Arcadia

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOM STOPPARD

Stoppard was born Tomáš Straussler in a small town in Czechoslovakia. In 1939, he, his mother, father and brother escaped the Nazi invasion and traveled to Singapore. Shortly thereafter most of the family traveled to Australia, leaving behind Stoppard's father, a doctor, who died during Singapore's conflicts with Japan when Stoppard was only four. Stoppard went to school in India and finally moved to England in 1946. Stoppard never went to college, but became a journalist after high school. He finished his first play in 1960, and has written many more, his most famous being *Arcadia* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. He also collaborated on the screenplay of the Oscar-winning "Shakespeare in Love." Arcadia opened in London in 1993 to rave reviews. To this day, Arcadia is seen as one of the best plays of its era: Brad Leithauser, writing in the New Yorker in 2013, proclaimed it "the finest play written in my lifetime." Stoppard was knighted in 1997.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tom Stoppard's plays draw from many eclectic sources, from quantum mechanics (*Hapgood*) to communist-era soccer (*Professional Foul*). *Arcadia* doesn't fit neatly into any particular playwriting movement, and doesn't synchronize with any modern events. But the play's fictions intertwine with real-world historical events, from Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" to Isaac Newton's theories. Most important, Thomasina Coverly, the intuitively genius mathematician, is based on a historical figure named Ada Lovelace (1812-1852), daughter of Lord Byron. Lovelace understood the potential of computers before they'd even been invented, and even wrote an algorithm meant to be completed by machine—the world's first computer program.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Stoppard has said that James Gleick's popular science book *Chaos: Making a New Science* was a source of information and inspiration. But in style and theme, the play is more closely related to nineteenth century literature. The play directly quotes from several of the Romantic poet Lord Byron's most famous poems, including "She Walks in Beauty" and "Darkness." Byron's influence, and his thematic interests, hang over the poem, as he is a source of obsession for many characters in both the past and present. The characters see his poetry as the exemplar of the greatest achievements of the Romantic era, full of passion and doom. In its high-class setting, its many love stories, and its ferocious battle of wits and intelligence, the play also resembles great comic works of the Regency era, such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Arcadia*
- **When Published:** First performed on April 13th, 1993, at the Lyttelton Theatre, Royal National Theatre, in London.
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Play
- **Setting:** A country estate in England in 1809 and the modern day
- **Climax:** When Valentine and Septimus both realize the implications of Thomasina's theories (Scene 7)
- **Antagonist:** Bernard, the overconfident academic

EXTRA CREDIT

Like Father, Like Son One of Tom Stoppard's four children, Ed, is an actor. He played the role of Valentine in a London production of *Arcadia* in 2009.

Heartless Reviewers have so often criticized Stoppard's plays for having all brains and no heart that this complaint has become a cliché. But critics widely acknowledge *Arcadia* to be Stoppard's first play to found all its intellectual games on real emotion.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Scene 1, which takes place in 1809, Thomasina, a 13-year-old British aristocrat, learns the definition of "carnal embrace" from her tutor Septimus. Meanwhile Noakes, the landscape gardener for the estate, has discovered Septimus making love with Mrs. Chater, a houseguest, in the gazebo. The cuckolded Mr. Chater wants to duel Septimus, as was the custom, for the offense to his wife. Septimus deflects Chater's rage by complimenting his terrible book-length poem, "The Couch of Eros," and hinting that he'll give Chater a positive review. Lady Croom enters, with Noakes and Brice, to discuss and complain about Noakes's planned changes to the **garden**. Noakes plans to replace its pastoral elegance with a Romantic-style wilderness.

In Scene 2, which zooms forward to the present day, Bernard, a scholar of the Romantic era, arrives at Sidley Park. He meets Hannah, another academic who is already there, studying the garden and the Sidley hermit, who she thinks symbolizes

Romanticism. Bernard professes to be interested in Chater's poetry, having found a copy of "The Couch of Eros," but Hannah uncovers him for who he really is—a Byron obsessive who'd written a mean review of her previous book. Despite Hannah's dislike of him, Bernard decides to stay around Sidley Park to do research. He thinks he may have found evidence that Byron was a houseguest at the same time as Chater, and that they dueled, with Byron killing Chater. We also meet the modern-day Coverly siblings, the current residents of Sidney Park, Valentine, Chloë, and Gus.

In Scene 3, back in 1809, Thomasina impatiently tries to read Latin. She picks up her math instead, proclaiming her intention to find an equation that will express the form of an apple leaf. Thomasina mourns the loss of ancient literature because of the **fire** at the library of Alexandria, and Septimus gives a stirring speech about the inherent good of the human search for knowledge. Brice and Chater return, with Chater newly offended to have discovered that Septimus wrote a scathing review of his previous book. Chater again wants to duel, and now Septimus consents.

In Scene 4, in the present day, Valentine and Hannah look over Thomasina's old math notebook, in which Thomasina wrote a note about how she's discovered a way to describe nature with math. Valentine figures out that Thomasina was making patterns using iteration, a very modern technique that he himself uses in his doctoral research to try to find patterns in the local grouse population. Bernard enters, still focused on proving that Byron killed Chater in a duel. After he and Hannah discuss some pieces of evidence, with Hannah remaining skeptical about Bernard's hypothesis, Valentine reveals that Byron definitely stayed as a guest at Sidley Park, because his hunting was recorded in a game book. Bernard runs off in astonishment to find the game books.

In Scene 5, Bernard begins to read his paper about Chater and Byron to the family. The siblings and Hannah interrupt many times, and Valentine points out that Bernard didn't include the statistical data that go against his hypothesis. Bernard, offended by the challenge to his big idea, makes an impassioned case that poetry is more important than science, and Valentine storms out. Bernard invites Hannah to London "for sex," but she dismisses the idea. Bernard leaves, and Hannah reads Valentine some new information from a 19th-century article about the hermit—the hermit was obsessed with mathematical ideas about the fate of the universe which sound suspiciously like Thomasina's.

In Scene 6, in the past, Septimus enters the house in the early morning. He learns from the butler, Jellaby, that Chater, Mrs. Chater, Brice, and Byron all left early in the morning, because Lady Croom found Mrs. Chater with Byron. The implication is that Lady Croom was having an affair with Byron, and she didn't like finding another woman with him. Because of the sudden departures, Septimus never had to fight his duel with Chater, which would have been that morning. The day before, Septimus, expecting to die, had left a love letter for Lady Croom, and now she invites him to her sitting room.

In Scene 7, past and present overlap. Chloë and Bernard discuss Bernard's paper and sex, Chloë's favorite topic. Hannah and Valentine sit together to work on the hermit project and the grouse project, respectively. Valentine shows Hannah a computer-expanded version of Thomasina's algorithm. The discovery would have made Thomasina famous, Valentine thinks. Hannah explains that Thomasina died in a fire right before her 17th birthday. In the past, which is superimposed on the present, Septimus and Thomasina, now 16 and about to turn 17, talk about geometry and Thomasina's algorithm. Thomasina draws a sketch of Septimus with his **tortoise**. Hannah, reading Lady Croom's garden book, finds out that Chater discovered the **dahlia**, which disproves Bernard's whole theory. Bernard gets upset. In both time periods, the characters prepare for evening parties. Septimus finally understands Thomasina's algorithm, while Valentine finally realizes Thomasina's genius. Chloë's mother discovers Chloe and Bernard carrying on, and Bernard abruptly leaves Sidley Park. Thomasina gets Septimus to teach her how to waltz. Gus brings Hannah the drawing of Septimus and the tortoise that proves he was the hermit, and Gus and Hannah dance side-by-side with Thomasina and Septimus.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Septimus Hodge – 22 years old at the play's beginning, tutor of Thomasina Coverly. Septimus has a clever, wry sense of humor only really matched by Thomasina, though she is actually smarter than he is. He studied science at Cambridge, alongside Lord Byron. He's always looking for love, from his famous carnal embrace with Mrs. Chater to his crush on Lady Croom, but ultimately, Thomasina has his heart. After her death at 16, he'll become the Sidley hermit, and live out the rest of his days trying, but failing, to express her mathematical theories.

Thomasina Coverly – Thirteen years old at the play's beginning, and 16 at the end. Daughter of Lady Croom and student of Septimus. She's a lively, witty girl with a precocious and creative skill for mathematics. During the play, we see her come up with two major ideas that had never been expressed in her time. One resembles the second law of thermodynamics, which states that systems tend to move towards entropy. Thomasina discovers this in her way just by thinking about stirring a rice pudding. Her other major idea resembles chaos theory—she's interested in trying to mathematically predict the future, and figures out a basic formula to show various future possibilities.

Mr. Ezra Chater – A bad poet and amateur botanist, and a long-

term guest at Sidley Park. Chater is a blundering, foolish figure, but he has a warm heart. He's blinded by his desire to believe the best of his wife and his poetry. He meets his death from a monkey bite on an expedition to Martinique, where he discovers a new type of **dahlia**.

Lord Byron – Byron was a real person, one of the most important Romantic poets. In the play, he never appears onstage, but he is mentioned so often that he is a character in his own right. Septimus's school friend from Cambridge, he sleeps with both Lady Croom and Mrs. Chater while a guest at Sidley Park.

Hannah Jarvis – A modern-day feminist scholar, Hannah earned renown with a bestselling book rehabilitating the reputation of Caroline Lamb, a historical figure who was Byron's lover. Hannah is hardworking, skeptical, and passionate about the value of academia and the quest for knowledge. Unlike every other character, love doesn't sway Hannah, and she rejects advances from Bernard and Valentine.

Bernard – Though Bernard, like Hannah, is a scholar interested in the Romantic era, he is her opposite. Where she is cautious and focused on figures neglected by history, Bernard is swaggering, overconfident, and obsessed with the already-renowned Byron. He gets into trouble, publishing an ambitious theory about Chater's death without adequate proof. Though Hannah and Bernard should be enemies, they end up with a relationship based on grudging mutual admiration. Bernard has an affair with Chloe.

