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Classicism versus Romanticism in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

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Tom Stoppard is one of the finest playwrights of the modern age. Some of his well-known plays are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, *Professional Foul*, *The Real Thing* and many more. The finest of all his plays is *Arcadia*. The literary meaning of the term "Arcadia" inspired Tom Stoppard to write his play *Arcadia*. It was titled "Et in Arcadia ego". "Arcadia" actually means a vision of pastoralism and harmony within nature. The Greek province of the same name has helped in the derivation of the term. The term's existence has also been figured out in Renaissance Mythology. "Arcadia" refers as something unattainable as commonly as Utopia. The term "Arcadia" is symbolic of pastoral simplicity.

The play *Arcadia* comprised themes of classical beauty and harmony in nature. In 1993, the play was penned by Tom Stoppard involving the relationship of the past and the present and between the order and disorder. It has been hailed as the finest play of contemporary theatre in English. Tom Stoppard highlights the relationship between the past and the present and struck a chord of harmony among the various aspects of life. According to Johann Hari, "Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* has only grown in power and relevance." Stoppard had focused on proving the fact that scientific knowledge differs from literary or historical knowledge. The desire for knowledge is more important and art is easily understandable in a way that science is not while using the language of art to explain things. Tom Stoppard has been hailed as Britain's greatest living playwright and his plays exemplify his artistic genius and craftsmanship.

Stoppard's *Arcadia* is a comedy of ideas. According to Michael Bellington, "*Arcadia* adorns the West End and makes us think and feel in equal measure." Michael Coveney has quoted about *Arcadia* in *The Independent* as "one of Tom Stoppard's undisputed masterpieces." The past and the present had been juxtaposed very efficiently with artistic genius. The setting of the play is in Derbyshire Country House in 1809 and in the modern day Stoppard had compressed new ideas and presented in the play. The play focuses on the romance of the mind and the body. Remarkably by early reviewers to be similar to Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, Tom Stoppard had excelled in this field and gives a glimpse of his theatrical genius with *Arcadia*.

Arcadia covers the two different ages- the early nineteenth century and the present modern world, matched, juxtaposed together bringing in a rare combination of the different facets of Classicism and Romanticism. The two timelines talk about sex, literature, love, epistemology, landscaping, the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the romance. Stoppard's intellect looms large over the plot of the play and is efficiently presented in the form of this play. It is a two-act play containing seven scenes. The characters belonging to the early nineteenth century are Septimus, Thomasina, Mr. and Mrs. Chater, Lady Croom, Captain Brice, Mr. Richard Noakes. Hannah Jarvis, Valentine, Bernard, Gus and Chloe are the characters belonging to the present modern world. Thomasina Coverly, the thirteen-year-old daughter of Lady Croom, is more

interested to know “what carnal embrace is than anything else.” With her Stoppard had presented a truly heartbreaking character. She is driven not only by intellectual knowledge but by sexual desires also. Although Lady Croom tells Thomasina that she must wed before she is over educated. With her Stoppard puts forth the classicism in an elegant way.

The questions and the myth or to say the reality about truth whether it really exists or not. The play categorically presents, “Which is the right way to seek the truth.” The theory that sex is an attraction or an irrational force is “the attraction that Newton left out.” This force works together to bring the characters together and splitting them. The theme of *Arcadia* and the switching over from 1700s to 1800s represent the two different ways of thinking about art, nature and all these things involved with them. The play is all about the debate between the two ages the Classicists versus the Romantics. The emotions and the passions of both the ages are reflected extensively which stand contrast to each other. The characters of the play with their respective attitude and existence represent their age. Along with the characters the ancient but living tortoise is symbolizing the long-suffering endurance and continuity of existence in this universe. Stoppard’s *Arcadia* very critically and realistically represents the two ages- one representing the Classic era and the other belonging to the Romantic era of Keats and Byron. The inhabitants of the play all belong to Sidley Park. Stoppard very artistically gave way to the fact that scientific knowledge differs from the knowledge of arts which in turn is the base of the universe. The play further depicts that science is different from arts. The scene is set in 1809 where Thomasina Coverly’s scientific queries regarding the various chaotic facts of nature reveal the scientific awareness of the age. Her desire to know about “carnal embrace” is distracted by her tutor Septimus Hodge. He challenges her to prove Fermat’s Last Theorem and tries to divert her to focus on reading the poem “The Couch of Eros”. The curious relationship of teacher-student aged twenty-two and thirteen respectively is captured by Stoppard. Thomasina’s serious query “why one cannot stir things apart” draws out the main theory of the play. Her question leads to a discussion about Newton’s Law of Motion. Her Newtonian view of Universe is incomplete and is evident as well as authentic when she questions her Mathematics tutor Septimus Hodge.

