

The publishers marketed the book to a mass audience, hoping to capitalize on the appeal of the original classic to the greater population: "A new meeting with old friends—the heroes of *War and Peace*—awaits you. [...] The author's unexpected discoveries: Alexander Pushkin, in love with the Empress Elizaveta Alekseevna, dedicates to her—his muse—the verses "Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnovenie," ... Nikolai Rostov is occupied with state problems but with household and amorous affairs. Intrigues, gossip, conspiracies."¹ Though the sequel tried to garner a large audience by riding on the coattails of the original, it did not manage to make it onto the bestseller lists after its publication. Instead, it alienated the mass readership with its idiosyncratic mix of parody and historical reevaluation, and its unfaithful depictions of beloved literary characters. It also distanced the scholarly audience by attempting to add to a closed canonical text, thus trivializing a literary classic.

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Notes

1. *Knizhnoe obozrenie* 12 (19 March 1996).

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* (San Michele aveva un gallo, 1971): A Cinematic Re-creation of Tolstoy's *Divine and Human* (Bozheskoe i chelovecheskoe).

An important cinematic masterpiece of the Italian 1970s has recently become available in videocassette in North America. This is the Taviani brothers' 1971 feature film *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* (San Michele aveva un gallo),¹ inspired by Tolstoy's *Divine and Human* (1906),² and strongly influenced by the almost literally revolutionary atmosphere of the times when it was made.

The Tavianis' film portrays the fate of a

fictional nineteenth-century Italian revolutionist, Giulio Manieri, who in vain attempts to foment a revolt in the central part of the peninsula, is jailed for long years, and by a skillful combination of discipline and fantasy successfully manages to withstand the trials of protracted isolation. Manieri, however, eventually collapses into utter despair when, during a transfer from one jail to another, he realizes from a coincidental encounter with younger revolutionaries that the political line to which he clings is superannuated and incompatible with that of the following generation. When he witnesses the scorn the younger subversives pour upon his convictions, Manieri flings himself to his death from the boat that is transporting him.³

A brief recapitulation of *Divine and Human* reveals the extent to which the film follows Tolstoy and where it departs from his text. While the Tavianis focus on one death only, Tolstoy's novella harks back to a triple parallelism already tested long before in *Three Deaths* [Tri smerti (1859)]. The three deaths examined in *Divine and Human* are tightly intertwined. The story's first protagonist is Svetlogub, a revolutionary sentenced to death for giving logistic support to the terrorist activities of his group—a group headed by the iron-willed leader Mezhenetskii. Despite his involvement in a violent form of subversion, Svetlogub is mild natured. In jail, he meditates on the Gospel. He lives out in peace the last few days before his execution, and when he dies, he dies serenely, exerting a profound impression on one of his elder prison mates—Tolstoy's second protagonist. This is an Old Believer who views the present social state as a direct expression of the power of the modern Antichrist, the Tsar. Stunned by Svetlogub's inner tranquility, the old man assumes that the lad must have beheld ineffable visions.

The third protagonist of the novella is Mezhenetskii himself. One day he, too, is captured, and by coincidence he is jailed in the same institution as the Old Believer. When the old man learns about this, he asks to meet the comrade of that other "luminous youth" [svetlyi iunosh] he used to know. Needless to say,

Mezhenetskii's thoroughly political reply to the Old Believer's questioning gives the old man no enlightenment whatever.

Mezhenetskii is sentenced to seven years' isolation in the Peter-and-Paul fortress; forced labour is to follow. In jail, his enormous will-power allows him to overcome moments of depression by creating inside his own cell a fantasy double of the outside world, where he meets friends and comrades, studies, dines comfortably, travels, and even carries on his terrorist activities—typically for him, until these meet with victory and shower him with glory.

A fortuitous transfer brings Mezhenetskii in contact with revolutionaries of the younger generation. At the new prison, however, further delay awaits him: the Old Believer, by yet another coincidence held on the same premises, is in the throes of death and wants to see him once more. Soon thereafter the old man dies, seeing the Lamb triumph over evil and redeem all worldly suffering. By contrast, the comforts afforded by universal love are denied to the pragmatic Mezhenetskii; to him, failing in the face of world history is a failure without redemption. Hence his despair, followed by his swiftly—and, by an ironic narrative twist, successfully—implemented decision to hang himself. After his death, Mezhenetskii's body is brought to the morgue, to be juxtaposed to that of the Old Believer.

The strategy adopted by the Tavianis in recreating Tolstoy can be described as one of simplification, on the one hand, and elaboration on the other. On the one hand, both the Old Believer's and Svetlogub's deaths are excised from their film. On the other, Manieri is not a mere duplication of Mezhenetskii, but a character more nuanced and humane. The Tavianis endow him with both the deeds of the iron-willed subversive and the Old Believer's fundamental meekness; with traits, in other words, that are re-assigned to him after originating in the personality of his deleted Tolstoyan co-protagonists. The overall result encourages the viewers to empathize with Manieri as they cannot with Tolstoy's hyperrational Mezhenetskii.

