

## A Postmodernist Reading of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

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**Abstract:** This study tries to analyze the theories of postmodernist literature in *Arcadia*, a play by Tom Stoppard. *Arcadia* is a play that shares both modernist and postmodernist features. However, Stoppard's use of multiple perspectives, parodic echoing; seeming instability and, his mixing of theatrical and intellectual ideas lead some critics more confident to label the work "postmodern". In postmodern theatre, nothing is absolute or eternal; nothing is exempt for skepticism and all meanings and values are historically conditioned. The way in which Stoppard's *Arcadia* may be seen as a postmodernist play is, perhaps, in using the criteria of how one responds to the intellectual uncertainty in the world. According to Wilde: "Postmodernists are characterized by a willingness to live with uncertainty, to tolerate and, in some cases, to welcome a world seen as random and multiple, even, at times absurd" (1987:44), and this is the way *Arcadia*'s characters can be best described. In fact, with a combination of comedy and tragedy and the discussion of serious ideas involving different disciplines of art and science, using them as modes of representation in his mixing of past and present to show how the past affects the present and, how the present interprets the past, Stoppard's *Arcadia*, as a postmodernist dramatic achievement, is able to bring together a wide variety of literary and scientific notions in a postmodern world.

**Key Words:** *Arcadia*; Postmodernist literature; grand narrative; pastiche; deconstruction; binary oppositions

### INTRODUCTION

The study starts with an introduction to postmodernism, which is followed by a brief look at Stoppard's *Arcadia*, and then the play is given a close postmodern reading.

This study intends to discuss some salient features of the social, historical and cultural content of literary postmodernism. By means of offering a postmodernist reading of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* one would depict the situation of man who is trapped in a postmodern society and suffers from lack of proper means to communicate even within his own limited environment. This "postmodern" problem usually leads to misunderstanding in language and it creates abstruse situations, which are closely displayed in Stoppard's

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drama. To express themselves, in a world in which there are no ultimate truths or grand narrative, Stoppard's characters have to stick to self-granted narratives.

## POSTMODERNISM

There has been considerable interest in postmodernism from the perspective of culture, of sociology, and of intellectual and epistemological history. It has been making known as a term that reconciles often incongruous developments on the influence of global restructuring in contemporary culture. With a touch of skepticism, it has been touched on as a way of representation and as a periodizing notion that characterizes a new epochal boundary.

In very general terms, postmodernism is connected with a cognitive change that stressed the termination of philosophical foundationalism and consequently epistemological uncertainty with the pluralization of "legitimate" knowledge from both within and outside of the predominant cultures of advanced industrial societies, originating from a crisis of legitimation; with hybridization, namely, the subversion or moderation of traditional boundaries between high culture, mass culture and vernacular culture, and with the increase in cultural oppositions between the first and the third world.

Postmodernism, as mentioned before, specifies many various types of cultural objects and phenomenon in many diverse manners. Among these, perhaps, three various uses of the term may widely be identified:

First, postmodernism represents a number of developments in the arts and culture in the latter half of the twentieth century. The reference point and point of departure for this type of postmodernism are the different forms of modernism that developed in the arts and culture in Europe in the first half of the century.

Second, it designates the rise of new frameworks of social and economic organization, again approximately since the end of the 1939-45 war. As such, its reference point and point of departure is the tendency of modernization which specified the early years of the century, with the development of industry, the growth of the mass market, and the speed in automation, travel and mass communication.

Third, it indicates a peculiar type of theoretical writing and reflection, usually though not completely, writing and reflection which chooses the first or second area as its goal.

It might be helpful to classify these three fields of application with the terms *postmodernism*, *postmodernity* and *the postmodern*. (There is an elaboration on the differences and applications of the three terms in the following sections). It should bear in mind that this classification is a suitable opportunity selected for present objectives alone, and does not coincide commonly with usage of these three variations in critical writing.

In another classification, regarding the evolution of this complicated phenomenon, as Conner notes: "four different stages in the development of postmodernism can be distinguished: accumulation; synthesis; autonomy; and dissipation" (1989:1). In the first stage, which extends through the 1970s and the early part of the 1980s, as Bertens (1995), explains:

Postmodernism was gradually drawn into a poststructuralist orbit. In a first phase, it was primarily associated with the deconstructionist practices that took their inspiration from the poststructuralism of the later Roland Barthes and, more in particular, of Jacques Derrida. In its later stages, it drew on Michel Foucault, on Jacques Lacan's revisions of Freud, and, occasionally, on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The translation of Jean-François Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne* (1984; original edition 1979), in which, a prominent poststructuralist adopted the term postmodern, seemed to many to signal a fully-fledged merger between an originally American postmodernism and French poststructuralism. Like poststructuralism, this postmodernism rejects the empirical idea that language can represent reality that the world is accessible to us through language because its objects are mirrored in the language that we use. From this empirical point of view, language is transparent, a window on the world, and knowledge arises out of our direct experience of reality, undistorted and not contaminated by language. (5-6)

In the course of the 1970s, Daniel Bell and Jean Baudrillard were offering new accounts of consumer society, Charles Jencks was issuing his powerful manifestos on behalf of architectural postmodernism, and Ihab Hassan was characterizing a new sensibility in postwar writing, all of them, apart from Baudrillard, more or less programmatically employing the rubric "postmodernism". (Conner, 1989: 2)

The term postmodernism was first popularized and employed by the American literary critic Ihab Hassan, whose interventions in the postmodern debate was crucial and, who made use of it in order to specify emerging tendencies in literature in 1960s. Such authors as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and later, Thomas Pynchon, reacting to the outstanding stylistic and conceptual achievements of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and the works of Samuel Beckett, started to write novels that played with the very concept of the novel- novels whose distortion of language, twists of plot, multiple narrative voices, obscurities of narrative order and disclosure, and stylistic games challenged the claims of the novel to objectivity and authority in identifying, describing and, generally, depicting its subject.