“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 it 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?”

“Classicism has no meaning without Romanticism.” Classicism is incomplete without Romanticism. With Stoppard’s *Arcadia* we end up concluding that these two aspects cannot exist without each other. The readers are introduced to the Classical and the Romantic in the third scene of the play. The conversation and subsequent argument between Lady Croom and Mr. Richard Noakes about the landscape and architecture introduce us to the Classical and the Romantic styles used in the play to depict the attitudes of the characters. The characters are presented and classified as either Classicists or Romanticists. Certain characters are portrayed in both Romantic as well as Classic style. The architecture, the landscape, the dressing sense, the mindset, the psyche and the views are all differentiated into these aspects. Classicism and Romanticism play a major role in the course and destiny of the characters making it a very remarkable play. Romanticism is a style in the fine arts and literature. It favours full expression of the emotions and is spontaneous. In Act I, the character of Thomasina, the thirteen-year-old girl genius of epic proportions give us a rare view of Classicism. The haughty Lady Croom

talking to the senile gardener refuses to have her lovely garden replaced with a modern, romanticized one display the striking differences between the Classic and Romantic style. The redesigning of the garden is just an aesthetic shift from Classical to Romantic. Lady Croom's not favouring Mr. Noakes' modern, romantic style explains this shift. "When 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 the rocks where there was neither a spring nor a stone." The presence of the old tortoise on the table throughout the play symbolizes the valuable classic styles which stand in contrast to the Romantic style. The relationship of these aspects holds the base of the play.

While Lady Croom is in favour of the Classic, old style, her daughter Thomasina approves the new, modern, Romantic style. The characters of *Arcadia* belonging to the 18th Century and the contemporary one are divided into these two aspects of imagination and help us to get a dichotomous view with some in dilemma whether to favour Classicism or Romanticism. Stoppard's earlier plays also depict the theme but in this play he presents it in a massive scale. The dichotomous presentation of these views and imagination is the hallmark of the play.

Tom Stoppard's masterpiece is not merely about mathematics and landscape gardening. It is about the existence of Classicism and Romanticism as one exists upon the base of other. Both are interdependent upon each other. These two are artistic movements that have influenced literature time and again. Classicism is beauty defined which demonstrates balance and order. Romanticism developed in the 18th Century as a contrast to the ideals of Classicism. It expresses beauty through imagination and powerful emotions. Both these school of thought exist in harmony with each other. Their ideals are dichotomous and rest upon balance, order and emotional restraint. Romanticism is said to have emerged as a response to Classicism. The characters and their destiny are all interdependent upon each other.

Tom Stoppard with his complex wits, puns, jokes and word play had made *Arcadia* the finest of all his plays. He has interwoven both the aspects of Classicism and Romanticism in the play with perfection. The chaos theory runs throughout the play and is dominant in all the comic scenes. Stoppard used the theory to create this comedy which represents the basic fact that the nature of knowledge whether mathematical, physical or historical is chaotic. Chaos theory is a field of study in mathematics, with applications in several disciplines including meteorology, physics, engineering, economics, biology and philosophy. According to Edward Lorenz, "Chaos: When the present determines the future, but the approximate present does not approximately determine the future."

