

SYDNEY
THEATRE
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EDUCATION

ON CUE

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Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

SUCH RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural

areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR
Years 10 and 12

SUBJECTS

Drama

English



Andrea Demetriades and Michael Sheasby in STC's *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

ARCADIA

BY TOM STOPPARD

LADY CROOM
BLAZEY BEST

SEPTIMUS HODGE
RYAN CORR

CHLOE COVERLY
HONEY DEBELLE

HANNAH JARVIS
ANDREA DEMETRIADES

JELLABY
JONATHAN ELSOM

THOMASINA COVERLY
GEORGIA FLOOD

CAPTAIN BRICE, RN
JULIAN GARNER

EZRA CHATER
GLENN HAZELDINE

BERNARD NIGHTINGALE
JOSH McCONVILLE

GUS COVERLY/AUGUSTUS COVERLY
WILL McDONALD

VALENTINE COVERLY
MICHAEL SHEASBY

RICHARD NOAKES
JUSTIN SMITH

DIRECTOR
RICHARD COTTRELL

SET DESIGNER
MICHAEL SCOTT-MITCHELL

COSTUME DESIGNER
JULIE LYNCH

LIGHTING DESIGNER
DAMIEN COOPER

MUSIC & SOUND DESIGNER
STEVE FRANCIS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
PHILLIP ROUSE

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

CHOREOGRAPHER
PAMELA FRENCH

PRODUCTION MANAGER
CHRIS MERCER

STAGE MANAGER
MINKA STEVENS

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
VANESSA MARTIN

COSTUME SUPERVISOR
REBECCA ELSON

HAIR & WIG STYLIST
NICOLA WATERS

BACKSTAGE WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
ROSALIE LESTER

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY
HON BOEY

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHY
HEIDRUN LOHR

2 HOURS 45 MINUTES, INCLUDING
INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT
THE DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA
HOUSE, ON 12 FEBRUARY 2016

ARCADIA © TOM STOPPARD 1993

PRODUCTION PATRON
THE PETRE FOUNDATION



Australia
Council
for the Arts



SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

TOM STOPPARD

Tom Stoppard's most recent play is *The Hard Problem*. His plays include *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; *The Real Inspector Hound*; *After Magritte*; *Jumpers*; *Dirty Linen*; *Dogg's Hamlet*; *Cahoot's Macbeth*; *Travesties*; *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (with André Previn); *Night and Day*; *The Real Thing*; *Hapgood*; *Indian Ink*; *Arcadia*; *The Invention of Love*; *The Coast of Utopia* and *Rock 'n' Roll*.

Translations and adaptations include *Tango* (Mrozek); *Undiscovered Country* (Schnitzler); *On the Razzle* (Nestroy); *Rough Crossing* (Molnar); *Dalliance* (Schnitzler); *The Seagull* (Chekhov); *Henry IV* (Pirandello); *Ivanov* (Chekhov); *The Cherry Orchard* (Chekhov); *The House of Bernarda Alba* (Lorca) and *Largo Desolato* (Havel). His most recent radio play is *Darkside* (with Pink Floyd). Other radio plays include *If You're Glad, I'll Be Frank*; *Albert's Bridge*; *Where Are They Now?*; *Artist Descending a Staircase*; *The Dog It Was That Died* and *In the Native State*.

His Evening Standard Award-winning plays are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; *Jumpers*; *Travesties*; *Night and Day*; *The Real Thing*; *Arcadia*; *The Invention of Love* and *Rock 'n' Roll*. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; *Travesties*; *The Real Thing* and *The Coast of Utopia* have also won Tony Awards.

Television work includes *Parade's End* and his original television play *Professional Foul*, which won awards from BAFTA and the Broadcasting Press Guild.

Screenplays include *Despair*; *The Romantic Englishwoman*; *The Human Factor*; *Brazil*; *Empire of the Sun*; *The Russia House*; *Billy Bathgate*; *Poodle Springs*; *Anna Karenina* and *Shakespeare in Love*, for which he won an Academy Award for best original screenplay, a Golden Globe, the Broadcast Film Critics and American Guild Awards for Best Screenplay. He directed and wrote the screenplay for the film of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which won the Prix d'Or at the Venice Film Festival 1990 for Best Film.

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)



Tom Stoppard. Photo courtesy of Google Creative Commons.



CHECK OUT OUR CLASSROOM HANDOUT ABOUT *ARCADIA*
BEING THE GREATEST PLAY OF THE 20TH CENTURY!

ABOUT THE PLAY

FALL IN LOVE WITH THE WIT, INTELLIGENCE, CHAOS AND ROMANCE

Tom Stoppard's much-loved *Arcadia* is recognised as one of the 20th century's greatest plays – a cocktail of ravishing comedy, literary sleuthing, romantic entanglements and scientific discoveries.

In a stately home in the British countryside, poets, tutors, academics and lovers roam the corridors some 200 years apart, each uncovering their own particular mystery. In April 1809, bright young Thomasina and her tutor Septimus are inventing chaos theory a century too early – or perhaps they are simply falling in love? Two hundred years later, two scholars try to piece history together from the puzzling fragments that remain. Along the way, there will be indiscrete affairs, mistaken identities, hermits, duels and ... horticulture.

