

## Questions for *Arcadia*

1. Someone commented a few weeks ago that the characters in *Arcadia* have more emotional depth than those in other Stoppard plays that we've read. Do you agree? How is Stoppard's characterization different in this play.

2. What's going on in the exchange between Bernard and Hannah on the top of page 37?

Bernard: Yes, I met him. Brideshead Regurgitated.

Hannah: My fiancé. (*She holds his look.*)

✓ Bernard: (*pause*) I'll take a chance. You're lying.

Hannah: (*pause*) Well done, Bernard.

3. *Arcadia* includes a number of characters (Hannah, Bernard, Valentine, Thomasina) doing research of some sort. What is the play's attitude toward the gathering of knowledge? Does it place more value on some types of research over others?

4. Why does Valentine find it hard to accept that Thomasina could have made the discoveries that she did? Is it her gender, her age, or when she lived? Or all three? Do we see any of these prejudices manifest themselves in him in other ways? What about other characters? What is the play's attitude toward Valentine's disbelief and Bernard's later inability to accept that his Byron theory is incorrect?

✓ 5. Time is used in an unusual way in this play, having successive scenes, and eventually events within the same scene, occur 200 years apart. Time is also mentioned by the characters. Valentine comments that computers have made analysis of dynamical systems possible: there just wasn't time before. Bernard comments on the reversal of time (72), while Septimus brings up the fact that time runs only forward in his example of stirring pudding (12). What is the play's attitude toward time?

6. How does seduction tie in with the other themes of the play? Septimus seduces Mrs. Chater, Bernard seduces Chloe, and then Bernard and Thomasina both fail at getting Hannah and Septimus, respectively, to have sex with them. The level of competence in language differs greatly in each of these, from Septimus' ability to convince Mr. Chater that seducing his wife was good, to Bernard's blunt suggestion: "No, no, bugger that. Sex" (90).

7. Hannah tells us that Thomasina dies in a fire on "the night before her seventeenth birthday" (Stoppard 108), presumably the night of the end of the play. What effect does this foreshadowing, and the decision to stop the play before her death, have? How do the references to the second law of thermodynamics (pages 93, 110-111, 122, 131-132) tie in? Do you think she succeeds in her seduction of Septimus?

8. Why did Stoppard end the present day component of the play as he did, with Bernard dumping Chloe and then Hannah dancing with Gus? What does the parallel between Hannah and Gus and Thomasina and Septimus suggest?

9. The classic question: what's your favorite joke?