Ihab Hassan defined postmodernism as an anti-formal anarchism as well as a new aesthetic formation. He brought together the various trends of postmodernity. Postmodernism, according to Hassan, "was an impulse of negation, a celebration of silence and otherness that was always present, though always repressed, within Western culture" (Walmsley, 2006: 408). "Decentring" was in fact the concept Hassan followed in his contribution:

For Hassan, postmodernism was an impulse to decentre, to create ontological and epistemological doubts as we accepted, and became intimate with chaos. This spirit of indeterminacy was, to some degree, counterbalanced by the principle of immanence insisted that humankind has a strong tendency to imaginatively create and appropriate all of reality to itself. (Walmsley: 408)

Ihab Hassan, as well as the principle architectural commentator of postmodernism, Charles Jencks, holds that the interrogation or revolutionary vigor of earlier forms of modernism had inured over the twentieth century to conventional artistic practices and considerable institutional forms. It should be noted that the points of the critiques undertaken by these two writers suggest clearly various definitions of the ways in which postmodernism arises out of and goes beyond this now institutionalized modernism.

These claims help to specify artistic postmodernism. Artistic postmodernism may be described widely as a repudiation of the paragon of art's autonomy and break-up from the world. For some critics, this indicates the reappearing sense of the essential links between art and the social and political domain from which modernism had separated it. Where the paragon of aesthetic autonomy was consolidated for modernism is the notion that the work of art has to be regarded as a complete and self-sufficient object, for instance, an opposite notion unfolds itself in the demise of the artistic object and the appeal for temporal process typical of main forms of postmodernism, such as the conceptual and performance art of the 1960s and beyond. Thus, one may sum up the change in perspectives toward the work of art from modernism to postmodernism as a new interest for complexity over purity, plurality over stylistic integrity, and contingency or connectedness over autonomy.

Daniel Bell's influential work, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, first published in 1976, gave the first coherent narrative of the emergence of postmodernity. In Bell's view, advanced capitalism has changed from being an economic and cultural system rested upon the methods needed for production to one focused on the pleasures of consumption.

Bell is the only one of a number of writers who considers the defining condition of postmodernity as a certain aestheticization of economic condition. The autonomy of culture, reached in art, now started to move over into the realm of life. The post-modernist attitude makes a claim for what was previously expressed in fantasy and imagination must be demonstrated in life as well. There is no difference between art and life. Therefore, "anything permitted in art is permitted in life as well" (Bell, 1978: 54). As one of the earliest commentators on postmodernism, Bell, then, made the suggestion that: "something like a postmodern condition arose when the utopian ideals and lifestyles, associated with modern artists, began to be diffused among populations as fashion, lifestyle and consumer choice" (qtd. in Conner, 1989: 5).

Jean Baudrillard's series of books, published from the late 1960s onwards, branched out from the similar origins and offered sharp criticism on those economic hypotheses such as Marxism, which made the role of

the economy the pivotal feature in social life and regarded the modes and forces of production as the main foundation of every economy.

This central instances of postmodernity based upon an economic-cultural transformation lies at the core of Harvey's account articulated in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), which goes along with positions similar in some cases to those of Bell and Baudrillard, though, with a very different attention and political ideas.

In the second stage, from the middle of the 1980s onwards, with Fredric Jameson's landmark essay, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, gradually,

"what came to seem important was not so much the aptness of the explanations of particular varieties of postmodernism as the increasingly powerful rhymes that different accounts of the postmodern formed with each other. Indeed, it seemed to be a feature of the postmodern itself that parallelism became more important and interesting than causation. This was also the period of the most vigorous syncretism in thinking of the postmodern" (Connor, 2004: 2).

The effect of this was that, according to Connor:

By the beginning of the 1990s, the concept of the "postmodern" was ceasing to be used principally in the analysis of particular objects or cultural areas and had become a general horizon or hypothesis ... it seems to have begun to be true for spotters of the postmodern during this second period, when it seemed that, if one wanted to pin down the postmodernist features of some unlikely object of analysis – war, say, or prostitution, or circus – the thing to do was to look directly not at your target but at what lay in its periphery ... As kinship patterns among postmodernists became more important than patterns of descent, "analogical" postmodernism took the place of "genealogical" postmodernisms. (ibid)

As the third stage had developed, by the middle of the 1990s, postmodernism became a name for the activity of writing about postmodernism. Frow declared roundly in 1997 that "the word "postmodernism" can be taken as nothing more and nothing less than a genre of theoretical writing" (qtd. in Connor, 2004: 4).

Terminating his classification, Connor, elaborates on the fourth, or the last stage of postmodernism that is the contemporary age in which:

postmodernism" slowly but inexorably ceased to be a condition of things in the world, whether the world of art, culture, economics, politics, religion, or war, and became a philosophical disposition, an all-too-easily recognizable (and increasingly dismissable) style of thought and talk. By this time, "postmodernism" had also entered the popular lexicon to signify a loose, sometimes dangerously loose, relativism. Now, its dominant associations were with postcolonialism, multiculturalism and identity politics. So, whereas postmodernism had expanded its reach in academic discussion, it had shrunk down into a casual term of abuse in more popular discourse. Postmodernism had become autonomous from its objects. (5)

There can be no doubt that, the history of postmodernism – that is a body of events which origins in modern life, modernism in arts, and post-war economics and politics - is clear enough. Events which are, some will say, still happening.

## **ARCADIA**

First performed and published in 1993, Stoppard's *Arcadia* is a play of ideas. It is also a play about ideas, in particular, about the processes that generate these ideas and, it is this feature that makes the play's text of certain significance in the postmodern world.

Consisting of two plots, one happens in the past and the other in the present, play moves around a theory on Lord Byron, however, Byron, not a major character in the play, is not the man to whom the challenge is

addressed and Stoppard never makes him onto the stage. In the same way, Stoppard repeats in *Arcadia* what he did in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Travesties*, where he assigned minor roles to Hamlet and James Joyce, while moving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Henry Carr to centre stage.

In the course of the play, then, opposite concepts and ideas are of certain significance. According to Haney II:

Stoppard's *Arcadia* juxtaposes the dimensions of time and timelessness, intuition and logic, heart and mind in a way that paradoxically induces in the characters and audience a transpersonal, transrational experience of freedom even from within the boundaries of time. (2008:83)

Regarding these opposite concepts and the idea of the postmodern, one often finds a strange accommodation of contradictions in postmodernism, which arises chiefly from the greater interest taken by its theorists in "popular culture". Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon and Roland Barthes are some of the leading figures of this movement. In their works, they blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, comedy and tragedy, fiction and reality to such extent that classifying them according to traditional literary forms is not possible. Rejecting the accepted modes of thought and experience, postmodern writers tried to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying void or nothingness of characters' lives on which no security or certainty is conceived. Considering these and other features of postmodernism, Stoppard's dramatic achievement, *Arcadia*, seems completely in parallel.

