

TEN THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE

by

ALEX COX





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"I know death hath ten thousand several doors  
For men to take their exits..."

The Duchess of Malfi

Act IV Scene II

## INTRODUCTION

"You know, I've got something in common  
with Hawks, Ford, Hathaway, Sturges,  
Walsh, Andre de Toth, and Lang --  
We're all blind in the right eye!"

### Sergio Corbucci Interviewed

Image Et Son, Paris, January 1971

I wrote this book back in the late nineteen seventies, when I was a student at UCLA. What I really wanted to do was to direct... but I was enrolled in the critical studies programme, and so as to get my hands on 16mm equipment I quickly wrote the following, which was intended to be my thesis.

When I switched to production, I no longer needed a thesis, so I sent the text off to various publishers of film books. It was almost printed by one of them: but I made the mistake of listening to one of my UCLA professors, and getting an agent. The agent fell out with the publisher, due to the small amount of the money involved, and the book was never printed. Now, thanks to the miracle of .pdf, you can read it at last.

Many years after their demise, Spaghetti Westerns are still popular.

I'm not sure whether this is nostalgia on the part of their ageing fans of old, or whether a new generation of fanatics has discovered them, via DVD. Certainly Imagica's release of fifty-odd Italian Westerns on DVD in Japan suggests there is a younger market for the things.

If I were to write a book about Spaghetti Westerns now, I'd make it a chronological history. That would seem to make the most sense. But this book was written back in the days when critics and theorists tended to analyse films based on the *symbols* they saw in them. Hence its categories, and its concentration of the apparent structure of the genre.

Spaghetti Westerns were made before 1964, and after 1973, but 10,000 WAYS TO DIE takes their lifespan as a single decade. This is fine, I think. 1964 saw the Italian release of Sergio Leone's A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, the film whose huge success began the Italian Western "boom." And 1973 saw the completion of Leone's MY NAME IS NOBODY, an elegy not just to Spaghetthis but to the Western itself. By then, the genre was dying, replaced by urban thrillers, kung fu action, and porn.

Until I finish the chronology - which may take a little while longer - this is my written offering about the Spaghetti Western. It's the original marked-up text that went to the publisher. I doubt that it provides enough context: sixties cinema was rich in mercenary anti-heroes existing outside society, and there must be connections between these films and EASY RIDER, say, which my book utterly fails to pursue.

Never mind. It's a young man's book, of interest to young men, maybe, and to young women, if any of you like these things (I don't blame you if you don't, since they are hideously sexist and thick-eared).

What follows is an enthusiast's celebration of an unusual genre. Whether the celebrations are justified; whether the Italian Western killed the genre, or kept it alive for an extra decade; and what this means, I'll address later, in my old man's book.

Alex Cox

Tabernas

October 2005

LANDSCAPE AND SOCIETY

A vast, ochre plain, with amber hills in the distance.  
From afar, a horseman rides slowly towards us. Money jingles,  
and he whistles tunelessly. The sun sears the plateau.  
After a long time, there is a shot. The rider falls from his  
horse. Another shot, and the horse bolts. The titles appear.

This is the opening of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. One long take,  
lasting over a minute and a half, which does much more than  
establish a mood for this, the second Western by Sergio Leone.  
The beginning of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE is the essence of the  
Italian Western: a harsh, desert world where human life is  
mercilessly exposed, and sudden violence erupts without a warning.  
There is no visual romanticism, and the dominant sound is the  
hard clink of coins. Identities are unimportant - we do not know  
who the rider is, or where the shots have come from. Or, for  
that matter, why. The attacker is as anonymous as his victim.  
Our only clue has been the jingling gold - reinforced by a post-  
credits caption:

"Where life had no value

Death, sometimes, had its price.

That is why the Bounty Killers appeared."

Overly portentous, undoubtedly, especially after the credits  
themselves have been shot to pieces by rifle blasts on the soundtrack.  
But interesting in its choice of phrase: "Bounty Killer" rather than  
the more familiar "Hunter", and even less redolent of sport and fair  
play. And though the tone is established, the setting is not.  
There is no reference to specifics such as time and place. The  
opening <sup>sequence</sup> distances us, mentally and physically, from the subject.  
The matter-of-fact title extends that distance.

Our expectations are defied from the very beginning. The figure riding across the range is not the hero riding into town. It is a nobody, cut down by another nobody. Compare the opening of an American Western such as THE MISSOURI BREAKS, made more than ten years later - where the first protagonist is still introduced in long shot on horseback.

The introduction to FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE takes for granted an assumption that no American Western had asked the spectator to make: that life is not a sacred thing, to be protected by force of arms if necessary, but an intrinsically worthless commodity. What follows is a detached illustration of this thesis, uncompromising yet rarely predictable. Our expectations will continue to be defied, our assumptions questioned. In time, those who appear villains - the bounty killers - will reveal themselves as heroes, and our conventional standards of Good and Evil will be undermined, if not reversed.

The world of the Italian Western is the desert. An intrinsically hostile environment, where only the equally hostile survive. Farms and ranches are ~~no longer havens, but isolated angry pockets~~ <sup>A RARETY/ AN ENDANGEROUS SPECIES.</sup> of resistance. When a stranger rides down from the hills, the universal reaction is to reach for a gun. Failure to keep up one's guard can mean death, as it does <sup>FAMILY C IS REVENGE OF CIBU</sup> for the farmer and his family in <sup>preparations</sup> ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, in the midst of wedding ~~celebrations.~~ - a traditional symbol of life and regeneration. Here, as elsewhere, specific dates and locations are not established. The terrain is vaguely that of the American Southwest and Northern Mexico, but which side of the border is often unclear, established only in passing dialogue. The land itself, that staple, stable element of the American Western, is of subsidiary importance. We know it is the supposed

abode of the characters, and that they tangle with civilisation with undisguised contempt - conforming to the traditional pattern. But for all practical purposes, the Italians' interest in the big country is minimal. The principal location is always urban, the major preoccupations with society and its attendant evils.

A reviewer for the Monthly Film Bulletin said of one early example,

"...it is not a Western at all, but some sort of village square landlord and peasant melodrama in Western drag" <sup>1</sup>

~~and though derisory~~ <sup>despite the implicit derision,</sup> this is also true. The American Western, with some exceptions (HIGH NOON and JOHNNY GUITAR, for instance), depicts a society in the making, where rough equality is the rule, and a man may carve as much as he is able from the virgin land. Evil is something outside the foetal society: for every crooked businessman (usually an Easterner) there are scores of cattle rustlers, stagecoach robbers, and of course Indians.

Hence we are convinced that out of the seeming anarchy something will grow that is, if less exciting, fundamentally Good.

In the Italian Western, social structures are nothing new.

The proximity of Mexico infers a social structure centuries old, where starving peones doff sombreros to hacienda-dwelling grandees. This historically Mediterranean society is reflected north of the border as well: the location is urban rather than rural, and no matter how young the town must logically be, its population is rigidly stratified and systematically exploited. No longer dynamic, nor anarchic in the true sense, since it is basically a feudal system of obeissance to powerful warlords, the West is decadent.

<sup>1</sup> GUNFIGHT AT RED SANDS Reviewed Monthly Film Bulletin, B.F.I.

Leone's first Western, A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, takes this as read - not surprisingly, since its plot is that of YOJIMBO, a samurai story set in feudal Japan. Joe, the drifter, rides apparently by chance into San Miguel, a village just south of the Rio Grande. He sees a family terrorized by bandits, meets various servile peasants and a corpse on horseback, and is set upon by toughs in cowboy gear. Falling in with Silvanito, the saloon-keeper, he learns what is wrong. Every town must have its boss, they agree - but San Miguel has two: "Sheriff" John Baxter and Don Miguel Rojo. Joe senses there is money to be made setting matters to rights.

Sergio Corbucci's Western, MINNESOTA CLAY (made the same year and owing much to Leone and hence to YOJIMBO) starts from the same premise. Mesa Encantada is dominated by two rival gangs - the Mexicans of Don Domingo de Ortiz Mendoza, and the gringo bandits led by Fox, who like John Baxter has appropriated the sheriff's star. Yet the approach to the factions is very different. In FISTFUL, the more respectable of the two bosses is also the weaker. Baxter's men are always getting killed and he has no taste for gunplay ("Don't shoot, suh, Ah'm unarmed" he stammers when Joe draws his gun). The brains behind his operations is his Mexican wife Consuelo. The Rojos' first thoughts are always for violence, and only after their biggest heist do they see ~~the~~ benefit ~~of~~ ostensible peace and quiet. Ramon Rojo in particular radiates virile violence - far more than his counterpart in YOJIMBO, the relatively dainty Nakadai. Nakadai is dangerous because he has a pistol and nobody else does. Ramon claims a similar superiority for his Winchester, but no one is fooled. He is dangerous because he is a jealous and sadistic madman, not because his gun is longer than Joe's. Nakadai has rather a punkish, lightweight air; Ramon is considerably older, and actually enjoys killing. Now this is unusual. The conventional American bad guy



1  
No.  
Consider  
Boettcher  
Wilson  
may have got a kick out of his violence, but it was always  
preceded by a lengthy motivation and in the psychological  
Westerns an unhappy childhood too. Ramon is wealthy, feared,  
respected, loved by his brothers, and as far as we can see sexually  
on the ball. He has no reason to laugh as he machine-guns a  
troop of cavalry, to make such a meal of the massacre of the Baxters.  
Simply, Ramon exists as an embodiment of Evil - and as such, his only  
real predecessor is Wilson, the hired gunfighter in <sup>the intensely mythological</sup> SHANE.

On the surface, MINNESOTA CLAY is more traditional. It is crammed  
with tedious exposition and feeble moralising, and saddled with an  
irritating love-interest between its two most insipid characters  
(so is FISTFUL, but there the sub-plot is both minimal and relevant).  
Its debts to Leone are obvious, particularly in a lengthy sequence  
where the hero and his supporter are tortured - a motif which  
Corbucci retained for all his subsequent films. As far as his  
villains are concerned, the balance of power is reversed.  
It is Ortiz who is the weaker, Fox the man to fear. The Mexican is  
fallible and human, betrayed into Fox's hands by his own girlfriend.  
Fox is altogether cooler, and like Ramon a sadist - forcing the  
treacherous Estella to her knees and making her swear loyalty on the  
Bible before he shoots her. The idea that there are shades of  
Evil is crucial in the Italian Western, and the philosophy that  
the more refined and establishment the figure the more Evil he is,  
was Corbucci's before it was Leone's. Corbucci, as we shall see,  
was always readier to make a social statement.

He covers the same ground in DJANGO, where the distinction between  
factions is more pronounced. General Rodriguez and his Mexicans  
are cruel and devious, but no match for the calculating Confederate  
Jackson. There is a certain animal quality to Ortiz and Rodriguez

which explains and even excuses their activities, in contrast to the cold sophisticated violence of Fox and the racist Jackson.

At the mercy of men such as these is the community Joe glimpses on his ride into San Miguel - personified by the character of Silvanito. The Mexican township is always pacific, even innocent, collectivist and self-sufficient, looks after its own yet remains hospitable to outsiders, and cannot hope to match the Evil that invariably threatens it. The proletariat is a persecuted majority, and if we witness at times its sullen and suspicious side, it has only become so through contaminating contact with the Bad. In one extreme case, NO ROOM TO DIE, Mexicans are smuggled like so many cattle into the United States and sold as slaves to ranchers. Only in films cast in the American mould (the RINGO pictures and THE HILLS RUN RED) is the helpless community the W.A.S.P. settlement of the American Western. Rather it will be an Indian tribe or even a multiracial collection of steppe-dwellers; or it will be isolated by its religion. When in a later film like THE SPECIALIST the traditional W.A.S.P. community is menaced, it is presented as such a crew of bickering, avaricious hypocrites that we - like the hero - wonder whether it is worth saving. Even when he is in the minority, the W.A.S.P. bourgeois is always presented in a bad light, as a greedy shopkeeper, crooked gambler or war profiteer.

The ultimate instance of this attitude to the frontier community is the township in DJANGO KILL, a vigilante horde of fanatics and perverts so Evil that the Mexican hero - himself a bandit - is stunned into inactivity. <sup>& when horror</sup> ~~Even where~~/of civilisation is not so studied, such cameos are common: in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY a hotelier shouts abuse at retreating Confederates and looks

forward to an influx of Yankee dollars; in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU a shopman who has seen two people shot dead on his porch exclaims, "Excellent gun! I'll have to order some more!"

A recurring figure in even the most corrupt settlements is the Sheriff. Always ineffectual, he falls into one of three categories: the cowardly, the corrupt, and the well-intentioned-and-therefore-doomed. The first type is familiar, blustering but backing off whenever a strong man appears - we encounter a succession of such <sup>when</sup> Bill Kiowa recruits gunmen in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU. The majority of lawmen fall into the second category: prey to bribery as well as bullying, and often on the villain's payroll. In FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE the Sheriff tips off Cavanagh's men that a bounty killer has come looking for their boss; in I WANT HIM DEAD the Sheriff pursues the hero to settle a personal score; in THE PRICE OF POWER Sheriff Jefferson pins a deputy's badge on the local newspaperman to shut him up. "Deputies" are sometimes employed by townsmen to massacre or drive out undesirables, such as Indians, squatters and Mormons. The honest lawman in such a context courts disaster. When the drunken peace officer attempts to arrest the bandit leader Esteban in THE RETURN OF RINGO he is summarily shot. The Sheriffs in THE BIG SILENCE and THE SPECIALIST are both scrupulous and competent, but out of their depth amid the schemings within their own communities. To survive, a lawman must keep out of the way, and limit his participation to cracker-barrel musings on how old and weak he is: Sheriff Klaus in GARRINGO chews his pipe and announces "It's an old fogey's job. Nobody makes trouble nowadays" while a murderer shelters beneath his roof.

Even when he is not in willing cahoots with the villains, the Sheriff may still be used by the forces of evil. This happens to the lawman in THE SPECIALIST, and Jonathan Corbett - blinded by the prospect of becoming a senator - unknowingly becomes the tool of the influential villain in THE BIG GUNDOWN. Just as the agent of the law is held in low esteem (a Sheriff hero like Corbett or a Texas Ranger like Shango is uncommon, and inevitably finds his office a hindrance rather than a help) so institutionalised justice is despised. Minnesota Clay is tried and imprisoned for Fox's crime, and the framing of an innocent hero is a favourite plot device. In THE PRICE OF POWER a crooked trial is held after the accused has been murdered by the Sheriff's men.

Two images sum up the attitude to the lawman.

One is from TODAY IT'S ME, where Kiowa enlists the aid of Jeff Milton, an ex-gunfighter who has sought the "quiet life".

Rapidly persuaded, Milton pins his Sheriff's star on the lapel of his weedy prisoner, who marvels incoherently ~~that~~ he "always wanted to...to be Sheriff!"

The other is early in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. Monco has come to collect the reward on Cavanagh from the Sheriff who tipped off the outlaw's gang.

SHERIFF: Two thousand dollars. That's a lot of money.

Take me three years to earn it.

MONCO: Waal - Isn't a sheriff supposed to be courageous, loyal...and above all honest?

SHERIFF: Yes. That he is.

MONCO: (Taking away his badge and tossing it into a loafer's hat) You people need a new sheriff.

As yet we are only half way up the social ladder. Many steps above the petit bourgeois grotesques and the bent policemen, using the lowlife then casting it murderously aside, is the grandee villain. The number one Bad man in an Italian Western is as a rule a refined and snakelike landowner with a taste for the baroque, living in a well-guarded hacienda on the edge of town. Leone's villains are something of an exception - Indio and Angel Eyes are very dirty and don't have a home; Morton lives in a railroad coach. But as the conventions were established, and what one might call the socio-political interest was more pronounced, this type of villain came to figure in almost every plot, along with his near cousin the banker. Brokston in THE BIG GUNDOWN, Sorro in DJANGO KILL, and Walleck in I WANT HIM DEAD are all grandees; Fargo in NO ROOM TO DIE, Pollicutt in BIG SILENCE and Virginia in THE SPECIALIST are bankers; and there are many more.

Both types employ bandit hordes, usually Mexican, to populate the saloon, do their evil work and keep the storekeepers in order. The bankers have a habit of robbing themselves, often at the behest of a grandee. They also die rather earlier, due to their slightly lower social status and proximity to crude types in town. Aloof and spiderish, it is the grandee who presents the hero with his final challenge.

