



**DREAM PALACE**

# The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover

*Introduced by Justin Johnson, BFI Lead Programmer (Thursday 20 May only).*

Eating is a constant theme in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. More oddly, as Donald Spoto observed in his biography, lavatories recur to a quite obsessive degree throughout his oeuvre. During his conversations with François Truffaut, Hitchcock, the greatest of cinematic gourmets, spoke of an ambition to make a film that would portray the life of a city through its food. It would show the raw ingredients being transported into the city, their preparation and consumption, and would then conclude in the sewers.

In *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*, Peter Greenaway has come close to fulfilling Hitchcock's ambition. In fact, he has taken it further, portraying the whole of life in terms of consumption and excretion. Greenaway himself has described the film as 'a violent and erotic love-story set in the kitchen and dining-room of a smart restaurant.' But this omits one crucial locale, the restaurant lavatory. In characteristically unflinching style, Greenaway views his subject in its totality. Food is consumed and excreted; some ingredients are lovingly and artfully prepared and cooked, others are allowed to rot.

If *Drowning by Numbers* was a film of the exterior world, shot entirely on location, the new film is a closeted, deliberately studio-bound work, shot entirely in and around one sound stage at Elstree. The film's restaurant is a domain of civilised pleasure, but it is also a Sadean refuge where force rules and everything is permitted: anything can be cooked and there is nothing that cannot be consumed in one way or another.

As in all Greenaway's films, the basic plot is straightforward. Each night the gross, violent villain, Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), comes to dine at the elegant restaurant, La Hollandaise. Permanently in tow are his downtrodden wife Georgina (Helen Mirren) and different members of his gang, played by such actors as Tim Roth and Ian Dury. Albert indulges in what is virtually a monologue, brutal and scatological, in which he insults and abuses all around him. His most delicate, edgy relationship is with the chef of La Hollandaise, played by the French actor Richard Bohringer (most familiar in Britain, perhaps, from *Diva*).

Georgina catches the eye of another of the regular patrons, Michael (Alan Howard), who sits silently reading at his table. They begin a passionate sexual affair which takes place, until the end, entirely within the precincts of the restaurant. This affair consists of virtually nothing but a series of couplings, first in a cubicle of the ladies' lavatory, then in the kitchen and the restaurant's ample storerooms. Finally, on the verge of discovery, they flee naked into the cold-store and escape in a truck full of rotting meat.

The proceedings are dominated, presided over, by Michael Gambon, who unites the film's two sides, part gangster movie, part revenge tragedy. Spica is a spray-cartoon of a gangster. He is like a big psychopathic child, smearing one of his victims with dog shit in the opening sequence, gleefully outdoing a

long line of misogynist gangsters by pushing a fork into the cheek of a girl. He's also a theatrical Jacobean villain, with the gang as his depraved courtiers and the curtained dining room as the stage where he finally receives his desserts.

The other three actors all stand in contrast to Gambon's towering central presence. Where he is coarse, Helen Mirren is painfully vulnerable. Where he is verbose and fluent, Richard Bohringer is restrained, not least by his thick French accent. And where he is loud, Alan Howard, one of the most self-effacing of actors, is virtually silent, speaking his first words halfway through the picture, and then almost in a whisper.

Greenaway is often seen as a director intoxicated with ideas, but his true obsession is the failure of ideas when they run up against the stubborn tyranny of the real world. His idealists are constantly thwarted: by power in *The Draughtsman's Contract*; by physical decay in *A Zed and Two Noughts*; by illness in *The Belly of an Architect*.

As with Greenaway's earlier films, *Cook* features a good deal of nudity, but the naked bodies are viewed in a strangely detached style. For a story about appetite, this is a startlingly unerotic film. Mirren and Howard lie together among the meat and poultry and their bodies come to seem like fleshy constraints, emblems of their possessors' failure to achieve transcendence.