## ARGUMENT

Gitlin in his famous essay "*Postmodernism: Roots and Politics*", differentiates postmodernism from pre-modernism (realism) and modernism. Applying his ideas to Stoppard's *Arcadia*, Gitlin's version of postmodernism is especially significant where:

The search of unity has apparently been abandoned altogether. Instead we have textuality, a cultivation of surface endlessly referring to, ricocheting from, reverberating onto other surfaces. The work calls attention to its arbitrariness, constructedness; it interrupts itself. Instead of a single centre, there is pastiche, cultural recombination ... Not only has the master voice dissolved ... The implied subject is fragmented, unstable, even decomposed; it is finally nothing more than a crosshatch of discourses. (Gitlin (1989:350))

## THE FALL OF GRAND NARRATIVES

Grand narratives, also known as master narratives, are interpretations about cultural practices and beliefs. According to Lyotard, these metanarratives that traditionally used to give cultural paradigms, some forms of legitimation or authority, have "lost their credibility" since the Second World War and notes the idea that "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984: xxiv).

In Stoppard's *Arcadia*, a play which is known as a "science play", discussions on scientific issues, Newtonian Determinism and Chaos Theory, for instance, and also, classicism versus romanticism, as examples of grand narratives in the play, show strength and weaknesses of mentioned grand narratives. As Fleming observes:

Whenever the characters try to fix and understand reality—whether it be through the use of language, the use of narratives designed to control and explain their experiences, or the study of science—they discover that life is not so easily confined and defined. (2001: 196-97)

First of all, the discussion of "Newtonian Science" in *Arcadia* represents a good example of the awareness of the insufficiency towards grand narratives. As the dominant study in the play, Newtonian Science represents the traditional grand narrative of tidiness and order as a favorable picture in reality.

Septimus: If everything from the furthest planet to the smallest atom of our brain acts according to Newton's law of motion, what becomes of free will? (Stoppard, 1993: 5, henceforth *Arcadia*)

Thomasina suggests a model based on the Newtonian logic:

Thomasina: If you could stop every atom in its position and direction, and if your mind could comprehend all the actions thus suspended, then if you were really, really good at algebra you could write the formula for all the future; and although nobody can be so clever as to do it, the formula must exist just as if one could. (ibid)

Although ridiculous, Thomasina's suggestion follows the deterministic aspect of "Newtonian Science", that, things happen today would happen tomorrow; and this unchangeable order results in predictable future. Since, events in the world are not simply and necessarily in one-to-one casual-effect relationship, the Newtonian science, in particular, and the classical science, in general, cannot explain some aspects of reality. Thomasina's observation of rice pudding:

Thomasina: 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?

Septimus: No.

Thomasina: Well, I do. You cannot stir things apart.

Septimus: No more you can, time must needs 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. ( *Arcadia*: 4-5)

According to the Newtonian logic, a car which moves forward two miles and then backward two miles should stay at the original place. However, as Thomasina's example implies, a rice pudding which is stirred forward and then backward for a circle respectively does not remain the same. With the same logic on the movement, the results are different and, in this way, Thomasina's example reflects that there is no absolute universal order and reality is not deterministic.

Even Septimus, who teaches "the classical authors", (*Arcadia*:11) has to explain the phenomenon of stirring rice pudding as "disorder out of disorder into disorder" (5).

Thomasina: Septimus, do you think God is a Newtonian?

Septimus: An Etonian? Almost certainly, I'm afraid. We must ask your brother to make it his first enquiry.

Thomasina: No, Septimus, a Newtonian. Septimus! Am I the first person to have thought of this?

Septimus: No.

Thomasina: I have not said yet.

Septimus: 'If everything from the furthest planet to the smallest atom of our brain acts according to Newton's law of motion, what becomes of free will?'

Thomasina: No.

Septimus: God's will.

Thomasina: No.

Septimus: Sin.

Thomasina: (Derisively) No!

Septimus: Very well. (5)

In the course of the play, another concept that attacks the deterministic classical science is the existence of "Second Law of Thermodynamics". Hodson defines it as: "the law that states that the irreversibility of the transfer of heat leads to the extinction of energy and the death of the universe" (1993:79).

Since heat disturbs the movement of atoms and then the order of energy – symptom of disorder – it is not included in Newtonian calculation and it makes mathematics incomplete. Thomasina realizes the incompleteness of her algebraical study as she realizes the existence of heat. She expresses the incompleteness of the Classicism: things are not deterministic and the world is unpredictable.

Thomasina: Well! Just as I said! Newton's machine which would knock our atoms from cradle to grave by the laws of motion is incomplete! Determinism leaves the road at every corner, as I knew all along, and the cause is very likely hidden in this gentleman's observation.

Lady Croom: Of what?

Thomasina: The action of bodies in heat.

Lady Croom: Is this geometry?

Thomasina: This? No, I despise geometry!  
(83-84)

While the classical science is found incomplete in revealing the truth, another grand narrative — Chaos Theory — is suggested to fill in the hole of the Newtonian science. Lyotard helps to elucidate such an engagement, especially in his explanation of how classical rules of physics reject any hope of formulating a universal scientific narrative of reality:

The modalization of the scientist's statement reflects the fact that the effective, singular statement (the token) that nature will produce is unpredictable. All that can be calculated is the probability that the statement will say one thing rather than another. (1984:57)

By means of writing a "science play" such as *Arcadia* which elaborates scientific ideas, like Newtonian law and thermodynamics and chaos theory as tools, Stoppard, then, raises another perspective to reflect the insufficiency of a single grand narrative. This is because every grand narrative contains unexplainable part which affects one's interpretation to reality.

## IRONY

Despite the break of postmodernism with modernism in certain aspects like its stand toward grand narratives, there are some aspects in which postmodernism benefits from modernism. The use of some modern literary devices such as irony, parody and pastiche in postmodernist works is one of those aspects. However, postmodernism employs these techniques in a slightly different way.

