
Tolstoy in the Movies

Revolution, Loneliness, and the Future of Love: Tolstoy in the Cinema of Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

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The film directors Paolo (1931-) and Vittorio (1929-) Taviani were born in the small Tuscan town of San Miniato (near Pisa). The first period in the Tavianis' filmography, from the early '60s into the mid-'70s, included films that, from different viewpoints, focused on the theme of social justice and / or social revolution: *A Man to Be Burned* (*Un uomo da bruciare*, 1962; co-directed with Valentino Orsini); *The Subversives* (*I sovversivi*, 1967); *Under the Sign of Scorpio* (*Sotto il segno dello Scorpione*, 1969); *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* (*San Michele aveva un gallo*, 1971, from Tolstoy); and *Allons enfants* (*Allonsanfán*, 1974). In the next period, from the mid-'70s until the end of the '80s, in Italy there was a strong ebbing of social concerns. Individualism became paramount, and although the two brothers never condoned its more aggressive forms, their films depict the struggle of lone individuals against a stifling social order. To this period belong *Padre padrone* (1977, from Ledda); *The Meadow* (*Il prato*, 1978, from Goethe); *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (*La notte di San Lorenzo*, 1982); *Kaos* (1984, from Pirandello); and *Good Morning, Babylon* (*Good Morning Babilonia*, 1987). Finally, in their latest productive phase, from 1990 to our day, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani have chosen to express their skepticism—possibly, distaste—vis-à-vis the minimalist filmmaking of an age deprived of great issues, great visions, and great ideas, by openly concentrating on some of the classics of world literatures. Their films from this period are *The Night Sun* (*Il*

sole anche di notte, 1990, from Tolstoy); *Elective Affinities* (*Le affinità elettive*, 1996, from Goethe); *You're Laughing* (*Turidi*, 1998, from Pirandello); *Resurrection* (*Resurrezione*, 2001, from Tolstoy); and *Luisa Sanfelice* (2003, from A. Dumas père). They rejuvenate these classics, in true Tolstoyan fashion, by “making them strange”—by looking at them afresh, without the conventional patina sedimented on them by literary canonization.¹

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1. Divine and Human / Saint Michael

Divine and Human (1906) can be argued to rewrite, from a different angle, *Three Deaths* (1859) almost half a century after the fact. To condense *Divine and Human* from the viewpoint that interests us here, the three deaths in question are those of the mild-natured revolutionist Svetlogub, the visionary Old Believer, and the iron-willed organizer Mezhenetsky. Svetlogub dies in peace: after his capture, he meditates on the Gospel during the last few days before his execution. The Old Believer, for his part, passes away seeing the Lamb triumph over evil and redeem all worldly suffering.²

Mezhenetsky is sentenced to seven years' isolation in the Peter-and-Paul fortress; forced labour will follow that. He reacts with an enormous willpower, which allows him to overcome moments of depression by creating inside his own cell a fantasy double of the outside world. In this

way, he has visions of himself meeting friends and comrades, studying, dining comfortably, traveling, and even carrying on his (wildly successful) terrorist activities. The realities of history, however, eventually catch up with Mezhenetsky. When he is transferred to another institution he learns that, far from admiring him, the revolutionists of the younger generation condemn his politics as old-fashioned, indeed as detrimental to the common cause. These are the words by which the young, *scientific* revolutionist Roman objects to Mezhenetsky's political line (end of Ch. 11):

We are not really enjoying our life [...] If we are here, we must thank the reaction, and the reaction is a product of March 1st.³

While this comment might seem somewhat cryptic to a twenty-first-century non-specialist, in its time and place it was anything but. Roman, keen on using all legal channels for the long-term growth of revolutionary ideals among the working class, is exposed to the reactionary backlash after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881. From his perspective this event set back the clock by decades, and explains as a matter of course the sharpness of his rancour toward the foolish comrade who has objectively become a tool of the class enemy.

The impact on Mezhenetsky of such a rejection is devastating. To him, failing in the face of world history is a failure without redemption. Hence his despair and, thereupon, his rapidly executed decision to hang himself.

