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"But Sidley Park is already a picture": Painting and Playwriting in Stoppard's *Arcadia*

Marianne Dugeon

- 1 "English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors" (Stoppard 36). Thus does Hannah define the intricate network linking landscape gardening, painting and literature in the first act of *Arcadia*. But the spectators of Stoppard's play do not have to wait for Hannah's clarification, as the title of the play already shows the importance of painting for the playwright. The full title was meant to have been *Et in Arcadia Ego*, but this was considered too long, and was consequently shortened, for commercial reasons, into the all-encapsulating word, *Arcadia*. This single word indeed conjures up many themes to be developed in the play, which could be summed up in a series of antithetical and dialectic couples: innocence and experience, life and death, ideal and real. But first of all *Arcadia* is to be understood as a *memento mori*, reminding the spectators as well as the characters that we are all doomed, and that nothing lasts forever. Eventually, the emphasis this term lays on the natural - though utopian - surrounding also draws our attention to a work of art which may be seen as an ekphrasis of the garden, and underneath it, if we follow Hermione Croom and start digging this garden, an ekphrasis of *Arcadia*. Starting with an exploration of the artistic tradition which has led so many painters to illustrate the mythology of *Arcadia*, we will show how Stoppard has carefully painted a décor for his characters, thus using the history of landscape gardening both as a part of the plot and as a backdrop for his other plots. Indeed, the questions which surround the progress of science are also depicted as artistic questions, so that, eventually, Stoppard presents himself as an artist whose shifting viewpoint offers a varying perspective on his play and on the many themes that it wants to exhibit and interpret.

Painting the ideal of *Arcadia*

- 2 All these themes may also be found in Nicolas Poussin's painting, *Spring or Paradise on Earth* (1660), which was used as a backdrop in the production of the play at New York's Lincoln Theatre in 1995:

Illustration 1: Nicolas Poussin, *Spring, or The Garden of Eden, Le Printemps ou le Paradis Terrestre*, 1660-1664.

- 3 In this painting, the reference is to another utopian garden, the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve are but tiny and insignificant creatures lost in Nature, but their presence also works as an ominous foreboding that the idyllic state of innocence may be lost.
- 4 Moreover, the full title of the play, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, which may be considered as a key sentence at the core of Stoppard's work, is a clear reference to another painting by Nicolas Poussin, *Arcadian Shepherds*, also known as *Et in Arcadia Ego*, which was reproduced in the programme of the first production in April 1993 at the National Theatre, directed by Trevor Nunn. There are in fact two versions of Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds*. The first one is dated 1628-1630, and is at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire:

Illustration 2: Nicolas Poussin, *Arcadian Shepherds, Bergers d'Arcadie*, 1627 (Chatsworth House)

- 5 In this painting, which is more baroque in style, the shepherds are busy trying to decipher the inscription on the tomb. They seem puzzled, even frightened by it. The woman on the left is cast in a rather provocative position, disclosing her breast and her leg. As a more negative note, there is a skull on top of the tomb. The whole composition is inspired by another painter, Guercino. This Italian baroque artist who is Poussin's contemporary painted his version of *Et In Arcadia Ego* in 1618:

Illustration 3: Guercino, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1618

- 6 In it, we also find a skull, this time with a fly on it, and a mouse near it. Those two animals were added probably because they were considered as symbols of the God Apollo, though they are also linked, in the popular imagination, to death. Poussin's second version of his *Arcadian Shepherds*, painted in 1637-38 and which is at the Louvre, is much more geometrical, with a woman who looks more severe and austere, even forbidding:

Illustration 4: Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego, Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, 1637-38

