

Audition Piece for Hannah Jarvis

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, that 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 sketchbook*). 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.