The same social order, in terms that are even more black-and-white, is to be found in the films about the Mexican Revolution. The suffering mass is of course Mexican, and what middle classes there are consist of army officers, priests and successful bandits (as Tuco says in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, "To survive you became a priest or a bandit"). The tiny upper crust contains generals, politicians and landed gentry. Devoid of its Western guise, this elementary

Marxist view lacks the force of allegory and often falls flat. At best it provides superficial entertainment (as with Corbucci's Mexi-Westerns), at worst not even that. When a film of this variety questions the simplistic social stratification, however - viz QUIEN SABE?, where landowners are not inherently evil, peasants not ~~inherently~~ <sup>inately</sup> benign, and we are faced with an appalling choice between the callous military leaders in Mexico City and the priggish puppyfat ponce of a Revolutionary commisar, Don Elias. Civilised society in all these films is seen as encouraging and profiting from war - a means of maintaining a corrupt social order and even of increasing productivity. The Civil War, usually skirted by American Westerns which are set later and further West, is a regular feature: and a number of heroes are ex-Confederates, for this emphasises the fact that they are outsiders, and questions the conventional attitude to the "right" side. As the West is still a racist community, the fundamental premise for the War must be invalid and more cynical explanations are sought. Walleck seeks to prolong the fighting for his own ends - "This War has to continue until every single item in that arsenal has been disposed of" he tells his secretary, "And I mean sold!" In both Mexican and American Wars, arms salesmen abound, and the profession is so widespread that even the heroes participate in it. The three protagonists in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY are all profiteers, though the scale of the senseless battle they witness dwarfs their avarice and bloodlust for a while. There is no honour in the Wars depicted: truces are broken, white flags ignored, and officers sell out their own men to escape further combat.

Since one basis for the social structure is race - rich whites exploit poor whites, rich Mexicans exploit poor Mexicans, but

whites exploit Mexicans generally - so an enormous variety of inequality and repression is introduced with the polygot community of the later films. Indians, as a rule, are despised by all: tribes are rarely seen, presumably because they have been decimated by government agents such as Duncan's Scalphunters in NAVAJO JOE, and those Indians we encounter are integrated second-class citizens who dress in white men's cast-offs. They are withdrawn and embittered - the surly, mystic Indians of DJANGO KILL are the classic examples - and as such useful allies for the taciturn hero. Blacks, too, are despised. Jack Donovan is the obvious fall-guy in THE PRICE OF POWER, because he is Black. His girlfriend can find work only as a prostitute. Here and in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST Negro porters carry bags at the railway station. Conventional attitudes to Western Blacks are geyed in MY NAME IS NOBODY, where Negroes are subjected to a degrading carnival sideshow, and witnessed drifting aimlessly in a riverboat, playing violins and chewing watermelon! Chinese and Japanese are often present, not only in the Kung Fu spin-offs like BLOOD MONEY. There is the jumpy Chinaman who tries to take the Colonel's bags to the station in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE; the laundrywomen and railroad workers in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST; the hotel manager in I'M SARTANA - I'LL DIG YOUR GRAVE ("All our looms are creaner than rissle!"). Generally immigrant Chinese are used for comic purposes - they panic, roll their eyes and jabber as Hollywood Blacks were accustomed to do - whereas Japanese are serious participants, as with the samurai warriors of THE FIVE MAN ARMY and TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU.

The use of a samurai as a main protagonist is particularly interesting - both on account of the Italian Western's roots, and

as example of increasing exoticism. The foreign-ness of a character is a means of emphasising his alien nature and the distance between him and the mundane majority. Hence the number of wholly foreign heroes and villains - the Greek Cacopoulos in REVENGE IN EL PASO, Sergei Kowalski, "Alias The Polack" in A PROFESSIONAL GUN, the English adventurers in MAN OF THE EAST and O CANGIACERO!, Brokston's Prussian bodyguard, the Irish gangsters in THE RETURN OF SABATA. Hence, too, the ironic use of minority characters as heroes whose cool efficiency shames the gringos. The redskin Navajo Joe is the only person who can save the town of Esperanza from its former employees. Conversely, Harmonica's most dangerous adversary among the gunmen at the station in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST is the silent Negro. An obvious but quite succinct instance occurs in BLOOD MONEY, when Wang deliberately flaunts a sign reading "No Negroes, Chinese or Unaccompanied Dogs Allowed" and emerges unscathed from the ensuing brawl.

The direction the Italian Western had taken by the early seventies is indicated ~~by~~<sup>in</sup> a scene ~~in~~<sup>from</sup> Corbucci's COMPANEROS, where the revolutionary Doctor Xantos is confronted by a group of American businessmen who want him to give up his activities. Here the Mexican represents the sane, restrained norm, and the gringos - popeyed and white-suited, with shades and panama hats - are the grotesques. In COMPANEROS the social structure is the same as it was in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS: but the exploiters are now the American establishment, the heroes radical Mexicans and enlightened Europeans - the Good guy in COMPANEROS is a Swede.



THE GOOD

"In so black a world, moreover, every fairly good deed, every abstention from a bad deed, has all the more power."

Raymond Durnat, Review of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY films & filming November 1968

There is something unique about the hero of an Italian Western, which is not confined to his use of violence: American heroes, in thrillers and War movies even more than in Westerns, have always been quick to anger and avenge a slight. It is not his laconicity: the private eye heroes of Chandler and Spillane, the strong silent cowboys, were generally slow on the drawl. Nor is it his professionalism: again, this is predated by the spy thriller - Nick Carter, Matt Helm, Bond et al in books and on film. Of course the combination of all these attributes in a Western hero supplies a partial answer, but surely not a complete one: Shane and the Ringo Kid in STAGECOACH are laconic, slick, and when the time comes violent. A comparison between one Italian and one American model will be more instructive, and, <sup>to this end</sup> I have chosen two of Clint Eastwood's roles - "The Man With No Name" from the DOLLARS films, and the hero of HANG 'EM HIGH, his first American Western.

HANG 'EM HIGH is superficially modelled on Leone's films. Some of the camera set ups are studied imitations, with extreme close-ups, very wide angles and hand-held sequences rather arbitrarily inserted. There is the odd Italianate episode as well - such as the Sheriff's mercy killing of the mad, chained "Prophet". The central character, however, could not be more different. Eastwood is not an anonymous drifter known only by a nickname: he is a rancher

called Jed Cooper, "an ex-lawman from St Louis". This in itself is of little significance - many earlier American heroes had sketchier names and pasts (Shane and the Ringo Kid...). What sets Jed Cooper apart from The Man With No Name is what happens to him. In the very first reel he is set upon by a band of vigilantes who try to lynch him for cattle rustling. Saved by Sheriff Bliss, Cooper changes from a mild, calf-toting cowboy into an implacable revenger determined to bring the mob to justice. The "transformation" is dubious to say the least - in credibility it ranks slightly above that of DEATH WISH, where for almost thirty minutes we are expected to believe Charles Bronson is a "liberal" architect, rather than the macho avenger he becomes after the rape and murder of his family. Both pretences fail. Bronson and Eastwood look like tough guys, and in any case we inevitably associate them with the parts they have played in the past. It is not even a case of acting against type: neither script is strong enough to establish an atypical character. We know we are watching an action movie, and that director and actor are just going through the motions which the convention demands, namely, to provide motivation for the mayhem we have come expecting to see. In both films, this takes the form of a fundamental change in the hero's character. From pacifist to man of action is the premise of American Westerns from MY DARLING CLEMENTINE to STRAW DOGS. In HANG 'EM HIGH and DEATH WISH the hero's turn to violence is assisted by an early training in gunplay - in St Louis or the Marines.

The essence of the American Western, then, is that something happens to make the hero behave the way he does, i.e. to make him become something other than what he was.

In Eastwood's Italian Westerns, though revenge is an element present, it is not the primary force behind his actions. It never instigates the action. The gunplay and pursuit of gold are well under way before the hero is given a personal score to settle. Admittedly the DOLLARS films are unusual in that revenge is a sub-plot rather than the prime cause: the majority of Italian Westerns deal - or seem to deal - primarily with the vendetta. Yet their approach is intrinsically different from that of HANG 'EM HIGH. The American revenge Western, ~~recently~~ typified by Eastwood's own OUTLAW JOSEY WALES, begins with the atrocity, and there follows a lengthy build-up (target-practice, grieving, the pursuit) before the cataclysm occurs. In the Italian Western we are usually plunged straight into the cataclysm, with the hero's release from jail or the death of a peripheral villain. The source of his vengeance trail - the premise or excuse - is kept deliberately vague at first, and explained by a series of cryptic flashbacks which climax late in the story. One particularly close-knit revenge drama, AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, begins almost where HANG 'EM HIGH ends, with the final night-time confrontation between hero and the villain's minions; and references to the past are so curt and telescoped that we never learn what the avenger was framed for.

All of which gives the Italian Western a very different basis from the American. Motivation is less important than action - and action seems to be dictated by the sort of people the protagonists are. We rarely see the hero practising his draw - the childlike Requiescant kills two outlaws the first time he ever holds a gun: his aim is instinctive, inherited from the gunfighter father he never knew. There is something about the Italian Western hero that is not learned or practised, but essential. A silly song

written to accompany FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE but not included in the film, makes this explicit: the singer curses

"the day that I became what I was born to be."

Motivation is of slight importance, perhaps of none, thanks to the hero's elemental nature. This elemental quality, and it is present in his opponents too, determines the way they act, the turn events will take, even the fall of cards.

Hence the recurring motifs, the ritual aspects of all the important action. And hence critical accusations of repetitive plots and characterisation that was "one dimensional".

I said of the American hero that, when something happened to him, he became something else as a result. The Italian Western reverses cause and effect. The participant is not a person, he is a force - an embodiment of Good or Evil. The hero of the Italian Western is something; things happen as a result.

The elemental quality explains the hero's attitude to violence.

Shane and the Ringo Kid are violent when the time comes - that is, they resort to violence when all other options are closed.

For the Italian hero violence is never a last resort. It too is essential, and unlike Shane he makes no attempt to control or escape from it - for it is a source of profit. Even the low characters in the films have essential characteristics, which help us to recognise stock figures and contribute to the telegraphed style of storytelling. But generally these traits are those of the familiar American character repertory. It is only in the principals that we find essential qualities that are uniquely interesting. It is one of the ironies of the form that we rarely have doubts as to the identity of the hero, and unhesitatingly classify him as Good. By traditional standards, the hero of

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A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS would be a villain, and even the light-hearted Ringo of Tessari's films might only just make it as a subsidiary good guy à la Doc Holliday. What the American tradition considers bad qualities are rife among the Italian hero figures. <sup>Aside from</sup> ~~Ignoring~~ his instinctive violence, the new breed of hero is characterised by his selfishness. Time and again, when asked for help or to perform some small service, he asks, What's in it for me? If the profit seems too small, he will not play; if an enterprise becomes a bore, he will up and leave without a thought for the others involved. Society is corrupt and grasping, and if <sup>he</sup> ~~the~~ agrees to have dealings with it, why should <sup>he</sup> ~~the hero~~ not beat it at its own game? Hence he will admit to only two goals - money and physical comfort. One episode of A PROFESSIONAL GUN, scripted by Luciano Vincenzoni, spells this out. Kowalski, the Polish mercenary, has sold his services to a band of revolutionaries. Fed up with their capriciousness, and his consequent discomfort, he prepares a contract.

"One: all technical and military decisions will be left up to me.

Two: through the period I work for you - and that will not exceed eight weeks - whatever the situation is at that time, I will be furnished with a roof and supplied with food, tobacco and beverages in my accustomed quantity.

Three: I will have the right to personally deduct, before anyone else, my salary, which from this moment has increased by 200% of the former. This money will come from any assets we seize or confiscate in all our revolutionary activities."

There follows a montage in which we see Kowalski sheltered from a thunderstorm while the Mexicans soak, fed on fresh goat's milk, and given a shower in the desert with their drinking water.

This is extreme and a bit crude, and Corbucci is deliberately laying it on thick in the visuals to make a political point. But creature comforts are never far from the hero's mind. Joe in FISTFUL won't sleep in the quarters the Rojos provide; Monco demands a good rest before he goes on a raid for Indio in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE; and it is the physical discomforts of banditry that make Arizona Colt turn down the outlaws' offer of a job, rather than any moral scruple.

The revenge hero is no less selfish than the bounty hunter. Revenge is a selfish motive, when the wronged party is the hero himself or some close relative. In TEXAS ADDIO, the lawyer Hernandez begs the avenger to side with the persecuted peones. "I'd like to help you," Burt tells him, "But I'm in too much of a hurry to wait for the Revolution." Jerry, in THE HILLS RUN RED, mocks the townspeople who ask for his aid after he has shot two of the villain's men - "How about that, folks? How come nobody gave me a hand?"

Yet when the chips are down, though he may have refused help in the past, the Good character finds himself drawn to protect the very people he has despised - compulsively, as if he were trying to rid himself of some old ghost, as when Joe tells Marisol

"Once I knew someone like you...and then there was no one to help."

Corbucci's heroes are particularly prone to such exorcisms: no matter how amoral and disinterested they may have appeared, in the end they face suicidal odds on the behalf of others.

The Good man's attempt to remain alone often ends in failure. Aloof he is safe: the problem is that in spite of himself he

is unable to keep his distance. Joe feels compassion for Marisol, and reunites her with her husband. His uncharacteristic act is discovered, and he is savagely beaten by Ramon, the woman's lover. It is the news that Silvanito is being tortured that makes him return to San Miguel to face the Rojos. Both these acts can be regarded as selfish - Silvanito is his friend, and Marisol reminds him of someone else - but they produce good results.

Likewise, though a Corbucci hero may be motivated by love or reward, his self-interested act produces a good result.

Both the Good and the Bad act selfishly: the difference is that while the Bad's self-interest always induces the same <sup>Evil</sup> consequences, the Good's is in the end sublimated or directed to benevolent ends.

Two pairs of contrasts may illuminate all this. Firstly, they illustrate the way in which a self-interested hero is induced to help others; secondly, they present the two possible extremes of selfishness and sacrifice.

The change of heart is at its most implausible in NO ROOM TO DIE, a rather feeble remake of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE with interesting social overtones. After several familiar episodes in which the two bounty killers, Brandon and "Preacher" Murdoch, demonstrate their deadly aim and form an alliance, a peripheral character called José is killed. Although they have had almost no contact (José has been ill in bed) Brandon goes all to pieces at his graveside, and declares "They'll pay for this, José - I swear by God!" When the Preacher remarks that this isn't really the way a bounty killer does business, Brandon turns on him and swears, "I'm not doing it...for the reward!" In other words, an insignificant death and two lines of dialogue have turned the

the pursuit of loot into revenge melodrama, and the hero's subsequent behaviour is abruptly "motivated". Compare this with the change of heart in ARIZONA COLT.

Arizona has been hired by the townspeople to kill Kay, a bandit who murdered the barman's daughter. The bounty is rather small ("You've no cause to mock us because we're poor people" Arizona is pompously told when he complains) and his real motivation is their additional promise of a night with the surviving sister Jane. At considerable personal cost, Arizona delivers Kay's body. While he is still weak from his wounds, and actually getting to like Jane, the townspeople have second thoughts and run him out of Blackstone Hill. Almost immediately, the rest of the bandits descend upon the town. In such circumstances, the hero's desire to stay out of things can be understood. Nevertheless, because he is the hero, we also feel he ought to act. The townspeople, unpleasant as they are, need help that only he can give. But when Jane puts this to him he refuses - why should he help "those kind men who threw me out, when I couldn't defend myself?" Besides, he is still wounded, and he and his pal Whiskey have a lot of money to spend. His attitude is more human than cynical - and it is his humanity that makes him return, when Whiskey sides with the townspeople. The sidekick's morality is more developed than the hero's. Whiskey goes to help the town, knowing he will almost certainly be killed, out of an abstract sense of duty. Arizona, selfishly and like a child, does so because he must stick up for a pal.

Neither Brandon nor Arizona is an archetype. Rather, they demonstrate two of the many selfish motives a Good man may have



for doing the Good thing. Neither film is particularly philosophical about the morality of motivation in any case. For a deeper look at the selfish hero let us turn to QUIEN SABE? and BIG SILENCE.

Nino, the central character of QUIEN SABE? is, like Sergei Kowalski, a foreigner adrift in the Mexican Revolution. He too falls in with a band of radical outlaws and proves a considerable asset. But unlike the Pole, the American is a cold fish, without visible vices or desires. Chuncho, leader of the bandits, says to him

"You don't smoke and you don't drink.

You don't notice a pretty girl.

What the hell do you like, Nino?"