Valentine – A modern-day Coverly sibling, along with Chloe and Gus. Valentine studies mathematics at Oxford and spends the play trying to find an algorithm that describes patterns in the Sidley Park grouse population. He is therefore uniquely suited to understand Thomasina's attempts to represent nature through iteration, and helps Hannah work out the significance of Thomasina's explorations.

The Sidley Park hermit – The hermit is actually Septimus, but his identity remains a mystery for most of the play. The hermit is the focus of Hannah's research at Sidley Park, as she sees him as a symbol of the Romantic era. Throughout the play, she attempts to understand his identity, and what he was doing out in the hermitage scribbling math and predicting the end of the world.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lady Croom – Thomasina's mother and wife of the owner of Sidley Park. Like Thomasina and Septimus, she's very smart, with a cutting sense of humor and a capability to see through the silliness of the Sidley Park social scene.

Mrs. Chater – Chater's wife. She sleeps around, with Septimus, Byron and Brice. She, Brice, and Mr. Chater head to Martinique together after leaving Sidley Park. Like Byron, Mrs. Chater never actually appears in the play.

Jellaby – The butler, whose main purpose in the play is to deliver letters.

Mr. Noakes – The landscape gardener, depicted as something of a slave to the latest Romantic fashions in gardening.

Captain Edward Brice, R. N. – Lady Croom's brother, and lover of Mrs. Chater.

Augustus – The brother of Thomasina. In the play, the same actor depicts him and the silent modern-day Gus Coverly.

Chloe – Sister to Gus and Valentine. Chloe theorizes that sex is the reason why the world doesn't go the way of Newtonian determinism. She has an affair with Bernard.

Gus – A modern-day Coverly sibling. He is very socially awkward and perhaps incapable of speech. However, he's very observant, giving Hannah her most important clue. He also seems to have a closer link to the past of Sidley Park than any other character.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MATHEMATICS, NATURE, AND FATE

Thomasina's project, tragically cut short by her early death, is to find a formula that will express not lines, circles, or other perfect geometric shapes, but the natural forms of nature: "If there is an equation for a curve like a bell, there must be an equation for one like a bluebell" (Act 1, Scene 3). Thomasina also believes that a comprehensive formula to describe nature will allow her to predict the future. She makes several discoveries, even without advanced knowledge of math. One breakthrough is her understanding that hot things cool down to room temperature, but room temperature things don't heat up, a concept that Newton did not describe in his laws of physics. In the modern day, Valentine, who studies similar topics at Oxford, interprets Thomasina's discovery, explaining how this one-directional type of physics relates to the universe's tendency towards equilibrium: "It'll take a while, but we'll all end up at room temperature" (82). Energy tends to leave, not arrive. So although the future is not as specifically predictable as Thomasina would like, she's correct that what's true of a bowl of rice pudding is true of the universe, and they both end up at the same low-energy point.

Another significant piece of Thomasina's exploration is the graphing she makes by iteration, using the result of the previous function to make a new function. Valentine explains

that contemporary science uses iteration to understand population changes and other major topics. However, iteration won't allow predictions of the future either—instead, it shows how tiny changes can have a huge effect, and demonstrates that "the future is disorder" (Act 1, Scene 4). Thomasina's discoveries and her focus on destiny not only link her to Valentine, but also to the play's larger concerns about beauty, death, and truth.

ROMANTIC CONCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY

Noakes's changes to the garden bring it from an 18th century Enlightenment mode of order and symmetry to the 19th century Romantic style, an attempt to return to and celebrate the wildness of nature, rather than to constrain it. Yet Romanticism thematically transcends the garden, becoming a sounding board for each character to express their own philosophies about beauty and art. The characters have mixed feelings about whether Noakes's garden is beautiful. Lady Croom finds the whole thing overwhelming, even silly: "Where there is the familiar pastoral refinement of an Englishman's garden, here there is an eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag"" (Act 1, Scene 1).

In the present day, Hannah agrees that Romanticism is "intellectual rigor turned in on itself…cheap thrills and false emotion" (Act 1, Scene 2). Bernard, on the other hand, is a scholar of Byron, one of the most important Romantic poets, and he sees the Enlightenment's will to order and divide as false, and science's progress as unimportant. He prefers the Romantic emphasis on individual experience: "A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need" (Act 2, Scene 5). As for Thomasina, and Valentine after her, their stroke of genius is to try to combine both forms of beauty, bringing the scientific rigor of the Enlightenment to bear on the wildness of nature.

SEX AND LOVE

Everyone in the play seems to be in love with someone else, or at least sexually attracted to someone else. Septimus loves Lady Croom and later Thomasina. Bernard gets with Chloe, but also wants to get with Hannah. Valentine calls Hannah his fiancée. Gus also seems to have a crush on Hannah. The play begins and ends on the themes of sex and love—ending with Septimus and Thomasina's kisses, and Gus and Hannah's dance, and beginning with Thomasina trying to get Septimus to explain what "carnal embrace" means.

Sex and love are also tied to the play's larger concerns with knowledge, beauty, and death. The play takes both sex and love seriously, never disdaining the characters' urges, but demonstrating how sex and love can be ways to explore what it means to know another person. Further, sex, because of its procreative properties and unique pleasures, ties into the play's interest in death and how to transcend it.

But sex and love in the play have even farther-ranging connections—Stoppard links each theme in a complex web. Sex and love also connect to nature, and even to the conflict/contrast between Romanticism and the Enlightenment. Here, after all, are all these scholars engaging in intense intellectual pursuits, but there are physical and emotional longings that also drive them, that are intertwined with their other pursuits and inescapable. They are minds *and* bodies.

ACADEMIA AND EDUCATION

Both the 19th century and modern-day sections are structured around academic pursuits. In the 19th century, the dynamic between Septimus, the quick-witted tutor who never condescends to his young student, and Thomasina, the pupil whose brilliance transcends her teacher's, shows education at its finest. In the last scene, when Thomasina has gone from 13 to nearly 17, sexual tension has entered their interactions, but the play presents this too as sincere and warm-hearted. We learn from Hannah's research about the hermit that this would prove to be the most important relationship of Septimus's life—after Thomasina's death, he lives out the rest of his days trying to carry on her intellectual vision, though, in all his mathematical calculations, he's unable to make any important breakthroughs. His fate shows how teaching and learning are closely tied to love and the search for truth.

In the present day, Hannah and Bernard represent modern academic discourse, and embody its good and bad aspects. Both are competitive, single-mindedly obsessed with their own views on their subjects, and, despite their similarities, constantly feuding. But the play also shows the joy of academic research, which is a combination of treasure hunt and boxing match. As the pair races to uncover what really happened at Sidley Park, they demonstrate how academia, in its best form, can bring lost knowledge to the attention it deserves. Once again, the systems of education are shown to be essential to bringing truth to light, bestowing on long-gone people lasting renown, which may soften the devastation of death.

DEATH

The title of the play comes from the Latin "Et in Arcadia ego," from a poem by Virgil made famous by a 1638 painting of that title by Poussin. As translated by Lady Croom to Thomasina, the phrase signifies "Here I am in Arcadia." What Lady Croom intends as a statement on the beauty of her grounds contains the darker meaning that death lurks even in the loveliest surroundings. The "I" speaking in the poem is death, and, in Virgil's poem and Poussin's painting, the line is an inscription on a tombstone in

Arcadia, a countryside region of Greece known for its harmonious natural beauty.

From Thomasina's Scene 1 musings on the omnipresence of death, in the form of hunting, in her childhood, to Septimus's eventual fate as the doom-obsessed madman in the midst of carefully plotted Romantic scenery, death underpins all of the characters' searches for beauty and love. And at the center of the mystery that Hannah's trying to research, the question of who the Sidley hermit was, is Thomasina's death, which drove Septimus crazy with grief. Still, sex, love, and contributions to the world of scholarship are all ways to transcend or be remembered after death, and in that way to gain a kind of immortality.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GARDEN

The Sidley Park **garden** is the play's strongest symbol of the shift from Enlightenment-era conceptions of beauty to Romantic ones. Noakes spearheads the change, transforming the grounds from a gentle, pastoral countryside scene to a dramatic Gothic wilderness complete with a moldering obelisk and a fake hermitage. This parallels the transformation in culture at the turn of the 19th century from a focus on reason, science and human progress to emotion and nature. The characters are split ideologically, with Bernard high Romantic, Valentine very Enlightenment, and Thomasina's math bridging the two. But, as Lady Croom and Hannah both point out, neither garden style is actually more natural or more real than the other. Both designs are human-made for a desired effect.

THE TORTOISE

The **tortoise** exists both in past and present versions. In the past, he belongs to Septimus and is named Plautus. In the present, he belongs to Valentine and is named Lightning. The tortoise represents the easily permeable boundaries between the present and the past. He also ends up being the proof for Hannah's theory that Septimus and the hermit are the same. A historical document notes that the hermit had a tortoise named Plautus, and in the play's last moment, Gus brings Hannah a portrait Thomasina drew of Septimus and Plautus together.

FIRE

Fire is a two-pronged symbol. On the one hand, fire relates to Thomasina's discoveries about the second law of thermodynamics. She identifies that heat tends to leave a system, and won't re-enter of its own accord. Heat, like jam stirred into rice pudding, only heads one direction—towards entropy and disorder. This contradicts Newton, whose physics only showed processes that can go in both directions. But before Thomasina can sort out the full implications of her discovery—is the universe doomed to end in disorder? Can the future be predicted?—she dies in a fire. Like the fire that consumed Alexandria's library, all of Thomasina's knowledge disappears, but ultimately, other scholars will rediscover her theories.

THE APPLE AND ITS LEAF

Like the **tortoise**, the **apple** exists both in the past and the present. In the present, Gus gives Hannah the apple. In the past, Septimus begins to eat it, and Thomasina declares her intention to write a formula that will describe the leaf. In the present once more, Valentine explains to Hannah that an iterated algorithm could describe the leaf's general form, though not its exact shape. There are certain parameters of order in nature, within which disorder works out the specifics. The apple and leaf become a perfect example of how Thomasina brings together Enlightenment and Romantic thought. She loves math and geometry, but she applies those Enlightenment techniques to a very Romantic subject, namely natural forms. And she and Valentine show that both order (Enlightenment) and chaos (Romanticism) command the world.