Tom Stoppard makes the best use of irony in his plays which, in the company of other elements like intermitted pauses and silence, enables him to construct an atmosphere that is as uncertain as possible. The irony and its radically self critical doubts about capturing adequately the truth of things in language manifest itself completely in Stoppard's *Arcadia*.

Different forms of irony have been applied in *Arcadia*, major among them are dramatic irony, Socratic irony, cosmic irony, philosophical and also periodical irony.

Dramatic irony which is a common feature to all drama – a character on stage or in the story of the play is ignorant, but the audience or the reader knows his or her eventual fate as a matter of juxtaposition of two time frames – is both supported and challenged in the course of *Arcadia*. The scenes in *Arcadia* are related to two periods of time which developed independently, but the reader and the audiences are encouraged to find connections between the two periods and these results in both periodical and dramatic irony. As Shepherd-Bar puts it:

Stoppard provides us with a whole new manifestation of dramatic irony, as we watch Bernard come to the wrong conclusions about what Lord Byron was doing at Sidley Park based on the

evidence before him. Because we are actually watching the 1809 and 1812 scenes that Bernard is attempting to reconstruct, we know how to feel in the gaps, and we know he is drawing incorrect conclusions. This furnishes one of the play's most intellectually challenging aspects: we, the audience, have to juggle the tremendous amounts of information coming at us from both time periods and constantly add to and revise our understanding of the events being depicted and researched at the same time. (2006:136-137)

Due to the overlapping presentation of the past and the present the audience or the reader are given knowledge of Thomasina's final fate – death – and misinterpretation of the duel initiated by Chater and Septimus's life as a hermit (discovered by Hannah in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). On the other hand, it could be said that these characters are not ignorant by their fate knowing that: all things will change, all things die, the very ground we walk on, even the universe itself will fall away or die. In fact, in *Arcadia*, by using the juxtaposition of two time periods, not only supports the dramatic irony, but also, by means of Thomasina's reflection on the end of all things challenges the irony, providing that the characters are both aware yet unaware of their eventual fate.

Socratic irony – someone pretends to be foolish or ignorant, in order to expose the ignorance of another – is particularly portrayed through the actions and dialogue of the characters of Septimus and Thomasina. Cosmic irony, however, represents a sharp incongruity between one's expectation of an outcome and what actually occurs. *Arcadia* makes advantage of cosmic irony to challenge the theory of determinism.

Septimus: 'If everything from the furthest planet to the smallest atom of our brain acts according to Newton's law of motion, what becomes of free will?' (Stoppard, "Arcadia" 5)

Irony in *Arcadia* also stems from the philosophical issues, including numerous interpenetrating and interdependent or coexisting binary oppositions (whose rich interactions make life as it is) like: irregularity/regularity, unpredictable/predetermined, order/disorder, heart/mind, Romanticism/Classicism, Newtonian/Chaotic, intuition/logic etc. the existence of these oppositions enables Stoppard to represent *Arcadia* as a celebration of human struggle to obtain knowledge with meanings drives from double meanings which makes the play both paradoxical and ironic.

## BINARY OPPOSITIONS

Postmodern theories are highly doubtful about endeavors to establish or comprehend society on the basis of universal values, methods or ideas. Using Derrida, especially, postmodernism suggests that the basic binary oppositions of modernist idea (true/false, mind/body, reason/ emotion) are less firm than we may take for granted. It is also maintained that there is no promise that foundational ideas like freedom or democracy really give rise to a better society.

Stoppard's *Arcadia* is a play shaped in a series of such dichotomies. In *Arcadia*, he suggests the specific idea of life as a series of conflicts in which one's interpersonal relationships and aesthetic perceptions and references are driven from distinctions between thinking and feeling (binary of reason/emotion), order and disorder (binary of order/chaos), and the Classical and the Romantic (binary of Classicism/Romanticism).

The action of *Arcadia* and the characters within it represents the chaos as everything is gradually dispersing into the state of chaos and entropy (represented by the final scene). As Stoppard has noted in an interview *Arcadia* has a *structure* which is modelled on the idea of a system which moves from order to chaos: "in a very crude way the structure of *Arcadia* mimics the reiteration towards chaos ... The play bifurcates two or three times and then goes into the last section, which is all mixed up. So, it's very chaos structured" (Kelly and Demastes, 1994: 5).

Within that chaos, however, order can be found. Valentine summarizes this idea:

Valentine: Lend me a finger. (He takes her finger and presses one of the computer keys several times.) See? In an ocean of ashes, islands of order. Patterns making themselves out of nothing.



I can't show you how deep it goes. Each picture is a detail of the previous one, blown up. And so on. For ever. Pretty nice, eh? (*Arcadia*: 76)

The second theme within *Arcadia* is the dichotomy of Classicism versus Romanticism. Throughout the play, it is primarily exemplified by Lady Croom and Mr. Noakes arguments over the changes being made to the garden from a geometrically styled eighteenth-century Classical garden to a Romantic wilderness in the Gothic style of untamed nature with ruins. Pointing at the before-and-after pictures drawn by the new landscape architect she complains:

Lady Croom: Where there is the familiar pastoral refinement of an Englishman's garden, here is an eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag, of ruins where there was never a house, of water dashing against rocks where there was neither spring nor a stone I could not throw the length of a cricket pitch. My hyacinth dell is become a haunt for hobgoblins, my Chinese bridge ... is usurped by a fallen obelisk overgrown with briars ... (*Arcadia*: 12)

As much as Noakes takes it for granted that the jagged, wild and sublime counts as beauty, so Lady Croom finds it completely natural to defend the pastoral garden for exactly the opposite reason:

Lady Croom: 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 ... (*ibid*)

The play's two scientific positions, Thomasina Coverly and Hannah Jarvis, stand in opposite sides regarding Classicism and Romanticism. Therefore, "throughout the play, Thomasina challenges the assumptions of the Enlightenment through Romanticism in her pursuit of nonrationality and the study of irregular landscapes of nature in the wild" (Henry II, 2008: 85).

