

CAESAR MUST DIE

(Cesare deve morire)

a film by

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani



Golden Bear, Berlin Film Festival 2012

Ecumenical Prize, Berlin Film Festival 2012

Italy 2012/ 76 mins / Italian with English subtitles/ Certificate TBC

UK Premiere – London Film Festival 2012

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SYNOPSIS

Each year the inmates of Rome's high security Rebibbia prison, incarcerated mostly for Mafia-related crimes, put on a play. The Taviani brothers follow the rehearsals and performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, a play where the conspiracies and betrayals echo the past and present lives of the prisoners. As the performance of *Julius Caesar* ends amidst much applause, the lights dim on the actors and they become prisoners once again.

Six Months Earlier

The warden and a theatre director speak to the inmates about a new project, the staging of *Julius Caesar* in the prison. The first step is casting. The second step is exploration of the text. Shakespeare's universal language helps the inmates-actors to identify with their characters. The path is long and full of anxiety, hope and play. These are the feelings accompanying the inmates at night in their prison cells after each day of rehearsal.

Who is Giovanni who plays Caesar? Who is Salvatore-Brutus? For what crimes have they been sentenced to prison? The wonder and pride for the play do not always free the inmates from the exasperation of being incarcerated. Their angry confrontations put the show in danger. On the anticipated but feared day of opening night, the audience is numerous and diversified: inmates, actors, students, directors. *Julius Caesar* is brought back to life but this time on a stage inside a prison. It's a success.

The actors become prisoners once again as they are accompanied back to their cells. Even Cassius, one of the main characters, one of the best actors. He has been in prison for many years, but tonight his cell feels different, hostile. He remains still. Then he turns, looks into the camera and tells us: "Since I have discovered art, this cell has turned into a prison."

Further details and downloads on www.newwavefilms.co.uk

CREW

Directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani
Written by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani
Screenplay collaboration Fabio Cavalli

Freely based on Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare

Camera Simone Zampagni
Editor Roberto Perpignani
Sound Benito Alchimedede, Brando Mosca
Music Giuliano Taviani, Carmelo Travia
General Organiser Patrich Giannetti
Director of theatre Fabio Cavalli
Assistant Director Mimmola Girosi
Executive Producer Donatella Palermo
Delegate Producers Agnese Fontana
Producer Grazia Volpi

A Kaos Cinematografica production, in association with Stemal Entertainment srl, Le Talee, La Ribalta – Centro Studi E. M. Salerno.

With the collaboration of Rai Cinema.

2012 / Colour and black and white / 76'

CAST

Cassio/Cassius Cosimo Rega
Bruto/Brutus Salvatore Striano
Cesare/Caesar Giovanni Arcuri
Marcantonio/Mark Antony Antonio Frasca
Decio/Decius Juan Dario Bonetti
Lucio/Lucius Vincenzo Gallo
Metello/Metellus Rosario Majorana
Trebonio/Trebonius Francesco De Masi
Cinna Gennaro Solito
Casca Vittorio Parrella
Legionary Pasquale Crapetti
Fortune-teller Francesco Carusone
Stratone/Strato Fabio Rizzuto
Ottavio/Octavian Maurilio Giaffreda

Directors' Statement

A dear friend recounted to us a theatre experience she had had a few nights earlier. She cried, she said, and it had not happened in years. We went to that theatre inside a prison. Rome's Rebibbia, the High Security Section.

After passing a number of gates and blockades, we reached a stage where twenty or so inmates, some of them serving life sentences, were reciting Dante's Divine Comedy. They had chosen a few cantos of Hell and were now reliving the pain and torments of Paolo and Francesca, of Count Ugolino, of Ulysses – all in the hell of their own prison... They each spoke in their own dialects, occasionally addressing parallels between the poetic story evoked by the cantos and their own lives. We remembered the words and tears of our friend.

We felt the need to discover through a film how the beauty of their performances was born from those prison cells, from those outcasts that live so far from culture.

We suggested Shakespeare's Julius Caesar to Fabio Cavalli, the stage director working with the inmates.

We staged it with the collaboration of the inmates, filming in their cells, in the prison yard, the depths of the High Security Section and eventually on stage. We tried to contrast the darkness of their life as convicts with the poetic force of the emotions Shakespeare evokes -- friendship and betrayal, murder and the torment of difficult choices, the price of power and truth. Reaching deep into a work like this means also looking at yourself, especially when one must leave the stage and return to the confinement of a cell.

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

PAOLO AND VITTORIO TAVIANI

Paolo and Vittorio Taviani are brothers. Paolo Taviani was born in San Miniato (Pisa) on 8 November 1931, and Vittorio was born in the same village on 20 September 1929.

