

Dramatis personae

There are two groups of characters in *Arcadia*, who share a location but inhabit different time zones: Regency and the present day (which was actually 1993 when the play was first performed). The two groups mirror each other across the time gap; as well as sharing the same set and props, they have similar interests and are on a quest for similar answers. They appear together, though are unaware of each other, in the last scene.

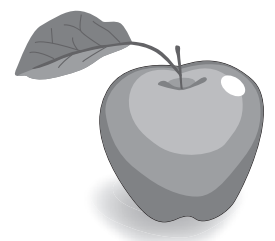
Regency period

Septimus Hodge

Aged 22, Septimus Hodge is tutor (and later more) to Thomasina, an admirer of Lady Croom, and he also has sexual encounters with Mrs Chater, a visitor to Sidley Park. He studied maths and natural philosophy at Trinity College Cambridge, where he was a contemporary of Byron, who was also a schoolfriend at Harrow. He is both a linguist and a scientist, currently teaching Thomasina maths and Latin and, at the end, how to waltz. He becomes the hermit of Sidley Park, having apparently gone insane as a result of either his pupil's discovery of the doomed universe or her tragic death, and spends the next 20 years, until his own death in 1834, living in the hermitage and doing maths equations. His brother is editor of the literary magazine called the *Piccadilly Recreation*, a 'thrice weekly folio sheet' for which Septimus writes book reviews. He is competitive and without modesty: 'At Harrow I was better at this than Lord Byron' (p. 51). Though generally urbane, unsentimental (he says sex is nicer than love) and with sarcasm as his weapon, he is nonetheless capable of passion and of losing his temper; he does not tolerate fools, such as Brice and Chater, gladly. His name in Latin means 'seventh', which would suggest that he has more than one elder sibling. Hodge was the name of Dr Johnson's cat.

Thomasina Coverly

Nearly 14, like Shakespeare's Juliet, she is intense, spirited and precocious; Stoppard calls her 'mercurial'. Her first question in the opening line of the play suggests that she has just arrived at an important coming-of-age point in her life: an interest in sex. Her drawing of a heat engine proves that she anticipated the Second Law of Thermodynamics. She dies in a fire on the eve of her seventeenth birthday. As well as being based on Byron's mathematical prodigy of a daughter, Ada Lovelace, she could be seen as a fictional precursor of the inquisitive and irrepressible Victorian female child, Alice, created by the Oxford mathematics don Charles Dodgson. Her delight at the prospect of rice pudding with jam shows that she still has traits of childhood in 1809, but by 1812 her mind is on more adult things, such as fashions and relationships. It is a 'diabolically difficult' part for any actress to encompass as a whole.



Augustus Coverly

Aged 15 in 1809, Thomasina's elder brother is at Eton. He apparently shoots a hare, which is claimed as his own shot by Byron. His only other contribution to the plot is to ask Septimus to tell him the facts of life at the end of the play, thus bringing it round in a circle to the beginning, when Thomasina wants Septimus to impart to her the same knowledge of carnal matters. His Roman emperor name is synonymous with the Age of Reason, and was that of one of George III's sons.

Lady Croom

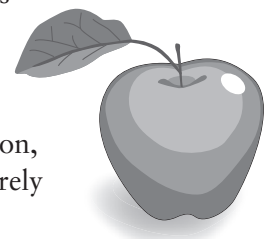
Mother of Augustus and Thomasina, Lady Croom is the *grande dame* of Sidley Park, who has sexual designs on a Polish pianist, her distant aristocratic neighbour Lord Byron, and her daughter's tutor. She married at 17 and now, in her mid-thirties she is bored with her inadequate husband and jealous of rivals, including her daughter. Somewhat negligent as a mother, she affects not to know Thomasina's age and fears that she is being over-educated for marriage. Like Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, she is anti-intellectual, domineering and censorious ('I cannot approve' p. 96) and speaks in epigrams. She wishes above all else to be fashionable — hence her interest in the wearing of drawers and her pride in being 'the first in the kingdom to show a dahlia'. She expels Mrs Chater, Mr Chater, her brother Captain Brice and Lord Byron in the middle of the night, after discovering the former leaving Byron's room, where she herself was heading. Her belief that she is always right — though she is often wrong, as when insisting that a rabbit is a hare — and her readiness to lie are symptomatic of the play's problem of being able to ascertain the truth about anything. She also lends credence to the theory of the unpredictability of sexual attraction, the 'defect of God's humour' (p. 95).

