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Family Plays



The Man Who Killed Time

**By
Arthur Fauquez**

**Translated by
Margaret Leona and Marie-Louise Roelants**

**Forward by
Esmé Church**

The Man Who Killed Time

Comedy. By Arthur Fauquez. Translated from French by Margaret Leona and Marie-Louise Roelants. Foreword by Esmé Church. Cast: 5m., 4w. This folk-type comedy expresses the importance of pleasure as well as duty. Ambrosio, a charming and lovable innkeeper, wants to sing and play when he feels the urge. He begs his friends to join him; but all have certain specified times in which to do their chores. Ambrosio is convinced the village will be completely happy if they can learn not to chop their lives up into little segments of time, and he undertakes a determined campaign to destroy all devices for measuring the hours. He succeeds in freeing his friends from the tyranny of the clock—but without time, the village falls into confusion, and it takes a near tragedy to bring a happy ending to the situation. *Two sets. Italian peasant costumes. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: MJ1.*

Family Plays

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CAST

AMBROSIO, an inn-keeper
SPAZZINO, a street-sweeper
REGOLO, signalman, and night-watchman
PADRONA, mayoress of the village
FANTESCA, a servant-girl
ROMEO, a farmer
JULIETTA, a milkmaid
MOTHER, Julietta's mother
FATHER, Romeo's father

SYNOPSIS

The action takes place in the little Italian village of San Buco.

PROLOGUE: Night. The garden-arbour of Ambrosio's inn.

ACT ONE: Morning. The same.

INTERLUDE: Before the curtain.

ACT TWO: Inside the steeple of the clock tower.

INTERLUDE: Before the curtain.

ACT THREE: Mid-day. The garden-arbour of Ambrosio's inn.



This play was first presented by its French title, *Ambrosio Tue l'Heure*, in 1946, by the Theatre de l'Enfance in Brussels, Belgium, under the direction of José Geal.

Translated into English by Margaret Leona, it was presented in 1954 by the Northern Children's Theatre of Bradford, England, under the direction of Esmé Church.

It then crossed the Atlantic, and was presented in 1955 by the Holiday Theatre of Vancouver, Canada, under the direction of Joy Coghill Thorne.

Revised by the author in 1963, the English text was adjusted, and the new matter translated, by Marie-Louise Roelants.



FOREWORD

Part of my work as “Master of Students,” and sometimes Producer at the Old Vic, then under the direction of Tyrone Guthrie, was to take charge of the children’s matinees of the current Shakespeare plays, organized by the London County Council.

It seemed to me that many of the children sent by the schools were far too young for the plays. Sometimes, after the initial excitement of being in a theatre for the first time had worn off, and the pleasure of the colour and movement and general magic after the rise of the curtain had been accepted, the youngest often fell asleep or endured tortures of boredom, intensified by having to sit quiet under Teacher’s quelling eyes! The archaic language, the long love scenes, and the adult character of the plays, were quite impossible for the little ones to follow. After one performance of *As You Like It*, I walked out into the sunshine in the drab Waterloo Road on the South bank of the river where the theatre lies. The children were pouring out of the theatre and I caught up with a small redheaded boy who was skipping delightedly along the pavement shouting at the top of his lungs: “Out of jail! Out of jail!” What a disastrous impression to have made, with a play played by Edith Evans, Michael Redgrave, and a very distinguished supporting cast, in a lovely setting designed by Molly McArthur. Something had to be done about it.

I reported the incident to Guthrie who said he would approach the London County Council about setting an age limit for the audiences. This he agreed was negative action, but our time table was too full to do more at the moment.

Then came the War and I found myself directing and playing in one of the two Old Vic companies on the road in the Industrial North of England. The Vic, having been hit by a bomb, was closed. History repeated itself—the Local Education Authorities sent large parties of children to the plays, many of them too young to understand or enjoy.

The younger members of the company, playing tiny parts and understudying, once the understudies were ready and rehearsals reduced to a minimum, were beginning to be restless, and if we were to keep a happy company, something must be done for them too. This was my chance. We had all the resources of the Vic wardrobe and

scenery to draw upon for a childrens' entertainment. I spoke to Guthrie and he readily agreed. The young members of the company were enthusiastic and a variety programme for children was very soon ready. It was given its first showing at Burnley, a small industrial town in Lancashire, to an invited audience. Guthrie passed it and thereafter wherever the company went, cities, towns and mining villages, at least one performance a week was given to houses crowded with delighted youngsters. The Young Vic was launched!

