



MAGICAL REALISM: THE FILM FABLES OF THE TAVIANI BROTHERS

Kaos

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Directors: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

©: FilmTre, Raiuno

Production Company: FilmTre, Raiuno

In association with: MK2 Productions

Producer: Giuliani G. De Negri

Production Managers: Barbara Galassi Berio, Claudio Gaeta

Production Supervisor: Grazia Volpi

Assistant Director: Roberto Aristarco

Screenplay: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

Script Collaborator: Tonino Guerra

Original Short Stories by: Luigi Pirandello

Director of Photography: Giuseppe Lanci

2nd Unit Photographer: Roberto Locci

Colour Technician: Giacomo Volpi

Aerial Photographer: Folco Gullici

Camera Operator: Pino Di Biase

Stills Photography: Umberto Montiroli

Editor: Roberto Perpignani

Art Director: Francesco Bronzi

Costumes: Lina Nerli Taviani

Make-up: Cesare Paciotti

Hair: Luciana Costanzi

Laboratory: Cinecittà Colore

Music Composed and Conducted: Nicola Piovani

Sound Recording: Sandro Zanon

Sound Re-recording: Fausto Ancillai

Cast:

Prologo/L'altro figlio (Prologue/The Other Son)

Margarita Lozano (*Maria Grazia*)

Fiorella Mari (*spoken voice of Maria Grazia*)

Maria Teresa Di Fede (*young Maria Grazia*)

Carlo Cartier (*doctor*)

Giuseppe Sorge (*emigrant*)

Laura Mollica (*emigrant's wife*)

Enzo Gambino (*young emigrant*)

Salvatore Rossi (*patriarch*)

Claudio Gazziano (*patriarch's son*)

Giovanni Catania (*carreterer*)

Orazio Torrisi (*Comizzi*)

Matilde Piana (*water woman*)

Mal di luna (Moon Sickness)

Claudio Bigagli (*Batà*)

Enrica Maria Modugno (*Sidora*)

Massimo Bonetti (*Sara*)

Anna Malvica (*Sidora's mother*)

La giara (The Jar)

Franco Franchi (*Zi' Dima*)

Ciccio Ingrassia (*Don Lollo*)

Enzo Alessi (*lawyer*)

Maria Lauretta (*lawyer's wife*)

Maria Lo Sardo (*Sara*)

Giovanni Marsala (*Jelli*)

Frida Terranova (*lawyer's sister*)

Requiem

Biagio Barone (*Salvatore*)

Salvatore Rossi (*patriarch*)

Franco Scaldati (*Father Sarso*)

Pasquale Spadola (*Baron*)

Laura Mollica (*Francesca, Salvatore's daughter*)

Nello Accardi (*peasant*)

Sabina Belfiore (*maiden*)

Angelo Mezzasalma (*Carabinieri's officer*)

Bartolo Vindigni (*gravedigger*)

Epilogo/Colloquio con la madre

(Epilogue/Conversation with Mother)

Omero Antonutti (*Luigi Pirandello*)

Regina Bianchi (*Pirandello's mother*)

Massimo Bonetti (*Sara*)

Laura De Marchi (*young Pirandello's grandmother*)

As the Taviani brothers are to Tuscany so, they suggest, Pirandello is to Sicily. It's doubtful that Pirandello himself ever felt that his Sicilian-ness was a decisive factor in his make-up, but he was certainly the first of countless commentators on his life and work to remark on the ironic aptness of his place of birth: 'I am a native son of chaos – literally, because I was born in a village near a forest named Cavusu, whose name is a corruption of the Greek word "kaos".' The Tavianis quote him at the start of their film, and they go on to respect both meanings of the pun. They have selected a handful of stories with Sicilian settings (Pirandello's short stories, the majority *not* set in Sicily, run to fifteen volumes) as the literal pre-texts for a panorama of Sicilian lives, histories, attitudes and beliefs. But they have also concerned themselves with the metaphorical 'chaos' that preoccupied Pirandello for most of his life.

