

Beyond Logocentrism: A Derridean Reading of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*

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Summary:

The study aims to analyze Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* through the perspective of Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, specifically addressing the concept of logocentrism and the instability of meaning. It scrutinizes the fragmented realities of the postmodern world, complexity, ambiguity, and the interrelation of knowledge in the face of uncertainty. The play challenges conventional notions of historical continuity, knowledge production, and textual authority. Derridean concepts such as *différance*, trace, and the binary oppositions have been applied to uncover how *Arcadia* resists totalizing interpretations, and aligns with the poststructuralist rejection of absolute truth.

Introduction:

This study, however, will be mainly about *Arcadia* (1993), a two-act play by Tom Stoppard. Like his other plays, *Arcadia* is a hilarious comedy with unsettling undercurrents. It is a rich interweaving of past and present, science and literature, order and chaos. As a dramatist, Stoppard engages deeply with philosophical and literary theories, making *Arcadia* a convincing text for a Derridean analysis. His works often blend intellectual depth with theatrical playfulness, employing wit, intertextual references, and structural experimentation to challenge conventional storytelling. He frequently examines themes of "knowledge, time, and the nature of truth, questioning the stability of meaning and the authority of historical narratives." (Kelly, 2001).

The story takes place in the Sidley Park mansion of Coverly Family in two parallel periods: 1800s and 1990s. It depicts two different periods of time at once. The

characters belonging to past are: Septimus, Thomasina, Mr. and Mrs. Chater, Lady Croom, Captain Brice, Mr. Noakes. While the ones who belong to the present time are: Hannah, Valentine, Bernard, Gus and Chloe. In the play, Stoppard presents five main characters who are engaged in the quest for knowledge. Thomasina, Septimus, and Valentine are pursuing an understanding of the world from a scientific perspective, while Hannah and Bernard represent the arts and humanities. Characteristic of Stoppard's desire to complicate matters, the three "scientists" are the least Newtonian—Thomasina intuits the shortcomings of the Newtonian model; Septimus is perplexed and made skeptical by her theorems; and Valentine is a working chaotician. In contrast, Hannah and Bernard are more "scientific" in their outlook and approach, and through their respective attempts to interpret the past, Stoppard exhibits classical and romantic temperaments at work.

By analyzing the play through Derridean theoretical framework, this paper endeavors to illuminate how *Arcadia* reflects the fragmented and interconnected nature of reality in the postmodern era. It is a work that resists singular interpretations, mirroring Derrida's challenge to logocentrism, the privileging of absolute, central meaning in language and thought. The play intertwines two timelines, the early 19th century and the present, revealing how knowledge is always fragmentary and incomplete. Derrida's theory of deconstruction provides a useful framework for analyzing the play's epistemological uncertainty, its critique of historical narratives, and its interrogation of textual authority. In *Arcadia*, Stoppard constructs a narrative that is simultaneously philosophical and dramatic, intertwining scientific theories like chaos theory and thermodynamics with literary allusions to Romantic poetry and classical drama. His writing style is "marked by its precision, humor, and complex layering of ideas, reflecting his broader interest in epistemology and the limits of human understanding. The play, through its dual

timeline structure, highlights the fragility of historical interpretation and the inevitable gaps in human knowledge.” (Fleming,1993).

Stoppard comments: “*Arcadia* is as full of theses as anything I’ve ever done, but if I hadn’t found my way into a kind of detective story, none of it would have been worth a damn dramatically. I think it’s the first time I’ve got both right, the ideas and the plot” In the same interview, Stoppard adds: “I think *Arcadia* is probably where all that was leading. It’s lost the comic songs and the parodies, but it’s a similar combination of larking about and trying to deliver some kind of thesis” For its mix of comedy, intellectual ideas, structural intricacies, effective story-telling, and emotionally-engaging characters, *Arcadia* is often considered Stoppard’s finest play. (Spencer, 1993,).

Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia* seamlessly intertwines the domains of science, literature, and human emotion, creating a work that is both intellectually stimulating and profoundly human. At its core, the play examines the tensions and harmonies between chaos and order, a contrast that is central to both its narrative structure and thematic concerns. It consists of many layers with a rich and deeply complicated plot with seven scenes. Set in Sidley Park, a fictional English estate, the play alternates between two timelines: the early 19th century and the present day. Some of the scenes take place in 1800s, whereas others in 1990s. Stoppard, in a way, wants to prove that however much physics and literature sound remote, they still deal with the same problems and concerns related to existence. During the nineteenth century, the plot of the story is guided by Thomas Coverly and it focused on the relationship between a teenager and her tutor Septimus Hodge and how their relation is affected by some currents of intelligence during the Romantic Era. That was clear in the communication between them about certain notions such as: chaos, determinism and even the concept of truth. Those ideas could be constructed about the near future. However, those researchers utilize the artistic style of supposition

and letters to reform the ancient time. In this case, there is a kind of explanation about the truth in a historical way.

Arcadia deconstructs logocentric assumptions by foregrounding instability, fragmentation, and the inherent contradictions in language and narrative. By applying Derridean concepts, the paper demonstrates how Stoppard challenges hierarchical binaries and emphasizes the interplay between absence and presence, order and disorder, knowledge and uncertainty. Jacques Derrida's critique of logocentrism, which privileges presence over absence and speech over writing, is particularly useful in deconstructing the play's engagement with historical knowledge, mathematical order, and the instability of meaning. Stoppard's use of metafiction, self-referential dialogue, and fragmented timelines aligns with Derrida's notion that meaning is always deferred, resisting fixed interpretations (Derrida, 1976).

Jacques Derrida's Deconstructive Framework:

Using deconstructive theory of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) enables us to examine the play's handling of language, meaning, time, and binary oppositions, to uncover its postmodern richness. Stoppard's play already deals with poststructuralist concerns, so Derrida's theory is an appropriate one through which to interpret it. His theory is the basis of poststructuralist thinking, shaping such fields as literary theory, philosophy, and postmodernism, cultural studies, feminism, law, and political theory. His framework compels us to question assumptions, to recognize the delicacy of meaning, and to accept the ambiguity of language and interpretation.

Derrida's Key Concepts include:

1. Deconstruction:

Derrida's theoretical framework revolves around deconstruction, a critical method that questions traditional structures of meaning, language, and interpretation. His work is a response to structuralism, particularly Ferdinand de Saussure's idea that

"language functions as a system of signs where meaning is derived from differences between words." Derrida extends this notion by arguing that meaning is never fixed, stable, or fully present. Instead, it is always in flux, shaped by context, interpretation, and the deferral of meaning itself.

Deconstruction is not a simple method but rather an approach that exposes internal contradictions, ambiguities, and the inherent instability of meaning in texts. It dismantles the assumed coherence of texts, revealing how they undermine their own claims to fixed meaning. Derrida does not seek to replace old meanings with new ones but rather to show that meaning is never fully complete or final. Deconstruction, as Derrida promises, focuses on the free play of the meanings of signs and thereupon texts and language in general, leaving no single determinate meaning to be assigned to them. (Cited in Bressler, 2011).

2. Logocentrism and the Limits of Language:

Logocentrism is the belief that language can fully capture truth. Western philosophy has traditionally privileged speech over writing because speech is associated with presence, authenticity, and direct meaning. Derrida critiques this logocentric bias, arguing that writing is not secondary to speech but is equally fundamental to meaning. He demonstrates how language itself is always mediated and deferred, making the idea of an ultimate presence or absolute truth impossible. Logocentrism is the term that Derrida uses "to describe all forms of thought which base themselves on some external point of reference." To Derrida, "Western metaphysics has invented a variety of terms that can function as centers: God, reason, origin, being, essence, truth, humanity, beginning, end, and self, to name a few. Each can operate as a concept that is self-sufficient and self-originating and can serve as a transcendental signified." (Ibid.)

