

ARCADIA

First presented at the Lyttelton Theatre, Royal National Theatre, on 13th April 1993, with the following cast of characters:

Thomasina Coverly	Emma Fielding
Septimus Hodge	Rufus Sewell
Jellaby	Allan Mitchell
Ezra Chater	Derek Hutchinson
Richard Noakes	Sidney Livingstone
Lady Croom	Harriet Walter
Captain Brice, RN	Graham Sinclair
Hannah Jarvis	Felicity Kendal
Chloë Coverly	Harriet Harrison
Bernard Nightingale	Bill Nighy
Valentine Coverly	Samuel West
Gus Coverly	Timothy Matthews
Augustus Coverly	

Directed by Trevor Nunn
Designed by Mark Thompson
Lighting by Paul Pyant
Music by Jeremy Sams

CHARACTERS

Thomasina Coverly, aged thirteen, later sixteen
Septimus Hodge, her tutor, aged twenty-two, later twenty-five
Jellaby, a butler, middle-aged
Ezra Chater, a poet, aged thirty-one
Richard Noakes, a landscape architect, middle-aged
Lady Croom, middle thirties
Captain Brice, RN, middle thirties
Hannah Jarvis, an author, late thirties
Chloë Coverly, aged eighteen
Bernard Nightingale, a don, late thirties
Valentine Coverly, aged twenty-five to thirty
Gus Coverly, aged fifteen
Augustus Coverly, aged fifteen

*Other plays by Tom Stoppard
published by Samuel French Ltd*

Albert's Bridge
Artist Descending a Staircase
Dirty Linen and New-Found-Land
The Fifteen Minute Hamlet
Hapgood
If You're Glad I'll Be Frank
Night and Day
The Real Inspector Hound
The Real Thing
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
A Separate Peace

*With Clive Exton
The Boundary*

ACT I

SCENE 1

A room on the garden front of a very large country house in Derbyshire in April 1809

Nowadays, the house would be called a stately home. The upstage wall is mainly tall, shapely, uncurtained windows, one or more of which work as doors. Nothing much need be said or seen of the exterior beyond. We come to learn that the house stands in the typical English park of the time. Perhaps we see an indication of this, perhaps only light and air and sky

The room looks bare despite the large table which occupies the centre of it. The table, the straight-backed chairs and, the only other item of furniture, the architect's stand or reading stand, would all be collectable pieces now but here, on an uncarpeted wood floor, they have no more pretension than a schoolroom, which is indeed the main use of this room at this time. What elegance there is, is architectural, and nothing is impressive but the scale. There is a door in each of the side walls. These are closed, but one of the french windows is open to a bright but sunless morning

There are two people, each busy with books and paper and pen and ink, separately occupied. The pupil is Thomasina Coverly, aged 13. The tutor is Septimus Hodge, aged 22. Each has an open book. Hers is a slim mathematics primer. His is a handsome thick quarto, brand new, a vanity production, with little tapes to tie when the book is closed. His loose papers, etc., are kept in a stiff-backed portfolio which also ties up with tapes

Septimus has a tortoise which is sleepy enough to serve as a paperweight. Elsewhere on the table there is an old-fashioned theodolite and also some other books stacked up

Thomasina Septimus, what is carnal embrace?

Septimus Carnal embrace is the practice of throwing one's arms around a side of beef.

Thomasina Is that all?

Septimus No ... a shoulder of mutton, a haunch of venison well hugged, an embrace of grouse ... *caro, carnis*; feminine; flesh.

Thomasina Is it a sin?

Septimus Not necessarily, my lady, but when carnal embrace is sinful it is a sin of the flesh, QED. We had *caro* in our Gallic Wars — "The Britons live on milk and meat" — "*lacte et carne vivunt*". I am sorry that the seed fell on stony ground.

Thomasina That was the sin of Onan, wasn't it, Septimus?

Septimus Yes. He was giving his brother's wife a Latin lesson and she was hardly the wiser after it than before. I thought you were finding a proof for Fermat's last theorem.

Thomasina It is very difficult, Septimus. You will have to show me how.

Septimus If I knew how, there would be no need to ask *you*. Fermat's last theorem has kept people busy for a hundred and fifty years, and I hoped it would keep *you* busy long enough for me to read Mr Chater's poem in praise of love with only the distraction of its own absurdities.

Thomasina Our Mr Chater has written a poem?

Septimus He believes he has written a poem, yes. I can see that there might be more carnality in your algebra than in Mr Chater's "Couch of Eros".

Thomasina Oh, it was not my algebra. I heard Jellaby telling Cook that Mrs Chater was discovered in carnal embrace in the gazebo.

Septimus (after a pause) Really? With whom, did Jellaby happen to say?

Thomasina considers this with a puzzled frown

Thomasina What do you mean, with whom?

Septimus With what? Exactly so. The idea is absurd. Where did this story come from?

Thomasina Mr Noakes.

Septimus Mr Noakes!

Thomasina Papa's landskip gardener. He was taking bearings in the garden when he saw — through his spyglass — Mrs Chater in the gazebo in carnal embrace.

Septimus And do you mean to tell me that Mr Noakes told the butler?

Thomasina No. Mr Noakes told Mr Chater. Jellaby was told by the groom, who overheard Mr Noakes telling Mr Chater, in the stable yard.

Septimus Mr Chater being engaged in closing the stable door.

Thomasina What do you mean, Septimus?

Septimus So, thus far, the only people who know about this are Mr Noakes the landskip gardener, the groom, the butler, the cook and, of course, Mrs Chater's husband, the poet.

Thomasina And Arthur who was cleaning the silver, and the bootboy. And now you.

Septimus Of course. What else did he say?

Thomasina Mr Noakes?

Septimus No, not Mr Noakes. Jellaby. You heard Jellaby telling the cook.

Thomasina Cook hushed him almost as soon as he started. Jellaby did not see that I was being allowed to finish yesterday's upstairs' rabbit pie before I came to my lesson. I think you have not been candid with me, Septimus. A gazebo is not, after all, a meat larder.

Septimus I never said my definition was complete.

Thomasina Is carnal embrace kissing?

Septimus Yes.

Thomasina And throwing one's arms around Mrs Chater?

Septimus Yes. Now, Fermat's last theorem —

Thomasina I thought as much. I hope you are ashamed.

Septimus I, my lady?

Thomasina If *you* do not teach me the true meaning of things, who will?

Septimus Ah. Yes, I am ashamed. Carnal embrace is sexual congress, which is the insertion of the male genital organ into the female genital organ for purposes of procreation and pleasure. Fermat's last theorem, by contrast, asserts that when x , y and z are whole numbers each raised to power of n , the sum of the first two can never equal the third when n is greater than 2.

Pause

Thomasina Eurghhh!

Septimus Nevertheless, that is the theorem.

Thomasina It is disgusting and incomprehensible. Now when I am grown to practise it myself I shall never do so without thinking of you.

Septimus Thank you very much, my lady. Was Mrs Chater down this morning?

Thomasina No. Tell me more about sexual congress.

Septimus There is nothing more to be said about sexual congress.

Thomasina Is it the same as love?

Septimus Oh no, it is much nicer than that.

One of the side doors leads to the music room. It is the other side door which now opens to admit Jellaby, the butler

I am teaching, Jellaby.

Jellaby Beg your pardon, Mr Hodge, Mr Chater said it was urgent you receive his letter.

Septimus Oh very well. (He takes the letter) Thank you. (And to dismiss Jellaby) Thank you.

Jellaby (holding his ground) Mr Chater asked me to bring him your answer.

Septimus My answer? (He opens the letter. There is no envelope as such, but there is a "cover" which, folded and sealed, does the same service. He

tosses the cover negligently aside and reads) Well, my answer is that as is my custom and my duty to his lordship I am engaged until a quarter to twelve in the education of his daughter. When I am done, and if Mr Chater is still there, I will be happy to wait upon him in — *(he checks the letter)* — in the gunroom.

Jellaby I will tell him so, thank you sir.

Septimus folds the letter and places it between the pages of "The Couch of Eros"

Thomasina What is for dinner, Jellaby?

Jellaby Boiled ham and cabbages, my lady, and a rice pudding.

Thomasina Oh, goody.

Jellaby leaves

Septimus Well, so much for Mr Noakes. He puts himself forward as a gentleman, a philosopher of the picturesque, a visionary who can move mountains and cause lakes, but in the scheme of the garden he is as the serpent.

Thomasina When you stir your rice pudding, Septimus, the spoonful of jam spreads itself round making red trails like the picture of a meteor in my astronomical atlas. But if you stir backwards, the jam will not come together again. Indeed, the pudding does not notice and continues to turn pink just as before. Do you think this is odd?

Septimus No.

Thomasina Well, I do. You cannot stir things apart.

Septimus No more you can, time must needs run backward, and since it will not, we must stir our way onward mixing as we go, disorder out of disorder into disorder until pink is complete, unchanging and unchangeable, and we are done with it for ever. This is known as free will or self-determination. *(He picks up the tortoise and moves it a few inches as though it had strayed, on top of some loose papers, and admonishes it) Sit!*

Thomasina Septimus, do you think God is a Newtonian?

Septimus An Etonian? Almost certainly, I'm afraid. We must ask your brother to make it his first enquiry.

Thomasina No, Septimus, a Newtonian. Septimus! Am I the first person to have thought of this?

Septimus No.

Thomasina I have not said yet.

Septimus "If everything from the furthest planet to the smallest atom of our brain acts according to Newton's law of motion, what becomes of free will?"

Thomasina No.

Septimus God's will.

Thomasina No.

Septimus Sin.

Thomasina *(derisively)* No!

Septimus Very well.

Thomasina If you could stop every atom in its position and direction, and if your mind could comprehend all the actions thus suspended, then if you were really, *really* good at algebra you could write the formula for all the future; and although nobody can be so clever as to do it, the formula must exist just as if one could.

Septimus *(after a pause)* Yes. *(Pause)* Yes, as far as I know, you are the first person to have thought of this. *(Pause. With an effort)* In the margin of his copy of *Arithmetica*, Fermat wrote that he had discovered a wonderful proof of his theorem but, the margin being too narrow for his purpose, did not have room to write it down. The note was found after his death, and from that day to this —

Thomasina Oh! I see now! The answer is perfectly obvious.

Septimus This time you may have overreached yourself.

The door is opened, somewhat violently. Chater enters

Mr Chater! Perhaps my message miscarried. I will be at liberty at a quarter to twelve, if that is convenient.

Chater It is not convenient, sir. My business will not wait.

Septimus Then I suppose you have Lord Croom's opinion that your business is more important than his daughter's lesson.

Chater I do not, but, if you like, I will ask his lordship to settle the point.

Septimus *(after a pause)* My lady, take Fermat into the music room. There will be an extra spoonful of jam if you find his proof.

Thomasina There is no proof, Septimus. The thing that is perfectly obvious is that the note in the margin was a joke to make you all mad.

Thomasina leaves

Septimus Now, sir, what is this business that cannot wait?

Chater I think you know it, sir. You have insulted my wife.

Septimus Insulted her? That would deny my nature, my conduct, and the admiration in which I hold Mrs Chater.

Chater I have heard of your admiration, sir! You insulted my wife in the gazebo yesterday evening!

Septimus You are mistaken. I made love to your wife in the gazebo. She asked me to meet her there, I have her note somewhere, I dare say I could

find it for you, and if someone is putting it about that I did not turn up, by God, sir, it is a slander.

Chater You damned lecher! You would drag down a lady's reputation to make a refuge for your cowardice. It will not do! I am calling you out!

Septimus Chater! Chater, Chater, Chater! My dear friend!

Chater You dare to call me that. I demand satisfaction!

Septimus Mrs Chater demanded satisfaction and now you are demanding satisfaction. I cannot spend my time day and night satisfying the demands of the Chater family. As for your wife's reputation, it stands where it ever stood.

Chater You blackguard!

Septimus I assure you. Mrs Chater is charming and spirited, with a pleasing voice and a dainty step, she is the epitome of all the qualities society applauds in her sex — and yet her chief renown is for a readiness that keeps her in a state of tropical humidity as would grow orchids in her drawers in January.

Chater Damn you, Hodge, I will not listen to this! Will you fight or not?

Septimus (*definitively*) Not! There are no more than two or three poets of the first rank now living, and I will not shoot one of them dead over a perpendicular poke in a gazebo with a woman whose reputation could not be adequately defended with a platoon of musketry deployed by rota.

Chater Ha! You say so! Who are the others? In your opinion? — no — no — ! — this goes very ill, Hodge. I will not be flattered out of my course. You say so, do you?

Septimus I do. And I would say the same to Milton were he not already dead. Not the part about his wife, of course —

Chater But among the living? Mr Southey?

Septimus Southey I would have shot on sight.

Chater (*shaking his head sadly*) Yes, he has fallen off. I admired "Thalaba" quite, but "Madoc". (*he chuckles*) oh dear me! — but we are straying from the business here — you took advantage of Mrs Chater, and if that were not bad enough, it appears every stableboy and scullery maid on the strength —

Septimus Damn me! Have you not listened to a word I said?

Chater I have heard you, sir, and I will not deny I welcome your regard, God knows one is little appreciated if one stands outside the coterie of hacks and placemen who surround Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh* —

Septimus My dear Chater, they judge a poet by the seating plan of Lord Holland's table!

Chater By heaven, you are right! And I would very much like to know the name of the scoundrel who slandered my verse drama "The Maid of Turkey" in the *Piccadilly Recreation*, too!

Septimus "The Maid of Turkey"! I have it by my bedside! When I cannot sleep I take up "The Maid of Turkey" like an old friend!

Chater (*gratified*) There you are! And the scoundrel wrote he would not give it to his dog for dinner were it covered in bread sauce and stuffed with chestnuts. When Mrs Chater read that, she wept, sir, and would not give herself to me for a fortnight — which recalls me to my purpose —

Septimus The new poem, however, will make your name perpetual —

Chater Whether it do or not —

Septimus It is not a question, sir. No coterie can oppose the acclamation of the reading public. "The Couch of Eros" will take the town.

Chater Is that your estimation?

Septimus It is my intent.

Chater Is it, is it? Well, well! I do not understand you.

Septimus You see I have an early copy — sent to me for review. I say review, but I speak of an extensive appreciation of your gifts and your rightful place in English literature.

Chater Well, I must say. That is certainly ... You have written it?

Septimus (*crisply*) Not yet.

Chater Ah. And how long does ...?

Septimus To be done right, it first requires a careful re-reading of your book, of both your books, several readings, together with outlying works for an exhibition of deference or disdain as the case merits. I make notes, of course, I order my thoughts, and finally, when all is ready and I am *calm in my mind* ...

Chater (*shrewdly*) Did Mrs Chater know of this before she — before you —

Septimus I think she very likely did.

Chater (*triumphantly*) There is nothing that woman would not do for me! Now you have an insight to her character. Yes, by God, she is a wife to me, sir!

Septimus For that alone, I would not make her a widow.

Chater Captain Brice once made the same observation!

Septimus Captain Brice did?

Chater Mr Hodge, allow me to inscribe your copy in happy anticipation. Lady Thomasina's pen will serve us.

Septimus Your connection with Lord and Lady Croom you owe to your fighting her ladyship's brother?

Chater No! It was all nonsense, sir — a canard! But a fortunate mistake, sir. It brought me the patronage of a captain of His Majesty's Navy and the brother of a countess. I do not think Mr Walter Scott can say as much, and here I am, a respected guest at Sidley Park.

Septimus Well, sir, you can say you have received satisfaction.

Chater is already inscribing the book, using the pen and ink-pot on the table

Noakes enters through the door used by Chater. He carries rolled-up plans

Chater, inscribing, ignores Noakes. Noakes on seeing the occupants, panics

Noakes Oh!

Septimus Ah, Mr Noakes! — my muddy-mettled rascal! Where's your spyglass?

Noakes I beg your leave — I thought her ladyship — excuse me —

He is beating an embarrassed retreat when he becomes rooted by Chater's voice. Chater reads his inscription in ringing tones

Chater "To my friend Septimus Hodge, who stood up and gave his best on behalf of the Author — Ezra Chater, at Sidley Park, Derbyshire, April 10th, 1809." (*Giving the book to Septimus*) There, sir — something to show your grandchildren!

Septimus This is more than I deserve, this is handsome, what do you say, Noakes?

They are interrupted by the appearance, outside the windows, of Lady Croom and Captain Edward Brice, RN. Her first words arrive through the open door

Lady Croom Oh, no! Not the gazebo!

She enters, followed by Brice who carries a leatherbound sketch book

Mr Noakes! What is this I hear?

Brice Not only the gazebo, but the boat-house, the Chinese bridge, the shrubbery —

Chater By God, sir! Not possible!

Brice Mr Noakes will have it so.

Septimus Mr Noakes, this is monstrous!

Lady Croom I am glad to hear it from you, Mr Hodge.

Thomasina opens the door from the music room

Thomasina May I return now?

Septimus (*attempting to close the door*) Not just yet —

Lady Croom Yes, let her stay. A lesson in folly is worth two in wisdom.

Brice takes the sketch book to the reading stand, where he lays it open. The sketch book is the work of Mr Noakes, who is obviously an admirer of Humphry Repton's "Red Books". The pages, drawn in watercolours, show "before" and "after" views of the landscape, and the pages are cunningly

cut to allow the latter to be superimposed over portions of the former, though Repton did it the other way round

Brice Is Sidley Park to be an Englishman's garden or the haunt of Corsican brigands?

Septimus Let us not hyperbolize, sir.

Brice It is rape, sir!

Noakes (*defending himself*) It is the modern style.

Chater (*under the same misapprehension as Septimus*) Regrettable, of course, but so it is.

Thomasina has gone to examine the sketch book

Lady Croom Mr Chater, you show too much submission. Mr Hodge, I appeal to you.

Septimus Madam, I regret the gazebo, I sincerely regret the gazebo — and the boat-house up to a point — but the Chinese bridge, fantasy! — and the shrubbery I reject with contempt! Mr Chater! — would you take the word of a jumped-up jobbing gardener who sees carnal embrace in every nook and cranny of the landskip!

Thomasina Septimus, they are not speaking of carnal embrace, are you, Mama?

Lady Croom Certainly not. What do you know of carnal embrace?

Thomasina Everything, thanks to Septimus. In my opinion, Mr Noakes's scheme for the garden is perfect. It is a Salvator!

Lady Croom What does she mean?

Noakes (*answering the wrong question*) Salvator Rosa, your ladyship, the painter. He is indeed the very exemplar of the picturesque style.

Brice Hodge, what is this?

Septimus She speaks from innocence not from experience.

Brice You call it innocence? Has he ruined you, child?

Pause

Septimus Answer your uncle!

Thomasina (*to Septimus*) How is a ruined child different from a ruined castle?

Septimus On such questions I defer to Mr Noakes.

Noakes (*out of his depth*) A ruined castle is picturesque, certainly.

Septimus That is the main difference. (*To Brice*) I teach the classical authors. If I do not elucidate their meaning, who will?

Brice As her tutor you have a duty to keep her in ignorance.

Lady Croom Do not dabble in paradox, Edward, it puts you in danger of fortuitous wit. Thomasina, wait in your bedroom.

