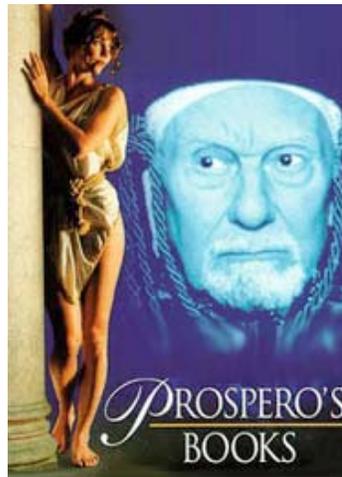
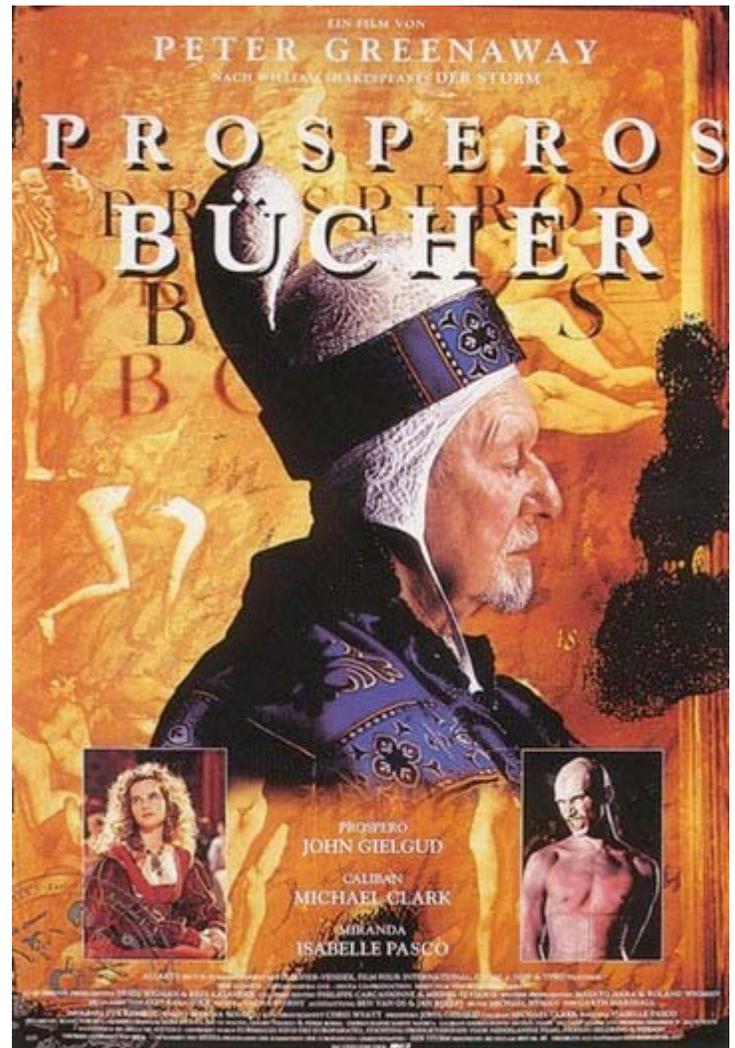


December 5, 2006 XIII: 14
PROSPERO'S BOOKS (1991) 129 min

Directed by Peter Greenaway
 Script by Peter Greenaway,
 based on William
 Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
 Produced by Kees Kasander
 Original Music by Michael
 Nyman
 Cinematography by Sacha
 Vierny
 Film Editing by Marina
 Bodbijl
 Production Design by Ben
 van Os and Jan Roelfs
 Sculptor of Prospero's books:



John Gielgud...Prospero
 Michael Clark...Caliban
 Michel Blanc...Alonso
 Erland Josephson...Gonzalo
 Isabelle Pasco...Miranda
 Tom Bell...Antonio
 Kenneth Cranham...Sebastian
 Mark Rylance...Ferdinand
 Gerard Thoolen...Adrian
 Pierre Bokma...Francisco
 Jim van der Woude...Trinculo



Peter Greenaway

Michiel Romeyn...Stephano
 Orpheo...Ariel
 Paul Russell...Ariel
 James Thiérée...Ariel
 Emil Wolk...Ariel
 Marie Angel...Iris
 Ute Lemper...Ceres
 Deborah Conway...Juno

Italian title: *L'Ultima tempesta*

Peter Greenaway (5 April 1942, Newport, Gwent, Wales, UK) has directed 41 films, the most recent of which is *Nightwatching*, currently in post-production. Some of the others are *A Life in Suitcases* (2005), *The Death of a Composer: Rosa, a Horse Drama* (1999), *8½ Women* (1999), *The Bridge* (1997), *The Pillow Book* (1996), *The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover* (1989), *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), *Fear of Drowning* (1988), *The Belly of an Architect* (1987), *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1985), *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982), *H Is for House* (1973), *Erosion* (1971), *Train* (1966), *Tree* (1966) and *Death of Sentiment* (1962).



Sacha Vierny (10 August 1919, Bois-le-Roi, Seine-et-Marne, Île-de-France, France—15 May 2001, Paris) shot 64 films, the last of which was *The Man Who Cried* (2000). Some of the others were *8 ½ Women* (1999), *The Pillow Book* (1996),

The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover (1989), *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), *Fear of Drowning* (1988), *The Belly of an Architect* (1987), *A Zed & Two Noughts* (1985), *Mon oncle d'Amérique* (1980), *Stavisky* (1974), *Belle de jour* (1967), *La Guerre est finie* (1966), *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Nuit et brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955) and *Pantomimes* (1954).