In re-creating Tolstoy in *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* (1971), the Tavianis focus on a single protagonist, the fictional nineteenth-century Italian revolutionist Giulio Manieri. Manieri, from an affluent family, has chosen for himself a humble life as an ice-cream vendor. Having in vain attempted to foment a revolt in central Italy, Manieri is captured and undergoes a mock execution. Capital punishment is commuted at the last moment into a life term; but, duplicating Mezhenetsky's self-discipline and fantasy, Manieri successfully manages to withstand the trials of protracted isolation.

Eventually, during a transfer by boat from one jail to another in the Venice lagoon, Manieri meets

the younger revolutionists about whom he has long fantasized. He realizes with shock that his politics have become outmoded and incompatible with that of the upcoming generation. Without uttering a word, he leaps to his death from the launch.

The Tavianis cumulate the three deaths of their proto-text into one; their *Saint Michael* is a partially coextensive re-creation of *Divine and Human*.⁴ They can be said both to simplify, in so doing, the plotline, and to elaborate on it. They excise from the film both the Old Believer's and Svetlogub's deaths; on the other hand, they reassign to Manieri many of the traits to be found in those two characters. He thereby becomes more nuanced and humane than his prototype. The overall result allows viewers to empathize with Manieri—a potential that in the case of Tolstoy's one-dimensional Mezhenetsky is simply not there.⁵

There are strong analogies between nineteenth-century Russia and Italy. First, both countries found themselves in comparably backward stages of economic development.⁶ Second, Marxism came late to Italy, as it did to Russia, and was a belated competitor to the anarcho-revolutionary movement. The Italian Socialist Party—not strictly Marxist anyway—was founded only in 1892, and as late as 1900 an Italian anarchist, Gaetano Bresci, assassinated the King, Umberto I of Savoy. (Bresci was later killed in jail.) In sum, the Tavianis' film re-creates the Russian background in a homologous context.

The further development of Italian history led to an unexpected twist, which confers upon *Saint Michael* a further layer of relevance after the fact. In 1971 it might have seemed that a "scientific" revolutionary world-view had definitely replaced a voluntaristic, "romantic" one of propaganda by the act (i.e., terrorism). As it turned out, however, shortly after the release of the film the 1970s saw an ominous comeback of the tradition of terror in Italy, which culminated, at the end of that decade, in the abduction and killing of the centrist politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades. Roman's concern is thus familiar to anyone who knows to what extent Italy's history since the 1970s has seen a growing intolerance toward many forms of dissent, violent or otherwise.⁷

2. *Father Sergius / The Night Sun*

Tolstoy's *Father Sergius* (published posthumously) is a story about the three evils of ambition, pride, and carnality; about the unreliability of social relations, indeed about their fundamental falseness; about the greed and corruption of religious institutions; and, in general, about the need for all of us to ignore the rhetoric of words—well-established abstractions in particular—and instead get down to the business of doing good in specific conditions that benefit our fellow human beings.⁸ The greatest praise in the novel accrues to old Pashen'ka: as Kasatsky himself eventually realizes, he

only lived for men on the pretext of living for God, while [Pashen'ka] lived for God imagining that she lived for men.⁹

Thus, of the four women outside his family who shape Kasatsky's life—Countess Korotkova (Mèri), Makovkina, the merchant's demented daughter Mar'ia, and Pashen'ka—Pashenka is the only one to show Sergio a genuinely altruistic quest for God. Her example prompts Sergio to serve the people, spreading the Gospel among them.

Siberia is the immense empty space where Kasatsky (and, eventually, Nekhliudov) come back to life after the long darkness of their earlier pride. There, to quote the title of Tolstoy's posthumous drama, "light shines in the darkness." It is in that new life—so argues the Tavianis' film on *Father Sergius*—that one can find sunshine at night too.

Yet, whatever many angles to *Father Sergius*, one thing is certain: Kasatsky is a loner—perhaps the quintessential hero of loneliness in Tolstoy's oeuvre. And it is just this feature that makes him so attractive for Paolo and Vittorio Taviani at the end of the 1980s. At that time, Italian politics and history had entered an individualistic phase, far removed from the extroverted, gregarious 1970s. While Tolstoy's Sergio is a practising Christian, the secular Tavianis also seek the answer to an existential dilemma by investigating that small part of the natural universe called human history.