THE POT OF DAHLIAS

In the past, the **dahlias** are important because Chater discovers them and Lady Croom is proud to be the first in England to display them. In the present, the dahlias provide the evidence that disproves Bernard's theory. Chater definitely didn't die at Byron's gun, because Hannah unearths the garden book that describes his discovery of the dahlia. Like the **apple and the leaf**, the dahlias are a product of the natural world, so they tie into the ideas of Romantic beauty, gardening, taming nature, and describing nature. Chater finds a place alongside Thomasina and Valentine as a describer of nature. Despite Noakes's attempts to make the Sidley Park **garden** into a Gothic wilderness, only Chater deals with the true dangers of the wild.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Farrar, Strauss and Giroux edition of *Arcadia* published in 1994.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

Thomasina: Tell me more about sexual congress.
Septimus: There is nothing more to be said about sexual congress.
Thomasina: Is it the same as love?
Septimus: Oh no, it is much nicer than that.

Related Characters: Septimus Hodge, Thomasina Coverly (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

As the play begins, the differences between Thomasina and Septimus couldn't be more obvious. Thomasina is a young, naive girl (barely a teenager), while Septimus is her older, more confident tutor. Curiously, Stoppard doesn't immediately convey Septimus's knowledge of the world by showing him to know math or poetry; instead, he characterizes Septimus as an authority figure by making it plain that he knows about sex--*that*, not Septimus's academic training, is what separates him from his pupil (who, it's quickly shown, is more than his mach in intelligence). Septimus also comes across as a distinctly *modern* kind of character, someone who's fairly frank about sex and sexual pleasure--an important kind of character in a play that flashes back and forth between the Romantic and contemporary eras.

When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomical atlas. But if you stir backward, the jam will not come together again. Indeed, the pudding does not notice and continues to turn pink just as before. Do you think this is odd?

Related Characters: Thomasina Coverly (speaker), Septimus Hodge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Thomasina is very young, but she notices that she can't "unstir" her pudding; that is, she can make her bowl of pudding more and more disorderly, but she cannot recreate order in a "natural" way. Thomasina has stumbled upon an idea that's at the core of modern mathematics and science: the principle of entropy. The total entropy (i.e., disorder, heat energy) of a system is always increasing: thus, Thomasina can increase the entropy of her pudding, but she can't decrease it again. Thomasina's idea has been known since ancient times, (it was the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who said "you can't bathe in the same river twice," often interpreted as an observation about entropy), but as we'll learn by the end of the play, Thomasina is actually a mathematical prodigy. Furthermore, the concept of entropy could be interpreted in a more philosophical way, in that life itself tends towards disorder and decay, and it is only through human will and action that we cling to our senses of meaning and order.

Brice (to Septimus): As her tutor, it is your duty to keep her in ignorance.
Lady Croom (to Brice): Do not dabble in paradox, Edward, it puts you in danger of fortuitous wit.

Related Characters: Captain Edward Brice, R. N., Lady Croom (speaker), Septimus Hodge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this amusing passage, Thomasina has given some sign that she understands what sex ("carnal embrace") is: a fact that distresses her mother, Lady Croom, and her uncle, Captain Brice. Lady Croom scolds Septimus for teaching Thomasina about such adult matters. And yet she seems more irritated with her brother for trying to sound clever: she tells him to avoid paradox, because he might say something clever without intending to. The way Croome scolds her brother is also interesting because it highlights the word "fortuitous" (i..e, Edward might accidentally say something smart). The concept of accident and randomness is an important theme of the play; the universe's randomness is always increasing, to the point where implausible events are actually likely to happen.

But Sidley Park is already a picture, and a most amiable picture too. The slopes are green and gentle. The trees are companionably grouped at intervals that show them to advantage. The rill is a serpentine ribbon unwound from the lake peaceably contained by meadows on which the right amount of sheep are tastefully arranged—in short, it is nature as God intended, and I can say with the painter, "Et in Arcadia ego!" "Here I am in Arcadia," Thomasina.

Related Characters: Lady Croom (speaker), Thomasina Coverly

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Stoppard gives us the title of the play and Lady Croom stakes out her loyalty to the Enlightenment mindset, not the Romantic. Croom surveys her gardens and criticizes the revisions Noakes wants to make--which would result in a wild, disheveled, romantic look. She prefers gardens that are beautiful and orderly--gardens so pretty that they could provoke one to say, "Here I am in Arcadia." (Arcadia was a Classical example of a pastoral, idyllic place of natural beauty and harmony.)

The notion of a clean, orderly garden is characteristic of Enlightenment upperclass society; the idea of a garden being more chaotic and unpredictable is more characteristic of Romanticism. Furthermore, this passage is crucial because Lady Croom quotes a line depicted in a famous painting by Poussin (and one by Guercino), but the words in the painting are inscribed on a tomb, suggesting that the speaker is dead, or is even Death himself, saying "here I am even in Arcadia." There's death (or entropy, perhaps) lurking everywhere in beauty--as Thomasina has already pointed out, everything naturally decays over time, even (and especially) Croom's beautiful, orderly gardens. Croom is unrealistic about the nature of the universe (as per her absurd suggestion that a garden represents "nature as God intended," and her notable misinterpretation of the play's titular quotation).

Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

The whole Romantic sham, Bernard! It's what happened to the Enlightenment, isn't it? A century of intellectual rigor turned in on itself. A mind in chaos suspected of genius. In a setting of cheap thrills and false emotion...The decline from thinking to feeling, you see."

Related Characters: Hannah Jarvis (speaker), Bernard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the scholar Hannah Jarvis makes a series of bold pronouncements about the Romantic era of European history. During the romantic era, she claims, Europe underwent a steady decline. Whereas the Enlightenment era had celebrated thought and rigorous self-control, the Romantics celebrated feeling, freedom, and happiness for their own sakes. The general "decay" from Enlightenment to Romanticism was, for Jarvis, characteristic of a decline from "thinking to feeling."

The passage openly suggests that the contrast between thinking and feeling is a major theme of the play. Hannah, like Lady Croom, is definitely on the Enlightenment/thinking side of the equation. (Such a binary is misleading, however, since the Romantics were hardly the sensual idiots Hannah believes them to be, and the Enlightenment thinkers were hardly the cold rationalists she claims they were.)

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

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? Do we believe nature is written in numbers?

Related Characters: Thomasina Coverly (speaker), Septimus Hodge

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In this important section, we see the novelty of Thomasina's thinking. Thomasina has learned so much about mathematics from Septimus that she begins to think in terms that eclipse the intellectual dogma of her era (and her teacher). Thomasina has learned how to model curves like a bell curve or a circle; but now she wants to discover the curve that can model the shape of a leaf or a rose. In short, Thomasina wants to use mathematics to discover the source of the beauty of the natural world.

Where do we situate Thomasina in the Enlightenment-Romanticism binary? Perhaps Thomasina's example shows us that it's really not a binary at all. Like the Romantics, Thomasina embraces the link between mind *and* nature; at the same time, she seems to want to use mathematics to break down nature into a series of rigorous patterns, not unlike the Enlightenment thinkers. In general, Thomasina's project goes beyond anything that the Enlightenment or the Romantic era was capable of achieving: her ideas are actually more characteristic of chaos theory, a distinctly postmodern theory of mathematics. Thomasina, one could argue, is the truly "modern" character in the text, someone who belongs in the 20th or 21st century.

We shed as we pick up, like travelers 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.

Related Characters: Septimus Hodge (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Septimus gives a long speech about the eternal nature of knowledge. Septimus notes that many of the greatest ideas in history were lost in the Library of Alexandria when it was burned to the ground. And yet these idea have been "reborn"--other human beings rediscovered the ideas later on. Septimus's monologue gives a sense of the limitations of human knowledge: a human mind can only hold so much, just as a traveler can only carry so much in his arms. The finitude of humanity means that certain ideas will inevitably be lost, only to be recovered again.

Septimus's view of history is one of eternal recursion: an idea is gained and then lost, sooner or later. His theories also help us understand why scholarship is so important: by recreating the lives of people who lived a long time ago (as Hannah and her fellow scholars do), we can rediscover some of their ideas--ideas which may have been lost to history.

Act 1, Scene 4 Quotes

I, Thomasina Coverly, have found a truly wonderful method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone.

Related Characters: Thomasina Coverly (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Thomasina begins the scene by claiming that she's discovered a mathematical proof that will allow her to model the shapes of natural objects like trees and leaves. It's not immediately clear if Thomasina really has discovered such a proof, or if she's only pretending.

Thomasina's discovery (and it is a real discovery, we later learn) is important because it anticipates chaos theory, a school of science and mathematics that wouldn't appear for more than 100 years. Thus, Thomasina's discovery seemingly confirms Septimus's observations about the cyclical nature of all knowledge: certain discoveries get lost in time, only to be rediscovered later on. It's also worth noting that Thomasina's discovery seems to be lost in part because she's a young woman--the sexism of her society ensures that her contributions to mathematics aren't valued, let alone remembered.

When your Thomasina was doing maths it had been the same maths for a couple of thousand years. Classical. And for a century after Thomasina. Then maths left the real world behind, just like modern art, really. Nature was classical, maths was suddenly Picassos. But now nature is having the last laugh. The freaky stuff is turning out to be the mathematics of the natural world.

Related Characters: Valentine (speaker), Thomasina Coverly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In the present-day, Valentine, a mathematics student at Oxford, discovers Thomasina's proof for how to model chaotic natural structures. He acknowledges that Thomasina wasn't just bluffing: she really had stumbled

upon a form of chaos theory 100 years earlier than anybody else. Valentine goes on to give an informal history of modern mathematics. Mathematics was once seen as a way to model the world in an orderly and predictable fashion. But over time, mathematics became increasingly abstract and alien to the natural world: innovations like non-Euclidean geometry and set theory seemed to have little application to the real world. But in the end, it became clear that the world of mathematics really was applicable to reality: the only way to truly model natural objects like leaves and trees was to use chaos theory.

