

2FPL  
Michael Chekhov

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Fairy Tale - The Mother - from H. C. Anderson  
told by Michael Chekhov

FAIRY TALE THEMES  
NATURALISM AND REALISM

Improvisation: The scene is a small, dark room in which a mother is sitting by the side of the cradle of her sick child - she has sat there for three days and nights watching every moment. When the child breathes with difficulty, it is as though she herself breathes, so close is she to the child. A half-sleep falls on her.

When she sleeps, all is peaceful and quiet, and only a big clock ticks. A small, tiny door opens, and we see a very old, very strange, tired beggar coming in. He bends over the child's cradle, looks at it with understanding eyes, following certain things which he sees, waiting for the moment; and when it comes, he moves to the clock and stops it. Full silence. The beggar takes the child, which is now dead, envelops it in his cloak, and, as a wise, strange man walks out of the house with the child. It was Death which took the child. The mother, being asleep, begins to sing, opens her eyes and sees the cradle empty. She understands what has happened. Take the scene profoundly, but rely on the feeling of form.

To be naturalistic is to resemble nature as it is outside of us. To resemble our bodies and everyday life psychology; to photograph, as it were, the life - this we call naturalism. To be realistic means that everything which often does



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not exist in nature but in pure imagination can become real through our creative activity. We must give reality to the things which are not naturalistic. Therefore, all fairy tales must be real - it must be a realistic performance - because of the inner creative power of the actor, it must become real.

But the danger lies that we sometimes forget that these things will become real only if the artist gives them the reality. We start sometimes with the wrong feeling. We feel that it [the fairy tale] is unreality, and we rely upon this unreality for imaginative and fantastic things. In our school we deny unreal performances, but we never deny imaginative fantasy, and things which don't exist in nature, but they have to be true and real. On the other hand, we deny mere photography of nature.

We must avoid two things - to become more and more photographic or to become more and more unreal. Everything on the stage is real. There is a very fine way between mere naturalism and unbridled unreality. Fantasy, through our art, becomes reality. It is the same old conflict between mysticism and reality on the stage. The terms are wrong. The deepest mystical event must be performed on the stage as real as the chair, then everyone will accept it because it is real. There are no limits for the imagination, if we understand the difference between reality and naturalism. This middle way allows us to perform everything.