

УДК 821.111(73)

CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC: ORDER AND CHAOS IN TOM STOPPARD'S "ARCADIA"

Lidiya Bondarenko

*Chair of the English Philology, Taurida National Vernadsky University,
4, Sovkhoznyaya, Flat 120, Simferopol, 95000,
e-mail: lybond@mail.ru*

"Arcadia" is one of the most philologically interesting, highly intellectual and extremely entertaining plays of Tom Stoppard. The play is based on the oppositions and paradoxes, bringing together most controversial ideas and feelings, revealing most deep philosophical meaning of Determinism and Free Will.

Key words: Classical, Romanticism, Gothic, Determinism, Free Will, Arcadia, theory of chaos.

Tom Stoppard is one of the most reputable modern English dramatists, whose plays are intellectual, entertaining with brilliant humor and eloquent figurative language. They are full with allusions to classical texts, real historical events and scientific theories. His works are often compared to Shakespeare's as Stoppard plays freely with settings, time and ideas, mocking history and teasing the reader/viewer. His most famous plays are "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" (1967), "Travesties" (1974), "Jumpers" (1972), "The Real Thing" (1982), "Arcadia" (1993), "Indian Ink" (1995), and others, which attracted much attention of scholars, philologists, and theatrical critics, such as Tim Brassel, Paul Delany, Mel Gussow, John Harty, Ronald Hayman, Jim Hunter, Anthony Jenkins, Roger Sales and others. Stoppard's plays are known in Ukraine and many of them translated into Russian. Kenneth Tynan, prominent critic and longtime literary manager of England's National Theatre, asserted that in terms of international prestige, the standard of British play-writing was held by Harold Pinter, Peter Shaffer and Stoppard [8, p. 46].

Stoppard's texts abundant in different, often paradoxical philosophical ideas, which are either explicit or, more often implicit in the plays and need detailed study. This article is devoted to one of the author's favorite strategy – to present everything in oppositions and trace them in his writing. Tom Hunter says, that "There is often no single, clear statement in any plays" [5, p. 14]. The problem highlighted in this work is juxtaposition of order and chaos in "Arcadia" by Tom Stoppard, as it has not been tackled upon in Ukraine before.

The play brings together in one room two periods, 1809-12 and the present (1993). It is about change in knowledge; yet also about two unchanging facts of human life: sexual and death. The play shows how the human notions of an ideal environment, an Arcadia, keep changing. In 1730 the Gardens of Sidley Park were geometrical in an Italian Style; by 1760 they had been replaced by sweeping vistas, a 'would-be "natural" landscape associated with

eighteenth century Enlightenment; and when the play opens, in 1809, this is all to be altered again into a "Gothic" style with artificial crags, ruins and hermitage. In 1809 the Enlightenment is yielding to Romanticism, in what the historical writer Hannah describes as "the decline from thinking to feeling". At the same time in Physics a few holes were beginning to appear in the elegant, balancing patterns discovered by Newton; and in *Arcadia* the teenage Thomasina, keen on the new Gothic fashion in gardening, longs for science to reach beyond regularity. With the fresh vision of a genius, she insists there must be an equation for a bluebell.

In the second period, the Now, the old gardens of *Arcadia* are being researched by the wife of the present owner, while Hannah and a literature academic Bernard are researching past events in the house, particularly involving one guest who became famous, Lord Byron. At the end of the play two epochs meet in 1990-s, the characters from both times are dancing to a beautiful music of waltz like in perfect *Arcadia*.

By 1809 many political and intellectual shifts were occurring in England, but at the start of Stoppard's play they have scarcely penetrated rural Derbyshire. The education Thomasina is receiving from Septimus is that of the mid-eighteenth century Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason: its regular forms and neatly fitting beliefs are sometimes described as "Classical". Her question "Is God a Newtonian?" [7, p. 6] is not just a joke: it sums up the impression that the science of Isaac Newton (1642–1727) has potentially sorted out the universe, the rules by which the Divine Creator worked. In the Enlightenment, everything might eventually prove capable of explanation, within a rational God-given order. This unifying religious confidence is summed up in the poem of Joseph Addison (1672–1729), "The spacious firmament on high", where sky, sun, moon and all stars and planets

...spread the truth from pole to pole... In reason's ear they all rejoice... "The hand that made us divine" [7, p. 32].

As it happens a moment earlier Thomasina has noticed a small hole in Newton's physics, which will be steadily widened as the play continues: she can't unstick the jam from her rice pudding. And in a later scene [7, p. 49] she complains that the geometry she has been taught confines itself to simple shapes: she wants to move on to tackle those which seem random and irregular, such as that of leaf. Her modern relative Valentine believes that randomness, disorder – or "chaos" – is as much a part of reality as order, and that far from being infinitely reversible as Newtonian physics suggested, the system is gradually running down: the jam indeed can't be unstirred. These ideas reveal themselves in the play in oppositions between Determinism and Free Will, entangling the Apple in the Garden as the third party in the "love triangle". The situation seems 'odd' to the girl because in Newtonian physics, any process that can flow one way in time can also flow the other. Septimus, her intelligent teacher, has not transferred his Newton to everyday life and so does not find it odd at all. The same pattern of words is repeated, on a similar subject, by Valentine and Hannah: "Valentine: Your tea gets cold by itself, it doesn't get hot by itself. Do you think that's cold? Hannah: No. Valentine: Well, it is odd" [7, p. 104].

