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Wrapping Up "Through the Eyes of Those Who Are No Longer": Paolo Taviani's *Leonora addio* (2022)

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Abstract

The first film signed by Paolo Taviani without his brother Vittorio (who died in 2018) in more than 60 years, *Leonora addio* (2022) recapitulates and condenses an entire career by recounting the grotesque (real-life) journey of the burial, cremation, exhumation, transfer (from Rome to Sicily) and re-burial of Luigi Pirandello's corpse over more than ten years, as well as by showing in the last thirty minutes an adaptation for the screen of "The Nail" ("Il chiodo", the last novella by the renowned Sicilian writer). A quintessential testament film refracting the writer's death in Vittorio's (one of the film's many Pirandello-esque mirror games) and alluding to the intellectual legacies of either, *Leonora addio* daringly thematizes *the exploitation of cultural value* as well as its political implications—particularly in the specific Italian context and, implicitly yet unmistakably, in the present day too. My paper will analyse *Leonora addio* paying particular attention to how this subtext intersects the film's "testamentary" surface, to Deleuze's "crystal images" (pervasively informing the structure of *Leonora addio*), to the film's many nods to *Kaos* (a 1984 Pirandello adaptation for the screen by the Taviani, analysed mainly through the lens of Lacanian gaze theory) and to the role of death in both films.

Keywords: gaze; crystal; inoperativity; Pirandello

Academic Editor: Andrew M. Nedd

Received: 22 July 2025
Revised: 11 September 2025
Accepted: 23 September 2025
Published: 24 September 2025

Citation: Grosoli, Marco. 2025. Wrapping Up "Through the Eyes of Those Who Are No Longer": Paolo Taviani's *Leonora addio* (2022). *Arts* 14: 115. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts14050115

1. Introduction

Screened in the main competition of Berlin Film Festival 2022, *Leonora addio* is the last film by Paolo Taviani, who died in 2024. It was the first film in sixty years he made without his brother Vittorio, who died in 2018 and shared with Paolo as a co-director an entire lifetime of internationally renowned cinematic achievements. *Leonora addio* recounts in black and white the bizarre story of Luigi Pirandello's corpse, and is framed in the very beginning and at the very end by two short scenes where the writer is seen (thanks to original footage) and heard (courtesy of actor Roberto Herlitzka uttering in voice over a couple of Pirandello's declarations regarding that occasion) at Stockholm's 1934 Nobel Prize award ceremony. Before the second of those short scenes, a cinematic adaptation of "The Nail" ("Il chiodo", one of the last novellas Pirandello wrote, in 1936, before dying that same year) is shown in colour. It is thus clear that, in *Leonora addio*, Pirandello's legacy intersects the Tavianis' own after Vittorio's passing and at a moment when Paolo's career too was drawing to a close, making it an unmistakeable testament film.

"The Nail" was originally scripted by the Tavianis in the early 1980s, as it was meant to be part of their *Kaos*, a 1984 anthology film collecting six rural-Sicily-set novellas by Pirandello (four, plus one functioning as incipit before and during the opening credits, and one as epilogue), taken from his collection *Novelle per un anno* (Pirandello 1937) (only

partly translated into English in such collection as *Stories for the Year* (Pirandello 2020), named after the original collection, and *Tales of Madness* (Pirandello 1984)). Eventually, at that time the two brothers decided not to shoot it. *Leonora addio* acknowledges this source by incorporating a few shots of the 1984 film, while *Tu ridi* (*You Laugh*), their 1998 adaptation of two novellas by Pirandello, appears largely unconnected to the 2022 film (it is referred to in the present essay in two occasions anyway). Accordingly, this article assumes that what *Leonora addio* has to say with regard to the Tavianis' and Pirandello's legacies is inseparable from the relationship the later film establishes with *Kaos*, a film which came at a crucial juncture of their artistic path and which will thus be closely analysed as a necessary preliminary step toward outlining *Leonora addio*'s testamentary stance. For the analysis of *Kaos*, I will draw primarily from Sulgi Lie's *Toward a Political Aesthetics of Cinema* (Lie 2020) and its outline of Fredric Jameson's political aesthetics against the background of Lacanian film theory in general and Jean-Pierre Oudart's suture theory in particular; for *Leonora addio*'s particularly, though not exclusively, on Gilles Deleuze's "crystal image", and on Giorgio Agamben's "inoperativity".

Kaos is not a testament film, but it can be safely regarded as a fitting epitome of Tavianis' cinema as a whole in at least a few important respects. By all means a testament film, *Leonora addio* does not implicitly refer to its authors' long-standing works without reconsidering their main premises by way of a significant perspectival shift. Therefore, *Kaos* will have to be analysed in length (despite not being a testament film), so as to sketch out what *Leonora addio* is a testament *of*, i.e., what kind of cinema the 2022 film revises with hindsight while recapitulating it. This also explains the essay's methodological heterogeneity: as we shall see, *Leonora addio*'s point lies in the abandonment of a certain (textual/programmatic) rigidity connected to the Marxist/Lacanian framework, so it makes sense to show it in full force in *Kaos* before showing that, in *Leonora addio*, that framework is no longer there and yet what it broadly stood for still lingers, albeit in different ways and forms.