The Tavianis' *The Night Sun* (1990)¹⁰ re-creates Russia's splendid backwardness via a backward

splendor of its own. The film is set at the court and in the mountainous countryside of the Kingdom of Naples during the eighteenth century.¹¹

Aside from its relocation to a different—though, again, homologous—country and time, the Tavianis' *The Night Sun* is a totally co-extensive re-creation that follows the storyline of *Father Sergius* relatively closely.¹² The film's main structural innovation is to drop Pashen'ka and to introduce instead two elderly peasants, Concetta and Eugenio. They act as Sergio's spiritual teachers from beginning to end and even from beyond the grave. Partly as a result of their example, the Tavianis' Sergio shifts Kasatsky's rigid and ambitious pride to a more humane version of self-discipline. Sergio's three remaining women recall those in Tolstoy, as does the film's criticism of the Church. The two directors see Sergio's quest as an existential one, not, as in Tolstoy, one linked to a particular religious revelation.

The Tavianis believe that neither monarchy nor ecclesiastical hierarchy give individuals the latitude needed to express themselves outside conformism. At the same time, they do not fall into the equally wrong and banal misperception of solipsism as panacea. *The Night Sun* sketches very clearly the aporias of a self-absorbed solitude, or the narcissism intrinsic to Sergio's own myth as a creator of miracles (eloquent stand-ins for the miracles performed by art).

3. *Three Heavenly Bodies—and Two Resurrections*

Katiusha Maslova, Nekhliudov, and Simonson, "the three heavenly bodies" according to Kryltsov's facetious definition (Part 3 / Ch. 20): what else is there in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*? Indeed quite a bit, as is obvious to Tolstoyan readers, seasoned or less so: the indictment of the "modern" judicial and penal system; the wretchedness of peasants and working class; the corruption of the Orthodox church; the Antichrist-like hypocrisy of a minority of humanity, self-appointed to sit in judgement over its vast majority; and, most importantly, the affirmation of the

belief that the reformation of society can only be achieved if we put God's five Evangelical commandments first. From these a harmonious world order will derive, not the other way around.

But of all this there is little explicit mention in the Tavianis' *Resurrection* (2001). Even though this film, too, is a totally coextensive re-creation, it reproduces the amorous storyline, and leaves out the interventions by Tolstoy's narrator. To be sure, Tolstoy's criticism of society is built into the very events reported to us. Little can be normal in a system that allows for the occurrence of injustices, both individual and generalized, of the kind we learn about. But more is at stake for Tolstoy than a court case. *Resurrection* is both a retrospective wrap-up of the human condition up until now, and a prophecy of what that condition ought to become. Simply put, for Tolstoy the love between Katiusha Maslova, Nekhliudov, and Simonson, far from being an exemplary love story, is love of the old, ugly kind: the love *before* rebirth.

Yet the lovers' duo Maslova-Nekhliudov, later expanded to include Simonson as part of a spiritual *ménage à trois*, is just the core of the Tavianis' attention in their *Resurrection* film. As they had already done in *The Night Sun*, the two directors interpret their prototype from a lay perspective. They do not put the Gospel of Matthew at the vanishing point where all the perspectival lines of the plot converge, where the "old" storytelling ends and the "new" one begins. I shall indicate shortly which concept the Tavianis do put there, and first briefly list certain new elements in their film.

First, both Katiusha and Nekhliudov are more melodramatic than in the novel: their dialogues and mimicry ensure this. They also meet relatively more often. None of their meetings is dropped in the film, whereas much of the connecting text in between is. Second, the Tavianis' Vera Bogodukhovskaia receives a more prominent role than her Tolstoyan prototype. More enterprising, self-confident, and better-looking, she becomes a kind of confidante for Katiusha. (This last feature obviously satisfies the need for cinematography to externalize mental processes that in literature tend to occur invisibly, or at any rate silently).¹³ During

the journey to Siberia, the Tavianis' Vera also expands into the narrative role held in the novel by Mar'ia Pavlovna, while retaining her own frank personality. She likes Nekhliudov, and on a couple of occasions gives the impression that she would be happy to replace Katiusha in the prince's heart, were he finally to lose patience with his beloved's tantrums. Third, Simonson takes on much of Kryltsov's role in the novel, most notably retelling the hanging of Lozinsky and Rozovsky (Part 3/Ch. 6). (For Kryltsov, improbably re-baptized Krilstov in the film, there is hardly any role left). Fourth, the film's Mariette is unequivocally a sophistic coquette, bent on derailing Nekhliudov's great mission, on attaching the prince to herself, and on keeping him in Petersburg *sine die*.