- and Nino's reply, "Money", is sadly predictable. But QUIEN SABE? is anything but predictable, and as the film progresses, Nino begins to change. He does not become any more open or politically aware, nor does he like Mexico any better <sup>but</sup> ~~he~~ falls in love with Chuncho. Nino's selfishness is his tragedy: his belief that he can retain Chuncho's love and carry out his secret assignment - the assassination of Chuncho's idol General Elias. Nino's <sup>very</sup> expression of his love is selfish. By introducing him to barbers, tailors and high-class prostitutes, Nino attempts to turn the peon into a surrogate Yankee. His self-centredness blinds him to the end. When Chuncho pulls a gun on him, Nino can only accuse his friend of betraying him. The thought that he has betrayed Chuncho never enters his head, and he dies the ultimate gringo death, unseeing, selfish and alone.

If Silence, the mute gunfighter in Corbucci's BIG SILENCE, were truly selfish he would survive. The message is clear in the

<sup>the mute</sup>  
opposition of Silence, hired killer of killers, and Tigrero, specialist in genocide. Both men are alike in their trade, in their methods, even in their appearance - bundled in furs and mufflers against a Utah winter. From the moment that Silence accepts an assignment for which he is not to be paid, he departs from the carrion code he and Tigrero have shared. Silence consciously starts to act the Good guy, sticking up for the widow and the impoverished farmers, trying to provoke Tigrero into a stand-up gunfight. But a selfless man can hardly survive, when his opponent refuses to play by the same rules. Silence's death is brave but useless. A hero so self-sacrificing, so lacking in self-interest and self-preservation, is only a noble failure, and the farmers die anyway.

The successful hero (an in terms of his survival this means the majority) is selfish and greedy, self-reliant in comparison to his adversaries, though as we have seen normally in need of at least one companion - if only to communicate some of his thoughts to for our benefit. For he is very taciturn. This is a classic heroic trait in any case, and in the Italian Western it is just one of many traditional elements emphasised almost to the point of parody. With so many larger-than-life performances overflowing around him, the hero's laid-back manner is in any case a dramatic necessity. There is also something admirable about his restraint - most of us would like to be men and women of few words, able to keep our own counsel and come out with some terse aphorism when called upon to speak. Tied up with his taciturnity are his indifference (few things seem to merit his conversation) and also his violence - all the more obviously latent in one who is unnaturally withdrawn. It took a while for the merit of silence

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to be established. The hero of YOJIMBO talks far more than Joe in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, yet in contrast to some of his later personas, Eastwood is positively talkative, making jokes, smiling and even singing when he pretends to be drunk (this is in itself noteworthy - there are few other cases where the hero feigns drunkenness, an ~~impossible~~ <sup>inconceivable</sup> state for one so controlled).

Taciturnity has two interesting side effects. One is obvious in BIG SILENCE, where the role of tight-lipped killer is such that the hero would not logically be required to speak until well into the story. We find nothing unusual in Silence's silence. We expect it, so familiar has the convention become.

The other is that an outburst on the part of the hero, indeed any lengthy speech, gives us the feeling that something is wrong.

The near-insanity of several revengers is demonstrated by their fits of yelling. Both Lizzani's heroes indulge in screaming fits when they learn of the deaths of their family. Jerry in THE HILLS RUN RED has a particularly severe bout of verbiage at one stage, which prompts his partner to tell him, "You're talking too much." I have seen no other Italian Western where the hero is told off for being a chatterbox.

If his taciturnity is basically an American characteristic, the Good man's dishonesty is certainly not. It is not dishonesty in the sense of crime - fewer Italian heroes are outlaws than Americans, since the Italian hero is always alien to society, but rarely opposed to it in the Jesse James manner. He is dishonest ~~instead~~ in his total disinclination to keep his word or stick to bargains and partnerships. The Man With No Name is constantly joining forces with outlaws to destroy them from within, and he just as

readily dissolves his partnerships with Colonel Mortimer and Tuco. The Good's refusal to be bound by his word is hardly surprising, since he is constantly betrayed by others, often respectable townsmen. Double betrayals are common: Nino and Chunchu both let each other down; Blondie turns Tuco in, collects the reward, then sets him free; in DEAD OR ALIVE the outlaw Clay is persuaded to seek amnesty from the governor - as soon as he gets it he is shot dead by bounty killers who don't believe in armistices. But though he is willing to betray any cause, and knows no claims of loyalty save to family and perhaps close friends (generally dead and requiring revenge), the hero is not without a code of sorts. He may indulge in callous killing of his wounded adversaries, but he is normally careful to give his opponents a chance. This is particularly clear in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, where Monco seeks out Red Cavanagh. The venal Sheriff tells Monco Cavanagh is "there - at that table. He's got his back to you." The inference is clear, that Red can be shot in the back. But Monco refrains from doing so, and after slapping Red around gives him a chance to come quietly.

"Alive or dead - it's your choice."

Of course Red chooses dead, but Monco has, by his own rules at least, played fair with him. If all this seems rather a dubious morality it's still a moral code of sorts, and elementary doctrine of fair play which the Good character adheres to and the Bad one doesn't. The Bad takes life unnecessarily and shoots unarmed men, which the Good doesn't, or not often. Of such stuff are our distinctions made.

Interviewed in a documentary about Eastwood, Leone said that what had attracted him about the actor (whom he'd only seen in episodes of 'Rawhide', speaking in a language Leone couldn't understand) was his indolencia. This easy idleness, often translated into laziness, was to become a regular heroic characteristic. Rarely does the hero ever exert himself physically, unless he is in the hands of his enemies - who are wont to make him dig his grave or take part in brawls. If there is heavy work to be done, it is normally palmed off on the Ugly character: Blondie makes Tuco dig for the gold; Cat makes Earp carry him in GOD FORGIVES - I DON'T. The hero is never seen working hard at anything. He cannot slave like a peon or run a saloon, because regular work is one of society's demands - like ostensible submission to the law. His ease, like the villain's Evil, is elemental. Another result of his elemental nature is the hero's lack of surname - often the lack of any sensible name at all. The "Man With No Name" was in fact a catchphrase dreamed up by American publicists: in all three DOLLARS films the Good character has a name of sorts - Joe, Monco and Blondie. Yet it was also quite a neat comment on the new hero, since what name he went by mattered no more than the colour of his poncho. Anonymity is another means of undercutting the conventional difference between hero and villain: when your protagonists are called the Ringo Kid and Luke Plummer, it is not hard to guess which part John Wayne will be playing. But when they are Monco and Indio, Harmonica and Frank, guessing is harder. In a world of Ringos and Moncos, Djangos and Shangos, the luxury of a surname is only afforded for a reason. And that reason is, almost exclusively, revenge. The revenger generally packs a double-barrelled name like Jerry Brewster or Douglas Mortimer or Burt Sullivan. Jerry had a wife who died through Ken Seagall's neglect while he was in

the jail; the Colonel had a sister whom Indio raped and who shot herself through same; Burt had a pa whom Cisco Delgado murdered (he also has an idiot brother called Jim who's really Delgado's son). The hero's surname <sup>invokes</sup> blood ties, complex family histories, and the vendetta which inspired so much popular Italian fiction - and fact.

The Good characters split into two groups here: the indifferent mercenary and the obsessive revenger. The former is more or less human, has a sense of humour, and feels compassion in fits and starts - in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY Blondie develops a primitive fondness for Tuco, and offers a dying soldier his cigar. The revenger is humourless, more taciturn still, without feelings and seemingly impotent. Mercenary may turn revenger at any moment, but it is rare that the latter can ever change: only Sean in DUCK! YOU SUCKER seems to learn forgiveness. His life's work accomplished, the revenger is normally left in a void. Bill Kiowa, hero of TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU, is asked where he'll be heading now his enemy is dead. He stares blankly for a couple of moments, before answering vaguely, "South..." In TEXAS ADDIO, Burt procrastinates so long that when he finally gets Delgado, his brother is dead. Mortimer rides off purged at the end of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, leaving his share of the bounty to Monco - but he is already thinking of future partnerships. When the avenger is provided with a future, it is invariably contrived and unsatisfying. If Jerry were really so cut up about his wife's death, would he ~~really~~ take up with another young lady so soon?

The laconic single-mindedness of the hero grows more pronounced with each film, as do his facility with firearms and the body-count.

Before long, his humour and compassion have vanished entirely, and are visible in the Ugly character instead. The focus of our interest shifts, and the Good becomes one element in a broader canvas, acting out his particular part of it. The ultra-cool, ultra-introvert revenger Harmonica, when asked his name, replies with the names of dead men. There is almost no distance between him and the ultra-cool killers who await him at the station in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. Conscious of this, Leone wanted the three assassins to be played by his previous principals Eastwood, Wallach and Van Cleef (Van Cleef and Wallach said yes; Eastwood wouldn't). Men like Harmonica, the Sabatas and Sartanas of the Circus Westerns, are portable killing-machines, playing by the rules of a game in which they <sup>hold all the aces.</sup> ~~are kings~~. They cannot lose, hence they can win nothing of value. They are sterile, they lack spark, and if they were still the principals the films would be boring - but now they mingle with the vital Ugliers, and our sympathies shift but are not lost. The Ugly character Cheyenne says of Harmonica,

"People like that have something inside.

Something to do with death."

Perhaps it is not death. But nor is it life. The later heroes are men pared down to elemental force and nothing else. Silence cannot speak; he does not need to. The Blindman fights and kills without eyes. Deaf Smith abandons his partner Johnny Ears. By this time inhuman connotations are inevitable. Sartana is likened to Satan; Sabata is told "The devil rides with you"; both dress in black, and appear from nowhere, tempting the wicked. Gary Hamilton, shadowy revenger of AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, resembles a ghost at times. Four years prior to HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER, the hero of DJANGO THE BASTARD almost certainly is one.

The sterility that pervades the denouement of so many Italian Westerns is inevitable - particularly the revenge stories. Simply, they are surely not meant to end this way.

The films are too cynical and in their own way moralistic to allow any positive result, and too intense to ~~allow~~ <sup>permit</sup> some happier sub-plot to temper the conclusion. The revenger stands abandoned in a void. At best, he can only envisage a return to his old tricks ("Maybe next time," the Colonel says). At worst, like Corbucci's gun-runner Django, he has lost everything and is capable of nothing. Revenge drama is satisfactorily concluded only by the hero's death - not just to fulfil the "He Who Lives By The Sword" saw, but because death is the logical end to a wasted life and an obsessive pursuit that has destroyed the hero's soul. Whereas this was obvious, say, to the Jacobean, it does not seem to have impressed itself upon the Italians - or rather, they chose ~~not~~ <sup>dis</sup> to <sup>American</sup> obey the fundamental rule about not killing off the Good guy. Hence, particularly with the less adventurous of the films, the tendency of plots to peter away into weak irony and adieus. And hence the strongest and most intelligent of the revenge stories end with the death of the hero (DUCK! YOU SUCKER and BIG SILENCE) or of someone close to him. And at times, even when revenge was not a "grafted" element but a central theme, the survival of the hero could be as morally pointed as his death - particularly, following the last, useless victory of the crippled Django.



THE UGLY

"I am not pretending that I was not guilty of  
Ugly things or that I never caused needless  
Sacrifice of human lives...

I am a Spaniard!"

Valentin Gonzales - "El Campesino"

Heinemann, London 1953

Just as A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS contained the model for the cool gringo hero, so it contained a prototype for his inconstant companion - the Ugly. Silvanito is the saloon keeper in San Miguel, and traditionally the hero's source of sustenance and information. In common with the talkative barmen and Mexicans of the American Western, he is superficially a comic character, constantly trying to persuade Joe to stay out of trouble even if it means he can't pay his bill. In his garrulousness and his age, Silvanito is like Walter Brennan or even Gabby Hayes; in his apparent timorousness and fear of graveyards he is a "typical" U.S. Mexican.

Strong, silent men have always required talkative companions, if only to redress the dramatic balance. When, as in the revenge Westerns, the hero's motives must remain shrouded in mystery, we are deliberately denied the presence of a sidekick whose constant questioning could enlighten us. Otherwise, for every Blondie there is a Tuco, for every Sabata a Carrincha: ebullient contrasts to marvel at the hero's behaviour and demand to know his plans. Silvanito is all of this, but in one important respect he differs from his American predecessor: he is not a coward. Certainly he is superstitious, but he is far from one

of the craven peones of THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, closer to Kurosawa's original models in fact. He is loyal and tough, and does not break under torture when the Rojos want to know where Joe is hidden. After his initially timid behaviour, Silvanito's true nature comes as a surprise. In particular, we are taken aback by his fundamental decency. It is Silvanito, not Joe, who is the first to defend the persecuted family against Ramon; and because he is no gunman this takes greater courage than it does for Joe to back him up. Joe can stand by and watch Marisol's husband thrashed by the bandits. Silvanito cannot.

In various ways, then, Silvanito is a mould for the shape of characters to come. He is a garrulous Mexican, a serio-comic figure of raging contrasts - timorousness and guts, cynicism and principles, suspicion and childish curiosity. He is also intelligent, appraising the drifter correctly as soon as he appears - "With all the trouble we have, all we needed was you." His role also demands that he play chorus, explaining the set-up to Joe. The choric quality will remain: the Uglies marvel when we are impressed, undercut the action when we are dubious. And as with the avaricious amoral hero, the Ugly is a figure drawn straight from YOJIMBO - Silvanito is a latinised Saké-Seller.

There is another side to the Ugly, not manifest in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS. Even more than the Good man, the Ugly would in an American Western have been a villain of major proportions - the bandit chief in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, for instance. His dark side is illuminated in Corbucci's films and Leone's FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. Ortiz and Hugo in MINNESOTA CLAY and DJANGO

are undoubtedly villains - they ambush, torture and kill without compunction - yet there is something attractive about them. Physically they are big and fat and jolly-looking. They deck themselves out in para-military outfits resplendant with braid and self-awarded medals, like the director of some banana republic. They laugh a good deal, though what they laugh at is often questionable. Most of all they are appealing by default - in contrast to the cold, paranoid gringo racists who massacre them by some ruse. Even Indio, the Bad character from FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, has certain elements of the Ugly - his nationality, his cunning, his fascinated respect for machismo.

Most Italian Westerns feature an Ugly of some description, and the reason he is not a carbon copy of Silvanito is not hard to fathom. The world depicted simply does not <sup>spawn</sup> loyal, trusting, principled types like him. It breeds losers and survivors, and to survive, especially if you are a Mexican and thus disadvantaged from the start, you have to be ruthless, good with a gun, and almost as devious as the Good guy. ARIZONA COLT offers a developed version of the Ugly well before Leone christened him. Arizona is cool and clean-shaven; his counterpoint is Whiskey. Arizona meets him in a water trough - dirty and bedraggled, with a scruffy fur coat. He is permanently drunk and a robber, specialising in the indiscriminate hurling of dynamite. The relationship, one might assume, has been established. Not so - the more we see of each, the less he conforms to our original assumptions. Arizona's wry, condescending manner becomes an irritation and a selfish shell, while Whiskey demonstrates a developing conscience. He grows disgusted at the senseless cruelty of his boss, Gordo, and - prompted no doubt by moral

outrage - absconds with Gordo's money and rescues Arizona, whom the bandits have crippled and left to die. When the Good proves he is as lacking in scruples as the Bad, the Ugly abandons both. Because he is responsible for Gordo's wrath, Whiskey feels morally obliged to go back to Blackstone Hill and face him, rather than let innocent people die: Arizona doesn't give a damn about innocent people, but he ~~has grown~~<sup>is</sup> sentimentally attached to Whiskey.

