

**The Emperor's New Clothes**  
by Hans Christian Andersen

Many years ago there lived an emperor, who was so tremendously fond of beautiful new clothes, that he spent all his money on being dressed up properly.

He wasn't interested in his soldiers, wasn't interested in comedy or driving in the forest, unless it gave him the opportunity to show off his new clothes.

He had a dress for every hour of the day, and just as people say of a king that he is in the council having a meeting, here they always said, "The emperor is in the closet."

In the big city where he lived, so much fun was going on – every day lots of strangers were arriving.

One day two fraudsters arrived. They pretended to be weavers and said that they knew how to weave the most beautiful clothes that you could ever imagine. Not only were the colours and patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but the clothes that were sewed from this material had the peculiarity of being invisible to anyone who was unfit for his position or was hopelessly stupid.

"Such clothes must be wonderful to have," thought the emperor. "By wearing such clothes, I could find out which men in my empire are unfit for the positions they have been appointed to; I would be able to tell the clever from the stupid! Yes, such clothes must be woven to me at once." And he gave the two fraudsters lots of money up front, so that they could start their work right away.

They set up two looms, pretended that they were working, but there was nothing at all on the looms. They boldly demanded the finest silk and the purest gold, but they stuffed it into their own pockets, and worked on the empty looms until late night.



The honest cabinet minister with the two fraudsters  
"I can't see a thing!" But he didn't say that.

"Well, now I wonder how far they have come with my clothes," thought the emperor, but he felt a bit strange when thinking of the person who was hopelessly stupid or unfit for his position, could not see it. Well, he thought that he didn't have to be afraid of that, but he preferred to send someone else to be the first to inspect it.

Everyone in the city knew what special powers the clothes had and everyone was keen to see how incompetent or stupid his neighbour was.

"I will send my honest old minister to the weavers," thought the emperor. "He is the best one to see how the clothes looks like, because he is intelligent and no one is doing his job better than him."

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The good-natured old minister entered the hall where the two fraudsters sat and worked at the empty looms. "My goodness!" thought the old minister and opened his eyes wide, "I can't see a thing!" But he didn't say that.

Both of the fraudsters asked him if he could be so kind to step closer, and they asked if the pattern wasn't beautiful and the colours lovely. Then they pointed at the empty looms, and the poor old minister continued opening his eyes wide – but he couldn't see a thing, because there was nothing. "Oh, good Lord," he thought, "should I be stupid? That I never thought about myself, and nobody must know about it! Am I not competent? No, it is not an option for me to say that I can't see the clothes."

"Well, you are not saying anything about it," said the one that weaved. "Oh, it is pretty, very lovely," said the old minister and looked through his glasses. "The pattern and the colours. Yes, I shall tell the emperor that it really pleases me."

"Well, we are happy to hear that," said both the weavers, and then they mentioned the name of the colours, and the special pattern. The old minister listened carefully so as to be able to repeat it when he came back to the emperor. And that was what he did.

The fraudsters demanded more money, more silk and gold – they needed it for their weaving. They stuffed everything into their own pockets. Not a thread was put on the loom, but they kept going on as before – to weave at the empty loom.

Soon after, the emperor sent another honest official to see how the weaving was going, and if the clothes would soon be finished. The same thing happened to him as to the minister – he looked and looked but as nothing was there but the empty looms, he could not see a thing. "Well, isn't it a beautiful piece of work?" said the two fraudsters and showed and explained the beautiful pattern that wasn't there at all.

"I'm not stupid," thought the man. "So it is my good position I am not fit for? That is quite funny. But one should not be affected by it." And then he praised the clothing that he could not see and assured them how happy he was with the beautiful colours and lovely pattern. "Yes, it is definitely the best," he told the emperor.



"Oh, it is very beautiful!"

The two fraudsters convincing the emperor  
(The Emperor's New Clothes porcelain figurine  
made by Christian Thomsen in 1911)



"What on earth! I don't see a thing!"

Everyone in town was talking about the magnificent clothing. Then the emperor wanted to see it for himself, while it was still on the loom.

With a great entourage of carefully selected men, among them the two old honest officials, who had been there before, he went over to the two smart fraudsters, who were now weaving with all their might, but without yarn or thread.