The variety programme was followed by a full-scale play, Cicely Hamilton's *The Beggar Prince*. But alas, the bombing grew worse . . . the company returned to London, where it was considered unsafe to gather such children as had not been evacuated, into large masses in theatres. The scheme had to be shelved till times improved. However some lessons had been learned.

The plays must have colour, movement, and continuous action. So vivid is the child's visual imagination that scenery could be minimal but must be evocative . . . so often in their drawings and letters the children added things which were not on the stage at all, but which they thought they saw! Music and dancing, and mime used to further the action of the play were always a delight. Duologue scenes, especially love scenes should be cut to a minimum; but above all the acting must be true, the young are quick to detect fake or any form of "playing down." They must be treated with great seriousness as what Enid Bagnold once described as "little us." The fun must be true fun, not fooling, and the drama real drama. If we are to create a desire for theatre, and train critical taste, the standard of performance and presentation cannot be too high. And this is most important—the quality of the plays must be good also. The play is the children's introduction to the power, beauty, and magic of the spoken word. This is surely our main difficulty, to persuade authors of quality to write for Children's Theatre.

When I left the Old Vic to become Director of the Bradford Civic Playhouse, in Yorkshire, I was able to start a Children's Theatre again and put these theories into practice. I was fortunate to have Rudolf Laban on my staff, to direct mime and dance in his own inimitable way. How exciting and funny his work could be. Children and actors loved it!

With the help of the Local Education Authorities we were able to take Northern Children's Theatre all over Yorkshire and Lancashire and eventually all over England.

I was anxious to get plays from all over the world, so that the audiences might find out that with the exciting differences of costume, scenery, colour, and customs, people are basically the same. They laugh and cry for the same reasons. All countries have good and bad, brave and cowardly, funny and dull. One other thing is important; friendly magic must not be fortuitous, it must be the reward of "effort" . . . no easy way out of our difficulties.

At this time I had the good fortune to meet Messrs. Hainaux and Cornelis of the Comediens Routiers, who had added a full scale Children's Theatre to the Belgian National Theatre of which they had been made directors. We agreed that children should come into theatres rather than that the plays should go into schools, where the magic of a real auditorium is missing, and where the plays are in danger of becoming an extension of lessons.

Through these young men I came in touch with Monsieur Fauquez and his delightful children's plays. In the course of twenty to thirty years' experience of children's theatre, *The Man Who Killed Time* is, I think, the best children's play I have ever directed. It has magic, it is gay, has simplicity and a great warmth. All the people in it are intensely lovable, foolish and wise. The play moves swiftly and with great economy so that the interest of the audience never flags. I am proud indeed to think that I sent this play some years ago to a children's theatre in the United States, and that now that it is to be published, I have been asked to write this foreword.

May the play long continue to give the same pleasure to your children as it has done to ours!

Esmé Church
Canterbury, England

The Man Who Killed Time

Three knocks. The lights dim in the Theatre while a tarantella is being sung. The curtains open slowly.

PROLOGUE

A ray of moonlight slowly lights up the singer, Ambrosio, in night-shirt and cotton nightcap, who sings as he swings lazily on a wooden flowertub suspended in his arbour. Suddenly a muted trumpet answers the song in the same tone.

(Spazzino enters, blowing his trumpet and carrying a lighted lantern. Seeing Ambrosio, he stops trumpeting).

AMBROSIO. Good evening, Spazzino.

SPAZZINO. Good evening, Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO. I took you for an echo.

SPAZZINO. Echoes sleep after nine o'clock in San Buco. Why are you singing after curfew?

AMBROSIO. To please myself.

SPAZZINO. You'll wake your neighbours.

AMBROSIO. They will sing with me.

SPAZZINO. Let them sleep since it pleases them.

AMBROSIO. Let me sing, since it pleases me.

SPAZZINO. Sing in the day time.

AMBROSIO. Impossible.

SPAZZINO. Why?

AMBROSIO. Because of the train going by rattling the village like a bag of nuts, and the mill-whistle, and your sweeper's bell, and the church bells, and the noise of street carts, and the market criers, and the dogs barking and cats miouing . . .