Ezra Chater

According to Septimus, who reviews them, Chater's poetic works — *The Maid of Turkey* and *The Couch of Eros* — are without any merit other than a soporific one. He is a guest at Sidley Park only because Captain Brice invites him there in order to have access to his wife. Chater goes as a botanist to the West Indies, where he dies in 1810 at the age of 32 from a monkey bite. He is very stupid and no match for Septimus, who has cuckolded him; nor is he aware that Captain Brice is his wife's long-term lover.

Captain Edward Brice

Lady Croom's brother is a naval officer who brings the Chaters to Sidley Park, and then takes them with him to the West Indies on his ship in order for Mr Chater to be kept engaged in botanical research while he enjoys Mrs Chater. It turns out that he also paid 50 pounds to have Chater published, in order to keep him compliant. His readiness to act as Chater's second for a duel with Septimus may be influenced by the convenience to himself if Chater were to be killed. After the death of Mr Chater in Martinique a year later he marries Mrs Chater. He shares his sister's conservative views on landscape gardening and Thomasina's education, and also her tendency to talk epigrammatically, though in his case it is merely 'fortuitous wit'.



Richard Noakes

A middle-aged landscape architect ('landskip gardener') hired by Lord Croom, he is 'a philosopher of the picturesque', 'the Emperor of Irregularity', tasked with re-modelling the garden in the latest style. With his 'before and after' sketchbook he represents the historical figure, Humphry Repton. His role is that of the serpent in the garden, a bringer of noise and chaos that destroys the previous Eden-like perfection of Sidley Park. Lady Croom calls him the horticultural equivalent of a bull in a china shop. Because he informs Chater of the tryst between Septimus and Mrs Chater in the gazebo (which is overheard by the groom who tells Jellaby), he is the spy (with his theodolite) who introduces unwelcome knowledge and shatters the harmonious relations at Sidley Park at the start of the play. Septimus, who considers him to be no better than 'a jumped-up jobbing gardener', calls him a 'muddy-mettled rascal', a disparaging quotation from *Hamlet* which Noakes is not well enough educated to recognise. He is insensitive, obtuse, and constantly baffled by the conversation of the other characters.

Jellaby

Jellaby is a stereotypical middle-aged butler who owes something of his knowingness and superciliousness to the butler Lane in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. He performs a practical plot function in bringing in letters and information at opportune moments, and in generally representing the otherwise invisible servant class who notice and gossip about the loose behaviour of their supposed superiors. He has a comical Dickensian name.

Present day

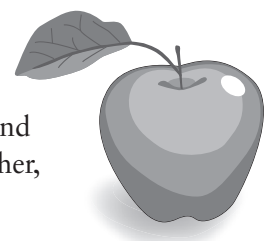
The Coverlys are an old Norman aristocratic family, the de Coverlys. They gave their name to an English country dance connected to fox-hunting.

Valentine Coverly

The romantically named Valentine is a postgraduate mathematician at Oxford in his late twenties, and future Earl of Croom. Using 200 years' worth of Sidley Park game books (in which the game killed by shooting parties is recorded and attributed) he is charting changes in the grouse population, linking science to nature by trying to formulate a model using a computer. He pretends to be Hannah's fiancé as a joke. He is initially sceptical about the possibility of Thomasina having discovered iterative algorithms as early as 1812. He is disparagingly described by Bernard as 'Brideshead Regurgitated'.

Chloë Coverly

The bossy 18-year-old daughter of the house takes a fancy to Bernard, presumably because he is the only available non-relative male. She flirts with him throughout in a way that reminds us of Mrs Chater's promiscuous behaviour, which is also reminiscent of Thomasina's crush on her tutor. There are other parallels with Thomasina in her temperament and in some of her questions and comments. She is caught *in flagrante* with Bernard in the hermitage by her mother, but is unrepentant.