Determinism declares that future events are predetermined. The faith behind this may be in a dictatorial God, unwilling to leave any aspect of this Creation to chance; or in "laws" of physical science, or in, say, Marxist theory ("Travesties") or genetics. The common element is the belief that human beings have little or no freedom of decision, even when they think they have. This idea is the most explicit in "Ros and Guil Are Dead", that is implied in the title of the play.

Free will is obviously the opposite concept. Individuals are able to make choices affecting their actions and their lives. The Judaeo-Christian idea is that although God is omnipotent, he decided not to predetermine everything for humankind. He wanted us to choose to be good. In Genesis, Adam and Eve were given a wonderful Garden of Eden to roam in, but were forbidden to eat the apples from one tree. Then they were left free to decide to do so or not. Human reaction to prohibitions being what it is, and egged on by the serpent [4, p. 6], they chose to eat the forbidden fruit: Eve first and she then tempted Adam. See the imaginary Byron letter: "It was the woman that bade me eat" [7, p. 76]. Although the Tree in the story is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, over the centuries it has become particularly associated with sex. It is a neat late-twentieth century reversal in this play that the apple is offered to a mature woman by a tongue-tied boy – Guss.

According to Newton's physics – the orthodoxy in which Thomasina is being trained – given complete information about the physical state of the universe and all the laws, we could predict the future exactly, and there would be no room for the free will. Thomasina adds to this what is really a religious idea: that therefore "the formula for all the future ... must exist" [7, p. 7].

But this leads her to feel the limitations of the geometry she is studying, with its regular shapes, symbolizing the order of the universe. However, most shapes in the world appear to be irregular: she wants to find the equations for them too – striking out with her own free will into what would be now called fractal geometry, a mathematics which might be seen as more Gothic than Classical. Stoppard ties in yet another the play's themes by having her choose the leaf of an apple as an example, thus associating in our minds the geometry of irregular forms with vagaries of "the attraction that Newton left out", implying the idea of sexuality and human feelings which do not always fall into pattern. The allusion is to the Eve's apple, which emerges in the 1990s at the end of the play but it is a silent boy Guss who handles it to Hannah.

In physics and maths Thomasina's intuitions are ahead of their time, but in other fields of life beyond Sidley Park changes are already advanced. Political revolution is in the air, and in music and literature old forms are being broken up and superseded. Today we think about 1809 as a year in which the Romantic movement was at its height, and one of the figures associated with it, Lord Byron, is actually staying at Sidley Park as Thomasina asks her question. Romanticism challenges the assumptions of Classicism or the Enlightenment and often Deliberately reverses them, seeking out gloom and shadow, pursuing irrationally (dreams, visions, madness, drugs), and preferring wild, irregular landscapes untouched by civilization. Hannah makes her opinion of this very clear: "The whole Romantic sham, Bernard! It's what happened to the Enlightenment, isn't it? A century of the intellectual rigor turned in on itself ... In a setting of cheap thrills and false emotion... The decline from thinking to feeling" [7, p. 36].

But Hannah copes with life by trying to deny feelings; and a more balanced view accepts Romanticism as a further development in human understanding. By making Thomasina want to investigate irregular forms Stoppard establishes a vague parallel between Romanticism and modern chaos theory – seeing the latter as a sort of Romantic maths. The analogy is developed by Valentine in his talk to Hannah.

A nearly popular manifestation of Romanticism, or at least of reaction against the En-

lightment, was the cult of the 'Gothic', the thrillingly wild, medieval and grotesque. This developed through the eighteenth century, almost as a kind of counter-culture, in painting, literature – and in garden design.

In religion and myth gardens often appear as places of perfection, where the potentially chaotic forces of Nature have been tamed and ordered by the gods. And myths of course reflect human dreams; even in cities, even on the rooftop of a tower block, a garden made where we live is a version of Nature as we prefer to see it. In such perspective Nature is viewed as a symbol of wilderness and disorder. The word 'chaos' has gradually come to mean wild disorder – as in a Gothic landscape. Its use to identify the modern science of chaos theory can be misleading. Chaos theory shows not that there is no order to things, but that certain iterative (repeating) processes in mathematics – while they are simple to define and perfectly deterministic – give rise to constantly changing graphs of results which appear to have no recognizable order, and so look as if they are randomly generated. Thomasina is looking at a leaf and dreaming of the iterated algorithm (a process where the output becomes the next input) which might produce it. Valentine is starting with statistics and trying to find the algorithm behind them.