SPAZZINO. That doesn't stop you singing.

AMBROSIO. O no, it would be a pretty song!

(He sings and mixes various noises with his song).

Lalalala lala lala - Bim bam bimbam - lalalala lala - ding diding diding - Sweeper! Lalalala - miouw, miouw, Wu - uuuuuu . . .

SPAZZINO. Very queer, I must say.

AMBROSIO. Can't we do without these noises?

SPAZZINO. But we must have them. Each sound reminds us there is something to do.

AMBROSIO. Well, it's this that makes me sing at night.

SPAZZINO. Think of the people sleeping. I put a stopper in my trumpet so as not to wake them.

AMBROSIO. You'd do better still if you stopped trumpeting.

SPAZZINO. But it's a custom. I've been trumpeting every evening for the past 20 years, from nine till midnight. It's become a habit.

AMBROSIO. I have my habits, too.

SPAZZINO. Live as you like during the day. Swing as you like in the evening; but be reasonable, and don't sing when people are sleeping.

AMBROSIO. I'll do my best . . . if I must.

SPAZZINO. Goodnight, Ambrosio.

(He goes).

AMBROSIO. Goodnight, Spazzino.

(He swings silently and then starts singing again mechanically, at first softly and then getting louder and louder. Somewhere a window opens).

VOICE OF PADRONA. Oh, Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO *(Swinging)*. Good evening, Padrona.

VOICE OF PADRONA. Can't you sing tomorrow morning?

AMBROSIO. It's more fun under the moon.

VOICE OF PADRONA. Your voice will be clearer under the sun.

AMBROSIO. Oh no, listen.

(He sings. Another window opens).

VOICE OF FANTESCA. Ambrosio . . .

AMBROSIO. What do you wish, Fantesca? Wine, noodles, macaroni, risotto?

VOICE OF FANTESCA. Only a little silence.

VOICE OF PADRONA. Yes, be good. Go to bed.

VOICE OF FANTESCA. Please be good, Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO. I can never refuse you anything.

VOICE OF PADRONA. Goodnight, Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO. Goodnight, Padrona.

VOICE OF FANTESCA. Goodnight, Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO. Goodnight, Fantesca.

(The windows close. Ambrosio swings dreamily and soon begins humming again. Then he remembers the time and stops. He stops swinging, comes off the swing, replaces the flowers in the tub of the swing and goes into the Inn).

ACT ONE

Little by little the light comes up on the set. The sun is rising. A cock crows a long way off. A dog barks. Another cock crows. The scene is Ambrosio's garden arbour—on one side the wayside inn with the sign "Ambrosio's Restaurant." At the back a vine. On the other side the garden with the suspended tub of flowers. A garden table and some stools, nearer the back, in front of the vine a trailing aerial wire across the stage.

VOICE OF SPAZZINO. Six o'clock, the market is open.

MARKET CRIES. Pumpkins, mushrooms, melons, fresh sea-fish, fresh river-fish, marrow, pimento, peppers, aubergines and onions.—Sweet, sharp, sweet smelling, fragrant. Grinder! bring out your knives, your scissors, your tools for grinding—Grinder! . . . Tomatoes, lovely tomatoes, the ripest, roundest, reddest, and best tomatoes . . .

FANTESCA *(Comes from the back and knocks at Ambrosio's, while the market goes on).*

AMBROSIO *(Puts out an arm with a jug for milk without being seen).*
Three pints.

FANTESCA. Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO *(Still unseen).* I'll pay tomorrow.

(The jug disappears).

FANTESCA *(Knocks).* It's me . . . Fantesca.

AMBROSIO *(Opens the door).* It's not the milkman?

(He comes out of the house in his nightshirt).

What do you wish, my pretty one?

FANTESCA. Will you make some raspberry waffles for me, so that I can pick them up when I return from the market?

AMBROSIO. At this hour?

FANTESCA. They're for the school master's breakfast. He wants a dozen of them.

AMBROSIO. You shall have them . . . as a special favour.

FANTESCA. You are a curly lambkin.

AMBROSIO. Do you really think so?

FANTESCA. Yes.

(She goes out delighted).

AMBROSIO. For the school-master? What an absurd idea. How can a school-master eat waffles at sunrise, when he is too good to eat them at any other time of day—or even night?

(Pause).

. . . A curly lambkin . . .