- 7 The profile of the woman is more classical, representing the Greek model. The men are contemplative and meditative.
- 8 Thus the same title may refer to different paintings, even sometimes works painted by the same artist, in whom we may trace a chain of influences and evolutions in style.
- 9 But what is even more interesting is the fact that the very meaning of the sentence in Latin has been interpreted in various ways along the centuries: Poussin's own biographer understood it as meaning "I (a shepherd) lived here in Arcadia, and now I lie in this tomb." This translation, which was widely spread in the 18th and 19th centuries, is also the way Lady Croom understands the Arcadian myth when she quotes the sentence in scene one: "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" (Stoppard 19). This variation on *carpe diem* puts the emphasis on the ideal Arcadia, rather than on the remembrance that we will all die.
- 10 But this reading was put in question when the art critic Erwin Panofsky wrote an essay in 1983¹, where he suggested another interpretation, which is now held as the only possible one: the paintings have to be read as *memento mori*, and the sentence should be translated as "Even in Arcadia, I (death) am / exist". This is the way Septimus and Thomasina understand the sentence, the former stating: "A calendar of slaughter. 'Even in Arcadia, there am I!'" (Stoppard 21). But in 1809, when Septimus utters those words, such a reading is anachronistic as, at the time, only Lady Croom's flawed translation is generally accepted.
- 11 Rather than choosing one or the other, Stoppard nevertheless manages to keep the two possible readings, a positive and a negative one, which are present in the paintings as well as in the play. They intertwine and represent the importance of interpretation, and misinterpretation in the plot.

- 12 What is more, Poussin's second version offers a detail which turns out to be even more significant than the question of the meaning of the Latin: one of the shepherds recognizes the shadow of his companion on the tomb and circumscribes the silhouette with his finger. According to an ancient tradition, this is the moment in which the art of painting is first discovered as Pliny the Elder writes in his *Natural History*: "We have no certain knowledge as to the commencement of the art of painting [...] but [...] all agree that it originated in tracing lines round the human shadow." (Pliny the Elder, XXXV 5, 15). Thus, the shepherd's shadow is the first image in art history.

Painting a décor: landscape gardening as an art

- 13 This allows us to underline the many ways in which *Arcadia*, Stoppard's play, transcribes not only the same themes but the same questioning and the same evolution as those two versions of Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds*: the whole play, based in the ideal setting of Sidley Park, the English version of the Greek Arcadia, takes place in a schoolroom, where characters are trying to interpret signs and symbols, to acquire knowledge about the future or about the past, and also to seize the day, knowing that death is looming.
- 14 The play thus wavers between the bliss and happiness of an idealistic countryside where love and knowledge are not forbidden, where inhabitants celebrate music, nature and love; and the awe inspired by the presence of death, even in this ideal setting, as the two sides of the same coin, a coin which Rosencrantz flips at the beginning of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*².
- 15 Indeed, though the actual setting of the play is a schoolroom, the symbolical one is a garden, Sidley Park, the architecture and possible evolution of which become the main concern of many of the characters, both in the past and in the present. Lady Croom is the first to describe it, and she uses pictorial terms to underline its idyllic harmony and beauty:
- 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. (Stoppard 19)
- 16 This garden is also symbolical, its "geography cause[s] the doubt" (Stoppard 19), as it is both referred to as "an Englishman's garden" (Stoppard 16) (note the indefinite article), and as the likeness of "the haunt of Corsican brigands" (Stoppard 16) by Captain Brice. It even has a "Chinese bridge" (Stoppard 16), which is probably better than the original in Peking, according to its owner.
- 17 While Lady Croom and Mr Noakes disagree as to what it should look like, Hannah and Hermione Croom spend their time in it, digging its many layers and trying to recount the history of its evolution.
- 18 Landscape gardening is indeed an art and a science. It is comparable, and compared to, painting, which requires precise optical instruments. The play teems with props such as pens, pencils, a spyglass or theodolite, and even a much talked-of steam engine...).

Illustration 5: Humphry Repton's trade card, 1760.

