



The Clockmaker

by **Stephen Massicotte**

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Tarragon's Education and Outreach department supports and fosters a strong relationship between, teachers, students and professional theatre artists. If there is further information that you would like about the production or more ideas about pre-show and post-show activities, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We are very pleased to be presenting the Toronto Premiere of Stephen Massicotte's *The Clockmaker*. Trying to discuss *The Clockmaker* - without giving its secrets away - Massicotte said, "This is a tricky one to talk about because if you talk to you much it gives it away. My step dad passed away two or three years ago and I started thinking about a lot of things-- the nature of existence, life and death, how one lives a good life. I also looked at inner morality and whether you get that from religion or from some other places. I seem to think it comes from other places and we should give mankind much more credit than just attributing everything to God."

In this study guide you will gain a further understanding of what has gone into creating this production, as well as information and questions to apply to discussions and activities with your class.

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The Clockmaker

written by Stephen Massicotte

It couldn't possibly be a matter of life and death... It's just a clock.

Two men enter a dark room with a long wooden table. One is the humble clockmaker, Heinrich Mann. The other is the mysterious Monsieur Pierre, who has some questions about Herr Mann's "file". It seems Monsieur Pierre suspects Herr Mann of *making false statements* – though he doesn't say in reference to what. Heinrich is totally bewildered: he can only just remember who he is and how he arrived at the table with Monsieur Pierre. After a thinly veiled threat, Heinrich promises to return to Monsieur Pierre on the following day to ascertain if he has, indeed, done anything *wrong*.

The next time we see Heinrich, he is working in his little shop. A soft-spoken young woman, Frieda, enters with a shattered cuckoo clock in tow – hoping that Heinrich will be able to repair it. When Heinrich tells her *This clock is all but obliterated. It would be less work to build a new clock*, Frieda unexpectedly erupts:

If you can't repair the clock, then I shall take my business elsewhere. I haven't the time to discuss it. It's a wonder you stay in business at all. If you can't even... repair a... how can you even call yourself a clockmaker if it's all a lie? Disgraceful.

She storms off leaving Heinrich stunned – and smitten.

When he next stumbles upon Frieda, taking refuge from the rain under a tall tree, she doesn't remember him. What's stranger is that she doesn't remember anything else – until Heinrich reminds her of her life with her husband. She races home to the waiting Adolphus, who isn't at all pleased to find his wife late, his dinner uncooked and his cuckoo clock still in shambles.

Adolphus: Repair my clock. Like I said. Then what's this?

Frieda: It can't be repaired.

Adolphus: It can't? It can't? Tomorrow. You will take the clock to be repaired. You will take the clock to be repaired. And you will come home and you will make your Adolphus something special.

Frieda: The clock cannot be repaired. At all.

Adolphus: Don't disobey me.

Frieda: I'm not disobeying you. It cannot be repaired. That is fact.

Adolphus: I say it can be repaired. I say it will be repaired.

Frieda: It can't. The clockmaker says.

Adolphus: The clockmaker says, or you say?

Frieda: We both say.

Adolphus: Disgraceful. Disgraceful. Disgraceful.

In the meantime, Heinrich takes his second meeting with Monsieur Pierre, who is becoming more and more certain that the little clockmaker has committed a crime – or is about to commit one.

The following day, Heinrich is put to the test: Frieda returns to his shop, begging him to fix her clock. When she discovers his true skill as a clockmaker – his clocks are magnificently carved and painted – she pleads with Heinrich to make her a new clock, *a clock built for no other purpose than to save one person, a clock only and especially for my husband.*

As Heinrich puzzles over what this could mean, an idea forms in his mind: he will make a clock that is not only lavishly carved and painted, but scented as well. He promptly orders some cyanide and sets to work.

The two jokes ascribed to Heinrich's father in *The Clockmaker* belonged to my step-dad. A seemingly simple man, I didn't think much of him while growing up. Maybe it was just me being a little shit or maybe it's the universal law of step-dads. After his passing several years ago, I gave our relationship a lot of thought, which eventually led to the writing of this play.

My step-dad had an excellent work ethic—both at his job and at home—always improving and maintaining our house, yard, car, camper, and fishing boat. He only read National Geographic (from cover to cover), curling it up and bringing it to the paper mill in his lunchbox. He had an appreciation for Hockey Night in Canada, Bond movies (the Sean Connery ones), and MASH reruns. His real passions were camping, fishing, and his family. He died fishing (we buried his ashes in his tackle box) and when I went through his nightstand I found all (and I mean all) of the Christmas, birthday, and father's day cards we'd ever given him.