John Gielgud (14 April 1904, London, England—21 May 2000, Wotton Underwood, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England) appeared in 130 theatrical and tv films, the last of which was *Catastrophe* (2000). Some of the others were *Elizabeth* (1998), *Hamlet* (1996), *Shine* (1996), "War and Remembrance" (1988 mini TV Series), *The Shooting Party* (1985), "The Far Pavilions" (1984 mini TV Series), *Oedipus the King* (1984 TV), *Antigone* (1984 TV), *Gandhi* (1982), "Brideshead Revisited" (1981 mini TV), *Arthur* (1981, for which is won a best supporting actor Oscar), *Lion of the Desert* (1981), *Chariots of Fire* (1981), *The Formula* (1980), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Murder by Decree* (1979), *Joseph Andrews* (1977), *Galileo* (1975), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), "QB VII" (1974 mini TV Series), *Julius Caesar* (1970), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968), *The Loved One* (1965), *Becket* (1964), *Saint Joan* (1957), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), *Richard III* (1955), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *The Prime Minister* (1941), *Secret Agent* (1936), *Insult* (1932) and *Who Is the Man?* (1924).

Michael Clark (29 May 1962, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Scotland) has acted in only two other films: *The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover* (1989) and *Degrees of Blindness* (1988).

Erland Josephson (15 June 1923, Stockholm, Sweden) has acted in 96 films and television programs, the most recent of which is *Wellkåmm to Verona* (2006). Some of the others are *Il Papa buono* (2003 TV), *C'è Kim Novak al telefono/Kim Novak Is on the Phone* (1994), *Meeting Venus* (1991), *Le Testament d'un poète juif assassiné* (1988), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), *Offret/The Sacrifice* (1986), *Saving Grace* (1985), *Dirty Story* (1984), *Nostalgia* (1983), *Fanny och Alexander/Fanny and Alexander* (1982), *Montenegro* (1981), *Höstsonaten/Autumn Sonata* (1978), *Scener ur ett äktenskap/Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), *Viskningar och rop/Cries and Whispers* (1972), *En Passion/The Passion of Anna* (1969), and *Ansiktet/The Magician* (1958).

"Peter Greenaway," from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink, Detroit, 1998. Entry by Saul Frampton and Rob Edelman

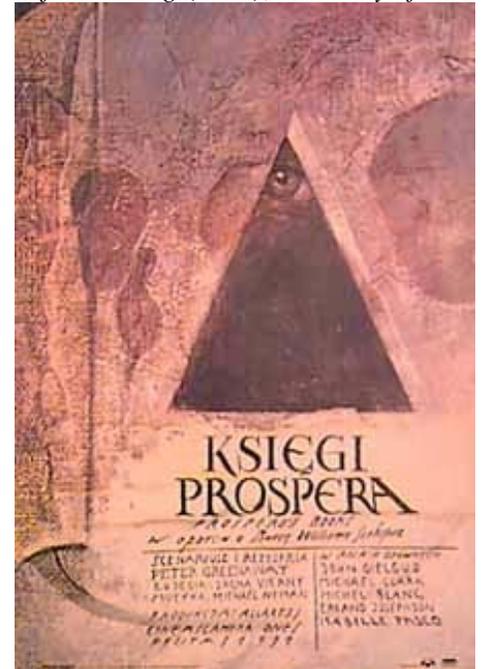
British. Born London, 5 April 1942. Studied painting. First exhibition London, 1964. Worked as a film editor for Central Office of Information, 1965-76.

An ancient Chinese encyclopedia, according to Borges, divides animals into "(a) those that belong to the emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (I) those that tremble as if they are mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance." One is tempted to add, (o) those featured in Peter Greenaway's films. The inclusion would seem appropriate for a filmmaker who has constantly displayed a fascination for the organic and classificatory in a body of films that have themselves retained an art-house individuality within the broader criteria of popular success.

Greenaway's biography implies a deeper integration between life and his art than some critics might

suggest. He grew up in post-war Essex, his father was an ornithologist—perhaps the quintessential English hobby—and the petit-bourgeois world of public respectability and private eccentricity seems to have left him with a taste for the contradictory that hallmarks his work ("The black humour, irony, distancing, a quality of being in control, an interest in landscape, treating the world as equal with an image, these are very English qualities. I can't imagine myself living abroad.") He trained as a painter rather than a filmmaker, but his first exhibition, "Eisenstein at the Winter Palace," indicated an interest that led him into film editing at the Central Office of Information, the government department responsible for informing the public in the unique "home-counties" voice of domestic propaganda.

These years saw Greenaway developing a crop of his own absurdist works—films, art novels, illustrated books, drawings—with such titles as *Goole by Numbers* and *Dear Phone*, as well as directing (non-absurdist) Party Political Broadcasts for the Labour Party. They also saw the introduction of his fictional alter ego, Tulse Luper, archivist, cartographer, ornithologist extraordinaire ("He's me at about 65. A know-all Buckminster Fuller, a McLuhan, a John Cage, a pain"). Nomenclature means a



lot to Greenaway in determining where one would be filed in the unfortunate event of a statistically (im)probable end. *The Falls* is a catalogue of victims of V.U.E. (Violent Unknown Event), with characters such as Mashanter Fallack, Carlos Fallanty, Raskado Fallcastle, and Henry Fallparco. The epitome of absurdity was perhaps reached in *Act of God*, a film based around interviews with people who'd been struck by lightning in an attempt to find out what led to such an unpredictable event.