Chaotic behavior can be observed in many natural systems, such as weather, style, background settings and also the characters. The two mathematicians in the play draw their inheritance from the past. Valentine, a modern day mathematician is heir to the Sidley Park and is supposedly the lineage of Thomasina. Thomasina's queries of the Second Law of Thermodynamics points to the increasing disorder in the Universe. Hannah Jarvis and Valentine discuss on Thomasina's heat exchange and his theories which were central to chaos. His proving the fact that Tea, like the swirl of the jam in rice pudding cannot be warm again. The temperature gradually decreasing, points towards the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

"The hot tea gets cold, but the cold tea never gets hot by itself." The two opposite theories of art, style and temperament- Classicism and Romanticism determine the unpredictability and pre-

determinacy of the chaos theory which is furthered by the two dichotomous theories. Along with the classical view of the characters runs parallel the Newton's Deterministic laws. Lady Croom's 'Arcadia' the heavenly garden represents the classical views on one hand and Mr. Richard Noake's attempt to reform the garden in a picturesque, wild and gothic style represents Romanticism. Time is irreversible and Stoppard's *Arcadia* is a beautiful representation of the ultimate evolution towards disorder or chaos which is theorized by Thomasina.

Arcadia shows the contrast of the two different pictures of Lady Croom's garden- 'Arcadia', one in the classical pastoral landscapes and the other gloomy, wild and gothic landscape. Tom Stoppard very craftily pictured the cultural decline which is eliminating the symmetrical layouts of human life into irregular and asymmetrical designs. The classical perception gives way to Romantic perception. This dichotomous theory proves the reversibility and irreversibility of time. The presence of the tortoise determines the repetition of ideas through the ages which further determines the harsh, predictable fates. In the third scene of the play with the tutorial session in progress between Septimus and Thomasina in Latin, the discussion focuses on the destruction of the Alexandrian Library. Thomasina mourning the loss of the knowledge contained there is pacified by Septimus with the response that all that is lost will eventually turn up again. In the next scene when Hannah rediscovers Thomasina's Latin primer with ideas on chaos theory she asserts that indeed what is lost is eventually rediscovered. Everything is gradually dispersing into a state of chaos and entropy and yet order is restored within that chaos. Thomasina's untimely death was destined to take place. All the characters from both times dance to the beautiful music of Waltz in perfect harmony and rhythm as in perfect 'Arcadia'.

Thomasina's realization of the limitations of the geometry, she is studying with its regular shapes, symbolizes the order of the Universe. Order and disorder are the two facts related to chaos which are focused alongside Classicism and Romanticism. The comic part of *Arcadia* is the stuff of comedy which is the gap between the ideal and the reality. As it turns out that all the characters are unlucky in love representing the misfits in lives of the characters. Stoppard makes fun at the futile attempts to make sense of the disorder and chaos. The play is well-constructed and the plot is tightly knit in harmony and order. It's a play of transition from intellect to emotion. It endorses a positive attitude towards change and progression of society.

Tom Stoppard excellence lies in drawing similarity among the characters of the play. All the characters are separated by centuries but united by Classicism and Romanticism in the play. Whatever is present draws its link from the past. Thomasina's attempt to accomplish the task is attained by Valentine Coverly by combining Thomasina's algorithms with technology. What couldn't be attained in the 1800s was successfully achieved in the present day. Valentine's revealing that it is actually Thomasina's discovery and what she couldn't achieve with pencil and paper was accomplished with his computer. The concept of entropy and the metaphor of serving rice pudding is suggestive of the powerful law. Bernard Nightingale tries to draw connection between the past and the present and making shrewd deductions about the past. His conclusion that Byron had once visited the house makes it scary but is not able to draw interconnections. It is dark when he tries to achieve any conclusion. The darkness and unknowability of the past make the search path deceptive. The play is structured to achieve its height of fineness and perfection.

Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* is one of the finest play and blends the Classicism with Romanticism along with the chaos theory, thermodynamics, disparate chemicals, botany together with the

mathematicians making up the play one of the richest masterpieces of all times. The only tragedy we see in the play is the premature and untimely death of Thomasina Coverly, who dies on the eve of her seventeenth birthday, setting her bedroom in fire. It looks as if she had foreseen her death. The play, *Arcadia* definitely displays Tom Stoppard's overwhelming intellectual genius. The play is emotionally and intellectually dense.

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