

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

The Emperor's New Clothes

A theatrical production of the story 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. The scene is set in a grand, ornate room with golden, patterned curtains. In the foreground, a man with a beard and a crown sits on a golden throne, wearing a long purple robe and a gold chain. He looks towards the camera with a serious expression. Behind him, three other men stand. The man on the left wears a red and gold turban and a green and orange robe, holding a sword. The woman in the middle wears a yellow turban and an orange and white robe, with her hands raised in a gesture of surprise or alarm. The man on the right wears a yellow turban and a blue and yellow robe, holding a sword. The background features golden, ornate wall decorations.

Adapted by Max Bush
From the story by Hans Christian Andersen

The Emperor's New Clothes

Fairy tale. Adapted by Max Bush. From the tale by Hans Christian Andersen. Cast: 2 to 3m., 1 to 2w., 1 either gender. This adaptation of *The Emperor's New Clothes* incorporates some aspects of Andersen's life—his passion for acting, his love of theatre, his mother's determination to help her son achieve his life's aspirations. Andersen was born a peasant. He grew up a playful child who loved his toy theatre and frequently improvised songs and stories. People said that his acting talents would do nothing but hamper him in the pursuit of a rational job. He wanted to be an actor, and the theatre became his favorite place—an odd preoccupation for a boy, but he contended: "I am not like other boys." The weavers in this adaptation are two actors, a mother and son; their acting talents come into play as they pretend to weave the "magic" cloth. As they improvise their plot, the hilarious results reveal to the audience, and finally the emperor himself, the extent of the emperor's self-absorbed vanity. Excellent four-actor touring piece. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 55 minutes. Code: E87.*

Children's Theatre of Charlotte, Charlotte, N.C., featuring (l-r) Scott Miller, Leslie Ann Giles, Tanya McClellan and Stephen Seay.
Photo: Meredith Sutton. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN: 978-1-61959-049-6



www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing
Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

© Dramatic Publishing Company

The Emperor's New Clothes

Adapted by
MAX BUSH

From the story by
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXV by
MAX BUSH

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-049-6

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the following for their invaluable help in the creation of the script:

Jeff Gruszewski, Brian M. Everitt, Deborah Schakel,
CJ Namenye Wood, Joshua Watkin and the cast and
crew of the Charlotte production.

To Mark Sutton

This version of *The Emperor's New Clothes* was commissioned by Children's Theatre of Charlotte and opened in September 2014 with the following cast and crew:

Cast:

Tanya McClellan Captain
Stephen Seay Emperor
Leslie Ann Giles Louise
Scott Miller Nicolas

Crew:

Director Mark Sutton
Scenic Designer Tim Parati
Costume Designer Paula Garofalo
Sound Designer Monica Falatic
Properties Designer Peter Smeal
Lighting Designer Eric Winkenwerder
Stage Manager Dallas Landrum
Assistant Director Andrew Ontiveros

The Emperor's New Clothes

CHARACTERS

EMPEROR: The emperor.

CAPTAIN: Captain of the guards, either gender.

NICOLAS: An adolescent actor.

LOUISE: Nicolas' mother.

TIME: Many years ago.

PLACE: In and around the Emperor's castle.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Hans Christian Andersen was born a peasant. His mother, a beggar as a child, worked as a washerwoman, while his father, a shoemaker, died while Hans was a child. Painfully frustrated in his own life's aspirations, Hans' father demanded his wife promise to help their son, Hans, become whatever he wanted to be, no matter how silly it was.

Hans grew up a dreamy, playful child. He loved his toy theatre and frequently improvised songs, stories and puppets. People said of his talents in singing, acting, dancing and drawing that they would do nothing but hamper him in the pursuit of some rational job such as tailoring, or, like his father, cobbling.

He wanted to be an actor. The theatre became his favorite place. An odd preoccupation for a boy, but he contended, whatever anyone said about him, that, "I am not like other boys."

People warned him that he was too thin to be an actor. Tall and angular, large hands and feet, a touch of the grotesque hung about him. People called him "Swampplant." And he was clever. "Too clever to live," someone said of him. But he said of himself—the Ugly Duckling—at age 14, "I shall become famous. That's the way it happens. First one must endure terrible adversity, then one becomes famous."