But perhaps the most tickling piece of absurdity for Greenaway came in the commercial success of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, his first film made on a reasonable budget. It made an uncharacteristic concession to plot, characterization, and scenic coherence. A stylish, lavish, and enigmatic puzzle revolving around murder in a stately seventeenth-century English home, it soon became the subject of a mythical French film conference that discussed its title for five days, and gained popular fame as everyone asked what it was all about. But it made Greenaway's name and briefly contested box office ratings with the likes of *E.T.* and *Gandhi*, although Greenaway's intended length was four hours—"one suspects it was originally closer to *Tristram Shandy* than *Murder at the Vicarage*," as one critic remarked.

Greenaway's ideas tend to work in twos. *A Zed and Two Noughts* took Siamese twins separated at birth and saw them cope with their grief at the death of their wives in a study in the decomposition of zoo animals. *Belly of an Architect* silhouetted the visceral mortality of Stourley Kracklite against his plans for an exhibition on a visionary eighteenth-century architect, Étienne-Louis Boullée. But the dialectic seems more important than the ideas themselves, as Greenaway hints: "The important thing about Boullée—and this is where he's very like a filmmaker, who tends to spend much more time on uncompleted projects than completed ones—is that very few of his buildings were constructed. I've taken that up in Kracklite's fear of committal, being prepared to go half-way and no further, which is Kracklite's position and maybe my position as well."

In this position Greenaway has always been most successful when casting strong leading actors. He secured Brian Dennehy as Kracklite, for instance, and the cast of arguable his most successful film, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, included Michael Gambon (the Thief) and Helen Mirren (his Wife).

Greenaway's ideas are always sufficiently ambiguous to resist trivialization, but invariably involve death: Death and Landscape, Death and Animals, Death and Architecture, Death and Sex, Death and Food (cannibalism). But there are factors which make them more palatable. One of them is a taste for sumptuous framing (helped by cinematographer Sacha Vierney), in which he envisages an aesthetic complexity similar to the golden age of Dutch art, "where those amazing manifestations of the real world that we find in Vermeer and Rembrandt are

enriched by a fantastic metaphorical language." The other is his close collaboration with the composer Michael Nyman, whose insistent scores lend an inexorable quality to Greenaway's sometimes spatial fabric of ideas.

The films of Peter Greenaway continue to be consistently outrageous and challenging. *Drowning by Numbers* is a bizarre, erotic concoction about three generations of women, each named Cissie Colpitts (and played by Joan Plowright, Juliet Stevenson, and Joely Richardson). Each Cissie is saddled with a husband who is lecherous or inattentive. And each one decides to murder her mate by drowning him. Madgett the coroner (Bernard Hill), who lusts after these women, agrees to list the deaths as natural. But the heroines hold the upper hand in the story, and Madgett's fate proves to be beyond his control.

Prospero's Books is an original, daring adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with almost all of the dialogue spoken by 87-year-old John Gielgud (cast as Prospero, a role he played many times on stage). The other actors are little more than extras and, as in many of Greenaway's works, there is a mind-boggling amount of nudity. Purist defenders of the Bard many find much to fault in *Prospero's Books*. But the film remains noteworthy both for Gielgud's splendid readings of the text and its exquisitely layered imagery and production design.

Finally, *The Baby of Macon*, which featured Julia Ormond and Ralph Fiennes prior to their ascension to stardom, is a demanding drama. It is set in the 17th century and presented as a play being performed on a vast stage. The play depicts the birth and life of a saint-like baby. In typical Greenaway fashion, there is luminous cinematography (by the filmmaker's frequent collaborator, Sacha Vierney) and production design. Some will find *The Baby of Macon* stimulating; others will think it overblown; and still others will be perplexed by it all.

There are contradictions in Greenaway's works, a fact that seems to openly provoke divided opinion. Some would suggest that the fecundity of his vision, his intellectual rigor, is the stuff of great cinema; others, while admitting his originality, would still look for evidence of a deeper engagement with film as a medium, rather than a vehicle for ideas. Lauded in Europe, under-distributed in the United States, loved and reviled in his own country, Greenaway is, nevertheless, in an enviable position for a filmmaker.

Sir John Gielgud (Prospero) Comments (from the *Prospero's Books* website)

Fairly soon after the release of "Prospero's Books" John Gielgud released a book on his life. In the book he relates his experience of working with Peter Greenaway on "Prospero's Books". The following is an extract from *Acting Shakespeare*, by John Gielgud with John Miller, Charles Scribner's Sons New York, 1991:

I always had a great ambition to film *The Tempest*, but I

could not find a director until I happened to meet Peter Greenaway. I had been fascinated by his films, especially *The Draughtsman's Contract*, which I saw two or three times. He was a completely new personality, as you could feel from the way in which his films were photographed and acted.