(He looks in the mirror hanging on the outside wall. Yawns).

C-ur-ly . . . lam-bk-in . . .

(He notices wrinkles on his face, pockets under his eyes, his dim expression, his dirty tongue, his yellow teeth, his shiny nose, his soft ears, a tuft of hair coming out of his night-cap. He makes faces at himself, trying to look like a curly lambkin and does a . . .).

Bee-eee-eee.

(Finally he yawns, scratches his head and goes into the house with the obvious intention of getting back to bed).

Bee-eee-eeee-in my be-e-ed.

(Exits).

FANTESCA *(Comes back with an armful of flowers)*. Ambrosio—Ambrosio—

(She knocks on the door with her heel).

AMBROSIO *(Coming out of the house, still in nightshirt, he receives a kick on the legs)*. Ow . . .

(He has two enormous ear plugs in his ears).

FANTESCA. Have you made my waffles?

AMBROSIO. In my bed.

FANTESCA. In your bed? And the raspberries?

AMBROSIO. Nose in the air.

FANTESCA. Are you deaf?

(She shows her ear).

AMBROSIO. My ear?

(He touches his ear and understands. Takes out the plugs).

FANTESCA. What are those?

AMBROSIO. Ear plugs. To drown the noises that stop me sleeping.

FANTESCA. Have you cooked my waffles?

AMBROSIO. Sit down. I'll have them ready in two or three strokes.

(Goes in).

FANTESCA. Hurry up. I have promised them for half-past seven. The teacher is not an easy man. When he says half-past seven, he means half-past seven.

AMBROSIO *(Puts head out)*. Don't worry. He will have them.

(Disappears. Sound of dishes).

FANTESCA. Don't break anything.

AMBROSIO *(Head out)*. Never.

(Disappears. Sound of something breaking. Head out).

Hardly ever.

(Disappears).

(Offstage, very quick). One egg, two eggs, three eggs, four eggs, flour, sugar, vanilla.

(He enters beating the mixture in a bowl).

Why don't you make your own waffles?

FANTESCA. Yours are so much better.

AMBROSIO. Well, I get more practice.

(He disappears. We hear the sound of the mixture poured on the hot waffle-iron).

Shall I still be a curly lambkin?

FANTESCA. Yes, if I have my waffles for breakfast.

AMBROSIO *(Off)*. And one—

(Sound of pouring the mixture on the waffle-iron more and more rapidly).

I will be—and two—a curly lambkin—and three—four—how many do you want? —and five—

FRANTESCA. Twelve.

AMBROSIO *(Off)*. The raspberries. One, two, three—

(More and more quickly).

Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten-eleven-twelve.

(He enters bearing the waffles, which he powders in a cloud of sugar, his nightcap fallen over his eyes, he collapses).

Here.

FRANTESCA. It's funny to see you make waffles in your night-shirt.

AMBROSIO. This is not living. It's the end of the world. The eggs go by like spinning stars, you mix the paste, you beat it like a merry-go-round, you put in the flour, it snows, the sugar, it showers, then the waffle iron snaps its jaws, you pour the paste, and you make little holes for the raspberries. It snows sugar, and you come out steaming from your pastry volcano, bruised, beaten, burned, skinned, amazed.

FRANTESCA. Amazed at what?

AMBROSIO. To be still alive after all that work.

FRANTESCA. If you started in time, this wouldn't happen.

AMBROSIO. Imagine cooking waffles at seven o'clock in the morning!

FRANTESCA. You get up a little earlier, you prepare the paste without hurrying, you cook the waffles at your convenience, I take them and go away.

(She starts out, leaving her flowers).

AMBROSIO. Your flowers.

FRANTESCA. I will come back and get them.

AMBROSIO. Am I a curly lambkin?

FRANTESCA. Curled and scented.

(She goes out).

AMBROSIO. Curled and scented.

(Tremblingly he takes a deep smell of her flowers).

Curled and scented.

(He starts to go back into his house).

ROMEO. *(A simple-minded peasant enters).* O, Ambrosio!

AMBROSIO. Hello, Romeo.

(He starts out).

ROMEO. Wait. I have to ask you something.

AMBROSIO. So early? I am hardly awake yet.

ROMEO. Me, I am up with the sun.

AMBROSIO. Me, at this hour, I prefer my pillow.