It is clear that *Arcadia* is not only concerned with the binaries of chaos and order, classical and romantic but, it concerns with the boundary between the present and the past. It is also about its crossovers of art and science. Hutcheon (1989) proposes that:

There are other kinds of border tension in the postmodern too: the ones created by the transgression of the boundaries between genres, between disciplines or discourses, between high and mass culture, most problematically, perhaps, between practice and theory. (18)

## PARODY

*Arcadia* is in many ways Stoppard's best play with multiple angles, discussing equally important issues. At its very core, structurally, the play is the parody of scholars in general and, history and new historicism in particular. This does not show that they are always misled or wrong in their comments, however, it concerns the practical impossibility of doing historical research, since all hidden variables make such research infinitely difficult.

It is Stoppard's use of chaos theory that creates the parodic atmosphere in *Arcadia*. This theory clarifies Stoppard's depiction of difficulties regarding the archaeological efforts of Bernard and Hannah as they attempt to piece together the events in their recovery of the past. There are always things in the past that will remain unknown. Life is so mysterious that could not be fully understood through Newtonian's law, physics or chaos theory. As one sees in *Arcadia*, life is random and complex.

Clearly, *Arcadia*'s parodic aspect is highlighted in the character of Bernard who numbers among his 'discoveries' that not only Lord Byron was present at the country house on the controversial date, but he also killed the third-rate, so-called poet, Ezra Chater, in a duel and fled the country to the United States because of this. Depending on his "gut instinct" (*Arcadia*: 50), Bernard's character, in this way, is the demonstration of style over substance. Hannah. On the other hand, opposes him and always asks for proof.

Bernard: English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. A pencilled superscription. Listen and kiss my cycle-clips! (He is carrying the book. He reads from it.) 'O harbinger of Sleep, who missed the press And hoped his drone might thus escape redress! The wretched Chater, bard of Eros' Couch, For his narcotic let my pencil vouch!' You see, you have to turn over every page.

Hannah: Is it his handwriting?

Bernard: Oh, come on.

Hannah: Obviously not.

Bernard: Christ, what do you want?

Hannah: Proof.

Valentine: Quite right. Who are you talking about?

Bernard: Proof? Proof? You'd have to be there, you silly bitch!

(Arcadia: 49)

According to Fleming, Bernard's flaw resides in a way:

He makes the mistake of starting with a desired conclusion, and only seeks information that will make his line of reasoning sufficiently logical. Bernard's unerring faith in his theory makes the lack of convincing evidence immaterial; he is determined to prove his theory whether it is true or not ... Instead of trying to understand how the events actually occurred, he has created an idealized account. His Newtonian narrative is limited, and ultimately is proved false because Bernard has allowed himself to see only what he has wanted to see. (2001: 202)

There is nothing left to Bernard but to apologize to anyone at the end of the play.

Bernard: Sorry to you too. Sorry one and all. Sorry, Hannah - sorry, Hermione sorry, Byron - sorry, sorry, sorry, now can I go?

(Arcadia: 95)

## **THE SENSE OF NON-ENDING**

The ending of all of the Victorian works are "closed" while, the ending of modernist works are open. The endings of postmodernist works are a hybrid of these two. In postmodern plays endings are "both open and closed" because they are "either multiple or circular". As Mc Hale claims:

Endings constitute a special case of self-erasing sequences, since they occupy one of the most salient positions in any text's structure. Conventionally, one distinguishes between endings that are closed, as in Victorian novels with their compulsory tying-up of loose ends in death and marriage, and those that are open, as in many modernist novels. But what are we to say about texts that seem both open and closed, somehow poised between the two, because they are either multiple or circular. (1987: 109)

*Arcadia*, since the action of the play goes nowhere, the reader/audience comes to a dead end or "aporia" in Derridian terms. There are indefinite contradictory meanings or significations in the play and the reader cannot decide which one to choose or refer to as the final signified. Consequently, it can be concluded that in *Arcadia*, there is not a sufficient ground for the reader to choose among the numerous signifier or signified. Thus, attaining an accurate and exact meaning is, approximately, impossible.

## **ART AND SCIENCE AS MODES OF REPRESENTATION**

Hutcheon states: "Our access through narrative to the world of experience – past or present – is always mediated by the powers and limits of our representations of it" (1989:54). Postmodern representational practice, as she explains, is used to bring together past experiences and bits of earlier works in a specific time space. In this regard, contradictory strategies such as art and science can be brought together in the

context of the postmodern work and this is exactly what Stoppard does as he employs both art and science as modes of representation to bring together various contrastive notions, namely Classicism and Romanticism, Newtonian science and deterministic chaos, rationality and emotion.

In *Arcadia* art is employed as a form of representation through which Enlightenment featuring Classicism and rationality is put forward as an implicit conflict to Romanticism and irrationality. This conflict is intensified with the dialectical discourse between Valentine and Bernard about scientific progress and personalities.

Valentine: The questions you're asking don't matter, you see. It's like arguing who got there first with the calculus. The English say Newton, the Germans say Leibnitz. But it doesn't matter. What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress. Knowledge.

Bernard: Really? Why? Why does scientific progress matter more than personalities?

Valentine: Is he serious?

Hannah: No, he's trivial. Bernard –

Valentine: (Interrupting, to Bernard) Do yourself a favour, you're on a loser.

Bernard: Oh, you're going to zap me with penicillin and pesticides. Spare me that and I'll spare you the bomb and aerosols. But don't confuse progress with perfectibility. A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need. There's no rush for Isaac Newton. We were quite happy with Aristotle's cosmos. Personally, I preferred it. Fifty-five crystal spheres geared to God's crankshaft is my idea of a satisfying universe. I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light. Quarks, Quasars – big bangs, black holes – who gives a shit? How did you people con us out of all that status? All that money? And why are you so pleased with yourselves?

(*Arcadia*: 61)

Stoppard's *Arcadia* also employs science as a mode of representation to reveal the progress and change in science. As Hutcheon proposes:

Postmodern representational practices that refuse to stay neatly within accepted conventions and traditions and that deploy hybrid forms and seemingly mutually contradictory strategies frustrate critical attempts (including this one) to systematize them, to order them with an eye to control and mastery – that is, to totalize. (1989: 37)

In fact, *Arcadia* is characterized by its emphasis on the coexistence of literary theories and science notions, which seem to be contradictory and exclusive to each other.