Co-opting Pirandello as a kind of passport to Sicily is in no sense a betrayal or a misrepresentation: Pirandello's early shift from poetry to prose writing was guided (and to some extent influenced) by two Sicilian writers of the *verismo* school, Luigi Capuano and Giovanni Verga, just as his later shift from prose to theatre was prompted by his work with a Sicilian-dialect theatre group, and he intermittently returned to Sicilian stories and themes throughout his writing career. But the quality in Pirandello that the Tavianis respond to most fully is not the vestige of regionalism found in some of his work but his fundamental pessimism, which they here rhyme with their own, together with the rich flights of fancy that he entertains whenever he can detach himself sufficiently from identification with his characters. The treatment of Sicily in *Kaos* is in direct line with the treatment of Sardinia in *Padre Padrone* and of Tuscany in *La notte di San Lorenzo*: it marks another stage in the Tavianis' calculated tactical withdrawal from engagement with the 'leader' politics of contemporary Italy.

The Tavianis, of course, start from the flights of fancy. Their prologue introduces the motif of the belled raven, which suddenly strikes awe into the hearts of its persecutors. The title sequence then juxtaposes shots of the raven in flight with sweeping aerial shots of the Sicilian landscape, picking out the ruined Greek temples, the craggy rocks and the sandy, arable fields. The raven makes a brief guest appearance in the first story, to be pelted with stones by the departing emigrants as a harbinger of bad luck, then reappears at the start of each story (along with the aerial shots), representing magic and mystery, but also introducing a note of Olympian detachment. The stories themselves, skilfully varied in setting and mood, constitute a suite of peasant tragedies, the central scherzo of *La giara* setting off the pathos of *Mal di luna* and the gravity of *Requiem*. The Tavianis plunge into conceptions of 'chaos' from the outset: *L'altro figlio* opens with a classic image of absurdity, an old woman dictating domestic platitudes for two sons she will never see again, and a young woman transcribing them as a series of abstract scrawls on the page. The exploration of the roots of the old woman's madness, in flashback, counterpoints a formalised, mock-heroic image of Garibaldi the liberator with its 'chaotic' opposite, a close-up pan following a rolling severed head.

But the film's ultimate understanding of 'chaos' lies in its recognition that these stories, these characters, these images, resist the very notion of being ordered or appropriated into any Grand Design, political, philosophical or even aesthetic. Meanings are produced solely by context; they have no fixity. The voluptuous moon that bewitches the infant Batà is the same moon that hides behind a cloud at the moment Don Lollo's jar is inexplicably fractured, but its 'meaning' is different. The fields worked by the missing husband in *L'altro figlio* are the same fields claimed as a patriarchal homeland by the squatters in *Requiem* . . . just as a belled raven inspires awe in one group of peasants and superstitious revulsion in another. With one exception, the stories have no 'punch-line', no resolution that offers any kind of narrative closure. A mad old woman cannot bring herself to look at her son, her only remaining relative, because he is the image of his rapist father; her misery will endure until her death. A group of settlers succeed in tricking the carabinieri, but

Giovanna Taviani (*young Pirandello's mother*)
Valentina Taviani (*Pirandello's aunt as a child*)
Giuliano Taviani (*Pirandello's uncle as a child*)
Italy 1984
187 mins
Digital 4K (restoration)

Restored by Cinecittà S.p.A.

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Elective Affinities Le affinità elettive

Thu 1 Feb 20:35 (+ intro by season curator Adrian Wootton); Wed 21 Feb 18:30

A Man for Burning (aka This Man is For Burning)

Un uomo da bruciare

Fri 2 Feb 18:10; Sat 10 Feb 20:40

St. Michael Had a Rooster

San Michele aveva un gallo

Sun 4 Feb 13:30; Mon 12 Feb 20:40

Allonsanfan Allonsanfan

Wed 7 Feb 18:20; Sat 24 Feb 20:25

Kaos

Sat 10 Feb 14:40; Sun 25 Feb 14:30

Padre Padrone

Sun 11 Feb 15:20; Thu 22 Feb 20:45

Wondrous Boccaccio Meraviglioso Boccaccio

Mon 19 Feb 18:45; Mon 26 Feb 20:40

You Laugh Tu ridi

Fri 23 Feb 18:10; Wed 28 Feb 20:50

Caesar Must Die Cesare deve morire

Sat 24 Feb 12:00; Thu 29 Feb 20:50

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Co-produced by Cinecittà, Rome.