"Yes, isn't it magnificent?" said both of the honest officials. "Would Your Majesty please take a look? What a pattern? What colours?" And then they pointed at the empty loom, because they thought that the others could probably see the clothing.

"What on earth!" the emperor thought, "I don't see a thing! This is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be the emperor? This is the most horrible thing that could happen to me!"

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"Oh, it is very beautiful," said the emperor, "it has my greatest approval," and he nodded contentedly and looked at the empty loom with great respect – he didn't want to say that he couldn't see a thing.

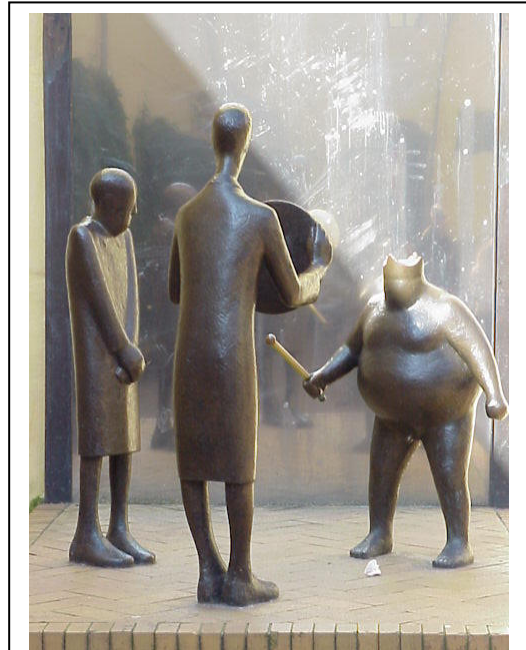
The entire entourage he had with him, looked and looked, but they didn't get more out of it than all the others, yet, they all said like the emperor, "Oh, it is very beautiful." and they advised him to wear these splendid new clothes for the first time during the big parade that was soon to happen. "It is magnificent; pretty; excellent." they said person to person, and they were all so incredibly pleased with it. The emperor gave each of the fraudsters a Knight's Cross to hang from his button hole, and the title of Imperial Weaver.

The fraudsters stayed up the whole night, with more than sixteen candles burning, before that morning when the procession was to take place - people could see that they were busy finishing the emperor's new clothes. They pretended to take the clothes off the loom, they cut the air with big scissors, they sewed with a needle without thread, and when they had finished, they said, "Look, now the clothes are done."

The emperor, together with his finest knights-awarded men, went over to see it himself, and when they entered the room, both fraudsters held one arm up as if they were holding something, and said, "Look, here is the trousers, here is the robe, here is the mantle," and so they continued. "It is as light as spider web. You would think you had nothing on your body, but that's exactly the beauty of it." "Yes," said all the honourable men, but they couldn't see a thing, because there was nothing to see.

"Now, will Your Imperial Majesty most graciously, please take off your clothes?" said the fraudsters. "Then we shall dress you with the new ones, over there, in front of the big mirror."

The emperor took off all his clothes, and the fraudsters behaved as if they were handing him each piece of the new that supposed to have been sewn, and they put their arms around his waist, as if attaching something – it was his long train clothing – and the emperor turned and twisted in front of the mirror. "Goodness, how well it suits. How lovely it fits." they all said. "What a pattern. What colours. It must be worth a fortune."



"Doesn't it fit well?"

The Emperor's New Clothes statue  
(Made by Keld Moseholm Jørgensen,  
City of Odense, Denmark)



And then the emperor walked in the procession  
under the lovely canopy

"Outside they are waiting with the canopy that will be raised above His Majesty for the procession," said the Chief Master of Ceremonies.

"Yes, I am done," said the emperor. "Doesn't it fit well?" And then he turned once more in front of the mirror, just to make it look that he was examining his best suit properly.

The chamberlains, who were to carry the long train of pure silk, were moving their hands above the floor as if they were picking up the silk train, but they were just holding on to air, because they dared not let anyone notice that they could not see anything.

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And then the emperor walked in the procession under the lovely canopy, and all the people in the streets and in the windows said, "Goodness, how the emperor's new clothes are unique. What a lovely silk train he has on his coat. How well it fits." Nobody dared to let anyone notice that they could not see anything, because that would have meant that you were not fit for your position or hopelessly stupid.