Often picked out as audiences' favourite play, *Arcadia* at the Sydney Opera House promises to be a thrilling night at the theatre. With tickets selling fast, this is an event not to be missed.

Directed by Richard Cottrell, whose production of Stoppard's *Travesties* was a hit in 2009, *Arcadia* brings back to STC the delightful talents of Ryan Corr (*Sex with Strangers*), Blazey Best (*Travesties*), Andrea Demetriades (*Arms and the Man*), Glenn Hazeldine (*After Dinner*) and Josh McConville (*Noises Off*) in a play that will entrance, stimulate and illuminate.



Blazey Best and Ryan Corr in STC's *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

SYNOPSIS ACT ONE

SCENE 1: APRIL 10, 1809.

Thomasina Coverly and Septimus Hodge are engaged in a mathematics lesson. While trying to prove Fermat's last theorem, Thomasina tells Septimus that she overheard the servants gossiping about Mrs. Chater (the wife of a visiting poet), who was seen in a "carnal embrace" in the garden gazebo with a man other than her husband. Septimus does his best to explain higher mathematics and carnality to Thomasina, but is interrupted by Jellaby, who brings him a note from the outraged Mr. Chater, who has accused Septimus of carnally embracing his wife. Septimus puts off Jellaby to continue Thomasina's lesson.

The lesson is again interrupted, this time by Chater himself, who demands satisfaction for Septimus's "insult" to his wife. Septimus tries to calm Chater by implying that Mrs. Chater was simply trying to seduce Septimus into writing a favorable review of her husband's most recent (and abominable) poem, *The Couch of Eros*. Impressed by his wife's apparently selfless sacrifice on behalf of his literary aspirations, Chater inscribes a grateful note into Septimus's copy of the poem.

Mr. Noakes, a landscape designer, enters, followed by Lady Croom and Captain Brice, who bewail Noakes's plans to redo the beautiful symmetry of Sidley Park in the newly fashionable irregular style, eliminating the gazebo and other lovely aspects of the grounds in favor of a hermitage, dark forest, and other picturesque elements. Thomasina playfully draws a hermit into the hermitage in Mr. Noakes's sketch book. She delivers a note from Mrs. Chater to Septimus; he inserts it into the pages of *The Couch of Eros*.

SCENE 2: THE PRESENT.

Hannah Jarvis, an author who recently published a book about Lady Caroline Lamb, the infamous lover of Lord Byron, stands at the window comparing the modern view of the garden to the drawings in Mr. Noakes's sketchbook. She is working on a book about the identity of the hermit depicted in Noakes's sketches, whom she believes lived in the hermitage in the nineteenth century. Hannah goes out to the garden as Chloë Coverly enters with Bernard Nightingale, a visiting Byron scholar.

When Hannah returns, Bernard at first assumes a false name; he has published a scathing review of Hannah's book and fears her wrath. Chloë blurts out Bernard's true identity, however, and he reveals the true purpose of his visit: he possesses the copy of *The Couch of Eros* that bears Chater's inscription. It was once part of Byron's private library. Tucked inside its pages he found three notes to an unidentified man—two from Chater and one from his wife—which seem to refer to the wife's infidelity and the husband's duel with the recipient at Sidley Park. Bernard believes he has discovered the answer to a mystery that has puzzled generations of Byron biographers: why did Byron leave England so abruptly in the summer of 1809? Bernard posits it must have been to escape punishment and scandal for shooting Mr. Chater in a duel over an affair with Mrs. Chater. He has come to Sidley Park to prove his theory.

SYNOPSIS ACT ONE (CONT.)

SCENE 3: APRIL 11, 1809.

Thomasina and Septimus are again engaged in a lesson, this time Latin. Jellaby brings Septimus yet another note, which Septimus ignores. Thomasina tells Septimus that she saw her mother in the gazebo with Lord Byron, who is a houseguest. Thomasina announces that for her next math lesson she will deduce the equation that describes an apple leaf. As she runs out, Chater storms in with Captain Brice. Chater has discovered Septimus's deception and challenges him to a duel. By the session's end, Septimus has agreed to fight both Chater and Brice, consecutively, on the following morning.

SCENE 4: THE PRESENT.

Hannah and Valentine Coverly examine Thomasina's lesson book. It seems that in trying to plot her apple leaf, she discovered a technique for calculating feedback equations about 160 years before it was developed by twentieth-century chaos theorists. She used the same mathematical process that Valentine has been using to analyze the fluctuating population of grouse at Sidley Park. He does not believe that an early-nineteenth-century schoolgirl could have been capable of developing this procedure, which is a fundamental part of a revolutionary new trend in mathematics and physics requiring the aid of computers.

Bernard enters in the middle of Valentine's passionate exposition on the future of scientific inquiry with the news that he has found a passage penciled in the margin of Byron's famous satire, "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," ridiculing Chater and The Couch of Eros. That—together with Valentine's revelation that Byron's name appears in the Sidley Park game book for 1809 and Hannah's discovery that in 1810 Mrs. Chater (by then a widow) married Captain Brice—convinces Bernard that his theory is correct.