They have always worked together on their films as writers and directors. They started directing in the early 60s and have made both fiction and documentary films. At the Cannes Film Festival, the Taviani Brothers won the Palme d'Or for *Padre Padrone* in 1977 and the Grand Prix du Jury for *La Notte di San Lorenzo (The Night of the Shooting Stars)* in 1982. They were awarded the Golden Lion for their entire career at the Venice Film Festival in 1986.

Caesar Must Die is their latest film, a blend of documentary and fiction that was awarded the Golden Bear at the 2012 Berlin Film Festival.

Filmography

1962 **Un uomo da bruciare**
1963 **I fuorilegge del matrimonio**
1967 **Sovversivi**
1969 **Sotto il segno dello Scorpione**
1973 **San Michele aveva un gallo**
1974 **Allonsanfan**
1977 **Padre Padrone**
1979 **Il Prato**
1982 **La notte di San Lorenzo (The Night of the Shooting Stars)**
1984 **Kaos**
1987 **Good Morning Babylon**
1990 **Il sole anche di notte (Night Sun)**
1993 **Fiorile**
1996 **Le affinità elettive (Elective Affinities)**
1998 **Tu ridi**
2001 **Resurrezione**
2004 **Luisa Sanfelice**
2006 **La masseria delle allodole (The Lark Farm)**
2012 **Cesare deve morire (Caesar Must Die)**

Fabio Cavalli (Theatre Director)

Born in Genoa, he's artistic director of the Study Centre Enrico Maria Salerno.

As a theatre actor he works, among others, with Franco Zeffirelli, Mario Missiroli, Enrico Maria Salerno, and Ugo Pagliai. With the Study Centre Enrico Maria Salerno – directed by Laura Andreini – he has produced over thirty plays, and as an author has received multiple awards.

He has curated various exhibitions, some of an historical nature, dedicated to theatrical entertainment in Italy. From 2002 he is joint-head of theatrical activities at the new complex of the Rebibbia Prison of Roma and directs the 'Compagnia dei Liberi Artisti Associati', the "company of free associated artists" which employs inmate-actors of the High Security block. His prison theatrical activity involves over 100 convicts, divided in three Companies. With these he has performed numerous plays. Up till now over 22.000 audience members have crossed the threshold of the prison to see these shows.

Salvatore Striano (Brutus)

He has known the hardships at the detention home as a juvenile offender and after that many years behind bars in Rebibbia. Salvatore Striano became involved in theatre while mentored by Fabio Cavalli.

Free, thanks to the 2006 pardon, Striano started an acting career with Cavalli, and after that with Emanuela Giordano and Umberto Orsini who gives him an important part in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He made his movie debut in *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone, and after this he worked with Abel Ferrara, Marco Risi, Stefano Incerti and in various television serials.

To take on the role of Brutus, he returned for several weeks, now as an actor, in the same place where he once was incarcerated.

Interview with Paolo and Vittorio Taviani

Could you tell us the story of this project?

All happened by accident, like our previous film "Padre Padrone" when everything started after our encounter with the Sardinian shepherd-linguist Gavino Ledda. This time – thanks to a phone conversation with a dear friend of ours – we got in contact with a universe that we knew only through American films, even though Rebibbia, the Roman prison on the outskirts of Rome is quite different from those we had seen on the screen. However, on our first visit there, the gloomy atmosphere of a life behind bars had given way to the energy and the frenzy of a cultural and poetic event: the inmates were reciting some of Dante's *Inferno* cantos.

Subsequently, we found out that they were the convicts of the High Security Section, mostly affiliates to the different kind of mobs - Mafia, Camorra, Ndrangheta – sentenced in most of the cases to life imprisonment. Their instinctual acting was animated by the dramatic urge to tell the truth and was channelled by the steady and continuous work of their "intern" director, Fabio Cavalli. When we left Rebibbia we immediately realized that we wanted to know more about them and their situation; so we paid a second visit and asked them if they wanted to work for a cinematic adaptation of "Julius Caesar" by William Shakespeare. The answer of Fabio and of the inmates was immediate and plain: "Let's start, now!"

The actors we see in the film are all inmates? And as to the auditions, did they take place exactly as we see in the film?

The actors you see in our film are all convicts in the High Security Section. To be more specific, we would like to add that Salvatore "Zazà" Striano - who plays Brutus - has already served his sentence in the prison of Rebibbia. Originally condemned to 14 years and 8 months, he has served 6 years and 10 months and following a general pardon he is now a free citizen; the same goes for Fabio Rizzuto (Strato). The only "foreigner" is one of the prison's acting teachers, Maurilio Giaffreda.