There's a lot to unpack here. Notice that Lady Croom's theory of the orderliness and regularity of the natural world is nonsensical: as it turns out, the natural world is infinitely chaotic, to the point where only the most abstract of mathematical formulae can represent it. Furthermore, notice the analogy Valentine makes between mathematics and painting: the boundaries between different intellectual disciplines fades away as civilization enters the 20th century.

❝ The unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is. It's how nature creates itself, on every scale, the snowflake and the snowstorm. It makes me so happy.

Related Characters: Valentine (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Valentine continues to explain chaos theory in a lyrical, nontechnical way. Chaos theory, he claims, argues that the world is both predictable and uncontrollable. The tiniest differences in scale or size can have enormous consequences (a principle often called the "butterfly effect," based on the idea that butterfly flapping its wings in Tokyo could cause a hurricane in Florida). Interestingly, Valentine claims that small, unpredictable events can sometimes, but not always, be balanced out by large, predictable events. Thus, the world consists of a constant interplay between randomness and predictability: uncertainty, but not too much uncertainty, freedom, but not too much freedom.

The passage is another good example of the "poetic" nature of modern mathematics and science, particularly as Stoppard portrays it. There's something poetic, even magical, about Valentine's vision of the world, even though he's a man of math and science, and can back up his ideas with rigorous proofs. Math is a kind of religion for Valentine, something that makes him "happy"--it gives his life meaning, and seems to have major applications for religion, morality, metaphysics, etc.

Act 2, Scene 5 Quotes

❝ Chaps sometimes wanted to marry me, and I don't know a worse bargain. Available sex against not being allowed to fart in bed.

Related Characters: Hannah Jarvis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hannah dryly sums up her take on marriage. She's been proposed to before, but she's always turned down her potential husbands, because she doesn't want to have to worry about things like "farting in bed." In other words, Hannah sees marriage as an attack on her personal (bodily) liberty, justifiable only in that it provides "available sex." At times,Hannah seems like a (pretty nasty) caricature of the modern feminist academic: humorless, opposed to all "conventional" relationships, etc.

It's interesting to think that there are almost no characters in the play, in either the present day or in the Romantic era, who believe in the ideal of love. Hannah dismisses love as sex and the loss of liberty, and Septimus seems to see love as an opportunity for sex, nothing more. The one character who, presumably, *does* believe in love is Lord Byron, and tellingly, he's never actually on the stage. *Arcadia* isn't really a play about interpersonal love at all; it's about the various kinds of desire and attraction that might lead someone to pursue mathematics, academia, science, or writing.

Act 2, Scene 7 Quotes

❝ Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter. Otherwise we're going out the way we came in.

Related Characters: Hannah Jarvis (speaker), Valentine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hanah makes a stirring speech about the ephemeral nature of all human knowledge (a speech that is seemingly intended to evoke the speech Septimus gave in the first half of the play). Like Septimus, Hannah sees knowledge as necessarily incomplete. Where Septimus sees human limitation as the source of knowledge's incompleteness, Hannah sees desire and *eros* as the reason for the incompleteness of knowledge. There can never be total knowledge, and that's a good thing: the *desire* for knowledge is more important and more powerful. Hannah's point of view is rather Romantic, then, since it eschews completeness and perfection in favor of a constant, noble striving. Yet her ideas could also be interpreted as evoking the Enlightenment, since they hinge on the rigorous examination of information. As the play approaches an ending, it becomes clear that even the characters who claim to believe in "thinking, not feeling" actually need both to survive.

> …There's an order things can't happen in. You can't open a door till there's a house.

Related Characters: Valentine (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Valentine analyzes Thomasina's notes on chaos theory, which she saw as an algorithm for predicting the randomness of the universe. Valentine admits that Thomasina understood the basic mechanisms of chaos theory very well: she saw the universe as a fundamentally unpredictable place, in which there was limited room for patterns and order. And yet Valentine also claims that Thomasina didn't really understand what she'd discovered: she didn't understand that chaos theory and the laws of thermodynamics predict the end of the universe. Everything in the universe proceeds from a place of low entropy to high entropy; i.e., things flow from hot to cold, until everything in the universe is exactly the same temperature. (As Valentine puts it, "you can't open a door till there's a house.") Thomasina had unknowingly predicted the end of the world by "heat death."

Valentine's observations illustrate a couple of important ideas. It's strange to think that Thomasina could discover something and yet not see the full implications of her own ideas: and yet such a phenomenon is common in intellectual history. Thomasina's ideas also illustrate a fundamentally pessimistic view of life: the world is getting more chaotic, and all human attempts to reverse the chaos will prove futile in the end. (That is, death exists "even in Arcadia.) In the end, both Enlightenment and Romantic notions of the world prove wrong, since they both hinge on a "pattern" (either intellectual or emotional) that, mathematics teaches us, must eventually break down. And yet perhaps Valentine's notions of life and fate are just as culturally determined as Thomasina's and Septimus's: perhaps Valentine's pessimism about the fate of the universe is just as arbitrary and mythological as his predecessors' optimism.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The curtain rises on a stately English room in the manor of Sidley Park, where a lesson is taking place. A **tortoise**, named Plautus, sits on the stack of papers on the simple, large table. Thomasina, the 13-year-old student, asks Septimus, her tutor, what "carnal embrace" means. Septimus doesn't give her the real answer (that is, sex), but says instead that "carnal embrace" means hugging meat, and mentions that Mr. Chater has written a bad poem, "The Couch of Eros." Thomasina comments that she overheard Jellaby, the butler, gossiping that Mrs. Chater had engaged in carnal embrace in the **garden**'s gazebo. Septimus is immediately curious about the news.

The play's opening lines introduce some major intersecting themes: education and sex, as well as poetry and fast-paced, pun-filled banter. "Carnal" is indeed related to the Latin word that means "meat," so Septimus's response shows that he has to try hard to hide information from Thomasina, who is more than his match intellectually.

Thomasina explains to Septimus the gossip chain—Mr. Noakes, the gardener, witnessed the carnal embrace from afar, then told Chater, Mrs. Chater's husband. A groom overheard this and told Jellaby, and now many others in the household have overheard as well. After her explanation, Thomasina calls Septimus out on his definition of "carnal embrace," pointing out that a gazebo "isn't a meat larder." She guesses correctly that carnal embrace involves kissing and hugging. At last, Septimus gives her a real definition, describing genitals, and then quickly returns to the lesson on Fermat's Last Theorum, which relates to exponents.

Thomasina's explanation quickly sketches out the Sidley Park atmosphere. Audiences are now situated in the upper-class countryside estate, full of servants, frivolity and comedy of the sort typical in 19th-century novels. Thomasina shows her unusual intuitive skills by pointing out that she knows Septimus is hiding something.

Thomasina won't be dissuaded from the topic of sex. She is disgusted but intrigued. She asks if sex is the same as love, and Septimus responds, "Oh no, it is much nicer than that."

Septimus comes off as cold-hearted and superficial, rather than Romantic and loving. Here he places the biological pleasures of sex above the emotional joys of love (as do many of the other characters in the play).

Jellaby enters with a letter for Septimus from Chater. Mr. Chater wants to meet with Septimus in the gunroom—a detail which suggests (along with Septimus's behavior so far) that Septimus was the other person with Mrs. Chater in the gazebo. Septimus says that Noakes, whose job as the gardener is about creating picturesquely beautiful **gardens**, is more like a snake. Thomasina is otherwise engaged, wondering why you can stir jam into a pudding, but not stir the jam out.

This short moment is loaded with symbols. The comedy gets darker with the addition of the possibility of death, represented by the gunroom. Septimus's biblical reference shows how Noakes, like the serpent that gave Eve the apple, was like a spy who brought death into the perfection of the gardens.

Thomasina wonders if God is a Newtonian—that is, if God agrees with Newton's laws of physics. Septimus begins to pose the question he thinks she's asking—if all of nature moves by the laws of Newton's physics, is there free will? But Thomasina has other things in mind. She's wondering if it might be possible to predict the future using very complex algebra. Septimus acknowledges that her question is original. He begins to describe how Fermat actually had a proof for his last theorum, but didn't write it down before his death, but the lesson is again interrupted.

This passage demonstrates how math and fate are linked in the play. Thomasina doesn't aim to learn math or science, but to unpack life's biggest questions. She doesn't get trapped in the common questions related to determinism and free will that Septimus poses, because she's more concerned with discovering what will happen.

Chater enters angrily. Septimus sends Thomasina away. She guesses that Fermat's note about having a proof for his theorem was a joke. Mr. Chater blames Septimus for "insulting" Mrs. Chater in the gazebo. Septimus talks circles around the slow but outraged Chater. Septimus explains that Mrs. Chater asked him to meet her, and that she is known for her sexual appetites. Just as Septimus appears to have totally enraged Chater, who wants to duel, Septimus begins to compliment Chater's poetry.

Chater is no match for Septimus intellectually, but he could still pose a real danger with a gun. Septimus finally shows his caution and fear by complimenting Chater's terrible poetry. Stoppard deftly combines comedy and drama. The stakes are high, but the jokes are still funny.

Chater is pleased with the compliment, and forgets momentarily that he's supposed to be angry at Septimus. Septimus cunningly explains that he's been tasked with writing a review of "The Couch of Eros," Chater's poem, and that the review will take some time to complete. Chater imagines that Mrs. Chater had sex with Septimus in order to ensure a good review, and feels proud of what a devoted wife she is. Chater writes a friendly inscription in Septimus's copy of "The Couch of Eros."

This scene introduces some more of the play's interests, including egos, flattery, and willful blindness. Bernard, though he's smarter than Chater, is his modern-day counterpart, similarly obsessed with his own work to the point of irrationality.