... Gielgud had been attempting to interest other directors in *The Tempest* for a while -- Akira Kurosawa and Ingmar Bergman never answered; Peter Brook only worked with his own company; Gielgud didn't like Derek Jarman's ideas; Peter Sellers was willing, but the financing fell through.

Then, out of the blue, Peter Greenaway rang me up to ask if I would appear for three or four days in a television film of Dante's *Inferno* (titled A TV DANTE)... Then, while we were having lunch one day, I said "You know, the one thing I long to do is to make a film of *The Tempest*." Three months later I received from him a detailed script, devised for the screen, and containing the first part of the play, up to the meeting of Ferdinand and Miranda. A few months later he had completed the whole shooting script and sent it to me. It made an enormously thick volume, with every kind of detailed description of how the film was to be shot. The scenario is, I think, extraordinarily original and daring. It consists entirely of Shakespeare's text: there is not a word in it that is not in the play. But then he suddenly said, "Why don't you play all the parts?" I replied, "You must be mad. What about Miranda and Ariel?" I didn't really understand what he was driving at...

We filmed in Amsterdam in the spring of 1990 and the final editing was being completed in Japan in 1991. It is a perfectly authentic version of the play, but completely fantasised and elaborated by Greenaway in his own particular way. I imagine, from what little I have seen of it so far, that what might emerge is a kind of mimed ballet of the action, with Shakespeare's words spoken over it. On the screen you see Prospero beginning to become inspired to write the play.

... The suggestion to use flashbacks to show the early life of Prospero and Miranda was Gielgud's.

As I write this, I have not yet seen the film, only an hour of clips, and there is an enormous amount of editing still to be done, with magic effects of all kinds. Until it is finished I have no means of judging how it has succeeded. But I am perfectly sure that it will be very beautiful to look at. Of course, Greenaway is a painter himself, influenced by Tintoretto and Titian and all the great Renaissance painters, and he organises and choreographs all his scenes with remarkable taste and feeling for depth and colour.

He was working with a crew, most of whom he had used in his other films, and a superlative French lighting man, Sacha Vierny, whose work is most imaginative, mysterious, and striking. There are magnificent sets and costumes, mostly in the Renaissance style, designed by two Dutchmen, Ben Van Os and Jan Raelfs, who have created the Renaissance palace which

Prospero has built in his imagination. It was fascinating to be given the opportunity of trying to play this great part, which I now know so very well, after playing it four or five times in the theatre. With Greenaway I had the same feeling that I had with Peter Brook, with Granville-Barker, and with Lindsay Anderson and Peter Hall, the feeling that I could trust their judgment and criticism and put myself entirely into their hands. I had the same experience with Alain Resnais in 1972, when I did the film *Providence*, which I came to regard as the only screen performance I could be proud of. I found that Greenaway is a great admirer of Resnais, and has never met him because he regards his work so highly....

We had another long scene in which Greenaway wanted me to walk with people standing beside me, and when I said I could not see it that way, he understood and changed it at once. We were in great sympathy over everything, and the few times I did suggest or alter something he immediately understood what I was driving at.

Above all, I was greatly impressed by his control. A very quiet man who never raises his voice, he walked about the studio all day long, never sat down, and seemed to work equally easily with the sound man who was British, the lighting man who was French, all the crew who were of mixed nationalities, including a lot of Dutchmen, and the whole cast, extras of every nationality, all very obedient, even when working overtime. They did not seem to mind taking all their clothes off to play the visionary and mythological characters. Unlike the atmosphere on most film sets, no one ever had to shout for quiet; there was no hammering or tantrums or bad behaviour. The whole thing was wonderfully organised, and I greatly hoped that the final result would be all that it seemed to promise while we were shooting it.

Peter Greenaway Interviews. Ed. By Vernon Gras and Marguerite Gras. University of Mississippi, Jackson Miss., 2000.

"Prospero's Books—World and Spectacle: An Interview with Peter Greenaway." Marlene Rogers, 1991

"Many years ago I wrote a script called "Jonson and Jones," about the relationship of Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones in making masques in a period of fifteen years, but apparently all the time they were quarreling. They were professionally—and in their private lives—very antagonistic and jealous of one another. But I think over and above these niceties, basically Ben Jonson was interested in the word, and Inigo Jones was interested in spectacle. And there's a way they had to fashion their two opposing interests to make a coherent whole, in order to present their masques. And in a way that is also the quandary of cinema...it's very interesting to try to find a filmmaker who can bring the word and the spectacle together." [Peter Greenaway]

Very evidently, Greenaway is this filmmaker. The marriage of word and spectacle informs every moment of his latest film, *Prospero's Books*. Greenaway's sixth feature is operatic in its use of music, song, dance, and the choreography of scores of extras. Against opulent settings of Renaissance architecture, naked spirits form tableaux based on classical mythology or Western art. The spectacle is further enhanced by the density of the images. Greenaway uses both conventional film techniques and the resources of high-definition television to layer image upon image, superimposing or opening out a second or third frame within his frame. At the same time, the film is highly literary and self-referential in its constant reminders that *The Tempest* is text: Greenaway conceives the play as Prospero's own creation. And we see the pen of the magician-playwright as it moves across the parchment, leaving baroque, calligraphic lines of the text in its wake.