For example, when Hannah states, "It's all trivial—your grouse, my hermit, Bernard's Byron—trivial!" (*Arcadia*, Act II, Scene 5), she underscores the futility of

seeking definitive historical narratives. This aligns with Derrida's idea that language never fully captures reality but rather defers meaning indefinitely. Furthermore, the tension between the rationalism of the Enlightenment, represented by Lady Croom's rigid adherence to classical order, and the Romanticism of Byron, Septimus, and ultimately Thomasina, reflects a Derridean subversion of dominant epistemological structures. By juxtaposing these conflicting intellectual traditions, *Arcadia* exposes the instability of grand narratives and the inherent limitations of logocentric thought. Moreover, the play dismantles the notion of an authoritative historical narrative by showing how different characters impose their interpretations on the past. Bernard Nightingale confidently asserts that Byron killed Chater, constructing a linear story based on selective evidence. However, his hypothesis is later discredited, illustrating the fragility of perceived truths.

The uncertainty surrounding history in *Arcadia* reflects Derrida's assertion that meaning is never absolute but contingent upon endless interpretation and reinterpretation. Additionally, words fail to fully capture reality. Septimus and Hannah attempt to understand historical events, but gaps in evidence lead to misinterpretation. Thomasina's mathematical ideas transcend language, she describes concepts that defy conventional explanation, hinting at meaning beyond linguistic structures. Letters and documents act as unstable texts, interpretation changes depending on who reads them, illustrating Derrida's idea that meaning is shaped by the reader rather than the author's intent.

3. Différance and the Instability of Meaning:

The term *différance* (difference + deferral) is derived from the French 'différer' which plays on the dual meanings of both 'to defer, (to postpone). and 'to differ (to be different). Meaning is created through differences between words, but it is also deferred, it never arrives as a final, fixed entity. This challenges the notion that words have stable referents and suggests that meaning is always relational and shifting.

Jacques Derrida (1976) argues that meaning is never fixed but constantly deferred through *différance*. This concept is central to *Arcadia*, where the search for historical truth, whether through literary analysis, scientific inquiry, or mathematical formulations, is constantly destabilized. Derrida uses this term in order to challenge the concept of logocentrism. The search for truth (about Byron's visit, Thomasina's discoveries, etc.) is never fully resolved; answers remain elusive and deferred. Bernard Nightingale's academic interpretation of history is proven flawed, showing how meaning shifts depending on context and perspective. The recurrence of motifs (fire, mathematics, lost letters) reinforces the instability of fixed meanings, as they take on new significance across different time periods.

Applying 'différance' to the concept of sign and its signifier and signified, Derrida delineates how a signifier inevitably defers its signified by its difference from other signifiers. This leads to conclude that the meaning of a sign or any element of language is never fully present because it depends on its association with other signs or elements to which it harks back and refers forward." (Derrida, 1982). In other words, the full meaning or an unquestionable center for meaning is never present and is indeed caught up in a continuous process of signification. Language is itself a sign system. The text, as a kind of language, will not rest on a single definite meaning; "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (Ibid.). Deconstructive criticism, thus, aims to demonstrate that any text undermines its own claim to have a determinate meaning. This leaves the reader to produce his/her own meaning out of it. However, these meanings will not be determinate and are caught up by and in an activity of semantic free play of meanings.

Moreover, Derrida's idea of the *trace*, which suggests that meaning is shaped by what is absent as much as what is present, underscores the play's structure, where lost letters, incomplete theories, and missing historical facts shape the unfolding narrative. This is evident in *Arcadia* through the recurring motifs of lost letters,