Thomasina (*retiring*) Yes, Mama. I did not intend to get you into trouble, Septimus. I am very sorry for it. It is plain that there are some things a girl is allowed to understand, and these include the whole of algebra, but there are others, such as embracing a side of beef, that must be kept from her until she is old enough to have a carcass of her own.

Lady Croom One moment.

Brice What is she talking about?

Lady Croom Meat.

Brice Meat?

Lady Croom Thomasina, you had better remain. Your knowledge of the picturesque obviously exceeds anything the rest of us can offer. Mr Hodge, ignorance should be like an empty vessel waiting to be filled at the well of truth — not a cabinet of vulgar curios. Mr Noakes — now at last it is your turn —

Noakes Thank you, your ladyship —

Lady Croom Your drawing is a very wonderful transformation. I would not have recognized my own garden but for your ingenious book — is it not? — look! Here is the Park as it appears to us now, and here as it might be when Mr Noakes has done with it. Where there is the familiar pastoral refinement of an Englishman's garden, here is an eruption of gloomy forest and towering crag, of ruins where there was never a house, of water dashing against rocks where there was neither spring nor a stone I could not throw the length of a cricket pitch. My hyacinth dell is become a haunt for hobgoblins, my Chinese bridge, which I am assured is superior to the one at Kew, and for all I know at Peking, is usurped by a fallen obelisk overgrown with briars —

Noakes (*bleating*) Lord Little has one very similar —

Lady Croom I cannot relieve Lord Little's misfortunes by adding to my own. Pray, what is this rustic hovel that presumes to superpose itself on my gazebo?

Noakes That is the hermitage, madam.

Lady Croom The hermitage? I am bewildered.

Brice It is all irregular, Mr Noakes.

Noakes It is, sir. Irregularity is one of the chiefest principles of the picturesque style —

Lady Croom But Sidley Park is already a picture, and a most amiable picture too. The slopes are green and gentle. The trees are companionably grouped at intervals that show them to advantage. The rill is a serpentine ribbon unwound from the lake peaceably contained by meadows on which the right amount of sheep are tastefully arranged — in short, it is nature as God intended, and I can say with the painter, "*Et in Arcadia ego!*" "Here I am in Arcadia," Thomasina.

Thomasina Yes, Mama, if you would have it so.

Lady Croom Is she correcting my taste or my translation?

Thomasina Neither are beyond correction, Mama, but it was your geography caused the doubt.

Lady Croom Something has occurred with the girl since I saw her last, and surely that was yesterday. How old are you this morning?

Thomasina Thirteen years and ten months, Mama.

Lady Croom Thirteen years and ten months. She is not due to be pert for six months at the earliest, or to have notions of taste for much longer. Mr Hodge, I hold you accountable. Mr Noakes, back to you —

Noakes Thank you, my —

Lady Croom You have been reading too many novels by Mrs Radcliffe, that is my opinion. This is a garden for *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho* —

Chater *The Castle of Otranto*, my lady, is by Horace Walpole.

Noakes (*thrilled*) Mr Walpole the gardener?!

Lady Croom Mr Chater, you are a welcome guest at Sidley Park but while you are one, *The Castle of Otranto* was written by whomsoever I say it was, otherwise what is the point of being a guest or having one?

The distant popping of guns is heard

Well, the guns have reached the brow — I will speak to his lordship on the subject, and we will see by and by — (*She stands looking out*) Ah! — your friend has got down a pigeon, Mr Hodge. (*Calling out*) Bravo, sir!

Septimus The pigeon, I am sure, fell to your husband or to your son, your ladyship — my schoolfriend was never a sportsman.

Brice (*looking out*) Yes, to Augustus! — bravo, lad!

Lady Croom (*outside*) Well, come along! Where are my troops?

Lady Croom goes. Brice, Noakes and Chater obediently follow her, Chater making a detour to shake Septimus's hand fervently

Chater My dear Mr Hodge!

Chater leaves also

The guns are heard again, a little closer

Thomasina Pop, pop, pop ... I have grown up in the sound of guns like the child of a siege. Pigeons and rooks in the close season, grouse on the heights from August, and the pheasants to follow — partridge, snipe, woodcock, and teal — pop — pop — pop, and the culling of the herd. Papa has no need of the recording angel, his life is written in the game book.

Septimus A calendar of slaughter. "Even in Arcadia, there am I!"

Thomasina Oh, phooey to Death! *(She dips a pen and takes it to the reading stand)* I will put in a hermit, for what is a hermitage without a hermit? Are you in love with my mother, Septimus?

Septimus You must not be cleverer than your elders. It is not polite.

Thomasina Am I cleverer?

Septimus Yes. Much.

Thomasina Well, I am sorry, Septimus. *(She pauses in her drawing and produces a small envelope from her pocket)* Mrs Chater came to the music room with a note for you. She said it was of scant importance, and that therefore I should carry it to you with the utmost safety, urgency and discretion. Does carnal embrace addle the brain?

Septimus *(taking the letter)* Invariably. Thank you. That is enough education for today.

Thomasina There. I have made him like the Baptist in the wilderness.

Septimus How picturesque.

Lady Croom *(off, calling distantly)* Thomasina!

Thomasina runs off into the garden, cheerfully, an uncomplicated girl

Septimus opens Mrs Chater's note. He crumples the envelope and throws it away. He reads the note, folds it and inserts it into the pages of "The Couch of Eros"

SCENE 2

The Lights come up on the same room, on the same sort of morning, in the present day, as is instantly clear from the appearance of Hannah Jarvis; and from nothing else

Something needs to be said about this. The action of the play shuttles back and forth between the early nineteenth century and the present day, always in this same room. Both periods must share the state of the room, without the additions and subtractions which would normally be expected. The general appearance of the room should offend neither period. In the case of props — books, paper, flowers, etc., there is no absolute need to remove the evidence of one period to make way for another. However, books, etc., used in both periods should exist in both old and new versions. The landscape outside, we are told, has undergone changes. Again, what we see should neither change nor contradict

On the above principle, the ink and pens etc., of the first scene can remain. Books and papers associated with Hannah's research, in Scene 2, can have

been on the table from the beginning of the play. And so on. During the course of the play the table collects this and that, and where an object from one scene would be an anachronism in another (say a coffee mug) it is simply deemed to have become invisible. By the end of the play the table has collected an inventory of objects

Hannah is leafing through the pages of Mr Noakes's sketch book. Also to hand, opened and closed, are a number of small volumes like diaries (these turn out to be Lady Croom's "garden books"). After a few moments, Hannah takes the sketch book to the windows, comparing the view with what has been drawn, and then she replaces the sketch book on the reading stand. She wears nothing frivolous. Her shoes are suitable for the garden, which is where she goes now after picking up the theodolite from the table

The room is empty for a few moments

One of the other doors opens to admit Chloë and Bernard. She is the daughter of the house and is dressed casually. Bernard, the visitor, wears a suit and tie. His tendency is to dress flamboyantly, but he has damped it down for the occasion, slightly. A peacock-coloured display handkerchief boils over in his breast pocket. He carries a capacious leather bag which serves as a briefcase

Chloë Oh! Well, she was here ...

Bernard Ah ... the french window ...

Chloë Yes. Hang on.

Chloë steps out through the garden door and disappears from view

Bernard hangs on

The second door opens and Valentine looks in

Valentine Sod.

Valentine goes out again, closing the door. Chloë returns, carrying a pair of rubber boots. She comes in and sits down and starts exchanging her shoes for the boots, while she talks

Chloë The best thing is, you wait here, save you tramping around. She spends a good deal of time in the garden, as you may imagine.

Bernard Yes. Why?

Chloë Well, she's writing a history of the garden, didn't you know?

Bernard No, I knew she was working on the Croom papers but ...

Chloë Well, it's not exactly a history of the garden either. I'll let Hannah explain it. The trench you nearly drove into is all to do with it. I was going to say make yourself comfortable but that's hardly possible, everything's been cleared out, it's *en route* to the nearest lavatory.

Bernard Everything is?

Chloë No, this room is. They drew the line at chemical "Ladies".

Bernard Yes, I see. Did you say Hannah?

Chloë Hannah, yes. Will you be all right? *(She stands up wearing the boots)*
I won't be ... *(But she has lost him)* Mr Nightingale?

Bernard *(waking up)* Yes. Thank you. Miss Jarvis is Hannah Jarvis the author?

Chloë Yes. Have you read her book?

Bernard Oh, yes. Yes.

Chloë I bet she's in the hermitage, can't see from here with the marquee ...

Bernard Are you having a garden party?

Chloë A dance for the district, our annual dressing up and general drunkenness. The wrinklies won't have it in the house, there was a teapot we once had to bag back from Christie's in the nick of time, so anything that can be destroyed, stolen or vomited on has been tactfully removed; tactlessly, I should say — *(She is about to leave)*

Bernard Um — look — would you tell her — would you mind not mentioning my name just yet?

Chloë Oh. All right.

Bernard *(smiling)* More fun to surprise her. Would you mind?

Chloë No. But she's bound to ask ... Should I give you another name, just for the moment?

Bernard Yes, why not?

Chloë Perhaps another bird, you're not really a Nightingale.

She leaves again

Bernard glances over the books on the table. He puts his briefcase down. There is the distant pop-pop of a shotgun. It takes Bernard vaguely to the window. He looks out. The door through which he entered now opens

Gus looks into the room

Bernard turns and sees him

Bernard Hello.

Gus doesn't speak. He never speaks. Perhaps he cannot speak. He has no composure, and faced with a stranger, he caves in and leaves again

A moment later the other door opens again and Valentine crosses the room, not exactly ignoring Bernard and yet ignoring him

Valentine Sod, sod, sod, sod, sod, sod ... *(As many times as it takes him to leave by the opposite door)*

Valentine goes out, closing the door behind him

(Off, shouting) Chlo! Chlo!

Bernard's discomfort increases

The same door opens and Valentine returns. He looks at Bernard

Bernard She's in the garden looking for Miss Jarvis.

Valentine Where is everything?

Bernard It's been removed for the, er ...

Valentine The dance is all in the tent, isn't it?

Bernard Yes, but this is the way to the nearest toilet.

Valentine I need the commode.

Bernard Oh. Can't you use the toilet?

Valentine It's got all the game books in it.

Bernard Ah. The toilet has or the commode has?

Valentine Is anyone looking after you?

Bernard Yes. Thank you. I'm Bernard Nigh — I've come to see Miss Jarvis. I wrote to Lord Croom but unfortunately I never received a reply, so I —

Valentine Did you type it?

Bernard Type it?

Valentine Was your letter typewritten?

Bernard Yes.

Valentine My father never replies to typewritten letters. *(He spots the tortoise which has been half-hidden on the table)* Oh! Where have you been hiding. Lightning? *(He picks up the tortoise)*

Bernard So I telephoned yesterday and I think I spoke to you —

Valentine To me? Ah! Yes! Sorry! You're doing a talk about — someone — and you wanted to ask Hannah — something —

Bernard Yes. As it turns out. I'm hoping Miss Jarvis will look kindly on me.

Valentine I doubt it.

Bernard Ah, you know about research?

Valentine I know Hannah.

Bernard Has she been here long?

Valentine Well in possession, I'm afraid. My mother had read her book, you see. Have you?

Bernard No. Yes. Her book. Indeed.

Valentine She's terrifically pleased with herself.

Bernard Well, I dare say if I wrote a bestseller —

Valentine No, for reading it. My mother basically reads gardening books.

Bernard She must be delighted to have Hannah Jarvis writing a book about her garden.

Valentine Actually it's about hermits.

Gus returns through the same door, and turns to leave again

It's all right, Gus — what do you want?

But Gus has gone again

Well ... I'll take Lightning for his run.

Bernard Actually, we've met before. At Sussex, a couple of years ago, a seminar ...

Valentine Oh. Was I there?

Bernard Yes. One of my colleagues believed he had found an unattributed short story by D. H. Lawrence, and he analysed it on his home computer, most interesting, perhaps you remember the paper?

Valentine Not really. But I often sit with my eyes closed and it doesn't necessarily mean I'm awake.

Bernard Well, by comparing sentence structures and so forth, this chap showed that there was a ninety per cent chance that the story had indeed been written by the same person as *Women in Love*. To my inexpressible joy, one of your maths mob was able to show that on the same statistical basis there was a ninety per cent chance that Lawrence also wrote the *Just William* books and much of the previous day's *Brighton and Hove Argus*.

Valentine (after a pause) Oh, Brighton. Yes. I was there. (And looking out) Oh — here she comes, I'll leave you to talk. By the way, is yours the red Mazda?

Bernard Yes.

Valentine If you want a tip I'd put it out of sight through the stable arch before my father comes in. He won't have anyone in the house with a Japanese car. Are you queer?

Bernard No, actually.

Valentine Well, even so.

Valentine leaves, closing the door

Bernard keeps staring at the closed door

Behind him, Hannah comes to the garden door

Hannah Mr Peacock?

Bernard looks round vaguely then checks over his shoulder for the missing Peacock, then recovers himself and turns on the Nightingale bonhomie

Bernard Oh ... hello! Miss Jarvis, of course. Such a pleasure. I was thrown for a moment — the photograph doesn't do you justice.

Hannah Photograph? (Her shoes have got muddy and she is taking them off)

Bernard On the book. I'm sorry to have brought you indoors, but Lady Chloë kindly insisted she —

Hannah No matter — you would have muddied your shoes.

Bernard How thoughtful. And how kind of you to spare me a little of your time.

He is overdoing it. She shoots him a glance

Hannah Are you a journalist?

Bernard (shocked) No!

Hannah (resuming) I've been in the ha-ha, very squelchy.

Bernard (unexpectedly) Ha-hah!

Hannah What?

Bernard A theory of mind. Ha-hah, not ha-ha. If you were strolling down the garden and all of a sudden the ground gave way at your feet, you're not going to go "ha-ha", you're going to jump back and go "ha-hah", or more probably, "Bloody 'ell!" ... though personally I think old Murray was up the pole on that one — in France, you know, "ha-ha" is used to denote a strikingly ugly woman, a much more likely bet for something that keeps the cows off the lawn.

This is not going well for Bernard but he seems blithely unaware. Hannah stares at him for a moment

Hannah Mr Peacock, what can I do for you?

Bernard Well, to begin with, you can call me Bernard, which is my name.

Hannah Thank you. (She goes to the garden door to bang her shoes together and scrape off the worst of the mud)

Bernard The book! — the book is a revelation! To see Caroline Lamb through your eyes is really like seeing her for the first time. I'm ashamed to say I never read her fiction, and how right you are, it's extraordinary stuff ... Early Nineteenth is my period as much as anything is.

Hannah You teach?

Bernard Yes. And write, like you, like we all, though I've never done anything which has sold like *Caro*.

Hannah I don't teach.

Bernard No. All the more credit to you. To rehabilitate a forgotten writer, I suppose you could say that's the main reason for an English don.

Hannah Not to teach?

Bernard Good God, no, let the brats sort it out for themselves. Anyway, many congratulations. I expect someone will be bringing out Caroline Lamb's *œuvre* now?

Hannah Yes, I expect so.

Bernard How wonderful! Bravo! Simply as a document shedding reflected light on the character of Lord Byron, it's bound to be —

Hannah Bernard. You did say Bernard, didn't you?

Bernard I did.

Hannah I'm putting my shoes on again.

Bernard Oh. You're not going to go out?

Hannah No, I'm going to kick you in the balls.

Bernard Right. Point taken. Ezra Chater.

Hannah Ezra Chater.

Bernard Born Twickenham, Middlesex, 1778, author of two verse narratives, "The Maid of Turkey", 1808, and "The Couch of Eros", 1809. Nothing known after 1809, disappears from view.

Hannah I see. And?

Bernard (*reaching for his bag*) There is a Sidley Park connection. (*He produces "The Couch of Eros" from the bag. He reads the inscription*) "To my friend Septimus Hodge, who stood up and gave his best on behalf of the Author — Ezra Chater, at Sidley Park, Derbyshire, April 10th, 1809."

He gives her the book

I am in your hands.

Hannah "The Couch of Eros". Is it any good?

Bernard Quite surprising.

Hannah You think there's a book in him?

Bernard No, no — a monograph perhaps for the *Journal of English Studies*.

There's almost nothing on Chater, not a word in the *DNB*, of course — by that time he'd been completely forgotten.

Hannah Family?

Bernard Zilch. There's only one other Chater in the British Library database.

Hannah Same period?

Bernard Yes, but he wasn't a poet like our Ezra, he was a botanist who described a dwarf dahlia in Martinique and died there after being bitten by a monkey.

Hannah And Ezra Chater?

Bernard He gets two references in the periodical index, one for each book,

in both cases a substantial review in the *Piccadilly Recreation*, a thrice weekly folio sheet, but giving no personal details.

Hannah And where was this (*the book*)?

Bernard Private collection. I've got a talk to give next week, in London, and I think Chater is interesting, so anything on him, or this Septimus Hodge, Sidley Park, any leads at all ... I'd be most grateful.

Pause

Hannah Well! This is a new experience for me. A grovelling academic.

Bernard Oh, I say.

Hannah Oh, but it is. All the academics who reviewed my book patronized it.

Bernard Surely not.

Hannah Surely yes. The Byron gang unzipped their flies and patronized all over it. Where is it you don't bother to teach, by the way?

Bernard Oh, well, Sussex, actually.

She thinks a moment

Hannah Nightingale. Yes; a thousand words in the *Observer* to see me off the premises with a pat on the bottom. You must know him.

Bernard As I say, I'm in your hands.

Hannah Quite. Say please, then.

Bernard Please.

Hannah Sit down, do.

Bernard Thank you.

He takes a chair. She remains standing. Possibly she smokes; if so, perhaps now. A short cigarette-holder sounds right, too. Or brown-paper cigarillos

Hannah How did you know I was here?

Bernard Oh, I didn't. I spoke to the son on the phone but he didn't mention you by name ... and then he forgot to mention me.

Hannah Valentine. He's at Oxford, technically.

Bernard Yes, I met him. Brideshead Regurgitated.

Hannah My fiancé.

She holds his look

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

Hannah (*after a pause*) Well done, Bernard.

Bernard Christ.

Hannah He calls me his fiancée.

Bernard Why?

Hannah It's a joke.

Bernard You turned him down?

Hannah Don't be silly, do I look like the next Countess of —

Bernard No, no — a freebie. The joke that consoles. My tortoise Lightning, my fiancée Hannah.

Hannah Oh. Yes. You have a way with you, Bernard. I'm not sure I like it.

Bernard What's he doing, Valentine?

Hannah He's a postgrad. Biology.

Bernard No, he's a mathematician.

Hannah Well, he's doing grouse.

Bernard Grouse?

Hannah Not actual grouse. Computer grouse.

Bernard Who's the one who doesn't speak?

Hannah Gus.

Bernard What's the matter with him?

Hannah I didn't ask.

Bernard And the father sounds like a lot of fun.

Hannah Ah yes.

Bernard And the mother is the gardener. What's going on here?

Hannah What do you mean?

Bernard I nearly took her head off — she was standing in a trench at the time.

Hannah Archaeology. The house had a formal Italian garden until about 1740. Lady Croom is interested in garden history. I sent her my book — it contains, as you know if you've read it — which I'm not assuming, by the way — a rather good description of Caroline's garden at Brocket Hall. I'm here now helping Hermione.