As stated by Fleming:

Since comprehending scientific concepts can sometimes be difficult, Stoppard aids his audience's understanding by paralleling the shift in the scientific paradigm to the analogous transition from classicism to romanticism – that is, classicism metaphorically corresponds to Newtonian science and Romanticism to deterministic chaos. (2001:197)

This is another clash between classicism and romanticism; rationality and irrationality; predictability and unpredictability. However, these dichotomies are brought to their final end with dissolution of competing qualities, replaced by the co-existence and interdependency in these opposites.

## **SELF-REFERENCE OF METAFICTION**

Metafiction, although not specific to postmodernist theatre, is one of the key features of postmodernist fiction. It is, as Hutcheon (1980) says, "fiction about fiction" (1). It does not refer to the outside world but to the fictitious nature of fiction, and "without discarding what he'd already written he began his story afresh in a somewhat different manner" (ibid).

Considering various meanings crafted to the text through illusions, Stoppard's *Arcadia* lends itself very well to an intertextual reading. Literary and real-life references within *Arcadia* could be said abundant. Some of them are Milton, Mr. Walter Scott, Mrs. Radcliffe, Horace Walpole, D.H. Lawrence, Coleridge, Thackeray, and Lord Byron.

Stoppard, also, makes advantage of intertextuality as he uses texts by Newton and Byron.

Bernard: (Ignoring her) If knowledge isn't self-knowledge it isn't doing much, mate. Is the universe expanding? Is it contracting? Is it standing on one leg and singing 'When Father Painted the Parlour'? Leave me out. I can expand my universe without you. 'She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies, and all that's best of dark and bright meet in her aspect and her eyes.' There you are, he wrote it after coming home from a party. (Arcadia: 61)

Containing, also, the one reference to the play's title, "Arcadia", Lady Croom's description of her garden in the opening scene makes a real-life reference to Nicolas Poussin's painting *The Shepherds of Arcadia* (also known as *Et in Arcadia Ego*).

Lady Croom: 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. (Arcadia: 12)

Therefore, *Arcadia's* implicit and explicit relationship with other text and its use of real-life names and references explains its intertextuality and the way it may be interpreted as a metafiction and, then, a postmodern text.

## DUALITY

Stoppard's *Arcadia*, in general, seems to be a kind of duel. Duality of time, characters and themes (science and art) are apparent in the play. *Arcadia's* characters – half of them dwelling on a Derbyshire country estate in the age of Lord Byron and the other half peering backward at them from the present day – at times, are represented differently.

In the course of the play, each member of a couple – in the past, Thomasina Coverly and Septimus Hodge and, in the present, Bernard Nightingale and Hannah Jervish – seems to represent one side of a double-headed coin, one, Classicism (Enlightenment) and the other, Romanticism.

Another critic, Antor, in his interesting article, "The Arts, the Sciences, and the Making of Meaning: Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* as a Post-Structuralist Play" (1998) represents a comprehensive discussion on the play's duality on science and art. Antor(1998) believes that Stoppard expresses the duality of arts (gardening) and the sciences (chaos theory and thermodynamics) to make his meaning purposeful to both modes of thinkers (classical and romantic). Through both, he shows the development from classical regularity to postmodern and post-structuralist complexity. Besides the gardening and mathematical change, he argues that "language and music in the play also reflect this new post-modern outlook. This is through a variety of misunderstandings in the communication between the characters", or what he calls "semantic entropy" (326–354).

The concept of "semantic entropy" takes place when Lady Croom, Captain Brice and the landscape architect Mr Noakes enter the schoolroom, where Septimus has been talking to Ezra Chater. Lady Croom and Captain Brice take Mr Noakes to task for the Gothic innovations that he has proposed for the garden, while Septimus and Chater think they are talking about an entirely different matter.

Lady Croom: Oh, no! Not the gazebo! ... Mr Noakes! What is this I hear?

Brice: Not only the gazebo, but the boat-house, the Chinese bridge, the shrubbery—  
Chater: By God, sir! Not possible!  
Brice: Mr Noakes will have it so.  
Septimus: Mr Noakes, this is monstrous!  
Lady Croom: I am glad to hear it from you, Mr Hodge. [...]  
Brice: Is Sidley Park to be an Englishman's garden or the haunt of Corsican brigands?  
Septimus: Let us not hyperbolize, sir.  
Brice: It is rape, sir!  
Noakes: (Defending himself) It is the modern style.  
Chater: (Under the same misapprehension as Septimus) Regrettable, of course, but so it is. [...]  
Lady Croom: Mr Chater, you show too much submission. Mr Hodge, I appeal to you.  
Septimus: Madam, I regret the gazebo, I sincerely regret the gazebo—and the boat-house up to a point—but the Chinese bridge, fantasy!—and the shrubbery I reject with contempt! Mr Chater!—would you take the word of a jumped-up jobbing gardener who sees carnal embrace in every nook and cranny of the landscap! (Arcadia: 9-10)

In the selected part, every sentence can be interpreted in terms of both sexuality and landscape gardening. Complicating this duality, Thomasina enters the discussion asking "What is the topic?"

Thomasina: Septimus, they are not speaking of carnal embrace, are you, Mama?  
Lady Croom: Certainly not. What do you know of carnal embrace?  
Thomasina: Everything, thanks to Septimus. In my opinion, Mr Noakes's scheme for the garden is perfect. It is a Salvator!  
Lady Croom: What does she mean?  
Noakes: (Answering the wrong question) Salvator Rosa, your ladyship, the painter. He is indeed the very exemplar of the picturesque style.  
Brice: Hodge, what is this?  
Septimus: She speaks from innocence not from experience.  
Brice: You call it innocence? Has he ruined you, child? (Pause.)  
Septimus: Answer your uncle!  
Thomasina: (To Septimus) How is a ruined child different from a ruined castle?  
Septimus: On such questions I defer to Mr Noakes.  
Noakes: (Out of his depth) A ruined castle is picturesque, certainly.  
Septimus: That is the main difference. (To Brice) I teach the classical authors, Captain Brice. If I do not elucidate their meaning, who will?  
Brice: As her tutor, you have a duty to keep her in ignorance.  
Lady Croom: Do not dabble in paradox, Edward, it puts you in danger of fortuitous wit. (Arcadia:11)

By means of Stoppardian technique – not answering each other and pursuing different ideas – a pattern of alternating and overlaying topics is created that reflects how well Stoppard represents duality and pluralism in his *Arcadia*.

