

## **“The past will have its time again”: History in Tom Stoppard’s *The Coast of Utopia* and *Arcadia***

Carmen Lara Rallo  
Universidad de Málaga  
carmenlara@uma.es

### **Abstract**

In one of his latest incursions into the past, *The Coast of Utopia* trilogy, Tom Stoppard displays an interest in history that does not emerge solely in the historical nature of the plays’ characters and setting, but which also takes the form of a conceptualisation of history that is reflected in several aspects of the series. Such a conceptualisation invites to reassess Stoppard’s exploration of the past in *Arcadia*, which offers likewise a characterisation of the course of history that has been analysed so far in connection with the idea of the linearity of time. In the light of this, the present paper aims at investigating the view of history advanced in these two works, with the final goal of showing that both favour a presentation of the passing of time as a cyclical continuity in which nothing is lost because the past keeps “having its time again”.

In 2002, the British playwright Tom Stoppard (b. 1937) published *The Coast of Utopia*, a trilogy of self-contained plays that focus on a group of Russian revolutionary thinkers and artists in mid-nineteenth century Europe. This sequential series, which comprises *Voyage*, *Shipwreck*, and *Salvage*, spans from 1833 to 1868 as it follows the personal and political experiences of historical figures like Michael Bakunin, Vissarion Belinsky, Alexander Herzen, or Ivan Turgenev, in their pursuit of philosophical and social ideals in and out of the tsarist Russia of Nicholas I and Alexander II. Stoppard’s setting of the trilogy in this specific historical period of the past, as well as his choice of historical figures for the characters of the plays, is very significant because it points to the outstanding position that the past, history, and memory occupy in Stoppard’s production.

In this sense, the presence of historical characters in his works can be already discovered in one of Stoppard’s early pieces, *Travesties* (1974), which evolves around the imagined relationship that developed among Lenin, Joyce, and Tzara over the historical background of the First World War. Similarly, the radio play *In the Native State* (1991)—which was adapted for the stage in 1995 under the title *Indian Ink*—portrays the beginning of the social and political upheaval in India in the 1930s that ultimately led to the independence of the British colony. Alongside this setting in the past, the action of *In the Native State / Indian Ink* moves forward to the contemporary period, alternating the thirties and the eighties in a dual time scheme that also pervades the play which stands as Stoppard’s most complex and ambitious exploration of the past so far, *Arcadia* (1993). This work, which shuttles back and forth between the Regency time and the present day, and where Lord Byron plays a crucial role in his offstage presence, shows an interest in history that acquires special relevance from two points of view.

On the one hand, the pre-eminence of the past and of historical characters that *Arcadia* shares with *In the Native State / Indian Ink*, *Travesties*, and above all *The Coast*

of *Utopia*, can be assessed in terms of the renewed fascination for history and memory which has become a landmark of British literature since the last decades of the twentieth century. In this context, as Pilar Hidalgo has demonstrated in an article centred on the uses of memory in contemporary English drama (2002: *passim*), Stoppard's attention to history has its parallel in the pervasive remembrance and representation of the past recurring in such diverse works as Harold Pinter's *Old Times* (1971) and *No Man's Land* (1975), Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1978), Howard Brenton's *Bloody Poetry* (1984), David Hare's *Plenty* (1978) and *The Absence of War* trilogy (1990-1993), or Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (1998).

Thus, contemporary drama is marked by a concern for memory and the past which could be linked with the "return to history" that critics such as Frederick Holmes (1997: 11) have identified as one of the defining traits of contemporary British fiction. In this sense, the historical drive underlying many current novels that explore both the near and the far-away past—like A.S. Byatt's *Frederica Quartet* (1978-2002) and *Possession* (1990)—emerges as the most appropriate artistic framework to contextualise the treatment of memory in present-day British theatre, in general, and Stoppard's fascination for history, in particular.