Andrea Demetriades and Josh McConville in STC's *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

SYNOPSIS ACT TWO

SCENE 5: THE PRESENT.

Bernard proudly reads to Hannah, Chloë, and Valentine a draft of the upcoming lecture in which he plans to reveal his brilliant Byronic discovery to the world. Hannah scornfully warns him that he has insufficient proof for his speculations; they quarrel. Bernard, resentful of modern society's rejection of humanists in favor of scientists, also picks a fight with Valentine. Hannah and Valentine console each other with new information about Hannah's hermit—they have found evidence that he was a mathematical genius who was trying to refute the second law of thermodynamics, which predicts the eventual dissipation of all the energy in the universe.

SCENE 6: APRIL 12, 1809.

At dawn, a gunshot is heard. Septimus enters with a rabbit he has shot for Thomasina. Jellaby informs him that, during the night, Lady Croom and Mr. Chater discovered Mrs. Chater leaving Byron's room. Byron and the Chaters were banished from the house at 4:00 in the morning. The Chaters embarked with Captain Brice on a botany expedition to the Indies. Byron left with the copy of *The Couch of Eros* he had borrowed from Septimus. Lady Croom arrives and flirtatiously confronts Septimus with a letter he had left, to be read in the event of his death, declaring his love for her. (He left another letter for Thomasina.) She invites him to visit her room later.

SCENE 7: THE PRESENT AND MAY 1812.

In the present, Hannah, Chloë, and Valentine discuss the splash Bernard's discovery has made in the tabloids. Chloë and Valentine debate Newton's notion of a deterministic universe; Valentine shows Hannah the fractal he has generated on his computer screen by iterating Thomasina's apple-leaf equation. They discuss Thomasina's doomed young genius: she is known to have died in a fire the night before her 17th birthday.

As Hannah and Valentine resume their work, the centuries overlap, and Thomasina, her brother Augustus, and Septimus also enter the room. Valentine and Hannah discuss the thermodynamic fate of the universe, while Septimus and Thomasina go over an essay she has found by a French scientist who has discovered the fundamental principle of thermodynamics as applied to a steam engine. Lady Croom enters, followed by Mr. Noakes. She protests the noise of the steam engine he is using to drain the garden and the damage he has been wreaking on her beautiful estate for three years.

Bernard arrives in a snit. Hannah has found that Chater was not killed in a duel, but in fact died of a monkey bite in the Indies. Bernard's Byron theory is therefore disproved, and he expects to be ridiculed in the press. Chloë and

Valentine are in Regency attire; there is a basket of period clothes for the others to put on for a party at Sidley Park that night.

Some time later in May 1812, Septimus returns with Thomasina. It is the night before her 17th birthday, and she collects on Septimus's previous promise to teach her to waltz in exchange for a kiss. When she prepares to leave, Septimus warns her to be careful of her candle. She tries to convince him to join her later in her room; when he refuses, she insists on another waltz for her birthday. They dance, lost in each other's embrace. Hannah, Valentine, Chloë, and Bernard come in from the party. Bernard and Chloë have been caught making love in the hermitage by her mother; he leaves in a hurry.

Hannah, left alone, is soon joined by Gus Coverly, who hands her the final clue that identifies the Sidley Park hermit as Septimus. They slowly begin to waltz, accompanying Thomasina and Septimus.

This synopsis was taken from the American Conservatory Theatre 'Words on Plays' Study Guide for *Arcadia* by Brodersen, E., Paller, M., & Robinson, C.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

THOMASINA COVERLY

Thomasina is the young and brilliant student of Septimus. Aged 13 and 16 at various points in the play, she implores Septimus to teach her “the true meaning of things” (*Arcadia* p.6) and seems equally interested in the physical laws of the universe and sexual relations between people. While her innate curiosity drives her habit of gossiping about others on the estate, it also manifests as a profound intellectual drive that sees her develop algebraic equations and theories that are far ahead of her time. With the historical perspective of the later scenes in which Hannah and Valentine discover Thomasina’s workbook, it is clear that Thomasina is a genius.

Although intellectually brilliant, Thomasina is naive in the ways of the world and is often petulant and enjoys teasing her tutor Septimus. Although she scorns love in favour of intellectual knowledge in an impassioned speech to Septimus, where she refers to Cleopatra as a “noodle” (*Arcadia* p.52), in the final scene we see that Thomasina has indeed fallen in love. This discovery is particularly poignant as by this point of the play, Stoppard has revealed that Thomasina will soon die in a house fire.

SEPTIMUS HODGE

Septimus is a witty tutor and scholar whose sexual liaisons with various women on the estate get him into strife. Septimus is confident in his ability to manipulate others to his advantage, displayed brilliantly when Chater accuses him of committing adultery with his wife, Mrs. Chater. Septimus deploys flattery and wordplay to successfully beguile and distract Chater.