2. Domesticating the Gaze of the Other

Few Italian directors have epitomized the engaged, leftist intellectuals more than the Tavianis. A number of their films tackle the bitter death of political utopias, including their Sicily-set cinematic debut (together with Valentino Orsini) *A Man for Burning* (*Un uomo da bruciare*, 1962). In the first half of their career they would mostly direct films of their own writing: before *Kaos*, they only directed one literary adaptation (*Padre padrone*, 1977), although at least a couple of their eight remaining films are informed by a very strong literary inspiration (Lev Tolstoy in *St. Michael Had a Rooster* [*San Michele aveva un gallo*, 1972]; Tolstoy and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in *The Meadow* [*Il prato*, 1979]). After *Kaos*, nine of their films have been adapted from a literary source (by Giovanni Boccaccio, Alexandre Dumas, Beppe Fenoglio, Goethe, Pirandello, William Shakespeare, Tolstoy), while three have not: *Good Morning Babilonia* (1987, which failed massively at the box office), *Fiorile* (1993) and *The Lark Farm* (*La Masseria delle allodole*, 2007). Thus, they have dedicated the latter half of their career, i.e., the one recognizably inaugurated by *Kaos*, mostly to finding and painstakingly chiselling a proper cinematic form to literary masterpieces of the past that could still speak to a contemporary audience.

In his will, Pirandello stipulated that his ashes should be put in an urn and spread in his native land, near Agrigento, Sicily. When he died, though, the fascist regime was in power, so the fascists thought that a burial in Italy's capital city would best suit a Nobel prize winner. This is where *Leonora addio* begins. In 1947, after the Liberation, the American army offers to transfer Pirandello's ashes from Rome to Sicily by plane. The flight, however, is cancelled because no other passenger, out of superstition, wanted to fly with a dead person. As the Americans pull out, an Italian State officer offers to transfer the ashes by

train. Once in Agrigento, however, the local bishop refuses to officiate a funeral without a proper Christian coffin—except that the only coffin available is a child-sized one, as all the others were used in a recent epidemic. As a result, during this second, very pompous Agrigento funeral, the participants laugh at this baby coffin more than they mourn the (then already long-) dead. Only four years thereafter though, in 1951, the mausoleum in the countryside near Agrigento is completed; only then, the writer can be buried there. However, before then, another officer steals away part of his ashes and throws them in the Mediterranean sea nearby. At this point, the in-colour adaptation of "The Nail" begins, on a child of Sicilian descent in turn-of-the-century Brooklyn, murdering another child for no reason, subsequently serving time in prison, and visiting every year the tomb of his victim after his release. Early in "The Nail", one black-and white scene shows a kid and his father leaving Sicily to migrate to the United States, while a desperate mother tries to tear the kid away from the father's arms to let him stay. That scene is taken from *Kaos*. A b/w picture of the same woman from *Kaos* appears in a later scene of "The Nail", in the restaurant the murderous child worked in, implying beyond any doubt that she is his mother.

The first thing we see in *Kaos*, before and during the credits, is an aerial view of Sicilian landscape that is meant to be a subjective shot of a crow flying around. One of the last ones, in the epilogue, is Pirandello himself going back to his dead mother's Sicilian house and having a vision of her. Therein, not long before the end of the film, she tells him that he should learn to also see things with the eyes of the departed. Thus, the film starts and ends with a gaze that does not belong to a living human.

The political implications of this gaze can be explained effectively through Sulgi Lie's discussion of Fredric Jameson's Marxism-informed notion of the "political unconscious" against the background of Jean-Pierre Oudart's largely Lacanian suture theory. The link between the two is postulated on the assumption of a convergence between the unrepresentable absent cause of moving images (the gaze supposedly originating them), and the equally unrepresentable totality of social relationships. Both are not only unrepresentable, but also non-subjectivizable (Lie 2020, p. 175). Cinema creates a visual consistency (chiefly though not exclusively through montage) which is also a consistency of meaning; the closer it gets to such consistency, the more it implies a subjectivity responsible for it, like an Other in Jacques Lacan's sense (an abstraction charged with representing the presupposed consistency of the Symbolic Order, which is to say the dimension of signification, of shared meanings, of language, law, society, History, etc.). This subjectivity, however, cannot be fully disclosed on the screen, because it is nothing but an aftereffect: implied, but not substantial. The closer film gets to visual consistency, the more this subjectivity is concealed; the more this consistency is dismantled (e.g., in Robert Bresson's cinema), the closer cinema gets to adumbrating this (imaginary) subjectivity. Likewise, the objectivity of historical processes as a whole is exclusively negative. To make that whole seamlessly consistent would be tantamount to subjectivizing it, i.e., to betray its objectivity, thereby lapsing into ideology; rather, it can only be represented a posteriori through the gaps of representation, i.e., through the failures of reducing the whole of historical processes to consistency. The political unconscious (Jameson 1981) informing cultural artworks and products, expressing the contradictions of socio-historical reality, is not an a priori substance or transcendental framework: it can only be reconstructed a posteriori. The utopian potential of cinema lies in subverting the illusory consistency of ideology and mapping out the contradictions of reality (themselves a construction, not a given) by working through the symptoms of the inconsistencies of the way cinema represents that reality. Cinema can best engage in mapping this political unconscious through the instances in which the gaze that is supposed to bestow consistency is manifested as not only non-objective, but also non-subjectivizable, that is, in and for itself inconsistent.