Noakes enters, distressed to find Septimus and Chater together. Chater reads out his friendly inscription to Septimus, surely the opposite of the scene Noakes expected to find. Lady Croom, Thomasina's mother and the mistress of Sidley Park, and her brother Brice enter. Brice lists features of the Sidley Park **garden**—the gazebo, the Chinese bridge—and a moment of comic misunderstanding ensues, with Chater and Septimus thinking Brice might be talking about locations of carnal embrace, and Brice and Lady Croom intending to discuss something else garden-related. Thomasina returns.

Brice's mentioning of the gazebo, site of carnal embrace, brings back the Garden-of-Eden undercurrent that Septimus introduced. Sex has taken place in the garden, and now (we will shortly see), the garden will be destroyed to make way for a new, wilder, deliberately ruined-looking vision.

Noakes lays out his plans for **garden** renovations. Brice hates them, but Noakes explains this is what's in fashion. The drawings apparently show a completely wild, Romantic landscape which as been stripped of the pleasantly decorative elements like the gazebo and the bridge. Lady Croom asks for Septimus's opinion. As usual, Septimus enjoys himself, hyperbolically criticizing the garden and exposing everyone else's ridiculousness. He mentions "carnal embrace" again, and Thomasina mentions that she knows what that is now. Just as everyone is getting upset about her lost innocence, Thomasina gives the definition of "carnal embrace" involving embracing meat.

Thomasina shows her loyalty to Septimus by not revealing her new awareness of sex. The idea of fallen innocence again echoes the Eden theme. Noakes's garden plans demonstrate a fundamental contradiction about the Romantic form of landscape design. Romantic beauty is all about an untamed style, but Noakes is planning every bit of it, and it is no less artificial than the pastoral scene which precedes it.

Lady Croom returns to the **garden** renovation plans. She describes how the gentle and carefully cultivated countryside look has given way to "gloomy forest and towering crag," filled with fallen ruins and creepy, wild-looking crannies. She notes in particular the hermitage, a little hut meant to look like an antiquated dwelling for a recluse, designed in an "irregular," non-symmetrical style, which Noakes asserts is what's in fashion. Lady Croom praises the garden's current layout, with pleasant slopes, a few sheep, and a pleasant river and lake. She describes it as "Nature as God intended," and then says the Latin phrase from which the play derives its name—"Et in Arcadia ego!" She translates this as "Here I am in Arcadia."

Lady Croom's Latin connects the Enlightenment-era beauty that she favors to the Classical aesthetics of ancient Rome. Like the Renaissance, the Enlightenment sought to banish religious, emotional, mysterious thinking in favor of a return to Classical thought, interpreted as science, evidence, and order. The Romantic-Enlightenment conflict is just another phase of an age-old cultural/intellectual conflict between reason and emotion.

Lady Croom blames the **garden** plans on Romantic literature like *The Castle of Otranto*. She hears shots from the men hunting on the grounds, and mentions that maybe Septimus's schoolmate has managed to shoot a pigeon. Brice thinks, rather, that it was Thomasina's brother Augustus who shot the pigeon. She exits with the other men. Thomasina muses about how she's been hearing gunshots from hunting her whole childhood, and mentions that her father could track his whole life in the game book, a record of what was shot on which day. Septimus quotes the Latin again, saying, "Even in Arcadia, there am I," referring to death's presence in the garden. (The death theme, present in the original Latin poem, was missing from Lady Croom's out-of-context translation.)

Lady Croom's placing the blame for the garden on literature ties in with Bernard's later speech about literature's relevance to everyday life. Literature influences culture and changes lives, imposing its effects on the future like a force of nature. The game books will turn out to be the basis for Valentine's later research on grouse, and they also show a genteel, cultivated Regency attitude towards death. Septimus's retranslation of Lady Croom's Latin phrase—her phrase is a pure delight of being in a beautiful garden; his is a recognition that even in a beautiful garden there is still death.

Thomasina begins to sketch in a little hermit on Noakes's plans for the hermitage. Thomasina asks if Septimus is in love with Lady Croom, and Septimus accuses her of being too clever for her age. Thomasina hands Septimus a letter from Mrs. Chater, and exits. Septimus reads the letter and slips it into his copy of "The Couch of Eros."

The scene ends as it begins, with Thomasina demonstrating her uncanny understanding of the workings of adult love. Later, Hannah will use the hermit drawing as a part of her research.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

This scene takes place in the same room, but in the present day. Stoppard notes in his stage directions that the table should retain bits and pieces from both eras—so papers, pens, and Septimus's **tortoise** from the first scene remain on the table. Hannah Jarvis, a scholar, looks through Noakes's sketchbook, then steps out. Chloë Coverley, the daughter of the current Lord of the estate, and Bernard Nightingale, another scholar, enter, and Valentine briefly enters and exits. Chloë tells Bernard about Hannah's project—she's writing a history of the **garden**. Bernard realizes that he's read the previous book that Hannah has written, and asks Chloë not to mention his name. Gus, Chloë's little brother, enters, but doesn't speak, and comes across as strange. He exits quickly.

The scene opens with a speedy introduction of all the characters who will be present in the modern-day portions of the play. Hannah is researching the garden's history, but we, the audience, have just been privy to several important conversations about it that Hannah will never see. For the rest of the play, because of our privileged position, we as the audience will know more than any single character. This adds both frustration and suspense—dramatic irony.

Valentine, another Coverly sibling, comes back in, searching for game books, but everything in the house has been taken away in preparation for a **garden** party. Valentine quickly and distractedly tries to figure out who Bernard is. Bernard explains that he's come to talk to Hannah about academic matters. Valentine talks about how his mother loves Hannah's book, which was a bestseller. Bernard remembers an academic conference where he met Valentine. Valentine is evidently involved with a group of mathematicians who attempt to use statistical tools to determine the authors of various works, and Bernard says he's happy that the work failed. Valentine exits, abruptly and rudely, as he's been all along. He takes the **tortoise**, named Lightning, with him.

Bernard right away presents himself as a typical Romantic sympathizer. He dislikes Valentine's project of combining math with literature, and even tells him so, though Bernard is Valentine's guest. This shows Bernard coming down on the side of mystery, human feelings, and subjectivity, where Valentine supports ordered methods and objective interpretations. It also reveals Bernard as something of a bully.

Hannah enters, calling Bernard "Mr. Peacock," though his last name is Nightingale—evidently Chloë concealed his identity, as he'd hoped. Bernard begins awkwardly complimenting Hannah's book about Caroline Lamb, a real historical figure who wrote novels and had a relationship with the Romantic poet Lord Byron. Bernard praises Hannah's book as "shedding reflected light on the character of Lord Byron," and Hannah threatens to kick him in the balls.

Hannah's virulent reaction to Bernard's "reflected light" comment comically demonstrates the single-mindedness and passion of academia. Hannah, we can assume, takes a feminist point of view, rehabilitating the reputation of an underdog. Bernard only cares for the already famous Byron.

Bernard finally gets to the point. He's looking for information on Ezra Chater, and takes out a copy of "The Couch of Eros," which turns out to be the copy that Chater inscribed for Septimus. The inscription includes "Sidley Park," which is what brought Bernard here. Bernard doesn't think he can write a whole book on Chater, but maybe a paper. There's no information about him anywhere, besides a mention of a possible relative, a botanist who died studying a **dahlia** in Martinique.

Septimus would be dismayed to learn that in 200 years an academic would be interested in Chater's terrible poetry. Bernard's quest shows how the future can head in surprising directions, which links to Thomasina's interest in prediction. In the vagaries of time, renown may go to the wrong person.

Bernard explains he's giving a talk possibly about Chater next week, and is looking for leads about Chater. Hannah says she's not used to such "groveling," because the academics who reviewed her book looked down upon it. When she learns Bernard teaches at Sussex, she mentions that a man named Nightingale gave her book a particularly harsh review. (Now we know why Bernard wanted to hide his real name.)

Like Thomasina and Septimus, Bernard isn't above lying to make a good impression and get what he wants. In this scene and others, Stoppard nods to the great tradition of British farces involving mistaken identities.

Hannah and Bernard banter about Valentine, who's studying something at Oxford related to math, computers, and grouse. Valentine likes to call Hannah his fiancée as a joke. Hannah explains she's studying the history of Sidley Park. She knows who Septimus is, to whom the inscription Bernard read is dedicated—he was a tutor, educated in science at Cambridge—but she doesn't know anything about Chater.

Valentine's nickname for Hannah introduces the topic of sex into the modern era. The scene as a whole shows how interpersonal navigation is as much a part of academia as the pure and noble search for knowledge.

Hannah explains in more depth her academic project, which centers around the same era (early 19th century) that's relevant to Bernard. She's trying to research the Sidley Park hermit, who she's using to frame her interpretation of the end of Romanticism. The hermit died in 1834, the same year, Bernard adds helpfully, that the Romantic poet Coleridge died. Hannah shows Bernard Noakes's plans for the **garden**, including the little drawing of the hermit that Thomasina drew in Scene 1. Hannah explains how Noakes changed the garden from gentle and pastoral to craggy and Romantic, but explains that each era of the English garden was equally gathered from other sources and ideals—none of it was "the real England," as Bernard says.

Hannah's mini-lecture about the garden to Bernard fleshes out the idea that there's no permanent, unsurpassed beauty in the world. While Bernard is a hard-line Romantic, and would argue (as he does in Scene 5) that Romantic poetry is the pinnacle of human achievement, Hannah is more moderate. Like Thomasina, she isn't tied to any single point of view about beauty. Instead, the search for knowledge in general motivates her.

Hannah continues talking about the Sidley Park hermit, whom Thomas Love Peacock (a real 19th-century writer, though the hermit is Stoppard's invention) described in a letter as "a sage of lunacy," brilliant but insane. Bernard focuses on whom Peacock was writing to as opposed to the details regarding the hermit, which annoys Hannah. She returns to her point about why she's going to hinge an entire book about the hermit. She explains that he wrote thousands of papers filled with nonsensical equations about the end of the world. He's a perfect symbol of Romanticism, which, Hannah says, is like a diseased reaction to the Enlightenment, when order and reason turned into nonsense, a "decline from thinking to feeling." Bernard asks what became of the hermit's nonsensical papers, and Hannah explains that they were intentionally **burned**.