Chaos theory is not in itself Gothic and terrifying, not does it contradict determinism. What it does show is that things are considerably more complicated than was thought in Newton's day – or even in the mid-twentieth century, when some imagined themselves to be on the verge of finding 'A theory of everything'. Chaos theory subverts such premature hopes with findings that may always look 'chaotic': 'the future of disorder'[7, p. 62]. But not everyone finds this bad news. Valentine has already said that it 'makes me so happy', and now adds that this is 'the best possible time to be alive'. Since chaos mathematics – in Stoppard's own later words to Mel Gussow – 'is precisely to do with unpredictability to determinism', it seems to offer at least temporary relief to those, such as this dramatist, who instinctively resist determinism's tyranic certainties [2].

The first words of *Arcadia* are about sex, and most of its characters turn out to be in love but unluckily: their beloveds don't respond and/or are of the wrong age or social position. So that does not fit the image of Arcadia, presupposing mutual love and happiness. In the play blind Cupid fires his darts of love at random. For all the pain this brings, it is the stuff of comedy, which is about the muddles and misfits of our lives, the gaps between the ideal and the reality.

Stoppard, whose previous work was sometimes seen as 'all head and no heart', here beautifully intertwines intellectual puzzlement with the frustrations about 'the attraction Newton left out'. At the same time the author focuses on a particular moment at which a faith in Enlightenment was challenged and began to crumble; and on a particular historical figure in whom many of these oppositions seem to come together. That figure remains always teasingly offstage, typically riding away at four a.m. after a married woman is found on the threshold of his bedroom: George Gordon Byron, whose life and works are symbol of Romanticism.

So the play is indeed about Arcadia in its classical meaning of the word, i.e. 'Paradise' as every idea or thought implied in the text has its opposite – as Jim Hunter called it – formula 'A minus A' [5], that is indispensable for its harmonious existence. In perspective we are going to dwell upon the symbolic role of Sidley Park and Coverly's stately house as a pattern of a modern worldview, as well as studying literary peculiarities and techniques of the play.

REFERENCES:

1. *Brassel T.* Tom Stoppard: An Assessment / Tim Brassel. – London: Macmillan, 1985. – 250 p.
2. *Gussow M.* Conversations with Stoppard / Mel Gussow. – London : Nick Hern Books, 1995. – 80 p.
3. *Harty J.* Tom Stoppard: A Casebook / John Harty. – Garland Inc., 1988. – 130 p.
4. *Hayman R.* Tom Stoppard / Ronald Hayman. – London : Heinemann, 1979. – 180 p.
5. *Hunter J.* Tom Stoppard's Plays / Jim Hunter. – London : F&F, 1982. – 250 p.
6. *Jenkins A.* The Theatre of Tom Stoppard / Anthony Jenkins. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990. – 370 p.
7. *Stoppard T.* Arcadia / Tom Stoppard. – L. : F&F, 2000. – 130 p.
8. *Tynan K.* Withdrawing with Style from the Chaos // Show People: Profiles in Entertainment / Kenneth Tynan. – NY. : Simon & Schuster, 1979. – 250 p.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 22.10.2011

Прийнята до друку 02.11.2011

КЛАСИЧНЕ ТА РОМАНТИЧНЕ: ПОРЯДОК ТА ХАОС У П'ЄСІ ТОМА СТОПАРДА “АРКАДІЯ”

Лідія Бондаренко

*Таврійський національний університет імені В. І. Вернадського,
просп. Вернадського, 4, м. Сімферополь, АР Крим, 95000,
e-mail: lybond@mail.ru*

“Аркадія” є однією з найбільш філософських та цікавих п'єс Тома Стопарда. Песа збудована на основі протиставлень та парадоксів, у ній стикаються найособливіше протилежні ідеї та почуття, відкриваючи глибокий філософський сенс детермінізму та Вільної Воли.

Ключові слова: класичне, романтизм, готичне, детермінізм, вільна воля, Аркадія, теорія хаосу.

КЛАСИЧЕСКОЕ И РОМАНТИЧЕСКОЕ: ПОРЯДОК И ХАОС В ПЬЕСЕ ТОМА СТОПАРДА “АРКАДИЯ”

Лидия Бондаренко

*Таврический Национальный Университет имени В. И. Вернадского,
просп. Вернадского, 4, г. Симферополь АР Крым, 95007,
e-mail: lybond@mail.ru*

“Аркадия” является одной из наиболее философских и интересных пьес Тома Стопарда. Пьеса построена на основе противопоставлений и парадоксов, в ней сталкиваются необычным противоположные идеи и чувства, открывая глубокий философский смысл детерминизма и Свободной Воли.

Ключевые слова: классическая, романтизм, готическое, детерминизм, свободная воля, Аркадия, теория хаоса.