ROMEO. At the farm I have to get up. The animals demand it. That's why I'm going to marry.

AMBROSIO. Then your wife will demand it. Who is she?

ROMEO. Who is who?

AMBROSIO. Your intended.

ROMEO. Julietta.

AMBROSIO. All Romeos marry Juliettas.

ROMEO. Yes, but there is only one like mine. She is the milkmaid from San Marco del Piolo.

AMBROSIO. Congratulations, you lucky fellow. And now, let me go. I'm going to dress.

ROMEO. But wait. I have to ask you something.

AMBROSIO. Well, hurry up. I'm listening.

ROMEO. I can't think what it is.

AMBROSIO. It must not be important.

ROMEO. Oh, on the contrary, it's very important.

AMBROSIO. Well, then—tell me.

ROMEO. But I tell you, I cannot think what it is.

AMBROSIO. Come back tomorrow, you will think of it.

ROMEO. Tomorrow? Why?

AMBROSIO. Or day after tomorrow. Whenever you wish.

ROMEO. Day after tomorrow? What day will that be?

AMBROSIO. Wednesday.

ROMEO. Wednesday? That is my wedding day. The Padrona said she would marry us at eleven o'clock.

AMBROSIO. Very well. You can tell me on your way out of the city hall.

ROMEO. You think so?

AMBROSIO. It would seem to me simple.

ROMEO. You are probably right.

AMBROSIO. Good bye, Romeo.

ROMEO. Good bye, Ambrosio.

(He goes out).

AMBROSIO. Romeo and Julietta . . . ha, ha . . . Ambrosia and Fantasca—one day . . . perhaps . . .

(He goes back into his house).

FANTESCA (*Comes back*). Ambrosio.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). I'm dressing.

FANTESCA. You'll be a curly lambkin to the tip of your nose if you'll tell me what I'm to cook for lunch.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Would you like some polenta?

FANTESCA. Not today.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Some Risi-pisi?

FANTESCA. I have no fancy for it.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Ravioli?

FANTESCA. The master had that yesterday.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Canneloni?

FANTESCA. Don't you have anything else?

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). A chicken?

FANTESCA. Well, why not?

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Would you like a young cockerel?

FANTESCA. Will you pluck it?

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Yes.

FANTESCA. Promise?

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). Yes.

FANTESCA. And you won't be late?

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). I'm never late.

FANTESCA. To be quite sure, I'll give you a gadget that will remind you what to do.

AMBROSIO (*Offstage*). I have my head.

FANTESCA. It's often in the clouds.

(Goes taking flowers).

AMBROSIO (*Comes on dressed and carrying a feathered cockerel*).
Look.

(Seeing he is alone).

Don't look.

(Puts the chicken on the swing).

FANTESCA (*Comes back with an alarm clock*). Here's an alarm.

AMBROSIO. Here's your chicken.

FANTESCA. Look at the alarm.

AMBROSIO. Look at the chicken.

FANTESCA. You should hear it when it rings.

AMBROSIO. You should hear him when he sings.

FANTESCA. It has a hand for the seconds.

AMBROSIO. He has a comb as red as a tomato.

FANTESCA. Thanks to this you will never be late.

AMBROSIO. Thanks to him you won't be hungry.

FANTESCA. It's a precious alarm.

AMBROSIO. It's a precious chicken.

FANTESCA. It's more than a hundred years old.

AMBROSIO. And he is more than 200 . . . 200 days, of course.

FANTESCA. I give it to you.

(Puts it on the table).

AMBROSIO. I sell this to you.

(He holds out the chicken).

FANTESCA. It isn't plucked.

AMBROSIO. Alright.

FANTESCA. I'll have it by eleven?

AMBROSIO. Of course.

FANTESCA. Plucked?

AMBROSIO. Plucked.

FANTESCA. The alarm will remind you.

AMBROSIO. Do you think it will pluck the chicken?

FANTESCA. No, but it will help you not to forget.

(Moves to go).

AMBROSIO. You're going?

FANTESCA. I've so much to do: put the soup on the fire, peel the potatoes, clean the vegetables, dust the furniture, sweep the house, wax the parquet, and a hundred other things.

AMBROSIO. What a pity. I take such pleasure seeing you in my garden.

FANTESCA. So do I. I love your garden. It's full of flowers, and songs, and the sun, and colours, and lights and gaiety.