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get no gratification from their success; they must still come to terms with the imminent death of their patriarch, and their struggles are just beginning.

It is this understanding of 'chaos' that lies at the heart of the film, and the Tavianis at once defer to it and – with typical rhetorical vigour-strain against it. The only way that they, as filmmakers, can come to terms with the plenitude of these stories, their sprawling profusion of emotions, attitudes and problems, is to contain them as cinema. And so *Kaos* is full of metaphors for cinema, with doorways and window frames constantly used to create frames-within-the-frame: the images glimpsed through these frames represent fictional worlds that can be approached and explored (the camera cranes out through a window to 'see' the story of a family in a boat at sea) or withdrawn from (the camera pulls back to 'see' the world through a doorway, and its 'view' is cut off when the door is closed). The visual rhetoric of this device gives *Kaos* an extraordinary inner tension between surrender and reserve that distinguishes it from Pasolini's otherwise similar story-cycle films.

The one episode that is neatly self-contained fittingly aligns itself with a specific cultural tradition; it could be taken as the equivalent of Pasolini's homage to Chaplin in *Canterbury Tales*. This is *La giara*, a Pirandello chestnut here mounted as a vehicle for the well-established comedy duo Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia. Pirandello wrote this story in 1909 and turned it into a one-act play in 1925; he later also wrote a Sicilian-dialect version of the play. The Tavianis have not tampered with this well-known text, and sensibly trust their two actors to give fine comic performances, but their direction imposes enough distinctive inflections on the material to turn the episode into a miniature Taviani feature in its own right. Nicola Piovani's score is paramount here, moving from Vivaldi-esque formality for the stately long shots of the huge oil jar being wheeled through the olive groves to more elemental rhythms for the scene of the workers' feast. The workers' moonlit dance around the jar is, in fact, a more elaborately choreographed recapitulation of the thrilling, barbaric dance in *Allonsanfan*. This episode contains everything the Tavianis know about cinematic artifice and rhetoric, but they are careful to integrate it into the overall scheme of the film by closing it with a return to the motif of the framing doorway: the memorable final shot, from inside the courtyard of Don Lollo's villa, shows the workers carrying Zi's Dima far away over the fields.

Kaos is designed to be seen either as a feature or as a five-part TV series. Either way, the achingly elegiac portrait of Pirandello in the final episode offers both a provocative reading of the writer's passion (*any* writer's passion) and a brilliant summation of the filmmakers' concerns in the project at hand. Like the first two episodes, it centres on the telling of a story from the past. Here, though, the 'story' is one that Pirandello has been unable to write, a fragment of 'chaotic' experience, full of sensual delight, deeply poignant in its sense of transience, but irremediably devoid of meaning. Narrative is present only in the sense that the events described are sequential; politics, philosophy and morality are absent. The artistic impulse to grasp and shape such evanescent moments, to define the latent meanings that they seem to contain, is 'central to *Kaos*. The Tavianis suggest that this impulse has Oedipal roots: it is not accidental that the fathers are missing from the framing story and the visionary memory alike.

Whatever its roots, the Tavianis dramatise the impulse through three stunning *coups de cinéma* of the kind that their work has always reached for. First, they have Pirandello, on arrival at the sleepy railway station, see (or imagine?) two boys tumbling down a sand heap; only later is it revealed that this is precisely an image from the elusive 'story' that obsesses him. Second, they have Pirandello fail to place his memory of the coachman who insists on picking him up at the station (and who now represents his importunate public, understandably but tragically insensitive to his private feelings); only when the man has gone does Pirandello remember that he's Saro – and, indeed, he *was* the Saro whom the writer transmuted into the failed adulterer of *Mal di luna*. Third, *they tell the story that cannot be told*, finding images and colours of pellucid clarity to render the mother's memory. Seen another way, *Colloquio con la madre* reconciles the neo-realist desire to transcribe life in all its vagaries into cinema with the surrealist desire to reveal wonder at the heart of the everyday. The language that effects this reconciliation is cinema, and the Tavianis' faith in cinema is undimmed.

Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1984