## POSTMODERN TIME AND HISTORY

Generally speaking, in Stoppard's theatre, time moves in odd and often unfamiliar ways. By the time he wrote *Arcadia*, in which the years 1809 and 1989, regency and postmodern, overlap and interact, he had already earned for himself a reputation as an expert in how time might be used to work on a postmodern and technically sophisticated English stage. *Arcadia* is a play about not only history, but also historifiction. The play's figures are taken from history and they are represented from the present time's point of view. It is a text about history and historians as well.

*Arcadia's* dual time structure is manipulated, carefully, to show cause after effect. This time shift and, in Stoppard's words "the architecture of the play is what has made the play work." (qtd. in Nadel, 2002: 434). The play's duality of time remarks the play's fusion of matters rather than confusion. In Fleming's words:

The non-linear bouncing between time periods suggests disorder, yet lurking underneath is a tightly ordered dramatic structure. There are seven scenes – three in the past, three in the present and, the chaotic seventh scene where the periods mix. Within that scene there are six sub scenes: two of only the past, two of only the present and two where the different periods share the stage. Thus, as with chaotic systems in the physical world, there are a series of bifurcations and even within the chaotic region, there are pockets of order, and so overall, this non-linear play exhibits a fine, underlying structure. (2008: 52)

In postmodern works, however, as Jameson notes, pastiche is a mode of nostalgia which is seen as a blank parody with its humour and mockery replaced by a mood of seriousness. Jameson believes that pastiche is a nostalgic act to satisfy a repressed desire to revisit the past. Hence, he proposes that:

With the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style – what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints, as incomparable as your own body – (the very source, for an early Roland Barthes, of stylistic invention and innovation) – the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture. (1991: 17)

In the conversation between Valentine and Hannah of the present, the intertextual leak of the dialogue between Thomasina and Septimus is incorporated in the act. Valentine in the present era speaks as if he were Thomasina in 1800 and Hannah, in a way, plays the role of Septimus tutoring the student. Yet both of the couples are contemplating the same implication of the second law of thermodynamics.

Thomasina: Do you think this is odd?

Septimus: No.

Thomasina: Well, I do. You cannot stir things apart.

Septimus: No more you can, time must needs 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.

(*Arcadia*: 5)

Valentine: (Ignoring that) I'm telling you something. Your tea gets cold by itself, it doesn't get hot by itself. Do you think that's odd?

Hannah: No.

Valentine: Well, it is odd. Heat goes to cold. It's a one way street. Your 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. But let's say you're right, in 18- whatever nobody knew more about heat than this scribbling nutter living in a hovel in Derbyshire.

(*Arcadia*: 78)

Indeed, the final scene, as Fleming explained, brings together two periods of time merging as one time-space in which the past dialogue of 1812 between Thomasina and Septimus is juxtaposed with the utterance of Valentine of the present 1993.

Interestingly, the character's belief on the irreversibility of time is very much cohesive and referential. This echoes with the notion proposed by Jameson in his *The Seeds of Time*, in which he states that:

It is at least certain that the form by which one dimension of the antithesis necessarily expresses itself by way of the figurality of the other, time being required to express itself in

spatial terms, is not repeated here; nor is the time-space antithesis symmetrical or reversible in this sense. (1994:21)

What is more, the ending of *Arcadia* features the dancing and waltzing of the two couples, namely Thomasina and Septimus as well as Hannah and Gus at the same time on the identical stage. This is an exemplifier of the elimination of boundaries between present and the past and the way *Arcadia* is interpreted as an exemplifier of a postmodern text.

On the subject of history, in *Arcadia*, Stoppard makes advantage of all literary and non-literary texts to create a new historical event, since for Stoppard "plays are events rather than texts. They are written to happen, not to be read." (qtd. in Gussow, 1995: 37)

Stoppard in *Arcadia* deconstructs history. Throughout the play, there are various interpretations of the past events which fail to call in to question the condition of their own production. Stoppard, then, deconstructs the way events of the play would come into the mind of the play's characters to come to the right conclusions. In this way, as Jenkins(2003) explains in her book, *Re-thinking History*, he demonstrates history of the postmodern condition. In the last chapter: "Doing History in the Postmodern World", she explains the same idea Stoppard represents in *Arcadia*:

In The Discourse of History, Roland Barthes has argued that the past can be represented in many historians' modes and tropes some of which, however, are less mythological and mystifying than others inasmuch as they deliberately call overt attention to their own processes of production and explicitly indicate the constructed rather than the found nature of their referents ... To work in this way is to adopt a method which deconstructs and historicises all those interpretations that have certainist pretensions and which fail to call into question the conditions of their own making; which forget to indicate their subservience to unrevealed interests, which misrecognise their own historical moment, and which mask those epistemological, methodological and ideological pre-suppositions that ... everywhere and every time mediate the past into history. (81)

## THE SENSE OF DISPLACEMENT

The theme of displacement is widespread throughout *Arcadia*. It is assumed to be the sense of not being in a place where one person or thing belongs to be. The main idea of Knowledge is displaced along with the characters. While Thomasina discovers a kind of knowledge too early for her time, Bernard's theories on Lord Byron and Ezra Chater not only displaces but also alienates him from the academic work as those theories turn out to be nothing just wrong suppositions. On the other hand, as a hard-hearted classicist, Hannah is also displaced in the modern age.

Hannah: Why are you cross?

Valentine: I'm not cross. (Pause.) 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.

Hannah: This feedback thing?

Valentine: For example.

Hannah: Well, could Thomasina have -

Valentine: (Snaps) No, of course she bloody couldn't!

Hannah: All right, you're not cross. What did you mean you were doing the same thing she was doing? (Pause.) What are you doing?

Valentine: Actually I'm doing it from the other end. She started with an equation and turned it into a graph. I've got a graph - real data - and I'm trying to find the equation which would give you the graph if you used it the way she's used hers. Iterated it.

(Arcadia: 44-45)

Representing a chaotic existence, *Arcadia* displaces every character of the play in having a proper placement. Even minor characters, Mr. and Mrs. Chater are displaced in their positions.