Septimus is a peer of Lord Byron, having studied mathematics and natural philosophy at Cambridge. He occupies an unusual status in the *Arcadia* estate – as Hannah describes, he is “not quite a guest but rather more than a steward” (*Arcadia* p. 34). Despite Septimus’cleverness, he knows he does not possess Thomasina’s genius and concedes that she is cleverer than her elders. Despite his rash and impetuous nature, challenging both Chater and Brice to duels, he reveals himself as a soft and respectful man in the final scene with Thomasina. By then, we also know that after Thomasina’s death he will become a hermit, driven by the obsessive desire to prove her theory.



Georgia Flood and Ryan Corr in STC's *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

HANNAH JARVIS

Hannah is a focused and sensible scholar who initially dismisses any trace of romantic feeling and sentimentality, which she scorns as “the whole Romantic sham” (*Arcadia* p.39). Her calm demeanour acts as a counterpoint to Bernard’s passionate ravings, although Stoppard makes it clear that Hannah is just as, if not more, passionate about her research, although she takes a more guarded approach. To her, the search for knowledge gives meaning to life, saying to Valentine, “It’s wanting to know that makes us matter. Otherwise we’re going out the way we came in” (*Arcadia* p.102).

She is sceptical of Bernard’s theory concerning Lord Byron’s activities at *Arcadia*, as he lacks proof. Her conservative approach to her research contrasts with Bernard’s, who tends to make fanciful leaps of imagination. Bernard pinpoints Hannah’s limitations as a scholar when he says “I’ll tell you your problem. No guts... By which I mean a visceral belief in yourself. Gut instinct” (*Arcadia* p.68). Hannah does begin to develop this self belief when it comes time to articulate her theory about Septimus being the Sidley hermit – she comes to trust her gut feeling that she is right, although her old conservatism remains and she knows she must find proof.

Hannah actively rejects passion in pursuit of reason and knowledge, refusing Valentine’s insistence on calling her his fiancé and rejecting Bernard’s sexual proposition. Despite this, Hannah accepts Gus’ invitation to dance in the final scene of the play and in so doing, suggests that her rejection of sexual attraction and affection may be softening.

BERNARD

Bernard is a self-centred and ambitious academic who is prone to getting carried away with his historical theories, adding flourishes to his research which may not be completely factual. His passionate excitement contrasts with Hannah’s reserve. He publishes his theory regarding Lord Byron’s activities at *Arcadia* prematurely, despite Hannah’s warnings, and seems largely motivated by fame and recognition.

Like Septimus before him, Bernard is comfortable among, but still separate to, the landed aristocracy at *Arcadia* (he admits being “boggle eyed” at them; *Arcadia* p.87) and attracts the attentions of Chloe, the daughter of the present day Lady Croom. He tends to refer to women by patronising monikers such as ‘dear girl’ and ‘darling’, much to the chagrin of Hannah. His dismissive attitude towards women appears

to be part of an entrenched bias, evident when he comes to blows with Hannah over the historical figure of Caroline Lamb, who Bernard insists was a “Romantic waffle on wheels with no talent” compared to Hannah’s portrayal of her as a “closet intellectual shafted by a male society” (*Arcadia* p.81). Despite the holes in his historical theory being exposed by the end of the play, Bernard doesn’t appear to have learned his lesson, imploring Hannah to similarly publish her theory without proof and blaming Hannah and Valentine for not stopping him from publishing. This suggests that Bernard has a tendency to rewrite not only literary history, but his own life decisions as well.



Andrea Demetriades in rehearsal for STC’s *Arcadia*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

VALENTINE COVERLY

Valentine is a born aristocrat who at first appearance seems forgetful and vague. His penchant for referring to Hannah as his fiancé and feeding his pet tortoise Lightning may make him seem a ridiculous figure, although he is a genuinely talented mathematician. His approach to history differs significantly from that of Hannah and Bernard, as Valentine insists that the progress of knowledge, specifically scientific knowledge, is more important than the people who make the breakthroughs. Valentine's interest in grouse and goldfish may seem laughable, but it is his research that establishes that Lord Byron was indeed at *Arcadia*. He later unlocks the meaning behind the graphs in Thomasina's workbook. After insisting that Thomasina was "just playing with the numbers... nothing she understood" (*Arcadia* p.63), he reluctantly concedes that Thomasina's work was significant and her scientific breakthrough suggests that she was a genius.

LADY CROOM

Lady Croom appears to be obsessed with propriety and the outward appearance of things – from the extensive gardens of *Arcadia* to her daughter's allure for potential suitors. However, she doesn't uphold her own standards of modesty in her pursuit of Lord Byron. She is the powerful matriarch of *Arcadia* and doesn't hesitate in wielding her power over guests, servants and her daughter – for example, she banishes Lord Byron from the estate after he is caught in a compromising situation with Mrs. Chater. She doesn't hesitate to proposition Septimus either, telling him a convenient time to come to her rooms for an hour of "Athenian philosophers" (*Arcadia* p.98). While she is witty and sharp, she does not care for her daughter's intelligence and is concerned that Thomasina may be educated beyond eligibility.