Gus Coverly

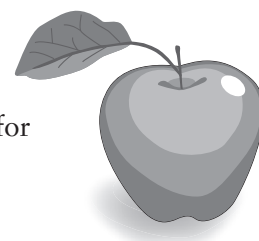
The present-day namesake of Augustus is played by the same actor, and can even wear the same costume in the final scene. For reasons never explained, the mute, autistic, Gus stopped speaking at the age of 5, but he is an intelligent presence, a damaged Romantic figure who seems to belong to the past and has intuitive understanding of what happened then. He ‘loves going through’ old stuff. He is fond of Hannah, presumably because of her interest in the house, garden and former inhabitants of Sidley Park. Since Thomasina died, and the Coverly name is still going strong, Gus must be in direct lineal descent from the Regency Augustus who wanted to know about procreation.

Hannah Jarvis

An author in her late thirties, Hannah wrote *Caro*, a biography of Lady Caroline Lamb, which was given a hostile review by Bernard. She is ‘doing landscape and literature 1750 to 1834’ and staying at the house in order to do research. She had previously sent a copy of *Caro* to Lady Croom, since Caroline Lamb had a fine garden, and was invited by ‘Hermione’ to write a history of the Sidley Park garden. While trying to solve the mystery of the identity of the hermit of Sidley Park she discovers a lesson book that contains Thomasina’s experiments with iterative functions. She does not jump to conclusions and represents a rationalist worldview; ‘She wears nothing frivolous’. She would seem to have feminist sympathies, given her lack of interest in men (she calls them ‘you people’) and her choice of book subject (a victim of Byron’s philandering), and to be unfeminine to the extent that she does not care about her appearance and might smoke ‘brown-paper cigarillos’. According to Valentine ‘She won’t let anyone kiss her’ and she doesn’t like dancing. Persistent rather than brilliant (she is ‘*not quick enough*’ on p. 35), she is the tortoise who wins the race against Bernard the hare and has the last laugh on the letters page of *The Times*. She also has the last word in the play. Hannah seems to owe something to the prickly literary sleuth Maud Bailey in A. S. Byatt’s novel *Possession*.

Bernard Nightingale

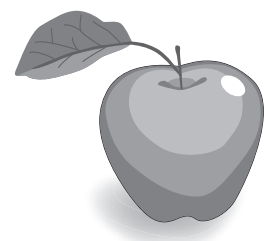
A literature don at Sussex University, in his late thirties, Bernard is ‘on the make’ for both sex and fame as a critic. He is a media don who engages in performance art. He comes to Sidley Park to search for evidence that Byron visited there, though he at first pretends to be on a different quest and agrees to give a false name to deceive Hannah into not realising that he is the same person who harshly reviewed her book on Lady Caroline Lamb. He creates a theory to suit his ambition, regardless of facts, which leads him to the erroneous conviction that Byron was forced to disappear abroad in 1809 because he had killed his fellow poet Chater in a duel at Sidley Park. He stays overnight at a pub in the local village and returns next day to practise the speech he goes to London with to give to the Byron Society. He returns for the party to partner Chloë and is expelled from the house by Lady Croom after being caught with Chloë in the hermitage, which reprises the events in 1809 of Septimus meeting Mrs Chater in the same location for the same purpose, and of Byron and Mrs Chater being expelled for the same reason by the earlier Lady Croom.



Hannah calls him ‘arrogant, greedy and reckless’, which are not the qualities one would expect in a scholar. He resents the fame, status and money that scientists are given and is tactless and combative in discourse with others. His surname links him wittily to romance and the Romantics, as well as to the play’s running bird gag. As Chloë points out, he is ostentatious and ‘not really a Nightingale’, as his ‘*peacock-coloured display handkerchief*’ and his red Mazda indicate. His name is strikingly similar to that of Benedict Nightingale, *The Times* theatre critic who has reviewed most of Stoppard’s plays over the last few decades, and who describes Bernard in his review of this play as a ‘predatory popinjay’. The part was written for the actor Bill Nighy, whose name may also have influenced Stoppard’s choice, as might that of the poet Nightshade, a character in Peacock’s satirical Gothic novel *Headlong Hall*.

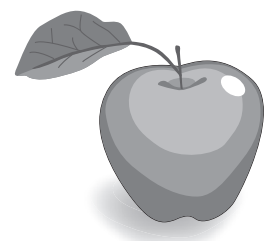


(1) For each of the time periods draw a diagram that shows the relationships between the characters.