incomplete knowledge, and misunderstood intentions. The character of Hannah Jarvis, for instance, seeks to reconstruct the past but can only do so through textual and material traces, which are always subject to revision. Similarly, Bernard Nightingale misinterprets historical evidence, highlighting the instability of textual meaning. In Act I, Scene 3, Bernard exclaims, "Byron killed Chater! Don't you see? It fits!" only to be proven wrong later, demonstrating how knowledge is continually deconstructed within the play. This reflects the Derridean assertion that meaning is not inherent but shaped by context and interpretation, perpetually deferring any final truth. The play's exploration of entropy and fractal geometry, particularly in Thomasina's mathematical investigations, provides a compelling metaphor for *différance*. Just as her equations resist resolution into neat, closed systems, so too does meaning in *Arcadia* remain instable, never arriving at a final, fixed point. Besides, *Arcadia* exemplifies *différance* in its structural form. Its narrative unfolds in a non-linear fashion, with the past and present interacting in ways that prevent a singular, authoritative reading. The gradual revelation of historical events reflects Derrida's view that meaning is always in motion, never arriving at a definitive conclusion.

4. Intertextuality and the Endless Chain of Meaning

Derrida claims that texts have no single, fixed meanings but are rather subject to infinite interpretation and context. Meaning is never fully present within a text; it occurs in intertextuality: the ways in which texts refer to and interact with other texts. It is a concept that destabilizes authorial control and challenges the potentiality for ultimate, particular elucidation. Stoppard's *Arcadia* is deeply intertextual, drawing on literary, scientific, and historical discourses, referencing Romantic poetry, Newtonian physics, and fractal geometry, making its meaning dependent on external texts and ideas.

Derrida's critique of logocentrism aligns with the play's treatment of intertextuality, where texts and meanings are constantly in dialogue and transformation. No singular interpretation prevails; rather, the play presents a multiplicity of meanings that resist closure (Barthes, 1977). The characters' attempts to define historical truths ultimately reveal the impossibility of fixed interpretation, echoing Derridean skepticism toward definitive meaning. In *Arcadia* The characters' dialogues echo past conversations, showing how meaning is always layered and evolving. For instance, in Act II, Scene 6, Bernard triumphantly proclaims, "The proof is in the pudding!" only to have Hannah retort, "The pudding has no proof," exemplifying the deconstructive principle that all claims to truth are suspect and contingent on context. By layering multiple narratives, *Arcadia* challenges the reader to question the reliability of textual authority. The play's meta-theatricality further complicates its relationship with meaning. By constantly drawing attention to its own status as a constructed text, *Arcadia* resists any reading that seeks to impose a definitive interpretation. Instead, it encourages a fluid, open-ended approach to knowledge, reinforcing Derrida's assertion that meaning is always in change.

Derrida challenges logocentrism, or the idea that language can fully capture truth. *Arcadia* plays with this idea through misinterpretation of documents and texts: Throughout the play, letters, diagrams, and books serve as sources of knowledge, yet they are consistently misinterpreted. Hannah and Bernard misread historical records, leading to incorrect conclusions. Septimus deciphers Thomasina's equations, but their full significance is lost until Valentine revisits them in the present. Thus, the play suggests that "no text contains a single, stable meaning. Interpretation is always subject to change based on the reader's perspective," just as Derrida argues in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967).

Septimus (reading Thomasina's notebook): "I, Thomasina Coverly, have found a truly wonderful method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their

numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone. This margin being too mean for my purpose, the reader must look elsewhere for the new geometry of irregular forms discovered by Thomasina Coverly.” (Act 2. This moment echoes Derrida’s idea that no text is self-contained, the reader must “look elsewhere” to make sense of it, reinforcing the endless deferral of meaning. As well as, Valentine’s frustration with language, Valentine, a scientist, embodies Derrida’s critique of language’s limitations: “It’s all trivial—your grouse, my grouse, Bernard’s Byron. Comparing what we’re looking for misses the point. It’s the wanting to know that makes us matter.” (Act 2). His frustration reflects poststructuralist thought, knowledge is not about discovering a final truth but about recognizing the infinite play of meaning.

