative themes to build analytic structures in the data, suggested one way of situating a particular case study amidst wider patterns of culturally defined attitudes and values (Jones 1985; Strauss 1987). One of these values concerned links between Beatrix Potter inspired tourism and ideas of childhood and family life.

**Happy Childhoods and Cultural Traditions**

Many people pursue tourism activities with family or friends; this was the case with an overwhelming majority (93%) of those interviewed at Hill Top. When individuals were subsequently asked about their reasons for visiting the site, 17% cited a friend or family member's interest. However, less easy to document, is how these relation-
ships stimulate an interest in Potter and how they manifest links between tourism and other social structures.

In both the Hill Top interviews and small discussion groups, people repeatedly used Potter and literary tourism to conceptualize and recapture idealized images of childhood and family life. Following from Johnson's (1986) argument, such associations between Potter and childhood illustrate one of the ways that textual meanings may be incorporated into different contexts, and through tourism, fulfil a range of both public and private functions. For one female English visitor, seeing the real places featured in Beatrix Potter's books brought back "memories of childhood" and allowed her "to get back into fantasy-land again." Many of the scenes depicted in Potter's illustrations are still clearly recognizable both at Hill Top Farm and throughout the surrounding village of Near Sawrey. Although childhood was long past for this woman and thereby envisaged as a kind of fantasy-land, her associations between Potter's books and childhood allowed her to use the visit (and specifically the sight of real settings for some of the books) to tangibly reconnect with aspects of her child-life.

Williams (1973) has written at length about nostalgia for childhood and the lasting significance of childhood memories. The relationship between this kind of nostalgia, its transferal between parent and child, and subsequent enactment through tourism, was described in an especially evocative way by a middle-aged American man on holiday with his wife: "I'm very drawn to [Potter's] paintings. . . . They're a very important part of our children's childhood. Coming here [to Hill Top] is the most deeply moving experience I've had since coming to the UK. It's overwhelming."

In this way, the visit allowed adults to make contact with certain aspects of childhood and their own memories, those associated with their children or even imagined memories. One of the functions of tourism, though, is that it enables people to indulge in dreams and idylls that are set aside when they return home to "ordinary" life. Much of the contemporary appeal of Beatrix Potter's books lies not just in their associations with childhood, but in their depiction of the English countryside as well.

In her stories and illustrations, Potter created idealized images of English country life and she celebrated rural virtues in diverse ways. One of the most pervasive images in her books is that of the garden. In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Peter trespasses in Mr. McGregor's garden, and this setting re-appears in both *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* and the *Flopsy Bunnies*. Gardens are also featured in a number of other books including *Tom Kitten*, *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*, and *Johnny Town-Mouse*. In these stories, Potter draws an evocative portrait of the English cottage garden with its mixture of vegetables and flowers, its stone walls and gates, and the smaller birds and animals to be found within it—sparrows, robins, and mice. Similar images of rustic simplicity are also fostered by the cozy cottage interiors and pretty village and farmyard scenes of *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*, *Tom Kitten*, *Samuel Whiskers*, and *Jemima Puddle-Duck*. Such engaging scenes are integral to Potter's powerful appeal, for her landscapes show few of the more unpleasant realities of rural life.
Links between the tourism setting and images of country childhood were, therefore, important. Interviewees and members of the small groups repeatedly assigned a particular social value to countryside, one indelibly tied to happy childhood memories. In terms of the circuits of culture model, these linkages represent another type of textual reading. As the books were conjoined and indeed frequently subordinated, to a range of other social and cultural issues, new meanings were forged.

Associations between childhood and countryside are sustained by a pervasive cultural tradition, communicated in everything from literature and films to popular music, television, magazines, and advertising (Ward 1978, 1988). In the context of Beatrix Potter-inspired tourism, both the books and the touristic experience were a means for individuals to identify a lost and hence progressively idealized rural past. According to a female Canadian interviewee, “[Potter’s books] probably colored my whole childhood. . . . I think reading those stories made you think of this kind of country. The countryside as it used to be and [now that I see it] really surprisingly still is.”