GUS COVERLY

As the mute brother of Chloe and Valentine Coverly, Gus is an enigmatic figure who has reportedly not spoken since he was five years old. As the actor who plays Gus Coverly also doubles as Augustus Coverly (Thomasina's younger brother), he is also the only presence who straddles both time periods in the play. This is compounded by the fact that Gus often carries objects that appear in both eras – for example, he offers an apple to Hannah that is later eaten by Septimus. His intuitive knowledge of what has passed at *Arcadia* is further suggested when he reveals the location of the hidden outbuilding ruins. When Hannah dances with him at the end of the play, Gus is dressed in Regency costume for the party, lending to the impression that the strands of time are intertwining. The mystery of Gus is never explained, although his mute presence acts as a strong contrast in a play filled with witty repartee, impassioned speeches and contested language.

CHLOE COVERLY

Chloe is a confident and privileged young woman whose interest in, and openness to, romantic and sexual love contrasts with the reserve of Hannah. From the moment Bernard arrives at *Arcadia*, Chloe sees him as a romantic figure, initially scheming for him and Hannah to get together. However, it soon becomes clear that Chloe is interested in Bernard for herself. Their brief affair, and his consequent disregard for her, leaves her as hurt by love as she had previously accused Hannah of being.

THEMES AND IDEAS

FIRST THERE WAS NEWTON...

Prior to the development of chaos theory, Isaac Newton organised the forces of the natural world into a set of rules and laws. His theories deemed the entire natural world and universe as predictable using a mathematical linear equation. Newton and his scientific followers believed anything that was more complex and not entirely solvable through those linear equations just needed a more complex equation, but was ultimately able to be predicted also. Basically, Newton's laws were saying that the future was pre-destined and fixed with no room for random events or chaos. Today, we know this is definitely not the case and Septimus in the 1800s sees this flaw in Newton's theories when he says "If everything from the furthest planet to the smallest atom of our brain acts according to Newton's law of motion, what becomes of free will?" (*Arcadia*, pg. 9) Thomasina also starts to think about the validity of Newton's laws and asks whether God who created the earth was a Newtonian. Knowing full-well that this couldn't have been the case, she says "If you could stop every atom in its position and direction, and if you mind could comprehend all the actions thus suspended, then if you were really, really good at algebra you could write the formula for all the future" (*Arcadia*, pg. 9).



Georgia Flood and Ryan Corr in STC's *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

THEN THERE WAS CHAOS....

What chaos theory did was turn this paradigm on its head. A simple computational oversight by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz showed that seemingly insignificant changes in the initial conditions of a system (such as the weather) can have huge ramifications. It's a phenomenon now widely referred to as 'the butterfly effect', the idea that a butterfly disturbing the air today in Sydney might magnify a storm system next month in Madrid. Soon, chaotic behaviour began to be recognised throughout the natural world: in the movements of planets; the fluctuations in insect populations; shifts in ocean temperature; the rhythms of a beating heart; the turbulence of a river's flow; and in the basic geometry of nature itself. The fuzziness (or complexity) of systems was far from peripheral. Rather, it was the very distortions of things like clouds and mountains – the ways they failed to comply with simple geometrical shapes (such as circles and cones) – which were crucial to our understanding of the way the universe worked.

Thomasina also notices this and says "Each week i plot your equations dot for dot, xs against ys in all manner of algebraical relations, and every week they draw themselves as commonplace geometry, as if the world of forms were nothing but arcs and angles. God's truth, Septimus, if there is an equation for a curve like a bell, there must be an equation for one like a bluebell and if a bluebell, why not a rose?" (*Arcadia*, page. 51). The algebra Thomasina talks of for making bluebells and roses (natural shapes that are not lines or circles) is called Fermat's Theorem that uses iterated algorithms or fractals to create the pattern of the shapes. Fermat wrote in the margin of a book he was reading, *Arithmetica* that he had discovered the proof for this idea but the margin was too small for him to write it. This theorem remained unsolved until 1993 when it was proven by a Princeton University student (the same year *Arcadia* was written). Valentine is also using Iterated Algorithms to create a fractal about grouse at Sidley Park.

Chaos theory became a means by which apparently random and chaotic behaviours could be reconciled with notions of order and organisation. Within disorder, 'islands of structure' existed – think of something like the Great Red Spot that is a constant feature of Jupiter's ever-swirling storms. It was "one coin with two sides. Here was order, with randomness emerging, and then one step further away was randomness with its own underlying order." It was a world of repeating patterns, periodic behaviour, branching structures, feedback loops, symmetry and self-referentiality (all of which Stoppard utilised in *Arcadia's* composition).

Scientists also began to see consequences beyond the immediate realm of experimental science. A universe governed by determinism – a universe that adhered to Newton's clockwork mechanism and all that implied about our capacity to shape our own destiny – by necessity negated the concept of free will. However, within the paradigm of deterministic chaos, free will again seemed a possibility: "the system is deterministic, but you can't say what it's going to do next."

