

Audition Piece for Bernard Nightingale

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 towards 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?

Cloë: 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 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 you're doing with grouse, Valentine, I'd love to know?