Sometimes, though, this interrelationship between childhood and country was more fluid in terms of both place and time. A visit to a Lake District farm once owned by Potter, but having no immediate literary connections, was “absolutely wonderful” for Janet, a retired teacher who traveled to the Beatrix Potter conference from the western United States. A demonstration of traditional agricultural techniques, including sheep being sheared by hand, brought back “memories that . . . are just very beautiful and special. You don’t see those things now. It’s all so mechanized.” As Janet’s father was a sheep rancher, the demonstration allowed her to “re-live” particular childhood experiences.

Many people developed these sorts of connections between Potter, the visit, and personal family history. Significantly, tangible “literary” links were often ill-defined, thereby highlighting one of the main tenets of Johnson’s argument. Cultural transformations are fluid and from the point of initial production (in this case, textual creation by Beatrix Potter), various other influences can play important roles. Hence, the resulting textual readings by different audiences will not necessarily reflect uniquely literary influences, and the texts and the visit were not an end in themselves. Rather, Potter was more frequently a starting point for other kinds of introspection.

North American visitors, for instance, often coupled the England they encountered through Beatrix Potter tourism with ancestors who had emigrated to the New World. As Isobel, a retired American teacher put it: “It just feels kind of good being here.” Others spoke about the importance of perpetuating an English family heritage. As one couple at Hill Top said, Potter and the visit “enlightens American children about their links to England. . . . it’s bridging the English past. . . . It’s part of our tradition, our memories, our heritage.” English visitors made similar allusions, although usually in terms of more immediate family heritage. As one man described his impressions of Hill Top: “it’s typically old-fashioned like [my] Gran used to have. An era I was sort of brought up in, so it’s familiar.” Further, a woman with young children commented: “what I say to my children is that
when I was a child, country people used to live like this. I suppose it's nostalgic for me because none of those cottages that I remember when going to visit aunties' houses exist any more."

This nostalgia for English country life was nearly universal. The power that Potter's stories and illustrations seem to hold for so many people, and the way that the Hill Top setting captures elements of this rural idyll were, therefore, fused with larger social and cultural ideologies. Following from the circuits of culture diagram, Potter has become part of a wider symbolic system and correspondingly, textual meanings were modified and integrated into lived cultures. Although different visitors with different value systems necessarily made different meanings from the touristic experience, certain interpretations, even cross-culturally, prevailed. In Japan, for example, Beatrix Potter has not typically been a part of childhood or family tradition. Yet Japanese interest in Potter continues to grow, partly because of widespread fascination for rural England and the possibility of experiencing firsthand that way of life through tourism.

Urban and Rural Lives

Beatrix Potter's books have been appropriated and transformed symbolically to fulfil a range of social and cultural needs. In the process, though, ideas of countryside, derived from the books and subsequently projected onto the visit, were also premised on the relationship between country and city, authenticity and heritage preservation.

Countryside has traditionally been defined in relation to other places and settings, usually the modern, the urban, and the industrial. A dominant culture of rurality has resulted (Barrell 1980; Williams 1973). For tourists, the countryside (or indeed heritage generally) has become something to gaze upon, often with admiration, but that does not require great personal involvement. Urban visitors typically experience countryside in discrete segments, often from the vantage of car or tour bus and framed by vehicle windows. In this way, visits to places like Hill Top become part of a larger stage set and help to sustain socially defined expectations of what rural life and English heritage should be like.

Notions of country. The links between Beatrix Potter inspired tourism, childhood, and countryside have already been noted. But, in a larger sense, the touristic experience also helped people to fulfill certain fantasies about countryside in general and England in particular. Here, again, both Potter and the touristic exposure were subsumed within a larger symbolic framework as people negotiated literary associations to make some powerful statements about other social and cultural values. To a Canadian woman, "It's essentially English. The absolutely quintessential English atmosphere that has always been in all the books . . . you've ever read"; and to a male American visitor, "It's all old England."