Examples are one thing, archetypes another. Even when major characters are limited to one of three different types, it is difficult to find any one who is perfectly true to form. The nearest to an Ugly archetype is "Il Brutto" himself, Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez. He resembles another of Eli Wallach's parts - the Mexican bandit from THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN - but stripped of all his predecessor's more mundane preoccupations, such as feeding and sheltering his gang. Just as his fellow-protagonists, Blondie and Angel Eyes, are essentially Good and Bad, Tuco is an elemental in-between - not essentially good enough to be the hero, nor naturally evil, but determined to live outside society on the same plane as these elite combatants. Hence his ability to gather bands of helpers out of nowhere, to survive, motivated only by revenge, a blistering trek through the desert. He is introduced to us in a joke scene which sets the tone for THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY and establishes his paradoxical character rather neatly. At a tumbledown clutter of shacks in the middle of the desert, three men confront each other. Coarse, bearded types all of them, and our immediate assumption is an impending gunfight. They stride towards each other with measured, practised pace, come to a halt outside one of the

buildings, and clear their guns. Then all three pile in through the door and there is a fusillade of shots. The window shatters and out flies an ungainly character with a napkin tucked into his shirt front, a knife in one hand, a leg of mutton in the other. Freeze frame, and the title appears:

THE UGLY

This is Tuco, outlaw Mexican with \$2000 on his head; a wanted man riding off on a stolen horse; leaving three would-be attackers dead or disabled on the cantina floor. The frozen frame paints a an incongruous picture of quick wits, volence, vulgarity and even pretention (the napkin). There is nothing humble or si-si-senorish about Mr Ramirez. When, in partnership with Blondie, Tuco finds he can make a profitable enterprise out of cheating the gallows, this is one of the "spontaneous confessions" he makes to the Judge -

"Murder, assaulting a justice of the peace, raping a virgin of the white race, statutory rape of a minor of the black race, derailing a train in order to rob the passengers, highway robbery, illicit traffic in firearms and explosives, attacking and injuring county, state and federal officials, counterfeiting and passing United States currency, Mexican currency, and French currency. The condemned has also been in various rebellions against the local, state and federal governments. And the accused in so doing utilised trusting and unwitting farmers and peones. The condemned has also received stolen goods, used marked cards and loaded dice; he has promoted prostitution; he is also guilty of abusive and obscene threats against private citizens and people in high places of authority. He has stolen a stagecoach and used it to make illegal postal pickups. He is guilty of

unlawful detention for purposes of blackmail, detention and sale of fugitive slaves, burning down the town hall of Amarillo, the El Paso jailhouse, and the Sheriff's office in Sonora. The condemned hired himself out as a guide to a wagon train, and after receiving his payment in advance deserted the wagon train in the hunting ground of the Sioux Indians. He also stole a steamboat on the Pecos River, and after throwing the pilot overboard sank the boat because of lack of skill at the wheel. The condemned is also guilty of cattle rustling, horse thievery, supplying Indians with beverages containing alcohol, and misrepresenting himself as a Mexican General in order to claim salary and living allowances from the Union Army..."

Whether or not we believe all this, Tuco - sitting on a horse with a rope around his neck and terrifying white women with a snarl - is acting as if he believed it himself. Of course no one, not ~~But~~ Cassidy and not even Pancho Villa, had time in his short outlaw life for all of these exploits: certainly not a small-time crook like Tuco. Even for a character in an Italian Western the roster is outrageous. Tuco's confession is a list of his ambitions - he and every other Ugly would like to be known as the bandido who stole steamboats and razed half of Texas: who made the gringos look small in a hundred different ways. Likewise, they would like to think of themselves dying without benefit of clergy, a sneer on their lips...the macho way. Yet when offered the opportunity for real, they start to sweat and plead, because they'd rather die in bed, thank you all the same.

I see nothing wrong in this. It is surely a good thing that the most sympathetic characters the form produced are the ones who

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value life the most (especially, and obviously, their own). As a philosophy, the attitude of the Ugly has more to offer than that of the sterile revengers or the death-and-glory heroes of Peckinpah's parables.

Not that Tuco is a saint. For all his likeable bluster, he has a very nasty streak. Abandoned in the desert by Blondie, Tuco finds his way back to town solely so that he can take various cruel revenges on his former partner. His Ugly aspirations to gentility provide us with a splendidly surreal sequence where he herds Blondie into the desert to die of thirst and exposure, protecting his own head with a delicate lace parasol.

After they have joined forces again, Tuco's emotional protestations of friendship ("We're all alone in the world - I have you, you have me") do not prevent him trying to dissolve the partnership when Blondie's back is turned. Although his tearful displays of affection are bogus, Tuco is sometimes genuinely sentimental.

In particular, his scene with Father Ramirez reveals depths and feelings which we would otherwise never guess at. He is proud of his brother the priest, awkward because he does not know the right way to greet him. Pablo - just back from their father's deathbed - is stuffy and disapproving. The priest is unforgiving, the bandit humble - a reversal of "natural" roles which says a lot about the treatment of supposedly conventional characters. Especially as Father Ramirez is played by Luigi Pistilli - an actor normally cast as slick villains such as Groggy in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE.

For Tuco and the Ugly characters, personal loyalties are paramount: like the Good, he owes no allegiance to any cause, though he may enthusiastically cleave to one (religion, the Confederacy) in times of stress.

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Like Whiskey, Tuco is able to effect some improvement upon the cold fish hero. Having overheard Tuco's interview with Father Ramirez, Blondie comforts him with "a good cigar". A slightly cynical gesture, but still compassionate. And having induced the Ugly to fight five of the villains single-handed, the Good feels obliged to lend a hand. Finally, when he has got his own back on Tuco for the revenge-games, Blondie spares his life and his share of the gold. Having friends, temporarily at least, seems a natural occupation for the Ugly - for the Good, it is depicted as a novelty.

The hero is invariably incapable of emotion ("Except maybe hate" as Bill Kiowa allows), unable to fall in love or better off not trying. For the revenger love is a thing of the past. Colonel Mortimer, Harmonica and Sean have all been in love, and the death of the loved one has robbed them of that capacity. The villain may lust after some young thing, but always with undertones of sadism. Only the Ugly, mid way between the fish and the lecher, is capable of love in a positive sense. Sometimes this is familial love - Tuco coos over his brother and is shaken to learn that their parents are dead; Juan declares in DUCK! YOU SUCKER that "My country is me and my family." In ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, Cheyenne's love for Jill is tied to memories of his mother:

"She was the biggest whore in Alameda, and the finest woman who ever lived. Whoever my father was, for an hour or a month, he must have been a happy man."

Though he is supposed to have murdered her husband, Cheyenne is fatally drawn to the young widow. And, without ever saying a word or going into a clinch, he falls in love with her.

Cheyenne is no nicer than Tuco. He rides with a bunch of hard



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cases, terrorizes people, kills lawmen, and bullies a cripple. Yet I find him infinitely more attractive than the Good man Harmonica, whose only gesture towards Jill is to rip the front off her dress and ask for a drink of water. There is a consummate impotence about Harmonica. Cheyenne burns with life. Jill naturally falls for Harmonica.

In his last scene with her, Cheyenne, who is secretly dying of a bullet wound, tries to steer her away from Harmonica. He draws her attention to the railroad workers outside.

"You know what? If I was you I'd go down there and give those boys a drink. You can't imagine how happy it makes a man to see a woman like you. Just to look at her. And if one of them should pat your behind... just make believe it's nothing. They earned it."

He wants her to learn to love men who are just men, and not the "ancient race" of cold warriors like Harmonica and Frank - who have "something to do with death." The tragedy of ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST is that it is the Ugly who dies. The Good is terribly like the Bad: both are elementals, as like as unlike poles drawn inevitably together, for whom life and death have no meaning and no difference. To watch them is like watching two chess masters. We can appreciate, but it is impossible to become involved. All of this is quite deliberate, and underlined in the recurring flashback - a blurred figure walking slowly towards us - when Frank and Harmonica meet. The enigma thus introduced distances us still further from their enmity, and is explained only at the end.

There is nothing enigmatic about Cheyenne. When he is annoyed he

lets people know, and when he is in love his expression says it all. He is fallible, and appealing for that reason. And there is no reason for him to die - not even the Sheriff bears him malice - and his death is savagely ironic. Shot in the stomach by a man on crutches, in a scene we never see, Cheyenne stays proud and pathetic to the end. He dies alone, refusing to let Harmonica see him die.

It is obvious in Leone's later Westerns that his principal interest was no longer in the hero, nor even in the villain. Hence it is hardly surprising that his next project was a film about the Mexican Revolution. For the prime convention of the Mexi-Westerns is that the Ugly is the focus of attention, the Good a subsidiary - the Ugly's sidekick, in fact. In QUIEN SABE?, first and still best of the Mexi-Westerns, we sympathise with Chuncho and understand his paradox - the profitable nature of disinterested crime opposed to the sacrifice his Revolution demands. Like Leone's Ugliers he is a family man: he loves his brother and his gang, and takes votes on their future plans. Petulant and easily bored, he rapidly despairs of teaching the peasants how to shoot. Yet if he is wilful, he is also sincere. He naively worships his General, demands his own execution when the town he deserted was overrun by government troops, and joins the pones weeping when Elias is shot. Chuncho sets off in search of revenge, but is almost persuaded not to carry it out, such is his confusion. The gringo "hero" is the opposite - always in control, systematically destroying all that Chuncho believes in, operating behind a veneer that only crumbles when he discovers love. The Good and Ugly traits remain, but the relationship they create is entirely different and our sympathies are focused in another

direction.

The Mexi-Westerns that followed QUIEN SABE? repeated the revised formula. In the same year as Leone made ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, three other directors tried their hands at Westerns in the QUIEN SABE? mould. In each, the Ugly is the focal point, and the Good a cool foreigner who offers his services to the Revolution. In Corbucci's A PROFESSIONAL GUN, the hero is Chunchu made simple - a dumb revolutionary peasant who doesn't like being taken for a bandit. Sergio Sollima's RUN MAN RUN is a rather hasty sequel to THE BIG GUNDOWN, with the same hero - the Mexican knife-specialist Cucillo - assisted by a familiar Good gringo. The balance of THE BIG GUNDOWN is far more interesting, with equal prominence given to its Good and Ugly heroes, the latter outsmarting the former at every turn. And the conflict of morals in Sollima's intervening Western, FACE TO FACE, is quite extraordinary, with the Ugly bandit growing Good as the Good character descends into Evil.

The third film from this period is TEPEPA, directed by Giulio Petroni - who had previously made the interesting revenge Western DEATH RIDES A HORSE. In a wider Revolutionary context it locates a specific story of revenge, with the Good, Doctor Price, tracking down the Ugly campesino, Tepepa (a Cucillo substitute, played by *ch* same actor, Tomas Milian). Like Chunchu, Tepepa faces a series of paradoxes, and has to kill his best friend El Puro, who has betrayed the cause. His genuine zeal gives Price cause to doubt whether he has the right man - until the Ugly's confession, in a delerium on the operating table, that he did kill Price's woman. "What" he wants to know "Is a woman compared to the Revolution?"

Tepepa dies during the operation. Whether Price has killed him we do not know. But the film ends with a message of hope, another revolutionary, on the horizon, calling Tepepa's name like a battle cry. The Ugly's optimism transcends even his death.

Milian was a freedom fighter again in Giovanni Fagi's O CANGACEIRO! and in Corbucci's remake of A PROFESSIONAL GUN, COMPANEROS. In Fagi's film, the Ugly was more thoughtful, in Corbucci's more thick-eared than ever. And if Sergio Leone's Mexi-Western, DUCK! YOU SUCKER, is a disappointment after his earlier work,<sup>1</sup> its Ugly hero is right on form. Juan Miranda is Tuco writ large, if such a thing were possible. Cunning, affecting servility when it suits his purpose, at other times manifesting enormous pride and ambition ("My mother she had the blood of the Aztecs!"), with a fierce love for his sons and a taste for the genteel - he hijacks a baroque stagcoach and extracts from it a banquet in the middle of the desert. Unlike most of the Ugliers, but very like Chunchu, Juan has no desire to be a revolutionary. He is cynical about politics generally, and wants only to be a successful bandit. As in ONCE UPON A TIME IN

<sup>1</sup> Leone did not want to direct the film himself. It was originally intended as a project for Peter Bogdanovich (!); then as a first film for Leone's assistant director Giancarlo Santi, who later made the Lee Van Cleef vehicle THE BIG DUEL; and finally offered to Peckinpah, who chose STRAW DOGS instead. Leone undertook it without time for his usual preparation, and was obliged to accept the studio's casting and a title change. None of which accounts for the repetitive weakness of the script.

THE WEST, the Ugly loses again. He is contaminated by his contact with the Good (an I.R.A. dynamiter with a grudge harder to eradicate than Harmonica's), his family is destroyed, and he is left alone when Sean is shot and decides to blow himself up.

If another variation on the character is noteworthy, it is the transposition of QUIEN SABE? into a Carribean setting for Pontocorvi's QUIEMADA! Scripted by Franco Solinas (co-writer of QUIEN SABE?) and Giorgio Arlorio (who with Vincenzoni and Solinas wrote A PROFESSIONAL GUN), QUIEMADA! features an Ugly hero called Jose Dolores - an ex-slave whom the English Sir William Walker transforms into a revolutionary leader, for his own political ends. Jose turns from a wily piece of sub-Tuco lowlife into a full-blown martyr, but his roots are with Silvanito in San Miguel. The script is inferior to its original source, and its politics are far more obvious. Thanks to the presence of Brando and the absence of the "Spaghetti Western" stigma, Pontocorvi's comparatively trite polemic won him the critical plaudits Damiani was denied.

In the Italian Western mainstream, meanwhile, Silvanito's offspring continued to prosper as strong men grew still more silent. Bud Spencer, an Italian whose real name was Carlo Pedersoli, was the grunting foil to Terence Hill (aka Mario Girotti, no relation to Massimo) in the comic Westerns of Colizzi and Barboni. And as a counterpoint to the paranormal Good guys of Parolini's Circus films, another Italian character actor, Ignazio Spallo, became Pedro Sanchez. The Ugly he plays in SABATA bears a remarkable similarity to Arizona Colt's compadre, Whiskey. Carrincha is regularly drunk, and boasts and marvels continually; but there is none of the moral complexity of the earlier relationship. As the form declined, characterisation

and interest in the moral subtleties that differentiated Good from Bad, and the Ugly from both, were abandoned in favour of improbable and frequent pyrotechnics, not to mention asinine comedy.

In its boom years, nevertheless, the Italian Western produced characters who were fascinating not merely as grotesques, but because they were sympathetic people - in whose fate we took more than an academic interest. The Ugliers, particularly those of Leone, are the most rounded and also the most attractive of the protagonists. At times they were hard to tell from the Bad, but they always remained a good deal more human than the hero. Tuco and Co were coarse and overstated, and we liked them because they couldn't manage either extreme, but struggled to survive somewhere between Good and Evil. A cynic's Everyman, if you like.

THE BAD

"His raison d'etre is a primitive cynicism and aesthetic appreciation of his own villainies. He has an instinctive appetite for horrendous crimes, but only the vaguest interest in holding a sceptre. He is, in short, a "modern" representative of ancient evils, a diabolical incarnation of at least six of the Deadly Sins."

Robert Ornstein

The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy

All this, though written about the theatrical Machiavel, applies to the Bad character of the Italian Western. It is a highly accurate summary of the villain's characteristics, in fact: and the similarity is not surprising in view of the common source of both characters - the court life of Renaissance Italy.

The Elizabethan dramatists chose Italy because of the enormous popular interest that endured long after the reigns of Alexander IV and the Borgias. Even in the seventeenth century Italy was regarded as "the Academie of man-slaughter, the sporting-place of murther, the Apothecary-shop of poyson for all nations" <sup>1</sup> and no fit place for an English gentleman. Accounts abounded of "Machiavellian" intrigues, murder in high places, and ingenious revenge at court. Not surprisingly, Italy became not only the conventional dramatic locale, but a source of inspiration - in the wealth of oral accounts, sensational pamphlets and translated histories. And more than three centuries after the "source date", popular fascination for outrage and atrocity has not lessened in the least. Prior to their Western boom, Italian film makers had used historical

1 Thomas Nashe, Pierce Pennilesse

material, and specifically Renaissance legends, in many commercial features. Maciste and his fellow muscle-men were constantly battling with Medici-style Machiavels, and occasionally with the Borgias themselves. No pretence was made at historical accuracy - if Samson could join Hercules in the same picture, he could easily oppose a recognisable Renaissance adversary.

The legends are ideal dramatic material, incorporating almost every imaginable evil: lust, perversion, treachery, duplicity, depravity, casual or sadistic violence, torture and elaborate murder, genocide, incest, insanity, atheism... They press pleasingly at the borders of what could be depicted on stage or in pictures: being part of national history, and assimilated into popular culture, it was impossible that the Renaissance material would not find its way into the new Italianate form.

In the Italian Western, there is little concern for a faithful reconstruction of life in the American West. What most of the writers and directors knew about the frontier was what Hollywood had shown them. Even Leone, whose knowledge of Western lore is apparently considerable, showed no real concern for historical fact. He and his contemporaries were engaged in creating a new myth, out of diverse and often incongruous elements. The ironic approach to death and the pessimistic view of life are two attitudes, characteristic of the Renaissance sources, which rapidly established themselves in the Italian Western - though they stem more immediately from YOJIMBO. The Italian influence is particularly strong in the character of the villain - who like his predecessor the Jacobean Machiavel is defined solely by what he does. Take the example of Cisco Delgado, Bad man from TEXAS ADDIO. He is introduced sitting amid the decayed splendour and potted palms of his hacienda, watching three young Mexicans being



branded and hung in the courtyard. His professed intention is to make their father sell his land, but when the old man ~~still~~ refuses, Cisco shoots him and the boys out of hand. The net result is therefore nil, and the incident is never referred to again. A true Machiavel, Cisco has only the vaguest interest in achieving his ends, but he finds the prospect of torture and killing irresistible. His only positive ambition, to win the love of his son, is characteristically unfulfilled.