On the other hand, the presence of the past in *Arcadia* acquires further relevance because it is not restricted to the historical setting of the play in the Regency period, or to the centrality of the historical character of Byron, but also takes the form of a portrayal of the relationship between past and present that results in an articulation of the concept of history itself. As a matter of fact, the structure and content of *Arcadia* set a dichotomy between the view of history as a linear oscillation of contraries, and as a flow of events ruled by repetition, which is deeply connected with the scientific and cultural background of the play, and that is eventually solved in favour of the latter, as I intend to show in this paper. At the same time, the articulation of a view of history underlying *Arcadia* emerges as well in *The Coast of Utopia*, where the character of Alexander Herzen gives voice to different approaches to life and history while the circular structure of the individual plays—and of the trilogy as a whole—suggests again a cyclical conception of time and history similar to that reflected in *Arcadia*.

In the light of this, the goal of the present paper is to investigate Stoppard's treatment of history both in his incursion into the past in *The Coast of Utopia*, and in his portrayal of the passing of time in *Arcadia*. This investigation, which takes as its working context the renewed interest in memory characteristic of contemporary British literature, aims at displaying the views on history offered by Stoppard in the two pieces, with the final purpose of demonstrating that both works favour an optimistic presentation of history as a cyclical continuity in which nothing is lost. In order to do so, the paper offers an approach to *The Coast of Utopia*—which so far has received little critical attention—and above all, focuses on *Arcadia*, whose overall structure and meaning invite to reassess its critical appraisal as a work that endorses the conceptions of the linearity of time and the irretrievability of the past.

The challenge to these notions, which is given full expression when one of the central characters of the Regency period in *Arcadia* states that discoveries and artistic works lost in the past "will have their time again" (Stoppard 1993: 51), also emerges in the course of *The Coast of Utopia*, where the action follows a chronological line along thirty five years of tsarist Russia that deserves to be analysed in terms of the representation of history. Indeed, the setting of the trilogy is remarkable not only because it produces an effect of verisimilitude that transforms the audience—and readers—of the plays into participants in history (Nadel 2004: 511), but above all because despite its wide temporal span, the action gives an impression of slow motion

and statism that, significantly, can be explained in connection with Alexander Herzen's attitude towards history and the historical moment in which he lived.

In this sense, the impression of slow motion in *The Coast of Utopia* results to a great extent from the long speeches about philosophical and political issues delivered by the different characters, and specially by Herzen, whose real-life counterpart argued that the despotism of Nicholas I made action impossible for his generation, and thus left pure thought as the only free realm for expression. In the light of this, the static quality of the plays could be interpreted as a dramatic expression of Herzen's view of philosophical thinking as the most appropriate course of action to open the way for the revolution against the tsar and in favour of the emancipation of the peasants.<sup>1</sup> Such an interpretation would point to the centrality of Herzen in the trilogy, particularly in *Shipwreck* and *Salvage*. Indeed, after brief appearances of this character in Act II of *Voyage*—which is centred in the Bakunin family and in the development of Michael's philosophical and political values from German idealism to the radical principles of anarchism—Herzen's personal and public experiences become the focus of the other plays in the series.

Precisely Herzen is the character who in the course of the trilogy offers several views on the passing of time that converge in a characterisation of history as an endless process marked by continuity and repetition. Thus, already in one of his appearances in the second act of *Voyage*, Herzen engages in a conversation with the literary critic Vissarion Belinsky in which he attacks Belinsky's ideas about the causality of historical events: "People don't storm the Bastille because history proceeds by zigzags. History zigzags because when people have had enough, they storm the Bastille" (Stoppard 2002a: 104). The fact that Herzen's first explicit speech about history in the trilogy emerges as a refutation of another character's ideas is very significant because it anticipates the way in which Herzen's statement about life and the passing of time in *Shipwreck* also takes the form of an attack on a particular worldview. Here, this attack is not issued against the ideas of an individual character like Belinsky, but against the general human concern for the future at the expense of the ability to enjoy the present:

Because children grow up, we think a child's purpose is to grow up. But a child's purpose is to be a child. Nature doesn't disdain what lives only for a *day*. It pours the whole of itself into the each moment. We don't value the lily less for not being made of flint and built to last. Life's bounty is in its flow, later is too late. Where is the song when it's been sung? The dance when it's been danced? It's only we humans who want to own the future, too ... Was the child happy while he lived? That is a proper question, the only question.... (Stoppard 2002b: 100)