Most admirable, to me, was his sense of morality and fairness. I never once witnessed him favoring his natural-born children over his children-by-marriage. And when he caught us doing the same stupid things that everyone else was doing, he informed us that 'just because everyone is doing it, doesn't make it right.' He had no religious views and I never heard him mention God or the supernatural, and it made me realize that morality had an entirely different source than religion leads us to believe. To him, work, family, and fishing were quite enough—no flashy speeches (as I am guilty of), he just tried his best to live fully. My belief in organized religion ended when I found that my Roman-Catholic mother couldn't receive Holy Communion because she was divorced, but not until my step-dad died did I finally do away with God. I don't miss him one bit but I do, very much, miss my old man.

My step-dad had one other joke, not included in *The Clockmaker*. On a wintry- spring day, over breakfast, he'd look out the window and say 'hey, there's a robin on the fence-post.' We'd look—no robin. 'April Fool's,' he'd say. I don't know why we looked, since his April Fool's joke never changed. Maybe attribute this to childhood gullibility. Maybe to the fun of playing along. Or, maybe, to our knowledge that— due to the actual existence of robins (unlike, say, gods, angels, demons, etc.)— sometimes, when someone points and we look at the fence-post, there really is one there.

Sometimes a pretty bird, most times not, but always a shame to miss for not looking. As far as I can tell, that's life.

Stephen Massicotte

January 13th, 2009

STEPHEN MASSICOTTE

Stephen's play *Mary's Wedding* premiered in 2002 at Alberta Theatre Projects' annual playRites Festival and was the winner of the 2000 Alberta Playwriting Competition, the 2002 Betty Mitchell Award for Best New Play and the 2003 Alberta Book Award for Drama. *Mary's Wedding* continues to be produced in English and French throughout Canada, the UK and the US. His play *The Oxford Roof Climber's Rebellion* was commissioned by the National Arts Centre of Canada and was produced in Toronto and Ottawa as a co-production between the Tarragon Theatre and Great Canadian Theatre Company and was a hit off Broadway. The play won the 2007 Canadian Author's Association Award for Best English Language Play and the 2007 Alberta Book Award for Drama. His newest play *The Clockmaker* premiered in February of 2009 at Alberta Theatre Projects' playRites Festival and had its US premiere at the City Theatre of Pittsburgh. Stephen's film writing credits include the feature films *Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning* and *The Dark*.



CLAIRE CALNAN (actor: Frieda) At Tarragon: *Past Perfect*. Other theatre credits include: *Soulpepper* (*Antigone*); Volcano/The Exchange Rate Collective (Appetite, six Dora nominations); Theatre Smith-Gilmour/Factory Theatre (Katherine Mansfield, Chekhov's Heartache); Independent Aunties (Robbers' Daughters), Greenland Collective (Greenland, Summerworks Prize for Outstanding Production, NOW Magazine Audience Choice Award); Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People (Duel at Dawn, New Canadian Kid); tiny bird theatre (Raising Luke – Crow's Theatre Emerging Director Award, The Demimondes, Inanna). Other: Claire is the co-Artistic Director of The AMY Project (Artists Mentoring Youth) and tiny bird theatre. She is a recipient of a 2010 Chalmers Professional Development Grant and a graduate of Studio 58.

Photo: Claire Calnan in *The Clockmaker*, photo by Cylla von Teideman.

How did you prepare for your role in *The Clockmaker*?

I did some research on women in abusive relationships- taking a look at the psychology and the stories about how women get there and why they stay. I also looked into the domestic norms of the 1940s- what life might have been like for a couple living in Germany at that time.

But I really found that the best tool that I had in this process was the script. If I felt lost or unable to figure out a particular moment I would go back to the script to figure out if I had missed a point in the journey that would help a moment later on.

The piece contains beautiful universal truths that I think we can all relate to- about memory and time and love and regret. So, I challenged myself to be honest and brave about my own relationships to those topics and that helped a lot.

What is your favourite part of the process and what is your least favourite part?

I think the first day might fall into both of those categories.

It is tremendous and exciting to enter a rehearsal hall on the first day- to meet the company and the actors you'll be working with. It is the beginning of the adventure, there's lots of innocence and curiosity. It's delightful and fun.

But they have a terrifying tradition that is a part of the theatre culture in this country (and perhaps many more places too) On the first day of rehearsal, they invite all of the staff of the theatre along with any artists who are working there at the time- so, basically, a room full of important strangers- to listen to the first read-through of the script. It's awful.