- 19 This reproduction of Humphry Repton's trade card displays a theodolite in the foreground, and was meant to underline the scientific dimension of Repton's art. His dramatic counterpart, Noakes, first appears on stage with "rolled-up plans" (Stoppard 14) under the arm, which define him straightaway as a painter of the garden. Captain Brice, stepping in just after him, carries "a leather-bound sketch book" (Stoppard 15), which turns out to be Noakes' book for the garden. The models for it are Repton's red books³.
- 20 The stage directions which Stoppard added to describe that book are very telling, as they put the stress on the pictorial quality of such work, underlining much more the beauty of his art than the techniques he used. Noakes chose watercolours, and Brice exhibits the result on the reading stand, for all the characters, and sometimes the spectators⁴, to see. The architect's stand, or reading stand, which is present on stage from the start (Stoppard 3) resembles an easel, and awaits its work of art.
- 21 Mr Noakes is then further described by Septimus: "He puts himself as a gentleman, a philosopher of the picturesque, a visionary who can move mountains and cause lakes, but in the scheme of the garden he is as the serpent" (Stoppard 8). Mr Noakes is indeed much more than a mere landscape architect: he is a painter of the garden, who gives himself godly powers of creation, but Septimus sees him only as the serpent of the garden of Eden, an informer, a traitor. The term "visionary" is here telling: Noakes uses the theodolite seemingly to "tak[e] bearings in the garden" (Stoppard 5), but he finally uses it to spy on Mrs Chater and Septimus. The theodolite is thus more accurately called a spyglass, the one that Hermione Croom also uses to spy on her daughter Chloë and Bernard:

Bernard (to Valentine) Your mother caught us in that cottage.

Chloë She snooped!

Bernard I don't think so. She was rescuing a theodolite. (Stoppard 130)

- 22 In scene 2, Hannah takes the same theodolite (Stoppard 23) and goes in the garden with it, symbolically trying to see the garden, which has changed, the way it was when Noakes designed it: she wants to see it from *his* point of view, through *his* optical instrument.
- 23 One may also notice a similar stress put on the point of view or the angle of vision, which imply an altogether different perspective on things (all those terms being understood in a pictorial way), not only for artists of the garden but also for researchers of the present time. Bernard thus explains to Hannah that he will have to look at the Croom papers again, because he has a different point of view from that of Hannah, and may notice elements which *she* has not:
- Hannah** There isn't, I've looked.
Bernard But you were looking for something else! It's not going to jump out at you like 'Lord Byron remarked wittily at breakfast!' (Stoppard 45)
- 24 Bernard here pedantically implies that only an artist such as himself would see those details that are so revealing.
- 25 But to return to landscape gardening, and its links with painting, we may notice that Noakes is also mistaken by Bernard for the painter Michael Noakes (Stoppard 36), born in 1933, a portrait and landscape painter. This is only one of the many clues that Stoppard has scattered in his text, hinting at the links between painting and landscape gardening. More precisely, Stoppard shows how painting the garden, or landscaping, actually corresponds to aesthetic trends, styles, artistic movements: Noakes mentions "the modern style" (Stoppard 16), while Thomasina uses the word "scheme" (Stoppard 17). This also works as an echo of Septimus's use of that same term, quoted earlier, but this time in a more positive way. The work of Noakes, inspired by the picturesque, is to transcribe in the garden the characteristics of paintings which are deemed picturesque. This leads Thomasina to mention the painter who influenced Noakes' style: Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). She exclaims: "In my opinion, Mr Noakes's scheme for the garden is perfect. It is a Salvator!" (Stoppard 17). Noakes enthusiastically takes up the reference to this Italian baroque painter, famous for his interest in bandits, wilderness and magic, and specialized in jagged rock formations and stormy skies. Rosa painted the sublime: the terrifying aspects of nature that nonetheless provided aesthetic experiences. By 1809, he had been adopted as a hero by the Romantic Movement. When Lady Croom describes the garden that Noakes has imagined, talking about "an eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag", "ruins", "water dashing against rock", "a haunt for hobgoblins", "a fallen obelisk overgrown with briars," (Stoppard 8) she could indeed be describing one of Rosa's paintings⁵¹!
- 26 The link with literature is, at that point in the play, made obvious by Lady Croom's mention of *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which such landscapes are used as a backdrop to the plot. Indeed, if romantic paintings were sources of inspiration for landscape gardeners, so were romances, and also actual theatre designs. Thus in their introduction to *The Genius of the Place, The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*, which was clearly a source of inspiration for Stoppard, John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis write:
- Stage plays, like history paintings, represent action in front of some scene, the full meaning or functions of which is only completed by the human element. Gardens featured frequently as stage settings, and artists like Kent who produced both theatre and garden designs would have transferred ideas and forms from one art to the other. (Hunt 18)