He became an actor. He wrote plays for the theatre throughout his life. He grew into an itinerant storyteller, touring the Royal Houses of Europe, singing, reciting, reading his tales to kings, queens, princes, princesses and everyone else.

Andersen's fairy tales have been translated into more than 125 languages. They have inspired numerous motion pictures, ballets and, of course, plays for the theatre that he loved.

POSTFACE

Part of growing up is learning to lie. To be polite, to avoid conflict, to spare ourselves embarrassment, to get what we want, sometimes we bend the truth. We justify it one way or another. When we don't want to hurt someone's feelings, we tell what is called a "white lie." Then, of course, there's deliberate denial of the truth and outright deceit. Politics, religion, health care, the evening news, Wikipedia—it's nearly impossible to determine with any certainty what's true and what's not. I think we can all agree, however, that innocent children shouldn't go hungry or suffer unnecessarily, that every child deserves a roof over his head and a warm bed to sleep in. Yet we know this isn't the reality of the world in which we live. Sadly, poverty prevails. The long-held capitalist axiom that the grossly inequitable distribution of the world's resources will eventually stabilize itself is obviously not true. On the contrary, the income gap continues to widen with the richest 1% of the population now holding more than 40% of the nation's wealth.

Lucky for us, the theatre is a place where we are supposed to be able to talk about these things, where we can laugh and cry about them together—ironically, a realm in which illusions, fantasies and tall tales serve to reveal the truth about what it means to be human. Both the pure and the corrupt, the selfless and the greedy, the beautiful and the hideous—all have an appropriate place in our stories. And sometimes the undeniable truth comes forth in the blunt honesty of a child who simply calls it as she sees it, who doesn't realize she is committing an indiscretion, who has yet to be manipulated into playing along with the grown-up game of complicity.

“What do riches mean to me? What are parades and pageantry?”

For better or for worse, however, the theatre world tends to be a mutual admiration society. Everyone praises just about everything. Given that there are so many egos in our field, we tend to be

overly complimentary regarding the quality of the work we see and, worse, incapable of objectivity about the shows in which we are involved. Having worked as an actor and director in the TYA field for a long time (for many years before I ever heard that acronym), I have, of course, been lucky to work on many productions that I truly felt to be transformational works of art, but I have also been involved with others that I knew were not, occasionally even some of which I was somewhat ashamed. Yet one quickly becomes very unpopular when one shares candid critical observations about the work of one's own peers.

For several years before Max Bush offered us the opportunity to produce *The Emperor's New Clothes*, I had come to refer to this infuriatingly habitual affliction within our field as "The Emperor's New Clothes." I am so glad that with this smart script Max has chosen to confront the destructive and insidious nature of self-deception. If we cannot detach ourselves and our fragile vanities from our efforts as artists, if we consider everything to be wonderful by the sheer fact of our having created it, we can never hope to improve upon our mistakes, to evolve toward more sincere, more effective, more potent work. Then sadly, as in the less-than-fictional reality created in Max's script, it is the general public who is most shortchanged.

Fortunately for us all, there are people who do care, who prioritize empathy and honesty and teach their children to speak out. I love that in adapting this well-known story, Max has given us not only the vain and selfish Emperor, but also a clever mother and son, characters who use their wits and talents to make their world a better place.

—Mark Sutton
Associate Artistic Director
Children's Theatre of Charlotte
May 2015

The Emperor's New Clothes

AT RISE: *The throne room of the castle; the floors and furniture littered with clothes. Boxes, wardrobes and dressing screens line the walls. The throne and a full length mirror are situated so the EMPEROR can see himself when on the throne.*

(CAPTAIN enters, calling. CAPTAIN is dressed in uniform and carries an impressive sword at his [or her] side. He also carries a large hat.)

CAPTAIN. Emperor! Your petitioners from the East have arrived! Sire? They gave me this hat as a gift. *(He carefully looks behind a screen.)* Sire, are you ... ? *(He looks about, sees a heap of clothes on the throne. Thinking the EMPEROR might be underneath them, he carefully lifts them.)* Emperor, your petitioners have arrived ... *(He yanks all the clothes off the throne and tosses them onto a box.)* The Emperor is in his clothes closet. *(Trumpets sound.)* Ah, here he comes. "How do I look?"

