

The Cook, The Thief, His Wife And Her Lover



Helen Mirren as the thief's wife, steals away for a quickie.

HELEN MIRREN Talks To Gerard Raymond

In Peter Greenaway's new film, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, Helen Mirren plays the abused wife of an obnoxious bully. She finds great love and passion with another man and eventually wreaks bloody revenge on her tyrannical husband. The 42-year-old English actress who was first known for her work with the Royal Shakespeare Company on stage, delivers a tour-de-force performance.

Among her many celebrated stage performances are Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. She is renowned for her extraordinary sensuality and passion, qualities she brought to movies like *Excalibur* and *Pascal's Island* as well. Since 1984 she has worked in America. She made three films in Hollywood, *2010*, *White Nights* and *Mosquito Coast* and currently lives in Los Angeles with director Taylor Hackford.

What attracted you to *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and*

Her Lover?

Well, the script is an extraordinary piece of writing, the language is so very powerful. I think it's an amazing piece of literature, which is rare in a film script. One isn't used to the discipline of listening to words in film, you are much more concerned with the visual images. But there is constant flow of language through this script. My background is in theater, very specifically in classical theater, so I am very attracted by poetry in drama and I think this film is poetic.

The British press used to describe you as "the sex siren of the Royal Shakespeare Company." Dating back to *The Age of Consent* (1969), your first film, you have not shied away from nudity or explicit sex scenes. Your current film, too, calls for very passionate love-making on screen. What are your thoughts on this?

I think nowadays it is something that comes with the job. It has just become a part of the vocabulary of

filmmaking, rightfully or wrongfully. I don't think there is any artistic necessity, as such, for such explicit scenes in any film but at the same time I am not offended by them myself and I don't make any particular moral judgments about that.

This film is explicit too, but it is different. It is much more dangerous than anything I have ever done before. Also, it is directed by a highly respected auteur with a very powerful idiosyncratic vision and is very firmly within the arthouse market.

Since coming to America acting in films seems to have taken precedence over your work in the theater.

I don't like the word "career." I find it kind of distasteful. I always use the word "work."

Yes I think that has a lot to do with the fact that I am dispossessed, if you like. I live in LA and I have been sort of cut-off from my theater world. That wasn't exactly a deliberate move on my part, it was one of the things that hap-

pened to me in my life. I love film work so I am not unhappy about it.

I came to America originally because I was absolutely attracted by American culture. I mean the culture that springs out of a multi-ethnic immigrant population. I grew up in a very class-ridden society in England so I was very excited by a new environment, a non-class society, a new culture and a new people.

But can you find the work that interests you in Hollywood?

There is wonderful work done in Hollywood but the really idiosyncratic, strange work which I am personally attracted to is rare. But that doesn't matter really because I have the ability to find that kind of work in England if I need to.

FILM

Yet this sort of film work will not particularly help your career in the Hollywood film market.

I don't like the word "career." I find it kind of distasteful. I always use the word "work." When you embrace an actor's life, which is a very different thing in England to what it is in America in general, you embrace a particular kind of life that is full of surprises and insecurity. There is absolutely no point in saying what you would like or you wouldn't like. I am extremely ambitious, don't get me wrong, but I have never been attracted by those things. You are a rogue and a vagabond and you simply have to follow through your destiny. I think there is a great truth in the statement "Beware of what you want because you'll get it."

Are there any roles you will not play?

Yes, they are usually to do with my general idea and feeling of how women should be portrayed. I want women to be given the full value that they have. And by that I don't mean one has to constantly play successful businesswomen, far from it. But the way we're represented is such a one-dimensional cliché. I am not being a propagan-

dist and saying that women should only be seen in one way. I am saying the opposite, I am saying that women should be seen in many different complexities and facets, and Georgina is certainly a character like that. †