



**SWEET BRIAR THEATRE**

SWEET BRIAR THEATRE  
2005-2006 SEASON PRESENTS

# Arcadia

BY TOM STOPPARD

April 6, 7, & 8 at 7:30 p.m.  
Sunday, April 9 at 2:00 p.m.

Director

**William R. Kershner**

Set, Lighting, & Costume Design

**Cheryl Warnock**

Stage Manager

**Maureen Kay McGuire**

Original Music Composed by

**Jonathan D. Green**

Performed by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*Arcadia* is brimming with ideas; that is one of the reasons I find this play so exciting. A few of them are:

The change from the Enlightenment to Romanticism: Stoppard uses landscape gardening to dramatize this. The Croom's carefully manufactured Italian garden with its geometric shapes has been transformed to an ideal "Arcadian" landscape of carefully sited woods, lawns, meadows and streams. During the play it is all being undone in the "picturesque" style, with mysterious grottos, wild regions, manufactured ruins and, of course, a hermitage with a living hermit in it. As Hannah says in scene 2: "The decline of thinking to feeling, you see."

The implications of the second law of thermodynamics: The discovery that some heat is always being lost means that the comforting thought of a universe that can run forever is not true - that at some point the sun and the stars will burn out and grow cold. As Valentine says in scene seven: "What is happening to your tea is happening to everything, everywhere. The sun and the stars. It'll take awhile, but we are all going to end up at room temperature."

Determinism and the Chaos Theory: Under Newton's laws, theoretically the entire future could be predicted. The chaos theory shows why that is not true, because in complicated systems small changes have great effects. Yet, the same general patterns appear over and over, never repeating themselves exactly. As Valentine says "The unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is."

Fractal Geometry: Thomasina intuits that geometry does not describe the real world, and embarks on a project to find the algorithm that would describe the shape of an apple leaf. She is doomed to failure because before computers are invented, it is not possible to do the equation enough times for the shape to emerge - but she has stumbled onto fractal geometry which does describe the natural world effectively. We have incorporated Thomasina's equation and the shape that emerges into the play's poster design.

Although all of these ideas and more are touched on in the play, what makes it a successful play is that the character relationships are fascinating. As Septimus says: "This isn't science, it's story telling." We see similar things happening in 1809 and the present day, but never exactly the same, and never predictable. Stoppard has made sexual attraction the metaphor for why things are not predictable - everyone is involved in a complicated love triangle, or several complicated love triangles.

Ultimately, I think the play is about the necessity of living life to the full and taking risks rather than remaining safe and guarded, even though it causes trouble. We see this at the end when Septimus speaks to Thomasina: “When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore.” She replies: “Then we will dance.”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

For those who may be interested in reading further about some of the ideas explored in *Arcadia*, here are some books that helped me in the preparation of *Arcadia*. Most of them can be found in the Sweet Briar College Library.

Nadel, Ira. *Tom Stoppard: A Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. This book has a very good chapter on *Arcadia* - it is chapter 18, Byron in a Laptop, that is a good start for anyone wishing to understand the concepts of the play and the sources Stoppard himself used.

Hunt, John Dixon and Peter Willis. *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620 - 1820*. London: Paul Elek, 1975

Fantastic source for understanding what the landscape gardeners were trying to accomplish. It reprints primary sources, including Humphrey Repton (who Noakes is partially based on). I particularly liked the reprints of the journal Thomas Jefferson kept in 1786 while touring various estates in England to get ideas for how to landscape Monticello. Note that Stoppard gives the title of this book to the book Hannah is working on.

McCarthy, Fiona. *Byron: Life and Legend*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

A fine, very readable biography of Byron.

Mandelbrot, Benoit B. *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company 1977, revised and updated 1982.

This is the classic fractals book with lots of stunning pictures of fractals. Thomasina’s line in scene seven “Mountains are not pyramids and trees are not cones” is a direct paraphrase of a sentence in Mandelbrot’s introduction’s opening paragraph: “Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line.”

Gleick, James. *Chaos: Making of a New Science*. London: Penguin Books, 1987. If I could recommend only one book for further reading, this would be my

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (CONTINUED)

Gleick, James. *Chaos: Making of a New Science*. London: Penguin Books, 1987. If I could recommend only one book for further reading, this would be my choice. Gleick tells the story for the general reader what the chaos theory is, how it came to be discovered, and what its implications are for the way we understand the world. Stoppard clearly pored over this book while writing *Arcadia*.

Peacock, Thomas Love. *Headlong Hall and Nightmare Abbey*. London: J. M Dent & Sons, 1908.

*Headlong Hall* is a surprisingly useful source for understanding this play - it is essentially a discussion in an English country house (much like Sidley Park) on the nature of landscape gardening and its larger connections. Characters in *Arcadia* in many ways appear modeled after characters in this novel.

There are some great web sites on *Arcadia* also - the most useful are:

<http://math.bu.edu/DYSYS/arcadia/index.html>

<http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/theater/productions/arcadia/>

<http://teachers.edenpr.org/~rolson/ArcadiaWeb/>

William R. Kershner

# DRAMATURG'S NOTES

## The Genius of the Play: Notes on *Arcadia* Dramaturgy

Tom Stoppard, who wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* as well as the screenplay for *Shakespeare in Love*, has a reputation for well-researched, witty plays that reference literature, science, history, and, at least in the case of *Arcadia*, mathematics. In putting together a dramaturgy for this show, I looked into landscape architecture, Lord Byron, Chaos Theory, Fermat's Last Theorem, Salvator Rosa, and the history of the Regency time period. This list barely scratches the surface. Even after over three months of researching, reading the play countless times, and writing an extensive glossary of terms and references, there is still plenty more to discover in Stoppard's play.

In conducting my research, one thing I became especially interested in was Stoppard's choice of title. In Scene One, Lady Croom declares, in reference to her garden, "I can say with the painter, '*Et in Arcadia ego!*' 'Here I am in Arcadia,' Thomasina." Thomasina recognizes this as an amusing mistranslation and denies correcting her taste or translation, telling her "it was your geography caused the doubt," the real Arcadia being a mountainous region of Greece that was especially noted for its "pastoral refinement" and became a model for Romantic English gardens. The painter Lady Croom refers to is Nicolas Poussin, and the painting, *Et In Arcadia Ego*, is a group of shepherds standing around a tomb: "Even in Arcadia, there am I," as if spoken by personified Death.

Arcadia has also come to mean a paradise of natural beauty, although unlike "utopia," which is a human-designed idyllic society, Arcadia is untouched by civilization, free of war and pain. A place of pastoral simplicity: it is plain to see why Arcadia became a popular subject for artists and poets. This search for paradise and an answer to life's burning questions drives the plot of Stoppard's play, allowing "Arcadia" not to be just an obscure reference to a garden and a painting, but the uniting concept of the play as a whole.

Virginia C. Robinson