A striking exemplification thereof can be found in a scene of "The Jar" ("La giara"), *Kaos*'s third episode.

- The gate of a rural estate opens up seemingly by itself.
- A jar in the middle of the estate's courtyard is gradually obscured by darkness.
- The owner of the estate, sleeping in bed, suddenly wakes up in anguish.
- In the courtyard, darkness gradually makes way for light again: the jar is broken in two.

As the gate opens, we are suggested the presence of someone we do not see and which does not seem to exist either. Thanks to editing and lighting, we see that something happens, a jar is broken, but seemingly nobody actually broke it. Facing a visual field that is structurally inconsistent, we are inevitably bound to presuppose an Other, with capital O in the Lacanian sense, bestowing consistency on the disjointed pieces. Every new piece of montage builds a continuity which, however, is broken at every new piece, every one of them revealing and at the same time hiding the gaze of the Other that bestows continuity on the fragments into a single visual field only by keeping out of that field—or, by inhabiting it qua absence.

In another courtyard in the first episode, "The Other Son" ("L'altro figlio"), Garibaldi, a hero of Italian Risorgimento usually regarded as a key figure of Italy's unification as a single country in the mid-19th century, is seen distributing grain to the population, crossing the courtyard from left to right on a horse, deep into the frame in the courtyard's farthest side from the camera. Short after he goes offscreen, a bandit (supposedly belonging to the gigantic criminal wave following Garibaldi's actions in Sicily, wreaking havoc in the region for decades) enters the frame from the right, leftward, following a trajectory parallel and contrary to Garibaldi's yet much closer to the camera, thereby flattening the image somewhat. One embodies the bright side of history, the other the dark side. One is the conscious, positive agent of history, the other is the unconscious of history, the side of history we do not want to see.

What Lacan calls the split between eye and gaze (Lacan 1978, pp. 67–78) is all about consciousness and the unconscious. As much as Garibaldi is the positive agent of History, the embodiment of History as a coherent, intelligible march forward, as a fabric with no rips that cannot be mended, here he is also the vanishing point in the sense of Renaissance's central perspective, i.e., the point of the image around which the eye revolves to endow the image with visual consistency and with an illusory depth of field. History here is all in visible, knowable actions and agents: there is no Other making History coherent that is not part of the visual field. Instead, the bandit embodies the gaze, i.e., the *objet petit a*, i.e., the inconsistency of the visual fabric that implies something beyond the visual field around which its consistency revolves. The bandit does not do anything (least of all redistribute wealth), but his demeanor and his looks suggest that there is a lot going on off the radars that is unsettling. History, in other words, revolves around its dark underside, but this dark underside is nowhere but in the very effort to subjectivize it, i.e., to make it something consistent. The bandit here is the *objet petit a* pointing beyond the image at an absent Other responsible for a consistency that is not in the image: this absent Other is not so much the viewer, but rather the viewer's unconscious desire (invalidating the alleged objectivity of the optical apparatus) for the image to be consistent, and for this consistency to revolve around in-frame Renaissance-perspectival pivot Garibaldi. As a blind spot in the visual field embodying a lack, i.e., standing for that which has been left out of it while actually structuring it, as something repressed that returns, the gaze of the absent Other returns the viewer's gaze qua object, i.e., by objectifying the very desire that the viewer has for what she sees to be consistent.

What actually is consistent is *Kaos*'s pervasive thematization of the gaze. In "The Other Son", a woman is affected by madness, i.e., by a psychotic conflation between eye and gaze (and incidentally also individual story and broader History): in a watermelon she sees the decapitated head (by the bandits who came in the wake of Garibaldi) of one of her sons, while she refuses another of her sons because she sees in his face the face of the bandit who once raped her. The second episode ("Moonsickness" ["Mal di Luna"]) is about a case of lycanthropy: whenever a peasant sees the full moon in the sky, serving as *objet petit a* returning his repressed desire, his unconscious takes over and he becomes an animal. Danger for his wife and her lover (whom he accepts), however, is precariously though effectively staved off short after he gathers the courage to responsibly talk about his problem. In the aforementioned third episode "The Jar", the tyranny of a landowner over the small community working in his rural estate is defeated by the shrewdness of a local artisan, a "jar-fixer" who gets trapped within the jar he was meant to fix and has the landowner himself break it (thereby setting him free) and pay for it too thanks to a communal Sabbath-like dance (that is, through something that resembles the invocation of a demonic Other) the artisan incites at night in the estate's courtyard. "Requiem", the fourth episode, is set in a remote mountain village. The dwellers ask a rich, aristocratic landowner a piece of land to be used as a cemetery. When he refuses, they occupy the land, so the landowner asks the police to disperse them. Once on the spot, the police are defeated by a cunning trick: the villagers ask the old patriarch to pretend to be dead, imagining that the police would leave them alone then. Indeed, upon seeing the faux dead patriarch and the villagers solemnly mourn him, they are moved and leave them alone out of compassion. Now villagers can finally build their cemetery.