(2) Put Byron at the centre of a spider diagram and show his relationship with characters past and present.

(3) Draw and label triangles that represent the three-way actual or would-be romantic/sexual relationships of the play.



Dramatis personae

(3) Draw and label triangles that represent the three-way actual or would-be romantic/sexual relationships of the play.

- ◆ Lady Croom (1) and Thomasina and Septimus
- ◆ Lady Croom (1) and Mrs Chater and Septimus
- ◆ Lady Croom (1) and Mrs Chater and Byron
- ◆ Lady Croom (1) and Septimus and Byron
- ◆ Lady Croom (1) and Septimus and Count Zelinsky
- ◆ Hannah and Chloë and Bernard
- ◆ Hannah and Gus and Valentine
- ◆ Brice and Mrs Chater and Mr Chater
- ◆ Bernard and Chloë and Lady Croom (2)

Eternal triangles are tragic if love is involved, but comic if it isn't. Marital or parental love is entirely absent from the play, making love of places and ideas, rather than people, the main emotional focus.

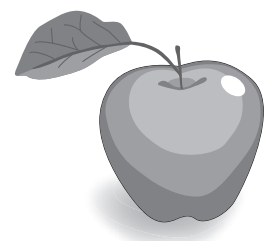
(4) Make a list to show how the characters address each other, i.e. by first name, surname, title, shortened name or nickname. What can you conclude from this study?

Septimus always calls Thomasina 'my lady', and Lady Croom 'madam' or 'your ladyship' though the former, surprisingly, calls him 'Septimus', and the latter calls him 'Mr Hodge'. Thomasina shows little reverence for any adult, including her mother, whom she calls 'mama' but without any affection. Byron is accorded his title of 'Lord', except by Thomasina, who is corrected by Septimus for not doing so. Mrs Chater is always thus called, even by her husband, which, although normal for the time, takes on an ironic nuance in the circumstances. The four other visitors generally call each other by their surnames — Hodge, Chater, Brice and Noakes — which reminds us of the rivalry or lack of approval that exists between them, as otherwise a 'Mr' or 'Captain' would have been appended to show respect. They call Lady Croom 'your ladyship'; even her own brother calls Lady Croom by her title — and we are never told her first name. Jellaby doesn't have one either, because in those days butlers were summoned by their surname and their first name was probably not even known by the family. 'Gus' must be a short form of 'Augustus', which is never used for him, whereas conversely the name is not shortened to 'Gus' for his ancestor. Obviously relationships have become less formal, and the class hierarchy less enforced, by the modern period, where the characters move swiftly to first names. Even so, Bernard is struck by the familiarity with which Hannah calls Lady Croom (2) 'Hermione', which suggests her lack of awe of the aristocracy.

(5) Which characters represent Classicism (thinking), which Romanticism (feeling), and which cross the divide?

Although Romanticism is most closely associated with the arts as the expression of aesthetic sensibility and talent, the movement also dabbled in the sciences insofar as they related to divine and human powers, the secrets of the universe and the occult, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) being an example.

Hannah is a Classicist and sees the garden changes as a 'decline from thinking to feeling' and a victim of 'Romantic sham', 'cheap thrills and false emotion'.



answer sheet

Valentine refers to her 'classical reserve' (p. 99). Bernard tells Hannah 'It takes a romantic to make a heroine of Caroline Lamb. You were cut out for Byron' (p. 84).

Valentine is a committed scientist and has no time for the arts as such. 'What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress. Knowledge' (p. 80). However, Hannah thinks he is a biologist (though he's actually a mathematician) because of his grouse research, and he crosses the divide in that respect, as his computer analysis is fed by nature and family history. He is also Romantic by temperament in that he is fascinated by the unknown ('these things are full of mystery', p. 62), passionate about the joy of being alive at a time when discoveries are being made, and given to showing frustration with his work.

Bernard is actually a Romantic because he lacks clear-headedness and discretion and follows his gut feelings, his 'visceral belief', despite professing admiration for Byron because he 'was an eighteenth-century Rationalist'. This leads him, along with his male chauvinism, to think that Caroline Lamb 'was Romantic waffle on wheels with no talent' (p. 79).