So the first day- on both counts.

Do you have an interesting story from the rehearsal hall you would like to share?

When we had one of our first run-throughs I had a laughing fit after one line in the play that is a little bit cruel. I could not stop laughing. We continued with the play but I said all my lines laughing, with tears starting to come out of my eyes. It was a kind of hysteria. I felt helpless and out of control...with laughter.

This does happen sometimes in plays (it's called 'corpsing') and other actors may get caught up in it or find it somewhat amusing at first. But, after it has gone on for a while- it stops being funny and everyone just waits for you to get over it.

Eventually, it passed.

But I have spent a good deal of time wondering about what this says about me...

What advice do you have for students interested in pursuing a career in acting?

If you think you might want to pursue a career in anything- I think a good way to find out is to throw yourself in head-first. Do everything and anything that comes your way at the beginning. I think this is a good way to figure out whether you really want something. Dive right in and see if you still like the idea of swimming.

And if you do pursue acting, remind yourself constantly that it is hard and that is one of the reasons why most people don't do it. But it is also a magical and whimsical way of living....and if that is reason enough to do it then stick with it.

Reward yourself often for doing so.

Throughout time and the world over, human beings have been plagued by the same, seemingly impenetrable riddles: What is our purpose on earth? How did human beings come to be? and perhaps, most unfathomably, Why did we come to be?

With the advent of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, philosophers began to seek answers outside of strictly religious modes of thinking. While many were still shaped and informed by their religious context, schooling, and personal beliefs, more and more turned to reason as the means to investigate perennial human questions. In a curious paradox, their search gave rise to both modern philosophical and scientific thinking, as many philosophers struggled to prove, through rational arguments, the existence of God. The watchmaker or clockmaker analogy is one of the most well-known and long-lived of these arguments. In simple terms, it posits that a complex object like a clock (or an organism) is the product of design and not accident, and that as such, it must have a designer.

The origins of the watchmaker or clockmaker analogy is most often traced back to Cicero, who wrote in *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*) in 45 B.C.:

When you see a statue or a painting, you recognize the exercise of art; when you observe from a distance the course of a ship, you do not hesitate to assume that its motion is guided by reason and by art; when you look at a sun-dial or water-clock, you infer that it tells the time by art and not by chance; how then can it be consistent to suppose that the world, which includes both the works of art in question, the craftsmen who made them, and everything else besides, can be devoid of purpose and of reason?

In Cicero's time and for a long time to come, the watch or clock was considered a marvel of design and technology. It is no surprise that it was considered a fitting symbol for the complexity of the human being. Consequently, it continued to serve as a useful cornerstone for an examination of how human beings came to be well into the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment. The clockmaker analogy was taken up by many notable philosophers including René Descartes in 1664, and Voltaire in 1734, who wrote in *Traité de Métaphysique*:

When I see a watch whose hands mark the hours, I conclude that an intelligent being has arranged the springs of this machine so that its hands mark the hours. Thus, when I see the springs of the human body, I conclude that an intelligent being has arranged these organs to be received and nourished for nine months in the womb; that the eyes are given for seeing, the hands to seizing, etc., but from this sole argument I cannot conclude anything further than that it is probably that an intelligent and superior being has skillfully prepared and fashioned the matter.

However, it was a British Christian apologist named William Paley who conceived and expounded a comprehensive argument for the existence of God based on the clockmaker analogy. In 1802 he published a treatise entitled *Natural Theology*, which begins:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer I had before given, that for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there. . . There must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers, who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

Though it was not without its critics, William Paley's carefully and forcefully argued philosophy convinced many, and still resonates with many people to this day.

PRE-SHOW LESSON #1

The scenes in *The Clockmaker* take place both in Heaven and on Earth. In the first excerpt we see some of Herr Mann's early interactions with Monsieur Pierre in Heaven, and in the second excerpt we see some of Frieda's early interactions with her husband Adolphus on Earth.

Use this exercise to have your students speak some of the play's text before attending our production of Stephen Massicotte's *The Clockmaker*.

All you need:

Enough copies of the excerpts for students to share as well as enough space for them to rehearse the scene in pairs.

In pairs:

Have the students each take a role and read the scene out loud.

Short discussion:

Have a discussion about what the students think of the style of the writing and the challenges of the text. This can lead into a short discussion on subtext.

Scene sharing:

Have each group present the scene they have rehearsed to the rest of the class.