Almost as if implementing Pirandello's mother's plea to "also see things with the eyes of the departed", the villagers then win their political struggle by quite literally having the eyes of the (faux) departed return the gaze of the police. They have blinded their political opponents by becoming the gaze of the Other. This retroactively clarifies *Kaos*'s narrative arc as one in which political emancipation increasingly informs the episodes as they followed one another, and as their focus shifts from the confusion of the single individual to bigger and bigger (from family to rural estate to village), and more and more self-conscious, communities. As the episodes unfold between two gazes that do not belong to a living human (the bird's in the beginning, the eyes of the departed at the end), such groups appear as increasingly capable, in order to achieve their goals, to strategically use public spaces (in ways that would deserve a more sustained analysis) and especially to consciously appropriate, master, tame, guide the non-appropriable, non-living and non-human gaze of the Other, as the key condition to somehow positively come to grips with the unconscious of History.

3. Utopia Reborn from Its Ashes

Terrorism ravaged Italy for the better part of the 1970s, pushing the then very strong Italian Communist Party (to which the Tavianis were affiliated) to undergo a far-reaching metamorphosis, particularly by initiating a long democratic process eventually culminating in the transformation of PCI into PDS (Partito Democratico della Sinistra) in 1991. In the midst of the 1980s, i.e., in an era which is customarily regarded as marking the beginning of the end of leftist utopias in Italy, the Tavianis, after having dealt with the end of leftist utopias more than once in their previous films, have turned to a notoriously pessimistic writer like Pirandello, and more precisely to his rural, lower-class Sicilian novellas as opposed to his more celebrated works steeped in bourgeois neurosis, to show that political utopia can be reborn from its ashes. Their strategy is *textual* through and through: they begin their film by optically displaying a non-subjectivizable gaze (the crow's) which then becomes an implicit

subtext shared by each of the four episodes through a number of textual hints scattered in the margins of each of them. As political utopia is gradually clarified as coinciding with this both impossible and necessary subjectivization and textualization of a non-subjectivizable gaze of the Other, this key subtext does not quite come to the fore in full view until the epilogue, i.e., until the plea to "also see things with the eyes of the departed" encapsulating the whole aforementioned subtext in a drastically de-politicized and abstractly literary fashion. In order to be political, the political must self-negate: by definition, the political unconscious has a utopian potential only insofar as it remains in some way unconscious, viz. only insofar as it is not fully subjectivized—which, according to Jameson, in a mass culture context would systematically turn into its opposite, i.e., reification (Jameson 1979), a political message ready to be consumed, and thus with no real potential.

This is why the spelling out of that subtext by Pirandello's mother is, after those four increasingly political episodes, back to being non-political. This is also why what the writer actually sees with the eyes of the dead mother replaces, decisively, textual closure with its opposite, i.e., with a thematization of the *tearing apart* of the textual fabric, in the form of the childhood recollection/flashback of Luigi's mother wrapping the film: returning from their political exile in Malta (almost as if enhancing the hollowing of the political characterizing the epilogue), her family stops at an island to let the children have an innocent, fun dive. No motivation, no consequence, just sheer purposelessness: the detour as an end in itself. In this way, the text renounces its seamlessness, leaving a fissure where closure should be, so as to imply that the gaze of the Other is not definitively subjectivized. "Felice" ("Tu ridi"), the first episode of *You Laugh*, similarly thematized the purposeless deviation from narrative closure qua closure: its singer protagonist, strangely bursting into laughter in his sleep every night, commits suicide by drowning himself but right before then he allows himself a happy singing interlude on the beach.

It might be objected, on the other hand, that this denial of closure may be too purposely located in the very lieu of closure for it not to be a closure in its own terms. The epilogue starts with Pirandello stepping in his own text, breaking the borders of the text and letting the extra-textual in, but ends with the triumph of textual closure, subsuming the opposite of closure as closure itself, thereby reaffirming the capability of the textual machine to process and digest any rupture, by way of squarely looking into the blind spots of the text. Accordingly, this final praise to purposelessness is in stark contrast with a film in which, as we have seen, innumerable details come across as textually very purposeful, in the name of appropriating a non-appropriable gaze of the Other seeping through the margins of the text. Everything holds together a little too well; more generally, before Tavianis' cinema, viewers can hardly avoid the impression that everything is as deliberately constructed as it would be on the written page: always a little stiff and contrived, always very well-staged, well-engineered, well-thought-out, well-composed, well-controlled, well-photographed. Ultimately, the impression that is hardest to avoid is that this "artistic pornography, arthouse obscenity" (Ghezzi 1995, p. 345) ("pornografia artistica, osceno d'artista"), as influential Italian critic Enrico Ghezzi called it when the film came out ends up stifling their cinema's political agenda. Eventually, *Leonora addio* will answer precisely this call for a cinema which, albeit following in *Kaos*'s footsteps, restores the political by managing the Pirandello-esque interplay between textual closure and its opposite (in the fissures of which the gaze of the Other also appears, along with its political potential) in a way that is far less prone to solving it unfailingly in favour of the former, i.e., of textuality and of its indiscriminate capability for reabsorbing any disruption.