EMPEROR *(entering, dressed in an extravagant gown)*. How do I look?

CAPTAIN *(aside)*. How did I know? *(Aloud, bowing.)* As magnificent as your royal self, sire.

EMPEROR. A clever answer, my young Captain, but I will have the truth from you. For my speech today, I shouldn't appear too *(Animating each description.)* rich or too poor, too glorious or too humble. And that hat—

(CAPTAIN puts it on his own head.)

EMPEROR (*cont'd*). I would not wear to a mud fight.

(*CAPTAIN throws it away.*)

CAPTAIN. The petitioners from the East have waited all morning to see you.

EMPEROR. But what of this gown?

CAPTAIN. Richer than the other three, but ...

EMPEROR. What?

CAPTAIN. The wrong color.

EMPEROR. No!

CAPTAIN. It makes your hair appear grey. And your waist seem large.

EMPEROR. Me, fat? People are rioting in the North because they say they lack food. I must look slender, and I will not wear this if it doesn't glorify me. (*Looks in the mirror.*)

CAPTAIN. This gown, (*Taking one off the box.*) brought in today from the West, may be just the image of your speech.

EMPEROR. Red? Again?

CAPTAIN. Red is strong on you. The women love you in red.

EMPEROR (*groans, grimaces*). But ...

CAPTAIN. And now, sire, will you meet your petitioners while you decide?

EMPEROR. Yes, yes, announce them. (*He sits in his throne and arranges his gown.*)

CAPTAIN (*moves to the entrance and announces formally*). Louise and Nicolas, from the East!

(*LOUISE and NICOLAS enter carrying a large trunk. They put the trunk down, and LOUISE moves quickly to EMPEROR. They are obviously peasants, looking and acting even more peasant-like for their purposes.*)

LOUISE (*kneeling to EMPEROR*). Oh, your majesty, bless you for seeing us.

(*EMPEROR holds out his hand. She takes it and kisses it.*)

LOUISE (*cont'd*). Bless you.

EMPEROR. You are welcome.

LOUISE. Oh! The Emperor has welcomed us! I can't believe it! (*To NICOLAS.*) I told you he'd see us, Nicolas. He's a man for his people. (*Kisses his hand again.*) A great one you are, sire, to see such humble folk in your magnificent castle.

EMPEROR. No one is more important than you.

LOUISE. Bless you!

NICOLAS. We thank you greatly. From our hearts, and deeply, too.

EMPEROR. What is your petition?

LOUISE (*rising*). Oh, now there's a sad story, sire. My son— isn't he a handsome young man ...

NICOLAS. Oh, mother ...

LOUISE. So much like his dead father only different.

CAPTAIN. What is your petition, woman?

LOUISE. We had a tragedy, my lord. A fire—

NICOLAS (*eagerly*). We wrote you letters about a theatre that burned.

CAPTAIN. You remember, sire. The theatre that lacked money to rebuild after a fire. (*No response.*) And we granted your wish.

LOUISE. I'm sure someone made a mistake, your highness. The gold you so generously sent, was not enough.

NICOLAS. Not nearly enough.

EMPEROR. The people are revolting in the North because they say their children are hungry. My soldiers lack uniforms and equipment. Tell me, how can I say to my people I've spent my treasury on a theatre. On pretending.

LOUISE. We don't know. We are simple folk, as you can see. Surely in your great wisdom, you could find a way to help my son. He's a talent, sire, in acting and singing and storytelling.

NICOLAS. Oh, Mother . . .

LOUISE. He can sing sweetly, what we call "lyrically."

NICOLAS (*singing sweetly to EMPEROR*).

"Oh, what do riches mean to me?

What are parades and pageantry."

EMPEROR. This will do nothing but hamper him in the pursuit of some important job such as tailoring or weaving.

LOUISE. He sings opera.

NICOLAS (*jumping on the trunk, singing opera style*).

"Oh, what do riches mean to me?

What are parades and pageantry."

LOUISE. He recites tragical poetry tragically.

NICOLAS (*recites*).

"Oh, what do riches mean to me?

What are parades and pageantry."

CAPTAIN. Always to the same words; a dull boy.