Leone's villains, Ramon and Indio, are the same: they go to a great deal of trouble to steal the gold, at a cost of many lives, but once they have it they will not allow it to be spent - the loot must be hidden away "until things cool down." There is never a spending spree following a heist. For Ramon and Indio, like Cisco Delgado, the execution of a daring and violent scheme as a reward in itself.

In this, the Bad is very like the Good. We never see the hero spending his bounty money or stolen gold, and he rarely even says what he plans to do with it. The pursuit of a prize means more than the prize itself. This is particularly true of the revenger, left destitute and aimless once he has got his man. In other ways, too, the Good and Bad are alike. They are anti-social animals, proscribed by a society which they intimidate. Any allegiance they make is temporary and financial: Ringo and Arizona Colt defend the townspeople for a reward: Wolcott (in DEATH RIDES A HORSE) and Lynne (NAVAJO JOE) become leading citizens so that they can rob the bank. Generally, hero and villain are both beyond the pale; incapable of existing within society because they live by a different set of rules, which society interprets as no rules at all. The stuffy saloon keeper in

FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE says of the Good, "He's nothing but a wild, vicious animal!" but his wife moons, "He's tall, isn't he?" with a pointed glance at her dwarfish husband. For her, as for us, the proscript is appealing - a man too big for a world of midgets. It is of course the noble savage's appeal - the attraction of the man who knows no fear; to whom death is no stranger; untainted by our flabby, bourgeois "civilisation". When Good and Bad meet for the last time in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, Leone's most consciously mythological Western, the following dialogue takes place:

FRANK: Surprised to see me here?

HARMONICA: I knew you'd come.

FRANK: Morton once told me I could never be like him. Now I understand why. It wouldn't have bothered him, knowing you were around somewhere, alive.

HARMONICA: So you found out you're not a businessman after all.

FRANK: Just a man.

HARMONICA: An ancient race. Other Mortons will be along, and they'll kill it off.

FRANK: Future doesn't matter to us. Nothing matters now - not the land, not the money, not the woman. I came here to see you. 'Cause I know that now you'll tell me what you're after.

HARMONICA: Only at the point of dying.

FRANK: I know.

I quote the whole exchange because it is very important: a rare articulation of their place and their relationship, in the same way as some speeches in QUIEN SABE? articulate the contrast between Mexican and gringo. It is also nonsense - existential pretentiousness

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with as much relevance to the viewer as the concept of courtly love. And like courtly love, it is very appealing. It is also overstated - deliberately so, with an undercutting distance. All this Man's a Man dialogue is so telescoped, so redolent with Meaning, that it inevitably sounds tongue-in-cheek. Certainly Leone's philosophising is refined in comparison with Peckinpah's. And his violent resolution is rightly localised: it does not require a massacre of Mexicans or Chinese for his hero to prove himself a (White) Man.

Frank and Harmonica are of the same breed. They do not become anything, they simply are - and their actions prove it. The Good and Bad of the DOLLARS films are similarly defined: Ramon, Indio and Angel Eyes all recognise the measure of their adversaries, and all establish their Evil in similar ways. Because they live on the same plane, and in some cases look so similar, it is necessary for the Bad to do something fairly early which will differentiate him from the Good. For Leone the destruction of a family characterises the villain - Ramon steals Marisol from her husband and child; Indio has his enemy's wife and baby shot; Angel Eyes kills a farmer and his eldest son; Frank's men ambush the McBains, and Frank kills the youngest boy himself; Guttierrez' troops murder Juan's father and sons; and in the lighter MY NAME IS NOBODY hired killers terrorize a barber and his boy. In the Italian Western the family is not a strong or even a wholesome institution (McBain seems a bit of a brute and slaps his son around), but an assault upon it is still an outrage - far more so than an attack on an individual man.

The same destruction of a family group features in many non-Leone films. It is the motivation of most revenge Westerns, and it is

used to characterise the villain in the Ringo films and ARIZONA COLT, where revenge is not a prime motif. There is something abominable about breaking up a family: unlike the killing of one or more pistol-packing hardcase, the normal introductory activity of the Good. Though he is always ready for action, the hero gives his enemies a chance to make the first move, or even to back down ("Now if you'll just apologise to my mule..."). Being hardcases they don't back down, and so they are killed. But the Good has at least made an effort. Killing is the Bad's first solution to any problem, and worse still he enjoys it. His sadism is not surprising considering his antecedents. Ramon laughs as he slaughters the cavalry in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, Fox empties his six-shooter into corpses in MINNESOTA CLAY, and the villains of Leone's and Corbucci's subsequent films are even more ingenious and sadistic. Madness, of which sadistic inclinations are one facet, is common. Indio deliberately spins out the moment before he kills a man, withing him "Hasta luego" or musing "I'm sure...you hate me just enough". He is haunted by a recurring nightmare - the red, rainy memory of a woman he raped - and his dope-smoking is a form of escape. Constantly (and, implicitly, as a result of the woman's suicide with his own gun) Indio thrusts himself into suicidal confrontations: his passionate violence is unlike that of the cold later villains, closer to that of the Ugliers. Like Tuco and Juan, in fact, he is blind and inconsistent. He destroys families, yet takes pride in a bandit "family" of his own, congratulating those who do their part. Unlike the Good, the Bad always surrounds himself with cronies - though he is eventually forced to fall back on his own resources and face the showdown alone. Indio's paternalism blinds him to the traitor in his midst, though wise after the event he assures his sidekick Nino that

he knew Monco was a bounty killer "from the moment he arrived." Mad but fiendishly clever, Indio sees Monco's presence as a means of destroying his own family and keeping the money for himself. To this end he frames one of his own men, Cucillo, for letting Monco and the Colonel loose. Yet having shot Cucillo, the bandit chief bursts into floods of frenzied tears and screams at his men to bring back the culprits. Scheme and reality merge in the Bad's mind - his dope-smoking, fits of sweating and screaming, and long periods of inactivity all contribute to his madness and his volatility.

Compare Indio, the instinctive, with the calculating Angel Eyes. Superficially they share the same traits - avaricious murderers who laugh at death - but in their approach to their profession they are poles apart. Indio takes everything far too seriously, and is duped an alarming number of times - by the bounty killers, even by one of his own men. Angel Eyes keeps his distance. He is wry, clever rather than cunning, one step ahead of the Good and the Ugly until the very end. He is consistently professional: when the farmer asks him to shoot Baker, Angel Eyes honours his bargain with Baker and kills the farmer, but takes the money and kills Baker as well. "When I'm paid", he tells his former employer, "I always follow my job through." The name originally scripted for Van Cleef was not Angel Eyes but Sentenza - "Judgement" - and this rather neatly conveys the cold impersonality of his trade. His sadism is more in check than Indio's, even when he systematically beats up a prostitute for information. Indeed his manner resembles that of the Colonel, playing games with the outlaws he is about to kill for the reward. Angel Eyes has much more in common with Colonel Mortimer, in fact (and Lee Van Cleef played both roles)

- with his calculation, cruelty and comparative refinement, the Colonel is more of a prototype for later villains, mainly grandees, than the "Ugly" Indio. In fact, we have come to the stage where there are two sorts of Bad character: the violent instinctive, resembling Indio, and the colder and more businesslike, drawn from the Colonel. In NO ROOM TO DIE, with its parallel plot and characters, the inherent villany of the cool second lead is realised: "Preacher" Murdoch, supposedly the hero's partner, reveals himself to have been in league with the villain all along.

An archetypal villain in the Indio mould is Gordo in ARIZONA COLT. The film is a cheerful rip-off of the early films of Leone and Corbucci, and Gordo is its most composite creation: aptly played by Fernando Sancho, who had been Ortiz in MINNESOTA CLAY and the Bad man of the Ringo films. He looks like Indio gone to seed - bristling with bandoliers and military medals, and dangling a musical chime-watch identical to the one Indio stole from the Colonel's sister. As in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, the bandit organises a jail-break, this time to amass new recruits for his depleted gang. He lines the ex-prisoners up in the desert and delivers a mad recruitment speech.

"When I began I was a poor peon like you. Before I explain why I saved you, I tell you how I started. My father had a musical gold watch. I always wanted to hear that music. He told me, "Gordo, you'll have this watch when I am dead." So five minutes after, It was mine! You see, the Americans they even call me 'Gordon.' My name is Gordo! They change the names of everything - stupid gringos!

There's \$5000 reward for each member of Gordo Watch's bandidos - even if he's dead or alive! And for me it's \$25000! There are times when I feel like cutting my own throat to get the reward.

If you cross us, first they will hang you, then they will ask you what you wanted to tell them. You there! You were all in that jail, and I was the one who freed you. And I tell you why - because I wanted you to join us. I'm always looking for new muchachos, to replace those who are killed. But if there is danger, there is gold besides; and all my men have their pockets full of gold! I offer you the chance to ride with Gordo amigos - instead of rotting in some prison.

As you see, I don't insist. No one has to join. But those who don't, will have to die."

Whiskey Arizona considers the bandit's offer for a while, but decides against enlisting. Gordo's determination to brand all his muchachos with the "Mark of the Sidewinders" is instrumental in Arizona's decision. Later he tells Whiskey he would have joined the outlaws if Gordo weren't "so plumb crazy to brand everybody." Particularly in evidence here is the Bad's ability to temper his cruelty with flashes of comedy. Robbing a bank, Gordo pauses to set the hands of a grandfather clock by his watch. And on his way out he reassures the surviving customers, "Don't be afraid. I am only going to kill one more of you before I go: the tallest." Bang. "Now you are the longest."

The Gordo-figure, still played by Sancho, reappeared in the later Circus Westerns - General Tampico in SARTANA looks and acts just like his predecessor. But by this stage the coarse and brutal

villain had been relegated to the role of incidental heavy. The Bad Man Principal had grown more sophisticated. Though most thoroughly explored in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, the grandee appears first in Carlo Lizzani's Westerns, REQUIESCANT and THE HILLS RUN RED. Ferguson, the villain from REQUIESCANT, is a Confederate renegade who has fled to Mexico after the Civil War. Under cover of a truce, he massacres the Mexicans led by Leonardo Marquez and sets himself up as a rancher on their land. Though he tries to act like an aristocrat and cultivates various bizarre pretensions, Ferguson's sophistication is skin deep. He uses the Mexican servants for target practice, and keeps his wealthy wife confined to a padded cell. He can only keep order - and thus sustain his position - through the use of vicious henchmen. Only gradually does the Good character, Requiescant, learn the truth about himself: when he does, he is transformed from gentle buffoon into vengeful sadist - and Ferguson is not even allowed the dignity of suicide. Ken Seagall in THE HILLS RUN RED is in a similar position. Also an ex-Confederate, he has changed his name to Milton and bought a ranch with stolen money. He now acts the part of self-made cattle baron, keeping the citizenry in check with a bandit horde. Only the arrival of the revenger Brewster breaks his hold on the community.

Fergusson and Seagall have a lot in common. They are nouveau aristos who delight in dressing up and putting on airs. Both are cruel, effete and petulant, terrified by an apparition from their sordid past. They rely entirely on their supporters rather than on any inherent strength, and each man's mainstay is a stronger sidekick. Ferguson's segundo, ironically christened Light, is a master - a drug-pushing punk in black leather, whom Requiescant



induces to hang himself in the saloon. Seagall's aide is another leather boy, Garcia Mendez - but Mendez is not altogether unpleasant. Like Light, he has designs on the heroine and acts like a bastard. But he is proud and principled, at times even dashing. Certainly Mendez is preferable to his craven employer, who swoons at the sight of blood. There is really no question of Seagall being a match for Brewster: Brewster and Mendez, however, are men of the same mould.

This same dichotomy of Evil receives a lengthy examination in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. On the one hand there is the instinctive, traditional Bad man Frank - with elements of Mendez, Indio and Sentenza. On the other there is the grandee Morton - who recalls Ferguson and Seagall, and the war profiteers from THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY. Frank and Morton despise each other - Frank because Morton is crippled with tuberculosis, Morton because of Frank's ferocity - yet they need each other. Morton must employ a gunman to "clear small obstacles from the track" or he will die before his railroad reaches the Pacific. Frank needs employment in the dying West, and sees in Morton a chance for great advancement. Here they discuss business aboard Morton's pullman.

MORTON: I'd say you've changed, Frank. A lot.

You used to take care of things personally.

Now you're keeping in the background. You'll end up giving orders.

FRANK: It's because I don't want to leave you alone too much. You're gonna need somebody more and more every day. To stay near you - like a friend.

MORTON: Or like a partner? How does it feel to be sitting behind that desk, Frank?

FRANK: It's almost like holding a gun.

Only much more powerful. You see, staying with you... I'm beginning to think big, too.

But Frank, like his implacable adversary Harmonica, is one of the proscribers. And though he thinks about becoming a businessman like his boss, and even considers marrying the heroine, these would be denials of his essence - and in the end he cannot deny what he is. When Morton, unable to trust him any longer, pays Frank's own men to kill him, Frank does not try to patch up their quarrel like a true businessman would have done. He rides off to kill Morton. Discovering he is too late even for that - Cheyenne has already done the job - Frank has only one course of action left: to confront Harmonica, the other survivor of their "ancient race."

In all Leone's Westerns the villain tries to evade his destiny: Ramon by shooting Joe at rifle-range; Indio by sneaking off with the money; Angel Eyes by ambushing Blondie and Tuco in the graveyard; Frank by sending deputies to intercept Harmonica (the gunfighters at the station). Each time, the Good forces the Bad to fulfill his function. His brothers dead and his advantage lost, Ramon must face Joe in a fair duel. Monco forces Indio at gunpoint into a showdown with the Colonel. Blondie tells Angel Eyes that he must "earn" his money in a three-cornered gunfight. And thanks to the intervention of Harmonica and Cheyenne, all Frank's other options are closed. This is what MY NAME IS NOBODY - directed by Tonino Valerii, but overseen and partially scripted by Leone - is all about. Jack Beauregard (like Frank, played by Henry Fonda) is an ageing gunfighter who has had enough. He is not a villain, but otherwise his position is identical to Frank's. But where Frank had his Nemesis, Jack finds a Good Angel, the young "Nobody" determined not to let him escape his destiny: a showdown with the legendary Wild

Bunch - "One hundred and fifty pure-bred sons-of-bitches riding like they was thousands!" All Jack wants to do is go to Europe. He even refuses to take revenge on his borther's killer, a slick businessman in the Morton mould; at which point Nobody almost dispairs, remarking disgustedly "how modern the old folks have become." Yet in the end Jack cannot **evade** "what he was born to be" and like countless villains and heroes before him he faces his final challenge, alone in the desert with the Wild Bunch descending on him out of the sun. And because this is a comedy, he still gets to Europe after all.

Villanous partnerships such as we find here and in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST are a particular favourite of Corbucci. . More a "traditional" Italian director than Leone, Corbucci loses no opportunity to make a political point, even if sometimes its relevance is dubious or its ideology dated. Bad men of Frank's ilk are not suited to this purpose, since being a-social, they tend to be a-political. THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, though its depiction of a vast and senseless military battle makes a certain moral point, is basically a celebration of individual self-interest and caprice. It is not a political film, and it is ancarchic only in the broadest sense of the word. Corbucci's villains are not like Frank or Angel Eyes - disinterested embodiments of Evil - but more akin to Morton and the profiteers. Even in his early films - MINNESOTA CLAY, DJANGO and THE HELLBENDERS - the accent is on the calculating Evil of the gringos, Fox, Jackson and Jonas: the instinctive Mexicans are crude and gullible, wiped out by the Americans half way through. In his later work the balance of power shifts, in so far as the instinctive villain proves the stronger and the calculator is defeated first, but the relationship remains. In NAVAJO JOE, BIG SILENCE, THE SPECIALIST and Corbucci's Mexi-Westerns, we witness a

decaying world where vicious capitalists employ instinctive thugs to maintain a corrupt status quo and rob the populace - and where the thug proves more resilient than his employer. The same set-up as Leone's, in fact, but arrived at by a different route: social conviction rather than gradual progression.