Gus is romantic because he dresses the part, has suffered a mysterious trauma, and behaves entirely intuitively.

Captain Brice has no illusions about mistress Chater but 'would die for her'. His role is paradoxically reminiscent of that of Lancelot, who loved Guinevere and deceived her husband, King Arthur.

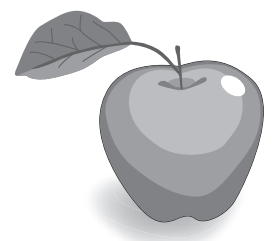
Septimus develops from a stereotypically urbane Augustan figure, restrained and dispassionate, with the demeanour and speech characteristics of a rationalist and satirist, to a reflective, sensitive, introvert, finally dying as that most extreme of Romantic figures, the emaciated mad hermit living in a wilderness. He represents the Romantic imagination in becoming a recluse with only a tortoise for company, and his death coincides with the death of Coleridge and that of the movement. His change mirrors that of the garden.

Thomasina approves of the picturesque 'improvements' ('In my opinion, Mr Noakes's scheme for the garden is perfect', p. 14) and wants to marry Lord Byron, as well as learn to waltz and follow fashions. Her Romantic desires to learn to dance and to seduce her tutor are a prelude to her sensational death. She is also demonstratively emotional and unconventional, although her mathematical rigour and determination to succeed are traits of a disciplined and rational mind.

(6) The play contains characters who are referred to and who are important to the plot, but who never appear on stage. Who are they, what is their role, and why is the audience not allowed to meet them in each case?

Byron: he is a non-fictional character in a fictional play; it makes him the mysterious blank at the centre of the action whom the other characters revolve around.

Mrs Chater: it is not necessary to see her as the audience is given a full picture of her behaviour through the other characters' comments; Lady Croom calls her a 'trollop' and 'the village notice-board'. She is a sexual force, a garden nymph who represents Eve and is the cause of the expulsion from paradise of herself, her husband, her future husband and Lord Byron — and very nearly of Septimus. The name suggests an amalgam of chaser and cheater. Her first name, Charity, is ironic (she is very generous with herself) and ambiguous ('deny it for Charity's sake'). It is given by her new husband to the dwarf dahlia discovered by her previous husband, which becomes a proud possession of Lady Croom. Practically speaking she does not appear because during the one day she remains at Sidley Park she feels it advisable to 'keep her room'.



answer sheet

Lady Croom (2): a lurking, snooping presence, she reprises not only the name but the role of her predecessor when she discovers Chloë in the hermitage with Bernard and causes him to leave suddenly and in disgrace. (She is also a second Noakes, associated with the spying tool, the theodolite.) The audience sees a mental reincarnation of and hears the voice of the Regency Lady Croom when the modern one is referred to, so it is as if she has time-jumped to the present and nothing has changed. Like her ancestor, Hermione is an imperious character, and not a great reader (except for gardening books), who seeks to impress in wanting to be known for her garden.

Lord Croom (1): it adds to his humorous ineffectualness that he has no stage presence (like Lord Bracknell who is absent from Wilde's play) and is conveniently deaf. His voice is heard in the game book as 'self'. His interest in life seems to be death, i.e. the killing of wildlife.

Lord Croom (2): we know of him that he dislikes typewriters, homosexuals and Japanese cars. We could infer that he is a 'dinosaur' eccentric living in a time warp and rejecting all new inventions and ideas, were it not that he reads tabloid newspapers.

Zelinsky plays the piano in an adjacent room on more than one occasion but we see him only through the eyes of Lady Croom and Septimus, as either a Polish count or a piano tuner respectively. He provides comedy in this ambiguous role and as the cause of Septimus's jealousy. One gets the impression that there have been many and will be more exotic foreign artistes in Lady Croom's life.

The garden is central to the play and gives it its title; it is the reason for all the external entrances and exits, but is tantalisingly invisible. It is a space to be filled in a play about the filling of spaces, the putting in of the missing notes until the tune is distinguishable.

(7) Which characters can be paired across the two time periods, and in what ways are they similar? Think about personality, interests, relationships, situations, events, outcomes.