None of the other clothes in the emperor's closet had ever been such a success.

"But he hasn't got anything on!" said a little child.

"Good Lord, listen to the voice of the innocent," said the father, and people whispered to one another, what the child had said, "He hasn't got anything on, a little child says, he hasn't got anything on!" "He hasn't got anything on!" shouted all the people together.

And the emperor felt most uncomfortable, for it seemed to him, that the people were right. But he thought to himself, "I must carry on until the end of the procession." And he walked even prouder than before, and the chamberlains walked along carrying the long train clothing – that wasn't there at all.

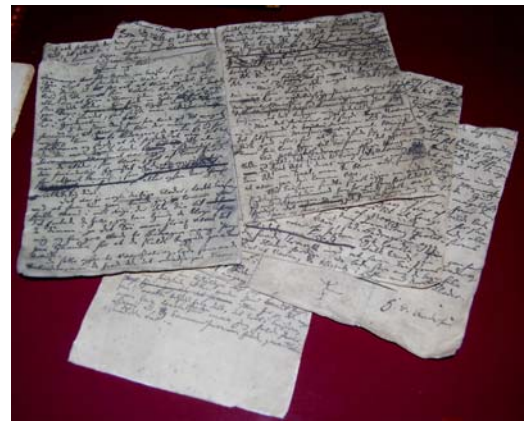
Story written by Hans Christian Andersen (1837)

[Click here to listen to a free MP3 taster](#)

Translated from the original Danish version by Benjamin Kurzweil in 2009. Unabridged version. Probably the best and most accurate English translation in the world of "The Emperor's New Clothes".

In December 2013 Benjamin Kurzweil recorded *The Emperor's New Clothes* with funny cartoon-style music bed.

(Please note that this version is from December 2013 and is a slightly amended version of the 2009 translation, in order to adapt it better for the audio version that was recorded in December 2013.)



Original manuscript  
The Emperor's New Clothes

## Q&A fun

The fairytale *The Emperor's New Clothes* is the funniest tale Hans Christian Andersen ever wrote. The second funniest is "*It is Quite True*" (the feather that became five dead hens).

*The Emperor's New Clothes* was published 7<sup>th</sup> April 1837, when Andersen was only 32 and full of fun.

**Question 1:** *The Emperor's New Clothes* is a story about an emperor that is very fond of new clothes. How often was the emperor wearing a new dress during the day?

A1: Three times a day.

A2: Five times a day.

A3: Every hour of the day.

**Question 2:** How many fraudsters arrived?

A1: One.

A2: Two.

A3: Three.

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**Question 3:** The fraudsters had a selling point about the clothes they made. What was the special feature about the clothes?

A1: The emperor could make a yearly wish and become very rich.

A2: The emperor could tell the clever from the stupid.

A3: The emperor would receive the most beautiful clothes in the world.

**Question 4:** What is it the fraudsters have in common with politicians?

A1: Fraudsters and politicians are both telling stories to reach their goals.

A2: Fraudsters are stealing for their own benefit, whereas politicians work for the people.

A3: Fraudsters and politicians are selling hope they cannot fulfil.

**Question 5:** Do you think the ministers and civil servants at Westminster are afraid of admitting they don't understand the Prime Minister, like in this tale?

A1: No, *The Emperor's New Clothes* is just pure fantasy and has no connection to real life.

A2: Yes, it happens every day at Westminster!

A3: No, politicians are not that bad – the newspapers like to exaggerate.

**Question 6:** In the original medieval Spanish tale, who is then revealing that the King of Castalia is riding completely naked through the capital city?

A1: An Indian.

A2: A black African.

A3: A Chinese.

**Question 7:** In Hans Christian Andersen's remake of the medieval Spanish tale, who is revealing that the emperor is walking naked through the city?

A1: A Jamaican.

A2: A professor.

A3: A young child.

## Introduction to The Emperor's New Clothes

The original medieval Spanish tale is about a king and three fraudsters that call themselves the best weavers and tailors in the world, and now they want to sew clothes to the King of Castalia, in order to make good money.

The clothes are so subtle and of such a fantastic quality that only the person, who is son of his presumed father, can see it, whereas anyone that says to be his father's son, but is not, will not be able to see the clothes. All the courts men and ministers, who fear for not being their father's son, therefore praise the invisible clothes, but at the end the fraud is revealed.