Language and text are further emphasized by the authoritative voice of Sir John Gielgud—as Prospero, author of the play, he speaks all the dialogue until the final act. The magical force of his words conjures his characters before our eyes in elaborate dumb shows, played out in long extended takes. Only when Prospero forgives his enemies, realizing that “The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance,” do the characters he has created come alive and speak in their own voices.

Perhaps Greenaway's most imaginative strategy in adapting *The Tempest* is his use of Shakespeare's brief mention of Prospero's magical books. Greenaway creates fantastical volumes that encompass the vast knowledge Prospero required to create his island utopia. The twenty-four books, which punctuate and structure the narrative, include anatomy texts with organs that throb and bleed and architectural texts with buildings that spring out, fully formed.

The realization of *Prospero's Books* has not exhausted Greenaway's creative engagement with *The Tempest*. He is publishing a collection of images from the film under the title *Ex Libris Prospero*, as well as a novel, *Prospero's Creatures*. Additionally, he is writing a play called *Miranda*, which forefronts Prospero's daughter as the characters of *The Tempest* journey back to Milan.

Greenaway was in Toronto for the Festival of Festivals and I spoke to him about *Prospero's Books* and his very evident interest in the seventeenth century. Greenaway's latest film is now the third to bear a relation to that period. His first feature *The Draughtsman's Contract*, is set in the Restoration, in 1692; *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* is strongly influenced by Jacobean revenge tragedy, particularly John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; and *Prospero's Books* is set in 1611—the year that Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*.

PG: For some reason, the seventeenth century is an extraordinary period, it's a transitional period—you must remember that the Renaissance came to England very late.

So by the time the High Renaissance had run its course in Italy, we were only just beginning our sense of Renaissance. Sometimes it's curious to imagine Shakespeare as an equivalent figure to somebody like Michelangelo; it's strange to think that they are both figures of the Renaissance but that they are posited in completely different worlds. I always think of the Jacobean as being much more Renaissance-conscious than Shakespeare—although the first Renaissance influence in England came in the reign of Henry VII. There was a man called Torrigiano who created the tomb for Henry VII, so that was the first evidence of Renaissance spirit in northern Europe.

There is a way that late Shakespearean drama has certainly excited and been a profound influence on a lot of my cinema for a long time, but I think that *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* has somehow been responsible for my interest in both the beginning of the seventeenth century and the end. I saw a production of that play when I was an adolescent and probably very impressionable, and I was immediately taken with all its themes and ideas—its violence towards women, its concerns with examining very dangerous taboo areas like voluntary incest, its gestures that are almost too melodramatic to be true, like the cutting out of the heart, and so on. Jacobean drama basically has to do with translations of Seneca coming through France and the Low Countries to influence English drama. There is an alternative tradition, that starts with Seneca and goes on through Jacobean drama to be picked up later by people like de Sade, and then much later by people like Genet, Bataille, and it even continues with Ionesco's *Theatre of Cruelty* and Peter Brooks *Theatre of Blood*, and perhaps it is also picked up by filmmakers like Bunuel and Pasolini. So I'm fascinated by an alternative examination of cultures, which I suppose basically examines the center of the human predicament by going to the edges, to the extremes, to see in fact how far one can stretch the examination of various forms of aberrant behavior. It's obviously a tradition that I'm interested in, as exemplified by the extremes of both literal and metaphorical cannibalism as an idea in *The Cook, the Thief...*

MR: In the past you've talked about the seventeenth century having correspondences in our own times. In what ways do you feel *The Tempest* is particularly relevant now?

PG: *The Tempest*, of course, is a play all about beginnings and endings, which makes it perhaps very relevant to the end of the century, the end of the millennium. Miranda is given those words which Huxley used, “O brave new world/That has such people in it,” which is an extraordinary statement for the future and optimism. I think that I saw about six performances of *The Tempest* on the stage in London last year, and there's now apparently a Danish animated film about *The Tempest* going around, and of course there's the famous Peter Brook

that is now travelling the world, so it seems to be a very, very useful and contemporary piece to play with.

Another nice thing is that Shakespeare begins to eschew narrative [in the last plays], he's not worried about all those narrative niceties any more. He jumps time, he changes locations very dramatically, all those sorts of things which I'm interested in. Because I'm not particularly interested in contemporary psychodrama—with all that pseudo-supermarket Freudian analysis of character which becomes so boring—that has now been going on so long, especially in dominant cinema, which itself seems to be simply an illustrational medium, illustrating novels all the time, not even twentieth-century novels but nineteenth-century novels. I mean, what film can you see that's actually taken cognizance of James Joyce, for example? I've made comments about cinema not reaching cubism yet, but there hasn't even been an awareness of Joyce. When these other art forms have taken great imaginative leaps, cinema tragically has remained very conventional and backward-looking. You can see why, of course: great sums of money are necessary, great collaborative efforts, distribution and exhibition systems that are very moribund and reactionary. So, as you can see with my cinema, I'm trying very hard, maybe overambitiously—for myself as well as for other purposes—to begin to explore these sorts of examples that exist cross-culturally.

What is your own theory of character, given that you're not interested in the traditional psychological exploration of character?