Bernard (*impressed*) Hermione.

Hannah The records are unusually complete and they have never been worked on.

Bernard I'm beginning to admire you.

Hannah Before was bullshit?

Bernard Completely. Your photograph does you justice, I'm not sure the book does.

She considers him. He waits, confident

Hannah Septimus Hodge was the tutor.

Bernard (*quietly*) Attagirl.

Hannah His pupil was the Croom daughter. There was a son at Eton. Septimus lived in the house: the pay book specifies allowances for wine and candles. So, not quite a guest but rather more than a steward. His letter of self-recommendation is preserved among the papers. I'll dig it out for

you. As far as I remember he studied mathematics and natural philosophy at Cambridge. A scientist, therefore, as much as anything.

Bernard I'm impressed. Thank you. And Chater?

Hannah Nothing.

Bernard Oh. Nothing at all?

Hannah I'm afraid not.

Bernard How about the library?

Hannah The catalogue was done in the 1880s. I've been through the lot.

Bernard Books or catalogue?

Hannah Catalogue.

Bernard Ah. Pity.

Hannah I'm sorry.

Bernard What about the letters? No mention?

Hannah I'm afraid not. I've been very thorough in your period because, of course, it's my period too.

Bernard Is it? Actually, I don't quite know what it is you're ...

Hannah The Sidley hermit.

Bernard Ah. Who's he?

Hannah He's my peg for the nervous breakdown of the Romantic Imagination. I'm doing landscape and literature 1750 to 1834.

Bernard What happened in 1834?

Hannah My hermit died.

Bernard Of course.

Hannah What do you mean, of course?

Bernard Nothing.

Hannah Yes, you do.

Bernard No, no ... However, Coleridge also died in 1834.

Hannah So he did. What a stroke of luck. (*Softening*) Thank you, Bernard. (*She goes to the reading stand and opens Noakes's sketch book*) Look — there he is.

Bernard goes to look

Bernard Mmm.

Hannah The only known likeness of the Sidley hermit.

Bernard Very biblical.

Hannah Drawn in by a later hand, of course. The hermitage didn't yet exist when Noakes did the drawings.

Bernard Noakes ... the painter?

Hannah Landscape gardener. He'd do these books for his clients, as a sort of prospectus. (*She demonstrates*) Before and after, you see. This is how it all looked until, say, 1810 — smooth, undulating, serpentine — open water, clumps of trees, classical boat-house —

Bernard Lovely. The real England.

Hannah You can stop being silly now, Bernard. English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors. The whole thing was brought home in the luggage from the grand tour. Here, look — Capability Brown doing Claude, who was doing Virgil. Arcadia! And here, superimposed by Richard Noakes, untamed nature in the style of Salvator Rosa. It's the Gothic novel expressed in landscape. Everything but vampires. There's an account of my hermit in a letter by your illustrious namesake.

Bernard Florence?

Hannah What?

Bernard No. You go on.

Hannah Thomas Love Peacock.

Bernard Ah yes.

Hannah I found it in an essay on hermits and anchorites published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in the 1860s ... *(She fishes for the magazine itself among the books on the table, and finds it)* ... 1862 ... Peacock calls him *(Quoting from memory)* "Not one of your village simpletons to frighten the ladies, but a savant among idiots, a sage of lunacy."

Bernard An oxy-moron, so to speak.

Hannah *(busy)* Yes. What?

Bernard Nothing.

Hannah *(having found the place)* Here we are. "A letter we have seen, written by the author of *Headlong Hall* nearly thirty years ago, tells of a visit to the Earl of Croom's estate, Sidley Park" —

Bernard Was the letter to Thackeray?

Hannah *(brought up short)* I don't know. Does it matter?

Bernard No. Sorry.

But the gaps he leaves for her are false promises — and she is not quick enough. That's how it goes

Only, Thackeray edited the *Cornhill* until '63 when, as you know, he died. His father had been with the East India Company where Peacock, of course, had held the position of Examiner, so it's quite possible that if the essay were by Thackeray, the letter ... Sorry. Go on. Of course, the East India Library in Blackfriars has most of Peacock's letters, so it would be quite easy to ... Sorry. Can I look?

Silently, she hands him the Cornhill, which is bound as a book

Yes, it's been topped and tailed, of course. It might be worth ... Go on. I'm listening ... *(Leafing through the essay, he suddenly chuckles)* Oh yes, it's Thackeray all right ... *(He slaps the book shut)* Unbearable ... *(He hands it back to her)* What were you saying?

Hannah Are you always like this?

Bernard Like what?

Hannah The point is, the Crooms, of course, had the hermit under their noses for twenty years so hardly thought him worth remarking. As I'm finding out. The Peacock letter is still the main source, unfortunately. When I read this *(the book in her hand)* well, it was one of those moments that tell you what your next book is going to be. The hermit of Sidley Park was my ...

Bernard Peg.

Hannah Epiphany.

Bernard Epiphany, that's it.

Hannah The hermit was *placed* in the landscape exactly as one might place a pottery gnome. And there he lived out his life as a garden ornament.

Bernard Did he do anything?

Hannah Oh, he was very busy. When he died, the cottage was stacked solid with paper. Hundreds of pages. Thousands. Peacock says he was suspected of genius. It turned out, of course, he was off his head. He'd covered every sheet with cabalistic proofs that the world was coming to an end. It's perfect, isn't it? A perfect symbol, I mean.

Bernard Oh, yes. Of what?

Hannah The whole Romantic sham, Bernard! It's what happened to the Enlightenment, isn't it? A century of intellectual rigour turned in on itself. A mind in chaos suspected of genius. In a setting of cheap thrills and false emotion. 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. The grass went from the doorstep to the horizon and the best box hedge in Derbyshire was dug up for the ha-ha so that the fools could pretend they were living in God's countryside. And then Richard Noakes came in to bring God up to date. By the time he'd finished it looked like this *(the sketch book)*. The decline from thinking to feeling, you see.

Bernard *(a judgement)* That's awfully good.

Hannah looks at him in case of irony but he is professional

No, that'll stand up.

Hannah Thank you.

Bernard Personally I like the ha-ha. Do you like hedges?

Hannah I don't like sentimentality.

Bernard Yes, I see. Are you sure? You seem quite sentimental over geometry. But the hermit is very very good. The genius of the place.

Hannah *(pleased)* That's my title!

Bernard Of course.

Hannah (*less pleased*) Of course?

Bernard Of course. Who was he when he wasn't being a symbol?

Hannah I don't know.

Bernard Ah.

Hannah I mean, yet.

Bernard Absolutely. What did they do with all the hermit's paper? Does Peacock say?

Hannah Made a bonfire.

Bernard Ah, well.

Hannah I've still got Lady Croom's garden books to go through.

Bernard Account books or journals?

Hannah A bit of both. They're gappy but they span the period.

Bernard Really? Have you come across Byron at all? As a matter of interest.

Hannah A first edition of "Childe Harold" in the library, and *English Bards*, I think.

Bernard Inscribed?

Hannah No.

Bernard And he doesn't pop up in the letters at all?

Hannah Why should he? The Crooms don't pop up in his.

Bernard (*casually*) That's true, of course. But Newstead isn't so far away. Would you mind terribly if I poked about a bit? Only in the papers you've done with, of course.

Hannah twigs something

Hannah Are you looking into Byron or Chater?

Chloë enters in stockinged feet through one of the side doors, laden with an armful of generally similar leather-covered ledgers. She detours to collect her shoes

Chloë Sorry — just cutting through — there's tea in the pantry if you don't mind mugs —

Bernard How kind.

Chloë Hannah will show you.

Bernard Let me help you.

Chloë No, it's all right —

Bernard opens the opposite door for her

Thank you — I've been saving Val's game books. Thanks.

Chloë goes

Bernard closes the door

Bernard Sweet girl.

Hannah Mmm.

Bernard Oh, really?

Hannah Oh really what?

Chloë's door opens again and she puts her head round it

Chloë Meant to say, don't worry if Father makes remarks about your car, Mr Nightingale, he's got a thing about ... (*and the Nightingale now being out of the bag*) ooh — ah, how was the surprise? — not yet, eh? Oh, well — sorry — tea, anyway — so sorry if I ...

Embarrassed, she leaves again, closing the door

Pause

Hannah You absolute shit. (*She heads off to leave*)

Bernard The thing is, there's a Byron connection too.

Hannah stops and faces him

Hannah I don't care.

Bernard You should. The Byron gang are going to get their dicks caught in their zip.

Hannah (*after a pause*) Oh really?

Bernard If we collaborate.

Hannah On what?

Bernard Sit down, I'll tell you.

Hannah I'll stand for the moment.

Bernard This copy of "The Couch of Eros" belonged to Lord Byron.

Hannah It belonged to Septimus Hodge.

Bernard Originally, yes. But it was in Byron's library which was sold to pay his debts when he left England for good in 1816. The sales catalogue is in the British Library. "Eros" was lot 74A and was bought by the bookseller and publisher John Nightingale of Opera Court, Pall Mall ... whose name survives in the firm of Nightingale and Matlock, the present Nightingale being my cousin.

He pauses. Hannah hesitates and then sits down at the table

I'll just give you the headlines. 1939, stock removed to Nightingale country house in Kent. 1945, stock returned to bookshop. Meanwhile,

overlooked box of early nineteenth-century books languish in country house cellar until house sold to make way for the Channel Tunnel rail-link. "Eros" discovered with sales slip from 1816 attached — photocopy available for inspection.

He brings this from his bag and gives it to Hannah who inspects it

Hannah All right. It was in Byron's library.

Bernard A number of passages have been underlined.

Hannah picks up the book and leafs through it

All of them, and only them — no, no, look at me, not at the book — all the underlined passages, word for word, were used as quotations in the review of "The Couch of Eros" in the *Piccadilly Recreation* of April 30th 1809. The reviewer begins by drawing attention to his previous notice in the same periodical of "The Maid of Turkey".

Hannah The reviewer is obviously Hodge. "My friend Septimus Hodge who stood up and gave his best on behalf of the Author."

Bernard That's the point. The *Piccadilly* ridiculed both books.

Hannah (after a pause) Do the reviews read like Byron?

Bernard (producing two photocopies from his case) They read a damn sight more like Byron than Byron's review of Wordsworth the previous year.

Hannah glances over the photocopies

Hannah I see. Well, congratulations. Possibly. Two previously unknown book reviews by the young Byron. Is that it?

Bernard No. Because of the tapes, three documents survived undisturbed in the book. (He has been carefully opening a package produced from his bag. He has the originals. He holds them carefully one by one) "Sir — we have a matter to settle. I wait on you in the gun-room. E. Chater, Esq."

"My husband has sent to town for pistols. Deny what cannot be proven — for Charity's sake — I keep my room this day." Unsigned.

"Sidley Park, April 11th 1809. Sir — I call you a liar, a lecher, a slanderer in the press and a thief of my honour. I wait upon your arrangements for giving me satisfaction as a man and a poet. E. Chater, Esq."

Pause

Hannah Superb. But inconclusive. The book had seven years to find its way

into Byron's possession. It doesn't connect Byron with Chater, or with Sidley Park. Or with Hodge for that matter. Furthermore, there isn't a hint in Byron's letters and this kind of scrape is the last thing he would have kept quiet about.

Bernard Scrape?

Hannah He would have made a comic turn out of it.

Bernard Comic turn, fiddlesticks! (He pauses for effect) He killed Chater!

Hannah (a raspberry) Oh, really!

Bernard Chater was thirty-one years old. The author of two books. Nothing more is heard of him after "Eros". He disappears completely after April 1809. And Byron — Byron had just published his satire, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in March. He was just getting a name. Yet he sailed for Lisbon as soon as he could find a ship, and stayed abroad for two years. Hannah, *this is fame*. Somewhere in the Croom papers there will be something —

Hannah There isn't, I've looked.

Bernard But you were looking for something else! It's not going to jump out at you like "Lord Byron remarked wittily at breakfast!"

Hannah Nevertheless his presence would be unlikely to have gone unremarked. But there is nothing to suggest that Byron was here, and I don't believe he ever was.

Bernard All right, but let me have a look.

Hannah You'll queer my pitch.

Bernard Dear girl, I know how to handle myself —

Hannah And don't call me dear girl. If I find anything on Byron, or Chater, or Hodge, I'll pass it on. Nightingale, Sussex.

Pause. She stands up

Bernard Thank you. I'm sorry about that business with my name.

Hannah Don't mention it ...

Bernard What was Hodge's college, by the way?

Hannah Trinity.

Bernard Trinity?

Hannah Yes. (She hesitates) Yes. Byron's old college.

Bernard How old was Hodge?

Hannah I'd have to look it up but a year or two older than Byron. Twenty-two ...

Bernard Contemporaries at Trinity?

Hannah (wearily) Yes, Bernard, and no doubt they were both in the cricket eleven when Harrow played Eton at Lords!

Bernard approaches her and stands close to her

Bernard (evenly) Do you mean that Septimus Hodge was at school with Byron?

Hannah (faltering slightly) Yes ... he must have been ... as a matter of fact.

Bernard Well, you silly cow.

With a large gesture of pure happiness, Bernard throws his arms around Hannah and gives her a great smacking kiss on the cheek

Chloë enters to witness the end of this. She is carrying a small tray with two mugs on it

Chloë Oh — erm ... I thought I'd bring it to you.

Bernard I have to go and see about my car.

Hannah Going to hide it?

Bernard Hide it? I'm going to sell it! Is there a pub I can put up at in the village? (He turns back to them as he is about to leave through the garden) Aren't you glad I'm here?

He leaves

Chloë He said he knew you.

Hannah He couldn't have.

Chloë No, perhaps not. He said he wanted to be a surprise, but I suppose that's different. I thought there was a lot of sexual energy there, didn't you?

Hannah What?

Chloë Bouncy on his feet, you see, a sure sign. Should I invite him for you?

Hannah To what? No.

Chloë You can invite him — that's better. He can come as your partner.

Hannah Stop it. Thank you for the tea.

Chloë If you don't want him, I'll have him. Is he married?

Hannah I haven't the slightest idea. Aren't you supposed to have a pony?

Chloë I'm just trying to fix you up, Hannah.

Hannah Believe me, it gets less important.

Chloë I mean for the dancing. He can come as Beau Brummel.

Hannah I don't want to dress up and I don't want a dancing partner, least of all Mr Nightingale. I don't dance.

Chloë Don't be such a prune. You were kissing him, anyway.

Hannah He was kissing me, and only out of general enthusiasm.

Chloë Well, don't say I didn't give you first chance. My genius brother will be much relieved. He's in love with you, I suppose you know.

Hannah (angrily) That's a joke!

Chloë It's not a joke to him.

Hannah Of course it is — not even a joke — how can you be so ridiculous?.

Gus enters from the garden, in his customary silent awkwardness

Chloë Hello, Gus, what have you got?

Gus has an apple, just picked, with a leaf or two still attached. He offers the apple to Hannah

Hannah (surprised) Oh! ... Thank you!

Chloë (leaving) Told you.

Chloë closes the door on herself

Hannah Thank you. Oh dear.

SCENE 3

The schoolroom. The next morning

Present are: Thomasina, Septimus, Jellaby. We have seen this composition before: Thomasina at her place at the table; Septimus reading a letter which has just arrived; Jellaby waiting, having just delivered the letter. "The Couch of Eros" is in front of Septimus, open, together with sheets of paper on which he has been writing. His portfolio is on the table. Plautus (the tortoise) is the paperweight. There is also an apple on the table now, the same apple from all appearances

Septimus (with his eyes on the letter) Why have you stopped?

Thomasina is studying a sheet of paper, a "Latin unseen" lesson. She is having some difficulty

Thomasina *Solio in sessa ... in igne ...* seated on a throne ... in the fire ... and also on a ship ... *sedebat regina ...* sat the queen ...

Septimus There is no reply, Jellaby. Thank you. (He folds the letter up and places it between the leaves of "The Couch of Eros")

Jellaby I will say so, sir.

Thomasina ... the wind smelling sweetly ... *purpureis velis ...* by, with or from purple sails —

Septimus (to Jellaby) I will have something for the post, if you would be so kind.

Jellaby (leaving) Yes, sir.

Jellaby goes

Thomasina ... was like as to — something — by, with or from lovers — oh, Septimus! — *musica tiliarum imperabat* ... music of pipes commanded ...

Septimus "Ruled" is better.

Thomasina ... the silver oars — exciting the ocean — as if — as if — amorous —

Septimus That is very good. (*He picks up the apple. He picks off the twig and leaves, placing these on the table. With a pocket knife he cuts a slice of apple, and while he eats it, cuts another slice which he offers to Plautus*)

Thomasina *Regina reclinabat* ... the queen — was reclining — *praeter descriptionem* — indescribably — in a golden tent ... like Venus and yet more —

Septimus Try to put some poetry into it.

Thomasina How can I if there is none in the Latin?

Septimus Oh, a critic!

Thomasina Is it Queen Dido?

Septimus No.

Thomasina Who is the poet?

Septimus Known to you.

Thomasina Known to me?

Septimus Not a Roman.

Thomasina Mr Chater?

Septimus Your translation is quite like Chater.

Septimus picks up his pen and continues with his own writing

Thomasina I know who it is, it is your friend Byron.

Septimus Lord Byron, if you please.

Thomasina Mama is in love with Lord Byron.

Septimus (*absorbed*) Yes. Nonsense.

Thomasina It is not nonsense. I saw them together in the gazebo.

Septimus's pen stops moving, he raises his eyes to her at last

Lord Byron was reading to her from his satire, and Mama was laughing, with her head in her best position.

Septimus She did not understand the satire, and was showing politeness to a guest.

Thomasina She is vexed with Papa for his determination to alter the park, but that alone cannot account for her politeness to a guest. She came downstairs hours before her custom. Lord Byron was amusing at breakfast. He paid you a tribute, Septimus.

Septimus Did he?

Thomasina He said you were a witty fellow, and he had almost by heart an article you wrote about — well, I forget what, but it concerned a book called "The Maid of Turkey" and how you would not give it to your dog for dinner.

Septimus Ah. Mr Chater was at breakfast, of course.

Thomasina He was, not like certain lazybones.

Septimus He does not have Latin to set and mathematics to correct. (*He takes Thomasina's lesson book from underneath Plautus and tosses it down the table to her*)

Thomasina Correct? What was incorrect in it? (*She looks into the book*)

Alpha minus? Pooh! What is the minus for?

Septimus For doing more than was asked.

Thomasina You did not like my discovery?

Septimus A fancy is not a discovery.

Thomasina A gibe is not a rebuttal.

Septimus finishes what he is writing. He folds the pages into a letter. He has sealing wax and the means to melt it. He seals the letter and writes on the cover. Meanwhile:

You are churlish with me because Mama is paying attention to your friend. Well, let them elope, they cannot turn back the advancement of knowledge. I think it is an excellent discovery. Each week I plot your equations dot for dot, x s against y s in all manner of algebraical relation, and every week they draw themselves as commonplace geometry, as if the world of forms were nothing but arcs and angles. God's truth, Septimus, if there is an equation for a curve like a bell, there must be an equation for one like a bluebell, and if a bluebell, why not a rose? Do we believe nature is written in numbers?

Septimus We do.

Thomasina Then why do your equations only describe the shapes of manufacture?

