



Three Plays: Anna Christie / The Emperor Jones / The Hairy Ape

Eugene O'Neill , Luann Walther (Editor)

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Winner of the Nobel Prize

This edition includes *Anna Christie*, *The Emperor Jones*, and *The Hairy Ape* three classic plays of uncontested power from the Nobel laureate and winner of two Pulitzer Prizes for drama.

In *Anna Christie*, a sailor reunites with his estranged daughter after years apart. As she begins to fall in love with a younger sailor, she realizes she must come clean to her father and her new love interest and reveal her troubled past.

In *The Emperor Jones*, African American fugitive, Brutus Jones, recounts his life through a series of flashbacks as he runs from rebelling subjects through a West Indies Jungle, showing just how he came to rule over a small island, and his eventual downfall.

In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neil explores class and identity as he follows the existential crisis of Yank, an engine worker for an ocean liner. After being called a beast from the daughter of a rich industrialist, Yank realizes he has no place in modern society, or even a class he can call his own.

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Three Plays: Anna Christie / The Emperor Jones / The Hairy Ape Details

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Alex Scales says

More of a 3.5 - These might be classics, but they aren't O'Neill's best work (I enjoyed The Hairy Ape quite a bit). The real draw here is just seeing a young O'Neill find his voice, and seeing how far he was attempting to push performance art right out of the gate.

Chris says

The plays fell flat with me. But then, most of the plays I've read alone since college have also lacked something. I think it's in the nature of the thing -- better to read these aloud with a group, and best to see them performed.

I'm sure I'll reevaluate once I take in a good performance.

Alfresco says

If Nietzsche had an Irish temperament he would be Eugene O'Neill. One of the greatest playwrights to ever live. He create his plays from an autobiographic perspective, lanced with wit, candor, and raw emotions.If i had to pick one from the three, Hairy Ape is one of his best plays "It takes a MAN to work in hell"! But read ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING O'Neill wrote he doesnt disappoint in showing the subtle tensions that make the human condition a tragic-comic one!

joey says

Local staging.

Megan says

The Emperor Jones and Anna Christie (you can buy the film with Greta Garbo--they did an English version and a German version) are two of my favorites by O'Neill. While they lack the epic scale, grandeur, and grace of Long Day's Journey (obviously a masterpiece), these plays are still brilliantly innovative and present a more raw vision of the experimentation that would be taken to Shakespeare-esque transcendent theater with LDJN. The drum beats of Emperor Jones!!! The dialogue in Anna Christie! AH!

Kate Dalton says

I've just read the last play in this book, "The Hairy Ape," but I enjoyed the dialect of it and the use of a Greek chorus throughout a more contemporary play. The main character, Yank, speaks like Pop-eye, but is profoundly sincere at several moments.

Megan says

Though I read all of these plays for academic games in high school, I really only remember "The Hairy Ape" and "The Emperor Jones".

O'Neill's plays on the whole are some of the best to read because they have a mix of mostly gritty realism with some fantastical or expressionistic elements; on the whole you can really "see" everything happening, and what the characters look like, and then you'll run into something fun that will really make your imagination work, and you just long to see how it might be put onto the stage in a production.

I've heard "The Emperor Jones" compared to Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" symbolically, but it always reminds me more of "Heart of Darkness" due to the jungle setting, but also the feel of persecution permeating throughout, and the explorations of how a seemingly regular or even low-class or undeserving person can set oneself into power through the use of superstition, fear, manipulation, and exploitation of ignorance.

"The Hairy Ape" is one of my favorite plays for exactly the reasons I mentioned above. From the beginning you have a great idea of what Yank must look like, this rough sailor who some socialite calls a "filthy beast" but then at the end you're encountered with this bizarre scene that it's really hard - but exciting - to imagine on stage. "The Hairy Ape" is also a pretty bold, if depressing, treatment of the dehumanization of the poor working class, or in another view, of the human condition.

I should read these plays again at some point.

Lauren says

Part of why I like my local library is that I can find a 1938 edition of three Eugene O'Neill plays and read an introduction that is a contemporary rather than historical essay of the plays. Lionel Trilling's introduction is the perfect preface to this collection, and if you can find this edition, I'd recommend it. As for the individual plays:

The Emperor Jones: Those who prefer their plays strongly rooted in reality should avoid this one. I'm mixed about expressionism, but I liked this tale of an African-American man who escapes to a Caribbean Island and sets himself up as an emperor. The play opens as his empire tumbles down, and I can't help but think that, with some tinkering, this would make an interesting revival for a commentary on Wall Street.

Anna Christie: Netting O'Neill his second Pulitzer, *Anna Christie* is the story of a prostitute, and, unlike the other two in this collection, grounded in realism. It's a love story but not, a family drama but not, and even in written form, the foggy, damp chill of the ocean snakes off the page.

normal books.

Em says

I just don't like reading plays. Doesn't that kind of defeat the purpose?

I didn't really not like it though. It just didn't add or subtract anything to/from my life at all, except maybe the hour or two spent reading it.

Katie R. Herring says

I had to read 'The Hairy Ape' for class, and I finished the other two on my own. 'Anna Christie' was my favorite of the three.

The dialogues were hard to read, but I got through them.

'The Emperor Jones' reminded me of 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' for some reason.

Rebecca says

'The Emperor Jones' was interesting but short, 'The Hairy Ape' less interesting but longer. My favourite was definitely 'Anna Christie' - a provocative work on love, sexuality, family, and redemption.

Chris says

Haven't read any O'Neill in more than 20 years and have thus far only read *The Hairy Ape* from this collection. Still settling in to it, but it's good enough to make me reread *Emperor Jones*. Gotta be a helluva challenge to stage this thing. O'Neill's dialect jangles like a brutal caricature (See:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfH9pC...> for reference) in my head, but Yank--the oppressed hairy ape/boiler man of the title who fits exactly nowhere--feels just as real and moving and in this thing as he insists he is. He belongs, y'see?

Jessica says

O'Neill does a fantastic job of illustrating the struggle of a character as they desperately cling to the remaining thread of their facade before it is forced from them, leaving them stripped of everything but their true forms; the inner ugliness and secrets kept hidden, crammed down into darker places, because their social acceptance depended on it. There is something appealing in that. The characters of these three plays (as well as the plays themselves) lack the depth and humorous disparity present in my favorite O'Neill play, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, but they are still interesting and profound in their own ways. The most enjoyable of the three was *The Emperor Jones*, but I felt that was because I was easily able to envision the theatrical

potential in the setting and dialogue.

Don says

Exciting plays. Especially love "The Emperor Jones".

Julie says

While I love Long Day's Journey... and O'Neill in general, I found The Emperor Jones really hard to read - mostly because the attempt at capturing the vernacular really failed (for me). Anna Christie is best for this aspect.