At this point, the audience doesn't know the identity of the hermit either. Hannah's discussion shows how academia plucks individuals from obscurity in order to frame larger trends. Hannah isn't interested in the hermit in particular. Rather, she's interested in his era, and he's the way she'll illustrate Romanticism for her audience. She sets herself up for more arguments with Bernard by coming down firmly on the Romanticism-is-nonsense side of the debate.

Bernard asks Hannah about some details relating to Lord Byron, and she realizes that Byron, not Chater, may be Bernard's ultimate goal in coming to Sidley Park. Chloë bustles through, moving the game books in preparation for the party, and accidently lets Bernard's real name, Nightingale, slip. Hannah is predictably disgusted, now that she knows that Bernard is in fact the academic who gave her book such a scathing and haughty review. Bernard manages to deflect some tension by laying out a plan by which he and Hannah, collaborating, can humiliate "the Byron gang"—that is, the group of arrogant, masculine Byron scholars with whom Hannah, as a feminist, has a sort of academic feud.

The name Nightingale only confirms Hannah's first impressions—Bernard is just the sort of testosterone-fueled Byron scholar that she wants to avoid. Bernard immediately flips sides, wanting to embarrass the other Byron scholars. Bernard seems more motivated by glory and grudges than by love of the material at hand, but later he'll redeem himself and show a more authentic side.

Bernard explains that he thinks that, though this copy of "The Couch of Eros" is inscribed to Septimus, Byron used it and marked it up to write a review in a newspaper called the *Piccadilly Recreation*, published in April 1809. Bernard's chief evidence: the book came from Byron's library. Hannah counters that the reviewer was definitely Septimus, but Bernard thinks Hannah's idea doesn't make sense—the inscription suggests that Septimus and Chater were friends, but the *Piccadilly* review, as well as a review by the same author of Chater's first book, were both negative and mocking.

Bernard is right that Hannah's idea doesn't make sense. And yet she's right, showing the way that the twists and turns of what is real can be impossible to interpret from a distance. Though Bernard is a Romantic, he's thinking too rationally about human behavior, expecting cause and effect to be as neatly linked as in a science problem. But human behavior, like the future, is unpredictable.

Bernard makes his point more significant by taking out three letters that had been stuck in the book. We, the audience, recognize the first two from the first scene—one is from Chater challenging an unnamed person (we, though not Bernard, know it's Septimus) to a duel, the next is from Mrs. Chater, and the last is again from Chater, asking the unnamed recipient to another duel. We assume from the date, April 1809, that the last letter must be related to the negative review in the *Piccadilly*. Bernard believes that these letters were meant for Byron, and also that Byron killed Chater in the duel.

The audience can already tell that Bernard's huge idea is doomed. If anyone dueled Chater, it's Septimus. But will Bernard find the evidence to show him his error? The scene demonstrates the difficulty of academia, which requires passion, vision and daring (the Romantic side), but also a slow and methodical gathering of evidence (Enlightenment-style).

Bernard is certain that there will be something in Lady Croom's papers that proves his idea. Hannah has had enough of him, but as she tries to get him to leave, she mentions that Byron and Septimus were at the same college at Cambridge, at exactly the same time. Thrilled at this news, Bernard enthusiastically kisses Hannah's cheek, right as Chloë enters. Bernard exits, exclaiming that he's going to try to find a place in the village to stay.

Bernard's action illustrates the play's warmhearted and optimistic vision of humanity. Despite Bernard's arrogance, he genuinely loves his subject matter. And sexual gestures, like his kiss, don't always lead to expulsions from Eden—sometimes they stem from the excitement of discovery.

Chloë tells Hannah that Bernard appears to have some feelings for her, and that he should come to the garden party as her partner. Hannah rejects this idea. Chloë says that her "genius brother" will be happy at her lack of feelings for Bernard. Hannah thinks Chloë is referring to Valentine, but then Gus enters, and offers Hannah an **apple**—it's Gus, not Valentine, who may have feelings for Hannah.

Chloë, as we'll see, is single-mindedly fixated on sex. Her advice to Hannah may be colored by her own feelings, as later on she'll have a relationship with Bernard. We learn to keep our eyes on Gus, who is quiet but all-knowing.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

Back in the 19th century, the **tortoise**, and Gus's **apple**, remain on the table. Thomasina attempts to translate Latin. Septimus reads a letter to which he has no reply, then gives Jellaby a letter of his own to mail. Septimus plucks off the apple's leaf and eats a piece. Thomasina criticizes the author of the Latin, who Septimus explains is Lord Byron. We learn that Byron is currently a guest at Sidley Park. In Thomasina's (usually accurate) opinion, Lady Croom has a crush on Byron. Thomasina recounts hearing Byron laugh about a terrible review of "The Maid of Turkey"—Chater's first book—that Septimus had written. So now Chater must know that Septimus was faking his respect for "The Couch of Eros."

This piece reveals a bit of information that Bernard needs. Byron did indeed stay as a guest at Sidley Park. Thomasina's impatience with Byron's poetry again shows how people living in one time period can't guess how they will be perceived in the future. In the world of the play, scholars like Hannah and Bernard have a huge amount of power, presenting some people as important geniuses, and neglecting others.

Thomasina understands that Septimus is sad that Lady Croom likes Byron. She continues on with her creative ideas about the intersections of math and nature: "If there is an equation for a line like a bell, there must be an equation for one like a bluebell." She picks up the discarded **apple leaf** and proclaims her intention to make an equation for its form.

Thomasina's line about the bluebell suggests a rudimentary sense of genetics, along with algebra. She clarifies her decision to predict the future using algebra. She'll start with trying to predict an apple leaf's shape.

Septimus attempts to put the lesson back on track, to the Latin poem about Cleopatra. Thomasina says she hates Cleopatra, who does a disservice to women by being so irrationally driven by love. Thomasina mourns the destruction, by **fire**, of the library in Alexandria, which she blames on Cleopatra's love-based politics, and the permanent loss of untold works of classical literature. Septimus counters with a monologue about how, rather than mourning lost knowledge, we can acknowledge that all great discoveries are made again. We will perhaps find pieces of burned plays, or someone else will write them. And, "mathematical discoveries glimpsed and lost to view will have their time again." Septimus begins to translate the Latin poem with suspicious ease, and Thomasina runs out of the room in frustration.

Thomasina sees love as an impediment to knowledge, rather than as an inseparable part of the passion that drives knowledge (as Bernard might say) or as knowledge itself (as the Eden story suggests). But Thomasina's attitude will change by the play's end. Septimus's beautiful musings about knowledge and fate show a new idea about both scholarship and predicting the future. We may not see the future clearly, but we can be sure that, in time, lost great ideas will come back around.

Brice and Chater enter. Chater asks Septimus to speak only to Brice. Septimus has some fun with this rule, asking Brice about his wife—meaning Chater's wife. Chater's new anger has to do with his awareness, from overhearing Byron, that Septimus wrote a brutally negative review of his first book. Lady Croom enters, hoping to obtain a copy of "The Couch of Eros" for Byron, because he's planning to sail away from England. Byron wants to use the book for a satirical poem. Lady Croom takes Septimus's copy (with the letters still inside), and exits.

This scene shows us the source of the third letter that Bernard unveiled in Scene 2. Why does Chater again ask Septimus for a duel? Because he learns that Septimus has been playing him for a fool, faking admiration for Chater's poetry. We also see how Byron ended up with Septimus's book and the letters, which forms another part of Bernard's misunderstanding of what occurred in the past.

Chater wants Septimus to duel him. Septimus consents, saying he's tired of Chater. Septimus mentions that Brice will take good care of Mrs. Chater, suggesting that they are having an affair as well. Now Brice wants to duel Septimus too. Septimus exits, and Chater and Brice follow in confusion and anger.

Though Septimus managed to evade the last duel through flattery, it seems he can't get out of this one. Still, he feels the need to go out with aplomb, exposing hypocrisy and offending Brice.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Back in the present day, Hannah and Valentine are looking at Thomasina's old math textbook. Hannah reads Thomasina's note about how she's discovered a "method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves by number alone." Thomasina, harking back to Fermat's note about his proof, explains that the margin is too small for her to write out her equations.

With this joking note, Thomasina places herself in a lineage of world-changing mathematicians. It's hard to tell right away if she's only joking, or if she really has discovered a way of predicting nature using math.

Valentine explains Thomasina's meaning, looking at both the textbook and Thomasina's notebook, where she's written more details and graphs. He tells Hannah that Thomasina was using iteration, a mathematical technique based on feedback, in order to describe a pattern. Valentine uses iteration to study grouse, but the technique has only been around for twenty years, and Thomasina's use of it is mysterious. Valentine compares math's progress in the 20th century as resembling the leap from classical, representative art to wildly imaginative modern art. Yet "the freaky stuff is turning out to be the mathematics of the natural world."

Valentine explicitly connects mathematics and art. Thomasina seems to have felt this connection as well, with her poetic line about bells and bluebells in scene 3, for example. Both art and math attempt to unpack the mystery and beauty of existence. Valentine's comments give us some useful context for Thomasina's discoveries. She really was ahead of her time.

Hannah asks for more details about how Valentine's work relates to Thomasina's. Valentine explains that he's trying to find the mathematical algorithm that describes patterns in the grouse population, whereas Thomasina's work started with an algorithm. Valentine bemoans all the "noise" in the grouse data from the Sidley Park game books. It's hard to pick out what the pattern might be. Hannah persists in trying to figure out if Thomasina had really hit on something important. Valentine is reluctant to see her work as anything more than random doodling, but he acknowledges that her iterated algorithm is a way of using math to represent nature—not the shapes of animals, but the shapes of populations and other complicated systems.

Valentine explains in simple terms how his project and Thomasina's project relate. Both of them focus on patterns in nature that are common across many different types of systems, large and small. Iteration means exchanging a dependent variable (an output) for an independent variable (the input) over and over, so that each previous step becomes the basis for the next step. This process echoes Bernard's academic research, where folly piles onto folly.