Septimus I do not know.

Thomasina Armed thus, God could only make a cabinet.

Septimus He has mastery of equations which lead into infinities where we cannot follow.

Thomasina What a faint-heart! We must work outward from the middle of the maze. We will start with something simple. (*She picks up the apple leaf*) I will plot this leaf and deduce its equation. You will be famous for being my tutor when Lord Byron is dead and forgotten.

Septimus completes the business with his letter. He puts the letter in his pocket

Septimus (*firmly*) Back to Cleopatra.

Thomasina Is it Cleopatra? — I hate Cleopatra!

Septimus You hate her? Why?

Thomasina Everything is turned to love with her. New love, absent love, lost love — I never knew a heroine that makes such noodles of our sex. It only needs a Roman general to drop anchor outside the window and away goes the empire like a christening mug into a pawn shop. If Queen Elizabeth had been a Ptolemy history would have been quite different — we would be admiring the pyramids of Rome and the great Sphinx of Verona.

Septimus God save us.

Thomasina But instead, the Egyptian noodle made carnal embrace with the enemy who burned the great library of Alexandria without so much as a fine for all that is overdue. Oh, Septimus! — can you bear it? All the lost plays of the Athenians! Two hundred at least by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides — thousands of poems — Aristotle's own library brought to Egypt by the noodle's ancestors! How can we sleep for grief?

Septimus By counting our stock. Seven plays from Aeschylus, seven from Sophocles, *nineteen* from Euripides, my lady! You should no more grieve for the rest than for a buckle lost from your first shoe, or for your lesson book which will be lost when you are old. 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. You do not suppose, my lady, that if all of Archimedes had been hiding in the great library of Alexandria, we would be at a loss for a corkscrew? I have no doubt that the improved steam-driven heat-engine which puts Mr Noakes into an ecstasy that he and it and the modern age should all coincide, was described on papyrus. Steam and brass were not invented in Glasgow. Now, where are we? Let me see if I can attempt a free translation for you. At Harrow I was better at this than Lord Byron. (*He takes the piece of paper from her and scrutinizes it, testing one or two Latin phrases speculatively before committing himself*) Yes — "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne ... burned on the water ... the — something — the poop was beaten gold, purple the sails, and — what's this? — oh yes, — so perfumed that" —

Thomasina (*catching on and furious*) Cheat!

Septimus (*imperturbably*) — "the winds were lovesick with them" —

Thomasina Cheat!

Septimus — "the oars were silver which to the tune of flutes kept stroke" —

Thomasina (*jumping to her feet*) Cheat! Cheat! Cheat!

Septimus (*as though it were too easy to make the effort worthwhile*) — "and made the water which they beat to follow faster, as *amorous* of their strokes. For her own person, it beggared all description — she did lie in her pavilion" —

Thomasina, in tears of rage, is hurrying out through the garden

Thomasina I hope you die!

She nearly bumps into Brice who is entering. She runs out of sight. Brice enters

Brice Good God, man, what have you told her?

Septimus Told her? Told her what?

Brice Hodge!

Septimus looks outside the door, slightly contrite about Thomasina, and sees that Chater is skulking out of view

Septimus Chater! My dear fellow! Don't hang back — come in, sir!

Chater allows himself to be drawn sheepishly into the room

Brice stands on his dignity

Chater Captain Brice does me the honour — I mean to say, sir, whatever you have to say to me, sir, address yourself to Captain Brice.

Septimus How unusual. (*To Brice*) Your wife did not appear yesterday, sir. I trust she is not sick?

Brice My wife? I have no wife. What the devil do you mean, sir?

Septimus makes no reply, but hesitates, puzzled. He turns back to Chater

Septimus I do not understand the scheme, Chater. Whom do I address when I want to speak to Captain Brice?

Brice Oh, slippery, Hodge — slippery!

Septimus (*to Chater*) By the way, Chater — (*he interrupts himself and turns back to Brice, and continues as before*) — by the way, Chater, I have amazing news to tell you. Someone has taken to writing wild and whirling letters in your name. I received one not half an hour ago.

Brice (*angrily*) Mr Hodge! Look to your honour, sir! If you cannot attend to me without this foolery, nominate your second who might settle the

business as between gentlemen. No doubt your friend Byron would do you the service.

At some point during the following, a badly-played piano is heard from the next room

Septimus (*giving up the game*) Oh yes, he would do me the service. (*His mood changes, he turns to Chater*) Sir — I repent your injury. You are an honest fellow with no more malice in you than poetry.

Chater (*happily*) Ah well! — that is more like the thing! (*Overtaken by doubt*) Is he apologizing?

Brice There is still the injury to his conjugal property, Mrs Chater's —

Chater Tush, sir!

Brice As you will — her tush. Nevertheless —

But they are interrupted by Lady Croom, also entering from the garden

Lady Croom Oh — excellently found! Mr Chater, this will please you very much. Lord Byron begs a copy of your new book. He dies to read it and intends to include your name in the second edition of his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

Chater *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, your ladyship, is a doggerel aimed at Lord Byron's seniors and betters. If he intends to include me, he intends to insult me.

Lady Croom Well, of course he does, Mr Chater. Would you rather be thought not worth insulting? You should be proud to be in the company of Rogers and Moore and Wordsworth — ah! "The Couch of Eros". (*For she has spotted Septimus's copy of the book on the table*)

Septimus That is my copy, madam.

Lady Croom So much the better — what are a friend's books for if not to be borrowed?

Note: "The Couch of Eros" now contains the three letters, and it must do so without advertising the fact. This is why the volume has been described as a substantial quarto

Mr Hodge, you must speak to your friend and put him out of his affectation of pretending to quit us. I will not have it. He says he is determined on the Malta packet sailing out of Falmouth! His head is full of Lisbon and Lesbos, and his portmanteau of pistols, and I have told him it is not to be thought of. The whole of Europe is in a Napoleonic fit; all the best ruins will be closed, the roads entirely occupied with the movement of armies, the lodgings turned to billets and the fashion for godless republicanism not yet

arrived at its natural reversion. He says his aim is poetry. One does not aim at poetry with pistols. At poets, perhaps. I charge you to take command of his pistols, Mr Hodge! He is not safe with them. His lameness, he confessed to me, is entirely the result of his habit from boyhood of shooting himself in the foot. What is that *noise*?

The noise is the badly played piano in the next room

Septimus The new Broadwood pianoforte, madam. Our music lessons are at an early stage.

Lady Croom Well, restrict your lessons to the *piano* side of the instrument and let her loose on the *forte* when she has learned something.

Lady Croom, holding the book, sails out back into the garden

Brice Now! If that was not God speaking through Lady Croom, he never spoke through anyone!

Chater (*awed*) Take command of Lord Byron's pistols!

Brice You hear Mr Chater, sir — how will you answer him?

Septimus has been watching Lady Croom's progress up the garden. He turns back

Septimus By killing him. I am tired of him.

Chater (*startled*) Eh?

Brice (*pleased*) Ah!

Septimus Oh, damn your soul, Chater! Ovid would have stayed a lawyer and Virgil a farmer if they had known the bathos to which love would descend in your sportive satyrs and noodle nymphs! I am at your service with a half-ounce ball in your brain. May it satisfy you — behind the boat-house at daybreak — shall we say five o'clock? My compliments to Mrs Chater — have no fear for her, she will not want for protection while Captain Brice has a guinea in his pocket, he told her so himself.

Brice You lie, sir!

Septimus No, sir. Mrs Chater, perhaps.

Brice You lie, or you will answer to me!

Septimus (*wearily*) Oh, very well — I can fit you in at five minutes after five. And then it's off to the Malta packet out of Falmouth. You two will be dead, my penurious schoolfriend will remain to tutor Lady Thomasina, and I trust everybody, including Lady Croom, will be satisfied!

Septimus slams the door behind him

Brice He is all bluster and bladder. Rest assured, Chater, I will let the air out of him.

Brice leaves by the other door

Chater's assurance lasts only a moment. When he spots the flaw ...

Chater Oh! But ...

He hurries out after Brice

SCENE 4

Hannah and Valentine

She is reading aloud. He is listening. Lightning, the tortoise, is on the table and is not readily distinguishable from Plautus. In front of Valentine is Septimus's portfolio, recognizably so but naturally somewhat faded. It is open. Principally associated with the portfolio (although it may contain sheets of blank paper also) are three items: a slim maths primer; a sheet of drawing paper on which there is a scrawled diagram and some mathematical notations, arrow marks, etc.; and Thomasina's mathematics lesson book, i.e. the one she writes in, which Valentine is leafing through as he listens to Hannah reading from the primer

Hannah "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."

Pause. She hands Valentine the text book. Valentine looks at what she has been reading. From the next room, a piano is heard, beginning to play quietly, unintrusively, improvisationally

Does it mean anything?

Valentine I don't know. I don't know what it means, except mathematically.

Hannah I meant mathematically.

Valentine (now with the lesson book again) It's an iterated algorithm.

Hannah What's that?

Valentine Well, it's ... Jesus ... it's an algorithm that's been ... iterated. How'm I supposed to ...? (*He makes an effort*) The left-hand pages are graphs of what the numbers are doing on the right-hand pages. But all on different scales. Each graph is a small section of the previous one, blown up. Like you'd blow up a detail of a photograph, and then a detail of the detail, and so on, forever. Or in her case, till she ran out of pages.

Hannah Is it difficult?

Valentine The maths isn't difficult. It's what you did at school. You have some x -and- y equation. Any value for x gives you a value for y . So you put a dot where it's right for both x and y . Then you take the next value for x which gives you another value for y , and when you've done that a few times you join up the dots and that's your graph of whatever the equation is.

Hannah And is that what she's doing?

Valentine No. Not exactly. Not at all. What she's doing is, every time she works out a value for y , she's using *that* as her next value for x . And so on. Like a feedback. She's feeding the solution back into the equation, and then solving it again. Iteration, you see.

Hannah And that's surprising, is it?

Valentine Well, it is a bit. It's the technique I'm using on my grouse numbers, and it hasn't been around for much longer than, well, call it twenty years.

Pause

Hannah Why would she be doing it?

Valentine I have no idea.

Pause

I thought you were doing the hermit.

Hannah I am. I still am. But Bernard, damn him ... Thomasina's tutor turns out to have interesting connections. Bernard is going through the library like a bloodhound. The portfolio was in a cupboard.

Valentine There's a lot of stuff around. Gus loves going through it. No old masters or anything ...

Hannah The maths primer she was using belonged to him — the tutor; he wrote his name in it.

Valentine (*reading*) "Septimus Hodge."

Hannah Why were these things saved, do you think?

Valentine Why should there be a reason?

Hannah And the diagram, what's it of?

Valentine How would I know?

Hannah Why are you cross?

Valentine I'm not cross. (*Pause*) When your Thomasina was doing maths it had been the same maths for a couple of thousand years. Classical. And for a century after Thomasina. Then maths left the real world behind, just like modern art, really. Nature was classical, maths was suddenly Picassos. But now nature is having the last laugh. The freaky stuff is turning out to be the mathematics of the natural world.

Hannah This feedback thing?

Valentine For example.

Hannah Well, could Thomasina have —

Valentine (*snapping*) No, of course she bloody couldn't!

Hannah All right, you're not cross. What did you mean you were doing the same thing she was doing? (*Pause*) What are you doing?

Valentine Actually I'm doing it from the other end. She started with an equation and turned it into a graph. I've got a graph — real data — and I'm trying to find the equation which would give you the graph if you used it the way she's used hers. Iterated it.

Hannah What for?

Valentine It's how you look at population changes in biology. Goldfish in a pond, say. This year there are x goldfish. Next year there'll be y goldfish. Some get born, some get eaten by herons, whatever. Nature manipulates the x and turns it into y . Then y goldfish is your starting population for the following year. Just like Thomasina. Your value for y becomes your next value for x . The question is: what is being done to x ? What is the manipulation? Whatever it is, it can be written down as mathematics. It's called an algorithm.

Hannah It can't be the same every year.

Valentine The details change, you can't keep tabs on everything, it's not nature in a box. But it isn't necessary to know the details. When they are all put together, it turns out the population is obeying a mathematical rule.

Hannah The goldfish are?

Valentine Yes. No. The numbers. It's not about the behaviour of fish. It's about the behaviour of numbers. This thing works for any phenomenon which eats its own numbers — measles epidemics, rainfall averages, cotton prices, it's a natural phenomenon in itself. Spooky.

Hannah Does it work for grouse?

Valentine I don't know yet. I mean, it does undoubtedly, but it's hard to show. There's more noise with grouse.

Hannah Noise?

Valentine Distortions. Interference. Real data is messy. There's a thousand acres of moorland that had grouse on it, always did till about 1930. But nobody counted the grouse. They shot them. So you count the grouse they shot. But burning the heather interferes, it improves the food supply. A

good year for foxes interferes the other way, they eat the chicks. And then there's the weather. It's all very, very noisy out there. Very hard to spot the tune. Like a piano in the next room, it's playing your song, but unfortunately it's out of whack, some of the strings are missing, and the pianist is tone deaf and drunk — I mean, the *noise*! Impossible!

Hannah What do you do?

Valentine You start guessing what the tune might be. You try to pick it out of the noise. You try this, you try that, you start to get something — it's half-baked but you start putting in notes which are missing or not quite the right notes ... and bit by bit ... (*He starts to dumdi-da to the tune of "Happy Birthday"*) Dumdi-dum-dum, dear Val-en-tine, dumdi-dum-dum to you — the lost algorithm!

Hannah (*soberly*) Yes, I see. And then what?

Valentine I publish.

Hannah Of course. Sorry. Jolly good.

Valentine That's the theory. Grouse are bastards compared to goldfish.

Hannah Why did you choose them?

Valentine The game books. My true inheritance. Two hundred years of real data on a plate.

Hannah Somebody wrote down everything that's shot?

Valentine Well, that's what a game book is. I'm only using from 1870, when butts and beaters came in.

Hannah You mean the game books go back to Thomasina's time?

Valentine Oh yes. Further. (*And then getting ahead of her thought*) No — really. I promise you. I *promise* you. Not a schoolgirl living in a country house in Derbyshire in eighteen-something!

Hannah Well, what was she doing?

Valentine She was just playing with the numbers. The truth is, she wasn't doing anything.

Hannah She must have been doing something.

Valentine Doodling. Nothing she understood.

Hannah A monkey at a typewriter?

Valentine Yes. Well, a piano.

Hannah picks up the algebra book and reads from it

Hannah "... a method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone." This feedback, is it a way of making pictures of forms in nature? Just tell me if it is or it isn't.

Valentine (*irritated*) To *me* it is. Pictures of turbulence — growth — change — creation — it's not a way of drawing an elephant, for God's sake!

Hannah I'm sorry. (*She picks up an apple leaf from the table. She is timid about pushing the point*) So you couldn't make a picture of this leaf by iterating a whatsit?

Valentine (*off-hand*) Oh yes, you could do that.

Hannah (*furiously*) Well, tell me! Honestly, I could kill you!

Valentine If you knew the algorithm and fed it back say ten thousand times, each time there'd be a dot somewhere on the screen. You'd never know where to expect the next dot. But gradually you'd start to see this shape, because every dot will be inside the shape of this leaf. It wouldn't *be* a leaf, it would be a mathematical object. But yes. The unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is. It's how nature creates itself, on every scale, the snowflake and the snowstorm. 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 clean out the whole problem between them. A theory of everything. But they only explained the very big and the very small. The universe, the elementary particles. The ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about — clouds — daffodils — waterfalls — and what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in — these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks. We're better at predicting events at the edge of the galaxy or inside the nucleus of an atom than whether it'll rain on auntie's garden party three Sundays from now. Because the problem turns out to be different. We can't even predict the next drip from a dripping tap when it gets irregular. Each drip sets up the conditions for the next, the smallest variation blows prediction apart, and the weather is unpredictable the same way, will always be unpredictable. When you push the numbers through the computer you can see it on the screen. The future is disorder. A door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong.

Pause

Hannah The weather is fairly predictable in the Sahara.

Valentine The scale is different but the graph goes up and down the same way. Six thousand years in the Sahara looks like six months in Manchester, I bet you.

Hannah How much?

Valentine Everything you have to lose.

Hannah (*after a pause*) No.

Valentine Quite right. That's why there was corn in Egypt.

Hiatus. The piano is heard again

Hannah What is he playing?

Valentine I don't know. He makes it up.

Hannah Chloë called him "genius".

Valentine It's what my mother calls him — only *she* means it. Last year some expert had her digging in the wrong place for months to find something or other — the foundations of Capability Brown's boat-house — and Gus put her right first go.

Hannah Did he ever speak?

Valentine Oh yes. Until he was five. You've never asked about him. You get high marks here for good breeding.

Hannah Yes, I know. I've always been given credit for my unconcern.

Bernard enters in high excitement and triumph. He is carrying a book

Bernard *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. A pencilled superscription.

Listen and kiss my cycle-clips! (*Reading from the book*)

"O harbinger of Sleep, who missed the press

And hoped his drone might thus escape redress!

The wretched Chater, bard of Eros' Couch,

For his narcotic let my pencil vouch!"

You see, you *have* to turn over every page.

Hannah Is it his handwriting?

Bernard Oh, come on.

Hannah Obviously not.

Bernard Christ, what do you want?

Hannah Proof.

Valentine Quite right. Who are you talking about?

Bernard Proof? *Proof?* You'd have to be there, you silly bitch!

Valentine (*mildly*) I say, you're speaking of my fiancée.

Hannah Especially when I have a present for you. Guess what I found. (*Producing the present for Bernard*) Lady Croom writing from London to her husband. Her brother, Captain Brice, married a Mrs Chater. In other words, one might assume, a widow.

Bernard looks at the letter

Bernard I *said* he was dead. What year? 1810! Oh my God, 1810! Well *done*, Hannah! Are you going to tell me it's a different Mrs Chater?

Hannah Oh no. It's her all right. Note her Christian name.

Bernard Charity, Charity ... "Deny what cannot be proven for Charity's sake!"

Hannah Don't kiss me!

Valentine She won't let anyone kiss her.

Bernard You see! They wrote — they scribbled — they put it on paper. It was their employment. Their diversion. Paper is what they had. And there'll be more. There is always more. We can find it!

Hannah Such passion. First Valentine, now you. It's moving.

Bernard The aristocratic friend of the tutor — under the same roof as the poor sod whose book he savaged — the first thing he does is seduce Chater's wife. All is discovered. There is a duel. Chater dead, Byron fled! P.S. guess what?, the widow married her ladyship's brother! Do you honestly think no-one wrote a word? How could they not! It dropped from sight but we will write it again!

Hannah You can, Bernard. I'm not going to take any credit, I haven't done anything.

The same thought has clearly occurred to Bernard. He becomes instantly po-faced

Bernard Well, that's — very fair — generous —

Hannah Prudent. Chater could have died of anything, anywhere.

The po-face is forgotten

Bernard But he fought a duel with Byron!

Hannah You haven't established it was fought. You haven't established it was Byron. For God's sake, Bernard, you haven't established Byron was even here!

Bernard I'll tell you your problem. No guts.

Hannah Really?

Bernard By which I mean a visceral belief in yourself. Gut instinct. The part of you which doesn't reason. The certainty for which there is no back-reference. Because time is reversed. Tock, tick goes the universe and then recovers itself, but it was enough, you were in there and you bloody *know*.

