



**RE-RELEASES**

# The Draughtsman's Contract

## **Peter Greenaway on 'The Draughtsman's Contract'**

*The Draughtsman's Contract*. A film that is 40 years old. Made in 1982 about events in 1694. Elaborate, stylised, enjoyable, spiteful and mysterious, a film in black, white and green. With sheep. Eminently enigmatic. Always associated with frames, so much so indeed that a framing device of the late 1600s is on hand to remind you that what is outside the frame is strictly irrelevant.

The French newspapers described Peter Greenaway as a cinematic dandy and the English, once they had passed their enthusiasm for being outside their comfort zone, slowly warmed to it. Shot on 16mm blown up to 35mm for cinema release, it surprised the art-cinema circuit and irritated some English cinematic luminaries to declare that filming in England was no longer tenable if such films were going to be made there henceforth.

I am delighted at its re-mastering. I remember it being made on a somewhat unorthodox filming procedure – being shot on super-16mm and enlarged to 35mm for cinema release. I was concerned that it should be seen as an English landscape film situated around a somewhat arcane proposition of 'draw what you see and not what you know'. Your eyes must be solely your guide. I never expected it to be as successful on the art-cinema circuit. It's a story about a 'frame-up' both in metaphor and for real, and the film frame is unremittingly ubiquitous with the appearance of that late 17th-century framing device to remind you of the tyranny of the film frame. The French especially enjoyed it though a French newspaper said I was a cinematic dandy and the English newspapers, at first, until they settled on a more relaxed approach were appalled at its literary, theatrical, and visual pretensions.

The costumes by Sue Blane surprised and delighted me, so many layers, cuffs, tails and frills tailored to exhibit the body. When everyone wore white the Draughtsman was out of step and wore black. When everyone wore black the Draughtsman wore white, an arrangement to persistently demonstrate the artist being out of step manoeuvred by the wealthy establishment whose controls were out of reach however hard he tried to learn and catch up. The music by Michael Nyman surprised and excited and delighted me, energetic often to a point of frenzy and exhibiting much irony.

When we had finally finished filming in the Groombridge Kent fields we wanted to start again. I wrote a sequel called 'The Hedgecutters' about trimming boundaries. Since the draughtsman was too blinded, damaged and too dead to be resuscitated, the follow-up hero was to become his overdressed effete servant primed to die with cut extremities. But it didn't work. For a start the title was too mundane and too artisanal. It was winter and the vegetation was becoming leafless. The next film titled *A Zed and Two Noughts* was calling. Leaving a film behind is always painful.

It was truly an idyllic experience to film in unusually persistent English summer weather that only collapsed when the weather finally broke when the characters appropriately began to complain in 1694 about the arrival of

storms. It was another delightful appropriate reference of the film being determinedly self-reflexive, a persuasive reason and excuse for me evermore to insist that when you were watching a Greenaway film you were only watching a film and should never ever possibly consider that you were doing anything else.

**Peter Greenaway, Summer 2022**

**(extracted from *The Draughtsman's Contract* BFI Blu-ray booklet)**

There is probably a greater jump between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and my last film than on any previous occasion. The jump often seems irreconcilable since I'm beginning to concern myself with much more conventional modes. But then I think that there's a lot of similarity with what went before. And I shall certainly cut this film very much with past considerations in mind. There are very strong visual associations with *Vertical Features Remake*. This concern with the draughtsman seeking out particular characteristics of a landscape and pursuing them in an almost minimalist way. And the way the film is structured to keep going back to the same landscapes at different times of the day, to see how the light has made shapes, forms, verticals, how they've changed and what new significance they have at different times of the day.

My prime interests are the landscape, the ideas involved in the sheer interplay of plot, the symmetry, and those concerns characteristic of the whole sub-text of gardening; also the games that can be played with the dialogue, its content and the forms it takes. It's a very literary film, the dialogue has been very carefully worked out for puns and conceits. The whole thing is an elaborate charade, a conceit, which the 17th century enjoyed doing, witness Restoration Tragedy. One of the characteristics of my filmmaking is a whole series of stories, anecdotes, apocrypha which all come together and create a total world.

Unfortunately, we didn't have enough rehearsal time. What I wanted to do was to make sure we all knew the text very well before we started filming. The other thing I suggested was doing very, very long takes. We were going to let the actors get themselves in the dramatic situation and let the whole thing evolve. I wasn't going to make an over-edited movie. So, that was another reason why we chose to use people with a very considerable theatrical background. Because of the rhythm of the dialogue, I would have preferred to take a more cerebral approach and to stand back more from the action. I found that in moments of high physical drama, like the various killings, the dialogue had to operate on a different sort of scale. I couldn't get that distancing effect which I'd hoped for.

The convention of the long take – some are eight minutes long – has occasionally resulted in highly literary verbiage. This gratifies and excites me, but whether it will gratify and excite a much larger and more 'public' audience I don't know. I'm also worried about the film's length. It's very long and I must get it down to a semi-commercial length, about 110 minutes [Greenaway's original cut was four hours long]. There's a lot of material which, due to pressures and exigencies, has gone missing about the details of the gardens. There are numerous pressures on the film partly because of extended budgets, commercial concerns, and so on.