This can be used to give practical feedback in front of the class for each group, and to open a discussion about script interpretation.

EXCERPT #1 – In Heaven with Pierre and Mann

Pierre: Herr Mann, you understand that giving false statements...

[Monsieur Pierre looks up at Mann and sees that he's not sitting. Mann sits quickly. To his mortification he discovers that one of his chair's legs is a quarter of an inch shorter than the others. Mann shifts his weight on the chair trying to ascertain whether the chair is 'this' or 'this' and every time he does so a knock resounds.]

Pierre: Are you comfortable?

Mann: I'm not uncomfortable.

Pierre: Why should you be uncomfortable?

Mann: I am quite comfortable.

Pierre: Are you quite positive of that?

[Knock. Pause.]

Mann: Yes.

Pierre: Herr Mann, you do understand that giving false statements is a serious transgression of regulations –

Mann: I am not the most comfortable I have ever been.

Pierre: And would seriously call your case into review?

Mann: I understand perfectly. I was being honest about the chair. It's no armchair is it? But it is quite well-suited for what it's for. Sitting.

Pierre: Would you like me to get you another chair?

Mann: This is a very good chair. Very well made it seems. Sturdy.

[Pause. Knock.]

Pierre: Here is a form. It is required that you fill it out before we proceed.

[Monsieur Pierre places an eighth sheet of paper in front of Mann. On top of that he places a small pencil with no eraser. Mann takes up the pencil and reads the eighth sheet of paper. He looks at the sheet, puzzled; turns it over, finds nothing on the back, and turns it over again. He mouths three words, then begins carefully writing his answer. In a few moments, he's finished.]

Mann: Finished.

Pierre: Finished? My pencil.

Mann: Yes, thank you. Your pencil. Wouldn't want to steal your pencil.

Pierre: Are you the kind of man that would steal a man's pencil?

Mann: No, no, I'd never steal a pencil.

Pierre: It's only a pencil.

Mann: It's the principle.

Pierre: It is indeed the principle. But it's only a pencil. Would you like the pencil?

Mann: *The* pencil?

Pierre: *My* pencil?

Mann: *Your* pencil, no.

Pierre: How about *a* pencil?

Mann: Especially not *a* pencil. Thank you, though.

Pierre: You don't want a chair nor do you want a pencil. What is it that you do want? Do you want to be left alone? To stroll and look in the shop windows?

Mann: Yes - not really.

Pierre: To stand near the steps and smoke a quiet cigarette?

Mann: I have asthma.

Pierre: I bet you'd just like to sit in the park and feed the pigeons? Doesn't that sound nice?

Mann: I'm not exactly comfortable with birds.

[Monsieur Pierre examines the eighth sheet of paper.]

Pierre: I see.

Mann: You see. Good.

Pierre: Is it—good?

Mann: Shouldn't it be? I answered as truthfully as possible.

[Mann scratches his chin momentarily.]

Pierre: I see. I see.

SCENE EXCERPT #2 – On Earth with Adolphus and Frieda

[A man in an undershirt sits at a table, eating sardines from a plate that also has a large peeled white onion on it. Frieda timidly enters, without bread or sweater, and sees that her husband is home, and steadies herself, trying to move without fear. She sets the pillowcase, containing the clock, discreetly on the floor by the doorway. The man continues to eat in silence as Frieda sits down at the table. She reaches for one of the sardines.]

Adolphus: Get your own supper. This is my supper.

Frieda: I'm sorry I'm late.

Adolphus: Sardines and onion.

Frieda: I'll make something special tomorrow.

Adolphus: You'll make something special tomorrow.

Frieda: What would you like?

Adolphus: Something special.

Frieda: I'll make that, then.

Adolphus: Where've you been?

Frieda: Running errands.

Adolphus: Running errands? Did you get bread?

Frieda: I got there too late.

Adolphus: Too late. Too late to get bread. Why? // You were running errands.

Frieda: I was running... yes.

Adolphus: No bread then.

Frieda: I'll get bread tomorrow. Fresh.

Adolphus: Will you?

Frieda: If you'd like some.

Adolphus: I'd like some. And don't dally in the park like you did last time.

Frieda: I told you –

[Pause. Adolphus has finished licking his fingers clean of sardine juice. He takes a bite of the onion as if it were an apple.]

Adolphus, I only stopped in the park because I got caught in the rain.

Adolphus: You told me. You waited out the rain and that's why you were late. And the bread was ruined. You waited out the rain by yourself, under a tree.

Frieda: Yes.

Adolphus: By yourself?