- 27 Thus, with this array of references to painting and literature, the spectators are presented with an imaginary scenery, an indirect image of what Noakes has in store for Sidley Park.
- 28 Moreover, beside Rosa who is explicitly referred to, the more general mention of the adjective "picturesque" by Noakes ("A ruined castle is picturesque, certainly" (Stoppard 17)) also reveals an aesthetic ideal, which could be represented by the paintings of Turner or Gainsborough⁶. Though these painters are not mentioned in the play, the spectators will indubitably connect them with notions of the sublime and of the picturesque, at the heart of the Romantic Movement. Here is the definition suggested by the glossary of the Tate Gallery for picturesque:
- 29 Interest in landscape painting and in looking at the landscape itself grew rapidly through the second half of the eighteenth century. Definitions of types of landscape or view, seen from an aesthetic or artistic point of view, followed. At one extreme was the Sublime (awesome sights such as great mountains) at the other the Beautiful, the most peaceful, even pretty sights. In between came the Picturesque, views seen as being artistic but containing elements of wildness or irregularity.⁷
- 30 Noakes also uses the term "irregularity" to describe his landscape:
- Brice** It is all irregular, Mr Noakes.
Noakes It is, sir. Irregularity is one of the chiefest principles of the picturesque style" (Stoppard 19).
- 31 Though Brice here also questions the morality of such drawings, Noakes concentrates solely on their aesthetic qualities. Indeed Noakes' picturesque ideal for the garden differs widely from Lady Croom's pre-Romantic garden: hers would be closer to another painter's landscapes, Claude Lorrain, Claude (1600-1682), who is also mentioned by Hannah:
- You can stop being silly now, Bernard. English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors. The whole thing was brought home in the luggage from the grand tour. Here, look – Capability Brown doing Claude, who was doing Virgil. Arcadia! (Stoppard 36)
- 32 Claude is an artist of the Baroque era, also admired for his landscape painting. Living in a pre-Romantic era, he did not depict those uninhabited panoramas that were to be esteemed in later centuries, but imagined a pastoral world of fields and valleys, with castles and towns in the background:

Illustration 6: Claude Lorrain, *The Dance of the Seasons, La danse des saisons*, 1662.

Illustration 7: Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Shepherds*, 1645-1646

- 33 In the play, Hannah refers to him in conjunction with Capability Brown, thus taking up again, and developing, the links between landscape gardening and landscape painting. Noakes' garden can be likened to Rosa's paintings, while Lady Croom's garden is closer to Claude's idyllic pastoral landscape. The transformation of the latter into the former

could be compared to Richard Payne Knight's imaginary transformation of the park of Sherigham Hall:

Illustration 8: Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape (before)*, 1794

Illustration 9: Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape (after)*, 1794

- 34 Those two pictures were also reproduced in the programme of the London production in 1993. The first one represents the park as Humphry Repton designed it, and the second one pictures it as Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824) imagined it, in the more

dramatic picturesque style. A champion of the picturesque style of the garden, Knight meant to move the emotions through his gardens, much as Coleridge or Wordsworth meant to, with their poetry.

- 35 Lady Croom's real garden, before it has been tampered with by Noakes, is also compared to literature, fiction, thus underlining its artificiality: it is indeed, literally, a theatre design, "a picture", with sheep "tastefully arranged", and trees "companionably grouped at intervals that show them to advantage" (Stoppard 19).
- 36 If Stoppard added so many pictures to his programme, it is because his main aim was to guide his audience along an exhibition of paintings representing important plots in his play. One of them is definitely the reproduction of temperaments, the classical one and the romantic one, in the gardens of the British aristocracy. But another important plot in the play is science.