Fifth, the film's Selenin—one of the four members on the Senate's review committee, rather than, as in Tolstoy, the prosecutor—first casts a negative vote and then reverses himself. His homonym in Tolstoy was less concerned with Nekhliudov's intentions and more with the case as such. Sixth, at the theatre *soirée* in Petersburg a full scene from *La dame aux camélias* is actually staged, and we can hear—an appropriate *en abyme* reference to Katiusha—the play's famous lines: "All will be forgiven to you, because you have loved much." Seventh, the Tavianis' Nekhliudov travels on the same train as the convicts; this allows him (and us, who share his viewpoint) to have almost unlimited access to Katiusha, the other prisoners, and their mutual interactions. (In the film, much of the journey on foot is converted to train travel. Thus, numerous episodes that in the novel take place at halting stations occur inside the train carriages in the film.) Eighth, some generic references made by Tolstoy in the imperfect mood (Part 3 / Ch. 1) to Katiusha being harassed by men are re-created in the film as dramatically happening once, during a stop in the forest. Nekhliudov intervenes and is wounded. Katiusha Maslova nurses him tenderly (thus once more externalizing for our benefit her feelings toward him).

The trans-media recasting process is most wide-ranging in the last part of the film. In the film Katiusha learns that she has been pardoned

—for Tolstoy, her sentence has simply been mitigated from hard labour to exile—and thereupon rushes to marry Simonson. The rite is celebrated with all the pomp called for in such circumstances by the Orthodox liturgy. (One can imagine how appalled Tolstoy would have been by this particular cinematic sequence.) A train is to transport the convicts to Eastern Siberia, and at that station Nekhliudov and Katiusha take their final leave. (This corresponds to their final meeting in Part 3/Ch. 25 in the novel, which occurs in the Transportation Prison). While in Tolstoy it is late September—it snows, but rivers haven't frozen over yet—in the Tavianis it is New Year's eve, and a newly abandoned Nekhliudov stumbles upon a well-lit *izba*. A crowd of rural merry-makers celebrate the advent of the twentieth century: they drink, sing, declare their loves both sacred and profane—and, on the twelfth stroke of the clock, express in silence their innermost individual wishes: recovering their lost teeth, owning another cow, buying two heating stoves, possessing the beloved person ...

Finally, the last image in the film brings us back to that second train on which Katiusha is heading out to the Far East. On the screen, the advancing train shrinks in the distance as it approaches the horizon, literally aiming for the perspectival vanishing point of the story. Meanwhile, the wording "XXth century" materializes, superimposed over the carriages. The harmonic music from the previous sequence, the New Year's Eve party, shifts into dissonant isolated chords. The earlier warm, glowing colours of the candle-lit evening yield to the cold whites and greys of the convoy which ominously carries humanity to its symbolic destination in the new century.

This last scene synthesizes most effectively all that is at stake in the Tavianis' re-creation of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. History replaces the Gospel as their film's "conclusion": that is to say, as the conclusion of the *old* story and as the beginning of the *new* and future one—the new century where, many (in vain) hoped, humiliation would be redeemed by love.

The ending of the Tavianis' *Resurrection* is consistent with their earlier Tolstoyan films. As in *Saint Michael* and *The Night Sun*, so in *Resurrection* too, individuals are only small droplets in the vast ocean of humankind's epochal motions, and can only command an insignificant view of the tidal displacements occurring around them. This is a lesson not at all incompatible with Tolstoy's views on history—albeit with the Tolstoy of *War and Peace*, rather than the later prophet of a new Christianity. The Tavianis' Tolstoyan films can be described, in other words, as films that the young Tolstoy could have made by re-creating in his own image and likeness the books written by his older self.

To be sure, in each of the three films history takes the upper hand in different ways. In *Saint Michael*, the forces that control social revolution/social evolution unpredictably transcend the single rebel's will to direct them. In *The Night Sun*, the loneliness that reigns in a hedonistic age determines the mental isolation, the inner conflict, and the existential sadness that haunts the Promethean "hero of his time." In *Resurrection*, the desire for epochal regeneration, envisaged at the end of a long evolution and nourished by a long and painful process of individual transfiguration, is eventually disappointed. Heading for a destiny characterized by steel-like colours and coldness, humanity winds up boarding, for all intents and purposes, the wrong vehicle.