Valentine Are you talking about Lord Byron, the poet?

Bernard No, you fucking idiot, we're talking about Lord Byron the chartered accountant.

Valentine (*unoffended*) Oh well, *he* was here all right, the poet.

Silence

Hannah How do you know?

Valentine He's in the game book. I think he shot a hare. I read through the whole lot once when I had mumps — some quite interesting people —

Hannah Where's the book?

Valentine It's not one I'm using — too early, of course —

Hannah 1809.

Valentine They've always been in the commode. Ask Chloë.

Hannah looks to Bernard. Bernard has been silent because he has been incapable of speech. He seems to have gone into a trance, in which only his mouth tries to work. Hannah steps over to him and gives him a demure kiss on the cheek. It works

Bernard lurches out into the garden

Bernard (*off, croaking*) Chloë ... Chloë!

Valentine My mother's lent him her bicycle. Lending one's bicycle is a form of safe sex, possibly the safest there is. My mother is in a flutter about Bernard, and he's no fool. He gave her a first edition of Horace Walpole, and now she's lent him her bicycle.

He gathers up the three items [the primer, the lesson book and the diagram] and puts them into the portfolio

Can I keep these for a while?

Hannah Yes, of course.

The piano stops

Gus enters hesitantly from the music room

Valentine (*to Gus*) Yes, finished ... coming now. (*To Hannah*) I'm trying to work out the diagram.

Gus nods and smiles, at Hannah too, but she is preoccupied

Hannah What I don't understand is ... why nobody did this feedback thing before — it's not like relativity, you don't have to be Einstein.

Valentine You couldn't see to look before. The electronic calculator was what the telescope was for Galileo.

Hannah Calculator?

Valentine There wasn't enough time before. There weren't enough *pencils*! (*He flourishes Thomasina's lesson book*) This took her I don't know how many days and she hasn't scratched the paintwork. Now she'd only have to press a button, the same button over and over. Iteration. A few minutes. And what I've done in a couple of months, with only a *pencil* the

calculations would take me the rest of my life to do again — thousands of pages — tens of thousands! And so boring!

Hannah Do you mean —?

She stops because Gus is plucking Valentine's sleeve

Do you mean —?

Valentine All right, Gus, I'm coming.

Hannah Do you mean that was the only problem? Enough time? And paper? and the boredom?

Valentine We're going to get out the dressing-up box.

Hannah (driven to raising her voice) Val! Is that what you're saying?

Valentine (surprised by her, mildly) No, I'm saying you'd have to have a reason for doing it.

Gus runs out of the room, upset

(Apologetically) He hates people shouting.

Hannah I'm sorry.

Valentine starts to follow Gus

But anything else?

Valentine Well, the other thing is, you'd have to be insane.

Valentine leaves

Hannah stays, thoughtful. After a moment, she turns to the table and picks up the Cornhill Magazine. She looks into it briefly, then closes it, and leaves the room, taking the magazine with her

The empty room

The Lights change to early morning. From a long way off, there is a pistol shot. A moment later there is the cry of dozens of crows disturbed from the unseen trees

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

Bernard is pacing around, reading aloud from a handful of typed sheets. Valentine, Chloë and Gus are his audience. Gus sits somewhat apart, perhaps less attentive. Valentine has his tortoise and is eating a sandwich from which he extracts shreds of lettuce to offer the tortoise

Bernard "Did it happen? Could it happen? Undoubtedly it could. Only three years earlier the Irish poet Tom Moore appeared on the field of combat to avenge a review by Jeffrey of the *Edinburgh*. These affairs were seldom fatal and sometimes farcical but, potentially, the duellist stood in respect to the law no differently from a murderer. As for the murderess, a minor poet like Ezra Chater could go to his death in a Derbyshire glade as unmissed and unremembered as his contemporary and namesake, the minor botanist who died in the forests of the West Indies, lost to history like the monkey that bit him. On April 16th 1809, a few days after he left Sidley Park, Byron wrote to his solicitor John Hanson: 'If the consequences of my leaving England were ten times as ruinous as you describe, I have no alternative; there are circumstances which render it absolutely indispensable, and quit the country I must immediately.' To which, the editor's note in the *Collected Letters* reads as follows: 'What Byron's urgent reasons for leaving England were at this time has never been revealed.' The letter was written from the family seat, Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire. A long day's ride to the north-west lay Sidley Park, the estate of the Coverlys — a far grander family, raised by Charles II to the Earldom of Croom ..."

Hannah enters briskly, a piece of paper in her hand

Hannah Bernard ...! Val ...

Bernard Do you mind?

Hannah puts the piece of paper down in front of Valentine

Chloë (angrily) Hannah!

Hannah What?

Chloë She's so rude!

Hannah (taken aback) What? Am I?

Valentine Bernard's reading us his lecture.

Hannah Yes, I know. (*Then recollecting herself*) Yes — yes — that was rude. I'm sorry, Bernard.

Valentine (*with the piece of paper*) What is this?

Hannah (*to Bernard*) Spot on — the India Office Library. (*To Valentine*) Peacock's letter in holograph, I got a copy sent —

Chloë *Hannah!* Shut up!

Hannah (*sitting down*) Yes, sorry.

Bernard It's all right, I'll read it to myself.

Chloë *No.*

Hannah reaches for the Peacock letter and takes it back

Hannah Go on, Bernard. Have I missed anything? Sorry.

Bernard stares at her balefully but then continues to read

Bernard "The Byrons of Newstead in 1809 comprised an eccentric widow and her undistinguished son, the 'lame brat', who until the age of ten when he came into the title, had been carted about the country from lodging to lodging by his vulgar hectoring monster of a mother" —

Hannah's hand has gone up

— overruled — "and who four months past his twenty-first birthday was master of nothing but his debts and his genius. Between the Byrons and the Coverlys there was no social equality and none to be expected. The connection, undisclosed to posterity until now, was with Septimus Hodge, Byron's friend at Harrow and Trinity College" —

Hannah's hand goes up again

— sustained — (*He makes an instant correction with a silver pencil*) "Byron's contemporary at Harrow and Trinity College, and now tutor in residence to the Croom daughter, Thomasina Coverly. Byron's letters tell us where he was on April 8th and on April 12th. He was at Newstead. But on the 10th he was at Sidley Park, as attested by the game-book preserved there: 'April 10th 1809 — forenoon. High cloud, dry, and sun between times, wind southeasterly. Self — Augustus — Lord Byron. Fourteen pigeon, one hare (Lord B.).' But as we know now, the drama of life and death at Sidley Park was not about pigeons but about sex and literature."

Valentine Unless you were the pigeon.

Bernard I don't have to do this. I'm paying you a compliment.

Chloë Ignore him, Bernard — go on, get to the duel.

Bernard Hannah's not even paying attention.

Hannah Yes I am, it's all going in. I often work with the radio on.

Bernard Oh thanks!

Hannah Is there much more?

Chloë *Hannah!*

Hannah No, it's fascinating. I just wondered how much more there was. I need to ask Valentine about this (*letter*) — sorry, Bernard, go on, this will keep.

Valentine Yes — sorry, Bernard.

Chloë Please, Bernard!

Bernard Where was I?

Valentine Pigeons.

Chloë Sex.

Hannah Literature.

Bernard Life and death. Right. "Nothing could be more eloquent of that than the three documents I have quoted: the terse demand to settle a matter in private; the desperate scribble of 'my husband has sent for pistols'; and on April 11th, the gauntlet thrown down by the aggrieved and cuckolded author Ezra Chater. The covers have not survived. What is certain is that all three letters were in Byron's possession when his books were sold in 1816 — preserved in the pages of 'The Couch of Eros' which seven years earlier at Sidley Park Byron had borrowed from Septimus Hodge."

Hannah Borrowed?

Bernard I will be taking questions at the end. Constructive comments will be welcome. Which is indeed my reason for trying out in the provinces before my London opening under the auspices of the Byron Society prior to publication. By the way, Valentine, do you want a credit? — "the game book recently discovered by ...?"

Valentine It was never lost, Bernard.

Bernard "As recently pointed out by." I don't normally like giving credit where it's due, but with scholarly articles as with divorce, there is a certain cachet in citing a member of the aristocracy. I'll pop it in ad lib for the lecture, and give you a mention in the press release. How's that?

Valentine Very kind.

Hannah Press release? What happened to the *Journal of English Studies*?

Bernard That comes later with the apparatus, and in the recognized tone — very dry, very modest, absolutely gloat-free, and yet unmistakably "Eat your heart out, you dozy bastards". But first, it's "Media Don, book early to avoid disappointment". Where was I?

Valentine Game book.

Chloë Eros.

Hannah Borrowed.

Bernard Right. — borrowed from Septimus Hodge. Is it conceivable that the letters were already in the book when Byron borrowed it?"

Valentine Yes.

Chloë Shut up, Val.

Valentine Well, it's conceivable.

Bernard "Is it *likely* that Hodge would have lent Byron the book without first removing the three private letters?"

Valentine Look, sorry — I only meant, Byron could have borrowed the book without asking.

Hannah That's true.

Bernard Then why wouldn't Hodge get them back?

Hannah I don't know, I wasn't there.

Bernard That's right, you bloody weren't.

Chloë Go on, Bernard.

Bernard "It is the third document, the challenge itself, that convinces.

Chater 'as a man and a poet', points the finger at his 'slanderer in the press'.

Neither as a man nor a poet did Ezra Chater cut such a figure as to be habitually slandered or even mentioned in the press. It is surely indisputable that the slander was the review of 'The Maid of Turkey' in the *Piccadilly Recreation*. Did Septimus Hodge have any connection with the London periodicals? No. Did Byron? Yes! He had reviewed Wordsworth two years earlier, he was to review Spencer two years later. And do we have any clue as to Byron's opinion of Chater the poet? Yes! Who but Byron could have written the four lines pencilled into Lady Croom's copy of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*" —

Hannah Almost anybody.

Bernard Darling —

Hannah Don't call me darling.

Bernard Dickhead, then, is it likely that the man Chater calls his friend Septimus Hodge is the same man who screwed his wife and kicked the shit out of his last book?

Hannah Put it like that, almost certain.

Chloë (*earnestly*) You've been deeply wounded in the past, haven't you, Hannah?

Hannah Nothing compared to listening to this. Why is there nothing in Byron's letters about the *Piccadilly* reviews?

Bernard Exactly. Because he killed the author.

Hannah But the first one, "The Maid of Turkey", was the year before. Was he clairvoyant?

Chloë Letters get lost.

Bernard Thank you! Exactly! There is a platonic letter which confirms everything — lost but ineradicable, like radio voices rippling through the universe for all eternity. "My dear Hodge — here I am in Albania and

you're the only person in the whole world who knows why. Poor C! I never wished him any harm — except in the *Piccadilly*, of course — it was the woman who bade me eat, dear Hodge! — what a tragic business, but thank God it ended well for poetry. Yours ever, B. — PS. Burn this."

Valentine How did Chater find out the reviewer was Byron?

Bernard (*irritated*) I don't know, I wasn't there, was I? (*Pause. To Hannah*) You wish to say something?

Hannah *Moi?*

Chloë I know. Byron told Mrs Chater in bed. Next day he dumped her so she grassed on him, and pleaded date rape.

Bernard (*fastidiously*) Date rape? What do you mean, date rape?

Hannah April the tenth.

Bernard cracks. Everything becomes loud and overlapped as Bernard threatens to walk out and is cajoled into continuing

Bernard Right! — forget it!

Hannah Sorry —

Bernard No — I've had nothing but sarcasm and childish interruptions —

Valentine What did I do?

Bernard No credit for probably the most sensational literary discovery of the century —

Chloë I think you're jolly unfair — they're jealous, Bernard —

Hannah I won't say another word —

Valentine Yes, go on, Bernard — we promise.

Bernard (*finally*) Well, only if you stop *feeding tortoises*!

Valentine Well, it's his lunch time.

Bernard And on condition that I am afforded the common courtesy of a scholar among scholars —

Hannah Absolutely mum till you're finished —

Bernard After which, any comments are to be couched in terms of accepted academic —

Hannah Dignity — you're right, Bernard.

Bernard — respect.

Hannah Respect. Absolutely. The language of scholars. Count on it.

Having made a great show of putting his pages away, Bernard reassembles them and finds his place, glancing suspiciously at the other three for signs of levity

Bernard Last paragraph. "Without question, Ezra Chater issued a challenge to *somebody*. If a duel was fought in the dawn mist of Sidley park in April 1809, his opponent, on the evidence, was a critic with a gift for ridicule and

a taste for seduction. Do we need to look far? Without question, Mrs Chater was a widow by 1810. If we seek the occasion of Ezra Chater's early and unrecorded death, do we need to look far? Without question, Lord Byron, in the very season of his emergence as a literary figure, quit the country in a cloud of panic and mystery, and stayed abroad for two years at a time when Continental travel was unusual and dangerous. If we seek his reason — *do we need to look far?*"

No mean performer, he is pleased with the effect of his peroration. There is a significant silence

Hannah Bollocks.

Chloë Well, I think it's true.

Hannah You've left out everything which doesn't fit. Byron had been banging on for months about leaving England — there's a letter in February —

Bernard But he didn't go, did he?

Hannah And then he didn't sail until the beginning of July!

Bernard Everything moved more slowly then. Time was different. He was two weeks in Falmouth waiting for wind or something —

Hannah Bernard, I don't know why I'm bothering — you're arrogant, greedy and reckless. You've gone from a glint in your eye to a sure thing in a hop, skip and a jump. You deserve what you get and I think you're mad. But I can't help myself, you're like some exasperating child pedalling its tricycle towards the edge of a cliff, and I have to do something. So listen to me. If Byron killed Chater in a duel I'm Marie of Romania. You'll end up with so much *fame* you won't leave the house without a paper bag over your head.

Valentine Actually, Bernard, as a scientist, your theory is incomplete.

Bernard But I'm not a scientist.

Valentine (*patiently*) No, *as a scientist* —

Bernard (*beginning to shout*) I have yet to hear a proper argument.

Hannah Nobody would kill a man and then pan his book. I mean, not in that order. So he must have borrowed the book, written the review, *posted it*, seduced Mrs Chater, fought a duel and departed, all in the space of two or three days. Who would do that?

Bernard Byron.

Hannah It's hopeless.

Bernard You've never understood him, as you've shown in your novelette.

Hannah In my what?

Bernard Oh, sorry — did you think it was a work of historical revisionism? Byron the spoilt child promoted beyond his gifts by the spirit of the age! And Caroline the closet intellectual shafted by a male society!

Valentine I read that somewhere —

Hannah It's his review.

Bernard And bloody well said, too!

Things are turning a little ugly and Bernard seems in a mood to push them that way

You got them backwards, darling. Caroline was Romantic waffle on wheels with no talent, and Byron was an eighteenth-century Rationalist touched by genius. And he killed Chater.

Hannah (*after a pause*) If it's not too late to change my mind, I'd like you to go ahead.

Bernard I intend to. Look to the mote in your own eye! — you even had the wrong bloke on the dust-jacket!

Hannah Dust-jacket?

Valentine What about my computer model? Aren't you going to mention it?

Bernard It's inconclusive.

Valentine (*to Hannah*) The *Piccadilly* reviews aren't a very good fit with Byron's other reviews, you see.

Hannah (*to Bernard*) What do you mean, the wrong bloke?

Bernard (*ignoring her*) The other reviews aren't a very good fit for each other, are they?

Valentine No, but differently. The parameters —

Bernard (*jeering*) Parameters! You can't stick Byron's head in your laptop! Genius isn't like your average grouse.

Valentine (*casually*) Well, it's all trivial anyway.

Bernard What is?

Valentine Who wrote what when ...

Bernard Trivial?

Valentine Personalities.

Bernard I'm sorry — did you say trivial?

Valentine It's a technical term.

Bernard Not where I come from, it isn't.

Valentine The questions you're asking don't matter, you see. It's like arguing who got there first with the calculus. The English say Newton, the Germans say Leibnitz. But it doesn't *matter*. Personalities. What matters is the calculus. Scientific progress. Knowledge.

Bernard Really? Why?

Valentine Why what?

Bernard Why does scientific progress matter more than personalities?

Valentine Is he serious?

Hannah No, he's trivial. Bernard —

Valentine (*interrupting, to Bernard*) Do yourself a favour, you're on a loser.

Bernard Oh, you're going to zap me with penicillin and pesticides. Spare me that and I'll spare you the bomb and aerosols. But don't confuse progress with perfectibility. A great poet is always timely. A great philosopher is an urgent need. There's no rush for Isaac Newton. We were quite happy with Aristotle's cosmos. Personally, I preferred it. Fifty-five crystal spheres geared to God's crankshaft is my idea of a satisfying universe. I can't think of anything more trivial than the speed of light. Quarks, quasars — big bangs, black holes — who gives a shit? How did you people con us out of all that status? All that money? And why are you so pleased with yourselves?

Chloë Are you against penicillin, Bernard?

Bernard Don't feed the animals. (*Back to Valentine*) I'd push the lot of you over a cliff myself. Except the one in the wheelchair, I think I'd lose the sympathy vote before people had time to think it through.

Hannah (*loudly*) What the hell do you mean, the dust-jacket?

Bernard (*ignoring her*) If knowledge isn't self-knowledge it isn't doing much, mate. Is the universe expanding? Is it contracting? Is it standing on one leg and singing "When Father Painted the Parlour"? Leave me out. I can expand my universe without you. "She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies, and all that's best of dark and bright meet in her aspect and her eyes." There you are, he wrote it after coming home from a party. (*With offensive politeness*) What is it that you're doing with grouse, Valentine, I'd love to know?

Valentine stands up and it is suddenly apparent that he is shaking and close to tears

Valentine (*to Chloë*) He's not against penicillin, and he knows I'm not against poetry. (*To Bernard*) I've given up on the grouse.

Hannah You haven't, Valentine!

Valentine (*leaving*) I can't do it.

Hannah Why?

Valentine Too much noise. There's just too much bloody noise!

On which, Valentine leaves the room

Chloë, upset and in tears, jumps up and briefly pummels Bernard ineffectually with her fists

Chloë You bastard, Bernard!

She follows Valentine out and is followed at a run by Gus

Pause

Hannah Well, I think that's everybody. You can leave now, give Lightning a kick on your way out.

Bernard Yes, I'm sorry about that. It's no fun when it's not among pros, is it?

Hannah No.

Bernard Oh, well ... (*he begins to put his lecture sheets away in his briefcase, and is thus reminded ...*) do you want to know about your book jacket? "Lord Byron and Caroline Lamb at the Royal Academy"? Ink study by Henry Fuseli?

Hannah What about it?

Bernard It's not them.

Hannah (*exploding*) Who says!?

Bernard brings the Byron Society Journal from his briefcase

Bernard This Fuseli expert in the *Byron Society Journal*. They sent me the latest ... as a distinguished guest speaker.

Hannah But of course it's them! Everyone knows —

Bernard Popular tradition only. (*He is finding the place in the journal*) Here we are. "No earlier than 1820". He's analysed it. (*He offers it to her*) Read at your leisure.

Hannah (*sounding like Bernard jeering*) Analysed it?

Bernard Charming sketch, of course, but Byron was in Italy ...