(The above information was written by Diane Stubbings for the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)

In *Arcadia*, the chaos and indeterminate nature of the universe is explained by Valentine using the idea of "noise" alongside the metaphor of a piano. "It's all very noisy out there. Very hard to spot the tune. Like a piano in the next room, it's playing your song, but unfortunately it's out of whack, some of the strings are missing, and the pianist is tone deaf and drunk – i mean, the noise, it's impossible. You start guessing what the tune might be. You try to pick out the noise." (*Arcadia*, page, 63). This speech by Valentine is delivered as Gus 'plays' the piano in the next room which similarly has no tune or melody, symbolising chaos. When Hannah asks Valentine what Gus is playing on the piano he says "I don't know he makes it up. Chloe called him genius" (*Arcadia*, page. 65).

Valentine continues to relish the amazement of scientific discovery. Where a new discovery surpasses old thinking; rather than being fearful of the unknown he remains optimistic saying, "A door like this cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong" (*Arcadia*, page. 65). He continues by saying that "What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress" (*Arcadia*, page. 83).

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT).

THE SECOND LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS

At the conclusion of *Chaos*, James Gleick considers what connection might exist between chaos and the second law of thermodynamics. The science of thermodynamics – the study of the relationship between heat and energy – began in the 18th-century and arose out of a desire to improve the efficiency of the steam engine. The first commercially successful steam engine – a device designed to remove water from mines – had been invented in 1712 by Thomas Newcomen. Decades later, while repairing a Newcomen Steam Engine, James Watt hit upon a means of making the steam engine more flexible, more efficient and, importantly, cheaper to run, thus providing the mechanical impetus for the Industrial Revolution. The quintessence of thermodynamics is the second law. Put simply, it states that “the spontaneous flow of heat is unidirectional, moving from a warm body to a cold one.” An ice cube dropped into your drink will melt, it won’t make your drink freeze. What the second law also implies is that it’s impossible to build an engine that will be one hundred per cent efficient – some energy will always be lost as heat (something Thomasina Coverly in *Arcadia* intuitively decodes decades before it will be officially discovered). This, in turn, leads to the notion of entropy, which maintains that all systems – the universe included – experience a gradual decline into disorder, as the energy available to that system becomes less and less useful. Scientist and novelist C P Snow asserted that “not knowing the second law of thermodynamics is like never having read the work of Shakespeare”, while astrophysicist Arthur Eddington argued it was the most important law in nature – more important than relativity, quantum physics or Newton’s laws. With its contention that “the past was more ordered and the future will be less ordered” it has implications for our understanding of the Big Bang, the expansion of the universe and, vitally, the inevitable drift of the universe towards ‘heat death’.

Even so, within this universe that is slowly winding down, we still witness the endlessly transformative dance of life – the linking of atoms, the intricate growth of plants, the formation of stars. The patterns that chaos theory has taught us to recognise – the “evolving islands of order” – highlight that despite the extinction predicted by the second law of thermodynamics, life forges on. Stoppard has incorporated this idea of the “dance of life” at the end of the play when Thomasina insists on learning to waltz with Septimus. As they waltz, Gus and Hannah also begin to dance and the lights go down.

(The above information was written by Diane Stubbings for the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)



Lighting the turtle in rehearsal for STC’s *Arcadia*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

ROMANTICISM AND THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN

“There’s more than one point of origin for a play,” Stoppard has said, “and the only useful metaphor I can think of for the way I think I write my plays is convergences of different threads.” What converged with Stoppard’s reading of chaos theory was a long-held inkling that there was a play to be written about the differences between the romantic and classical temperaments, an idea that coalesced when he happened upon a biography of Byron in a friend’s study. Byron was the epitome of the Romantic poet. By 1809 (the year in which much of the action of *Arcadia* is set), Byron had published one volume of poetry, but he was largely known for his satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in which he attacked the literary establishment. He was soon to produce *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, giving to the world the original Byronic hero, ‘a moody, passionate, and remorse-torn but unrepentant wanderer.’ Romanticism was “preoccupied with revolution” – with energy and experiment – and, according to the poet William Wordsworth, it was marked by “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. In this, it was at odds with the classical temperament (which had held sway through the 18th-century) which advocated the importance of order, rationality and logic. The Romantics responded to the world not on the basis of their reason and intellect, but through their perceptions, emotions, and imaginations. The English landscape garden was one aspect of life where these differences – between the classical and romantic temperaments – was most striking. In the 18th-century the landscape garden had undergone a transition, from a formal, aristocratic style (designed to assert man’s dominance over nature) to one where the imprint of the landscape gardener – Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown was widely recognised as the master of the form – was virtually invisible.

Artificial lines were abandoned in favour of a more regular, more natural landscape, the ha-ha, a constructed ditch that gave the illusion of fields coming right up to the house (while still keeping livestock at a distance) being a prime example of how the ideal worked in practice. With the advent of Romanticism, the landscape garden was again transformed. Brown’s subtle renderings of the ‘natural’ landscape were too tame for the romantic imagination, and wilder landscapes – of unrestrained vegetation, follies and mock ruins – as evinced in the paintings of seventeenth-century Italian painter Salvator Rosa, became all the rage. It is just such a metamorphosis that the gardens of Sidley Park are undergoing when we arrive in *Arcadia*.