Politically, Corbucci's films suggest that he is a primitive Marxist. His world is populated with self-sufficient, happy communities (Indians in NAVAJO JOE, farmers in BIG SILENCE, otherwise Mexicans), persecuted to the death by villainous gringos (Duncan the Bastard, Tigrero, Curly, John-the-Wooden-Hand) in the pay of urban capitalists, the banks and the government. There are profounder philosophies, but few produce more entertaining yarns. And certainly no other writer-director mined so rich a vein of grotesques. NAVAJO JOE offers Duncan, paranoid leader of a horrible army of scalphunters, obsessed by the fact that he is part-Indian. Here he reveals his dark past to the vicar, prior to killing him:

"Nobody ever had any mercy on me! When I was a boy they beat me, even called me...bastard! I didn't cry and I couldn't fight back. But I grew to hate the Indians, like my mother, and white people, like my father. He was a preacher like you, a minister. Bred by mercy. I got a bad break when somebody killed him and beat me to the punch."

This is pure corn - as feeble a psychological explanation of a villain's villany as one can find anywhere. But in its equally implausible context it is quite apt: the Bad man, having assembled all the townspeople in the church, is threatening to burn it down unless the Good produces the gold. And by this time, Duncan's capitalist partner is already dead, shot down in the arms of his silly wife.

Curly and John, villains of A PROFESSIONAL GUN and COMPANEROS, are almost identical, though each has a specific nastiness: Curly is homosexual (and hence especially ornery), and has a penchant for castrations; John smokes reefers and has a pet falcon called Mary Jane who gnawed him free when the hero nailed his hand to a tree some years before. Both have various grotesque followers, and John's are all disabled in some way - such as the Chinaman with an enormous hearing-aid. In addition they both work for the Mexican government against the rebels.

In THE SPECIALIST almost everyone in town is a villain of some sort. Top of the list is the owner of the bank, a scheming hussy called Virginia who has the hots for the hero. Having embezzled the funds and killed off her feeble lover-cum-partner-in-crime, she falls into the hands of El Diablo - a Mexican bandits who lives up in the mountains. He too is an amputee, having lost an arm for stealing a loaf of bread as a boy. In a climax of mounting madness, El Diablo ignores a truce and shoots the decent but deluded Sheriff, while his men gang bang Virginia in the barn. The Good man Hud is forced to kill El Diablo, whom he had rather liked; and is mortally wounded himself. Virginia dies in the crossfire, and Hud burns the townspeople's money. At which point a new force of Evil appears, in the form of four androgynous hippies, dope fiends all, who make everyone strip naked and crawl along the street on his belly. Hud, bleeding profusely, sorts them out and rides away. It is tempting to suggest that Corbucci's mind snapped while he was making THE SPECIALIST: but its philosophy is quite in keeping with his other films', and indeed with the mentality of the recationary Left, which has never looked with favour on drugs, free love or homosexuals.

But if THE SPECIALIST has the air of an indisciplined tract against its maker's pet hates, Corbucci's BIG SILENCE is a masterpiece of tight plotting and intensity. Its theme is simple. Two hired killers, one Good, one Bad, are induced by warring factions to confront each other. The Bad is employed by a malevolent banker to kill off the farmers whose mortgages he owns; the other by the farmers, to defend them. We have already met the hero, Silence: let us look now at the villains. Pollicut is a usurer straight out of Dickens - hunched and hand-rubbing, defferential and perverse. He has forced the farmers into penury, thence into brigandry, and has now posted rewards for their capture, dead or alive. Scenting an amnesty, a horde of bounty killers has descended on the region - at its head, the blond and grinning Tigrero. Tigrero is wholly despicable, a coward and instinctive sadist. But he is clever too. It is nothing unusual for the villain to be cleverer than his henchmen of course: Leone's Bad men employ particularly stupid sidekicks (Ramon has Chico, Indio Nino, Frank the laundryman Wobbles), who at times get ideas above their station (Indio is betrayed by Groggy, Frank's gang is bought off by Morton). Tigrero's intelligence is of a different order - it is diabolical. Not only is he smarter than his gang, he is smarter than his boss: and in the end he outsmarts Silence as well. Silence, sworn nemesis of bounty killers, tries desperately to provoke Tigrero into a gunfight. He has already done so with one of Tigrero's gang, a stupid bruiser whom Silence intimidated simply by leaving a door open and causing a draught. But Tigrero will not play by the hero's rules. He knows Silence by reputation, and refuses to risk a stand-up confrontation. In fact Tigrero won't stand up to anyone - he only shoots when he has the advantage. It is the Harmonica-Frank stand-off with the opposite resolution. The Good tries to make the Bad face his

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destiny, but the Bad won't hear of it. Tigrero doesn't believe in elite proscriptions and "an ancient race." But he still knows the rules, and he uses them to entice Silence to his doom. Like Corbucci's other villains, after his capitalist boss is dead, Tigrero rounds up a bunch of hostages and says that unless the Good shows himself the hostages will die. Wounded though he is, Silence comes out of hiding to fight Tigrero fair and square, and is shot down by snipers. Tigrero kills the farmers and rides off, presumably to become a businessman.

Individual Bad men, even the elementals of Leone, never came as Evil as Tigrero. Groups of them managed it at times - particularly the perverted families of the later films. 1000 DOLLARS ON THE BLACK features a strange family triangle of widowed mother and two sons, Good and Bad. Good brother comes home after a prison sentence to find Bad hanging out in a ruined Aztec temple and holding the local towns to ransom, with mother growing fat on the proceeds. When a deputation of local womenfolk convinces Ma that her son's deprivations must ease off, she goes after him with a rifle. Rod Murdoch's family in DJANGO THE BASTARD is even worse. Murdoch, an ex-Confederate traitor who has established himself as a gentleman rancher, is quite a mild villain in comparison to his brother Luke - a pasty, pill-popping epileptic lunatic who casually murders people to prove his manhood. His spasms can only be calmed by the ministrings of Anita, a hard and mercenary bitch Rod has paid to marry the madman. A toned-down version of the same trio can be found in AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, a revenge Western similar in many respects to DJANGO THE BASTARD. But the odd thing about Acombar, his wife Mary and son Dick, is that they do not initially impress us as monsters. Whereas Cisco Delgado, Ferguson, Indio et al are introduced in the course of some act of

villany, Acombar and his family come across as a fairly pleasant bunch. Pa is admittedly obsessive, taking pot shots at a gallery of toy soldiers and predicting governorships for his son, but Mary is simply a glamorous loving mother, Dick a wide-eyed student from West Point. Even Acombar's strong-arm boys, the Santamaria brothers, demonstrate a taste for prankery rather than cutting throats. It is the arrival of the revenger that unleashes the Evil within them: and here Evil is no longer a stamp which either marks a character or spares him. Having learnt the truth about his father's wicked past, Dick remains bitterly loyal.

"The only thing that's sure is that we must kill him before he kills you. Even if I must become a murderer like you, Dad, and kill an innocent man."

The climax owes far more to the Renaissance than it does to Zane Gray. Like a Machiavellian court, the family destroys itself. Mary, having failed to seduce the revenger as she did years before, runs through the shadowy corridors screaming "Acombar! He's in the house!" Terrified, Acombar shoots his son by mistake. His mind goes and he accuses Mary of the deed. He kills her, and is left alone in his burning house, to face the dark malevolent hero.

Occasionally the concept of developing Evil is given serious consideration. In FACE TO FACE Good and Bad swap roles: Brad, the mild university professor, develops a taste for killing which far outstrips that of the bandit Beau - whose sensibilities are increasingly refined as a result of his contact with Brad. But this is not a question of fundamental personality change so much as a late recognition of identity. Personality determinism rules here as elsewhere, and characters are marked out for the role they play. Acombar's bad blood dooms Dick to share his father's Evil: innate sadism lurks within Brad from the beginning.



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It is the same with the Good guys: Beau the bandit has always borne the seeds of something more; Tuco and Blondie must join forces to combat the greater Evil; Ricky Shott, the gentle cowboy in BA NDIDOS, cannot escape the role of gunfighting avenger.

Increasingly, the Bad characters of the Italian Western began to conform to a stereotype which was Lizzani's rather than Leone's. Indio and Angel Eyes have no ties (in either sense of the word), no full-time occupations, no interest in the way they look: compared to Angel Eyes with his shabby coat and curling lapels, Tuco and Blondie are almost a pair of fashion plates. Apart from theft, they have no ambition. Lizzani's villains dress with studious care, and seem to be trying to look like successful businessmen, which of course successful businessmen never do. In DEATH RIDES A HORSE, Lizzani's starting-point is reworked: a whole gang of down-at-heel outlaws have become prominent city fathers, running saloons and banks. Sollima's films draw the same conclusions - that the villain is not in fact the Mexican bandido, but the sophisticated gringo who operates under cover of the law. In his THE BIG GUNDOWN, the oily rancher Brokston frames an innocent Mexican for his son-in-law's crime; in FACE TO FACE Brad is a grandee in embryo, and the crooked banker Williams uses Beau for his own ends; and in RUN MAN RUN, the revolutionary hero's most redoubtable enemy is not the Mexican bandit but the American agent.

Gianfranco Parolini's Circus-Westerns use Sollima's conclusions as a starting-point. Figures of authority - bankers and ranchers - are not merely corrupt, they are the instigators of all that is Evil. Only the arrival of an elemental, ghostlike hero - Sartana or Sabata - can unseat them. SARTANA, the first of the series, establishes the

scenario. The stage to Goldspring is robbed by Mexicans, and its consignment of money stolen. The thieves are massacred shortly afterwards by Lasky, a local hooligan - but the gold is not recovered. Lasky and the Mexicans' boss, Tampico, are shadowed by a black-cloaked stranger. Panicking, the bandits kill each other off or are killed by the man of mystery, Sartana. A pile of stones is substituted for the gold. Sartana apparently dies in a duel. And at last the true villains are unmasked - Stewell and Hallman, the bankers of Goldstone and the most respected men in town. A very live Sartana pops up and mops up the remaining Bad men. He keeps the loot for himself. This, incident for incident, is the plot of all Parolini's subsequent films (SABATA, INDIO BLACK, THE RETURN OF SABATA), and provides a rough structure for most of the Circus Westerns directed by Giuliano Carmineo. Stewell and Hallman are grandees in the Seagall/Ferguson mould: mini-versions of the criminal mastermind in SABATA. SABATA is the best of the Circus Westerns, and the ranch boss Hardy Stengel is its showpiece. Stengel looks like an aristocratic frog, with popping eyes and an aquiline, toothy face. Like all the grandees he affects frills, wing collars and brocade waistcoats. When we first find him at home (home being the inevitable baroque mansion) he is reading a book called "Inequality Is The Basis of Society" - for our benefit, he reads aloud:

"All men gifted with superior talent, and thus with superior powers, must command and use inferior men."

Stengel is the quite conscious Machiavel, boning up on villany out of books. Moments later he preens himself before his stupid henchman Oswald, putting the pose into practice:

"I like living at the peak of excitement. For life is only worthwhile when you can face death without showing

any fear. In fact - I enjoy it!"

And when he has finally cornered the shadowy Sabata, he repeats his book larnin' almost by rote:

"Before you die...you should know that those men with superior talents, and consequently with superior powers, always have one last card to play."

It is unfortunate, then, that Stengel is given hardly any opportunity to demonstrate the villany he works so hard to cultivate. His every move is anticipated and stymied by Sabata, and hence he is reduced to impotence almost before we are aware who he is. Like so many grandee villains, he is little more than a walking illustration that pride goes before a fall, and Sabata soon cuts him down to size - both verbally and with Stengel's own sword cane. Like Lizzani's Bad men, Stengel turns out to be a craven and deceitful coward, whose army of men and mechanical toys are no match for the quick wits and ~~deadly aim~~ <sup>straight shooting</sup> of the hero.

It is on account of this inherent weakness in their core of Evil (Stengel et al are basically effete embezzlers and nothing more) that the later films feature such a proliferation of sub-villains. Hordes of quirky cannon-fodder support Sartana's enemies; and Sabata finds himself up against a dozen different bad men - corrupt city fathers, an Oedipal subhuman called Sharkey, a pair of latinate bounty hunters with identical suits and moustachios, a bogus "Padre Brown", and even his old comrade-in-arms Banjo. The same is true of Carmineo's convoluted sequels: in A CLOUD OF DUST - A CRY IN THE NIGHT - SARTANA ARRIVES, Sartana does battle with a Polish madman inexplicably called "Eye", a pistolero called Manassass Jim, a deranged Confederate called Monk, and his own poker tutor "Big Full"; in I'M SARTANA - I'LL DIG YOUR GRAVE, he is pursued by a mob of bounty

killers including an Indian called Chato, the elegant dandy Diejo, a white-suited Southern eccentric named "Hophead" and his old amigo Buddy Ben. In both cases, the villain principal is once more the supposed victim of the crime. Even this little list shows the repetitive aura that had begun to overtake the films, even in their most potentially exciting characters. For all his camp appeal, Stengel is far from original - an early Western like THREE GOLDEN BOYS depicts an equally exotic Bad man, Giulio Cesare Fuller, whose grotesqueries (dressing in the robes of an Eastern potentate and sitting in a steam bath) are even more inspired. So as not to end this catalogue with the whimper of the Western in decline, I have saved the worst till last. Let us now consider the most complete and explicit catalogue of Evil the form produced - Giulio Questi's DJANGO KILL.

Everyone in DJANGO KILL is bad, even by the standards we have come to adopt. The hero participates in a massacre of unarmed troops just as vicious as Ramon's, and even more callous - for the soldiers are semi-nude and bathing. Betrayed by his partners-in-crime, Django survives multiple gun wounds and sets off in search of revenge. But his vengeance is shallow and plunges him into a world of Evil the like of which he has never known. The local townsmen have beaten him to the punch and lynched the suspected bandits without a trial. Only Oaks, the bandit chief, remains. For a reward Django shoots him, but is not allowed the coup de grace: Oaks dies at the hands of a doctor probing for Django's golden bullets. Django is hired as a bodyguard by the storekeeper Hagerman, who offers him the favours of his half-mad wife. Having pocketed the bandits' gold, Hagerman and his neighbour Tumbler fall out and attempt to kill each other. A homosexual rancher, Sorro, intervenes and kidnaps Tumbler's

crazy son. When Tumbler refuses to part with the money, Sorro's men kill the boy and make Django carry the body back to town. Tumbler profanes his son's coffin with the loot, but Hagerman gets it anyway, killing Tumbler and his mistress into the bargain. The townspeople go on another lynching spree. Sorro catches Django and crucifies him in his cellar. Django escapes, shoots him and dynamites the ranch. He returns to town to discover Hagerman's store ablaze, its burning occupants watched by a crowd of locals. His vengeance incomplete, his gain nothing, Django rides blindly away.

There is no conventional means of categorizing the protagonists. Django, if he is anything, is the hero-by-default par excellence. Everyone else is either a negative quantity (Tumbler's son, two faceless, mystic Indians) or a monster. It is impossible to select one villain principal from among Sorro, the sadistic sugardaddy who talks to his pet parrot ("You don't know how much my muchachos really mean to me!"); Oaks, the thuggish betrayer; Tumbler, who hoards his gold and sacrifices his son; Hagerman, who mutters prayers and systematically drives his wife insane; even Flory Hagerman herself, professing love for Django and deliberately setting the house on fire. The town breeds Evil and opposes life. The plot is as crowded and ingenious as a Borgia scandal, and its obsessions are those of the Jacobean - particularly the emphasis on perverse sexuality and madness. Hagerman's fate is straight out of the Italian Renaissance at its blackest: choked and blinded by a flood of molten gold, he meets the same apt, ironic end as Isabella in Middleton's WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN. Some of Schoenbaum's comments on Middleton's tragedy also fit the vulgar, bourgeois hell of Questi and Arcalli:

"Having only the faintest or most outrageous notions of good or evil, these personages fail to recognise that ... one day they will be called to judgement.

And so they stumble on, rationalising away any passing doubts, revelling in their momentary triumphs - ignorant of the futility of their projects, unaware that the only certainty is their own destruction.

They take part in elaborate intrigues, only to find themselves the victims of intrigue; they betray their fellows to lust, only to be themselves betrayed by the same passion." <sup>2</sup>

Now I am not suggesting that DJANGO KILL is a studied re-working of WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN - it is emphatically not, and its preoccupations are those of other, more courtly tragedies. Nor do I think that Middleton and Questi shared a collective consciousness which included vengeful showers of molten gold. What this quotation does illustrate, along with the extract from Ornstein which began this chapter, is that at times the worlds of the Italian Western and the Jacobean Tragedy are one and the same. Partially, as we have already seen, this is because of their shared source material - but more importantly, it is because their authors had something in common. Like the Elizabethans and the Jacobean, Italian writers and directors had a taste for (indeed a traditional inclination towards) allegory and moralising in an unconventional manner, a love of bizarre characters and contrivances, and a set of preoccupations and obsessions which their American counterparts had either lacked

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies*.

or felt themselves unable to explore.

