

Tivoli Gardens and Hans Christian Andersen: A Tale of Confluence

Story-based amusement parks and literary playgrounds are now coming into their own as witnessed by the tremendous success of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which is now the most popular attraction at Universal Orlando. However, the history of story-based amusement parks can be traced back to 1843 with the opening of Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. Initially intended to function as a “pleasure garden” for the residents of Copenhagen, Tivoli Gardens gradually came to be associated with fairy tales in part because of the influence of Hans Christian Andersen. An examination of this history shows that Tivoli Gardens had an impact on Andersen’s fairy tales while Andersen’s fairy tales had an impact on the development of Tivoli Gardens. In many ways, this is a tale of confluence.

The founder of Tivoli Gardens, Georg Carstensen, and Andersen knew each other through business connections, and Andersen followed Carstensen’s plans to build Tivoli Gardens. Andersen took a special interest in Carstensen’s plan to include a Chinese pavilion as one of the attractions. Andersen visited Tivoli Gardens during its first season, and he especially liked the whimsical Chinese pavilion, which was designed by the Danish architect H. C. Stilling. Inspired by this visit, Andersen wrote an original fairy tale titled “The Nightingale.” Andersen set this fairy tale in China, and he used the Tivoli Garden’s Chinese pavilion as the model for the Emperor’s palace.

Over the history of Tivoli Gardens, Andersen’s fairy tales became incorporated into the park’s programming and attractions. The theater that operates as part of Tivoli Gardens regularly includes productions based on Andersen’s fairy tales. Also, Tivoli Gardens now includes a seven-minute dark ride called The Flying Trunk in which riders board a trunk-shaped vehicle that takes them on a tour of scenes from thirty-two of Andersen’s fairy tales.

The success of Tivoli Gardens inspired other amusement park developers to incorporate story-based features. The most notable example is Walt Disney, who visited Tivoli Gardens in 1951 and drew on his experiences when he designed and built Disneyland.