5. The Instability of Truth and Meaning:

One of the key tenets of poststructuralism is the idea that truth is not fixed but constructed through language, interpretation, and historical context. In *Arcadia*, the search for historical truth is a major theme, yet the play ultimately demonstrates that knowledge is always partial and shifting. As it is indicated in Bernard’s flawed interpretation and the deferral of truth. Bernard Nightingale, a literary scholar, confidently asserts that “Lord Byron killed Ezra Chater in a duel at Sidley Park.” However, his theory is built on selective evidence and flawed assumptions, showing how history is often a textual construction rather than an objective reality. “The Coverly set was a bloody Waterloo of intelligence.” (Act 2). Bernard’s claim is later deconstructed by Hannah, who uncovers evidence that Byron was not at Sidley Park at the time of Chater’s death. Bernard’s mistake underscores Derrida’s idea that meaning is deferred, truth is never fully present but constantly postponed as new evidence emerges. Hannah: “Byron was not at Sidley Park after the 10th of April. There was no duel.” (Act 2). This aligns with *différance*, where meaning is never final but continually shifting depending on context and perspective.

6. Deconstructing Binary Oppositions:

The play progresses on the binary opposition of reversibility and irreversibility of time. The play has many instances proving the irreversibility of time. The garden is changed, the game of Lord Croom is slaughtered, the letters of Byron and Septimus are burnt and reduced to ash, candles and oil lamps burn, most tragic of all, Thomasina herself is burnt. But on the other hand, we see Septimus claiming that the prior condition will return again. Very ironically all the present-day scenes are proof of Septimus's belief in the repetitive quality of time. Most strikingly we will see in the scenes of the present day that Thomasina's lesson books or diagrams are not lost, they challenge time although neither Thomasina nor none of the other characters of the past are alive due to their mortality. For Thomasina time is still irreversible according to the second law of thermodynamics.

Once the energy is dissipated into diffusion it cannot be recovered. As Edwards states: "the final scene of the play shows us an image of perfect harmony, time overcome through the co-presence of past and present as the modern couple." Hannah and Gus dance alongside Thomasina and Septimus to the tune of a waltz. The audience knows that Thomasina will take a candle and be burnt to death. She cannot be brought back to life –certainly not by algebra. The overcoming of time at the conclusion of Arcadia, for Edwards, is a "triumph of art, not of science, and like all such triumphs it is momentary, fragile and all the more poignant for being quite useless." (Edwards,2001).

Traditional thought relies on binary opposites (e.g. presence/absence, speech/writing, reality/appearance, male/female, reason/emotion, past/present, order/chaos). Derrida argues that these oppositions are hierarchical unstable and interdependent rather than absolute, with one term being privileged over the other. He deconstructs these binaries by showing that the supposedly dominant term depends on the supposedly subordinate one (e.g., presence is only understood in

contrast to absence). *Arcadia* actively dismantles these dichotomies, showing that each side is intertwined with the other. In a way Stoppard manages to reconcile all the opposite hypotheses, scientific laws and historical discoveries through art, and thus creates order out of the chaotic framework of the play.

6.1. Past vs. Present: A False Opposition

The timelines of the early 19th century (1809-1812) and the present day are interconnected, showing that history is never fully 'past.' *Arcadia* constantly distorts the boundaries between past and present. Characters from different time periods engage with the same ideas, particularly through Thomasina's mathematical discoveries and their eventual rediscovery by Valentine Coverly in the present. The play's final scene (Act 2) collapses time entirely, Septimus and Thomasina in 1812 and Hannah and Gus in the present day share the stage, symbolizing the impossibility of separating history from the present: "It's wanting to know that makes us matter." (Act 2). This moment disrupts the logocentric notion that time flows linearly, reinforcing poststructuralist notions of intertextuality and the instability of historical knowledge.