Painting a plot: perspectives on science

- 37 Thus, even the very basic, trivial events of everyday life are depicted in geometrical terms by Septimus: his love affair with Mrs Chater is summed up as a "perpendicular poke" (Stoppard 12), and the "platoon of musketry deploying by rota" (Stoppard 12) which would, according to him, be unable to defend her reputation, evokes in a way a fractal, developing progressively in reproducing itself indefinitely.
- 38 One can also think of the "drawing lesson" (Stoppard 105) in scene 7, which is also a lesson in geometry:
Septimus We are drawing today.
Lady Croom negligently examines what Thomasina had started to draw.
Lady Croom Geometry. I approve of geometry. (Stoppard 113)
- 39 The links between drawing and science are thus constantly underlined thanks to geometry, just as are those between science and landscape architecture, the two being closely related to drawing. Both Thomasina and Noakes want to draw nature in a mathematical way: the fact that their respective books are very similar is a sign of it. Noakes' book has two versions for every drawing, one before and one after, while Thomasina's mathematics lesson book is thus described by Valentine: "The left-hand pages are graphs of what the numbers are doing on the right-hand pages." (Stoppard 59). The rest of his description, which might describe a fractal, insists on the aesthetic aspect of this mathematical drawing, compared to a photograph: "Each graph is a small section of the previous one, blown up. Like you'd blow up a detail of a photograph, and then a detail of the detail, and so on, forever" (Stoppard 59).
- 40 Indeed the play leaves Euclidian geometry behind and offers us, covering this simple geometry, another layer, that of the scientific discoveries of the last century. When the theory gets very intricate and difficult to follow for the average audience, Stoppard resorts to art once more: the discussions on the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the Theory of Chaos are expressed through drawings and pictures, which make them easily understandable, for the spectators as well as for the characters in the play. The first example that the play offers is that of the rice pudding:
- 41 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. (Stoppard 8)

- 42 The increasing disorder of the universe is expressed in terms of colour, more precisely the mixing of colours on a painter's palette. Thomasina, while referring to her memory of the dessert she likes, also conjures up another image, that of her astronomical atlas. She thus effectively links scientific explanations for "the ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about (...) what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in" and images of "the very big (...) the universe," to quote Valentine (Stoppard 65).
- 43 But her use of the term "picture" also underlines the artificiality of such an image, as the jam in the rice pudding probably looks more like a galaxy:

Illustration 10: The Milky Way

- 44 than a meteor:

Illustration 11: A meteor

- 45 We are here presented with stereotypical images: we all remember how jam spreads, and the link with astronomy, whether the meteor or the galaxy, works as a general reference in our memory.
- 46 Similarly, when Thomasina imagines a formula for all the future, she has to create in her mind the image, the picture, of everything that she would then be able to describe, to depict, in mathematical words, colours, shapes or numbers: "If you could stop every atom in its position and direction, and if your mind could comprehend all the actions thus suspended, (...) you could write the formula for all the future" (Stoppard 9). The problem here seems to be at least as well one of scale as one of algebra: the difficulty of being able to "comprehend", here not only in the sense of understand, but also in the sense of contain, comprise, embrace in only one picture, the whole of the universe, jeopardizes the ability of the scientist turned artist to write the formula. Thomasina also expresses the link between science and drawing - for here it is more drawing than painting - in scene 3: she, as a genius, has understood how the theoretical equations that she plots in her mathematics lessons are to be turned into geometrical figures. She literally visualizes science, so much so that the "commonplace geometry, as if forms were nothing but arcs and angles" (Stoppard 51) that is the result of the simple equations that her algebra suggests, is not enough for her. She wants to be able to draw the equation corresponding to every shape in nature, which means that she wants to draw the mathematical likeness of the landscape, its image in mathematical terms. Indeed her models are all taken from the natural environment: "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?" (Stoppard 51), and she starts with a leaf: "we must work outward from the middle of the maze. We will start with something simple. (*She picks up the apple leaf.*) I will plot this leaf and deduce its equation." (Stoppard 52) The image of the maze that Thomasina conjures up here reminds us of a fractal, such as one of those:

Illustrations 12, 13, 14: Fractals

- 47 The leaf that could have appeared on the screen of Valentine's computer, had he decided to complete Thomasina's work with the drawing of the leaf instead of the drawing of the Coverly set in scene 7, may have looked like this:

Illustration 15

- 48 Benoît Mandelbrot is the one who actually discovered what he called the "geometry of nature", which distances itself from the Euclidean geometry, where everything is smooth and simple but feels inadequate to model the world around us. Interestingly, Mandelbrot (1924-2010) described himself as a deeply visual person, and explained how he solved complicated mathematical algebra by visualising the result and describing it afterwards. "Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line." (Mandelbrot, xiii). These are the words that Mandelbrot uses in his introduction to *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, and they are clearly echoed by Stoppard's characters: Thomasina

thus exclaims "as if the world of forms were nothing but arcs and angles" (Stoppard 51), and Valentine mentions "the things people write poetry about – clouds – daffodils – waterfalls" (Stoppard 65), also reminding us of Wordsworth's famous poem, "The Daffodils", the first line of which reads: "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (Wordsworth 219). Here again, Stoppard, along with Mandelbrot, plays on the link between scientific discoveries and the ability of the scientist to visualize his theories as pictures in his mind, and then to reproduce them as actual works of art. The verb "to draw" is thus used in the play to talk about mathematical equations, though Valentine, at first doubting Thomasina's genius, also uses the word "doodling" (Stoppard 63). Indeed Thomasina herself explains that her ambition is to find "a wonderful method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and *draw* themselves through number alone" (Stoppard 64, emphasis mine). Then Valentine, on finally recognizing Thomasina's genius, also uses a pictorial metaphor: "She saw what things meant, way ahead, *like seeing a picture*" (Stoppard 127 emphasis mine), while Septimus adds "[t]his is not science" (Stoppard 127). We cannot but concur, as the science discussed in the play is highly spectacular and theatrical, thanks to its links with painting and drawing. What is more, Thomasina has jokingly entitled her new science the "New Geometry of Irregular Forms" (Stoppard 59), taking up Noakes' claim that his art is all about irregularity, which he declares is the principle of the picturesque style: both the landscape architect and the mathematician define their art as belonging to the pictorial movement of the picturesque! Valentine also characterizes those very specific pictures produced by mathematical equations with a vocabulary which could easily fit a description of Noakes' picture of Sidley Park: "Pictures of turbulence-growth-change-creation" (Stoppard 64).

- 49 Valentine also refers to another artistic movement to describe the evolution of science, when likening the mathematical discoveries of the 20th century to the art of Picasso:

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. (Stoppard 61)

- 50 Picasso was probably chosen by Stoppard, among many reasons, because he would be recognized as one of the most famous representatives of modern art by the audience, and also because his most famous paintings are cubist, thus also creating a link with geometry. What is more, the following popularized definition of cubism allows us to liken it to the artistic methods of many of the characters and those of Stoppard himself:
- 51 In cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analysed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form – instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context.⁸
- 52 Thus Thomasina wants to break up, analyse and reassemble the leaf into a mathematical equation, that is to say an abstracted form, and Bernard and Hannah represent different viewpoints on the same object, while Stoppard offers us a post-modern play where each scene, each event is depicted from various angles, offering each time a different interpretation.
- 53 Science, to be explained, needs to be represented, which is what Stoppard does for us spectators. His play is highly theatrical in that, among other characteristics, it manages to tell a story to the audience by relying on the imagination of the spectators. As we have seen, this is the case for the décor: although much of the play's and the characters' concern is concentrated on the garden, its shape, its aspect, the spectators

actually do not see it. It is only a suggestion, the suggestion of a typical, ideal garden, based on cultural references. Stoppard does not even take the trouble of describing it, merely stating:

[N]othing much need be said or seen of the exterior beyond. We come to learn that the house stands in the typical English park of the time. Perhaps we see an indication of this, perhaps only light and air and sky. (Stoppard 3)

54 Stoppard thus leaves it to the stage director to decide how much he wants to actually show: what matters should take place in the spectators' imagination.

