

Arcadia: split significance



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The parallel and overall relation of time is a phenomenon that has been explored from both creative and philosophical perspectives. By forming a connection between the impacts of action, in hand with the various possible outcomes, Tom Stoppard creates a dramatic piece that challenges the very basis of human life itself. Stoppard's thrilling drama, *Arcadia*, primarily serves to discuss the relationship between science and the progress of life... proposing that the past is significant, but only in moving us forward. The story exemplifies that time must still move on from what is already tangible, and civilization must persist to expand the limits of knowledge, otherwise time will be doomed to repeat itself.

In *Arcadia*, Stoppard accentuates the concept of ambiguity within human knowledge, furthering the idea that a fair amount of what is known to be is still questioned. By incorporating the dichotomy into the play between the past and present, this ambiguity is able to flower into a conjectural nightmare for the characters in the play, initially. Drawing into the theory of determinism, Stoppard proves the chaos that is to arise out of attempting to know what can't truly be ever known, which in turn formulates an ingenious incorporation of irony into the play by allowing the audience to fall into the same trap as the characters. The audience must accept that ambiguity is present, just as the characters...otherwise they will fall victim to the conflict that those of Septimus and Thomasina, or Valentine and Hannah, faced during intervals of their desperation for expanded intellect. As Septimus comes to realize by the end of the play, "the Improved Newtonian Universe must cease and grow cold. Dear me" (Stoppard 98). Stepping into the realm of acceptance that knowing everything is useless, for all will come to an

end...that all must come to a concluding fate in life, expresses Septimus' and Thomasina's acceptance that time must move forward, and that all knowledge just simply cannot be completely known. Septimus embraces ideas similar to the concept of stoicism, learning to painfully accept ambiguity, claiming how "When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore" (Stoppard 98). Time must run the full circle inevitably, so as all come to accept this unfortunate fate and learn to come to terms with incomplete intellectual satisfaction...the two parallels, each from different eras coming to split the stage, as the curtain closes; this essentially, granted Stoppard the last laugh, since the audience is left to face the actuality of the situation as well due to the fact that as the waltz comes together, the curtain closes...which in it of itself, expresses ambiguity. Stoppard's genius in this move allows for his incorporation of ambiguity to flourish, furthering the concept of time, and how it is destined to continue.

Attempting to grasp the intangible generates another key element in Arcadia, one which Stoppard deploys in order to expand upon the notion that time is doomed to persist forward. This is the theory of determinism, which states that all of life is predestined, and that in order for life to occur in this way no deviation can arise. The entire idea of this, however, opens up various dichotomies that Stoppard elucidates throughout the play. One of these dichotomies that are particularly highlighted is the contrast of order and chaos, with its relation to the Law of Thermodynamics. In particular, through reference to both Newton's and Clausius' theorized concepts on the subject matter. Septimus first connects to this idea in response to

Thomasina's observation of the rice pudding stirring with the jam, where he states how "time must needs to run backward, and since it will not, we must stir our way onward mixing as we go, disorder out of disorder into disorder until pink is complete, unchanging and unchangeable, and we are done with it for ever. This is known as free will or self-determination" (Stoppard 9). As a result of assimilating this theorized conclusion, the theme of the play is embodied into scientific explanation; since time is impossible to manipulate, and turn backwards, Septimus is telling Thomasina the entire theory Newton proposed on thermodynamics...that time must run in a circle from order into chaos and once more, back into order. This entire idea is illustrated through Stoppard's entire inclusion of the parallel between the different time periods depicted in the play, alone...and he conveys this later on in the drama, when Valentine comes to make the same discovery, just through a different theoretical take.

Valentine's conclusion occurs when he makes the observation of the tea with Hannah, and how "tea will end up at room temperature. What's happening to your tea is happening to everything everywhere. The sun and the stars. It'll take a while but we're all going to end up at room temperature. When your hermit set up shop nobody understood this" (Stoppard 82). The entire idea that this proposal of Valentine embodies is connected to 19th. Century German Scientist, Rudolf Clausius' theory on thermodynamics that states that heat can never transform from colder to warmer without some sort of other deviation, or external alteration. Overall, the notions reached from both Septimus and Valentine contribute to the fact that time will continue to move without change, and continue along its path of determinism unless of

course, there is an anomaly; this is where the entire concept and almost comical affect on the subject of sex and attraction in Arcadia are incorporated. Chloe articulates this hypothesis through asserting how the “universe is deterministic all right, just like Newton said, I mean it’s trying to be, but the only thing going wrong is people fancying people who aren’t supposed to be in that part of the plan” (Stoppard 78). Stoppard urges another point in the play within this scene, where as a reader or audience member would be set that answers were finally reached in concluding that all of life is deterministic and Stoppard could’ve easily just closed the curtain there and said “The end”...but instead, another curveball is thrown and he includes sexual attraction into the picture...everyday, ordinary circumstances among deep scientific proposals, in order to assert that no matter how far people go into thinking they know something, it is never truly true...since all components to the equation must be factored in. Stoppard is simply depicting human nature in this case, underscoring that in order to know, one must still discover...and that spectrum continues infinitely.

Ultimately, Stoppard shapes the underlying theme of Arcadia by incorporating multiple conceptual and theoretical ideas into the story, so they combine in a fashion that fabricates more questions for the reader or audience member to think of. This stems from the ambiguity Stoppard includes from the opening page of the book, to the final closing on the waltz. But much of the story also has root in the theory of determinism and whether or not life is predestined for all...or if we are just simply pawns of our own game. It is all the same ideas towards life that Thomasina Coverly and Septimus question, Valentine and Hannah question...and all the very

same ideas that to this day, as well as into the future, humans will endure to discover answers for. This is where Stoppard frames society into the greater fool, however...because he knows we will question these subjects and search for the answers, but the fact of the matter is that there is none. And until there are, we are all doomed. So all of us continue in the mad search for reason, by chasing our own tails...delving into the discoveries from our own pasts, desperately trying to shape them into answers for our future since “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...To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing” (Stoppard 51).