Even today no American movie - certainly no American Western - has painted so black, savage and uncompromising a picture of society: nor one so readily interpreted as anarchic allegory. The world of DJANGO KILL is totally without hope, full only of unrelieved Evil and despair. And the future will be as dark as the present. As Django leaves, he passes two monstrous children trying to frighten each other with ugly, distorted faces. "I'm uglier than you are" - they snarl and scratch. All this well prior to the similar image of children torturing insects that opens THE WILD BUNCH. If there is hope for man, Q uesti refuses to find it among his cruel, greedy bourgeoisie. For him, society is the ultimate end of villainy - its shopmen, landowners and marriage beds imbued with Evil. Within society, the only Good man is the proscript - even if he is a murderer.

BURT KENNEDY: Have you seen any of these Spanish  
or Italian Westerns?

JOHN FORD: You're kidding!

BURT KENNEDY: No, they have them - and a few have  
been popular.

JOHN FORD: What are they like?

BURT KENNEDY: No story, no scenes. Just killings.  
Fifty or sixty per picture.

Action, the Magazine of the Directors Guild of America.

Death, or acts of violence resulting in something near to it, is integral to the Italian Western. It was ~~to~~ the American Western as well, but in a different way. There violence was a violation of the natural order of things (the sleepy townships of SHANE and RIO BRAVO and HIGH NOON), an unpleasant necessity before true peace could be established and the frontier tamed. Of course the peaceable frontier would never be as interesting or as manly: Ford saw this very clearly and THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE makes it explicit. But rarely is there any doubt that the new land will be better than the old, for when the violence is over the good things of life - the family, motherhood, ordered capitalism - will flourish. Hence Ford could say of his two protagonists, the frontiersman Doniphon and the lawyer Stoddard, "I liked them both" <sup>1</sup> For though Doniphon is more attractive, it is Stoddard who will become a senator and bring the greater good West.

The Italian Western's view of the encroaching East is fundamentally different. In most cases it has encroached, and the result has not

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<sup>1</sup> John Ford by Peter Bogdanovich, University of California Press  
Berkeley, 1968



been greater good but greater Evil - a corrupt and decadent oligarchy, bolstered by bourgeois greed and force of arms.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST is set at a point in time identical to that of LIBERTY VALANCE and though it recognises the inevitability of civilisation (there are repeated references to time running out), it despises it - the representative of the East, Morton, is a moral and physical cripple, and the Westerner Frank is condemned in our eyes for trying to ape him. Civilisation thrives on violence as much as the Old West ever did, since any exploitative system requires effective machinery of repression. Hence, in the Italian Western there is no visible end to violence, no escape from sudden death. In THE SEARCHERS, the isolated family is massacred by Indians, the American Western's traditional symbol of frontier savagery. In ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, in a sequence clearly modelled on Ford's, the isolated family is gunned down by agents of an Eastern railroad magnate who wants their land. Though here violence is an outrage, it is often a necessity - as where the perpetrator of the outrage meets his nemesis. Such a death is always right. Outrageous murders are often a device for making moral distinctions: Leone's Bad men distinguish themselves early by the destruction of the family. This is almost always tinged with sadism, as where Indio catches up with the man who betrayed him. Tomaso is forced to kneel, his hands tied behind him. His wife and child weep and look on.

INDIO: (to Tomaso's Wife) How old's the boy?

How old is the boy, I asked?

WOMAN: He's eighteen months now.

INDIO: Just the time I was in jail. You used the reward money to start a family. Well, your family is part mine. I'll take my part now. Outside!

The woman and baby are hauled outside. Tomaso strains and pleads with Indio to take his revenge on him alone. We hear two shots. The wailing stops.

For one who has been brought up on a diet of American Westerns, this is particularly shocking. Every possible horrific element has been included - torture, humiliation, the murder of a baby, the blasphemous overtones of Tomaso's supplication and his wife's Madonna-pose. Yet viewed correctly it is not gratuitous: the horror is calculated, like the horror of THE DUCHESS OF MALFI where images of the Duchess's murdered children are displayed, and <sup>calculated</sup> to the same end. Like Webster, Leone and Vincenzoni are not interested in realism or naturalism or even credibility - they are building up a picture of consummate Evil - an Evil which can only be destroyed by men we would not normally consider Good. This one episode says much about the villain's obsessions: his own perverse "family" of outlaws, his madness, his pride, his suicidal compulsion when, having murdered his wife and child, Indio gives Tomaso back his gun.

Comparable acts of cruelty are not as common as one might expect. But like Tomaso, the Good men of the Dollars films are savagely tortured by the villains and we react with almost as much horror - particularly at the sight of Joe's bloody, bloated face in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS. In this respect, Corbucci's Westerns were even more influential than Leone's, and certainly their brutality is more characteristic of the Italian Western. Corbucci's violence takes two forms: physical mutilation and systematic humiliation (the latter usually reserved for women). DJANGO develops the subsidiary themes of MINNESOTA CLAY - torture of the

hero, sadistic murder of the villainess, minor mutilations - into a schema for all his subsequent films. At times his obvious relish for sadistic violence takes on the mesmeric edge of a nightmare. The cruel intensity of BIG SILENCE, in particular, is quite unique. Corbucci's work is consistently inspired: the problem is that, shorn of the surreal distance of DJANGO or the intimacy of SILENCE, his sadistic set-pieces tend to be funny or simply distasteful.

Elsewhere, the cruelty which Corbucci made a convention became a fleeting refuge for still more fleeting imagination. There is no real case to be made for salacious sadism which has been inserted to enliven a tedious Italian Western (or a tedious Jacobean Tragedy, for that matter) - and many violent incidents simply betray the weakness of their settings. But at times even a weak film momentarily achieves some intensity through its violence: in TIME FOR A MASSACRE, a sunlit garden party is interrupted by a violent flogging, and white-suited guests with pastel ladies look on appreciatively; in DEAD OR ALIVE, the hero's only friend is drowned in an oil well, which the villains set alight; and at the beginning of SHANGO, we find the starving, amnesiac hero hanging in a wooden cage in the depths of the forest - the victim of untellable tortures.

The more satisfying films are those whose torture and humiliation serve some purpose other than obedience to the convention.

BANDIDOS, a dark and unusually intelligent parable about revenge, has several haunting scenes: the innocent peon kidnapped by bandits and forced to wait on them until they grow bored and kill him; the dying gunman who terrorizes a saloon full of people,

fascinated by the painting of another dying gunman that hangs behind the bar; the old gunfighter painfully filing away a shotgun barrel because his crippled hands cannot hold a pistol. Lizzani's Good men suffer mental and physical agonies in extremis: to convince Seagall he is dead, Jerry Brewster cuts a tattoo from his arm with a red-hot knife, while Requiescant is nearly burnt alive when Ferguson sets the mission ablaze. Each man goes through the same process of immolation (self-immolation in Jerry's case) as the early heroes of Leone and Corbucci - the death and rebirth motif which was to inspire many later sufferings. For the hero of DJANGO KILL, there is immolation without relief. Crucified in a dank catacomb, he is tortured not by conventional means but by the presence of bats, rats and creeping animals - an agony he cannot endure. When he is rescued he finds only vague and partial revenge before making his stunned departure.

In contrast to these grotesque - sometimes overwrought - scenes of death and semi-death, is juxtaposed the epitome of clean, aesthetic violence - the classical gunfight. Here the hero is bound to win, as he always has been. The fact that in STAGECOACH the Ringo Kid can hardly be beaten by the Plummers does not mean that he isn't playing fair. The gunfight is the clean and classic conflict, the moment when Good and Bad stand equal, when the villain can rely on guile and treachery no longer. Against its backdrop of ambushes, beatings and massacres, the gunfight is all the more right and necessary. In the American Western, it is the paring-down of hostilities to the barest essentials. In the Italian Western, the gunfight is the result of the same process, but with the essentials celebrated at the

~~same~~ level ~~as~~ an operatic crescendo. Hence, Joe discards his armour vest for the final showdown with the Rojos. It has served its purpose, shattering their smugness and security: to wear it in the <sup>proper</sup>gunfight would be against his manly code. Leone's Good men always force the Bad into a fair duel - Silence dies trying to do likewise. Only when hero and villain are perfectly matched, as they are in BANDIDOS - schooled in gunplay by the same sharpshooter - does luck play a part in the demise of the Bad character. Otherwise, skill and speed with a gun are coincident with moral rectitude - just as they always have been, in Western terms at least.

Such a confrontation ends every Italian Western I have seen. Usually, though, it is complicated by an additional element (the crippled gunhands of DJANGO, the villain's hidden pistol in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU, the empty gun in DEATH RIDES A HORSE, the mirrored reflection which draws Kane's fire in BANDIDOS), and occasionally it has no proper conclusion (Chuncho assassinates Bill Tate, his Nino, in QUIEN SABE, Arizona Colt turns Gordo over to the ravening townspeople, Tepepa dies on the operating table). Leone is fond of the final irony - hidden gunmen and score-settling follow the gunfight proper in the Dollars films, Cheyenne's unexpected death <sup>concludes</sup> ~~in~~ ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST - but his presentation of the gunfight itself is purer than any other director's. Unimpaired by any extraneous matter, the gunfight is all. It is where Good and Bad meet, with Ugly close by, and all additional questions are resolved. We realise that Tuco will not try and shoot Blondie, we learn why Harmonica and the Colonel have pursued Frank and Indio. Leone's weakest film, DUCK! YOU SUCKER, lacks this resolution, whereas the climactic confrontation is what MY NAME IS NOBODY is all about. Showdown equals showpiece:

reserved for it are the biggest close-ups, the most extravagant framings, the most stylised cutting, the best Morricone themes. Leone's choreography is extremely exact: in the taking up of positions at the end of THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY, Lee Van Cleef actually walks in time to the music, picking his way across the cracked earth like a strutting bird. Just as composition and choreography follow a pattern, so does location - a circle of stones or graves or fencing, with elements of a bull ring and of a vortex, the perfect calm at the hub of the whirlpool.

Leone's staging is not merely a piece of accomplished style, however. There is an inference to be drawn from his use of big close-up shots when men confront each other, and it is this: that these men are on a par, and that they are alike. Consider the confrontation between Monco and the three toughs in the White Rocks saloon, or between Harmonica and Frank's gunmen at the railroad station. We know nothing of them other than what we see on the screen: hard, stubbly faces, most of them ugly. They are all given the same prominence, and so their status, man-to-man, is equal. Only gunplay will decide between them. The more important the gunfight, the closer the camera comes and the longer it lingers. Even when a gunfight is threatened, but does not take place (as on Monco's arrival in Agua Caliente), Leone details the faces of the men whose lives hang in the balance. Live man have no value, but death has significance and is sometimes prized. His concern is not with tragic implication, but with the nature of those who choose to live on the brink of death; and he concentrates our attention on the moment when one or more is about to topple over.



It is worth comparing this approach with that of a prominent American director ~~of Westerns~~, Howard Hawks. In RIO BRAVO the men who get the drop on Sheriff Chance are not afforded close-ups. They remain vague faceless figures in the sunlight outside the saloon, implicitly no match for Chance and his allies. Hawks saves his close-ups for Wayne and the other principals, for conversation rather than action.

The other noticeable difference between the two approaches is the Italian's elaboration - not only by extending a sequence and incorporating more camera set-ups, but also by raising the body-count. On his own, Monco kills as many men in White Rocks as Chance did with two others to help him. He shoots another, Baby Red, without even looking at him. One man is never a match for the Italian hero, <sup>unless</sup> he be the villain principal, and the Good establishes his strength by killing villains in threes and fours. As Harmonica says when he meets his enemy for the second time, "Your friends have a high mortality rate, Frank."

In the killing of groups of outlaws to demonstrate the hero's authority, the Italian Western is borrowing direct from the samurai film - specifically, YOJIMBO by way of FISTFUL. Early in Kurosawa's film, the bodyguard hero baits a gang of roughians.

MIFUNE: No objections to fighting, then?

MAN: You just try and kill me!

MIFUNE: It'll hurt a little.

MAN: Bad men like us can't be cowards.

MIFUNE: (Sighing) Then it can't be helped.

And without further ado he kills a couple and proves his point. In exactly the same way, Joe provokes Baxter's cowboys.

MAN: You making some kind of joke?

JOE: No. I understand that you men were.

I just didn't get it. Of course, if you  
all apologised...

Because they won't say sorry for laughing at his mule, Baxter's boys die too. A similar debt can be found in the Italian hero's habit of killing off his wounded adversaries. Until recently unheard of in the American Western (it contravened not only the cowboy code, but the Hays Code too), for the pragmatic samurai it made a lot of sense. <sup>2</sup>

There are worse things than sudden death - lingering death, for instance - and though everyone tries to avoid it, he recognises it as part of his environment. An ironic situation, in which people accept death and at the same time flee from it, results in the ironic presentation of death itself. Fitting fates are meted out to Good and Bad alike. This can be in a general sense, as where the grandee villain is dispatched by a peasant; or it can be specific, with <sup>Tailor-made demises</sup> ~~apt fates~~ the order of the day. In ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, Frank asks his inept henchman,

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<sup>2</sup> Another transposition of the samurai approach to violence is to be found in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU, where the climactic gunfight is treated with the utmost simplicity - one long shot with both participants in profile, held for several seconds until they draw. The same technique, in fact, as Kurosawa used in SANJURO - and with the same loser (Tatsuya Nakadai, who played the villain in YOJIMBO and SANJURO, cast here as Elfego, a frock-coated samurai out West).



"Wobbles - how can I trust a man who wears both a belt and suspenders? Man doesn't even trust his own pants!"

Sure enough, Wobbles has been followed to their hideout, and Harmonica is lurking within earshot. To dispose of his unreliable recruit, Frank shoots Wobbles three times - in the belt and suspenders. Similarly, in DJANGO Ortiz decides one of his gang is hearing and talking too much. The penalty is the loss of an ear, which the defaulter is made to eat. Often the villain with the grandest design dies the meanest death: Brad in FACE TO FACE and Jonas in THE HELLBENDERS die dragging themselves away in the dust, and Morton - the railroad man who yearned to reach the sea - expires in a puddle of ditchwater beside his train.

The conclusion of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY is full of studied irony. After Angel Eyes has been shot and fallen into an open grave, Blondie doublecrosses his partner Tuco - leaving him perched on a creaking wooden cross with a noose around his neck. For once, though, the resolution is a fair one, and both share the gold. By now we have reached the stage of not only accepting this as natural, but of being able to derive amusement from the most macabre and appalling things. Bergson suggests a reason: <sup>3</sup>

"The comic...appeals to the intelligence pure and simple; laughter is incompatible with emotion... Take a downright vice - even one that is, generally speaking, of an odious nature - you may make it

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<sup>3</sup> Bergson, On Laughter

ludicrous if, by some suitable contrivance, you arrange so that it leaves our emotions unaffected. Not that the vice must then be ludicrous, but it may, from that time forth, become so. It must not arouse our feelings; that is the sole condition really necessary."

We have already seen how the Italian Western, through its ironic and stylised approach, its overemphases and parody, works deliberately to distance us rather than engage our emotion. Of course, certain things - the acts of violence we class as outrages - still shock us, and certain characters, specifically the Ugliers, remain sympathetic. But generally we watch the proceedings without being emotionally affected. We appreciate but we do not participate. Much critical hostility to the Italian Westerns was due to people schooled in one way of seeing a Western being unable to look at one in a different way: just as, until quite recently, theatrical historians schooled in nineteenth-century naturalism regarded the Jacobean as purveyors of period horrorshows.

The constant distancing of death is apparent in its regular juxtaposition with games. Poker is a constant catalyst for violence: in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, Red Cavanagh is discovered playing cards; in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU Bill Kiowa has to rescue one of his men from a crooked poker game; In ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, Morton pays ~~off~~ Frank's men to kill their boss by dealing each a hand of banknotes; and every nuance of an important game is detailed in vast close-ups in GOD FORGIVES - I DON'T - beautifully photographed by Alfio Contini, it is the best thing in the film.

Where there is no poker table, there will be a roulette wheel or a bunch of men shooting craps. Or other games, to suit the art director's taste as much as anything - galleries for target practice in BANDIDOS, AND GOD SAID TO CAIN and THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY; a miniature bowling-alley in I WANT HIM DEAD; the circus sideshows of BOOT HILL, MY NAME IS NOBODY and Parolini's films; a deadly game of toss-the-dynamite for the villain's amusement in DJANGO THE BASTARD; Stengel's costly toys in SABATA. The "child's play" comparison is well made: Leone's characters liken the protagonists' ritualistic actions to children's games, and the cat-and-mouse activities of Blondie and Tuco are those of irresponsible, vindictive (but essentially innocent) children. The same analogy is drawn in <sup>Monte</sup> Hellman's THE SHOOTING, where the simple cowboy Coley plays with a miniature puzzle as his friend Gashay is drawn into an obsessive, fatal pursuit - for no good reason. In such a context, the activities of the hero have no more real significance than Coley's puzzle or Acombar's shooting-gallery, and we would ~~make~~ ~~be~~ mistaken to treat them as if they did.