(The above information was written by Diane Stubbings for the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)



An example of a romantic and picturesque garden. *The Arcadian or Pastoral State* by Thomas Cole, 1833-1836.

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

LOSS

In *Arcadia* the concept of loss runs through the play. This is not necessarily loss in the sense of death and grief (although we do know Thomasina dies), but loss in the sense of what is lost to history and times past. As time moves on things are left behind, forgotten, cast aside or disappear. This is seen with Thomasina herself whose glimpses of mathematical and scientific breakthrough with Chaos and Fermat's Theorem are lost with her premature death. Thomasina herself laments works of genius lost to history when she talks about *Cleopatra* saying "...but instead the Egyptian noodle made carnal embrace with the enemy who burned the library of Alexandria without so much as a fine for all that is overdue. Oh, Septimus! – can you bear it? All those lost plays of the Athenians! Two hundred at least by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides..." (*Arcadia*, page. 52).

Septimus refutes this and believes that something lost is not lost indefinitely; just left to be found again by someone else. "You should no more grieve for the rest than for a buckle lost from your first shoe, or for your lesson book which will be lost when you are old. We shed as we pick up, like travellers who must carry everything in their arms, and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind. The procession is very long and life is very short. We die on the march. But there is nothing outside the march so nothing can be lost to it." (*Arcadia*, page. 53). His speech also relates to the idea that scientific and mathematical theories take a long time to be solved and discovered – much longer than one human's lifetime. But because we all live in the same world, someone else will pick it up and continue on. This was seen with Fermat's Theorem that wasn't solved until the same year *Arcadia* was written - 1993.

PROOF VS. ASSUMPTION

The tension in *Arcadia* is centred around finding the proof of Sidley Park's history. The idea and importance of proof is different for various characters and changes across the course of the play as discoveries are made. For the audience, the proof of what happens in the past unfolds through the dramatic structure of *Arcadia* that jumps in time and place between a room in Sidley Park in the 1800s and the Sidley Park room of today.

In the present day, Hannah is trying to prove the existence of the hermit, while Bernard is trying to prove that Lord Byron visited Sidley Park and discover why he left England so suddenly in 1809. While, Valentine is trying to determine the number of grouse on the property.

Discovering the truth of past events is complicated by the opposing views of Hannah and Bernard. The two characters argue about the importance of needing exact proof, or whether a theory or assumption is good enough. Bernard believes you can't prove anything unless you were there, saying to Hannah "Proof? Proof? You'd have to be there you silly bitch!" (*Arcadia*, page 66). He also believes all you need is guts and confidence in what you are assuming – "...by which i mean a visceral belief in yourself. The part of you which doesn't reason. The certainty for which there is no back – reference." (*Arcadia*, page. 68). This way of thinking backfires on Bernard when he presents a paper claiming Lord Byron killed Mr. Chater at Sidley Park after having an affair with Mrs. Chater, which is what he believed caused Byron to flee England soon after. This was in fact not true as it was discovered that Mr. Chater died from a monkey bite in the West Indies.

Hannah on the other hand, believes there must be absolute proof before a theory is presented to the world. She is disgusted by Bernard's flippant thinking saying "you've gone from a glint in your eye to a sure thing in a hop, skip and a jump" [...] "...your theory is incomplete. But i'm not a scientist" (*Arcadia*, page. 80 and 81).

The world of the play also encompasses many theories which we see glimpses of in the 1800s that across the course of time have been discovered and solved and are now spoken about and used by characters in the present day. These include Chaos Theory and Fermat's Theorem. An example of this is Valentine using Fermat's Theorem to discover the population of grouse at Sidley Park.

STYLE

“IT IS A MISTAKE TO ASSUME THAT PLAYS ARE THE END PRODUCTS OF IDEAS THE IDEAS ARE THE END PRODUCTS OF THE PLAYS.” - TOM STOPPARD

AN IDEAS PLAY

It's an argument that could as readily be made for *Arcadia*, the play many consider to be Stoppard's masterpiece. Critics have variously described it as a play that explores “our determination to keep dancing even as the darkness gathers”; a world where “the quest for knowledge itself becomes an heroic act”; and “a poignant study of change and decay in human affairs”. Stoppard himself called *Arcadia* “all sex and love and romance and jokes.” It's a fiercely intellectual play, but a play in which, as The Guardian's theatre critic Michael Billington has noted, Stoppard perfectly balances intellect and emotion.

Ideas have always been central to Stoppard's playwriting. Whether moral philosophy (*Jumpers*), quantum physics (*Hapgood*) the life and beliefs of 19th century Russian intellectuals (*The Coast of Utopia*) or the nature of consciousness (*The Hard Problem*), Stoppard's plays have their genesis in an idea sparked by his reading. His friend and one-time flatmate Derek Marlowe claimed that, for Stoppard, writing a play “is like sitting an examination. He spends ages on research, does all the necessary cramming, reads all the relevant books, and then gestates the results.” In a 2008 interview, Stoppard emphasised that, for him, it's the ideas that always come first. Plot and characters follow, and they are always in service to the ideas. “I get interested by a notion of some kind and see that it has dramatic possibilities. Gradually,” he says, “I see how a pure idea can be married with a dramatic event.” Finding the right idea, Stoppard told The Paris Review in 1988, “is like picking up a shell on a beach.”