Hannah But, Bernard — I know it's them.

Bernard How?

Hannah How? It just is. "Analysed it", my big toe!

Bernard Language!

Hannah He's wrong.

Bernard Oh, gut instinct, you mean?

Hannah (*flatly*) He's wrong.

Bernard snaps shut his briefcase

Bernard Well, it's all trivial, isn't it? Why don't you come?

Hannah Where?

Bernard With me.

Hannah To London? What for?

Bernard What for.

Hannah Oh, your lecture.

Bernard No, no, bugger that. Sex.

Hannah Oh ... No. Thanks ... (*Then, protesting*) Bernard!

Bernard You should try it. It's very underrated.

Hannah Nothing against it.

Bernard Yes, you have. You should let yourself go a bit. You might have written a better book. Or at any rate the right book.

Hannah Sex and literature. Literature and sex. Your conversation, left to itself, doesn't have many places to go. Like two marbles rolling around a pudding basin. One of them is always sex.

Bernard Ah well, yes. Men all over.

Hannah No doubt. Einstein — relativity and sex. Chippendale — sex and furniture. Galileo — "Did the earth move?" What the hell is it with you people? Chaps sometimes wanted to marry me, and I don't know a worse bargain. A available sex against not being allowed to fart in bed. What do you mean the right book?

Bernard It takes a romantic to make a heroine of Caroline Lamb. You were cut out for Byron.

Pause

Hannah So, cheerio.

Bernard Oh, I'm coming back for the dance, you know. Chloë asked me.

Hannah She meant well, but I don't dance.

Bernard No, no — I'm going with her.

Hannah Oh, I see. I don't, actually.

Bernard I'm her date. Sub rosa. Don't tell Mother.

Hannah She doesn't want her mother to know?

Bernard No — I don't want her mother to know. This is my first experience of the landed aristocracy. I tell you, I'm boggle-eyed.

Hannah Bernard! — you haven't seduced that girl?

Bernard Seduced her? Every time I turned round she was up a library ladder. In the end I gave in. That reminds me — I spotted something between her legs that made me think of you.

He instantly receives a sharp stinging slap on the face but manages to remain completely unperturbed by it. He is already producing from his pocket a small book. His voice has hardly hesitated

The Peaks Traveller and Gazetteer — James Godolphin 1832 — unillustrated, I'm afraid. (He has opened the book to a marked place) "Sidley Park in Derbyshire, property of the Earl of Croom ..."

Hannah (numbly) The world is going to hell in a handcart.

Bernard "Five hundred acres including forty of lake — the Park by Brown and Noakes has pleasing features in the horrid style — viaduct, grotto, etc. — a hermitage occupied by a lunatic since twenty years without discourse

or companion save for a pet tortoise, Plautus by name, which he suffers children to touch on request." (He holds out the book for her) A tortoise. They must be a feature.

After a moment Hannah takes the book

Hannah Thank you.

Valentine comes to the door

Valentine The station taxi is at the front ...

Bernard Yes ... thanks ... Oh — did Peacock come up trumps?

Hannah For some.

Bernard Hermit's name and cv? (He picks up and glances at the Peacock letter) "My dear Thackeray ..." God, I'm good. (He puts the letter down) Well, wish me luck — (Vaguely to Valentine) Sorry about ... you know ... (and to Hannah) and about your —

Valentine Piss off, Bernard.

Bernard Right.

Bernard goes

Hannah Don't let Bernard get to you. It's only performance art, you know. Rhetoric. They used to teach it in ancient times, like PT. It's not about being right, they had philosophy for that. Rhetoric was their chat show. Bernard's indignation is a sort of aerobics for when he gets on television.

Valentine I don't care to be rubbished by the dustbin man. (He has been looking at the letter) The what of the lunatic?

Hannah reclaims the letter and reads it for him

Hannah "The testament of the lunatic serves as a caution against French fashion ... for it was Frenchified mathematick that brought him to the melancholy certitude of a world without light or life ... as a wooden stove that must consume itself until ash and stove are as one, and heat is gone from the earth."

Valentine (amused, surprised) Huh!

Hannah "He died aged two score years and seven, hoary as Job and meagre as a cabbage-stalk, the proof of his prediction even yet unyielding to his labours for the restitution of hope through good English algebra."

Valentine That's it?

Hannah (nodding) Is there anything in it?

Valentine In what? We are all doomed? (Casually) Oh yes, sure — it's called the second law of thermodynamics.

Hannah Was it known about?

Valentine By poets and lunatics from time immemorial.

Hannah Seriously.

Valentine No.

Hannah Is it anything to do with ... you know, Thomasina's discovery?

Valentine She didn't discover anything.

Hannah Her lesson book.

Valentine No.

Hannah A coincidence, then?

Valentine What is?

Hannah (*reading*) "He died aged two score years and seven." That was in 1834. So he was born in 1787. So was the tutor. He says so in his letter to Lord Croom when he recommended himself for the job: "Date of birth — 1787." The hermit was born in the same year as Septimus Hodge.

Valentine (*after a pause*) Did Bernard bite you in the leg?

Hannah Don't you see? I thought my hermit was a perfect symbol. An idiot in the landscape. But this is better. The Age of Enlightenment banished into the Romantic wilderness! The genius of Sidley Park living on in a hermit's hut!

Valentine You don't *know* that.

Hannah Oh, but I do. I do. Somewhere there will be *something* ... if only I can find it.

SCENE 2

The room is empty

A reprise: early morning — a distant pistol shot — the sound of the crows

Jellaby enters the dawn-dark room with a lamp. He goes to the windows and looks out. He sees something. He returns to put the lamp on the table, and then opens one of the french windows and steps outside

Jellaby (*outside*) Mr Hodge!

*Septimus comes in, followed by Jellaby, who closes the garden door.
Septimus is wearing a greatcoat*

Septimus Thank you, Jellaby. I was expecting to be locked out. What time is it?

Jellaby Half-past five.

Septimus That is what I have. Well! — what a bracing experience! (*He produces two pistols from inside his coat and places them on the table*) The dawn, you know. Unexpectedly lively. Fishes, birds, frogs ... rabbits ... (*he produces a dead rabbit from inside his coat*) and very beautiful. If only it did not occur so early in the day. I have brought Lady Thomasina a rabbit. Will you take it?

Jellaby It's dead.

Septimus Yes. Lady Thomasina loves a rabbit pie.

Jellaby takes the rabbit without enthusiasm. There is a little blood on it

Jellaby You were missed, Mr Hodge.

Septimus I decided to sleep last night in the boat-house. Did I see a carriage leaving the Park?

Jellaby Captain Brice's carriage, with Mr and Mrs Chater also.

Septimus Gone?!

Jellaby Yes, sir. And Lord Byron's horse was brought round at four o'clock.

Septimus Lord Byron too!

Jellaby Yes, sir. The house has been up and hopping.

Septimus But I have his rabbit pistols! What am I to do with his rabbit pistols?

Jellaby You were looked for in your room.

Septimus By whom?

Jellaby By her ladyship.

Septimus In my room?

Jellaby I will tell her ladyship you are returned. (*He starts to leave*)

Septimus Jellaby! Did Lord Byron leave a book for me?

Jellaby A book?

Septimus He had the loan of a book from me.

Jellaby His lordship left nothing in his room, sir, not a coin.

Septimus Oh. Well, I'm sure he would have left a coin if he'd had one.

Jellaby — here is a half-guinea for you.

Jellaby Thank you very much, sir.

Septimus What has occurred?

Jellaby The servants are told nothing, sir.

Septimus Come, come, does a half-guinea buy nothing any more?

Jellaby (*sighing*) Her ladyship encountered Mrs Chater during the night.

Septimus Where?

Jellaby On the threshold of Lord Byron's room.

Septimus Ah. Which one was leaving and which entering?

Jellaby Mrs Chater was leaving Lord Byron's room.

Septimus And where was Mr Chater?

Jellaby Mr Chater and Captain Brice were drinking cherry brandy. They had the footman to keep the fire up until three o'clock. There was a loud altercation upstairs, and ——

Lady Croom enters the room

Lady Croom Well, Mr Hodge.

Septimus My lady.

Lady Croom All this to shoot a hare?

Septimus A rabbit.

She gives him one of her looks

No, indeed, a hare, though very rabbit-like ——

Jellaby is about to leave

Lady Croom My infusion.

Jellaby Yes, my lady.

He leaves

Lady Croom is carrying two letters. We have not seen them before. Each has an envelope which has been opened. She flings them on the table

Lady Croom How dare you!

Septimus I cannot be called to account for what was written in private and read without regard to propriety.

Lady Croom Addressed to me!

Septimus Left in my room, in the event of my death ——

Lady Croom Pah! — what earthly use is a love letter from beyond the grave?

Septimus As much, surely, as from this side of it. The second letter, however, was not addressed to your ladyship.

Lady Croom I have a mother's right to open a letter addressed by you to my daughter, whether in the event of your life, your death, or your imbecility. What do you mean by writing to her of rice pudding when she has just suffered the shock of violent death in our midst?

Septimus Whose death?

Lady Croom Yours, you wretch!

Septimus Yes, I see.

Lady Croom I do not know which is the madder of your ravings. One envelope full of rice pudding, the other of the most insolent familiarities regarding several parts of my body, but have no doubt which is the more intolerable to me.

Septimus Which?

Lady Croom Oh, aren't we saucy when our bags are packed! Your friend has gone before you, and I have despatched the harlot Chater and her husband — and also my brother for bringing them here. Such is the sentence, you see, for choosing unwisely in your acquaintance. Banishment. Lord Byron is a rake and a hypocrite, and the sooner he sails for the Levant the sooner he will find society congenial to his character.

Septimus It has been a night of reckoning.

Lady Croom Indeed I wish it had passed uneventfully with you and Mr Chater shooting each other with the decorum due to a civilized house. You have no secrets left, Mr Hodge. They spilled out between shrieks and oaths and tears. It is fortunate that a lifetime's devotion to the sporting gun has halved my husband's hearing to the ear he sleeps on.

Septimus I'm afraid I have no knowledge of what has occurred.

Lady Croom Your trollop was discovered in Lord Byron's room.

Septimus Ah. Discovered by Mr Chater?

Lady Croom Who else?

Septimus I am very sorry, madam, for having used your kindness to bring my unworthy friend to your notice. He will have to give an account of himself to me, you may be sure.

Before Lady Croom can respond to this threat, Jellaby enters the room with her "infusion". This is quite an elaborate affair: a pewter tray on small feet on which there is a kettle suspended over a spirit lamp. There is a cup and saucer and the silver "basket" containing the dry leaves for the tea. Jellaby places the tray on the table and is about to offer further assistance with it

Lady Croom I will do it.

Jellaby Yes, my lady. (To **Septimus**) Lord Byron left a letter for you with the valet, sir.

Septimus Thank you.

Septimus takes the letter off the tray. Jellaby prepares to leave. Lady Croom eyes the letter

Lady Croom When did he do so?

Jellaby As he was leaving, your ladyship.

Jellaby leaves

Septimus puts the letter into his pocket

Septimus Allow me.

Since she does not object, he pours a cup of tea for her. She accepts it

Lady Croom I do not know if it is proper for you to receive a letter written in my house from someone not welcome in it.

Septimus Very improper, I agree. Lord Byron's want of delicacy is a grief to his friends, among whom I no longer count myself. I will not read his letter until I have followed him through the gates.

She considers that for a moment

Lady Croom That may excuse the reading but not the writing.

Septimus Your ladyship should have lived in the Athens of Pericles! The philosophers would have fought the sculptors for your idle hour!

Lady Croom (*protesting*) Oh, really! ... (*Protesting less*) Oh really ...

Septimus has taken Byron's letter from his pocket and is now setting fire to a corner of it using the little flame from the spirit lamp

Oh ... really ...

The paper blazes in Septimus's hand and he drops it and lets it burn out on the metal tray

Septimus Now there's a thing — a letter from Lord Byron never to be read by a living soul. I will take my leave, madam, at the time of your desiring it.

Lady Croom To the Indies?

Septimus The Indies! Why?

Lady Croom To follow the Chater, of course. She did not tell you?

Septimus She did not exchange half a dozen words with me.

Lady Croom I expect she did not like to waste the time. The Chater sails with Captain Brice.

Septimus Ah. As a member of the crew?

Lady Croom No, as wife to Mr Chater, plant-gatherer to my brother's expedition.

Septimus I knew he was no poet. I did not know it was botany under the false colours.

Lady Croom He is no more a botanist. My brother paid fifty pounds to have him published, and he will pay a hundred and fifty to have Mr Chater picking flowers in the Indies for a year while the wife plays mistress of the Captain's quarters. Captain Brice has fixed his passion on Mrs Chater, and to take her on voyage he has not scrupled to deceive the Admiralty, the Linnean Society and Sir Joseph Banks, botanist to His Majesty at Kew.

Septimus Her passion is not as fixed as his.

Lady Croom It is a defect of God's humour that he directs our hearts everywhere but to those who have a right to them.

Septimus Indeed, madam. (*Pause*) But is Mr Chater deceived?

Lady Croom He insists on it, and finds the proof of his wife's virtue in his eagerness to defend it. Captain Brice is *not* deceived but cannot help himself. He would die for her.

Septimus I think, my lady, he would have Mr Chater die for her.

Lady Croom Indeed, I never knew a woman worth the duel, or the other way about. Your letter to me goes very ill with your conduct to Mrs Chater, Mr Hodge. I have had experience of being betrayed before the ink is dry, but to be betrayed before the pen is even dipped, and with the village noticeboard, what am I to think of such a performance?

Septimus My lady, I was alone with my thoughts in the gazebo, when Mrs Chater ran me to ground, and I being in such a passion, in an agony of unrelieved desire —

Lady Croom Oh ...!

Septimus — I thought in my madness that the Chater with her skirts over her head would give me the momentary illusion of the happiness to which I dared not put a face.

Pause

Lady Croom I do not know when I have received a more unusual compliment, Mr Hodge. I hope I am more than a match for Mrs Chater with her head in a bucket. Does she wear drawers?

Septimus She does.

Lady Croom Yes, I have heard that drawers are being worn now. It is unnatural for women to be got up like jockeys. I cannot approve.

She turns with a whirl of skirts and moves to leave

I know nothing of Pericles or the Athenian philosophers. I can spare them an hour, in my sitting-room when I have bathed. Seven o'clock. Bring a book.

She goes out

Septimus picks up the two letters, the ones he wrote, and starts to burn them in the flame of the spirit lamp

SCENE 3

Valentine and Chloë are at the table. Gus is in the room

Chloë is reading from two Saturday newspapers. She is wearing workaday period clothes, a Regency dress, no hat

Valentine is pecking at a portable computer. He is wearing unkempt Regency clothes, too

The clothes have evidently come from a large wicker laundry hamper, from which Gus is producing more clothes to try on himself. He finds a Regency coat and starts putting it on

The objects on the table now include two geometrical solids, pyramid and cone, about twenty inches high, of the type used in a drawing lesson; and a pot of dwarf dahlias (which do not look like modern dahlias)

Chloë "Even in Arcadia — Sex, Literature and Death at Sidley Park". Picture of Byron.

Valentine Not of Bernard?

Chloë "Byron Fought Fatal Duel, Says Don" ... Valentine, do you think I'm the first person to think of this?

Valentine No.

Chloë I haven't said yet. The future is all programmed like a computer — that's a proper theory, isn't it?

Valentine The deterministic universe, yes.

Chloë Right. Because everything including us is just a lot of atoms bouncing off each other like billiard balls.

Valentine Yes. There was someone, forget his name, 1820s, who pointed out that from Newton's laws you could predict everything to come — I mean, you'd need a computer as big as the universe but the formula would exist.

Chloë But it doesn't work, does it?

Valentine No. It turns out the maths is different.

Chloë No, it's all because of sex.

Valentine Really?

Chloë That's what I think. The universe is deterministic all right, just like Newton said, I mean it's trying to be, but the only thing going wrong is people fancying people who aren't supposed to be in that part of the plan.

Valentine Ah. The attraction that Newton left out. All the way back to the apple in the garden. Yes. *(Pause)* Yes, I think you're the first person to think of this.

Act II, Scene 3

Hannah enters, carrying a tabloid paper, and a mug of tea

Hannah Have you seen this? "Bonking Byron Shot Poet".

Chloë *(pleased)* Let's see.

Hannah gives her the paper, smiles at Gus

Valentine He's done awfully well, hasn't he? How did they all know?

Hannah Don't be ridiculous. *(To Chloë)* Your father wants it back.

Chloë All right.

Hannah What a fool.

Chloë Jealous. I think it's brilliant. *(She gets up to go. To Gus)* Yes, that's perfect, but not with trainers. Come on, I'll lend you a pair of flatties, they'll look period on you —

Hannah Hello, Gus. You all look so romantic.

Gus following Chloë out, hesitates, smiles at her

Chloë *(pointedly)* Are you coming?

She holds the door for Gus and follows him out, leaving a sense of her disapproval behind her

Hannah The important thing is not to give two monkeys for what young people think about you. *(She goes to look at the other newspapers)*

Valentine *(anxiously)* You don't think she's getting a thing about Bernard, do you?

Hannah I wouldn't worry about Chloë, she's old enough to vote on her back. "Byron Fought Fatal Duel, Says Don". Or rather — *(sceptically)* "Says Don!"

Valentine It may all prove to be true.

Hannah It can't prove to be true, it can only not prove to be false yet.

Valentine *(pleased)* Just like science.

Hannah If Bernard can stay ahead of getting the rug pulled till he's dead, he'll be a success.

Valentine Just like science ... The ultimate fear is of posterity ...

Hannah Personally I don't think it'll take that long.

Valentine ... and then there's the afterlife. An afterlife would be a mixed blessing. "Ah — Bernard Nightingale, I don't believe you know Lord Byron." It must be heaven up there.

Hannah You can't believe in an afterlife, Valentine.

Valentine Oh, you're going to disappoint me at last.

Hannah Am I? Why?

Valentine Science and religion.

Hannah No, no, been there, done that, boring.

Valentine Oh, Hannah. Fiancée. Have pity. Can't we have a trial marriage and I'll call it off in the morning?

Hannah (*amused*) I don't know when I've received a more unusual proposal.

Valentine (*interested*) Have you had many?

Hannah That would be telling.

Valentine Well, why not? Your classical reserve is only a mannerism; and neurotic.

Hannah Do you want the room?

Valentine You get nothing if you give nothing.

Hannah I ask nothing.

Valentine No, stay.

Valentine resumes work at his computer. Hannah establishes herself among her references at "her" end of the table. She has a stack of pocket-sized volumes, Lady Croom's "garden books"

Hannah What are you doing? Valentine?

Valentine The set of points on a complex plane made by —

Hannah Is it the grouse?

Valentine Oh, the grouse. The damned grouse.

Hannah You mustn't give up.

Valentine Why? Didn't you agree with Bernard?

Hannah Oh, that. 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. Otherwise we're going out the way we came in. That's why you can't believe in the afterlife, Valentine. Believe in the after, by all means, but not the life. Believe in God, the soul, the spirit, the infinite, believe in angels if you like, but not in the great celestial get-together for an exchange of views. If the answers are in the back of the book I can wait, but what a drag. Better to struggle on knowing that failure is final. (*She looks over Valentine's shoulder at the computer screen. Reacting*) Oh! but ... how beautiful!