It is not revealed by a nice little, sharp boy - as described in Andersen's tale - but by a black African, who rubs his eyes and thereafter walks directly to the king's procession. In front of the king – who is sitting on a horse – the black African says boldly, "Your Majesty, I have never had the honour to know my father, and actually I can't be bothered to know who he is. That is why I dare telling you – right up in your face – that you are riding completely naked through the capital city!"

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## A citizen with education and critical thinking



Original illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen

In Hans Christian Andersen's own commentary to the 1862 edition of "Fairytales and Stories" Andersen writes, "*The Emperor's New Clothes is of Spanish origin.*"

Andersen mentions Prince Don Juan Manuel as the author to whom he is indebted for the idea.

Prince Juan Manuel was a nephew of King Alfonso X of Castile, and son of Don Pedro Manuel, Lord of Villena; a brother of King Alfonso X, nicknamed Alfonso the Wise. His mother was Beatrice of Savoy.

Don Juan Manuel, Prince of Villena (1282 – 1348) was a Spanish prince often engaged in wars against the Moors; the Moors were Muslims from the Maghreb countries in North Africa and Andalusia in Spain.

But it was not the wars he became known for – he became known after his death for his collection of Spanish tales, *El Conde Lucanor*.

*Tales of Count Lucanor* (1328 – 1335) is a collection of 50 short stories based on Greek Aesop, Indian Panchatantra, Persian tales and tales from Jewish and Arabic literature. Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* is a remake of tale 7 in *Tales of Count Lucanor* that has the title "Of that which happened to a King and three Impostors".

When comparing Prince Don Juan Manuel's version with Andersen's version, it becomes clear that Andersen's remake has a much stronger narrative style and much stronger humour – superior to Prince Don Juan Manuel's version. Although Andersen took virtually the whole plot from Prince Don Juan Manuel's version, Andersen clearly perfected the story in every way.

The stories in *Tales of Count Lucanor* are kicked off through a dialog between Count Lucanor and his adviser Patronio; Count Lucanor asks a question, where upon Patronio gives him the answer by telling Count Lucanor a story. Prince Don Juan Manuel concludes the story with a short verse (a song) condensing the moral of the story into a short, concrete statement – a moral style similar to that of Aesop's Fables.

### Spain in a constant state of war

Prince Don Juan Manuel prided himself mostly with his battles and victories, and barely made a mention of his authorship, because he did not regard it as being noble – it would indicate that he had time to engage in something that during the European Middle Ages was considered for the lower classes.

Spain was during the European Middle Ages in a constant state of war – especially with the Moors – and that is why Prince Don Juan Manuel was mostly engaged in battles, because that was considered a very fine act among the upper ranks of nobility (the High Nobility), but Prince Don Juan Manuel is not remembered for his victories and defeats on the battlefield – he is remembered for his authorship.

When Prince Don Juan Manuel had finished his *Tales of Count Lucanor*, he gave the complete handwritten manuscript to the monks of Peñafiel in the province of Valladolid in Spain – hundred years before the invention of printing – so that they could give it to the generations to come, **who would regard the arts of peace nobler than the arts of war.**

## **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**

When Prince Don Juan Manuel was born, Spain had been in war with the Moors – on and off – for almost 600 years (from year 711 at The Battle of Guadalete to year 1282) and throughout his life, he had only experienced war, and was sucked into the logic of revenge.

Prince Don Juan Manuel was quite wealthy – he had the right to mint coins – you would naturally place him at the upper end of *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Nevertheless was Prince Don Juan Manuel's way of thinking coloured by the way of thinking during the European Middle Ages, and in terms of his thinking, you would place him at the bottom of *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*.

But all that changed. Eventually – during the last twenty years of his life – he moved further up *Maslow's hierarchy of needs* and his way of thinking reached level four and level five (illustrated in Maslow's pyramid). Prince Don Juan Manuel's proud attitude toward wars changed, because he gradually, gradually realised that most of the wars with the Moors were purposeless, and the huge loss of his countrymen and even the enemy – the Moors – affected him and an inner urge for time for contemplation became more and more apparent.