The two Lord Crooms, Lady Crooms and Augustus/Gus are obviously meant to be paired. Gus inherits Thomasina's role of teenage prodigy, showing intuitive understanding and baffling his elders. His giving Hannah an apple plus leaf suggests he wants her to discover Thomasina's important work with fractals.

Hannah and Thomasina are both independent females capable of lateral thinking and seeing the truth, which others deny and ridicule. They both make discoveries with an apple leaf.

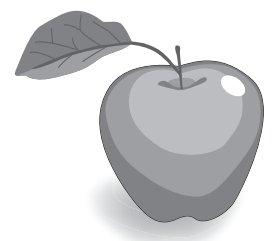
Septimus and Bernard are both literary reviewers/scholars; both womanisers, including the daughters of the house; both fancied by the mothers/Lady Crooms; both competitive and with a high opinion of themselves.

Hannah and Lady Croom (1) value order and harmony, as represented by the natural landscaping of Capability Brown, and lament the destruction of the garden.

Thomasina and Chloë are the teenage daughters of their respective families who have grown out of childish pleasures and have designs on educated men. Chloë's rampant sexuality and garden assignation also connect her to Mrs Chater.

Septimus and Gus are both, ultimately, recluses, the spirits which haunt Sidley Park.

Bernard and Ezra Chater both want to believe in something so much that they confuse their desire for it to be so with proof that it is so.



answer sheet

(8) Stoppard has been accused by critics of not creating characters an audience can care about, of using them only as vehicles for repartee. Say whether or not you agree, with reference to specific characters in *Arcadia*.

The critic Anne Barton assumes her readers all agree when she refers to the 'four loved characters', i.e. Septimus, Thomasina, Hannah and Gus. The audience cannot love characters it doesn't care about, and it can't care about characters who have not engaged them intellectually or emotionally, or both. These four characters are sympathetic because of their humanity, innocence, wit or compassion — or some combination of these qualities — and they elicit admiration at the end of the play because of both who they are and what they have achieved as well as concern for what is going to happen to them in the future. They do, indeed, produce an amusing line in repartee, but so does Bernard, and we really don't care what happens to him, as he actually invites and deserves his come-uppance. The other characters do not engage us because they are silly or stereotypical or apparently devoid of real feeling, with the possible exception of Valentine. He, like the beloved four, is capable of love, not just lust or infatuation, at least with regard to his work.

(9) A critic has described the main characters of the play as having carapaces to hide behind. Do you agree, and if so say which characters you think keep their true selves hidden, and why.

Septimus gives the impression of being the urbane wit, always ready with a *bon mot* and without feelings of any kind; but there is a tenderness in his treatment of Thomasina (bringing her a rabbit for a pie, agreeing to dance with her), which belies apparent cool indifference. His becoming the hermit suggests that his inner self breaks out of its restraint as a result of grief at her death. Thomasina's switches from comic to serious are a paradigm for the play, but they also disguise her depth of feeling on any matter. Her uncompromising regard for the truth is veiled by her playful tone and her trivial references to food, animals and fashions, so that only belatedly do the audience, and Septimus, realise that she is a genius who could change the world. The disapproval of cleverness in young women is revealed by Lady Croom and her brother, who are afraid that Thomasina will not be able to marry — a fate worse than death — if she is too serious and knowledgeable. This attitude (reinforced by Septimus telling her that it is not polite for her to be cleverer than her elders) explains Thomasina's need to adopt a flippancy that belies her intellect.

The present-day characters do not seem to need to hide their thoughts and feelings and needs. This may be a comment on the change of codes of behaviour over the centuries, whereby nowadays one might dare to be open and individual in a way that Regency people did not, for fear of censure and social ostracism ('comment on the platform', as Lady Bracknell calls it). Hannah is wedded to her work and also likely to remain unmarried; the stigma has gone, but Chloë still tries to matchmake for her. Though generally assertive, Hannah has moments of self-doubt, as revealed in her sudden admission that she knows 'Nothing'. Bernard does not have the self- or social awareness to see that he should rein himself in and control his behaviour and expression if he wishes to be respected in the academic and publishing world, or to understand that he is not God's gift to women. Apart from his seeming impressed by the social rank of the Coverlys, there is no evidence that he is hiding a less confident and less objectionable persona within.

