

PROSCENIUM

Arcadia

By Tom Stoppard

Arcadia

Wednesday 22nd to Saturday 25th October, 2003,
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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By Tom Stoppard

Cast

In 1809-12

Thomasina Coverly..... Olwen Mears
Septimus Hodge, her tutor Vincent Eavis
Lady Croom, her mother Crystal Anthony
Capt. Brice, RN, her uncle..... Michael Williams
Augustus Coverly, her brother..... Richard Caine
Ezra Chater, a poetRobert Ewen
Richard Noakes, a landscape architect.....Alan Glover
Jellaby, a butlerAlan Bobroff

In the present day

Hannah Jarvis, an author..... Izzie Cartwright
Bernard Nightingale, a donMark Sutherland
Chloe Coverly Emma Burton
Valentine Coverly, a scientist..... Charles Anthony
Gus Coverly Richard Caine

Directed by..... Colin Hickman
Set Design.....Rod Moor-Bardell
Stage Managers Rod Moor-Bardell
..... Pauline Anthony
Assisted by..... Linda Hampson
Lighting & Sound Barny Daley
..... Paul Davis
Music composed and recorded by..... Vincent Eavis
Costumes..... Evelyn Moutrie

The play takes place in a room overlooking the garden of a large country house, Sidley Park, owned for centuries by the Coverly family – the head of which holds the title of Lord Croom – variously and sometimes co-incidentally in 1809-12 and the present day.

Our thanks to Harvey's of Hove, theatrical costumier, Two Jays Bookshop in Edgware and The Abbey Theatre in St. Albans for their help.

An Era of Change

The play brings together in one room two periods, 1809-12 and the present. Not surprisingly, it is about change, in fashion, art and knowledge; but it is also about two unchanging facts of human life: sexual attraction and death.

Et in Arcadia Ego

Lady Croom, seeing her garden as an example of the ideal Virgilian Arcadia, translates this Latin tag as *Here I am in Arcadia*. But there is a darker implication present in the play. Poussin, in a painting of 1638, uses the phrase as an inscription on a tomb, puzzled over by Arcadian shepherds. Are these the words of the person within the tomb – *I lived in Arcadia once* – or are they spoken by Death – *Even in Arcadia I am here?*

Classicism and Romanticism

When the play opens in 1809, in Derbyshire life is on the cusp between the classicism of the Enlightenment and the new Romantic movement (it had happened somewhat earlier in London and Paris). In literature, painting, music, architecture and landscape gardening, imagination was becoming more important than reason, emotion than logic, nature than geometry, spontaneity than formality. The youthful Thomasina revels in the new Salvator inspired garden design and yearns to discover an equation for a curve like bluebell and a rose. The modern researcher Hannah sees only *the decline from thinking to feeling*.

Landscape Architecture

The gardens of Sidley Park in 1730 were geometrical in an Italian style. In the 1760s all this was replaced by a more natural landscape associated with eighteenth century Enlightenment and described with such delight by Lady Croom – green and gentle slopes, trees companionably grouped, lakes peaceably contained by meadows, even the right amount of sheep (Stoppard's irony rather than Lady Croom's). In 1809 all this is about to be transformed again, into a Gothic style beloved of Romantic designers and seen in the paintings of Salvator Rosa – full of artificial crags, ruins and a hermitage.

Hermits

Really enterprising hermitage owners might install a hired recluse, or possibly acquire a suitable volunteer rent free. One young man, Mr Laurence from Plymouth, wished to retire as a hermit (to a convenient spot) and was willing to engage (for a gratuity) to any nobleman or gentleman who was desirous of having one. In another instance, an applicant was asked to live underground, invisible, silent, unshaven and unclipped for seven years, in a comfortable room with books, an organ and delicious food. The reward was to be a pension for life of £50 a year, and a hermit accepted, but lasted for only four years.

Physics

The elegant balancing 'Classical' patterns discovered by Newton which lead to a belief in determinism are the orthodox physics and maths which Septimus teaches Thomasina and lead her (via the possibility of God being a Newtonian) to speculate that *the formula for all futures must exist*. But her questioning mind longs for science to reach beyond regularity, and her inspired hunches – when analysed by Valentine – lead her, impossibly ahead of her time, to modern chaos theory, suggesting the randomness and gradual running down of the world. Valentine asserts *the unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is*, and Stoppard has said *chaos mathematics is precisely to do with the unpredictability of determinism*, and both are possibly delighted that *the future is disorder and almost everything you thought you knew is wrong*.

Byron

Just as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* happens in the wings of *Hamlet*, so *Arcadia* is situated in imaginary footnotes to Byron's life – footnotes which Bernard Nightingale is determined to write. There is an important gap in our knowledge of Byron concerning his reasons for leaving England in the summer of 1809. He was certainly in debt and there were sexual scandals, but he wrote that there were *circumstances which render it absolutely indispensable that I quit the country immediately. I will never live in England if I can avoid it. Why, must remain a secret*. However, he was back in England in 1811, womanising with great

energy.

He is a suitably ambiguous figure to form part of the background of *Arcadia* and his life and work reflect some of the themes and conflicts in the play: Classical versus Romantic, order versus randomness, rationality versus sexual impulse. He certainly demonstrates the chaos caused by sex, by what Chloe calls *people fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan*.

Critical Reaction

Written within its writer's middle-aged decorum, *Arcadia* maintains all that was best in the young Stoppard: theatrical surprise, word-play and a genuine concern for fundamental questions about existence and morality. Above all, Stoppard's ability to charm is integrated within an intricate structure, which leaves no feeling of awkward compromise but is entirely satisfying.

Jim Hunter

Tom Stoppard's new play is as intricate, elaborate and allusive as anything he has yet written. It deals, amongst a hundred other things, with determinism and free will, classicism and romanticism, historical reality and academic deduction.it is a significant breakthrough that shows Stoppard working with tongue in cheek and hand on heart at the same time.

Michael Billington

A Chronology – real and imaginary



The Shepherds in Arcadia : Et in Arcadia Ego
Nicolas Poussin (1594 - 1665)
Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire

1638	Nicolas Poussin's Et in Arcadia ego
Mid 1600s	Painters Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorraine active. Fashion for ornamental geometrical gardens
1712	Thomas Newcomen's original steam engine
1727	Death of Isaac Newton
1740s	Horace Walpole's Gothic garden
mid 1700s	Fashion for Capability Brown's landscape designs
1764	Walpole's The Castle of Otranto
1787	Birth of Septimus Hodge
1788	Birth of Byron
1794	Mrs Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho
1796	Birth of Lady Thomasina Coverly
1797	Birth of Lord Augustus Coverly
early 1800s	Fashion for 'picturesque' gardens
1809	Byron at Newstead. Capt Brice and the Chaters sail for West Indies
1810	The dwarf dahlias at Sidley Park
1811	Byron returns to Britain: begins affair with Lady Caroline Lamb
1834	Death of the Sidley Park hermit

About Proscenium

George Woodlands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known "The Tide" by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

Our Next Production :

All My Sons

by Arthur Miller

"All My Sons" is one of the earliest of Miller's plays to explore what has become one of his principle themes - the tragedy contained in the destruction of the common man. At the centre of "All My Sons" is a father and husband who is unable to overcome the forces that threaten to overwhelm him and his dreams.

Directed by Duncan Sykes
Wednesday 28th to Saturday 31st January, 2004
7.45pm Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre

Rest Of The Season

Troilus and Cressida,

by William Shakespeare

March 24th to March 27th 2004

Absent Friends,

by Alan Ayckbourne

June 9th to June 12th 2004