The production design, by Ben van Os and Jan Roelfs (also responsible for *A Zed and Two Noughts* and *Drowning by Numbers*), is magnificent and there are moments in their collaboration with the photographer Sacha Vierny when the film touches greatness. Each area of action, the kitchen, the dining room and the lavatory, has a different design and colour scheme, and the actors' extravagant Jean-Paul Gaultier costumes change colour as they move between them. The different rooms also seem to represent different stages of history, an architectural mockery of human progress. The kitchen with its still lives and its fowl being dismembered is 18th century, the dining room with its lush fabrics 19th century and the hi-tech bathroom late 20th.

Greenaway's last three films, made with the help and boldness of his Dutch producers, are among the most original visual experiments since Powell and Pressburger's great years. With increasing resources and skill, Greenaway has taken old forms – the murder story, the thriller – dismantled them and put them back together to make something entirely new. It's a perilous project and filmgoers must keep their fingers crossed. British visionaries have a way of going terribly wrong. But Greenaway is now beyond question the most exciting intelligence at work in our cinema.

**Sean French, *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1989**

## THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE & HER LOVER

*Director:* Peter Greenaway  
*Production Companies:* Allarts Enterprises, Erato Films, Films Inc., Elsevier-Vendex Film Beheer  
*Producer:* Kees Kasander  
*Co-producers:* Denis Wigman, Pascale Dauman, Daniel Toscan Du Plantier  
*Office Manager:* Roland Wigman  
*Production Manager:* Karin van der Werff  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Nancy D'Ancona  
*Production Accountants:* Cor Severs, Nigel Wood  
*Production Assistants:* Jules Eyres, Nick Searle  
*Assistant to the Producer:* Andi Wright  
*1st Assistant Director:* Gerrit Martijn  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Milfid Ellis  
*3rd Assistant Director:* Mark Harrison  
*Continuity:* Nathalie Vierny  
*Casting Director:* Sharon Howard-Field  
*Casting Director's Assistant:* Karen Lindsay-Stewart  
*Screenplay:* Peter Greenaway  
*Director of Photography:* Sacha Vierny  
*Camera Operator:* Arthur Cloquet  
*Focus Puller:* Chris Renson  
*Clapper Loader:* Max Harrison  
*Editor:* John Wilson  
*1st Assistant Editor:* Julian Rodd  
*2nd Assistant Editor:* Birgit Berger  
*Production Designers:* Ben van Os, Jan Roelfs  
*Art Department Production:* Sophie Fiennes  
*Assistant Art Directors:* Ank van Straalen, Michael Howells  
*Set Dresser:* Constance de Vos  
*Assistant Set Dresser:* John Bramble  
*Scenic Artists:* Michel de Graaf, Wieger de Jong  
*Costumes:* Jean-Paul Gaultier  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Dien van Straalen  
*Wardrobe Mistress:* Elianne van Dorp  
*Make-up Artist:* Sara Meerman  
*Make-up Effects:* Sjoerd Didden  
*Titles:* Platform Design  
*Music/Music Conductor:* Michael Nyman  
*Music Performed by:* Michael Nyman Band  
*Music Producer:* David Cunningham  
*Violin:* Alexander Balanescu, Elizabeth Perry  
*Violin/Viola:* Johnathan Carney  
*Cello:* Tony Hinnigan  
*Double Bass:* Chris Lawrence  
*Clarinet/Bass Clarinet:* David Fuest  
*Soprano/Alto Sax:* John Harle  
*Alto Sax:* David Roach  
*Tenor/Baritone Sax/Flute:* Andrew Findon  
*Trumpet:* Graham Ashton  
*Trombone:* David Stewart  
*Piano:* Michael Nyman, Will Gregory  
*Cabaret Singer:* Flavia Brilli  
*Guitar:* John Perry

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*Drums:* James Hall  
*Boy Soprano:* Paul Chapman  
*Soprano:* Sarah Leonard  
*London Voices Director:* Terry Edwards  
*Music Mixer:* Michael J. Dutton  
*Production Sound:* Garth Marshall  
*Boom Operator:* Tom Buchanan  
*Dubbing Mixer:* Peter Maxwell  
*Sound Transfers:* Hackenbacker Sound & Video  
*Dubbing Editors:* Chris Wyatt, Shirley Shaw, Michael Danks  
*Sound Effects Treatment:* Nigel Heath  
*ADR Mixer:* Aad Wirtz  
*Footsteps Artists:* Bill Garlick, Felicity Cottrell, Dianne Greaves  
*Footsteps Mixer:* Ted Swanscott  
*Footsteps Editor:* Michael Danks  
*Chief Propfood:* Giorgio Locatelli