4. A Very Lively Corpse

In *Leonora addio*, the split between the eye and the gaze is no longer a merely textual matter, but is inscribed, sadly, in the very flesh of the brothers-directors. One has become the eye, the other the gaze. Paolo is literally in the position of having to also see things with the eyes of the departed. These eyes are now no longer just Pirandello's but also Vittorio's.

Not a lot in the film comes across as usable for the sake of a Lacanian analysis. Perhaps only one thing does, namely the myth of lamella (Lacan 1978, pp. 187–200) whereby Lacan lays out a certain manifestation of libido as undead excess of death, irreducible to the cycle of life and death and just insisting beyond it. Lamella comes to mind notably in front of the strange excitement that Pirandello's ashes seem to infuse all around, especially in the scene of the Agrigento funeral (for instance, a child sees the baby-coffin from the household's balcony and slowly exhilarates his entire family by telling them a midget is being buried)—but even then, it is something that cannot quite be pinned down or localized. It is, if anything, an outright social kind of energy spreading from those ashes; it is something elusively circulating in the actors, in the actions, in the situations.

Gilles Deleuze's crystal-image (Deleuze 1989, pp. 68–97) (that is, the coalescence between actual and virtual, between past and present, between real and imaginary, etc.) seems distinctly more relevant in this context. In the second scene of the film, Pirandello is in his deathbed. His sons enter the room: children after trespassing the door, they quickly become middle-aged adults as they approach his bed. Meanwhile, Pirandello's voice over seemingly refuses the passage of time: "My life's already over. . . how could it be possible? That soon? And those are my children! Is this a dream or are they really them? When did I have them? Ah yes, it must have been yesterday, when I was still young". Past and present converge, dream and reality converge—as shown especially by the rather unrealistic, ultra-minimal set design of the room.

Importantly, in the scene's last shot the writer's daughter reverts from old woman to young again. While epitomizing the crystal-image (a kind of image that can be easily regarded as prefigured in many instances of Pirandello's literature and theatre, as he was quite famous for these kinds of mirroring), this scene implies that the closing upon one another of the two halves of the crystal-image, actual and virtual, is inseparable from the infinite re-opening of it.

By extension, the whole film comes across as an infinite movement whereby closure leads to opening and opening leads to closure. This is also what happens to Pirandello's corpse: a very lively corpse even reduced to ashes. The latter are first contained in a random vase, then in a Greek urn, than the priest expected to officiate the funeral gets anxious about having to bless a Greek urn and thus asks for a Christian coffin, whose content will after four years be pulled out of the coffin and part put in a mausoleum and part spread on the Sicilian sea. The officer transferring the ashes from Rome to Sicily is even more anxious than the priest about the fate of the writer's remains. More generally, the ashes seemingly generate waves of emotion around them, actually any kind of emotion *but* mourning. They do generate, for instance, waves of hilarity during the funeral. Nothing disrespectful here though, since Pirandello's own sense of and conceptualization of humour and of the grotesque was very much along similar lines.

This Pirandello-esque movement whereby closure leads to opening and opening leads to closure can also be found in the "crystalline" (in the aforementioned sense: coalescence between past and present) reusing of bits from old films/newsreels, among which (often quite extended) excerpts from postwar Italian classics like Roberto Rossellini's *Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1946) or Valerio Zurlini's *Violent Summer* (*Estate violenta*, 1959). The reuse of the aforementioned farewell scene from *Kaos* reopens the otherwise very tight textual closure of the original text for a purpose that is very different from the original one.

"The Nail" starts off with the kid in a police station, asked for a reason why he killed the little girl. He replies that a nail fell from a cart passing by *on purpose*, so that he could stick it into the girl's head. As for the two girls, he says they were fighting *on purpose* for him to kill one of them. Moreover, in a subsequent flashback, in the crime scene short before the murder two more crystal-images appear: in one, the kid plays with a dog in the exact same way he is seen playing during *Kaos*; in the other, some waving branches replicate identical images in the 1984 film.

Both of them can safely be taken as reminding the kid of the Sicilian home he left behind. To be sure, one may always put this in terms of poor-man Freudism, i.e., the kid, traumatized by having left home, accumulates an aggressiveness that he then randomly unleashes on some innocent—but this would only take us so far. It would not explain, for instance, why the kid goes back to his victim's grave every year. But if we frame it, in a far less psychological vein, according to the perturbation of sensory-motor schemes that most of the *Time-image* volume of Deleuze's diptych revolves around, then everything clicks far more easily. From the start, the boy only pretends to live in the present, as the shadow of the past, i.e., of home, weighs heavily on him, implicitly calling for a prospective resolution in the future retroactively determining as necessary the steps leading to it (the nail and the girls being there "on purpose"), bypassing organic action in the present altogether. After spending time in jail as a result, he goes back every year to his victim's grave because that event has, in the meantime, literally replaced his homesickness with the regret for the murder: it has become a past weighing on the present in the same way.

