

The Evil That Men Do:

The Taviani Brothers' *Cesare Deve Morire* and Paul Schoolman's *Jail Caesar*

The beginning of the twenty-first century saw numerous productions about the life of Julius Caesar, each one more lavish in its production values and dedicated to authentic period detail than the one that had preceded it. TNT's miniseries, *Julius Caesar*, in 2003, was richly detailed (and perhaps best known for having Richard Harris in one of his final roles as Sulla). In 2005, ABC brought out *Empire*, focused more on the rise of Octavian but shamelessly imitative of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* in its overall look. And the same year likewise saw the grand-daddy of them all appear, HBO's *Rome*, with its handsome Cinecittà settings and superb performances, especially by Ciarán Hinds as Caesar himself. If Rome is "the eagle in the mirror," Cullen Murphy had written in *Are We Rome?* of the US in this period, it was a country full of anxiety about its imperial pretensions, but still strangely intoxicated by its imperial grandeur.

A new decade saw a new way of looking at the power politics of the ancient Roman past. 2012 saw the release of two films that re-envisioned the story of Julius Caesar by situating it in a prison context. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Cesar Deve Morire (Caesar Must Die)* set an Italian version of Shakespeare's tragedy in modern Rome's notorious Rebibbia Prison, with convicted murders and Mafiosi taking the play's principal roles. In this arty black-and-white quasi-documentary, we watch as the convicts practice their roles and try to imagine the inner lives of their ancient Roman forebears. At times, a certain savagery breaks out among the players, but the passion is ultimately subjugated to the service of the drama (the only part of the film in color). Likewise set in a maximum security facility but far more experimental in nature, Paul Schoolman's *String Caesar (Jail Caesar)* reimagined the rise of Caesar amid the gangs of Cape

Town's Pollsmoor Prison, among other places. Schoolman's cast consists of some well-known actors, notably Warren Adler as Caesar and Derek Jacobi as Sulla, together with a talented crew of prisoners, of whom John Peter Christian (a rapper also known as I.K., "Incarcerated Knowledge") as Cicero is the most memorable. Adler's Caesar uses all the means at his limited disposal, including his sexuality, in a hostile and indeed inhumane environment to give us a chilling portrait of a dictator in the making.

"The evil that man do lives after them," Shakespeare's Mark Antony famously intoned. "The good is oft interred with the bones." If the new millennium opened with lush productions of Caesar that were enticing in their presentation of authority and privilege, the decade that followed saw screen images far more critical of the rise of Caesar. There is a charm to Ciarán Hinds' Caesar that both *Cesare Deve Morire* and *Jail Caesar* seem by design counteract. When dressed not in the crested helmet and golden cuirass of an ancient aristocrat but rather the orange jumpsuit of a hardened criminal in a penal institution, the brutality of Roman power politics are difficult to admire, or even to stomach.

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