This moving speech, with which Herzen tries to comfort himself after the poignant death of his young son Kolya in a shipwreck, conflates Herzen's pessimism towards the events of political history—the outcome of the Paris rebellion of 1848—and the painful bitterness resulting from the irruption of death in his personal story. Thus, overwhelmed by a sense of loss both in political history and in his personal story, Herzen claims the value of the transience of life in a celebration of the present moment which connects with the portrayal of history in *Salvage*. There, in the closing scene of the play—and of the trilogy—the course of historical events is described as a maze without beginning or end, a continuity in which the loss of the past or the uncertainty of the future should not be grieved for because history is a labyrinthine path in which human beings come and go through the gates of chance:

But history has no culmination! There is always as much in front as behind. There is no libretto. History knocks at a thousand gates at every moment, and the gatekeeper is chance. We shout into the mist for this one or that one to be opened for us, but through every gate there are a thousand more. We need wit and courage to make our way while our way is making us. (Stoppard 2002c: 118)

Significantly, this view of history as an infinite space which takes the form of an endless maze is offered once more by Herzen, in the speech he delivers while he is dreaming of a political dialogue between Karl Marx and the writer Ivan Turgenev. The presentation of Herzen asleep in this final scene of *Salvage* acquires special relevance if we take into account that the play also opens with Herzen's dream of a conversation among political revolutionaries from different European countries. In this way, *Salvage* begins and ends with mirror images that provide a cyclical structure to the work. This cyclical structure is not a feature displayed only by the last volume of the trilogy, but it can be traced as well in *Voyage* and *Shipwreck*, and in the series as a whole, since all the individual plays—and the beginning and ending of the trilogy—share a pattern of repetition which operates on different levels.

Thus, if the closing scene of *Voyage* moves from Moscow in Act II to the setting of the first scene and act of the play—the Bakunin estate of Premukhino—the ending of *Shipwreck* goes back in time and space to the opening scene of the work, where the unfruitful search for little Kolya is replaced at the end of the play by the joyful meeting of the boy with his mother. The incorporation of this change in the repeated scene introduces a mood of hope that counterbalances the feeling of bitterness presiding the climactic moment when Herzen and his wife Natalie learn about Kolya's death. In this way, the audience of the play is not left with the sense of loss that results from the shocking episode of the boy's death, but the dominant atmosphere by the end of the performance is one of harmony and conciliation.

This atmosphere is also the prevailing mood at the end of the trilogy as a whole, where the portrayal of the safe return of Herzen's daughter Olga deserves to be analysed from two points of view. Firstly, this episode is part of a constant swing between disillusionment and renewal, departure and return, exile and freedom, that the critic Ira Nadel (2004: 506) has identified as the source for a cyclical rhythm in the trilogy. Secondly, Olga's celebrated arrival echoes the coming back of Michael Bakunin at the beginning of *Voyage*, in two parallel episodes of joyful family gatherings that bring together the Bakunins, in the opening scene of *Voyage*, and the Herzens, in the closing scene of *Salvage*. The mirror quality of both moments, which are pervaded by an optimistic mood that again counterbalances the bitterness springing from the loss of other young members of the families like Kolya or Bakunin's sister Liubov, provides the trilogy with a circular structure.

This circular structure is deeply connected with the view of history as an infinite continuity, or using Herzen's image, as a never-ending labyrinthine path where each gate leads to a repeated series of multiple gates (Stoppard 2002c: 118). Significantly, the process of repetition that governs the cyclical structure of *The Coast of Utopia* and of the individual plays, and which lies at the heart of this image of the maze full of self-similar gates, underlies a pattern of loss and recovery of objects and ideas that is crucial for the view of history advanced in *Arcadia*. This pattern emerges on different levels in the plays of the trilogy, where the recurring situation in which several characters of *Salvage* lose and find one of their gloves (Stoppard 2002c: 4, 42) has its parallel in a

remark by Belinsky in *Voyage* that describes his ability to recover lost objects in a river near the Bakunin estate: “Lost objects from another life are restored to you in the belly of a carp” (Stoppard 2002a: 36).<sup>2</sup>