In her analysis of the film, Millicent Marcus (1993, pp. 179–203) had shown that the thematization of motherhood in *Kaos* conflated together the impossible return to maternal womb (History drives men away from mothers as well as from motherlands, to which Pirandello himself in the end nostalgically returns) and the impossibility, for cinematic adaptation, to be one with the original text. In 1985, the Tavianis published (Taviani and Taviani 1985) in Italian journal *Bianco e Nero* the script for "The Nail" which they had intended to shoot for *Kaos*. Albeit "The Nail" was conceived by the brothers at that time already as "The Other Son"'s ideal follow-up, it is very different from the eventual version in *Leonora addio*: there is no trace of the "on purpose" scene in the police station, nor of the kid's periodic visits to the girl's grave after his release from prison—which actually is not in Pirandello's original novella either. *Leonora addio* thus recovers *Kaos*'s lost episode only by betraying it again, in a way that might recall Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's messianic redemption of the past: the past is only redeemed "through a double structure of restoration and incompleteness" (Agamben 2000, p. 156), because the "idea of origin contains both singularity and reproducibility" (Agamben 2000, p. 155). What is actually repeated of the origin is its unattainability; accordingly, what *Leonora addio* actually recovers is not the original script of "The Nail", but rather the very movement of differing the origin that informs *Kaos* and is perpetuated in "The Nail" by the repetition of the protagonist's visit to the tomb of somebody he killed out of frustration for being forever separated from his origin (Sicily and his mother). Tellingly, "Leonora addio" is the name of a novella by Pirandello which Paolo Taviani planned to shoot. . . but did not. According to Agamben's Benjamin, to save the past and to acknowledge it as unsavable are one and the same thing: hence, the monumentalization of Pirandello after his death is one with its dispersion in more than one funeral and more than one place where his ashes ultimately rest; the celebration of his cultural legacy is one with its dissolution by way of contamination. Similarly, Deleuze's crystal-image is the opposite of a mere presentification of the past: the absent origin is not simply made present, but lost in an infinite range of temporal differences mirroring one another. The things that belong to the boy's past

(Sicily, his mother) are not brought into the present, but are replaced by something else (his attachment to the dead girl) which takes their place as past.

The very long scene when the officer takes the ashes from Rome to Sicily by train is even more literally Deleuzian. It is set in 1947, right after the event (World War Two) which Deleuze famously identifies with the disruption of sensory-motor schemes, and is a mannerist imitation of Italian neorealism in terms that are specifically reminiscent of Deleuze's take on neorealism (1989, pp. 1–13). Narrative action is reduced to a shallow pretext, no less shallow than the worker looking for his bicycle in *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948), namely the officer looking for the wooden crate containing the ashes of the writer, which at some point seems to be lost before the officer finds out that some passenger had taken the crate to play cards on. All around this mock action, very much neorealism-style, a series of bozzetti are displayed, i.e., a series of sketched descriptions, of purely descriptive and immediately self-explanatory vignettes of the human landscape all around. A soldier taking off his shoes after having marched for thousands of kilometres during and after the war; an American soldier improbably courting a little girl surrounded by her customarily ultra-jealous Sicilian family; another couple being formed between an Italian and a German woman freshly released from a refugee camp; and so on and so forth. All these are, very much in line with the famous explanation of neorealism by Deleuze, "pure optical situation[s]" (1989, p. 2), emerging as a result of the blockage of sensory-motor schemes brought forth by the war. Closure and opening: a page was turned in Italian history and life starts to bustle about again.

Since the very birth of that cinematic movement, it has been generally maintained that with fascism old school literature had died, including Pirandello's, and neorealism was what cinema needed in order to effectively document the vital disorder of life as opposed to the abstractions of decadent literature. Very aware of all the modernist waves of the turn of the century, Pirandello did conceptualize in his literature and theatre those modernist stances and forms from which eventually Deleuze will draw for his *Time-image* book. "Crystal-images" essentially designate, among others, all those games of mirrors between real and imaginary, past and present, actual and virtual and so on and so forth that artistic modernity had by that time long rehearsed. At the same time, Pirandello also obscurely felt that the infinite reversal between closure and opening, and between opening and closure, that modernism had introduced could only be properly accomplished beyond literature, including beyond Pirandello himself, as well as beyond that fascism which he had, if in only part of his life and somewhat controversially, endorsed. That "beyond" was the place of cinema in general and neorealism in particular. *Leonora addio* takes up his challenge and tries to acknowledge the ways in which the infinite reversal between opening and closure characterizing the crystal-image on the one hand but also a lot of Pirandello on the other, as so clearly shown by "The Nail", has found ways to exist beyond Pirandello and beyond literature, in and through cinema, in and through history, in and through death.

5. The Past, Tucked Under One's Arm

A certain way of conceiving of death lies by all means at the centre of Deleuze's Time-image. Susana Viegas (2023) has shown that one of the key ideas structuring the second tome of Deleuze's diptych is indeed the "beyond two deaths" also discussed by Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Lacan, arguably both via Georges Bataille. That would be, in short, the gap between actual biological death and symbolic death. This is very clearly what happens in *Leonora addio*: there is a corpse reduced to ashes, whose symbolic death however constantly fluctuates and never stabilizes into something definite. Only at the end of the film this seems to happen. Before the opening credits, Pirandello's voice over is heard