You know the novels of Heinrich von Kleist? There is a way in which this writer, who is writing about the eighteen-twenties, had a great sense of de facto examination of characters, so there was never any attempt to explain. Characters were given characteristics and there was no attempt to delve into Oedipal problems and the traumas of childhood and all that sort of association. And there's a way that I really like that approach. Another thing that I'm trying to do—since Prospero has become an industry—I've written a novel called *Prospero's Creatures*, which is about all those allegorical creatures that dart about in the penumbra areas of the film. Because I've been interested for a very long time in allegory. Allegory is very largely not important to us anymore. We have Father Time with the attribute of the scythe, and maybe Blind Justice holding the scales, but compared to the plethora of allegorical figures that inhabited the seventeenth-century imagination there is no comparison to be made anymore. And all those characters in the tracking shots behind the title, I've tried to find as many characters as I could who had an allegorical reference to water. So, just to name a few, you get Mr. and Mrs. Noah with their ark, you get references to Moses in the bulrushes, there are examples of Leda and the Swan, there are examples of Icarus falling into the sea—all those mythological allegorical figures that have some association, since it is

The Tempest, with water. And I use this sort of idea elsewhere according to whatever else is happening on the screen. So...an examination of character as ciphers, characters carrying the weight of an allegorical significance. *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*: the very title implies all cooks, all thieves, all wives, all lovers. It's like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the so-and-so's tale, and the so-and-so's tale. And these characters are all brought together in one particular situation. I've often been castigated for not wishing to develop the characters in a three-dimensional sense, but I'm not really interested if their grandmother was called Grace and had a dog called Fido. So quite readily, without apology, characters for me have to hold a weight of allegorical and personifying meaning.

Yet there were a lot of psychological insights into character to be taken out of The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover.

Inevitably, invariably. You could work up great theses about the sexuality of Albert Spica, for example, and his interest in the lavatory rather than the bedroom and his concern for sexual apparatus being so near the digestive tract and all that. Of course that was there for those readings, but I would also like all these other readings to be apparent.

I want to come back to the water imagery in The Tempest you were talking of earlier. This is obviously a very strong element in the play, but it seems that water imagery has a special fascination for you in your other films, too. Most obviously in Drowning by Numbers, but also in other films, including your short, Making a Splash, which was sort of an ode to water.

Well, on a practical level, water is fantastically photogenic. But of course, the world is four-fifths water, we're all born in amniotic fluid, water is a big cleansing medium whether it's literal or metaphorical. On another, pragmatic level, water provides almost a legitimate opportunity for people to be seen nude, in the case of *Twenty-six Bathrooms*, for example. But it literally is the oil of life, it is the blood of life, which splashes, dribbles, washes, roars—it's a great friend and a terrifying enemy, it has all those significances. And there is a way in which somehow water is the unguent, the balm, the cooling agent of the dramas of all the films. And I suspect I should go on using it too.

You suggest in your notes to Prospero's Books that the books Prospero has on his island are responsible for making him the paradoxical character that he is. To what extent did you actually use the books as a means of reflecting on Prospero's character?

On a slightly facetious note, if *The Cook the Thief*...was a film about "You are what you eat," *Prospero's Books* is a film about "You are what you read." We're all products of our education, our cultural background, which very largely is perceived through text. Text is so desperately important in this film. All the images

come out of Prospero's inkwell, as though the inkwell were a top hat, with the magician pulling out the scarves, image after image. And there's a way in which each time a book is brought forth, it indicates a slight change in Prospero's behavior. Because sometimes he is a stern grandfather, sometimes he is rather avuncular—he has an avuncular relationship with Ariel. Sometimes he is a dictator, wearing the hat of a doge, representative of a maritime power. Sometimes he is a beneficent magician. Sometimes he is worried about his daughter's virginity. His character changes all the time, so we introduce a book which might, as it were, explain the cultural references that made him the man he was.

So the books are working on that level, as well as introducing the vast plethora of Prospero's knowledge. In some senses the whole film is going on in his head; there are masses and masses of knowledge that a scholar accumulates, some of it quite wasteful, some of it quite bad. There are images obviously from Michelangelo but also from nineteenth-century salon painting, there's high art and low art. You know this post-Warhol attitude towards the elevation of kitsch into something more significant. Although the film is posited in 1611, Prospero has—as a magician—foresight. He embraces the art of the future, as well as the art of the past.

A narcissistic desire for omnipotence drives a lot of seventeenth-century protagonists, as well as some of your characters, like Albert Spica, for example. They crave the kind of godlike power that Prospero possesses. It is ironic that at the end of The Tempest, Prospero relinquishes that power by destroying his books.

I have a great antipathy to that ending and would take up a quarrel with Shakespeare, if I could be so bold in my humble position as an eccentric English filmmaker at the end of the twentieth century. I could never imagine that there would be any great significance gained by throwing away knowledge—I don't think you can throw away knowledge. And the correspondence for our present reality that is important to me is that we have invested ourselves with so much knowledge that I think we ourselves have almost become magicians. We can alter nature's course, with our creation of the atomic bomb, and with all the investigations into embryology and DNA and so on—you know this whole business about genetic manipulation of continuums. I don't think you can de-knowledge yourself, so the gesture of throwing books away is a peculiarly wasteful one. It's also a very selfish one, too, because even if we cannot use the value of those books ourselves, other people can, so somehow it's almost not just denying knowledge to himself but to everyone else too.

There is, I suppose, even one more gesture after the throwing away of the books. You must remember the last two—a collection of Shakespeare's plays and *The Tempest*—are preserved. Otherwise of course I wouldn't have the wherewithal to make the film itself. That's a typical post-modernist self-referential gesture at the end.