These ideas of "old England," "English atmosphere," and "Englishness" have their origins in other cultural traditions. These traditions reflect an intricate combination of historical fact and fantasy, perpetu-
ally mediated and distorted by aspects of contemporary experience (Williams 1973). Because circuits of culture is about meanings and communication, the way that Potter has been incorporated into such culturally defined ways of seeing the English countryside provides graphic illustration of the various producers, consumers, and interactions that underlie interpretations of cultural form. As these meanings and values for Beatrix Potter intersect with such wider cultural traditions, however, they are also premised on certain accepted interpretations of rural life.

This pervasive rural idyll was aptly described by Ben, a British librarian in one of the groups: “I think people have a . . . very romantic view of England . . . and they expect [it] to be all a land of . . . quiet life and countryside . . . and very nice gardens.” In interpretations like this one, there is seldom any recognition of the realities that sustain the picturesque scenes encountered through a transitory touristic visit. Managed by Potter and latterly the National Trust, Hill Top has always been a working farm, occupied by a tenant farmer. For most visitors, though, agricultural labor remained largely invisible, for it is simply part of the background against which ideas about countryside have been developed. Jean, a writer from London asserted that the farm did not “intrude upon the house”; while Catherine, a book collector from the Midlands, saw the sheep and ducks as “more or less all laid on with the ornaments.” Marcie, a small business owner from California, described work as “going on around Hill Top,” clearly distinguishing between labor and the attraction presented to visitors.

These perceptions of countryside are derived from distinctions between the rural and the urban and a wider value system ascribing virtue to country settings, while rating cities negatively. Both visitors and group members repeatedly invoked such comparisons to describe their impressions of Hill Top. As an American woman put it: “Coming from a city, the country is very appealing. I feel so peaceful here.” This view was echoed by Sandra, a Canadian librarian: “When I think of the country, it’s peace and green and quiet. Cities are so intense.” In the groups, all the participants lived in urban or suburban environments; therefore, countryside had become something to be experienced vicariously, usually on holiday. Teresa, living outside New York City, made this point directly: “Even the farmland that I grew up on is all built up with houses . . . and the idea that there can be a little secret corner in the world . . . where these animals live and they’re not dodging . . . cars as they run across the street . . . is important.” This little world is not only about Beatrix Potter, so explicitly “literary” links are again less substantive. Rather, both Potter’s books and, more tangibly, the visit to Hill Top Farm were appropriated symbolically for other purposes. In this instance, they were taken to offer temporary escape from a variety of external pressures: everyday life, modernity, and urban industrialization.

**Authentic heritage.** This escape from modernity through tourism, and the ideas about countryside upon which it is in part based, reflect larger questions of both heritage preservation and authenticity. In the context of circuits of culture, such questions represent yet another kind
of differential textual reading. At Hill Top, the Beatrix Potter heritage has been preserved by the National Trust to commemorate and replicate aspects of the author’s life and work. Various items depicted in her illustrations are on display and “picture book” settings are immediately recognizable. Preserved literary heritage, however, correspondingly forms part of a wider dialogue about the meanings of country life in contemporary, often urban culture. Specifically, this dialogue is associated with an ideology of preservation that unequivocally fuses the past with the rural. In Britain particularly, the rural past is the source of a flourishing tourism industry, but the role of the tourists (consumers) who perpetuate it by seeking authentic heritage experiences is often overlooked.

Authenticity has been described as “a pivotal concept for the analysis of contemporary tourism” (Cohen 1989:31). Its links with Hill Top Farm, Beatrix Potter and her texts are developed more fully below. However, it does remain difficult if not impossible to proffer consistent explanations for the meanings of authentic and inauthentic experiences. MacCannell’s ideas about “staged authenticity” have been applied in various contexts and need no elaboration here (Buck 1977, 1978; MacCannell 1976). Subsequent work has raised provocative questions about how and by whom authenticity should be defined. A study of visitors to historic theme parks in Australia, for instance, gave no indication that people valued authentic experiences any less because those experiences had been created for them in manufactured settings (Moscardo and Pearce 1986). As Cohen suggests, “mass tourism does not succeed because it is a colossal deception, but because most tourists entertain concepts of “authenticity” which are much looser than those entertained by intellectuals and experts” (1988a:383).