As to the auditions, for some years we have adopted a quite simple but extremely effective method: we ask the actors to identify themselves, as if they were being interrogated by customs officials; then we ask them to say goodbye to somebody they love, telling them that the first time they have to show pain and the second rage. In this case, we have had a sort of pre-casting with Fabio Cavalli showing us the photographs of some inmates he had pre-selected and who afterward have all been cast without much additional work. As for the others, during the audition we told them that for the sake of privacy and if they wished to, they could have provided us with phoney names; we have been extremely impressed when all of them insisted on sharing their real names, the names of their parents and their birthplaces with us. After a

while we came up to the conclusion that for them the film could become a way to remind all the people living outside that they were leading their lives in the silence of the prison. It was only after watching them going before the camera one by one that we got to know them and discovered their real painful, outraged and turbulent nature.

Did you follow the screenplay or you resorted to improvisation as if you were shooting a documentary?

We did follow the screenplay. We have written a screenplay as we do with all our films; then, as it is always the case, once on the set, with the camera rolling and the actors playing, the screenplay becomes something different, thanks also to the locations, the lighting, and the darkness. With all due respect for Shakespeare (who has always been a father, a brother and then – as we grew older - a son for us), we have taken over his “Julius Caesar”, dismembered and rebuilt it. We have certainly kept the spirit of the original tragedy as well as the narrative but at the same time we simplified it taking it a bit far from the traditional stage work tempos. We have tried to construct that audiovisual organism that we call film, and that is the degenerate son of all the arts that have preceded cinema. A degenerate son that Shakespeare would have certainly loved! Fabio Cavalli has been extremely helpful in translating all the lines into the different dialect/slang of the various inmates-actors. They have understood what we intended to do and gave mesmerizing performances with different degrees of emotions and involvement. Thanks to them, to the various truths they expressed and to their unexpected performances, the screenplay evolved. To make myself clear I would like to mention just an example: the soothsayer, the Neapolitan “Pazzariello” who brings his open palm to the nose and with disquieting jests tells the audience to be silent, was not in the screenplay. However, he reminded us one of the many crazy characters of Shakespeare, a Yorick for instance, who has run away from his tragedies. It was almost a tribute and a wish by that genius to all of us.

Why did you choose Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar?

We had never had anything else in mind. And our choice came out of necessity: the men we wanted to work with had a past – far or close – to reckon with; a past characterized by misdeeds, faults, offences, crimes and broken relationships. Hence we had to confront them with an equally powerful story going in the opposite direction. And in this Italian cinematic version of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, we bring to the screen the great and the pitiable relationships among human beings that include friendship, betrayal, power, freedom and doubt. And murder, too. Several of our inmates-actors once were “men of honour”; and in his arraignment Mark Antony quotes the “men of honour”. On the day we shot the sequence of the killing of Caesar, we asked our dagger-armed actors to find the same killer urge within them. A second later we realized what we had just said and we wished we could withdraw our words. But that wasn’t necessary because they were the first ones to reckon the necessity to face reality. Consequently, we decided to follow them through their extremely long days and nights. We wanted our common work to take place within the tiny five-people cells, in the corridors, in the yard where they spend the only time in the open air, or while waiting for the meetings with the relatives.

How did you work with Fabio Cavalli?

To give you an idea of our cooperation and of the enthusiasm of Fabio, I’ll mention you what he told us when we discussed with him our film for the first time. “We could shoot the Philippi battle sequence in the meadows behind the jail; we would ask the director to allow all the inmates to participate” But since this was not the point of view we wanted to adopt for our

film, Fabio has immediately understood our approach and accepted it, thanks to his intellectual sensitivity and to his deep knowledge of the show business.

We have described him how we wished to construct the plot and Fabio has worked with us in writing the screenplay; he helped us to discover some of the most secret places of the jail, organized the meeting with the inmates selecting those who were more suitable for some roles. Before the final cast was completed, he attempted to stage some of the sequences with a selected group of inmates but above all, with the help of his assistant, he focused on the staging of the final sequences of the film. In a later phase, he proposed us a sketch of the set design with two Roman columns made up of coloured fibreglass, like the soldiers' shields.

And in the end, he made the final leap: he gave up his role of director and turned into an actor playing the Director of the film who has a prominent role. He was excellent in his performance ... even because his actors were watching over him! He said to them: until today I have been your stage director; now we are switching to cinema and we will use a totally different language. So, this time, they will direct us." But now we know that he has gone back to Rebibbia, among his inmates-actors to stage the original version of "Julius Caesar". "The most beautiful sequence – he told us with a defiant grin – is the one with Brutus with Calpurnia.." That is the sequence we have eliminated because we had an all-male cast.

Could you explain why you have decided to have the characters talk in the different dialects of the inmates?