I would like to think that the characters – not just Neville but also Talmann – and their dialogue, which is often near the knuckle, represent some aspects of myself. As they do in a key scene between Neville and Mrs Talmann where

they talk about 'arrogance' and 'innocence'. That may be my particular problem as well, balancing the 'arrogance' with the 'innocence'. Although Neville is ostensibly a very arrogant figure, bouncing through the world and destroying all in his path out of his own self-centredness, it's through his innocence that he gets involved in other people's plots. Because, if he was a wiser man, he would have seen these machinations a mile off. But his innocence opens him up, makes him vulnerable.

All the strength of image and plot and feeling in *The Draughtsman's Contract* is pretty universal. It just happens to be put in this particular format. I want to make a good movie which has got punch, visual excitement and cerebral entertainment.

**Peter Greenaway, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1982**

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#### THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT

*Directed by:* Peter Greenaway  
©: Peter Greenaway  
*a British Film Institute production*  
*In association with:* Channel Four Television Company  
*Producer:* David Payne  
*Head of Production:* Peter Sainsbury  
*Production Assistant:* Marie Meyrick  
*Production Officer:* Peter Broughan  
*Production Secretary:* Fiona Latto  
*Assistant Director:* Andy Powell  
*Casting:* Lucy Boulting  
*Written by:* Peter Greenaway  
*Lighting Cameraman:* Curtis Clark  
*Rostrum Camera:* Hugh Gordon  
*Camera Assistant:* Luke Cardiff  
*Gaffer:* Steve Blake  
*Assistant [Gaffer]:* Paul Woods  
*Grip:* Simon Archer  
*Stills:* Simon Archer, James Merrell  
*Editor:* John Wilson  
*Assistant Editor:* John Taylor  
*Art Director:* Bob Ringwood  
*Design Assistants:* Jane Hamilton, Digby Howard  
*Calligraphy:* Kenneth Breese  
*Props:* Michael Hunter, Tommy Raeburn  
*Construction Manager:* Charlie Simmons  
*Carpenter:* Bob Coleman  
*Painter:* Alan Brown  
*Rigger:* Gordon Wright  
*Costume Designer:* Sue Blane  
*Costume Design Co-ordinator:* David Perry  
*Costumes Made by:* Colin MacNeil  
*Assistants:* Ellen Cairns, Caroline Bayliss  
*Hat Makers:* Michael Jones, Linda Eke  
*Wardrobe:* Anthony Williams, Sue Langridge  
*Make-up:* Lois Burwell  
*Assistant:* Christine Allsopp  
*Wigs Created by:* Peter Owen  
*Wig and Hair:* Peter King  
*Stylist:* Robbie Gardner  
*Titles:* Hugh Gordon  
*Laboratory Supervisor:* Len Brown  
*Lighting:* Lee Electric (Lighting)  
*Laboratory:* Kay Film Laboratories  
*Music Composed by:* Michael Nyman  
*Musicians:* Alexander Balanescu, John Harle, Elisabeth Perry, Steve Saunders, Keith Thompson, Stina Wilson, Ben Grove, David White, Malcolm Bennett, Edward Pillinger, Ian Mitchell, Michael Nyman  
*Counter-tenor:* Chris Royle  
*Music Producer:* David Cunningham

*Music Recording:* Studio 80  
*Music Engineer:* Martin Rex  
*Sound:* Godfrey Kirby  
*Sound Assistants:* Clive Osborne, Bob Doyle  
*Sound-mix:* Cinelinqual Studios Ltd  
*Dubbing Mixer:* Tony Anscombe  
*Dubbing Editor:* Doctor Lion  
*ADR:* Lionel Strutt  
*ADR Studios:* Mayflower Studio London  
*Drivers:* Gillian Strachan, Safi Farrah, Rupert Christie, Michael Coulson

#### Cast

Anthony Higgins (*Mr Neville*)  
Janet Suzman (*Mrs Herbert*)  
Anne Louise Lambert (*Sarah Talmann*)  
Neil Cunningham (*Thomas Noyes*)  
Hugh Fraser (*Louis Talmann*)  
Dave Hill (*Mr Herbert*)  
David Gant (*Mr Seymour*)  
David Meyer, Tony Meyer (*The Poulencs*)  
Nicholas Amer (*Mr Parkes*)  
Suzan Crowley (*Mrs Pierpoint*)  
Lynda Marchal (*Mrs Clement*)  
Michael Feast (*the statue*)  
Alastair Cummings (*Philip*)  
Steve Ubels (*Mr van Hoyten*)  
Ben Kirby (*Augustus*)  
Sylvia Rotter (*governess*)  
Kate Doherty (*maid*)  
Joss Buckley (*Mr Porringer*)  
Mike Carter (*Mr Clarke*)  
Vivienne Chandler (*laundress*)  
Geoffrey Larder (*Mr Hammond*)  
Harry Van Engel, George Miller (*servants*)

UK 1982©  
107 mins

Remastered by the BFI National Archive

A BFI release

There will be a Seniors' matinee screening on Mon 14 Nov, a screening with an intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov, and a screening with an intro by Film Editor John Wilson ACE on Thu 17 Nov

The remastered *The Draughtsman's Contract* will be available to buy on BFI Blu-ray from Monday 14 November