Valentine The Coverly set.

Hannah The Coverly set! My goodness, Valentine!

Valentine Lend me a finger.

He takes her finger and presses one of the computer keys several times

See? In an ocean of ashes, islands of order. Patterns making themselves out of nothing. I can't show you how deep it goes. Each picture is a detail of the previous one, blown up. And so on. For ever. Pretty nice, eh?

Hannah Is it important?

Valentine Interesting. Publishable.

Hannah Well done!

Valentine Not me. It's Thomasina's. I just pushed her equations through the computer a few million times further than she managed to do with her pencil.

From the old portfolio he takes Thomasina's lesson book and gives it to Hannah. The piano starts to be heard

You can have it back now.

Hannah What does it mean?

Valentine Not what you'd like it to.

Hannah Why not?

Valentine Well, for one thing, she'd be famous.

Hannah No, she wouldn't. She was dead before she had time to be famous ...

Valentine She died?

Hannah ... burned to death.

Valentine (*realizing*) Oh ... the girl who died in the fire!

Hannah The night before her seventeenth birthday. You can see where the dormer doesn't match. That was her bedroom under the roof. There's a memorial in the Park.

Valentine (*irritated*) I know — it's my house.

Valentine turns his attention back to his computer. Hannah goes back to her chair. She looks through the lesson book

Hannah Val, Septimus was her tutor — he and Thomasina would have —

Valentine You do yours.

Pause. Two researchers

Lord Augustus, fifteen years old, wearing clothes of 1812, bursts in through the non-music room door. He is laughing. He dives under the table. He is chased into the room by Thomasina, aged sixteen and furious. She spots Augustus immediately

Thomasina You swore! You crossed your heart!

Augustus scampers out from under the table and Thomasina chases him around it

Augustus I'll tell Mama! I'll tell Mama!

Thomasina You beast!

She catches Augustus

Septimus enters from the other door, carrying a book, a decanter and a glass, and his portfolio

Septimus Hush! What is this? My lord! Order, order!

Thomasina and Augustus separate

I am obliged.

Septimus goes to his place at the table. He pours himself a glass of wine

Augustus Well, good-day to you, Mr Hodge! *(He is smirking about something)*

Thomasina dutifully picks up a drawing book and settles down to draw the geometrical solids. Septimus opens his portfolio

Septimus Will you join us this morning, Lord Augustus? We have our drawing lesson.

Augustus I am a master of it at Eton, Mr Hodge, but we only draw naked women.

Septimus You may work from memory.

Thomasina Disgusting!

Septimus We will have silence now, if you please.

From the portfolio Septimus takes Thomasina's lesson book and tosses it to her; returning homework. She snatches it and opens it

Thomasina No marks?! Did you not like my rabbit equation?

Septimus I saw no resemblance to a rabbit.

Thomasina It eats its own progeny.

Septimus *(after a pause)* I did not see that.

He extends his hand for the lesson book. She returns it to him

Thomasina I have not room to extend it.

Septimus and Hannah turn the pages doubled by time. Augustus indolently starts to draw the models

Hannah Do you mean the world is saved after all?

Valentine No, it's still doomed. But if this is how it started, perhaps it's how the next one will come.

Hannah From good English algebra?

Septimus It will go to infinity or zero, or nonsense.

Thomasina No, if you set apart the minus roots they square back to sense.

Septimus turns the pages. Thomasina starts drawing the models

Hannah closes the lesson book and turns her attention to her stack of "garden books"

Valentine Listen — you know your tea's getting cold.

Hannah I like it cold.

Valentine *(ignoring that)* I'm telling you something. Your tea gets cold by itself, it doesn't get hot by itself. Do you think that's odd?

Hannah No.

Valentine Well, it is odd. Heat goes to cold. It's a one-way street. Your tea will end up at room temperature. What's happening to your tea is happening to everything everywhere. The sun and the stars. It'll take a while but we're all going to end up at room temperature. When your hermit set up shop nobody understood this. But let's say you're right, in 18-whatever nobody knew more about heat than this scribbling nutter living in a hovel in Derbyshire.

Hannah He was at Cambridge — a scientist.

Valentine Say he was. I'm not arguing. And the girl was his pupil, she had a genius for her tutor.

Hannah Or the other way round.

Valentine Anything you like. But not *this*! Whatever he thought he was doing to save the world with good English algebra it wasn't this!

Hannah Why? Because they didn't have calculators?

Valentine No. Yes. Because there's an order things can't happen in. You can't open a door till there's a house.

Hannah I thought that's what genius was.

Valentine Only for lunatics and poets.

Pause

Hannah "I had a dream which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air ..."

Valentine Your own?

Hannah Byron.

Pause. Two researchers again

Thomasina Septimus, do you think that I will marry Lord Byron?

Augustus Who is he?

Thomasina He is the author of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", the most poetical and pathetic and bravest hero of any book I ever read before, and the most modern and the handsomest, for Harold is Lord Byron himself to those who know him, like myself and Septimus. Well, Septimus?

Septimus (absorbed) No.

Then he puts her lesson book away into the portfolio and picks up his own book to read

Thomasina Why not?

Septimus For one thing, he is not aware of your existence.

Thomasina We exchanged many significant glances when he was at Sidley Park. I do wonder that he has been home almost a year from his adventures and has not written to me once.

Septimus It is indeed improbable, my lady.

Augustus Lord Byron?! — he claimed my hare, although my shot was the earlier! He said I missed by a hare's breadth. His conversation was very facetious. But I think Lord Byron will not marry you, Thom, for he was only lame and not blind.

Septimus Peace! Peace until a quarter to twelve. It is intolerable for a tutor to have his thoughts interrupted by his pupils.

Augustus You are not my tutor, sir. I am visiting your lesson by my free will.

Septimus If you are so determined, my lord.

Thomasina laughs at that, the joke is for her. Augustus, not included, becomes angry

Augustus Your peace is nothing to me, sir. You do not rule over me.

Thomasina (admonishing) Augustus!

Septimus I do not rule here, my lord. I inspire by reverence for learning and the exaltation of knowledge whereby man may approach God. There will be a shilling for the best cone and pyramid drawn in silence by a quarter to twelve at the earliest.

Augustus You will not buy my silence for a shilling, sir. What I know to tell is worth much more than that.

And throwing down his drawing book and pencil, he leaves the room on his dignity, closing the door sharply

Pause. Septimus looks enquiringly at Thomasina

Thomasina I told him you kissed me. But he will not tell.

Septimus When did I kiss you?

Thomasina What! Yesterday!

Septimus Where?

Thomasina On the lips!

Septimus In which county?

Thomasina In the hermitage, Septimus!

Septimus On the lips in the hermitage! That? That was not a shilling kiss!

I would not give sixpence to have it back. I had almost forgot it already.

Thomasina Oh, cruel! Have you forgotten our compact?

Septimus God save me! Our compact?

Thomasina To teach me to waltz! Sealed with a kiss, and a second kiss due when I can dance like Mama!

Septimus Ah yes. Indeed. We were all waltzing like mice in London.

Thomasina I must waltz, Septimus! I will be despised if I do not waltz! It is the most fashionable and gayest and boldest invention conceivable — started in Germany!

Septimus Let them have the waltz, they cannot have the calculus.

Thomasina Mama has brought from town a whole book of waltzes for the Broadwood, to play with Count Zelinsky.

Septimus I need not be told what I cannot but suffer. Count Zelinsky banging on the Broadwood without relief has me reading in waltz time.

Thomasina Oh, stuff! What is your book?

Septimus A prize essay of the Scientific Academy in Paris. The author deserves your indulgence, my lady, for you are his prophet.

Thomasina I? What does he write about? The waltz?

Septimus Yes. He demonstrates the equation of the propagation of heat in a solid body. But in doing so he has discovered heresy — a natural contradiction of Sir Isaac Newton.

Thomasina Oh! — he contradicts determinism?

Septimus No! ... Well, perhaps. He shows that the atoms do not go according to Newton.

Her interest has switched in the mercurial way characteristic of her — she has crossed to take the book

Thomasina Let me see — oh! In French?

Septimus Yes. Paris is the capital of France.

Thomasina Show me where to read.

He takes the book back from her and finds the page for her. Meanwhile, the piano music from the next room has doubled its notes and its emotion

Four-handed now! Mama is in love with the Count.

Septimus He is a Count in Poland. In Derbyshire he is a piano tuner.

She has taken the book and is already immersed in it. The piano music becomes rapidly more passionate, and then breaks off suddenly in mid-phrase. There is an expressive silence next door which makes Septimus raise his eyes. It does not register with Thomasina. The silence allows us to hear the distant regular thump of the steam engine which is to be a topic

A few moments later Lady Croom enters from the music room, seeming surprised and slightly flustered to find the schoolroom occupied. She collects herself, closing the door behind her. And remains watching, aimless and discreet, as though not wanting to interrupt the lesson

Septimus has stood, and she nods him back into his chair

Chloë, in regency dress, enters from the door opposite the music room. She takes in Valentine and Hannah but crosses without pausing to the music room door

Chloë Oh! — where's Gus?

Valentine Dunno.

Chloë goes into the music room

Lady Croom (annoyed) Oh! — Mr Noakes's engine!

She goes to the garden door and steps outside

Chloë enters

Chloë Damn.

Lady Croom (calling out) Mr Noakes!

Valentine He was there not long ago ...

Lady Croom Halloo!

Chloë Well, he has to be in the photograph — is he dressed?

Hannah Is Bernard back?

Chloë No — he's late!

The piano is heard again, under the noise of the steam engine. Lady Croom steps back into the room

Chloë steps outside the garden door

Chloë (shouting) Gus!

Lady Croom I wonder you can teach against such a disturbance and I am sorry for it, Mr Hodge.

Chloë comes back inside

Valentine (getting up) Stop ordering everybody about.

Lady Croom It is an unendurable noise.

Valentine The photographer will wait.

But, grumbling, he follows Chloë out of the door she came in by, and closes the door behind them

Hannah remains absorbed. The rhythmic thump can be heard still

Lady Croom The ceaseless dull overbearing monotony of it! It will drive me distracted. I may have to return to town to escape it.

Septimus Your ladyship could remain in the country and let Count Zelinsky return to town where you would not hear him.

Lady Croom I mean Mr Noakes's engine. (Semi-aside to Septimus) Would you sulk? I will not have my daughter study sulking.

Thomasina (not listening) What, Mama?

Thomasina remains lost in her book. Lady Croom returns to close the garden door and the noise of the steam engine subsides

Hannah closes one of the "garden books", and opens the next. She is making occasional notes

The piano ceases

Lady Croom (to Thomasina) What are we learning today? (Pause) Well, not manners.

Septimus We are drawing today.

Lady Croom negligently examines what Thomasina had started to draw

Lady Croom Geometry. I approve of geometry.

Septimus Your ladyship's approval is my constant object.

Lady Croom Well, do not despair of it. (*Returning to the window impatiently*) Where is "Culpability" Noakes? (*She looks out and is annoyed*) Oh! — he has gone for his hat so that he may remove it. (*She returns to the table and touches the bowl of dahlias*)

Hannah sits back in her chair, caught by what she is reading

For the widow's dowry of dahlias I can almost forgive my brother's marriage. We must be thankful the monkey bit Mr Chater. If it had bit Mrs Chater the monkey would be dead and we would not be first in the kingdom to show a dahlia.

Hannah, still reading the garden book, stands up

I sent one potted to Chatsworth. The Duchess was most satisfactorily put out by it when I called at Devonshire House. Your friend was there lording it as a poet.

Hannah leaves through the door, following Valentine and Chloë

Meanwhile, Thomasina thumps the book down on the table

Thomasina Well! Just as I said! Newton's machine which would knock our atoms from cradle to grave by the laws of motion is incomplete! Determinism leaves the road at every corner, as I knew all along, and the cause is very likely hidden in this gentleman's observation.

Lady Croom Of what?

Thomasina The action of bodies in heat.

Lady Croom Is this geometry?

Thomasina This? No, I despise geometry!

Lady Croom (*touching the dahlias she adds, almost to herself*) The Chater would overthrow the Newtonian system in a weekend.

Septimus Geometry, Hobbes assures us in the *Leviathan*, is the only science God has been pleased to bestow on mankind.

Lady Croom And what does he mean by it?

Septimus Mr Hobbes or God?

Lady Croom I am sure I do not know what either means by it.

Thomasina Oh, pooh to Hobbes! Mountains are not pyramids and trees are not cones. God must love gunnery and architecture if Euclid is his only geometry. There is another geometry which I am engaged in discovering by trial and error, am I not, Septimus?

Septimus Trial and error perfectly describes your enthusiasm, my lady.

Lady Croom How old are you today?

Thomasina Sixteen years and eleven months, Mama, and three weeks.

Lady Croom Sixteen years and eleven months. We must have you married before you are educated beyond eligibility.

Thomasina I am going to marry Lord Byron.

Lady Croom Are you? He did not have the manners to mention it.

Thomasina You have spoken to him?!

Lady Croom Certainly not.

Thomasina Where did you see him?

Lady Croom (*with some bitterness*) Everywhere.

Thomasina Did you, Septimus?

Septimus At the Royal Academy where I had the honour to accompany your mother and Count Zelinsky.

Thomasina What was Lord Byron doing?

Lady Croom Posing.

Septimus (*tactfully*) He was being sketched during his visit ... by the Professor of Painting ... Mr Fuseli.

Lady Croom There was more posing at the pictures than in them. His companion likewise reversed the custom of the Academy that the ladies viewing wear more than the ladies viewed — well, enough! Let him be hanged there for a Lamb. I have enough with Mr Noakes, who is to a garden what a bull is to a china shop.

This as Noakes enters

Thomasina The Emperor of Irregularity! (*She settles down to drawing the diagram which is to be the third item in the surviving portfolio*)

Lady Croom Mr Noakes!

Noakes Your ladyship —

Lady Croom What have you done to me!

Noakes Everything is satisfactory, I assure you. A little behind, to be sure, but my dam will be repaired within the month —

Lady Croom (*banging on the table*) Hush!

In the silence, the steam engine thumps in the distance

Can you hear, Mr Noakes?

Noakes (*pleased and proud*) The Improved Newcomen steam pump — the only one in England!

Lady Croom That is what I object to. If everybody had his own I would bear my portion of the agony without complaint. But to have been singled out by the only Improved Newcomen steam pump in England, this is hard, sir, this is not to be borne.

Noakes Your lady —

Lady Croom And for what? My lake is drained to a ditch for no purpose I can understand, unless it be that snipe and curlew have deserted three counties so that they may be shot in our swamp. What you painted as forest is a mean plantation, your greenery is mud, your waterfall is wet mud, and your mount is an opencast mine for the mud that was lacking in the dell. (*Pointing through the window*) What is that cowshed?

Noakes The hermitage, my lady?

Lady Croom It is a cowshed.

Noakes Madam, it is, I assure you, a very habitable cottage, properly founded and drained, two rooms and a closet under a slate roof and a stone chimney —

Lady Croom And who is to live in it?

Noakes Why, the hermit.

Lady Croom Where is he?

Noakes Madam?

Lady Croom You surely do not supply a hermitage without a hermit?

Noakes Indeed, madam —

Lady Croom Come, come, Mr Noakes. If I am promised a fountain I expect it to come with water. What hermits do you have?

Noakes I have no hermits, my lady.

Lady Croom Not one? I am speechless.

Noakes I am sure a hermit can be found. One could advertise.

Lady Croom Advertise?

Noakes In the newspapers.

Lady Croom But surely a hermit who takes a newspaper is not a hermit in whom one can have complete confidence.

Noakes I do not know what to suggest, my lady.

Septimus Is there room for a piano?

Noakes (*baffled*) A piano?

Lady Croom We are intruding here — this will not do, Mr Hodge. Evidently, nothing is being learned. (*To Noakes*) Come along, sir!

Thomasina Mr Noakes — bad news from Paris!

Noakes Is it the Emperor Napoleon?

Thomasina No. (*She tears the page off her drawing block, with her "diagram" on it*) It concerns your heat engine. Improve it as you will, you can never get out of it what you put in. It repays eleven pence in the shilling at most. The penny is for this author's thoughts.

She gives the diagram to Septimus who looks at it

Noakes (*baffled again*) Thank you, my lady.

Noakes goes out into the garden

Lady Croom (*to Septimus*) Do you understand her?

Septimus No.

Lady Croom Then this business is over. I was married at seventeen. *Ce soir il faut qu'on parle français, je te demande*, Thomasina, as a courtesy to the Count. Wear your green velvet, please, I will send Briggs to do your hair. Sixteen and eleven months ...!

She follows Noakes out of view

Thomasina Lord Byron was with a lady?

Septimus Yes.

Thomasina Huh!

Now Septimus retrieves his book from Thomasina. He turns the pages, and also continues to study Thomasina's diagram. He strokes the tortoise absently as he reads. Thomasina takes up pencil and paper and starts to draw Septimus with Plautus

Septimus Why does it mean Mr Noakes's engine pays eleven pence in the shilling? Where does he say it?

Thomasina Nowhere. I noticed it by the way. I cannot remember now.

Septimus Nor is he interested by determinism —

Thomasina Oh ... yes. Newton's equations go forwards and backwards, they do not care which way. But the heat equation cares very much, it goes only one way. That is the reason Mr Noakes's engine cannot give the power to drive Mr Noakes's engine.

Septimus Everybody knows that.

Thomasina Yes, Septimus, they know it about engines!

Pause. He looks at his watch

Septimus A quarter to twelve. For your essay this week, explicate your diagram.

Thomasina I cannot. I do not know the mathematics.

Septimus Without mathematics, then.

Thomasina has continued to draw. She tears the top page from her drawing pad and gives it to Septimus

Thomasina There. I have made a drawing of you and Plautus.

Septimus (*looking at it*) Excellent likeness. Not so good of me.

Thomasina laughs, and leaves the room

Augustus appears at the garden door. His manner cautious and diffident. Septimus does not notice him for a moment. Septimus gathers his papers together

Augustus Sir ...

Septimus My lord ...?

Augustus I gave you offence, sir, and I am sorry for it.

Septimus I took none, my lord, but you are kind to mention it.

Augustus I would like to ask you a question, Mr Hodge. *(Pause)* You have an elder brother, I dare say, being a Septimus?

Septimus Yes, my lord. He lives in London. He is the editor of a newspaper, the *Piccadilly Recreation*. *(Pause)* Was that your question?

Augustus, evidently embarrassed about something, picks up the drawing of Septimus

Augustus No. Oh ... it is you? ... I would like to keep it.

Septimus inclines his head in assent

There are things a fellow cannot ask his friends. Carnal things. My sister has told me ... my sister believes such things as I cannot, I assure you, bring myself to repeat.

Septimus You must not repeat them, then. The walk between here and dinner will suffice to put us straight, if we stroll by the garden. It is an easy business. And then I must rely on you to correct your sister's state of ignorance.

A commotion is heard outside — Bernard's loud voice in a sort of agony

Bernard *(off, outside the door)* Oh no — no — no — oh, bloody hell! —

Augustus Thank you, Mr Hodge, I will.