Prince Don Juan Manuel

During the last twenty years of his life – "el Scritor" or "the writer" as he was nicknamed – he retired, so that he could dedicate his time to literature at the Peñafiel Castle, which included a Dominican monastery.

Prince Don Juan Manuel was realistic enough to realise, that he could not share his thoughts in *El Conde Lucanor* with the Spanish people and the nobility, because it was not in line with the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time) – publishing such stories would make him liable of lese-majesty (the crime of violating majesty).

That is why Prince Don Juan Manuel gave the complete manuscript to the monks of Peñafiel, where he had founded a Dominican monastery, because he hoped that they would give it to enlightened nobles, who would spend more of their energy on the arts of peace than the arts of war.

## **Forgotten for nearly 200 years**

*El Conde Lucanor* first found its way into print in 1575, when it was published in Seville. It was again printed in Madrid in 1642, and then it was forgotten for nearly two hundred years. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was reprinted again, in a contemporary translation – a German version printed in Stuttgart in 1839, a French version printed in Paris in 1840, a Spanish version printed in Barcelona in 1853.

Hans Christian Andersen did not know the Spanish work *El Conde Lucanor*, but he had read one of the stories – *Of that which happened to a King and three Impostors* – in a German translation entitled: *So ist der Lauf der Welt*. (In English: *That's the way of the world*).

*The Emperor's New Clothes* was published the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1837 in Copenhagen in Danish, and translated from the original Danish into an up-to-date English version by Benjamin Kurzweil in 2009.

In December 2013 Benjamin Kurzweil recorded *The Emperor's New Clothes* in Danish and English with funny cartoon-style music bed.

*The Emperor's New Clothes* has indeed been on a long journey, and it is Hans Christian Andersen's most funny and entertaining tale.

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## The true richness of modern society

To understand the context, it is worth mentioning that Prince Don Juan Manuel fought with King Alfonso XI of Castile against the Moors – and believe it or not – Prince Don Juan Manuel also formed an alliance with King Mahomet III, the Moorish ruler of Granada, and together they declared war against King Alfonso XI! But Prince Don Juan Manuel lost against King Alfonso XI of Castile, and had to flee to Seville.

The animosity Prince Don Juan Manuel held against the young King Alfonso XI of Castile is shown in the tale "Of that which happened to a King and three Impostors".

Hans Christian Andersen had initially chosen the title "The King's New Clothes", but changed the title in the final draft to "The Emperor's New Clothes", in order not to offend the King of Denmark (lese-majesty; the crime of violating majesty).

The change of title made it look like Andersen made a mockery of Emperor Napoleon of France – a kind of mockery fully acceptable for the Danish royal court; but the citizens of Denmark could read between the lines.

Today the citizens of Denmark and Spain express their opinion about their leaders without fearing imprisonment or the death penalty. That is the true richness of modern Western society.

## Reading skills is the mother of all skills

Reading skills is the mother of all skills. Whatever you will be doing in your life, good reading skills will be the foundation to success for most people – there are of course exceptions.



Hans Christian Andersen

In the preface of the book, "*Andersen and strategies of reading – practical activities in the school*", the Spanish professor Dr. Eloy Martos Núñez writes:

"...texts such as *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Emperor's New Clothes* are prototypes of reading experiences of great importance to education, culture, and the actual building of citizenship. At the same time they are products of the opportunity to improve children's literacy skills."

In this way you kill two birds with one stone, according to Professor Dr. Eloy Martos Núñez.

In part 1 of the same book, "*Andersen and strategies of reading – practical activities in the school*", the Brazilian Professor Ana Maria Martins da Costa Santos writes:

"Hans Christian Andersen revealed the vulnerability of the rich and the powerful, and makes apparent the spiritual strength, intelligence and sensitivity of the poor, particularly the children... The richness of Andersen's texts allows them to be explored at different levels and by different audiences.... We chose to develop a method of work enabling teachers to bring Hans Christian Andersen's tales into the classroom, and by applying reading comprehension strategies, we made possible to teach students to understand the text more deeply than simply decoding the text... The use of reading strategies will help teachers develop meaningful activities for the performance of critical reading and aesthetics with their students."

## World Heritage Literature

Hans Christian Andersen's stories are universal in their message and suitable for all generations and cultures, and have become part of world heritage literature.

By Benjamin Kurzweil, June 2014,  
London, Britain.