## CAST

Richard Bohringer (*Richard Borst*)  
Michael Gambon (*Albert Spica*)  
Helen Mirren (*Georgina Spica*)  
Alan Howard (*Michael*)  
Tim Roth (*Mitchel*)  
Ciarán Hinds (*Cory*)  
Gary Olsen (*Spangler*)  
Ewan Stewart (*Harris*)  
Roger Ashton-Griffiths (*Turpin*)  
Ron Cook (*Mews*)  
Liz Smith (*Grace*)  
Emer Gillespie (*Patricia*)  
Janet Henfrey (*Alice*)  
Breevelt Arnie (*Eden*)  
Tony Alleff (*Troy*)  
Paul Russell (*Pup*)  
Alex Kingston (*Adele*)  
Ian Sears (*Phillipe*)  
Willie Ross (*Roy*)  
Ian Dury (*Terry Fitch*)  
Diane Langton (*May Fitch*)  
Prudence Oliver (*Corelle Fitch*)  
Roger Lloyd Pack (*Geoff*)  
Bob Goody (*Starkie*)  
Peter Rush (*Melter*)  
Pauline Mayer (*fish girl*)  
Ben Stoneham (*meat boy*)  
Andy Wilson (*1st diner*)  
John Mullis (*2nd diner*)  
Flavia Brilli (*cabaret singer*)  
Brenda Edwards, Sophie Goodchild (*dancers*)  
Alex Fraser, Michael Clark, Gary Logan, Tim Geary, Saffron Rainey, Hywel Williams-Ellis, Michael Maguire, Patricia Walters, Sue Maund, Nick Brozovic, Karrie Pagano (*waiters/kitchen staff*)  
UK/France 1989  
124 mins

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**DREAM PALACE:****THE FILMS THAT CINEMAS WERE BUILT FOR****Blow Out**

Mon 17 May 17:45 (+ intro by Ben Roberts, BFI CEO); Tue 1 Jun 20:40

**Winner of the Dream Palace Audience Vote: Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)**

Mon 17 May 20:45; Sun 30 May 12:20

**The General**

Tue 18 May 18:10 (+ intro by Stuart Brown, BFI Head of Programme and Acquisitions); Sat 29 May 12:45

**The Shout** + pre-recorded intro by Mark Jenkin

Wed 19 May 21:00; Thu 3 Jun

**The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover**

Thu 20 May 17:30 (+ intro by Justin Johnson, BFI Lead Programmer); Thu 24 Jun 20:30

**Footloose** + pre-recorded intro by Francis Lee

Thu 20 May 20:45; Sat 29 May 18:00

**Car Wash**

Fri 21 May 18:00 (+ intro by Gurinder Chadha); Mon 31 May 18:50

**David Byrne's American Utopia**

Fri 21 May 20:45 (+ intro by Tricia Tuttle, BFI Festival Director); Mon 14 Jun 18:00

**Beginning** + pre-recorded intro by Luca Guadagnino

Sat 22 May 11:30; Tue 22 Jun 20:30

**Black Narcissus**

Sat 22 May 14:20 (+ intro by Edgar Wright); Mon 7 Jun 17:50

**The Wonders (Le meraviglie)** + pre-recorded intro by Mark Cousins

Sat 22 May 15:15; Thu 3 Jun 20:30

**Hair** + pre-recorded intro by Kleber Mendonça Filho

Sat 22 May 20:30; Fri 28 May 17:45

**Magnificent Obsession + Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)**

Sun 23 May 15:45 (+ intro by Heather Stewart, BFI Creative Director); Sun 6 Jun 18:40