55 In terms of painting as well as playwriting, the result is that the focus is transferred to the secondary subjects. In this case, the play is about interpretation, rather than about what is being interpreted. This works for the garden, but also for literature, and it explains why Stoppard chose to have the most famous character of his play, Lord Byron, remain in the wings throughout, while putting a second-rate and imaginary poet, Chater, in the limelight. Stoppard draws the paradox even further, having Byron and Caroline Lamb, two characters who never appear on stage, drawn by Henri Fuseli (1741-1825): "He was being sketched during his visit...by the Professor of Painting...Mr Fuseli" (Stoppard 115). In the contemporary period, Hannah used this ink study on the dust jacket of her book, and Bernard mentions the latest theory according to which the subjects were not Byron and Lamb:

Bernard (...) Do you want to know about your book jacket? 'Lord Byron and Caroline Lamb at the Royal Academy?' Ink study by Henry Fuseli?

Hannah What about it?

Bernard It's not them.

Hannah (*she explodes*) Who says!? (...)

Bernard This Fuseli expert in the Byron Society Journal. They sent me the latest... as a distinguished guest speaker. (Stoppard 85)

56 The spectators are constantly asked to rely on their imagination and on their concentration and memory, to draw reliable facts from all those imaginary pictures which, if some of them are unquestionably real and genuine, are nevertheless never actually (re)presented.

57 After having created this imaginary décor, Stoppard the playwright places his characters in it. The fact that reputation is, for all of them, of paramount importance, is here also to be understood in pictorial terms: it is all about the place that they hold. Thus Septimus evokes the "seating plan of Lord Holland's table" (Stoppard 12) as the way society judges the worth of a poet, and then purports to give Chater his "rightful place in English literature" (Stoppard 13). Though this should be read as an ironical antiphrasis, it still underlines the importance of place. Similarly, the "placemen" who are mentioned in this passage recall Septimus's use of the adjective "jobbing" (Stoppard 16) to describe Noakes: even when the place is not rightfully owned in the hierarchy of society, it still is a fact that everything is a matter of composition, spatial organisation, positioning in the painting.

58 The different characters must find their place in the general drawing of Stoppard's composition. Hannah thus chooses to stand while she forces Bernard to sit down on their first encounter in scene 2, and Lady Croom positions herself to advantage, knowing perfectly well which is her best profile, and arranging her face just as she wants to arrange her garden. Thomasina describes her knowingly: "Lord Byron was reading to her from his satire, and mama was laughing, with her head in her best position" (Stoppard 50). In this very dialogue, the aspect of the garden is actually the

object of the very next line: "She is vexed with papa for his determination to alter the park", as if to imply that, not having her say in the aspect of her garden, she at least decided as to her own aspect so that she could take her revenge on her husband by having an affair with Lord Byron. Similarly, when Thomasina draws a hermit in the hermitage in scene one, she gives Septimus his rightful place in the landscape, and her insight, which is also tragic irony for the spectators, is so good that Hannah thinks it has been "drawn by a later hand" (Stoppard 36). Painting is at the same time a testimony of the past, a sign which the characters of the present time try to decipher, but it is also an enigma, a riddle, because it does not necessarily follow the rules of logic: in this case, Thomasina has added a character in Noakes's picture, before the garden was transformed by him, and before the character took shape in it as Septimus. Moreover, her drawing is also meant to be typical, almost a caricature, as she entitles it "the Baptist in the wilderness" (Stoppard 21). Then, when Septimus indeed becomes the hermit, he turns himself into a work of art, or rather a decorative ornament. Here is how Hannah describes the process, using a passive form: "The hermit was placed in the landscape exactly as one might place a pottery gnome. And there he lived out his life as a garden ornament." (Stoppard 38). Once more the main concern of the other characters and of the playwright is to place themselves, or to place the others, as so many pawns in a composition.

