



MAGICAL REALISM: THE FILM FABLES OF THE TAVIANI BROTHERS

The Subversives (I sovversivi)

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Directors: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

Production Company: Ager Cinematografica

Producer: Guilian G. De Negri

Screenplay: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

Cameramen: Gianni Narzisi, Giuseppe Ruzzolini

Music: Gianni Fusco

Conductor: Romolo Grano

Cast:

Ferruccio de Ceresa (*Ludovico*)

Lucio Dalla (*Ermanno*)

Giorgio Arlorio (*Sebastiano*)

Giulio Brogi (*Ettore*)

Pier Paolo Capponi (*Muzio*)

Fabienne Fabre (*Giovanna*)

Marija Tocinowsky (*Giulia*)

Filippo de Luigi

Lidija Jurakic

Nando Angelini

Barbara Pilavin

Maria Cumani Quasimodo

Raffaele Triggia

Jose Torres

Feodor Chaliapin

Italy 1967

97 mins

Digital

This early drama interweaves the stories of four men with complex personal lives (one of whom is a film director) and political affiliations, linked by their presence at a – real-life – public figure’s funeral. The Tavianis’ breakthrough film demonstrates their belief in the power of cinema and includes a nod to Jean-Luc Godard’s then recent *Pierrot le fou*.

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In the immediate pre-68 climate, it is the lesson of Franco Fortini (*Verifica dei Poteri*, 1965) and the debate about the social mandate of artists and writers that tempers the impulses of neo-realist partisanship for the Taviani brothers. In *I sovversivi*, the funeral of Communist leader Togliatti and the symbolic burial of the last vestiges of neo-realism are the Tavianis’ answer to Bellocchio’s *Fists in the Pocket* and Bertolucci’s *Before the Revolution*. The five stories concerning a cross-section of Italian life already prefigure the sense of post-68 depression and involution soon to grip most of their more famous contemporaries. Ludovico, the paralysed filmmaker unable to work on a project about Leonardo, serves as a prophetic metaphor for the general disillusionment which is to follow the triumphal entrance into film of the various Maoist and extra-parliamentary groups.

It is precisely in this context that the Tavianis’ first film without the mediating presence of [trade-unionist filmmaker and collaborator] Valentino Orsini is subjected to a barrage of attacks and charges of defeatism. The most vociferous opponent is Goffredo Fofi, whose magazine, *Ombre Rosse*, is the bastion of the revolution for student radicals and politicised filmmakers alike. Branded the ‘misguided, blind kittens of the revolution’, the Taviani brothers contend that they want to make behaviourist and not ideological films (sic), that the ‘subversive’ of the title is an adjective to indicate ‘an attitude, by which the present needs to be accepted completely but only in order to verify it, to contradict it.’

Don Ranvaud, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1982

I Fuorilegge del Matrimonio [1963] led to a period of self-assessment, continued research and various unrealised projects (including a *Decameron*, scotched by Pasolini’s project), until in August 1964 the Tavianis were commissioned by the Italian Communist Party, together with a number of other directors (including Pasolini, who interpolated footage into *Uccellacci e Uccellini*), to film the funeral of Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI’s leader and co-founder with Gramsci. From this footage, the brothers gradually developed *I sovversivi*, mixing documentary fact and speculative fiction, ‘in the hope that it would be difficult to distinguish between the two’, to confront directly the themes arising from the sense of a crucial turning point in Italian political life and the feeling of stagnation resulting from the passing of an era. The film anticipates the explosion of overtly (and frequently glossy) political cinema after 1968.

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The Subversives *I sovversivi*

Fri 1 Mar 18:20; Tue 5 Mar 20:40

The Night of the Shooting Stars

La notte di San Lorenzo

Sat 2 Mar 15:45; Tue 12 20:20 + extended intro by
season curator Adrian Wootton

Good Morning Babylon *Good Morning, Babilonia*

Sat 2 Mar 18:10; Thu 7 Mar 20:40

The Lark Farm *La masseria delle allodole*

Sat 2 Mar 20:40; Sun 10 Mar 18:15

The Meadow *Il prato*

Sun 3 Mar 12:30; Sat 9 Mar 18:20

Rainbow: A Private Affair *Una questione privata*

Fri 8 Mar 17:55; Mon 11 Mar 21:00

Leonora Addio

Sat 9 Mar 20:40; Wed 13 Mar 17:50

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in London and the Italian Cultural Institute.

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Cinecittà, Rome

CINECITTÀ

The monograph *Paolo & Vittorio Taviani*, published
by Cinecittà, and featuring an article by season
curator Adrian Wootton, will be available during
the season.

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I sovversivi traces the separate but parallel liberating personal crises of four militant Communist observers of the funeral. Ermanno (played by the prominent folk singer Lucio Dalla), a philosophy graduate, is in the process of breaking with his family background to devote himself to photography, and proclaims his belief in an imminent Communist revolution to all comers. Giulia, the wife of a Communist party official, decides to 'come out' and explore her lesbian inclinations. Ettore (Giulio Brogi), an exiled Venezuelan revolutionary, who 'claims Utopia as a moment of truth – history is not just development, it's also discontinuity, negation; it doesn't just happen, it invents itself,' compares the situation in Italy to that in Venezuela, where he decides to return to take the place of a comrade who has died in the struggle against the dictatorship. And Ludovico, in some ways a self-conscious mirror image of the directors, who is working on a non-commercial film about Leonardo da Vinci, decides that 'art is not enough – it repels you, makes you want to give it all up and go out and mingle with the people.' He abandons the literary structure of his film to concentrate on images of liberation, a process which parallels that of *I sovversivi* itself, in its demonstration through image and action of the possibility of going beyond discussion to active change.

The quartet of protagonists are 'subversive' because their revolutionary fervour takes them beyond the constraints of ideology, history and environment into the sphere of personal action, inventing their own histories, in the absence of a coherent, organised mass political movement, instead of being passive spectators to its conditioning processes. Thus the final image of the film, that of Togliatti's coffin being lowered into the grave, is presented coldly and unemotionally as a historical terminal point which has been shown to have been superseded by the positive and imaginative decisions of the four subversives.

Tony Mitchell, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1979