



MAGICAL REALISM: THE FILM FABLES OF THE TAVIANI BROTHERS

The Meadow (Il prato)

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Directors: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

Production Companies: RAI, Filmtre

Producer: Giuliani G. De Negri

Screenplay: Paolo Taviani, Vittorio Taviani

Director of Photography: Franco Di Giacomo

Editor: Roberto Perpignani

Art Director: Gianni Sbarra

Costumes: Lina Nerli Taviani, Renato Ventura

Music: Ennio Morricone

Choreography: Gino Landi

Cast:

Isabella Rossellini (*Eugenia*)

Michele Placido (*Enzo*)

Saverio Marconi (*Giovanni*)

Angela Goodwin (*Giovanni's mother*)

Giulio Brogi (*Giovanni's father*)

Remo Remotti (*doctor*)

Ermanno Taviani (*Stefano*)

Mirio Guidelli

Giuseppe Rocca

Francesca Taviani

Maria Toesca

Alessandra Toesca

Giovanni Bacciottini

Giacomo Pardini

Massimo Bertolaccini

Italy 1979

100 mins

35mm

In a large room in an 18th century villa cluttered with coloured pictures and posters, and patchwork and papier-mâché puppets, a waif-like, girlish figure is conducting a lesson on film animation with a group of children. Outside a storm is raging. As the thunder and lightning reach a crescendo, the glass doors leading to the garden smash open and an oak tree crashes into the room. The teacher tunes the children's fear into an impromptu discussion about what they would do if they were caught in a flood, and gradually an atmosphere of calm and security filters into the room. The teacher is played by Isabella Rossellini, daughter of Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, in her first film performance; the film is *Il prato* (*The Meadow*), the eighth feature by the brothers Vittorio and Paolo Taviani.

This sequence shows a measured development of the Taviani brothers' psychological-political-agrarian confrontation of the relationship between people and the land they inhabit, almost replaying in an affirmative key the traumatic opening sequence of *Padre Padrone*, where Gavino's father interrupts the school lesson to drag his son back to the hills, and the switch he carries becomes an emblem of the brutal domination of the *padroni* of the land over their peasant vassals, like the clog tree of Olmi's *Albero degli Zoccoli*. The teacher's reaction to the fallen oak tree in *Il prato* suggests that a more gentle and sympathetic response to the forces of nature can impart a more vital understanding of the positive tutelage they have to offer.

Shot in the Tuscan countryside, *Il prato*, besides featuring a father-son relationship based on reciprocal respect and affection, examines the possibilities of realising what could be termed Utopian ideals in the agrarian context of developing a direct understanding of the land as a source of spiritual and material nourishment. Enzo (Michele Placido), an agriculture graduate, is enamoured by the equilibrium and balance of the Tuscan countryside. After trying without success to integrate himself into an agricultural commune, he is forced to find work in a supermarket. Eugenia (Isabella Rossellini) has a degree in archaeology, but works in a post office. Her passion is children's theatre and cinema, and in the course of the film she stages a children's fable, 'Il Pifferaio Magico' ('The Magic Recorder'), with her children, using the fields and piazzas of San Gimignano as her stage. Enzo and Eugenia decide to try to weld their interests together and take over an abandoned country villa. The tranquillity of their creative retreat is broken by Giovanni (Saverio Marconi, Gavino in *Padre Padrone*), a former law student about to become a magistrate, but whose real passion is for the cinema. He and Eugenia form an attachment, born of their common interests, and the film develops this uneasy *ménage à trois*. The landscape of San Gimignano is used as a base for the conflicting emotions of the three isolated, aspiring protagonists, whose shared dilemma is taken up from the point which Gavino had reached at the conclusion of *Padre Padrone*.

With the 1978 Silver Ribbon award by the Italian film critics for *Padre Padrone*, and its screening on television to a record audience of nearly 17 million, the Taviani brothers have finally emerged into the front line of contemporary Italian directors. The belatedness of this success was amply testified at the end of 1978 in a rare opportunity to assess their complete work through a television retrospective of six of the seven feature films they have directed since 1961, under the authors' blanket title of 'Research, Invention and Spectacle'.

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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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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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'By the expression "cinema of research",' they have stated, 'we also mean a cinema which finds what it is searching for, even if it only uncovers the reasons behind the research, and confirms or undermines or even negates them. In order to find the open road ahead, one has to try out a hundred wrong tracks. This means that there has to be a guaranteed area of risk, because research implies risk, in the sense of the violation of received ideas, compromises, in fact everything we know.'

With *Il prato*, the Taviani brothers show signs of having started out along the 'open road' they describe, not only in the narrow sense of having moved into the realm of mainstream budget production (*Il prato* was made on a budget of less than £700,000, one-fifth of which was put up by RAI, the Italian television network, compared to *Padre Padrone*, which cost less than a third of that figure). In a larger sense, they have reached a position where they have the means to explore more fully the uninterrupted process of political, social and psychological research they have undertaken since their first decisive step in 1960, when they gave up making documentaries to concentrate on the invention and spectacle of fiction. In their films, which they see in terms of a continuous linear development, variations on a single film, the Tavianis always function as a single unit, working in tandem, and continuously alternating on every stage of the filming process, from developing the screenplay and choosing a location right up to the editing and dubbing. When they give interviews their points of view are interchangeable, and no attempt is made in their printed form to distinguish one brother's statements from the other's. On the set, they work collectively, a co-operation which includes the actors, some of whom in the past have been members of their own family and unpaid friends and comrades. Searching for individual signatures is fruitless. 'They are never authoritarian,' Isabella Rossellini has commented, 'there is always a collective participation in the construction of the film.'

Through the dialectical presentation in image and action of the possibilities for self-determination through political action, the Tavianis play off Utopian idealism against an ironic, self-regarding detachment, personal fantasy against a constant resort to the agrarian contours of an objective, physical reality, while the emotive, stylistic sweep of their films is always rooted in painstaking, rational research.

Tony Mitchell, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1979