**Beau Travail** + pre-recorded intro by Kirsten Johnson

Sun 23 May 18:40; Sun 30 May 18:20

**Mirror (Zerkalo)** + pre-recorded intro by Malgorzata Szumowska

Mon 24 May 17:50; Wed 9 Jun 14:30

**Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawat)** + pre-recorded intro by

Chaitanya Tamhane

Mon 24 May 20:30; Sat 19 Jun 17:50

**Goodbye, Dragon Inn (Bú sà'n)**

Wed 26 May 18:10 (+ intro by Peter Strickland); Wed 2 Jun 20:50

**The Gleaners & I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse)** + pre-recorded intro by

Zhu Shengze

Thu 27 May 18:15; Fri 26 Jun 14:30

**The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)** + pre-recorded intro by Mike

Williams, Editor *Sight & Sound*

Fri 28 May 20:50; Wed 30 Jun 14:30

**Broadcast News**

Sun 30 May 15:40 (+ intro by Sarah Smith); Sat 19 Jun 20:20

**The Elephant Man** + pre-recorded intro by Prano Bailey-Bond

Tue 15 Jun 17:45; Sat 19 Jun 12:00

**The Warriors**

Mon 21 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Asif Kapadia); Mon 28 Jun 14:30

**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS****Persona**

Mon 17 May 14:30; Fri 28 May 21:00; Wed 2 Jun 18:10 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large) Mon 28 Jun 21:00

**Touch of Evil**

Tue 18 May 14:30; Mon 31 May 12:45; Sat 5 Jun 17:50; Sun 20 Jun 18:15

**The Tango Lesson**

Tue 18 May 20:45; Wed 9 Jun 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by So Mayer, author of 'The Cinema of Sally Potter')

**Citizen Kane**

Wed 19 May 18:00; Sun 30 May 12:40; Mon 21 Jun 20:45

**L'eclisse (The Eclipse)**

Thu 20 May 14:15; Sat 5 Jun 12:10; Tue 15 Jun 17:50

**La Haine**

Thu 20 May 17:50; Sat 29 May 21:00; Wed 16 Jun 21:00; Fri 18 Jun 20:40

**The Last Picture Show (Director's Cut)**

Fri 21 May 20:30; Mon 31 May 12:50; Mon 7 Jun 17:45

**Steamboat Bill, Jr.**

Sat 22 May 12:00; Thu 3 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:30

**Raging Bull**

Sat 22 May 14:40; Sun 30 May 15:30; Tue 1 Jun 17:30

**Cleo from 5 to 7 Cléo de 5 à 7**

Sat 22 May 21:00; Thu 10 Jun 21:00; Mon 21 Jun 14:30

**The Big City (Mahanagar)**

Sun 23 May 12:10; Wed 23 Jun 17:40

**The Gospel According to Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo)**

Sun 23 May 15:20; Thu 24 Jun 17:40

**The Night of the Hunter**

Mon 24 May 14:30; Tue 8 Jun 20:50; Wed 16 Jun 18:15 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

**The Killers** + pre-recorded intro by Imogen Sara Smith, author of 'In

Lonely Places: Film Noir beyond the City'

Tue 25 May 20:30; Tue 8 Jun 14:30; Wed 23 Jun 17:50

**Alice in the Cities (Alice in den Städten)**

Wed 26 May 17:50; Tue 1 Jun 14:30; Fri 25 Jun 20:45

**Eraserhead**

Thu 27 May 18:20; Mon 14 Jun 21:00; Thu 24 Jun 21:10

**Man Hunt**

Fri 28 May 18:10; Sat 12 Jun 16:00; Tue 29 Jun 14:15

**Sweet Smell of Success**

Fri 4 Jun 15:00; Sun 13 Jun 15:45; Sat 26 Jun 11:40

**The Man Who Wasn't There**

Fri 4 Jun 17:50; Sun 27 Jun 18:20

**The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band)**

Sun 6 Jun 18:10; Sat 26 Jun 16:30

**Le Doulos** + pre-recorded intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau, King's

College London

Mon 7 Jun 14:15; Thu 17 Jun 20:45; Wed 30 Jun 17:45

**Bitter Victory**

Sun 20 Jun 13:00; Mon 28 Jun 17:55

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Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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