In this same line, *Shipwreck* also plays with the idea of recovering “lost objects from another life”, though here the possibility of crossing the boundaries between past and present is articulated in a scene that subverts the chronology of art history by anticipating the arrangement of a picture by Edouard Manet in the disposition of the characters of the play, as it is made explicit in the opening stage direction: “‘*Déjeuner sur l’herbe*’... *There is a tableau which anticipates—by fourteen years—the painting by Manet. Natalie is the undressed woman sitting on the grass in the company of two fully clothed men....*” (Stoppard 2002b: 73). The effect of this scene, which could be summarised in the characterisation of the feeling of *déjà vu* offered by Herzen’s wife at the beginning of *Shipwreck* (“there are certain moments ... situations ... which keep having their turn again” (Stoppard 2002b: 4)), results from a perception of the course of history and culture as a constant flow in which a particular concept or idea emerges periodically under the form of multiple artistic expressions. Interestingly, such a perception is the pivot of the speech in *Arcadia* that condenses the conceptualisation of history as an infinite sequence of cyclic re-discoveries, where the image of the maze advanced by Herzen in *The Coast of Utopia* gives way to the picture of a never-ending procession that preserves the cultural tenets of civilisation in a circular pattern of loss and recovery:

We shed as we pick up, like travellers who must carry everything in their arms, and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind. The procession is very long and life is very short. We die on the march. But there is nothing outside the march so nothing can be lost to it. The missing plays of Sophocles will turn up piece by piece, or be written again in another language. Ancient cures for diseases will reveal themselves once more. Mathematical discoveries glimpsed and lost to view will have their time again. (Stoppard 1993: 50-51)

The fact that this moving speech is delivered by Septimus Hodge, tutor of the brilliant aristocratic girl Thomasina Coverly in the past section of *Arcadia* (1809 and 1812), is very important because that character embodies in the course of the play the transition between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, as his pupil’s genial intuitions lead him to dismiss his faith in the Classical-Newtonian deterministic universe. This transition, which is part of the linear oscillation of contraries in a view of history opposing that of the cyclical continuity, forms the basis for the composition of *Arcadia*, since as Nadel has pointed out (2002: 437), Stoppard’s early impetus for writing the play was a desire to portray the dichotomy between the Classical and the Romantic.

Such a dichotomy is articulated through three main elements of *Arcadia* that interact on different levels: the characters—both in the past and in the present—the unseen setting of the garden of Sidley Park (the Coverlys’ countryhouse, where all the action takes place), and the scientific background of the play. Firstly, Septimus’ belief in the classical concepts of Newton’s physics and Euclidean geometry is counterbalanced by Thomasina’s romantic enthusiasm for irregularity, which emerges in her positive assessment of the transformations undergone by the garden of Sidley Park towards the picturesque style (Stoppard 1993: 14). These transformations are investigated in the contemporary period by the character of Hannah Jarvis, a researcher into the history of the garden that embodies the classical temperament in her “sentimentality over geometry” and her “classical reserve” (Stoppard 1993: 37, 99).

Both traits converge in her attitude towards her field of study, where the love for regular, Euclidean geometry that Hannah shares with Septimus is given voice in her description of the changes introduced in Sidley Park in the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism:

The whole Romantic sham ... It's what happened to the Enlightenment, isn't it? A century of intellectual rigour turned in on itself ... The history of the garden says it all, beautifully. There's an engraving of Sidley Park in 1730 that makes you want to weep. Paradise in the age of reason. By 1760 everything had gone—the topiary, pools and terraces, fountains, an avenue of limes—the whole sublime geometry was ploughed under by Capability Brown ... And then Richard Noakes came in to bring God up to date. By the time he'd finished it looked like this ... The decline from thinking to feeling, you see. (Stoppard 1993: 36-37)

Similarly, Hannah's "classical reserve" pervades her cold, objective method of investigation by rational deduction from proved facts. Thus, when she focuses her research on the figure of the hermit of Sidley Park—a mysterious character that was incorporated into the garden in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of the picturesque landscape—she does not allow her intuition to be her only guide in the discovery of the hermit's identity. Instead, she waits until having material evidence for her hypothesis (a drawing of Septimus which proves that, after Thomasina's accidental death in 1812, he became mad and spent the rest of his life in the hermitage of the garden) to reach a definite conclusion.

