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Pippi Goes to the Fair

Astrid Lindgren

Why don't we try taking a childlike perspective on theatre? Young readers world-wide have been fascinated by the rascally and wilful girl, Pippi Longstocking, who never conforms to reality as we know it. Whenever she steps out of her own little world at Villekulla Cottage, she turns the familiar upside down. This excerpt is surprising in that Pippi experiences theatrical fiction as reality, while the audience perceives her intervention in events on stage as fiction. We smile because Pippi is so charmingly naive. The drama on stage touches her so much that she feels compelled to intervene. Associations with Bertolt Brecht's Aesthetics of Theatre seem appropriate, inviting perhaps a reassessment of the role played by the naïve in Brecht's concept of theatre.

Pippi Goes to the Fair

Outside a tent nearby a man stood shouting: 'Another performance starting in five minutes! You must not miss this unique drama! *The Murder of the Countess Aurora*, or *Who is Creeping in the Bushes*?'

'If anyone's creeping in the bushes, we must find out who it is straight away,' said Pippi to Tommy and Annika. 'Let's go in!'

Pippi went up to the box-office. 'Can I go in half price if I promise to look with one eye only?' she enquired, with a sudden attach of economy. The ticket lady would not hear of it. 'I don't see any bushes, and no one creeping in them, either,' said Pippi crossly when she and Tommy and Annika had placed themselves in the front row close to the curtain. 'It hasn't started yet,' said Tommy. At that moment the curtain went up, and they could see the Countess Aurora pacing the floor of the stage, wringing her hands and looking very worried. Pippi followed it all with keen interest. 'I think she's unhappy about something,' she said to Tommy and Annika, 'or else she's got a safety-pin sticking into her.'

The Countess Aurora *was* unhappy. She raised her eyes to the ceiling and said in a plaintive voice:

'Is there anyone so unhappy as I? My children have been taken from me, and my husband had disappeared, and I myself am surrounded by scoundrels and bandits who want to kill me.'

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'This is terrible to hear,' said Pippi, and her eyes went rather red. 'I wish I were dead already,' cried the Countess Aurora. Then Pippi burst into a flood of tears. 'Please don't say that!' she sobbed. 'Things will get better, you'll see. I'm sure the children will turn up, and perhaps you can have another husband. There are so ma-any me-en in the wo-orld,' she hiccupped between sobs.

Then the theatre manager came up to Pippi – he was the man who had been standing outside the tent, shouting – and said that if she did not stop all that noise, she would have to leave the theatre immediately.

'I'll try,' said Pippi, rubbing her eyes.

It was a terribly exciting play. Tommy kept turning his cap round and round and inside out from sheet nervousness, and Annika's hands were clasped tight. Pippi's eyes were wet and did not leave the Countess Aurora for a minute. Things were going from bad to worse for the poor Countess. There she walked in the palace garden, suspecting nothing. Suddenly there was a shriek. It came from Pippi. She had caught sight of a man behind a tree, and he was looking far from friendly. The Countess Aurora seemed to have notices the rustling, too, because she said in a frightened whisper:

'Who is creeping in the bushes?'

'I can tell you,' said Pippi eagerly, 'it's a sly, horrid man with a black moustache. Hide in the wood-shed and lock the door, for goodness' sake!'

Now the theatre manager came up to Pippi and said that she must go at once.

'And leave the Countess Aurora alone with that ruffian? You don't know me!' said Pippi.

On the stage the play continued. Suddenly the horrid man rushed out of the bushes and threw himself at the Countess Aurora.

'Your last hour has come,' he hissed between his teeth.

'We'll see about that,' said Pippi taking a leap on to the stage. She seized the bandit round the waist and threw him into the audience. She was still weeping.

'How could you?' she sobbed. 'What've you got against the Countess, I'd like to know? Think of it! She's lost her children and her husband. She's quite al-o-o-one!'

She went up to the Countess who had collapsed on a garden seat.

'You can come and live with me at Villekulla Cottage if you like,' she said soothingly. Sobbing loudly, Pippi stumbled out of the theatre, closely followed by Tommy and Annika – and by the theatre manager. He shook his fists at her. The people in the theatre, however, clapped their hands and thought it was a splendid performance.

When they were outside Pippi blew her nose loudly and said:

'My goodness, that was a sad affair! Let's do something to cheer ourselves up!'

Bibliography

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