- 59 Stoppard himself uses the word "composition" in the stage directions at the beginning of scene 3, describing the relative positioning of his characters on stage: "We have seen this composition before" (Stoppard 48). In this composition, the position of the different characters, as a consequence, implies a specific standpoint from which they look at the world, but also at the future or at the past. This is obvious in the case of Bernard and Hannah: while Bernard takes the perspective of Lord Byron, Hannah has chosen that of Lady Caroline Lamb. Thus Bernard sycophantically concedes that "to see Caroline Lamb through your eyes is really like seeing her for the first time" (Stoppard 29), as a way to seduce her into helping him: he remains indeed so engrossed in his own vision that he cannot help looking at the new picture in his own light, with Lord Byron again at the centre: "Simply as a document shedding reflected light on the character of Lord Byron" (Stoppard 30). Similarly, his interest in Chater goes only so far as it may shed reflected light on Byron, the only central character in his own composition, or vision of the past.
- 60 The whole play thus multiplies extended metaphors referring to painting and drawing: the plot is constantly using painters and their works as points of reference, the characters are as many artists, with their individual vision, composing their environment, with an interest in light, positioning and décor, and Stoppard thus offers us a myriad of viewpoints on the objects of his play.
- 61 Playwriting, just like painting, is recreating, whether on a stage or on a canvas, a reality the way the artist sees it. *Arcadia* is a postmodern play in which there are many points of view, each of them offering one piece of the puzzle, leaving the spectator to reassemble the whole.

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NOTES

1. Panofsky, Erwin. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
 2. The comedy *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* also mingles very funny comments on probability when, in the first scene, the coin continually falls on heads, and rather awe-inspiring conclusions as to the terrible fate that awaits the two central characters at the end.
 3. See, among others, <http://cityzenart.blogspot.fr/2010/10/art-of-humphrey-reptons-red-books.html> (last visit 25 July 2012)
 4. This was the case in the London performance at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in 1995, in which the reading stand is in the background, facing the spectators.
 5. One may, for instance, see reproductions of Rosa's paintings: *Landscape with Mercury and the Dishonest Woodman* (after 1649) at this address <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/salvator-rosa-landscape-with-mercury-and-the-dishonest-woodman> (last visit 25 July 2012), or *Bandits on a Rocky Coast* (1655-1660) at this address <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/110001957> (last visit 25 July 2012).
 6. One may find, for instance, a reproduction of Gainsborough's painting *Boy Driving Cows near a Pool* (c. 1786) at this address <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gainsborough-boy-driving-cows-near-a-pool-n00309> (last visit 25 July 2012)
 7. The definition is taken up again by the Online Encyclopedia, and can be found at this address <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/define/Picturesque> (last visit 25 July 2012)
 8. Definition found on Wikipedia, at this address <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cubism> (last visit 25 July 2012)
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ABSTRACTS

Tom Stoppard chose, as his main theme in his play *Arcadia*, to depict the aesthetic transformations undergone by the park of a stately home in England, from the beginning of the

19th century to the present. But the reason why landscape gardening is so captivating, for him and for the spectators, is that it transcribes in Nature the various aesthetic movements which led art from Classicism to Romanticism. Painting and drawing are thus at the crux of the characters' occupations and preoccupations, whether they are artists themselves, or study and judge the art produced by others. The playwright has woven a network of links and ties between human beings, their personalities, the Nature that surrounds them, and the history of art, thus creating a complete composition, where each character must find his or her rightful position in the painting, so as to produce a harmonious work of art.

Tom Stoppard a choisi, pour thème principal de sa pièce *Arcadia*, les transformations esthétiques du parc d'une grande propriété anglaise depuis le début du XIX^e siècle. Mais si l'architecture des paysages le captive, et captive les spectateurs, c'est qu'elle retranscrit dans la nature les divers courants esthétiques qui ont fait évoluer la peinture de l'ère classique à l'ère romantique. La peinture, et le dessin, sont ainsi au centre des préoccupations des personnages de la pièce, soit qu'ils en sont les créateurs, soit qu'ils l'étudient et l'évaluent. Tout l'art du dramaturge se lit dans les liens constants qu'il tisse entre les êtres, leur personnalité, la nature qui les entoure, qui est créée par l'homme, et l'histoire de l'art pictural. Stoppard produit lui-même une composition achevée, où chacun des personnages doit trouver sa place dans le décor afin de respecter l'harmonie générale de l'œuvre d'art.

INDEX

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