Taking the drawing with him, Augustus allows himself to be shown out through the garden door, and Septimus follows him

Bernard enters the room, through the door Hannah left by. Valentine comes in with him, leaving the door open and they are followed by Hannah who is holding the "garden book"

Bernard Oh, no — no —

Hannah I'm sorry, Bernard.

Bernard Fucked by a dahlia! Do you think? Is it open and shut? Am I fucked? What does it really amount to? When all's said and done? Am I fucked? What do you think, Valentine? Tell me the truth.

Valentine You're fucked.

Bernard Oh God! Does it mean that?

Hannah Yes, Bernard, it does.

Bernard I'm not sure. Show me where it says. I want to see it. No — read it — no, wait ...

Bernard sits at the table. He prepares to listen as though listening were an oriental art

Right.

Hannah *(reading)* "October 1st 1810. Today under the direction of Mr Noakes, a parterre was dug on the south lawn and will be a handsome show next year, a consolation for the picturesque catastrophe of the second and third distances. The dahlia having propagated under glass with no ill effect from the sea voyage, is named by Captain Brice "Charity" for his bride, though the honour properly belongs to the husband who exchanged beds with my dahlia, and an English summer for everlasting night in the Indies."

Pause

Bernard Well, it's so round the houses, isn't it? Who's to say what it means?

Hannah *(patiently)* It means that Ezra Chater of the Sidley Park connection is the same Chater who described a dwarf dahlia in Martinique in 1810 and died there, of a monkey bite.

Bernard *(wildly)* Ezra wasn't a botanist! He was a poet!

Hannah He was not much of either, but he was both.

Valentine It's not a disaster.

Bernard Of course it's a disaster! I was on *The Breakfast Hour*!

Valentine It doesn't mean Byron didn't fight a duel, it only means Chater wasn't killed in it.

Bernard Oh, pull yourself together! — do you think I'd have been on *The Breakfast Hour* if Byron had missed!

Hannah Calm down, Bernard. Valentine's right.

Bernard *(grasping at straws)* Do you think so? You mean the *Piccadilly* reviews? Yes, two completely unknown Byron essays — and my discovery of the lines he added to "English Bards". That counts for something.

Hannah *(tactfully)* Very possible — persuasive, indeed.

Bernard Oh, bugger persuasive! I've proved Byron was here and as far as I'm concerned he wrote those lines as sure as he shot that hare. If only I hadn't somehow ... made it all about *killing Chater*. Why didn't you stop

me?! It's bound to get out, you know — I mean this — this *gloss* on my discovery — I mean how long do you think it'll be before some botanical pedant blows the whistle on me?

Hannah The day after tomorrow. A letter in *The Times*.

Bernard You wouldn't.

Hannah It's a dirty job but somebody —

Bernard Darling. Sorry. Hannah —

Hannah — and, after all, it is my discovery.

Bernard Hannah.

Hannah Bernard.

Bernard Hannah.

Hannah Oh, shut up. It'll be very short, very dry, absolutely gloat-free.

Would you rather it were one of your friends?

Bernard (*fervently*) Oh God, no!

Hannah And then in *your* letter to *The Times* —

Bernard Mine?

Hannah Well, of course. Dignified congratulations to a colleague, in the language of scholars, I trust.

Bernard Oh, eat shit, you mean?

Hannah Think of it as a breakthrough in dahlia studies.

Chloë hurries in from the garden

Chloë Why aren't you coming?! — Bernard! And you're not dressed! How long have you been back?

Bernard looks at her and then at Valentine and realizes for the first time that Valentine is unusually dressed

Bernard Why are you wearing those clothes?

Chloë Do be quick!

She is already digging into the basket and producing odd garments for Bernard

Just put anything on. We're all being photographed. Except Hannah.

Hannah I'll come and watch.

Valentine and Chloë help Bernard into a decorative coat and fix a lace collar round his neck

Chloë (*to Hannah*) Mummy says have you got the theodolite?

Valentine What are you supposed to be, Chlo? Bo-Peep?

Chloë Jane Austen!

Valentine Of course.

Hannah (*to Chloë*) Oh — it's in the hermitage! Sorry.

Bernard I thought it wasn't till this evening. What photograph?

Chloë The local paper of course — they always come before we start. We want a good crowd of us — Gus looks gorgeous —

Bernard (*aghast*) The newspaper!

He grabs something like a bishop's mitre from the basket and pulls it down completely over his face

(*Muffled*) I'm ready!

And he staggers out with Valentine and Chloë, followed by Hannah

A light change to evening. The paper lanterns outside begin to glow. Piano music from the next room

Septimus enters with an oil lamp. He carries Thomasina's algebra primer, and also her essay on loose sheets. He settles down to read at the table. It is nearly dark outside, despite the lanterns

Thomasina enters, in a nightgown and barefoot, holding a candlestick. Her manner is secretive and excited

Septimus My lady! What is it?

Thomasina Septimus! Shush! (*She closes the door quietly*) Now is our chance!

Septimus For what, dear God?

She blows out the candle and puts the candlestick on the table

Thomasina Do not act the innocent! Tomorrow I will be seventeen!

She kisses Septimus full on the mouth

There!

Septimus Dear Christ!

Thomasina Now you must show me, you are paid in advance.

Septimus (*understanding*) Oh!

Thomasina The Count plays for us, it is God-given! I cannot be seventeen and not waltz.

Septimus But your mother —

Thomasina While she swoons, we can dance. The house is all abed. I heard the Broadwood. Oh, Septimus, teach me now!

Septimus Hush! I cannot now!

Thomasina Indeed you can, and I am come barefoot so mind my toes.

Septimus I cannot because it is not a waltz.

Thomasina It is not?

Septimus No, it is too slow for waltzing.

Thomasina Oh! Then we will wait for him to play quickly.

Septimus My lady —

Thomasina Mr Hodge! *(She takes a chair next to him and looks at his work)*

Are you reading my essay? Why do you work here so late?

Septimus To save my candles.

Thomasina You have my old primer.

Septimus It is mine again. You should not have written in it.

She takes it, looks at the open page

Thomasina It was a joke.

Septimus It will make me mad as you promised. Sit over there. You will have us in disgrace.

Thomasina gets up and goes to the furthest chair

Thomasina If Mama comes I will tell her we only met to kiss, not to waltz.

Septimus Silence or bed.

Thomasina Silence!

Septimus pours himself some more wine. He continues to read her essay

The music changes to party music from the marquee. And there are fireworks — small against the sky, distant flares of light like exploding meteors

Hannah enters. She has dressed for the party. The difference is not, however, dramatic. She closes the door and crosses to leave by the garden door. But as she gets there, Valentine is entering. He has a glass of wine in his hand

Hannah Oh ...

But Valentine merely brushes past her, intent on something, and half-drunk

Valentine *(to her)* Got it!

He goes straight to the table and roots about in what is now a considerable mess of papers, books and objects. Hannah turns back, puzzled by his manner. He finds what he has been looking for — the "diagram"

Meanwhile, Septimus reading Thomasina's essay, also studies the diagram. Septimus and Valentine study the diagram doubled by time

Valentine It's heat.

Hannah Are you tight, Val?

Valentine It's a diagram of heat exchange.

Septimus So, we are all doomed!

Thomasina *(cheerfully)* Yes.

Valentine Like a steam engine, you see —

Hannah fills Septimus's glass from the same decanter, and sips from it

She didn't have the maths, not remotely. She saw what things meant, way ahead, like seeing a picture.

Septimus This is not science. This is story-telling.

Thomasina Is it a waltz now?

Septimus No.

The music is still modern

Valentine Like a film.

Hannah What did she see?

Valentine That you can't run the film backwards. Heat was the first thing which didn't work that way. Not like Newton. A film of a pendulum, of a ball falling through the air — backwards, it looks the same.

Hannah The ball would be going the wrong way.

Valentine You'd have to know that. But with heat — friction — a ball breaking a window —

Hannah Yes.

Valentine It won't work backwards.

Hannah Who thought it did?

Valentine She saw why. You can put back the bits of glass but you can't collect up the heat of the smash. It's gone.

Septimus So the Improved Newtonian Universe must cease and grow cold. Dear me.

Valentine The heat goes into the mix. *(He gestures to indicate the air in the room, in the universe)*

Thomasina Yes, we must hurry if we are going to dance.

Valentine And everything is mixing the same way, all the time, irreversibly —

Septimus Oh, we have time, I think.

Valentine — till there's no time left. That's what time means.

Septimus When we have found all the mysteries and lost all the meaning, we will be alone, on an empty shore.

Thomasina Then we will dance. Is this a waltz?

Septimus It will serve. *(He stands up)*

Thomasina *(jumping up)* Goody!

Septimus takes her in his arms carefully and the waltz lesson, to the music from the marquee, begins

Bernard, in unconvincing Regency dress, enters carrying a bottle

Bernard Don't mind me, I left my jacket ... *(He heads for the area of the wicker basket)*

Valentine Are you leaving?

Bernard is stripping off his period coat. He is wearing his own trousers, tucked into knee socks and his own shirt

Bernard Yes, I'm afraid so.

Hannah What's up, Bernard?

Bernard Nothing I can go into —

Valentine Should I go?

Bernard No, I'm going!

Valentine and Hannah watch Bernard struggling into his jacket and adjusting his clothes

Septimus, holding Thomasina, kisses her on the mouth. The waltz lesson pauses. She looks at him. He kisses her again, in earnest. She puts her arms around him

Thomasina Septimus ...

Septimus hushes her. They start to dance again, with the slight awkwardness of a lesson

Chloë bursts in from the garden

Chloë I'll kill her! I'll kill her!

Bernard Oh dear.

Valentine What the hell is it, Chlo?

Chloë *(venomously)* Mummy!

Bernard *(to Valentine)* Your mother caught us in that cottage,

Chloë She snooped!

Bernard I don't think so. She was rescuing a theodolite.

Chloë I'll come with you, Bernard.

Bernard No, you bloody won't.

Chloë Don't you want me to?

Bernard Of course not. What for? *(To Valentine)* I'm sorry.

Chloë *(in furious tears)* What are you saying sorry to him for?

Bernard Sorry to you too. Sorry one and all. Sorry, Hannah — sorry, Hermione — sorry, Byron — sorry, Lightning — sorry, sorry, sorry, now can I go?

Chloë stands stiffly, tearfully

Chloë Well ...

Thomasina and Septimus dance

Hannah What a bastard you are, Bernard.

Chloë rounds on her

Chloë And you mind your own business! What do you know about anything?

Hannah Nothing.

Chloë *(to Bernard)* It was worth it, though, wasn't it?

Bernard It was wonderful.

Chloë goes out, through the garden door, towards the party

Hannah *(an echo)* Nothing.

Valentine Well, you shit. I'd drive you but I'm a bit sloshed.

Valentine follows Chloë out

(Off, calling) Chlo! Chlo!

Bernard A scrape.

Hannah Oh ... *(she gives up)* Bernard!

Bernard I look forward to *The Genius of the Place*. I hope you find your hermit. I think out front is the safest. *(He opens the door cautiously and looks out)*

Hannah Actually, I've got a good idea who he was, but I can't prove it.

Bernard *(with a carefree expansive gesture)* Publish!

He goes out closing the door

Septimus and Thomasina are now waltzing freely. She is delighted with herself

Thomasina Am I waltzing?

Septimus Yes, my lady.

He gives her a final twirl, bringing them to the table where he bows to her. He lights her candlestick

Hannah goes to sit at the table, playing truant from the party. She pours herself more wine. The table contains the geometrical solids, the computer, decanter, glasses, tea mug, Hannah's research books, Septimus's books, the two portfolios, Thomasina's candlestick, the oil lamp, the dahlia, the Saturday papers ...

Piano music

Gus appears in the doorway. It takes a moment to realize that he is not Lord Augustus; perhaps not until Hannah sees him

Septimus Take your essay, I have given it an alpha in blind faith. Be careful with the flame.

Thomasina I will wait for you to come.

Septimus I cannot.

Thomasina You may.

Septimus I may not.

Thomasina You must.

Septimus I will not.

She puts the candlestick and her essay on the table

Thomasina Then I will not go. Once more, for my birthday.

Septimus and Thomasina start to waltz together

Gus comes forward, startling Hannah

Hannah Oh! — you made me jump.

Gus looks resplendent. He is carrying an old and somewhat tattered stiff-backed folio fastened with a tape tied in a bow. He comes to Hannah and thrusts this present at her

Oh ...

She lays the folio down on the table and starts to open it. It consists only of two boards hinged, containing Thomasina's drawing

"Septimus holding Plautus". (To Gus) I was looking for that. Thank you.

Gus nods several times. Then, rather awkwardly, he bows to her. A Regency bow, an invitation to dance

Oh, dear, I don't really ...

After a moment's hesitation, she gets up and they hold each other, keeping a decorous distance between them, and start to dance, rather awkwardly

Septimus and Thomasina continue to dance, fluently, to the piano

CURTAIN

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST

ACT I SCENE 1

- On stage:** Large table. *On it:* books, papers, inkstand containing ink, pens, tortoise, old-fashioned theodolite, matches, sealing wax, spirit burner, small diary-type volumes, bound copy of *Cornhill Magazine*, bound copy of "The Couch of Eros", slim mathematics primer, lesson book, closed portfolio containing sheet of blank paper and sheet of drawing paper with scrawled diagram and some mathematical notations etc.
4 straight-backed chairs
Period architect's stand or reading stand
French windows open
- Off stage:** Sealed letter (Jellaby)
Leatherbound sketchbook (Brice)
- Personal:** **Thomasina:** letter sealed in envelope in pocket
Septimus: fob watch, worn throughout

SCENE 2

- Strike:** Copy of "The Couch of Eros" from table
- Off stage:** Briefcase containing copy of "The Couch of Eros" (without letters enclosed), 3 separate photocopies, 3 documents in a package (**Bernard**)
Pair of rubber boots (Chloë)
Leather-covered ledgers (Chloë)
Small tray with 2 mugs of coffee (Chloë)
Apple with leaf attached (Gus)
- Personal:** **Hannah:** cigarettes, cigarette holder, lighter (optional)

SCENE 3

- Set:** On table: letter for **Septimus**, tortoise, copy of "The Couch of Eros" with 2 letters enclosed

- Personal:** **Septimus:** pocket knife

SCENE 4

- Re-set:** Portfolio open on table
- Check:** On table: maths primer for **Hannah** and lesson book for **Valentine**
- Off stage:** Book (**Bernard**)
- Personal:** **Hannah:** letter

ACT II SCENE 1

- Set:** **Bernard's** briefcase containing copy of *Byron Society Journal*
- Off stage:** Piece of paper (**Hannah**)
- Personal:** **Bernard:** typed sheets, silver pencil, small book in pocket
Valentine: sandwich containing lettuce

SCENE 2

- Re-set:** French windows closed
- Off stage:** Lighted lamp (**Jellaby**)
Two letters in opened envelopes (**Lady Croom**)
Pewter tray on small feet. *On it:* kettle suspended over a spirit lamp, cup, saucer, silver "basket" with dry tea leaves, letter
- Personal:** **Septimus:** two pistols, dead rabbit

SCENE 3

- Set:** Large wicker laundry hamper containing Regency style clothes
On table: Saturday newspapers, portable computer, 2 geometrical solids (pyramid and cone), pot of dwarf dahlias, 2 drawing-books and pencils
- Re-set:** Lesson book in open portfolio

Off stage: Tabloid newspaper, mug of tea (**Hannah**)
 Book, decanter of wine, glass, 2nd portfolio (identical to 1st) containing lesson book (**Septimus**)
 "Garden" book (**Hannah**)
 Lighted oil lamp (**Septimus**)
 Lighted candle (**Thomasina**)
 Glass of wine (**Valentine**)
 Bottle (**Bernard**)
 Old-fashioned tattered stiff-backed folio fastened with a tape containing **Thomasina's** drawing (**Gus**)

LIGHTING PLOT

Practical fittings required: paper lanterns for Act II, SCENE 3

Interior with exterior view beyond. The same scene throughout

ACT I, SCENE 1

To open: Bright, sunless morning effect

Cue 1 **Septimus** inserts the note into the book
Fade to black-out

(Page 12)

ACT I, SCENE 2

To open: Bright morning effect

Cue 2 **Hannah:** "Thank you. Oh dear."
Fade to black-out

(Page 29)

ACT I, SCENE 3

To open: Bright morning effect

Cue 3 **Chater** hurries out after **Brice**
Fade to black-out

(Page 36)

ACT I, SCENE 4

To open: Bright daylight effect

Cue 4 **Hannah** exits. The empty room
Change to early morning effect

(Page 44)

ACT II, SCENE 1

To open: Bright daylight effect

Cue 5 **Hannah:** "... if only I can find it."
Fade to black-out

(Page 56)

ACT II, SCENE 2

To open: Very dim lighting in room; early dawn effect through windows

Cue 6 **Jellaby** enters with a lamp
Increase lighting slightly in room (Page 56)

Cue 7 **Septimus** burns the letters
Fade to black-out (Page 61)

ACT II, SCENE 3

To open: Bright daylight effect

Cue 8 **Bernard, Valentine, Chloë and Hannah** go out
Change to evening light with practicals on; very dim lighting in room (Page 79)

Cue 9 **Septimus** enters with an oil lamp
Increase room lighting slightly (Page 79)

Cue 10 Music changes to modern party music
Fireworks effect outside in distance (Page 80)

EFFECTS PLOT

ACT I

Cue 1 **Lady Croom:** "... being a guest or having one?"
Distant popping of guns (Page 11)

Cue 2 **Chater** leaves
Guns, closer this time (Page 11)

Cue 3 **Bernard** puts his briefcase down
Distant popping of guns (Page 14)

Cue 4 **Septimus:** "Oh yes ..."
When ready, the sound of a badly-played piano from the next room; continue until end of SCENE 3 (Page 34)

Cue 5 **Hannah:** "... discovered by Thomasina Coverly." Pause
Piano begins to play quietly in the next room; stop after a while (Page 36)

Cue 6 **Valentine:** "... there was corn in Egypt." Hiatus
Piano begins to play again as before; continue (Page 41)

Cue 7 **Hannah:** "Yes, of course."
Piano stops (Page 43)

Cue 8 The Lights change to early morning
Distant pistol shot followed by cry of large number of crows taking flight (Page 44)

ACT II

Cue 9 To open SCENE 2
Distant pistol shot followed by sound of crows as before (Page 56)

Cue 10 **Valentine** gives the lesson book to **Hannah**
Piano heard quietly from next room (Page 65)

Cue 11 **Thomasina:** "Show me where to read."
Piano music doubles its notes and emotion (Page 70)

- Cue 12** **Septimus:** "... a piano tuner."
*Piano music becomes rapidly more passionate and then
breaks off in mid phrase. Rhythmic distant throb of
steam engine; continue* (Page 70)
- Cue 13** **Chloë:** "No — he's late!"
Piano heard again under steam engine (Page 70)
- Cue 14** **Lady Croom** closes the french windows
Steam engine noise subsides (Page 71)
- Cue 15** **Hannah** is making occasional notes
Piano ceases (Page 71)
- Cue 16** The Lights change to evening
Piano music from next room (Page 79)
- Cue 17** **Septimus** pours himself more wine
Music changes to modern party music (Page 80)
- Cue 18** **Hannah** pours herself more wine
Change modern party music to piano music from next room (Page 84)