History is at the centre of the three films in two ways. It is the engine that powers them as the force that all human beings obey, without being aware of the direction in which they are ultimately moving. Second, history—Italian history in particular—powers the specific forms of the Tavianis' imagination. In 1971, during the questioning, subversive years "before the revolution" (to use Bertolucci's expression), for *Saint Michael*; in 1990, during the careerist, money-grabbing age of Reaganism, Thatcherism, and (for Italians) Craxism, for *The Night Sun*; and in 2001, during the post-Communist hopeful epoch opened up by the fall of the Berlin wall, the Maastricht treaty, and European integration, for *Resurrection*. The latest image of Tolstoyan inspiration created by the Tavianis is among their most gripping; it

certainly causes us to wonder (and apprehensively at that) what the *present* century's train will look like to denizens of a distant future.

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Filmography

Saint Michael Had a Rooster (*San Michele aveva un gallo*). A Film by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy. Starring Giulio Brogi (Giulio Manieri), Renato Scarpa (Battilana), Vittorio Fanfoni, Cinzia Bruno, Daniele Dublino (prison guard), Virginia Ciuffin (Virginia). A RAI Radio-Ager Film Co-production. Film © 1971 RAI Radio and Ager Film. Video © 1997 Fox Lorber Video, 419 Park Ave. South, New York N.Y. 10016.

Giuliani G. De Negri presenta *Il sole anche di notte* (*The Night Sun*), un film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Con Julian Sands (Padre Sergio), Charlotte Gainsbourg (Matilda), Massimo Bonetti, Margarita Lozano, Patricia Millardet (Aurelia), Rudiger Vogler, Pamela Villoresi, Nastassia Kinski (Cristina). Sceneggiatura di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Liberamente tratto dal romanzo *Padre Sergio* di L. Tolstoj. Film © 1990 Italia - Francia - Germania: Filmtre / RAIUno / Capoul / Interpool / Sara Film / Direkt Film. Video © 1992 Ricordi Video, via Berchet 2, 20121 Milano. Video © 1999 Fox Lorber Video, 419 Park Ave. South, New York N.Y. 10016.

RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana e Filmtre presentano un film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani: *Resurrezione*. Con Stefania Rocca (Katiusha), Timothy Peach (Nekhliudov), Marie Bäumer (Missy), Cecile Bois (Marianne), [...] Sonia Gessner (zia Maria), Giulia Lazzarini (zia Sofia), Michele Melega (Krilstov - sic), [...] Marina Vlady nel ruolo della zia duchessa; con Antonella Ponziani (Vera), e con la partecipazione speciale di Giulio Scarpati (Simonson). Sceneggiatura di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani tratta dall'omonimo romanzo di L. Tolstoj. Film © 2001 Italia - Francia - Germania: RAI Fiction / Filmtre / Pampa Production / France 2 / Bavaria Film. Video © 2002 Multimedia San Paolo, via Guglielmo Silva 36, 20149 Milano - su licenza RAI Trade.

Notes

1. For English-language contributions on the Tavianis, see the appropriate chapters or sections in: Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2003 [1991, 1983]); Lorenzo Cuccu, *The Cinema of Paolo and Vittorio Taviani: Nature, Culture and History Revealed by Two Tuscan Masters* (Rome: Gremese, 2001); Marcia Landy, *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); id., *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); id., *Filmmaking By the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema 1896-1996* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Carlo Testa, *Italian Cinema and Modern European Literatures* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Praeger, 2002); id., *Masters of Two Arts: Re-creation of European Literatures in Italian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); id., "Paolo and Vittorio Taviani," in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2006).

The following is an essential bibliography in other languages: Fulvio Accialini and Lucia Coluccelli, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani*, Florence: La nuova Italia, 1979 (Il Castoro cinema 65); Pier Marco De Santi, *I film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani*, Rome: Gremese, 1988 (Effetto Cinema 16); Riccardo Ferrucci and Patrizia Turini, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani: La poesia del paesaggio*, Rome: Gremese, 1995; Jean A. Gili, ed., *Paolo et Vittorio Taviani: Entretien au pluriel*, Arles: Institut Lumière - Editions Actes Sud, 1993; Francesca Parmeggiani, "Lo sguardo rivolto al passato: Storia e storie nel cinema dei Taviani (1971-1984)," *Italica* 80: 3 (Fall 2003), 403-21; and Aldo Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano*, Milan: Il Formichiere, 1980, vol. 2, 335-37, 350-51, 357-58, 360, 361, and 370.