Also, Caliban, the image of the negative aspect of the island, so-called, is the savior of the books, which is I think a nice ironic gesture. But even when that's done, we still see the final, almost apocalyptic release of Ariel, the final gasp or release of the spirit. So you see them [the Ariels] running, through fire and water, through the main elements towards us. Finally there is the little child who runs to the audience almost like a child would run so that you could embrace it, catch it with a great sense of innocence and pleasure. But then he too escapes our grasp—whhht—and goes flying up into the sky. And all that we're left with is the equivalent of a safety curtain that has come down between us and this whole world. This whole universe now gradually disappears and all we're left with is a few scribbles, some animated graffiti. And then we finally hear on the sound track this huge splash and we're right back again at the beginning of the play, which began with those single drips. So—the final release of the spirit when you've thrown the knowledge away.

In divesting himself of power and knowledge, Prospero is of course preparing for death—even though he is going back to Milan.

There's that beautiful, very last thing he says before the burning of the books, "And thence retire me to my Milan, where/Every third thought shall be my grave."

Prospero feels a strong sense of inevitability. There's a way in which he wants his power back again, and he could conceivably return to Milan fully fleshed as the Duke. But by bringing Miranda and Ferdinand together, he does hand over the power—he's passing it on to the next generation. He's finally resigned himself to the fact that he's no longer significant, that the rod of power had already by that gesture passed on.

This sense of reconciliation is a common thread in all of Shakespeare's last plays. The other interesting thing that they have in common is that the men abandon their quests for power and domination and make some peace with their own vulnerability and the contingencies of the natural world. The fathers, like Prospero, rely on their daughters to carry on their identities through bearing children, rather than relying on their sons to maintain their honor through deeds and achievements.

The fallback Darwinian position—where we are all basically just carriers of the genetic material and we're only here in some senses to pass it on. The corollary of that, which is terrifying to some people, is that of you do not pass it on, you're valueless. So that if you don't have children, your purposes on earth are invalidated, which is a quite terrifying sentence for all those people who have no wish to procreate, or no desire, or no opportunity. I've done my procreation—I'm idling my way between now and death, my purpose on earth has been completed.

Unless we believe that our civilizing projects, art and so on, are worth doing.

Well, there's a way in which maybe that's only merely decorating the nest.

You've said before that in The Belly of an Architect one of your questions is "Is art worth doing?"—and this is perhaps one of the questions Prospero's gesture suggests at the end of the play.

The Belly has become retrospectively very, very sensitive material for me. There is the central argument between a public and a private life, which is very important for a creator—and the film makes lots of personal references to myself and my offspring and my next of kin. But also, it does really examine this question of "Can art make you immortal?" It's posited in Rome, the city of eternity. That title suggests that it's the longest-living, the longest-existing—certainly architecturally—city that there's ever been in the Western world. But also one must remember that Rome, both in the ancient empire and certainly in the Second World War, was the home of fascism. Ultimate power, ultimate narcissism, personified in someone like Mussolini, taken to extremes. And Rome is full of monuments to death and glory, ruins, enormous pyramids to Sestius, triumphal arches representing slavery, representing colonization of the rest of Europe. So Rome itself is the most extraordinary image of all these power crises: it has kings, it has republics, it has democracies, it has Garibaldi, it has emperors like Napoleon, it has oligarchies, it has the most extraordinary range of political systems. And that Roman power and glory and might and narcissism—and the political ideas taken to extremes—were all part of what was represented by Stourley Kracklite, the architect who comes from Chicago, which Upton Sinclair described as the city of blood, meat, and money. Those descriptions can perhaps be used for Rome too.

The film is also about the way that man reproduces himself. At the beginning we see a lot of three-dimensional sculpture, one way of man reproducing himself, a very complicated and time-consuming way. A little later on we begin to examine painted representations of man at that bathroom scene, and then there's the representation of man through photography, and finally, the most banal of all, through photocopying. Now there are more photocopies in the world than there are photographs, there are more photographs than there are paintings, and there are more paintings than there are sculptures. There is a way in which we have increased the banality in proportion to the accuracy in which man actually finds a picture of himself. Because after all, a photocopy is supposedly an exact reproduction of the original that you put into a machine. But all these things fail, all these attempts to continue man in sort of an artistic sense or search for immortality, and the film ends with the cry of a child. Rather clichéd, rather contrived, how the actual birth of his child happens at the selfsame moment as the artist himself, the architect throws himself out the window. Suggesting that this is the only way we can ever

conceivably imagine any sense of immortality. Which throws an enormous question on the significance not only of civilization but of all cultural pursuits. So it's still a question for me—am I doing something which is valuable, is this a total waste of time, what am I doing, what do I think I'm doing, and all those problems. In that sense it's a very, very personal film....

Stylistically it seemed to me that Prospero's Books was very close to TV Dante, in which you were also bringing together your images and a very renowned literary text. However, the technologies used in Prospero's Books and TV Dante were obviously very different.