As opposed to Hannah's classical attitude, the other character that is doing research into the past of Sidley Park in the contemporary period—Bernard Nightingale, a university teacher interested in Lord Byron—is marked by a romantic temperament which emerges in several aspects of his personality and behaviour. Thus, apart from displaying a blind faith in his intuition that leads him to advance a wrong theory about Byron's visit to Sidley Park in 1809—according to which Byron killed there the minor poet Ezra Chater in a duel—Bernard shows a passionate nature that reaches a climactic moment in his argument with the eldest Coverly child in the present day, the scientist Valentine: "A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need. There's no rush for Isaac Newton ... I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light...." (Stoppard 1993: 81).

The fact that Valentine is a scientist is very significant from two perspectives. On the one hand, because his research into the mathematical patterns of chaos theory informs the scientific background of *Arcadia* together with Thomasina's intuitions, which anticipate the change from Newtonian determinism to thermodynamics, and from Euclidean geometry to the fractal geometry of chaos theory.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, because Bernard's argument with Valentine becomes a confrontation between humanities and sciences that signals the rivalry opposing these fields of human culture. Despite this opposition, however, there is a common desire for knowledge that drives scientists and humanists alike, as Hannah remarks in a conciliatory note: "Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter...." (Stoppard 1993: 100).

Thus, the dichotomy between sciences and humanities becomes blurred in Hannah's statement, in the same way as the opposition between the Enlightenment and Romanticism weakens in the course of the play. In this context, as critics like John Fleming (2001: 201-202) and Hersh Zeifman (2001: 191-92) have pointed out, the

characters that embody the Classical and Romantic temperaments—Hannah and Bernard—experience a change in their attitudes which emerges with special force in the case of Hannah, who forgets her “sentimentality over geometry” when acknowledging the beauty of fractal images (Stoppard 1993: 100-101), and by the end of the play leaves aside her “classical reserve” and agrees to dance with young Gus Coverly. In consequence, both the discovery of a common goal for sciences and humanities, and the blurred differences between the Classical and the Romantic, suggest in *Arcadia* the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut division between opposites in history and culture, thus subtly displacing the view of history as a linear oscillation between contraries in favour of the image of continuity advanced by Septimus, and captured by Hannah in her evocation of the transformations undergone by the garden of Sidley Park:

English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors ... Here, look—Capability Brown doing Claude, who was doing Virgil. Arcadia! And here ... untamed nature in the style of Salvator Rosa. It's the Gothic novel expressed in the landscape.... (Stoppard 1993: 34).

The pre-eminence of Septimus' image of history has been dismissed in many critical responses to *Arcadia*, where the optimistic message underlying the view of culture as a never-ending procession is considered to be overwhelmed by the gloomy prospects of Thomasina's death and the disappearance of the universe predicted in her intuitions. In this sense, while Paul Edwards has offered a negative assessment of the artistic quality of the conclusion of the play as “momentary, fragile, and all the more poignant for being quite useless” (2001: 183), Prapassaree and Jeffrey Kramer (1997: 7-8) have claimed that Septimus' view on history is disrupted by the irretrievability of the past in a non-linear universe doomed to the loss of heat and energy.

Nevertheless, the possibility of considering that *Arcadia* favours the optimistic image of history as an endless march in which nothing is lost can be argued in relation to several aspects of the play. Firstly, as in *The Coast of Utopia*, the structure of *Arcadia* supports the view of the cyclical flow of history, since it is pervaded by repetitions, echoes and doublings that emerge even in the circular configuration of the play.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the overall meaning of *Arcadia* supports Septimus' message because, even though Thomasina's glimpses are “lost to view” due to her premature death, Valentine's contemporary work with one of her intuitions—chaos theory—as well as his ability to interpret the girl's glimpses into thermodynamics, prove how scientific discoveries and works of art that “fall” in the march of history are “picked up by those behind” (Stoppard 1993: 50-51).