Derrida argues that the privileging of presence over absence is a fundamental flaw in logocentric thought (Derrida, 1976). In *Arcadia*, this is dramatized through the relationship between past and present. The play's structure ensures that the past is always absent yet exerting influence, much like Derrida's "trace" of meaning. The final scene, where past and present characters seemingly occupy the same space, collapses distinctions between presence and absence, reinforcing the idea that meaning is never stable. In Act II, Scene 7, as Valentine and Hannah discuss iterated algorithms and entropy, their dialogue mirrors Thomasina and Septimus's from Act I, Scene 1, showing how ideas transcend time and refuse containment within a singular historical moment. As Septimus states, "When we have found all the meaning, we will be able to calculate the future" (*Arcadia*, Act I, Scene 3), yet the play

ultimately denies this possibility. This is particularly evident when Hannah and Valentine discuss the implications of Thomasina's work. Valentine insists that "It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing" (*Arcadia*, Act II, Scene 7). His realization reflects the paradox of presence and absence, knowledge is only possible because of gaps and deferrals in understanding. The inability to fully capture the past reinforces Derrida's argument that meaning is always constituted through absence. Additionally, Thomasina herself embodies this concept. Although she dies young, her ideas continue to shape the present timeline. Septimus, her tutor and intellectual partner, preserves her work, yet her presence is only ever felt through fragments—unpublished drawings, unfinished equations, and indirect recollections. This underscores Derrida's notion that presence is always mediated by traces of what is absent.

Byron, a character central to the play's mystery, is another example. He never appears on stage, yet his supposed actions ripple throughout the narrative, influencing Bernard's theories and Hannah's skepticism. His absence is paradoxically more significant than his presence would be, reinforcing the Derridean idea that meaning is shaped by what is missing rather than what is directly accessible. Even the presence of Byron in the play is paradoxical. His influence haunts the characters, particularly Bernard, whose obsession with uncovering Byron's supposed duel is ultimately misplaced. Byron's absence underscores the Derridean notion that meaning is always deferred, never directly accessible. The final scene of *Arcadia* offers one of the most striking dramatizations of presence and absence. As past and present characters dance in the same physical space, the boundaries between history and the present moment dissolve. Septimus and Thomasina waltz in 1809, while Hannah and Gus move in the present. The past is made "present," yet remains fundamentally unreachable. This theatrical device embodies Derrida's assertion that presence is always haunted by absence—an idea foundational to deconstruction.

In *Arcadia*, these hierarchical binaries are consistently undermined. The play's dual timelines (1809 and present-day) challenge linear history, demonstrating that knowledge is never fixed but always subject to reinterpretation. The juxtaposition of the two periods reveals the absence inherent in any attempt at absolute understanding—what Derrida terms the "trace" (Derrida, 1972). The past is never fully recoverable; it is mediated through fragments, interpretations, and textual remnants, resisting the notion of a singular truth.

6.2. Reason vs. Emotion: Thomasina and Septimus as Hybrid Thinkers

The play initially sets up a contrast between reason and emotion, with characters like Thomasina and Valentine representing logic, while characters like Septimus and Bernard embody passion and intuition. However, these distinctions break down over time. Thomasina represents both intellectual curiosity and passionate feeling, breaking the strict division between rationality and emotion. Thomasina, despite being a mathematical genius, is also deeply emotional and romantic, interested in love as much as Newtonian physics. Septimus, though a scholar, engages in passionate affairs and ultimately chooses solitude and love over pure intellect after Thomasina's death. "When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore." (Act 1). Her words reflect postmodern skepticism toward absolute meaning—knowledge does not necessarily bring clarity but rather complicates understanding.

6.3. Order vs. Chaos:

Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* masterfully challenges the rigid opposition between order and chaos. The play blends scientific theories, historical interpretation, and human relationships to illustrate how these concepts are interconnected rather than separate. Through mathematics, narrative structure, Romanticism vs. Classicism, thermodynamics, and human relationships, the play reveals that chaos is not the absence of order but an intrinsic part of it. Deterministic chaos is grounded in

nonlinear mathematics, and appropriately Stoppard constructs *Arcadia* in a nonlinear manner, the scenes alternate between the early 1800s and the present. While some literary critics view any nonlinear play as being “chaos-structured”, Stoppard deliberately crafted a structure that embodies essential attributes of deterministic chaos. In a 1993 interview, when Stoppard was questioned about the intricacies of *Arcadia*'s alternating scenes, he was initially reticent about revealing too much. Eventually, he conceded: “I have a secret agenda, but I wouldn't lay it on the audience. The play mimics the way an algorithm goes through bifurcations into chaos” (Fleming 24). In an interview the next day, he added: “The play bifurcates two or three times and then goes into the last section which is all mixed up. So, it is very chaos structured” (Kelly 1959).