There is a way that *Prospero's Books* is *The Cook, the Thief...meets TV Dante*—the two big vocabularies of film and television that I'm trying very hard to bring together, which is so exciting. The opportunity I had to work with a number of Japanese backers was instrumental in making *Prospero's Books*. There's no way I could have used the low-tech television that's represented by *TV Dante* and put it up against 35mm without embarrassment, because the quality's so bad. But with the new technical equipment of high definition, we have 100-percent improvement, because there are twice as many lines on the television screen. Very obviously this is like a picture in the newspaper—the more dots you have the higher quality the picture. There's still a long way to go because the technology hasn't been fully perfected yet, but it did give the courage to feel that a TV picture finally could be put up against a 35mm picture of excellent quality. I could finally consider a marriage between the two—and I want to go on and on doing this because I think it's very exciting.

from a 1992 interview with Suzanna Turman

ST: Your inventions of the books themselves are wonderful.

PG: Although Shakespeare doesn't tell us what those books are, I would like to think that they were magical books which could be associated very much with the year of the first performance of the play in 1611. In some sense they could be described as fantasy books, like the book of motion that jumps up and down on the library shelf, and the books of architecture which when you open, out springs Rome. I would like to imagine perhaps that maybe in a hundred years we shall certainly have books like that. But each book is supposed to represent a whole area of knowledge which would be applicable to the imagination of a post-Renaissance prince such as Prospero. And there is also a facetious joke about the twenty-four books—Godard suggested that cinema was truth 24 frames a second. The whole phenomenon has become a sort of industry for me, because I've also written two books, one of which explains Prospero's library in much greater detail.

And I heard you were writing a sequel as well?

Yes, because I'm so unhappy about the wretched position of Miranda. I've complained so bitterly about the female in cinema, either being a passive sexual object, or at

very best a catalyst for male behavior. And, lo and behold, Miranda exactly fulfills those two stereotypes! So I've written a play about Miranda, and she completely changes things on that boat going back home—a whole different twist to everything.

You're certainly non-sexist and even-handed with the nudity in the film.

Americans always ask about nudity. There are many rationales for it, but primarily I'm trying to create here the imagination of late Renaissance mannerist potentate, who would almost certainly have as his background classical imagery. So that his pictorial landscape, I'm sure, would be formed by the classical nude as seen in paintings by Titian, and Giorgione, and late Bellini. I'm interested in the debate about sensitivity to the nude in some senses, which was certainly started with me in the last film I made, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife And Her Lover*, which you might remember. Normally, contemporary American cinema, indeed, contemporary world cinema, presupposes that when you take your clothes off, it's a prelude to sex. This landscape of the nude and the naked in *Prospero's Books*—it's a very de-sexualized, or un-sexualized concern. There is a proposition here that the body, the clay, the lode of Prospero's magic is represented

by this huge population of people, both young and old, masculine and feminine, so-called beautiful and so-called ugly—though, I think in context, a body can hardly ever be described as being ugly.

But do Americans usually ask you to justify the nudity?

I think they're perplexed. Those sensitivities are obviously interesting to contemplate and examine. Anybody in New York can go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and see nudes galore, but they are in the context of art. Now, what happens if I think that cinema is art? Can my audience acclimatize themselves to the fact that I'm using the same language that exists at the Metropolitan? I think those things need to be debated.

Are you aware that there has been a debate going on in the U.S. regarding the propriety of funding art, if it should be distasteful to the general public, usually hinging on sexual content?

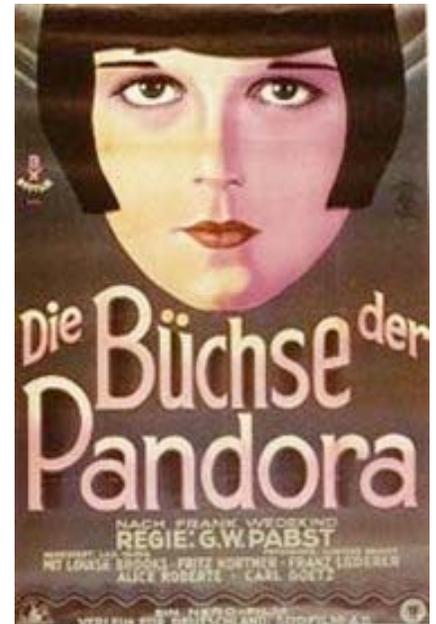
Really? Who decides? That's artistic fascism, isn't it? You're all so Puritanical. There are criticisms—and maybe with a Puritanical nation like America—a suspicion of excess, which is crazy, because the Americans are the most excess-ful nation on earth.

SPRING 2008 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS (REDUX) XIV:

- Jan 16 Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton, *The General* 1927
- Jan 23 Georg Wilhelm Pabst, *Pandora's Box/Die Büchse der Pandora* 1929
- Jan 30 Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will/Triumph des Willens* 1935
- Feb 6 Jean Cocteau, *Beauty and the Beast/La Belle et la bête* 1946
- Feb 13 Jean Renoir, *Rules of the Game/La Règle du jeu* 1939
- Feb 20 Vittorio De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves/Ladri di biciclette* 1948
- Feb 27 Yasujiro Ozu, *Tokyo Story/Tokyo monogatari* 1953
- March 6 Orson Welles, *Touch of Evil* 1958
- March 20 David Lean, *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962
- March 27 Jean-Luc Godard, *Contempt/Le Mépris* 1963
- April 3 Stanley Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove* 1964
- April 10 Sergio Leone, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly/Il Buono, il brutto, il cattivo* 1966
- April 17 Robert Altman, *Nashville* 1975
- April 24 Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

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