(The above information was written by Diane Stubbings for the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)

METAPHOR AND OPPOSITION

“*Arcadia* is as full of theses as anything I've ever done,” Stoppard has said, “but if I hadn't found my way into a kind of detective story, none of it would have been worth a damn dramatically.” For Stoppard, playwriting is, first and foremost, about storytelling. He's not interested in “the transmission of scientific information for its own sake”. Rather, he's interested in the metaphor that the science affords him. “Chaos mathematics suggested [itself] as a quite interesting and powerful metaphor for human behaviour, about the way it suggested a life ruled by determinism, and a life which is subject to random causes and effects.” It is contradictions such as this which interest Stoppard. “I write plays,” he has said, “because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. I'm the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation. Forever. Endlessly.”

In *Arcadia*, these divisions manifest themselves in tensions between order and chaos; determinism and free will; science and poetry; Romanticism and Classicism; past and present; and, ultimately, what Stoppard refers to as the tension between “the textbook of human life” and “the poem of human life.” Felicity Kendal, the actress who originated the part of author Hannah Jarvis in *Arcadia*, noted, “in *Arcadia*, there's no single voice; arguments are going on all the time, and [Stoppard's] voice is coming in and out of a lot of people. That's him really flying ... it's what he really likes to do.”

Stoppard laughs off suggestions that audiences need to study up before seeing one of his plays: “I have faith in the receptivity of the audience to what's coming at them.” In a play as flawlessly composed as *Arcadia*, audiences can have equal faith in Stoppard. As director Richard Eyre recognised: “Stoppard's ability to translate very, very difficult ideas into an accessible form for an audience – his desire to communicate his joy in what he's discovered – is overwhelming.” An audience prepared to engage with Stoppard's ideas – and his jokes – can only be rewarded.

(The above information was written by Diane Stubbings for the Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)

COMEDY

The serious intellectual ideas featured in *Arcadia* are cleverly complemented Stoppard's comic language featuring puns, wit and wordplay. Stoppard even describes himself as a “bounced Czech” (he was born in the Czech Republic before fleeing to Singapore as a refugee when the Nazi's took hold in 1938). *Arcadia* has often been described as a comedy with one critic describing the play as “...an English country-house farce about the death of the universe. It is a laugh-filled tragedy about what happens if you take the intoxicants of poetry and science seriously. It is a play where Stoppard turns himself into a clown whose juggling balls are Romanticism, Classicism, and the meaning of life” (Hari, 2009).

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

CHARACTER

Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character. Intention, status and attitude are integral ingredients for a character's motivation and belief. Complexity in character can be developed through interaction and relationship with others.

TENSION

Tension is the force which drives all drama. It creates a powerful and complex form of energy on stage which, in turn, generates a level of excitement in the audience. Tension strengthens audience engagement as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to question the ideas in the play

ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere is the feeling or mood that is created by, and emerges through, dramatic action. It is closely linked with tension: as the tension in a drama builds so too does the mood and this strengthens the tension. Drama appeals to the senses to evoke the atmosphere and emotions to intensify the mood.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ How would you describe Thomasina Coverly?
- ◇ How do the voice, body language and language choices of Thomasina reflect her character?
- ◇ How do the characters in the 1800s mirror some of the characters in the modern day Sidley Park?
- ◇ What are the opposing values and beliefs of Hannah and Bernard that create their roles?

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ Name two of the major tensions in *Arcadia*.
- ◇ How is the dramatic tension built through the narrative structure of the play? What role do time and place play in this?
- ◇ When a mystery of Sidley Park's past is resolved, how then does the tension of the play continue?
- ◇ In the final scene of the play, the tension reaches a climax. Why is this and how is this represented on stage?

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ Describe a moment when a funny mood was created on stage. How was it created?
- ◇ Describe a moment when a tense mood was created on stage. How was it created?
- ◇ What mood was created in the final scene of the play? How was it created?

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT.)

DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic Meaning is created through the manipulation of the elements of drama which are interrelated and interdependent.

Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.



CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FACT SHEET FOR ALL THE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION PRIOR TO THE SHOW!

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ Read the Themes and Ideas section of this On Cue. Devise what you believe to be the Dramatic Meaning of *Arcadia*.
- ◇ Choose a moment for the play that had strong meaning for you as an audience member. What Elements of Drama were operating in this moment to make the meaning really explicit for you as the audience? E.g. Language (the script), in conjunction with symbol and movement.

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OTHER RESOURCES

- Designer Sketchbook with sketches from Julie Lynch's costume designs
- Pre-Show In-the-Know handout for fast facts and what to look for in the performance
- Classroom poster and handout that looks at Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* as the greatest play of the 20th century
- A worksheet that asks students to align the symbols in the play with the major themes and ideas