saying, during the Nobel Prize ceremony, "I've never felt so alone and sad. The sweetness of glory is no recompense for the bitterness it cost". In the very last shot of the film, after "The Nail", we see again him in Stockholm, but now the voice over is somewhat different: "Time must pass and carry us away with all the scenarios of our life. Mine, I've already rolled it up and tucked it under my arm". The film thus begins with a closure unattained, and ends with a closure attained and explicitly acknowledged as attained. In between, what made closure for the scenarios of Pirandello's life possible is the attainment of a form intertwining together art and life, which Pirandello has so often depicted as mirrors mirroring one another, in such a way as to comply with the infinite reversal between closure and opening. His own corpse never finding peace and actually getting buried in two different places at once, i.e., the mausoleum and the Sicilian sea, is juxtaposed with a literary/cinematic work ("The Nail") itself conceptualizing the infinite reversal between closure and opening. Thanks to this juxtaposition not of Pirandello's novellas (like in *Kaos*), but rather of his post-mortem biography *and* one of his novellas, closure is attained by sealing its crystal-like reciprocity with opening (a reciprocity expressed as well in both parts of *Leonora addio* in their own terms) way beyond *Kaos*'s affirmation of textual closure by way of its opposite.

Pirandello's "between two deaths", i.e., the interstice between Pirandello's actual biological death and a symbolic death that always seems to be slipping away, is shown as lying for the most part in the aftermath of fascism's fall. This may beg the question whether this "between two deaths" applies to fascism too: is fascism dead also symbolically or is its legacy still floating around after its fall? The film's answer is not particularly comfortable, because fascism is shown in the film only for a handful of minutes, but in that handful of minutes fascists do only one thing, and that same thing also happens to be done subsequently by a number of subjects after the war as well, namely: *capitalize on Pirandello's cultural prestige, and extract value from it*. The fascists want to turn his funeral into a celebration of fascist virtues, in stark contrast with Pirandello's final will, which asked for a low-key ceremony and especially to leave absolutely no trace of his mortal remains whatsoever. But the fascists are by no means the only ones who go against his will. Taviani shows not the fascist funeral, but the second funeral in Agrigento eleven years down the line, when fascism too is dead and gone: a ceremony grotesquely drenched with pomp and circumstance. The film shows very clearly that Pirandello, at least in Italy and at least in that time period, matters less as a writer than he matters as a *brand*—which means, among other things, that it matters first and foremost for all the reflected light that those who use it hope to receive on themselves, not very differently from, say, a famous clothing brand on a t-shirt. In other words, what brand scholars call *portability* (Balmer 2006, p. 36) is key. The officer transferring the ashes is obsessed by Pirandello's reputational image and by the reputational image the Italian State (desperately in need of international trust and respectability after the war) was going to get in dealing with and managing Pirandello's. The priest is obsessed by the reputational image the church was going to get if he was really going to bless his ashes inside a Greek urn, and when he asks his seminar students who among them actually read Pirandello's books, nobody answers in the affirmative—in fact, the priest himself admits that he used to read Pirandello when he was a young seminar student only because it was officially forbidden, just for the mere thrill of breaking the rules.

This is the point. Brands, including cultural brands, circulate and must circulate. People appropriate them in their own ways. The Pirandello brand is as little carved in stone as his corpse is exceedingly lively and never quite still. Cultural brands too, in other words, never attain complete closure without being ready to open up to eccentric, heterodox appropriations; the more a brand becomes something else through its circulation,

the stronger it gets. Capitalization of cultural prestige thus turns out to be one of the most fitting instances of the infinite reversal between closure and opening.

No matter how surreal the vignettes involving the famous writer's remains may be, Taviani does not particularly seem to criticize this state of things. What he does seem to ridicule are those who believe that the semantic circulation of the brand can be forever fixed, and try to exploit the value of the brand for their own sake: the fascists of course, but also the former actors of Pirandello's plays, who during the funeral seem clearly more interested in striking poses for the sake of self-publicity, than in actually mourning Pirandello—so much so that they make sure that their highly premeditated poses are struck at the exact moment when the coffin parades under their balcony. The artist in charge of Pirandello's mausoleum is depicted as the very epitome of pretentiousness: he is shown visiting the stone in the middle of nowhere, touching it here and there, striking the chisel a couple of times before pausing and reflecting with a very serious face, sniffing the landscape all around, and then walking away leaving everything essentially untouched, indulging in ridiculous self-satisfaction.

If, in the past half-century of Italian cinema, there has been somebody who more than any other has been obsessed with monumentalizing cultural and chiefly literary heritage, i.e., who applied a certain pompous theatricality to literary masterpieces in order to create stiff and stuffy cinematic monuments, rich in overly staged solemnity, that somebody was without any doubt the Taviani brothers. Still, we should resist the temptation to regard *Leonora addio* as a mere exercise in ironic self-deprecation. Rather, it looks like a confession of sorts, i.e., a way for Taviani to *lay bare* the aesthetic and political strategy underlying his and Vittorio's careers (namely the celebration/exploitation of the cultural value of so many recognized masters of highbrow culture), less as an end in itself than as a means to make a broader point.

It is no coincidence that this "confession" comes at a time in which Italy, a country which after 2008 has lost 25% of its industrial and manufacturing sector, (source: Italian National Institute of Statistics 2014) is relying more and more (including investments-wise) on its heritage, tourism being only the tip of the iceberg of this widespread, multifaceted and multi-sector trend. The film's point thus regards only so much Taviani's career, and rather more generally present-day Italy: the strategy that is here laid bare as pioneered by Taviani brothers, who made a significant part of their career out of it, is implied as now being pursued by a great many economic and social agents. Ultimately, *Leonora addio* draws attention to crystal-image's infinite reversal between closure and opening, and by extension to the time-image itself, as that which would most suitably raise the (self-)consciousness of the kind of osmotic and, in a way, even parasitic relationship with the past that present-day Italy is pursuing disorderly and with limited self-consciousness.