LOUISE. He dances—

(LOUISE throws open the trunk, tosses him a tambourine, takes out a woodwind and begins to play while NICOLAS dances.)

CAPTAIN. Fortunately, without the words.

NICOLAS (*as he dances*).

“Oh, what do riches mean to me?
What are parades and pageantry.”

LOUISE. And he can act—

EMPEROR. There is more?

LOUISE. Oh, yes, my lord. He can act the entire story of Hercules saving poor Anna from the sea monster—by himself—taking all the parts.

CAPTAIN. His majesty has seen enough to be able to decide—

(EMPEROR gestures for CAPTAIN to be quiet and then turns to NICOLAS.)

EMPEROR. Sea monster ... *(He considers this.)* Continue.

NICOLAS. See, my lord, the wind whistling *(He whistles as the wind. LOUISE will also supply sound effects for the story with a tambourine.)* and the sea crashing against the rocky shore, *(He sounds the crashing sea.)* and Hercules himself boldly approaching the maiden Anna. The sea monster, ready to devour her, lies waiting; hidden.

EMPEROR *(intrigued)*. Where?

NICOLAS. In a cave, under the crashing sea. The serpent watches the brave Hercules get closer and closer to his vicious claws. *(As Hercules.)* “Anna, it is I, Hercules! I’ve come to free you from the beast of the sea!” *(Taking her part. She is tied to a post.)* “Oh, Hercules, my suffering is beyond all bounds. But you have a name whose very sound is hope. Save me! I’ve seen his horrible face. It’s the face of a monster!

CAPTAIN. I think I’d leave this girl to the serpent.

(NICOLAS becomes the serpent as it rises out of the sea, hissing, growling, slithering.)

EMPEROR. Ah, there it is.

NICOLAS. “Who are you that dares to enter my realm of the sea! And seeks to rob me of this maiden. Speak, little man!” (*As Hercules.*) “I am Hercules, you foul wrecker of cities, and I’ve come for this maiden!” (*As serpent.*) “She is my just sacrifice, fool. Offered to me by the cowardly people of this shore. Do not destroy our bargain or I will I rage upon them the awesome force of wind and water.”

EMPEROR. Yes, yes!

NICOLAS (*as Anna*). “Help, oh help, this wave of woe holds me in its deadly claws!”

(Anna screams. By now EMPEROR is completely engrossed in the story.)

NICOLAS (*as Hercules*). “Of all that swims or crawls upon our mother earth, nothing is fouler than you, devourer of maidens. I am under the protection of the gods and warn you to leave this place or this hand of mine, with its unerring sword, will slay you.” (*As serpent.*) “What do I care about the gods! I’m bigger than any god! Come, little man, I will break you upon the rocks and take this purest maiden to my deepest chamber.” (*As Anna.*) “Save me or slay me, Hercules. Do not let him take me to his deepest chamber.”

(NICOLAS as the serpent slithers violently forward.

As Anna, he screams.

As Hercules, he leaps up with his sword.

As serpent, he slithers and fights, then fights as Hercules, then the serpent, then Hercules.)

EMPEROR. What a battle!

NICOLAS (*as Anna*). “Kill him, Hercules, color the sea with his black blood!”

(Hercules jumps on the back of the serpent, hacking and stabbing.)

EMPEROR. Claw him—bite him—tear him to pieces!

(The serpent throws Hercules off. Hercules flies and falls to the ground. EMPEROR enjoys this moment.)

EMPEROR (*cont'd*). Haaahh!

(But Hercules rises and aims his sword.)

NICOLAS (*as Hercules*). “Gods guide my sword home! Now, son of the hag, join the breathless dead!”

(Hercules throws the sword at the serpent.

NICOLAS twirls the sword through the air.

It strikes the serpent in the heart. The serpent writhes and screams.)

NICOLAS (*as serpent*). “My end is come! I see death’s gate before me. Curse you, Hercules. Curse the gods.” *(The serpent slowly, in flamboyant agony, dies.)*

EMPEROR. Oh, that is sad. He was a great and noble beast. Robbed of his just sacrifice, this ... *maiden Anna*. This is tragedy.