Hannah asks if Valentine might be able to draw the **apple leaf** using iteration. Valentine explains that iteration could roughly show you the shape of the leaf, by showing the general pattern within which randomness may occur. Valentine's personality shifts to genuinely enthusiastic, even poetic, as he talks about how nature is governed by both "the unpredictable and the predetermined," and ultimately the future can't be predicted, because tiny changes can have a huge impact. Hannah and Valentine listen to Gus play the piano in the other room, and Valentine explains that, though Gus hasn't talked since he was five, he seems to know more about the **garden** than their mother.

Valentine authoritatively answers the question that occupies Thomasina. Is the future predetermined, as Newton says? Can it be predicted with algebra? No, it can't, because of the nature of iteration. This thinking is often called "chaos theory." However, the play eventually teaches us that the universe will inevitably end in entropy, so on a very long timescale, the future is *predetermined—it's headed toward a sameness, where everything is "room temperature."*

Bernard enters, thrilled to have discovered a note about "The Couch of Eros" penciled into Byron's satirical poem "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (which Lady Croom mentioned in Scene 3). Bernard sees this as proof of his hypothesized Byron-Chater connection. Hannah mentions that she's discovered a letter that notes that Brice and Mrs. Chater married in 1810, presumably after Chater's death. Bernard reiterates his idea: Byron killed Chater in a duel over Mrs. Chater's honor. He is entirely certain and plans to write a paper, but Hannah still isn't convinced, as Bernard hasn't found direct evidence for the duel.

Bernard's passion and ego prevent him from following the correct scholarly steps. But his mistakes also show how hard it is to reconstruct the past. Even the records of a highly literate, upperclass family leave out important details. It's hard to identify what's important enough to record because of "the noise," as Valentine terms it. Both Valentine and Bernard struggle to see a clear picture; they take alternate means to try to achieve not-so-dissimilar objectives.

Valentine cuts in to mention that he knows that Byron stayed at Sidley Park in 1809 because of the game books. Bernard, stunned, exits in search of the books. Gus enters, and Valentine prepares to leave. Hannah, still focused on Thomasina's iterations, asks why no one did that kind of work until the 20th century. Valentine explains that it's because iteration is so time-intensive that it's only practical on calculators. Otherwise, you'd need a lifetime of repetitive work, and "you'd have to be insane."

Valentine's parting line about insanity recalls Hannah's research on the Sidley hermit. He may have been doing just what Valentine describes—endlessly iterating numbers, creating huge piles of graphs and formulas. Though his papers have been burned, Hannah may start to feel a connection between the hermit and Thomasina.

ACT 2, SCENE 5

Bernard reads his paper about the Chater-Byron duel to the Coverly siblings. Partway through, Hannah enters with a copy of a letter related to their research. Bernard continues, sketching out the game book evidence of Byron's stay at Sidley Park, then explaining why the invitations to duel were directed at Byron. As a key piece of evidence, Bernard incorrectly identifies Byron as the author of the *Piccadilly* review of "The Maid of Turkey." Hannah is very skeptical about all this, asking why Byron never mentioned the review in his letters, among other things.

Bernard's paper demonstrates how academia frames and shapes history. The play is perpetually concerned with questions of taste. Who gets to decide who's good and who's bad, who's famous and who's obscure? Part of it is randomness, but part of it is people like Bernard boldly imposing their vision. Neither future nor past is set in stone.

The argument escalates, and Bernard calls Caroline Lamb, beloved subject of Hannah's bestseller, talentless. Valentine mentions that statistical analyses of the *Piccadilly* review didn't convincingly connect it to Byron's other writings. Bernard, by now very angry, lays out in a monologue why poetry and philosophy is more important than science. Art, he says, is always timely, but science is irrelevant to human life. "I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light," says Bernard, quoting Byron's love poem "She walks in beauty."

Bernard's speech is the play's clearest articulation of the positive side of Romanticism. Bernard compellingly shows that poetry is more relevant to the specifics of human emotion than science. The gorgeous lines from Byron demonstrate Bernard's authentic love of his material. He may be egotistical, but he conveys that poetry is a legitimate way to approach the mysteries of life.

Valentine leaves, almost crying, declaring that he's giving up on his grouse project. Chloë follows. Bernard gives Hannah the unwelcome news that the depiction of Caroline Lamb and Byron on the dust jacket of her book has been proven not actually to be them. Hannah rebuts this in the same way that Bernard has tried to prove his Byron-Chater idea, by saying she just has a gut feeling that she's right. Bernard invites Hannah to come attend his lecture in London, and afterward "for sex."

So far, Hannah's seemed purely responsible, and Bernard much less careful. But Hannah, it turns out, falls into the same traps as Bernard. She wants to believe in her dust jacket image, and is just as unwilling to change her views to fit the evidence. Maybe this switch into blind passion attracts Bernard.

Hannah explains a bit of her romantic history. She's tired of men always so focused on sex, and has refused marriage proposals, because to her there's no worse bargain than "Available sex against not being allowed to fart in bed."

Hannah's view echoes Thomasina's ideas about Cleopatra (Scene 3). Sex means a lack of liberty. Comically, Hannah focuses on bodily, not mental, liberty.

Bernard prepares to leave for London, but explains he's coming back for the party, which he'll be attending with Chloë. In fact, Bernard confesses arrogantly, they've been sleeping together for some time. Hannah slaps Bernard. Bernard, not dissuaded, reads Hannah a bit of 19th-century travel writing that mentions the Sidley hermit, who had a **tortoise** named Plautus. (We, though not Hannah, know that Septimus's tortoise was called Plautus.) Valentine returns and Bernard leaves for his taxi.

Bernard's actions here recall Septimus's in the first scene. Like Septimus, Bernard reveals a huge bit of sex-related information, and then quickly follows with a return to academics. What's a distraction from what? In the play, both sex and academia are modes of connection and immortality, both are equally important and equally a part of being human.

Hannah reads Valentine a little from the new source about the hermit. The article, from 1832, describes the hermit as convincing himself with math that the world would end. The article expresses the hermit's ideas via a **fire**-based simile, "as a wooden stove that must consume itself until ash and stove are as one, and heat is gone from the earth." Valentine identifies this theory as the second law of thermodynamics, which describes how everything is headed towards entropy. Hannah wonders if this connects to Thomasina's work.

Though the hermit was seen as a madman, his ravings are apparently accurate. The universe will (probably) decay from order into disorder until it reaches a state of "thermodynamic equilibrium," coldness and darkness. There are two kinds of disorder in Thomasina's theorizing—the small disorder of things like leaf-shapes, and the ultimate disorder of entropy.

Hannah notes that Septimus Hodge and the hermit were born in the same year, 1787. She starts to believe that they may be the same person, and modifies her thesis. The hermit isn't a symbol Romantic nonsense spun out of control, but of Enlightenment scientific progress, forced to live in a hut in a Romantic landscape. She's sure she'll find proof of the hermit's real identity.

Hannah's modification shows how she embodies Enlightenment-style priorities. Unlike Bernard, who takes a point of view and tries to hammer truth to fit it, Hannah's willing to reconsider her stance after new evidence.

ACT 2, SCENE 6

Septimus returns from an early-morning hunt, carrying a dead rabbit, which he gives to Jellaby. Jellaby tells Septimus that while he was off sleeping in the boat house, Brice, Mr. Chater, and Mrs. Chater all left, followed by Byron. Septimus bribes Jellaby to get the gossip. Last night, Lady Croom, on a late-night visit to Byron, found Mrs. Chater exiting. The two of them had a noisy fight.

All the lines of romance begin to cross. From Jellaby's gossip, we can gather that Lady Croom thought Byron was having an affair exclusively with her. She was therefore not pleased to find Mrs. Chater on her way out of Byron's bedroom.

Lady Croom enters, sending Jellaby away for tea. She tosses down two letters and begins to yell at Septimus. We can gather that one letter was a confession of love to her, and the other a letter about rice pudding to Thomasina. Septimus left both because he expected he might be killed in a duel this morning, but, it's now clear, the duel never took place because Chater left after the previous night's drama.

This scene touchingly shows that Septimus didn't feel as invincible as he pretended at the end of Scene 3. Expecting death, he finally felt he could spill his feelings to Lady Croom. Despite his statement that sex is better than love, he is a real romantic.

Jellaby delivers tea and a letter from Byron to Septimus. Lady Croom doesn't want Septimus to read the letter from Byron, whom she no longer considers a friend, so Septimus burns it. Lady Croom explains that Brice, Chater and Mrs. Chater are sailing for the West Indies. Brice is funding Chater to be the expedition's botanist, but, Lady Croom explains, Brice's real goal is to continue his affair with Mrs. Chater. Chater still wants to believe in his wife's virtue.

Lady Croom's explanation of the Chater-Brice expedition gives us a link that Bernard is still missing. The botanist Chater who died by monkey bite is, we realize, the same as the "Couch of Eros" Chater. They're not relatives, as Bernard assumes, and Chater certainly didn't die in a duel.

Lady Croom mentions that Septimus's passionate love letter to her rings false because of Septimus's fling with Mrs. Chater. Septimus explains that he only got with Mrs. Chater because of his unquenched passion for Lady Croom. Lady Croom, with characteristic ironic humor and high manners, invites Septimus to come to her sitting room that evening.

Not even the untouchably high-society and elegant Lady Croom is free of lust or immune to flirting and compliments. Her invitation to Septimus corresponds to Hannah's rejection of Bernard's invitation.

ACT 2, SCENE 7

Chloë, Valentine and Gus lounge around the table, wearing Regency period clothing (ie, from the early 19th century, the time of Thomasina and Septimus). A pot of **dwarf dahlias** sits on the table. Chloë reads the title of Bernard's paper. "Even in Arcadia—Sex, Literature and Death at Sidley Park." She talks to Valentine about whether it's possible to use math to predict the future. Valentine points out that Newton's laws can't adequately predict the future. Chloë thinks that the force Newton left out is sex.

The title of Bernard's paper neatly ties together several major themes while referencing the Latin line about death in Arcadia. (It's also worth noting that orgasm was sometimes called the "little death"). Chloë, too, links together some of the play's threads, making a new, more emotional theory about how to predict the future, and suggesting that love is a force of nature.