In this same line, the pessimistic prospect of the extinction of the universe posited by the law of entropy, which destroys Septimus' faith in the Newtonian system, is counterbalanced by the implications of Thomasina's other genial intuition, chaos theory, since this form of mathematics allows us to discover the equations governing the shapes of nature, and therefore, as Valentine puts it, to know “how [this universe] started, [and] perhaps ... how the next one will come” (Stoppard 1993: 103).<sup>5</sup> Finally, the centrality of Septimus' hopeful view of history in *Arcadia* can be seen reflected as well in the contextualisation of the play within a long tradition of artistic articulations of the classical concept of Arcadia. In this sense, since Stoppard's work is placed “within an almost infinite line of backward-looking, neoclassical regressions, hearkening back all the way to classical antiquity” (Scolnicov 2004: 480), continuity is epitomised by the

play itself in its being a contemporary manifestation of a cultural idea that has been given multiple expressions in the course of history.

All this opens the way for concluding that, as has been mentioned, in its articulation of the dichotomy between the view of history as a linear oscillation of contraries, or as a periodical cycle of repetition, *Arcadia* favours the conceptualisation of history as a continuous flow where no idea, discovery, or artistic achievement is lost. Indeed, the oscillation of contraries in history and culture—which is portrayed in the play in terms of the opposition between the Classical and the Romantic, sciences and humanities—is relegated to a secondary position by the pre-eminence of those aspects of *Arcadia* supporting Septimus' picture of history as a never-ending march ruled by a cyclical pattern of loss and recovery.

This optimistic presentation of the passing of time also pervades Stoppard's incursion into the past in *The Coast of Utopia*, where the continuity of history is articulated through the circular structure of the individual plays and of the complete series, and through the speeches delivered by Herzen. In this context, Herzen's description of history as an endless maze in which each gate leads to an infinite series of gates, like Septimus' image of the eternal procession, proves the centrality of the relationship between past and present in Stoppard's production, where the characterisation of history offered in *The Coast of Utopia* and *Arcadia* signals how "the past is having its time again" in contemporary British drama.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Apart from this possible correspondence between the impression of slow motion in the plays and Herzen's philosophical approach to politics, the centrality of his thoughts and writings in *The Coast of Utopia* can be attested in the embedding of quotations from his memoirs and essays in the stage directions of the plays (Stoppard 2002b: 40, 73; Stoppard 2002c: 92). Moreover, Herzen's work *From the Other Shore* provides the imagery that informs the title of the trilogy, where the philosophical quest for utopian freedom is materialised in the physical journey from Russia to Europe undertaken by the main characters. At the same time, the image of the shore presiding the title of Herzen's work emerges in the sea-voyage imagery pervading the names of the individual plays, which again display a two-fold meaning operating both in a literal sense and in terms of the characters' philosophical and political attitudes. Thus, if the title of *Voyage* applies simultaneously to Bakunin's departure from German idealistic philosophy and to his physical departure from Russia in his 1840 sea-voyage, *Shipwreck* portrays the metaphoric shipwreck of Herzen's ideals in his disappointment with the Paris popular rebellion of 1848 ("now we know what reactionaries have always known: liberty, equality and fraternity are like three rotten apples in their barrel of privilege" (Stoppard 2002b: 55)), as well as referring to the literal shipwreck that caused the death of Herzen's young son Kolya. Similarly, *Salvage*, the title of the third part of the trilogy, points to the symbolic salvage of Herzen's hopes for a social reform in Russia after the accession of Tsar Alexander II, while capturing at the same time the atmosphere that presides over the last scene of the play after the safe arrival of Herzen's daughter Olga.

<sup>2</sup> The recovery of lost gloves in *Salvage* resonates with special force for the audience—and readers—of the complete trilogy when Herzen's comment suggests a link between the motif of the lost glove and Kolya's death in *Shipwreck*: "Kolya's body was never found. There was a young woman rescued from the sea, my mother's maid.