For more information on the three films discussed in this article, see the notes below.

2. Parts of this section appeared, in earlier versions, in Carlo Testa, "Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Saint Michael had a Rooster* ...," *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 11 (1999), 139-41, and *idem.*, *Italian Cinema*, 68-70.

3. "Ne ochen'-to naslazhdaemsia zhizn'iu (Š) A esli i sidim zdes', obiazany ètim reaktzii, a reaktisia proizvedenie imenno pervogo marta." Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoj, *Bozheskoe i chelovecheskoe*, PSS, vol. 42, 222.

4. For an exact definition see Testa, *Italian Cinema*, p. xiv, and id., *Masters*, 17-18.

5. On *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* see Accialini and Coluccelli, 68-82; Guido Aristarco, *Sotto il segno dello scorpione: Il cinema dei fratelli Taviani*, Messina and Florence: G. D'Anna, 1978, 101-52; rpt. as "San Michele aveva un gallo," in his *I sussurri e le grida: Dieci letture critiche di film*, Palermo: Sellerio, 1988, 173-206; De Santi, 74-85; Ferrucci and Turini, 119-23; Gili, ed., 43-51; Parmeggiani, "Lo sguardo ...," 408-13; and Bruno Torri, ed., *Il cinema dei Taviani*, Roma: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1989, 29-31 (in English, 79-82).

6. See Gerschenkron.

7. This intolerance was most spectacularly on display during the repression of no-global demonstrations during the July 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, although it seems likely that such incident was only the tip of a much larger iceberg. On the subject, see Francesca Comencini's documentary film *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* (2002).

8. This section develops parts of the *Night Sun* analysis contained in Testa, *Masters*, 82-97.

9. TCE 16: 354. Ia zhil dlia liudei pod predlogom Boga, (Pashen'ka) zhivet dlia Boga, voobrazhaia, chto ona zhivet dlia liudei. PSS 31: 44.

10. Aside from the chapter in *Masters* alluded to above, *The Night Sun* has elicited surprisingly little specific literature. Some further coverage of the film can only be found in Ferrucci and Turini, and Cuccu.

11. We are under the reign of Carlo di Borbone, the king of Spanish origin who held the Neapolitan throne from 1734 to 1759. He subsequently became King of Spain under the name Carlos III.

12. See *Masters* for a more detailed comparison of the two plots.

13. For example, in the film Vera summons Nekhliudov to a secret meeting at a skating rink—she will only be arrested later—and she arranges for Nekhliudov to intervene on behalf of a comrade of hers (a certain Krilstov [*sic*]—the film's counterpart to Kryltsov) by talking there and then to the prison commander (a former schoolmate, called Mennikov by the Tavianis).

In the novel, in contrast, Nekhliudov meets the commander Kriegsmuth (a comrade of his late father) in Petersburg (Part 2 / Ch. 19), because that is where Vera's friend Shustova is held. (Shustova is eventually released in Part 2 / Ch. 25). There is no Muscovite rink in Tolstoy (though there is ice skating in *Anna Karenina* ...)

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Interview with Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (Rome, 14 April 2004)

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Q. In an autobiographical sense, how did you cross paths with Tolstoy?

A. There is hardly any need to dwell on Tolstoy's importance as a literary figure: for pupils who attend a *liceo classico* [high school with option in classical letters] and belong to an intellectual bourgeois family, Tolstoy is one of the obligatory monuments of culture. However, well beyond that, for us *War and Peace* is the fundamental

book, the book that is always at hand on our night-table. In the same way, Kurosawa used to say: "I always keep *War and Peace* on my night-table, and before I shoot a sequence, I always re-read a page from it." When we met the great master, we told him: "We know that you have a great love for *War and Peace*, and, if you allow us, it seems to us that such-and-such a sequence in *The Seven Samurai* is an *exact* remake of a chapter from *War and Peace*." He had to admit that it was true.