

Audition Scene 1: Thomasina & Septimus

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 backward, 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, you cannot; time would need to 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 forever. This is known as free will or self-determination.

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 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: (*Pause*) Yes. (*Pause.*) Yes, as far as I know, you are first person to have thought of this. (*Pause. With an effort.*) In the margin of his copy of *Arithmatica*, Fermat wrote that he had 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. 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.

Audition Scene 2: Septimus & Chater

SEPTIMUS: 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! 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! (*Suddenly reacting to his considering him first rank.*) You say so! Who are the others? In your opinion?—no—no—I—this goes very ill, Hodge. I will not be flattered out of my course. (*Again, flattered.*) 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 stable boy 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: (*who we learned earlier wrote the damning review*) "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.

Audition Scene 3: Noakes, Lady Croom, Capt. Brice

BRICE: Is Sidley Park to be an Englishman's garden or the haunt of Corsican brigands? It is rape, sir!

NOAKES: (*Defending himself.*) It is the modem style.

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: 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 principle 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 it is nature as God intended, and I can say with the painter, "*Et in Arcadia ego!*" "Here I am in Arcadia."

Audition Scene 4: Valentine

VALENTINE: (*Speaking to Hannah.*) 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.

Audition Scene 5: Bernard & Hannah

(*Bernard enters in high excitement and triumph*)

BERNARD: *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. A penciled superscription. Listen and kiss my cycle-clips!
(*He is carrying the book. He reads from it.*)

“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!

HANNAH: 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!” You see! They wrote — 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.

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 [solemn, serious].*)

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*.

Audition Scene 6: Bernard, Valentine, [Hannah]

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 favor, 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 bang, 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?

HANNAH: 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.

Audition Scene 7: Septimus & Jellaby

JELLABY: (*At door*) Mr. Hodge!

SEPTIMUS: (*Coming back from hunting.*) 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. 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 dead rabbit without enthusiasm.*)

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 turns 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 anymore?

JELLABY: (*Sighs*) Her ladyship encountered Mrs. Chater during the night.

SEPTIMUS: Where?

JELLABY: On the threshold of Lord Byron's room.

SEPTIMUS: Ah. Which 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 an altercation upstairs
and...

Audition Scene 8: Hanna & Valentine

VALENTINE: 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 (*skeptically*) "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.

HANNAH: What are you doing? Valentine?

VALENTINE: One 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 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.

Audition Scene 9: Thomasina, Augustus, Septimus

THOMASINA: You swore! You crossed your heart!

AUGUSTUS: I'll tell mama! I'll tell mama!

THOMASINA: You beast!

SEPTIMUS: Hush! What is this? My lord! Order, order!

AUGUSTUS: Well, good day to you, Mr. Hodge.

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 memory.

THOMASINA: Disgusting!

SEPTIMUS: We will have silence now, if you please.

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
of any book I ever read before, and the most modem
and the handsomest, for Harold is Lord Byron himself
to those who know him, like myself and Septimus.
Well, Septimus?

SEPTIMUS: (*Absorbed*) No.

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.

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

THOMASINA: (*Admonishingly*) 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 best cone and pyramid drawn in silence by a
quarter to twelve *at the earliest*.

AUGUSTUS: You will not buy me for a shilling, sir. What I
know to tell is worth much more than that.

Audition Scene 10: Noakes & Lady Croom

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: 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.*) 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, 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.