A special mention must be made of the fundamental role played in *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* by the soundtrack: in particular, by Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio italiano*, whose sudden extradiegetic ons-and-offs convey with undescrivable power the psychological reality of Manieri's pendulum in and out of the imaginary world he is able to create, Mezhenetskii-like, inside his mind at the time of his detention.

The paradox about *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* from the viewpoint of Italian cultural history is that the film raises the issue of the relationship between the nineteenth-century "romantic," anarchistic approach to political activity (Manieri's terrorism) and the twentieth century "scientific," mass-industrial version of it (trade union Marxism) precisely at a time—1971—when it seemed obvious that the future belonged to the latter, while the former was but a quaint feature of a bygone time. Little did anyone suspect that, between 1971 and 1981, the decade to follow the release of the film would see something close to this very conflict being fought out, quite literally, in Italian factories and streets. During that time, the Red Brigades and similar groups would square off against labour unions and pro-democracy organizations, and force these to seek the support (as well as endure the suffocating embrace) of an arch-conservative State's ubiquitous police forces. "The State's reaction against us is but a product of your terrorist activities"—how topical the younger militant's complaint against Manieri's political adventurism would have struck an Italian viewer of 1981!⁴

To be sure, by the time terrorism became a real factor effectively threatening to tear apart the fabric of Italian society, it also became ipso facto impossible for filmmakers (and for others as well) to tackle it openly and fully. It is fortunate that, in shooting *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* decades after the facts portrayed, the Tavianis also managed to slip it in a few years before new and at the time unpredicted tragic events. The Tavianis filmed Tolstoy again at the end of the 'eighties, this time adapting Father Sergius to make the protagonist an eighteenth-

century nobleman in the southern Kingdom of Naples. Released as *Sunshine at Night Too* (Il sole anche di notte, 1990), this video is for the time being available in Italy only.⁵ Once more, Tolstoy's narration is not reproduced in *Sunshine at Night Too* as a costume film with a philological or didactic intent, but is rather de-familiarized to make it correspond to the real and urgent issues of the directors' own country and times.

In repeatedly embracing Tolstoy as one of the major stars in their intellectual firmament, the Tavianis show how ethically relevant and artistically productive he continues to be throughout the decades—provided, that is, that his legacy be approached with piety, intelligence, and patient determination. The Tavianis do approach Tolstoy's work this way. They think it through until they are able to reformulate it in terms which Tolstoy himself might use today, were he still with us.

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Notes

1. *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, Renato Scarpa, Vittorio Fantoni, Cinzia Bruno, Daniele Dublino, Virginia Ciuffin. A RAI Radio-Ager Film Coproduction. Film @ 1971 RAI Radio and Ager Film. Video @ 1997 Fox Lorber Video, 419 Park Ave. South, N.Y. N.Y. 10016.

2. Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, *Bozheskoe i chelovecheskoe*, in vol. 42 of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 1957, pp. 194-227.

3. On *Saint Michael Had a Rooster* see Fulvio Acciaini and Lucia Coluccelli, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1979): 68-82 (11 Castoro cinema 65); 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; Pier Marco De Santi, *I film di Paolo*

e *Vittorio Taviani* (Rome: Gremese Editore):74-85 (Effetto Cinema 16); Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, eds., *Il cinema italiano d'oggi 1970-1984 raccontato dai suoi protagonisti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984): 127-30; Riccardo Ferrucci and Patrizia Turini, *Paolo e Vittorio Taviani, La poesia del paesaggio* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1995): 119-23; Aldo Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano* (Milan: 11 Formichiere, 1980), vol. 2: 335-37, 350-51, 357-58, 360, 361, and 370; and Bruno Torri, ed., *Il cinema dei Taviani* (Roma: Ministero degli affari esteri, Direzione generale relazioni culturali, 1989): 29-31 (English on 79-82).

4. The original of Roman's objection to Mezhenetskii's political line (end of Tolstoy's Chapter 11: Tolstoi, PSS 42: 222) is worded as follows:

"We can't be said to be enjoying life. And if we are stuck here, we must thank the reaction, and the reaction is a product of [your faction having killed Czar Alexander 11 on] March 1st."

"Ne ochen'-to naslzhdaemsia zhizn'iu (...) A esli i sidim zdes', obiazany etim reaktzii, a reaktsiia proizvedenie pervogo marta."

5. Giuliani G. De Negri presenta *Il sole anche di notte* (*Sunshine at Night Too*), un film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Con Julian Sands (Padre Sergio), Charlotte Gainsbourg (Matilda), Massimo Bonetti, Margaritha Lozano, Patricia Millardet (Aurelia), Rudiger Vogler, Pamela Villoresi, Nastassia Kinski (Cristina). Sceneggiatura di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani. Liberaamente tratto dal romanzo Padre Sergio di L. Tolstoj. Film (D 1990 Italia - Francia - Germania: Filmtre / RAIUno / Capoul / Interpool / Sara Film / Direkt Film. Video (D 1992 Ricordi Video - via Berchet 2 - Milano.

David Holbrook. *Tolstoy, Woman, and Death: A Study of War and Peace and Anna Karenina*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997. Pp. 273.

As I learned from a *Festschrift* published in honour of his seventieth birthday, David Holbrook is a prolific writer in many genres: poet, novelist, literary critic, educational theorist,