That the film does not end with Pirandello's ashes finally joining Sicilian soil and waters, but with "The Nail" instead, goes a long way toward confirming that Taviani's purpose is not ironic self-deprecation or the criticism of the capitalization of cultural heritage: otherwise he would not do it *again* after criticizing it. Rather, *Leonora addio* seems to imply that, if that attitude is pursued, one should do it more *consciously*, navigating the relationship between present and past with greater awareness and possibly even deliberateness. Not unlike other contemporary Italian films (e.g., Alice Rohrwacher's *La chimera*, 2023) but in a very different fashion, *Leonora addio* portrays Italy on the one hand as stuck in a perpetual past which is, however, at the same time also definitively out of reach and impossible to return to, and on the other hand as being confronted with the necessity of the thorny, uncomfortable and inherently contradictory *management* of that past.

By laying bare Tavianis' decade-long strategy, and by acknowledging it not as some personal idiosyncrasy but as part of a wider, ongoing, objective historical trend, Paolo

Taviani can claim, like Pirandello in the last shot of a film virtually recapitulating an entire career, that he has "rolled up the scenarios of his life and tucked it under his arm". This statement should be interpreted in terms of Giorgio Agamben's *inoperativity*, i.e., as the attainment of a post-historical state in which one's vocation is no longer a potentiality to be actualized, but rather potentiality *as such* ("the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality" (Agamben 1993, p. 42)), to be merely exposed in the open and made a gift of for others to re-open, i.e., to use in turn for something other than a project to be actualized now that humanity has revealed itself, Agamben maintains, as essentially goalless. The writer, the artist, is no longer the bearer of some mystery, some beyond, an *aura* in the sense of Walter Benjamin (a key reference for Agamben), but rather the enabler of the infinite, perpetually renovated joint celebration of the absence of any mystery and any beyond (Agamben 1999)—and hence of any prospective horizon to be actualized.

In "Two Kidnappings" ("Due sequestri"), the second episode of *Tu ridi*, in the same mountain two abductions take place, one in the past and one in the present. The past one had already attained post-historical state in Agamben's terms as circumstances forced both wardens and detainees to be stranded for months in the same place, blurring the very borders between victims and perpetrators (all were equally stuck with nowhere else to go) and abolishing the conflict between them in a seemingly never-ending stillness; yet in the present kidnapping the detainee is killed by his warden, reactivating the difference between them. Post-historical state is not stasis, but the perpetual return of and to its own impossibility *along with* its own necessity.

6. Conclusions

Toward the end of "Moonsickness" (*Kaos*'s second episode), at a certain point the lycanthropic peasant takes a chair, goes to the village's main square, sits down and talks out loud for everybody to hear about the disease on which he has no control. This proto-therapy-session of sorts ideally encapsulates the conception of the political informing *Leonora addio* as opposed to *Kaos*. Whereas for *Kaos* the political lies in acknowledging the gaze of the Other and in using it for socially emancipative purposes, the implicit conception of the political that can be drawn from *Leonora addio* is different, perhaps because in the meantime the split between eye and gaze has been, sadly, replicated by the split dividing dead Vittorio and back-then-not-dead Paolo. *Leonora addio*'s implicit conception of the political lies in acknowledging oneself as looked at by the gaze of the Other and in sharing with the others, *socially*, what the Other sees in oneself—which is to say: the vocation that one is socially identified with. As opposed to carrying out the capitalization of cultural value as per his and his brother's usual, Paolo Taviani here *exposes*, puts on display in the open, the capitalization of cultural value that has been defining his and his brother's cinema more than anything else.

That this capitalization (but also the fluctuations and metamorphoses of cultural value regardless of the intentions of those setting out to capitalize on it) is what *Leonora addio* primarily deals with, makes the film the Tavianis' ideal testament, in that the two brothers have engaged in it for most of their careers. And that the film centres around Pirandello furtherly confirms this point: with Paolo approaching death after Vittorio had already died, the post-mortem vicissitudes of the writer (an important cultural reference for the brothers in several of their films) implicitly but unmistakeably allude to the directors' own legacy. However, this recapitulatory account of the attitude having informed most of their works does not come without a significant shift in perspective, in that the Tavianis' former conception of the political is revised into something like "looking at oneself as if from the out-side, i.e., as if through the eyes of the departed".

The two key words of "The Nail", as we have seen, were "on purpose". *Kaos*'s extremely deliberate construction and textual structure were very much purposeful. It was a film with a message, and a political agenda. But *Leonora addio* implies a different conception of the political: what matters is the act of *sharing* the being-looked-at by the gaze of the Other, the laying bare of the hidden presuppositions of what one is and does, making them simply public and openly acknowledged, literally *socialized*, not necessarily for any purpose.

Funding: This research was funded by European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (FILM AND DEATH research project), grant number 101088956.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data is contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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