For some reason one of Kolya's gloves was in her pocket. So that's all we got back. A glove" (Stoppard 2002c: 56).

<sup>3</sup> This change stands as a parallel of the transition between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. In this sense, if the ordered worldview of Newtonian physics gave way to the certainty of death and randomness in a universe doomed to the gradual and irretrievable loss of heat—which was postulated by the second law of thermodynamics or “entropy”, glimpsed by Thomasina in *Arcadia* (“Newton's equations go forward and backwards, they do not care which way. But the heat equation cares very much, it goes only one way” (Stoppard 1993: 116))—the regularity of Euclidean geometry has been challenged in the last years by chaos theory, a new form of mathematics based on a series of repeated operations that result in the production of self-similar graphics (or “fractals”) representing the irregular forms in nature. Like the second law of thermodynamics, chaos theory is one of Thomasina's genial glimpses in *Arcadia*, where her contempt towards Euclidean geometry is given voice in a speech that shows many points in common with the ideas advanced by the mathematician that first developed fractal geometry, Benoit Mandelbrot: “Mountains are not pyramids and trees are not cones. God must love gunnery and architecture if Euclid is his only geometry” (Stoppard 1993: 112); “Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth...” (Mandelbrot 1983 (1977): 1). Together with Mandelbrot's work on fractals, another study that lies behind the scientific framework of *Arcadia* is James Gleick's *Chaos*, which includes an example of fish populations to describe the application of chaos theory to biology (Gleick 1988 (1987): 62-65) that recurs in Valentine's explanation of his own research (Stoppard 1993: 59-60).

<sup>4</sup> As Lucy Melbourne has suggested, the opening dialogue between Thomasina and Septimus at the beginning of Scene One (“Septimus, what is carnal embrace?” (Stoppard 1993: 2)) is echoed in the final scene of the play when these characters dance together on stage in an embrace of love (1998: 571). This final scene, in which the continuity of history is fully expressed in the merging of past and present, is very significant in terms of the pattern of repetitions and doublings pervading the whole play, which critics like Fleming (2001: 195) and Veas-Gulani (1999: 417) have associated with the scientific background of chaos theory—based on a series of repeated mathematical operations—and that can be linked as well with the representation of history as a cyclical process mentioned before. In this context, the final scene of *Arcadia* not only introduces visual repetitions like the doubling of Thomasina's brother Augustus and Gus Coverly (played in the first production of the work by the same actor, Timothy Matthews), but also incorporates the sound effect of piano music that echoes both Valentine's explanation of the difficulties of chaos theory with a musical example (Stoppard 1993: 60-61), and the multiple allusions to sound, music, and noise in the course of the play.

<sup>5</sup> Septimus' sense of loss after his acceptance of the implications of Thomasina's intuition is condensed in a poetical speech (“When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore” (Stoppard 1993: 126)) that deserves to be analysed from two perspectives. On the one hand, the image of the empty shore, like the one evoked by Valentine to describe the apparent randomness underlying chaos theory (“In an ocean of ashes, islands of disorder” (Stoppard 1993: 101)), can be connected with the sea-imagery prevailing in *The Coast of Utopia*. On the other hand, Septimus' speech invites to discover an intertextual link with John Keats's sonnet “When I have fears that I may cease to be”, where the image of loneliness on an empty shore is also at work in its final lines: “then on the shore / Of the wide world I stand

alone, and think / Till love and fame to nothingness do sink” (Keats 1979 (1848): 366; lines 12-14). The relevance of such a link does not lie solely in the parallel existing between the situation evoked in the poem and Thomasina’s prospect—since her premature death will “sink to nothingness” both her love relationship with Septimus and the fame resulting from her mathematical glimpses—but emerges as well in relation to the view of history as a continuity in which scientific discoveries and works of art are lost and recovered in a circular pattern. Thus, like the scene in *Shipwreck* that anticipates a painting by Manet in its arrangement of the characters, the (fictional) anticipation of Keats’s poem in Septimus’ speech points to the process whereby a particular concept or idea takes multiple artistic forms in the cyclical flow of history and culture.

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