One of the most explicit ways *Arcadia* explores the fusion of order and chaos is through Thomasina Coverly's discovery of iterated algorithms and fractals, which foreshadow modern chaos theory. Classical Newtonian physics assumes a deterministic universe, where if all initial conditions are known, the future can be predicted with certainty. However, Thomasina's work suggests a more complex reality: “If you were to stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoon would leave a wake behind it, just like a boat. And if you were to drop a spoonful of jam in the pudding and swirl it around, there would be a wonderful red trail, like the rose in a swirl of smoke.” (Act 1, Scene 1). This metaphor demonstrates that while there is an underlying pattern, the resulting motion is unpredictable—a hallmark of chaos theory. Thomasina's realization undermines the notion of a universe governed purely by Newtonian determinism, blending chaos into what was previously thought to be rigid order. Similarly, Valentine Coverly, a modern-day scientist, reinforces this perspective when discussing Thomasina's equations: “It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. People were talking about the end of physics. Relativity and quantum looked as if they were going to

explain everything, and then we would be like the Victorians, so sure of everything. But oh, we can't even predict the next drop from a dripping tap when it will fall, or which way it will go." (Act 2, Scene 5). Here, Valentine articulates that uncertainty (chaos) is not an error in understanding but a fundamental aspect of nature itself.

The structure of *Arcadia* destabilizes linear chronology, wavering between the early 19th century and the late 20th century. This disruption challenges the traditional notion of historical "order" by presenting the past as something that is constantly reinterpreted rather than fixed. The final scene of the play is particularly significant: characters from both time periods exist on stage simultaneously, as if history and the present are overlapping. This collapse of time underscores the chaotic nature of historical reconstruction. Bernard Nightingale, for example, constructs a grand theory about Lord Byron's involvement at Sidley Park, only for it to unravel due to his reliance on incomplete information. Hannah Jarvis, in contrast, takes a more methodical approach, but even she acknowledges the limitations of historical certainty: "It's all trivial—your grouse, my hermit, Bernard's Byron. Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter." (Act 2, Scene 7). This assertion reflects how history is not a fixed, ordered narrative but a chaotic process of reconstruction based on fragmented knowledge.

The philosophical and aesthetic conflict between Romanticism and Classicism mirrors the tension between chaos and order. Sidley Park's transformation from a precisely structured classical garden to an untamed Romantic landscape symbolizes this shift: "The real England is a garden, and the English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors." (Act 1, Scene 2). Lady Croom, representing classical order, laments this transformation, equating it with chaos: "This is not a garden, it is simply the landscape... This is the very thing, a decline from thinking to feeling!" (Act 1, Scene 2) However, the play suggests that both structured rationalism and emotional spontaneity are necessary

parts of human experience. While Lady Croom resists the shift, the play embraces the idea that chaos and order are not opposing forces but interwoven elements of progress.

On the other hand, Valentine's discussion of entropy provides a scientific foundation for the idea that chaos is inevitable in all ordered systems: "The heat goes into the mix. We can't go backwards. We can't run the film in reverse. Heat was the first thing which had to be explained, and now the whole problem is the direction of time." (Act 2, Scene 5). This concept, the Second Law of Thermodynamics implies that systems naturally evolve from order to disorder, reinforcing the idea that chaos is a fundamental principle rather than a failure of order. The universe moves toward increasing entropy, yet within that chaos, patterns emerge, just as Thomasina's equations predict.