Another means to create the sense of displacement is the idea of gardening throughout the play. As a prominent symbol which represents, among other things, the battle between Enlightenment and Romanticism as well as intellect and emotion, the garden Mr. Noakes designed displaces family psychologically. He means to transform the green, lush perfect Englishman's garden into an "eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag" (Arcadia: 12).

The play's title "Arcadia", also, stresses the sense of displacement. As a place where everybody wants to belong to, "Arcadia" also connotes the paradise-like place on earth which has full order and death at the same time.

The sense of displacement comes along with the notion of pluralism and from this perspective it explains the postmodern understanding of the play.

## **ABSENCE OF UNIFIED AND UNDERLYING REALITY**

In "Romantic vs. Postmodern Reality: An Examination of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*", Stern writes that in *Arcadia*:

Stoppard outdistances even all his previous deconstructions of reality [...]. [T]hree recondite researchers prove before our eyes that the past is unreconstructable, reading its records, intuiting its spirit, or trying to quantify it via modern mathematics inevitably leads to major distortions. (1996:155)

Concerning scientific truth – Newton's scientific determinism, the classical values of intellect, reason and thinking – the whole play faces a continuous rejection and refutation of all kinds of truth by Thomasina's theory of "the actions of body in heat". What she talks about is thermodynamics which burns away some fundamental certainties of Newtonian determinism. Hannah, on the other hand, among the romantic instances punctuating the action of *Arcadia*, "positions herself deliberately as an outsider, who never kisses, dreams, fancies or makes love" (189). Trying to make her own version of "Arcadia", Hannah is in favor of rationality and predictability. However the garden's apple stands for opposites, the irrational and unpredictable powers. Chloe's comment on the problem is as follows:

Chloe: That's what I think. 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.

Valentine: Ah. The attraction that Newton left out. All the way back to the apple in the garden.

Yes. (Pause)

(Arcadia:73)

The discussions elaborate on the molding phenomena based on incomplete knowledge in the course of the play. In one hand, Thomasina and Valentine try to formulate mathematical rules in their numerical representations, and on the other hand, characters like Hannah and Bernard try to reconstruct people's life in the past.

Not defined as a collection of simplistic calculating rules, mathematics, however, provides rich descriptions of our contemporary complex world. Describing the same idea, Valentine says:

Like a piano in the next room, it is playing your song, but unfortunately it is out of whack, some of the strings are missing, and the pianist is tone deaf and drunk...(so you) start guessing what the tune might be. You try to pick it out of the noise. You try this, you try that, you start to get something –it's half-baked, but you start putting in notes which are missing or not quite the



right notes. And bit by bit... (He starts to dumdi da to the tune of "Happy Birthday.") Dumdi dum-dum, dear Valentine, dum-di-dum-dum to you –the lost algorithm! (Arcadia: 46)

For nothing is presented in a well-ordered, in other words, a clear way in postmodern art, this remarkable analogy is the essence of both Stoppard's play and postmodern art in general. Throughout the play, the audience is left on itself to make one's own composition of reality and in order to take a message out of it. Valentine's analogy, in fact, describes what Bernard, Hannah, Thomasina, Septimus and he himself all do, and that is working on bites without having complete knowledge.

## POSTMODERN SILENCE

Stoppard uses silence in *Arcadia* in his representation of Gus – aged 15, the silent savant who stopped speaking at the age of five and mysteriously inhabits both times and links them – to mark time shifts between the past and the present. He seems to be an embodiment of a metaphysical belief. Though not readily from the text, according to Fleming: "Stoppard did have thematic intent in his creation of Gus as a 'natural genius' with psyche-like abilities, but who never speaks" (2008: 41).

Furthermore, while Gus silent character is used to create Stoppard's kind of double take; it also serves as a means of deepening the play's sense of mystery. Breaking the frame of the play and by using this device Stoppard teases the idea of the possibility of some magical connection between the past and the present. According to Septimus: "When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore" (Arcadia: 94).

However, Gus's silence in the play, and the way Stoppard makes advantage of the character to represent the theme of silence is a strange strategy that cannot be explained but in a postmodern condition. As he told Fleming in an interview:

[Gus] is about as far as I'm prepared to go into metaphysics, I suppose. By which I mean, intellectually or temperamentally – I don't know which it is – I don't believe in a mechanistic universe. I don't think that's a complete description. So Gus represents, I suppose, my feeling that there is something more mysterious than that. And we don't know that how it works, and there is no point in my explaining Gus because that would say I do know how it works. But in the first place, I don't know how it works; in the second place, I don't think anybody does know; in the third place, I don't think it's possible to know; in the fourth place, I don't think it's necessary to know. It's that kind of feeling. (1993: 23)

## CONCLUSION

As postmodernist theorists are highly doubtful about endeavors to either establish or comprehend the society on the basis of fixed and universal values, binary oppositions and their blurring distinctions are of significant importance in the postmodern age. *Arcadia* is a play shaped in a series of such dichotomies such as distinctions between thinking and feeling (binary of reason/emotion), order and disorder (binary of order/chaos), and the Classical and the Romantic (binary of Classicism/Romanticism).

Stoppard represents a nice discussion for the fall of grand narratives in *Arcadia*. He shows that having just grand narrative is insufficient to fully reflect the truth. It is insufficient, because one grand narrative shows only one perspective.

Stoppard's *Arcadia*, a play with multiple angles, discusses other important issues including irony, duality and parody. Different forms of irony have been applied in *Arcadia*, major among them are dramatic irony, Socratic irony, cosmic irony, philosophical and also periodical irony. As a kind of duel, *Arcadia* represents opposing couples – in the past, Thomasina Coverly and Septimus Hodge and, in the present, Bernard Nightingale and Hannah Jervish – where each couple seems to represent one side of a double-headed coin, one, Classicism (Enlightenment) and the other, Romanticism. The play is, on the other hand, the parody of

scholars, particularly Bernard, in general and history and new historicism, in particular, through which Stoppard satirizes the possibility of historical and bibliographical discoveries.

In *Arcadia*, as in most of Stoppard's plays, there is no final meaning, no real authority and no transcendental signified. This feature leads to a sense of non-ending in the play. Everything is unreliable and ambiguous. The lack of final meaning results in lack of the closure, which is another characteristic of postmodernism.

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