At Hill Top, 42% of the people interviewed voluntarily used words like “authenticity” or “authentic atmosphere” to describe what they liked best about the site. Although the house and garden have clearly been preserved, (both as Potter’s home and as a recognized image of rurality), most visitors were oblivious to the setting’s inherent artificiality. As a woman from the south of England commented: “[Hill Top is] an absolutely blissful place. Everything is so real. It’s turned fantasy into reality.” Or as an American man put it: “It’s like a physical photograph of a time. . . . Genuine. The complete reverse of Disney. It’s an actual, genuine setting rather than manufactured.”

This last comment embraces several different notions of authenticity. Although Hill Top is a National Trust property, formally organized and presented to the paying public as an attraction, it is not seen to be “fake” in the same way as sites inspired by the Walt Disney industry. Eco (1986) has commented at length on this relationship between tourism and aspects of the fantasy/reality spectrum. In an eclectic journey across contemporary America, conjoining “completely real” attractions with the “completely fake,” Eco notes that “everything looks real, and therefore it is real” (1986:7,16). In a similar vein, many visitors at Hill Top emphasized the value and importance of experiencing tangible living history, identifying preservation as a hallmark of authentic heritage. As a young English woman commented: “[Hill Top] is very well preserved and authentic. You really get a sense
of how Beatrix Potter lived." Or as an American man explained: "A setting of extreme natural beauty has been nurtured. It's not blighted."

These excerpts substantiate arguments that authenticity is a social construct that may be negotiated. The American's use of the word "nurtured" is especially interesting. Although in preserving history, the National Trust has altered and reinterpreted it, preservation remains authentic because it is necessary to retain the valued setting. Indeed, part of the value that Hill Top holds for visitors lies in how it has been preserved, to conform not only to associations with Potter and the settings for her books, but also to popular ideas of the rural past. As a woman from London said: "there's nothing modern about it. . . . it harks back to an earlier time when people were more innocent and had simple pleasures." From an American perspective, the setting also "counters a plastic society [for] the real things in life which are important are right [here]."

This image, temporarily captured through tourism, results from nostalgia for a bygone age (Hewison 1987). For such impressions to persist, history must be suspended and distorted. Visitors repeatedly emphasized the lived-in feeling of the house, claiming that they had a sensation of going back in time. According to an American teacher, "It's nice and tidy. You just imagine [Potter’s home] to have stood still in time. The back door's always open as it never rains." This view of heritage was rarely challenged. Among more than 600 people interviewed, only two overtly questioned the basis of the "authentic" setting presented to visitors. In the words of an American student: "at that time you always imagine people living in more squalid conditions than this." For the majority, however, it was much easier to adopt a "tidy" and one dimensional view of history, immune from inclement weather and other potentially unpleasant realities.

It must be emphasized, though, that visitors were not duped by the quite obviously staged authenticity of Hill Top. As Wright suggests in another context, "everyday life always starts with the person living it" and individuals mediate the meanings of their lived experiences (1987: 8). At Hill Top, visitors were actively negotiating and transforming the meanings of authenticity in attempts to fulfill expectations about what Potter's home, the setting for her books, and the version of English country life within which these ideas are embedded, should be like. In the summer, Hill Top is a busy site and visitor pressures are such that the National Trust has been forced to restrict site advertising and hours of opening. Many people complained about lack of parking facilities, traffic congestion on narrow approach roads, overcrowding, and time spent waiting in line to tour the house. Such concerns were, however, consciously separated from discussions of the heritage experience. A young man from an industrial city in the English Midlands mused: "It's a dream. This is where you'd like to be. No noise from the road outside." To an American man, "modern technology excluded, it's a very quiet place."

Therefore, progress and manifestations of "modern" life were consistently denied, while heritage was privileged through a selective vision reducing the object of tourist interest to something enjoyed on holiday, yet distinct from everyday life. The role of overseas visitors in perpetu-
ating this selective view of Potter’s home and more generally of Britain, merits special attention. It highlights again how literary meanings can be appropriated symbolically and linked to other social and cultural structures. As Louise, a primary school teacher from the American south explained:

I think Beatrix Potter represents what lots of adults would like to think England is like. We have a friend who brings [tours] to England and he says, I’m only going to show them the real England, the beautiful rural areas. And you have to admit, unfortunately, that if it weren’t for the National Trust you wouldn’t have this countryside this way. It’s an unnatural development which we all cherish because this is the way we’d like it to be.