Human relationships in *Arcadia* defy logical order and often lead to unpredictable outcomes. Septimus's relationships, for example, are marked by disorder—he is a tutor, a lover, and ultimately, a reclusive hermit. Thomasina's untimely death, which prevents her from realizing the full implications of her mathematical discoveries, underscores the unpredictable nature of life. Bernard, in his passionate (and often misguided) theorizing, represents intellectual chaos, whereas Hannah symbolizes a more structured approach. Yet, despite their differences, Hannah recognizes the necessity of embracing uncertainty: "It's the wanting to know that makes us matter." (Act 2, Scene 7). This reinforces that human curiosity, like history, love, and science, thrives in a space where order and chaos coexist.

The interplay between Thomasina Coverly's mathematical discoveries and the eventual chaos they predict further emphasizes the impossibility of finality or totalizing knowledge. As Thomasina poetically muses, "We are all doomed to chaos" (*Arcadia*, Act II, Scene 7), reinforcing the notion that structured, deterministic models of the world inevitably collapse into uncertainty.

Through its scientific, philosophical, and narrative complexity, *Arcadia* deconstructs the binary opposition of order and chaos, revealing their interdependence. Thomasina's mathematical discoveries, Valentine's reflections on entropy, and the play's fragmented structure all demonstrate that chaos is not the negation of order but an intrinsic part of it. Stoppard suggests that the beauty of life, knowledge, and even history itself emerges not from rigid certainty but from the dynamic interplay between structure and uncertainty. In the end, *Arcadia* celebrates the unpredictability of human existence, our theories may crumble, our gardens may overgrow, and our stories may remain unfinished, but it is within this chaos that meaning is ultimately found. The play suggests that order emerges from chaos and vice versa, as seen in Thomasina's mathematical discoveries. This collapse of binary oppositions aligns with Derrida's view that meaning is never fixed but always relational and unstable, shaped by relationships rather than rigid categories

Conclusion:

Due to its disjointed structure, self-referentiality, and deconstruction of opposites, *Arcadia* is the quintessential work of Derridean deconstruction. It defies stable meaning by demonstrating how history is reconstructed from faulty evidence. It erodes the oppositions between past and present, reason and emotion, order and chaos. It challenges the truthfulness of language, emphasizing interpretation over fixed truth.

Through its structural complexity, thematic concerns, and interrogation of knowledge, *Arcadia* resists logocentric assumptions and aligns with Derrida's deconstructive principles. By destabilizing the presence-absence binary, illustrating the deferral of meaning, and challenging hierarchical oppositions, Stoppard's play exemplifies poststructuralist thought in dramatic form. As a self-reflexive text, *Arcadia* not only narrates a story but also critiques the very act of meaning-making, reinforcing the notion that truth is always contingent, provisional, and open to

reinterpretation. Stoppard's play eventually adheres to the poststructuralist belief that meaning is not fixed but ever-changing, and thus *Arcadia* is an intriguing example of how Derrida's ideas can be applied to literature.

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ما وراء المركزية العقلية: قراءة دريدانية لمسرحية أركاديا لتوم ستوبارد

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الكلمات المفتاحية: المركزية العقلية، جاك دريدا، التفكيك.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل مسرحية أركاديا لتوم ستوبارد من خلال منظور نظرية التفكيك لجاك دريدا، مع التركيز على مفهوم المركزية العقلية وعدم استقرار المعنى. تستكشف الدراسة طبيعة الواقع المجزأ في العالم ما بعد الحداثي، وتعقيداته، وغموضه، وعلاقة المعرفة بعدم اليقين. تتحدى المسرحية المفاهيم التقليدية المتعلقة بالاستمرارية التاريخية، وإنتاج المعرفة، وسلطة النص، والثنائيات المتقابلة، تكشف الدراسة كيف تقاوم المسرحية التفسيرات الشمولية من خلال تطبيق مفاهيم دريدانية مثل الاثر والاختلاف، مما يعكس انحيازها إلى الرؤية ما بعد البنيوية التي ترفض الحقيقة المطلقة.