Frieda: By myself.

Adolphus: By yourself. Under a tree. So you said.

Frieda: I got caught up, the rain falling, the bread. The smell. There was something about the smell. It was silly. Girlish. The smell –

Adolphus: Reminded you of something.

Frieda: It didn't remind me of anything. It was just quiet. Nothing.

Adolphus: Silly. Girlish.

Frieda: It won't happen again. I'm sorry.

Adolphus: If you get caught in the rain, you get caught in the rain. Nothing to be sorry about.

Frieda: I'm sorry anyway.

Adolphus: Me too.

Frieda: For what?

Adolphus: For getting angry with you...

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY #2

One of the unique things about *The Clockmaker* is that the word 'time' is spoken more than 35 times by the characters on stage. Use this writing exercise to explore writing about time: either as a reality or concept.

All you need: paper and pencils

On your own: have each of your students on their own brainstorm about time on a piece of paper (2-5 mins)

In pairs: have your students get into pairs and discuss their ideas – by the end of this discussion they should know which idea they would like to expand on through writing (5 mins)

Continuous Writing: give your students time to write non-stop about their chosen idea. Encourage your students to write whatever comes to mind with this stream of consciousness writing activity.

Share: have your students get together with the same partner from before and share their writing. These can then be edited and shared with the rest of the class.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY #1

The character of Monsieur Pierre in *The Clockmaker* holds a power a fair bit of power and control over our lead character. Use this activity to give your students a chance to experience this power dynamic from both sides.

All you need: enough copies of EXCERPT #3 for each student

In pairs: have your students read through the scene twice – once as one character and once switched.

Intimidation: ask your students to each take turns rehearsing the role of Monsieur Pierre trying to find as many ways as possible to be intimidating – using levels, blocking, different voices, etc.

Share and Discussion: have your students share their scenes and allow this to open into a discussion around tactics, intentions and interpretation.

SCENE EXCERPT #3 – In Heaven with Mann and Pierre

Pierre: You are under review.

Mann: For some crime I've committed?

Pierre: Possibly. Or possibly for some crime you are about to commit which you haven't yet committed. It's quite possible.

Mann: That's not possible.

Pierre: It isn't? Let me tell you a story. It's about a simple man, a very fine baker, a stranger in a country where they speak a different language than he. Now, he bakes very well, learns the language, is fair and pleasant to his new countrymen. And they, in turn, are fair and pleasant to him. All is good. But then, a war breaks out between his home country and his adopted one. When the war becomes particularly bloody, people—as they tend to do—stop coming to his shop. Soon his bakery is nearly bankrupt. One night, rocks are thrown through his shop windows. The baker sweeps up the broken glass but the next night more than rocks are thrown. The following morning, standing before the charred remains of his pastry-shaped aspirations the simple baker sees clearly. Not long after that, the baker boards a train full of seaside travellers. He carries a black valise and finds his seat. Mopping sweat from his brow he pushes the black valise far under the seat where no one can see it and leaves it there. When the train slows on a bend, he leaps from the back door for the railway ties. Unfortunately, the baker—not accustomed to leapings and landings from the back doors of trains—stumbles, falls and breaks his neck. He lies in a ditch, in a country far from his own, dead.

Mann: But?

Pierre: But. But the clock on the bomb in the black valise keeps on ticking, until just more than a half-hour later when it blows the seaside travellers into an array of little mismatched pieces.

Mann: Oh.

Pierre: Now, Herr Mann, the baker set the bomb for his love of baking. And though his heart had stopped, his bomb—his act of love—keeps on ticking. His revenge keeps on ticking. Contemplate that, Clockmaker.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY #2 - 1930s and Now Scene Writing Exercise

The Clockmaker takes place in small town Germany in the 1930s. Use this exercise to have your students write two versions of a scene: one that takes place in the 1930s and one that takes place today.

All you need:

Each student will need paper and pencils to write.

In pairs or small groups:

Have your students brainstorm different scenarios for the scene inspired by the play.

For example, if you use Frieda and Adolphus from Excerpt #2 in this study guide:

1930s: Frieda arrives home late and explains how she got caught running errands

Today: Frieda arrives home late and has to explain why she didn't text to say she would be late

Improvisation and Rehearsal:

Have your students improvise the two scenes from the scenario that they have chosen.

Sharing of scenes:

Have the pairs or groups share their scenes with the rest of the class. Allow this to open into a discussion about what has changed since the 1930s and what your students feel hasn't changed.

NOTES