The National Trust is clearly identified as the creator of authentic heritage experiences and such settings “unfortunately” must be recognized as “unnatural” developments. Still, preservation succeeds (and reaps economic return), because it meets certain cultural needs. Places like Potter’s home present the past as many people, North Americans particularly, would like to see it. Cindy, a Canadian college student, also made this point: “I had a very romantic view of England and when you come to London . . . it’s kind of destroyed . . . but as soon as you come up here [to the Lake District] it’s restored.”

Authenticity is, thus, a fluid concept that on the basis of different textual readings, individuals adapt and redefine to suit their own purposes. Literary tourism is one medium that allows people to live out certain fantasies, not only about favorite books or authors, but also a range of other culturally constructed attitudes and values. Not least such heritage experiences provide a way for individuals to revise reality and to perpetually modify the present in the guise of the past. Visits to Beatrix Potter’s home are only one expression of this process and this case study embraces a range of heritage issues. Commenting on the growth of Britain’s heritage industry, one writer has expressed fears that “the whole country [is becoming] one big open air museum, and you just join it as you get off at Heathrow” (Hewison 1987:24). In social and cultural terms, the meanings that people make from this heritage industry are only beginning to be explored.

CONCLUSIONS

Culture has been described as the “medium through which social change is experienced, contested and constituted” (Cosgrove and Jackson 1987:95). If this is the case, tourism must begin to play a larger part in such discussions. Tourism is about meanings. In adopting cultural studies perspectives to analyze literary tourism, this paper has pointed to some of the links between touristic activities and a variety of personal, social, and cultural values.

The tourism industry inspired by the Beatrix Potter heritage in the English Lake District highlights how the meanings of this kind of activity are neither static, nor uniquely a reflection of “literary” associa-
tions and influences. Rather, Potter's stories were appropriated symbolically as starting points for another sphere of values about happy childhoods and nostalgia for English country life, ideas about the rural and the urban, and authenticity and heritage preservation. These meanings were defined by different people in different social contexts. Indeed, while visitors from the United Kingdom liked to think of Potter as uniquely English, she has in reality been adopted and celebrated internationally. As a young Japanese woman mused: "Beatrix Potter is very famous in Japan. Is she famous here [in England] too?"

Johnson's (1986) circuits of culture framework offers a useful way of synthesizing and understanding such cultural transformations theoretically. As developed here, its potential applications for tourism have only begun to be explored. The model highlights the myriad of producers, consumers, and meanings underlying interpretations of a cultural form like tourism. In the process, it also helps to enrich understandings of tourism as a social construct with important links to other cultural values. In conjunction with greater use of qualitative methodologies, circuits of culture suggests some exciting possibilities for future research. Beatrix Potter-inspired tourism is but one illustration of larger processes of cultural communication. Therefore, more empirical work is needed. Cultural consumption and the meanings that visitors negotiate from touristic experiences have been emphasized here, but the role of producers who facilitate the experience merits further scrutiny. Similarly, more attention could be devoted to how tourism meanings and values change over time (in terms of both production and consumption) and how such changes may be expressed and reflected in the built environment.

In focusing on cultural consumption and how visitors were interpreting their experiences in the literary place, this paper has considered tourism to be a form of cultural expression and communication involving the appropriation of images between different symbolic systems. In adopting the Beatrix Potter setting for diverse purposes, visitors were consciously indulging in escapist fantasies, filtering out those elements that did not conform to the dictates of popular mythology. As an American woman put it: "We see what we want to see. It's what [we] expect and then [we] go home." Tourism caters to and trades in such expectations. Contemporary fascination with heritage and the past, of which Beatrix Potter tourism is but one expression, results from shared cultural understandings, compared and contrasted against other realities, often modern urban and industrial life. Produced and consumed with a social context, these meanings are integral to what contemporary tourism is all about.

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