In the months before shooting, we often went to Rebibbia. On those visits, we crossed the different wards of the High Security Section and through the half-closed doors we could see the inmates, young and old men silently lying in their beds. "We should be called the ceiling-lookers – they one told us– since we spend half of our days lying in bed watching the ceiling..." After hearing these words, while we freely went up and down those corridors, we were often assailed with a sense of guilt. But one particular morning, in a larger cell we found out something that had us laugh out of amazement and complicity: six or seven inmates sitting around a table reading a text placed at the centre of the table. We later found out that the text was our screenplay and those men were our actors who were translating their lines into their respective dialects, that is Neapolitan, Sicilian, Apulian with the help of other compatriots – who had not been cast for the film. The whole work was supervised and coordinated - as always - by Fabio and Cosimo Rega – Cassius. This anecdote too, helps to explain the meaning of the film.

And even previously, watching their screen test, we were extremely and happily surprised to hear Prospero and Ariel squabbling in Neapolitan, or Romeo and Polonius whispering, shouting and cursing in Sicilian, or Apulian... We realized that the dialectal mispronunciation of the lines did not belittle the high tone of the tragedy, but on the contrary lent those lines a new truth. And deeper connection through a common language and followed more easily the unwinding of the drama, that in Shakespeare has always had a popular side, too. So it was not us who decided to use the dialects, but our actors who have taken over the screenplay and adapted it to their respective natures.

Has the film been entirely shot in the prison? Which have been – if any – the main production and artistic challenges? Did the authorities impose any limitation to the camera's access?

The whole film was shot in Rebibbia. We have spent four weeks in Rebibbia: we entered in the morning and we left at night, exhausted but happy and satisfied. One day we said to ourselves: "We are shooting this film with the same brash recklessness of our first films." As for the camera, we have been granted the freedom to take it everywhere: the wards, the stairs, the cubicles, the yard, the cells, and the library. With a sole exception: the unreachable and off-limit area where the prisoners under protective confinement are held in isolation.

Nobody can see their faces, and not us either. From the outside, a prison guard showed us the windows of the turncoats' cells, that were immersed in a deep silence.

We suspended shooting only when the inmates of the other wards had to pass through the corridors to go out in the yard, to go to the showers or when some of our actors had to move for the meetings with their relatives. When they came back they were deeply touched, moved, gloomy or crossed. They went back to acting but their gazes were floating far away, they had lost the wild and tender spontaneity of their acting. A film set is a place where friendships and complicity thrive and this film was no exception. One of the wardens had mumbled to us: "Don't get too close to them; I have excellent relationships with them, and sometimes I also feel some mercy and compassion, even friendship... But then I have to impose to myself to keep at distance and to think about those who have suffered and who suffer more than them, that is the victims of their crimes and their families..." This is true but nevertheless, when the film was completed and we left the jail and our actors, it was a heartbreaking goodbye. Climbing the stairs back to his cell, Cosimo Rega – who plays Cassius – raised his arms and shouted: "Paolo, Vittorio: from tomorrow on, nothing will be the same!".

Why did you decide to shoot most of your film in black and white?

Because colour is realistic and black and white is unrealistic. This may appear a sweeping statement but at least in this film it is true. Once inside the jail, we felt that there was the risk to fall into TV naturalism and we escaped from that using black and white that made us feel more free to invent and to shoot in this absurd set that was the prison of Rebibbia, where Caesar is not killed against the backdrop of ancient Rome but in the tiny cubicles where the inmates spend their time in the open air. Using black and white we felt freer to shoot in a cell where Brutus repeats with suffering and passion his monologue: "Caesar must die." We opted for strong and violent black-and-white images that in the end take on the magic colours of stage work, extolling the furious joy of the inmates overwhelmed by their success. But the choice of black-and-white was also due to narrative reasons: we wished to underline the passing of time, the leap backward in a kind of easy and straightforward way. This isn't certainly a new idea, we are well aware of that, but sometimes we do like to follow well-trodden paths.

Let's talk about the music score and the composers.

As always, we started by sending the screenplay – even though it was not the final version – to the composers. But, one of the most topical days for the musicians was the day they came to Rebibbia during the shooting of the film. The shooting was going smoothly, we were all full of energy, and extremely concentrated, but nevertheless the musicians could still seize the shadows of the past on the faces and in the eyes of the inmates. And on that day they made their decision: the music had to be scarce but extremely powerful. Very few musical instruments: the saxophone with its sweet disconsolation; the cornet laden with omens; hard, raw and crude sounds and finally an orchestra with electronic instruments and synthesizers.

As to the participation of Giuliano Taviani, he once said to us: "Since I'm your son and your nephew respectively, I'll never work with you"; twenty years have gone by from that declaration and in those twenty years Giuliano has scored 26 films working with several great filmmakers of the new generation. So, after two wonderful seasons with Morricone and Piovani, we asked him to work with us as if he were any composer.

In the meantime, Giuliano met a very special person in a very special place, that is the Aeolian Islands: the person in question is a young and extremely talented pianist, Carmelo Travia with whom he has started a very fruitful cooperation that led them to co-sign the music score of our film.