Hannah enters, noting the group's unusual outfits. Bernard's theory about Byron has even made the tabloids, but she still thinks it's silly. Chloë and Gus exit. Valentine hopes that Chloë isn't too blinded by her feelings for Bernard. Hannah and Valentine banter about how Bernard's theory may be wrong, and then Valentine propositions Hannah, in a teasing way.

Valentine's actions here demonstrate that all his joking about Hannah being his fiancée isn't completely silly. He's genuinely attracted to her, though she remains the only character in the play who seems unmoved by love.

Valentine continues work on his grouse project. Hannah in a stirring monologue about the necessity of the search for knowledge, encourages him not to give up on his project. "It's the wanting to know that makes us matter." She doesn't want to believe in an afterlife, because that lessens the meaningfulness of the struggle for knowledge on earth.

Here, Hannah combines both Enlightenment and Romantic views. She believes in the rational search for knowledge, but also doesn't believe that total, perfect knowledge is possible.

Hannah looks at Valentine's work. He shows her how he's iterated Thomasina's equation millions of times, producing a beautiful fractal-like pattern. He says this work, "the Coverly set," is publishable, and that Thomasina would have been famous for it if she'd understood what she achieved. Because she's not famous, Valentine apparently still believes that Thomasina stumbled upon the math accidentally, and didn't really know what it meant. Hannah reveals that Thomasina died in a **fire** before she had time to put her work out in the world, the night before her 17th birthday.

Hannah reveals a crucial piece of information that suddenly explains one of the play's central mysteries: how did Septimus end up as the crazy old hermit? Thomasina dies while still a child, in a tragic real-world and accidental demonstration of her revelation that time only goes one direction, and everything tends to go from order to disorder.

As Hannah and Valentine continue, silently, to do work at the table, the two time periods begin to overlap, though the characters, separated by 200 years, don't interact. Augustus, Thomasina's brother, who's played by the same actor as Gus, enters the room, chased by 16-year-old Thomasina. Septimus makes them settle down for the drawing lesson, at the same table where Hannah and Valentine sit.

Last time we saw these characters, Thomasina was 13—three years have passed. Septimus's presence shows that Lady Croom didn't banish him from the house after his love confession. The modern and historical scenes parallel thematically as all the characters are studying.

Thomasina reviews her math notebook. Septimus didn't give her a grade for what she calls her "rabbit equation." She explains that it's an iteration—"It eats its own progeny." Septimus looks back at the book. Hannah and Valentine talk about whether the math demonstrates the end of the world, while Septimus begins to understand Thomasina's equation. Valentine explains the second law of thermodynamics to Hannah. Tea only cools down, and never heats up by itself. The point, Valentine explains, is that certain processes only move in one direction. Valentine thinks that Septimus and Thomasina didn't understand this major idea. Hannah quotes some lines from Byron that describe an apocalyptic vision.

This complex scene shows how current and past concerns echo one another, which links to Septimus's monologue, in Scene 3, about how lost discoveries will be made again in the future. Valentine, meanwhile, connects a sense of death to the truths of post-Newtonian physics. The universe is headed towards chaos, towards death, just as Thomasina is. Septimus and Thomasina, however, are still optimistic about their discoveries, unaware of the implications of doom.

Thomasina asks Septimus if she'll marry Byron. He's doubtful. Augustus, bored with the lesson, leaves in a huff. Thomasina brings up a kiss she shared with Septimus in the hermitage yesterday. She wants to learn how to waltz. Septimus shows Thomasina a prize-winning essay in which a French scientist explains that something about heat contradicts Newton.

The play suggests that the French essay describes something related to the same thermodynamic tendencies that Thomasina noted in her rice pudding. This highlights again how cutting-edge her ideas were and how tragic her death.

Chloë and Lady Croom both enter, Chloë in search of Gus, and Lady Croom in search of Noakes. A steam pump and a piano make noise off stage—the pump pertains to Noakes, and the piano to Gus. Lady Croom complains about the pump noise to Thomasina, while Chloë and Valentine exit to have their photo taken (they're still wearing Regency-period clothing). Lady Croom touches the pot of **dahlias**, while Hannah reads from Lady Croom's garden books, which function as journals. The journal mentions Chater's death by monkey bite. The dahlia he described had never been in England before.

The pot of dahlias on the table, coupled with Hannah's reading of the garden book, demonstrates that Chater has by this time died in Martinique, but the dahlia he discovered has arrived in England. The steam engine that bothers Lady Croom represents the dawning of a new era of industry and mechanical reproduction . Romanticism's focus on the wild and emotional is already giving way to machines.

Thomasina finishes with the French essay, which discusses a flaw in Newton's theories. Determinism, the idea that the future is predictable and locked in, is not true. Thomasina is excited about her own theorizing about the forms in nature. Lady Croom shifts the conversation. Thomasina is just a week away from turning 17, and she wants to marry Byron. Septimus and Lady Croom gossip about Byron and Caroline Lamb.

There are now several theories about the future. Newton's idea was that everything is predetermined, but that's wrong. Valentine, and modern science, think the future will end in disorder and entropy. Thomasina is beginning to understand Valentine's side.

Noakes enters, and Lady Croom airs her grievances about the noisy steam pump. She also complains about the hermitage, and wonders who might live there. Septimus mysteriously asks whether the hermitage might fit a piano. Thomasina mentions that the steam pump cannot ever work efficiently, because of the same forces of heat involved with her understanding of the second law of thermodynamics. Thomasina draws Septimus with his **tortoise**, Plautus. She exits to prepare for the dinner with a count that will take place that evening.

Thomasina shows her flexible understanding of the world by bringing her theory of heat to bear on a totally new object, the steam pump. She understands how technological progress is limited by physics, whereas Lady Croom merely objects to the pump because of its ugly noise. The hermitage also doesn't fit Lady Croom's Classical ideas of beauty.

Augustus enters, meekly asking if Septimus will explain some "carnal things" to him. They leave to take a walk, Augustus carrying Thomasina's drawing, as Bernard, Valentine, and Hannah enter. Hannah carries the garden book of Lady Croom. Bernard is in a fury about something, raving that he's been "fucked by a **dahlia**." Hannah reads a passage from the garden book, which clearly connects the botanist Chater, who died after describing a dahlia in Martinique, to the Ezra Chater of "The Couch of Eros." This revelation disproves Bernard's entire theory about Chater's death in a duel with Byron.

Augustus's request to Septimus recalls the book's beginning. In Arcadia, one perpetual topic of education is sex. Bernard's raving amusingly reflects this. Of course he frames his disgrace in terms of sexual subjugation. The dahlia may be a sexual conqueror, but it is also a symbol of the natural world, and therefore linked to the grouse and to Thomasina.

Bernard scrabbles to think if any of his claims are true. He still thinks the *Piccadilly* reviews were Byron's (though we know them to be Septimus's), but the exciting part of his discovery is gutted. Bernard rather unfairly asks Hannah why she didn't stop him. He wonders how long he has before another scholar points out his flaw, and Hannah indicates that she'll publish a letter right away. Chloë and Valentine quickly give Bernard a Regency costume for the photograph of the family that will appear in the newspaper, and they all exit.

In tortoise-and-hare fashion, cautious Hannah has the greatest victory merely by waiting for Bernard to trip over his own feet. Now she'll have the satisfaction of publicly pointing out his mistake. Despite his bluster and disappointment, Bernard accepts his future like a true scholar.

The lighting changes to evening. Septimus enters carrying a lamp, and Thomasina enters carrying a candle. Thomasina blows out the candle, exclaims that she'll be 17 tomorrow, and kisses Septimus. She begs Septimus to teach her how to waltz. He reads one of her essays.

Throughout the play, Septimus has never truly appreciated the groundbreaking nature of Thomasina's work. Here, his late-night study of her essay shows his growing awareness.

Hannah and Valentine enter. Valentine goes to the table to find Thomasina's diagram. Septimus also finds Thomasina's diagram. Valentine realizes that the diagram shows heat exchange, and Septimus summarizes his takeaway from Thomasina's essay: "We are all doomed." Valentine finally understands what Thomasina was getting at, namely that some processes only go in one direction. This goes against Newton, Septimus realizes. Septimus now offers to dance with Thomasina.

Septimus only consents to dance with Thomasina once he understands the true genius of her work. Now he can see her as an equal, or even his superior. But we know from Hannah's disclosure earlier in the scene that Thomasina died in a fire the night before her seventeenth birthday. These are her last hours, just as she and Septimus begin to realize that their love as scholar/tutor has become a romantic love between equals.

Bernard enters, removing his costume and planning to leave. Septimus and Thomasina dance slowly and kiss. Chloë enters angrily. Her mother discovered her and Bernard carrying on in the hermitage. Bernard apologizes to everyone, but tells Chloë, "It was wonderful." Chloë and Valentine exit. Bernard gives his best wishes to Hannah for her book. She says she thinks she knows who the hermit is, but she can't prove it. Bernard encourages her to publish. He exits.

Despite his love of Romantic poetry, Bernard isn't a true romantic like Septimus, and clearly doesn't have lingering feelings for Chloë. Still, his compliment that it was "wonderful" seems sincere. Though he often functions as an antagonist, Bernard is a good person deep down.

Septimus and Thomasina continue to waltz. Then Septimus lights her candle and tells her, "Be careful with the **flame**." She wants him to come visit her in the night, but he won't agree to. Meanwhile, Gus enters, and hands Hannah a portfolio containing Thomasina's drawing, labeled "Septimus holding Plautus," the **tortoise**. Hannah thanks Gus, and Gus bows to invite her to dance. She rejects, then accepts his offer. The two of them begin to dance, alongside Thomasina and Septimus.

Gus gives Hannah the crucial information she needs to link the tortoise-owning hermit to the tutor. After a whole play of rejecting men's offers, she finally gives in to a bit of romance. For Hannah, as for Septimus and Thomasina, intellectual pursuits and love go hand in hand.

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