NICOLAS (*as Anna*). “Oh, Hercules ... ” *(Her hands become untied.)* “Blessed by gods, you have saved me. You have freed us all.” *(She kisses him. As Hercules.)* “You are an innocent maiden.” *(He suddenly embraces Anna and kisses her repeatedly.)* “And for you, serpent ... *(With a sound,*

he pulls his sword out of monster.) Tell everyone in the underworld that it was Hercules' sword that slew you, little beast!" *(He poses in tableau as Hercules.)*

LOUISE. The end.

(NICOLAS bows, and all applaud.)

EMPEROR. Good. Very good. Very well done.

LOUISE. You see what a talent he is and that would be wasted but for your generous self.

EMPEROR. My generous self ...

(Motions for NICOLAS to come to him. NICOLAS, overwhelmed, moves to EMPEROR, kneels. EMPEROR takes out a coin and flips it to NICOLAS, who catches it.)

EMPEROR *(cont'd)*. You are a clever boy. But dressed as you are, you look like ... a swampplant.

NICOLAS. A swampplant?

EMPEROR. Buy yourself and your mother a bath and new clothes. *(He flips NICOLAS another coin.)* And as to your theatre, washerwoman, tell them back home that their Emperor does not encourage play-acting in children. It teaches them to tell lies.

LOUISE. But in telling lies the theatre states the truth.

EMPEROR. Use the money for the theatre to train this boy as a tailor, and then return him to me.

NICOLAS. I don't want to make clothes. Or shoes like my father. I'm not like other boys. I want to be an actor.

EMPEROR. You will learn I am wise. And you are fortunate I am patient. You may go.

NICOLAS. But the theatre is not just for me, it is for the townspeople too—People come from far villages to see us perform and—

CAPTAIN. You may go, boy. And now.

LOUISE (*bowing*). Your majesty.

(She takes NICOLAS by the arm, grabs the trunk with her other hand and drags both out.)

NICOLAS. But ... but Mother, what about the theatre? The people put their hope in us. Emperor ... No, this isn't fair! Mother!

(They are off.)

CAPTAIN. A wise judgment, my lord, and generous to the boy.

EMPEROR. I must prepare for my speech. Once more, your honest opinion of this gown. How do I look?

CAPTAIN. Your majesty, this gown makes you appear shorter than you are.

EMPEROR. Shorter!

CAPTAIN. By making you appear larger in the middle.

EMPEROR. Fat again! Short and fat!

CAPTAIN. And grey.

EMPEROR. Old, short and fat?

(EMPEROR rips off the gown. He can't get it off fast enough. Then he throws it on CAPTAIN.)

EMPEROR (*cont'd*). The thing is a traitor to its Emperor! It is yours. (*In a mild panic.*) What do you say to this one? (*He holds up the red one.*)

CAPTAIN. If I were to see you in that, I would say: "That is a handsome leader. Tall, slender, young, powerful, yet gentle with children."

EMPEROR. This is my choice. I will speak immediately after I am dressed. Prepare my people for my speech. (*He goes behind a screen to change.*)

CAPTAIN (*aside*). He changed because of my words. He trusts me more and more. And he gives me this ...

(CAPTAIN exits with the gown. LOUISE and NICOLAS enter, carrying their trunk, on the road back home.)

LOUISE. How dare he call you a swampplant.

NICOLAS. The people put their hope in us to rebuild our theatre.

LOUISE. What else could we do?

NICOLAS. We cannot give up and return home with a few gold pieces.

LOUISE. We delivered our petition, we pleaded with him, you performed magnificently, but he refused us.

NICOLAS. We need to sell him something; something he would pay gold to have.

LOUISE. We have nothing—except perhaps a play, and we have learned what he thinks of the theatre.

NICOLAS. Did you see him looking in the mirror? He was never away from it for long.

LOUISE. Of course. He spends the treasury's gold on his expensive robes while children starve in the North. That peacock!

NICOLAS. His robes! ... What if we return to the palace—disguised—and say: “We are weavers, my lord, of a most marvelous cloth. The most beautiful fabric ever made.” He would pay gold for that.

LOUISE. Yes, but we don't know anything about weaving.

NICOLAS. We will be acting, Mother. We'll pretend like we are weaving ... an ... invisible cloth.

LOUISE. Acting ...

NICOLAS. We'll say: “People who cannot see this cloth are those who are too stupid. Certainly you can see it, Emperor?”