Ironic distance has its drawbacks: one of them is the impossibility of making an explicit statement and having it taken seriously. Theoretically, an appreciative audience need not be engaged to be influenced, but in practice such engagement is vital - hence the failure, say, of Brecht's plays to achieve the author's full political intent. Implicit statements are common (social and political analogies being readily available if you look for them, and some at least are presumably deliberate) and effective. So is the deliberate undercutting of the conventional hero's role. But when the Good man is made to utter conventionally-Good

sentiments (such as Blondie's isn't-war-a-terrible-thing soliloquy during the battle in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, or the revolutionary platitudes of some Mexi-Westerns) it is impossible to take them seriously. Cynicism does not gel with agit-prop or humanitarian sentiment.

Death-symbols, particularly coffins and cemeteries, occur frequently. When Joe takes Silvanito to the graveyard in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, the innkeeper comments

"You look as though this place suits you very well."

And well he might. The atmosphere of the charnel-house pervaded almost all the films that followed - to such an extent that, for example, the disinterring of a coffin became a convention in its own right. Minnesota Clay, setting off on his vengeance trail the same year, made sure to stop at his wife's graveside en route; and Corbucci's interest in the iconography of death was soon to outstrip Leone's. Whereas Leone's graveyard excursions are regular but brief, Corbucci's are often the focal point of the film. There are no cemeteries in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, though Indio likens his hideout to a morgue, and Monco piles a wagon high with corpses. Death symbols are most marked in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, where courtmartialed soldiers bear their coffins on their backs, dead spies are tied to locomotives, and the finale occurs in a military graveyard. Yet all this is set against an enormous canvas of battlefields, hospitals, prison camps and missions - there is none of the singleminded fixation of Corbucci's Civil War picture, THE HELLBENDERS. And the funeral sequence in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST is so statuesque that it could almost be out of Ford or Stevens - at least, until the mood is shattered by a corpse's-eye-view from within the grave.

Corbucci's remarkable DJANGO is perhaps the charnel-Western par excellence. As Joe escaped from San Miguel concealed within a coffin, so Django arrives dragging one, followed at a discreet distance by his mistress. There is no body in the coffin (there hardly ever is). The casket contains a machine-gun. Having killed off a bunch of local Klansmen with his miraculous weapon,<sup>4</sup> Django offers it to the ~~local~~ bandit Ortiz. And when their customer is slow in paying, Django and Maria steal his loot and hide it in the coffin - which promptly falls off a bridge and is lost in a muddy river. The Mexicans catch up with them, Maria is killed, and Django's hands are smashed by horses' hooves. The bandits are wiped out by Jackson and his Klan, who come after Django. But the hero wins a victory of sorts, ambushing the villains in a graveyard, and firing his gun with his teeth while he supports it on a wooden cross.

Such symbolism is both more obvious and more sustained than it was in FISTFUL, especially with regard to the hero's wounds. The coffin and the cemetery are no longer plot devices, but essential to the atmosphere of the film. In Corbucci's other Westerns they are often present, if only as embellishments. A coffin is the principal prop in THE HELLBENDERS, as a repository for arms and whiskey, and later for storing gold. After it is buried, the villains dig up the wrong box and make off with the body of a Mexican bandit. Two cemeteries feature in NAVAJO JOE - a murdered prostitute is buried in the Esperanza boneyard, and hero and villain fight to the death in an abandoned Indian burial-place. Religious statues and processions feature in A PROFESSIONAL GUN, and Doctor Xantos is hidden in a coffin in COMPAÑEROS. BIG SILENCE is a particularly rich source of icons, second only to DJANGO: prostitutes bury a customer in the snow; the mute hero suffers a martyrdom similar to Django's when his gun-hand is thrust into

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<sup>4</sup> This sequence appears almost complete in the Rialto Cinema ~~sequence~~ of Perry Henzell's THE HARDER THEY COME (1973)   
 Scene from

a fire; but for him there is no resurrection, and he loses the use of his other hand before he dies. A coffin full of phony dollars is the prize in THE SPECIALIST, and a bizarre jumbled graveyard (with an equally bizarre jumbled gravedigger) provides the key to a mystery. Hud, the dying hero, undergoes a painful resurrection and saves the town.

Another recurring aspect of Corbucci's death scenes, which distinguishes them from Leone's, is his lingering concentration on the bodies of the deceased. Whereas Leone's corpses are generally a backdrop, accorded brief prominence <sup>in the case of</sup> ~~like~~ the dead rider in FISTFUL and the wagonload of bodies in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, Corbucci's are always to the fore. DJANGO concentrates on bodies tumbling into the mud, and the opening sequence of BIG SILENCE lingers fascinatedly on corpses bleeding into the snow. Corbucci's treatment here is as languorous as Leone's slow pans over the dead sons in DUCK! YOU SUCKER, for Leone could stage scenes just as morbid when he chose. But Leone's principal interest was in what leads men to the brink of death; Corbucci's was in death itself.

Generally, the Italian Western inclined in Corbucci's direction, though rarely with his single-minded skill. One director who succeeded was Carlo Lizzani. His REQUIESCANT is, as its title suggests, a strange homage to death, in many forms. Before the credits, a clan of Mexicans, men, women and children, is massacred by Confederate renegades. A small boy survives. The bodies are left unburied, their bones bleach in the sun. Some years later, a religiously-inclined young man appears calling himself Requiescant. Gradually, the innocent learns about his past. He is the son of Marquez, murdered leader of the Mexicans - these bones are those of his family. The grandee Ferguson, who has previously taken an amused interest in the boy, must now kill Requiescant before he discovers that Ferguson is the murderer. This odd and unrelenting



film is heavily laden with images of death. Its principal setting is a ruined church, around which the unburied bones are scattered; it is here that Requiescant learns the truth and ~~cracks~~<sup>breaks down</sup>, running in circles as he wrenches bones and ribcages from the reddened earth. Morbid games are played throughout, as where Ferguson invites his guests to shoot out candles perched on a servant-girl's head; and where the hero catches up with Ferguson's familiar Light, and forces him into a manic hanging-contest (a year before the identical hanging-games of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY).

Lizzani's THE HILLS RUN RED is less compulsive, and a less impressive picture, but it has its share of symbols. Amid the decay of his deserted home, Jerry Brewster learns his wife is dead; he feigns his own death to get near those responsible. His mysterious partner Getz says just before the showdown, "We're alone - in a cemetery called Austin." And Brewster strikes the first blow by sending a dynamite-laden hearse against the villains. As in FISTFUL, corpses are disguised as living people.

#### COLT

ARIZONA, that splendid compendium of the early conventions, is naturally a rich lode. Like Django, Arizona loses the use of his hands - and to make the allegory crystal-clear, Gordo shoots him in the legs as well. His recovery is well-nigh miraculous. There are two lengthy funeral processions, with glowering priest and cadaverous undertaker in attendance (considering the death rate and abundance of cemeteries, it is surprising how rare such processions are), and the final shootout takes place in the undertaker's workshop. The undertaker hides in a coffin and plays dead, and Gordo - wounded in hands and feet - falls into a casket himself.

The first shot of DJANGO KILL is the edge of an open grave. A hand appears and grips the earth, and the wounded hero struggles out. Two Indians nurse him back to health, convinced he can show them the way to the "happy hunting ground." The town in which he corners Oaks is littered with corpses, its streets full of ~~fighting~~ dirty children and legless animals. Sorro's cowboys desecrate a graveyard, uprooting the crosses as they hunt for a coffin full of gold. Django suffers an actual crucifixion. When his enemies are dead, we linger on the bodies in close-up, flies crawling across faces.

When Leone assessed his myths in MY NAME IS NOBODY, death symbols were an obvious subject for consideration. Nobody confronts his hero Jack in a Navajo graveyard - one grave bears the name of Jack's brother, the Nevada Kid; another that of an old Indian, "Sam Peckinpah" (no capricious comment this, since the film deals with the conscious creation of a legend, far more Peckinpah's theme than Sergio Leone's). In the same graveyard, Jack tries to provoke Nobody by shooting off his hat - a game motif from the Dollars films - and it is here that the two catch their first glimpse of the Legendary Wild Bunch. After the circus interlude, Leone harks back to FISTFUL, with a pistolero concealed within a coffin; and Jack's wait at the railroad tracks, as the Wild Bunch approaches out of the sun, is the longest and most accomplished of Leone's face-downs. To enable the gunfighter to escape his otherwise inevitable fate, he and Nobody stage a sham showdown in which Jack is seemingly killed. In a voice-over epilogue that appears at first to be coming From Beyond The Grave, Jack bids the West goodbye and sets sail for Europe.



In its establishment of a new convention, in which the hero is subjected to considerable suffering, left for dead, and unexpectedly reappears to take revenge, the Italian Western was drawing away from the American tradition and entering different territory. Even THE RETURN OF RINGO, deliberately fashioned in the American style, involves a hero who is taken for dead, crippled, and miraculously restored to vengeful life. The many dark and shadowy sequences of this and other films, together with their emphasis on fear of the unknown (Ringo is afraid to face the Fuentes; villains often have the horrors) have more in common with gothic melodrama than with cowboy films. One short episode from THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY illustrates the new tendency. It is night, naturally. A wagon filled with soldiers dumps a prostitute outside her home. They ride off, and she gathers herself up, steps onto the porch. Inside, all is silence. A long, empty corridor stretches towards us - lit only by a low lamp and the moon. She shuts the door behind her. A whisper, barely audible - "Maria?" The girl starts, and looks around. Then, she asks delightedly - "Is that you, Bill?" There is no reply. She rushes down the hall, calling his name, and enters her room. But there is no Bill. There is only the sadistic villain Angel Eyes.

Allied to the recurring death symbols, a pervasive aura of this sort produced Westerns which function equally well as horror films. DJANGO KILL is one, REQUIESCANT another. Even ghost stories are to be found - the two most fully realised being Antonio Margheritti's AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, and Sergio Garrone's DJANGO THE BASTARD. Both are "minor" works, easily lost in the unexceptional mainstream of Italian Westerns; and both are the work of directors whose other Westerns were rather poor - though some of Margheritti's fantasies have a

cult following in France and Italy. Yet AND GOD SAID TO CAIN and DJANGO THE BASTARD are, by any standards, interesting and accomplished films.

Though it is voiced only once, the suspicion exists throughout AND GOD SAID TO CAIN that its avenger, Gary Hamilton, is a ghost. He slides in and out of the shadows, decimating the villain's men and closing inexorably on Acombar's "impregnable" abode. Pushes and roadblocks are useless, for Gary brings with him a blinding, dusty whirlwind (the film's French title was, ET LE VENT APPORTA LA VIOLENCE). The hero and the elements are as one. When the villain's unsuspecting son mentions Gary's name, the room goes quiet and birds of prey start to scream outside. Acombar swears that "Hamilton will never get in here alive" and the windows fly open with a crash. Clad in red and black, Gary Hamilton has a satanic air; accentuated by the fact that Klaus Kinski, who plays the avenger, had till then portrayed only mad villains like Tigrero. The atmosphere is tense and claustrophobic, the ranch lush and overdressed, and reds predominate. The street is filled with swirling leaves and swarming men, later strewn with corpses. The properties and conventions are those of a horror film: Gary hides in the graveyard, figures stalk through catacombs, baroque music rooms are lined with mirrors; outside the wind howls all the while. Even the photography, with its circular tracking shots, low angles and pregnant zooms, is reminiscent of a horror picture - though all these techniques are characteristic of the Italian Western.

The depiction of death is quite in keeping with the style. As Gary takes his revenge, the killings grow increasingly exotic: one man is hung from a bellrope, another chopped in half by the falling bell. Acombar panics and shoots the priest, who, ~~dying,~~ sounds a shrill accusing note on his organ, bloody-fingered.

Confused and frightened by the dark and flying debris, Acombar's men kill each other - by accident, or to settle private scores. The chaos and collapse of Acombar's estate leads the evil family to destroy itself. Where AND GOD SAID TO CAIN lingers upon the corpses, it inevitably recalls the work of Questi and Corbucci. But the concern shown for the dead - the early attempts, before panic sets in, to lay the corpses out reverently in church - is rare in any Western, but a familiar consideration of the gothic tale. So too is Dick Acombar's dreamlike search for Gary, wandering through the windy street and up and down the church's chancel aisle.

In AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, whatever his victims fear, we assume the avenger is not a phantom - having seen him released from a military prison and board the stage. In DJANGO THE BASTARD we can assume nothing - indeed, it seems more likely that the hero really is a ghost. Garrone's film works on three quite different levels. ~~different levels.~~ Firstly, as a conventional revenge story, with the hero's motivation gradually revealed via flashbacks. The short opening sequence contains all the essential rituals: Django, the stranger in a flapping poncho, walks into town (we never see him ride), plants a wooden cross that reads "Sam Hawkins" and proceeds to make good its promise by killing Hawkins and his men.

Secondly, like all the best Italian Westerns, it is a cynical and often surreal depiction of an Evil world populated almost exclusively by self-destructive grotesques. Its villainous family is far more monstrous than Acombar's, with the regulation sadist, slobbering epileptic brother and mercenary whore/wife. At one stage, for no reason other than to prove their nastiness, these characters force the local populace to pack up and leave town - which explains, for once, why those dusty streets are always empty.

But on a third level, DJANGO THE BASTARD functions as a perfectly conventional ghost story of the Pee/Corman school. In a long flashback, where a company of Confederate soldiers is sold out by its officers, we see Django cut down by a sniper - and apparently killed. "Over thirteen years it's taken me to find you" he tells his ex-Major, but no explanation is offered as to what he's been doing all this time. Even for the hero of an Italian Western, Django manifests a phenomenal gift for materialising in the midst of his enemies, to be mistaken for somebody else, to vanish momentarily and reappear. As the story gathers pace, references to his unearthly nature become less formulaic, more insistent:

"Leave me alone, Django - you're dead!"

"Who are you?" "A devil from hell."

"Everybody thinks you're some kind of ghost."

"What happens if you find out they're right?"

His second act of revenge, against a businessman named Ross Howard, is straight Roger Corman gothic. Howard sits alone in his library, late at night. He writes in a ledger, with a quill pen. A clock ticks. Time passes. The candle burns low. There is a creak... And suddenly Django is standing in the shadows. Before the terrified Howard can draw his gun, Django has gone again. Like a will o'the wisp, he lures Howard out into the night. - "I'm waiting for you..." - to a graveyard, where Howard collapses before a grave that bears his own name. Materialising behind the wooden marker, Django declares,

"Your time has come."

Is this a Western?

The third, and longest, episode - Django's duel with the sadist Rod Murdock - is conducted along the same lines as Gary Hamilton's

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revenge. The only man able to harm him is Murdock's mad brother Luke, who runs ravening through the dark streets crying "This is his blood!" Otherwise no chinks show in Django's armour, and after he has killed Murdock the avenger is allowed a departure which is in keeping with both genres.

Avaricious heroine, trying to persuade him to stay:

"We'll be rich forever!"

Django, cold and satiated:

"We don't live forever."

She stoops to pick up another handful of the dollar bills that litter the street. When she looks up again, she is alone...

It is ~~certainly~~ noteworthy that the Good character can be so simply transformed into a ghost - his stealth, his coldness, the chill he inspires in others, his apparent indestructability, are all potentially spectral characteristics. Even the live revenger is said to have "something to do with death" - and, in this context, it is interesting that Fellini's version of TOBY DAMMITT (the best episode of HISTOIRES EXTRAORDINAIRES) depicted Poe's obsessive hero as an English actor cast in an Italian Western. Several years later, the hero-as-avenging-spirit was to become the premise of an American Western - Clint Eastwood's semi-homage to Leone, THE HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER.

Like the Renaissance tragedy, the Italian Western is suffused with memento mori - morbid reminders such as the skull on which the tragic hero was wont to brood. Indeed, this is the closest any modern drama has come to the Middle Ages' Dance of Death: all the principal elements are there - a macabre milieu where mirth and horror mingle; desperate plots, schemes and bizarre

games played in an effort to evade or ignore the ever-present fact of death; the recurring symbols. Death is common currency. Familiar, yet feared by all. There is nothing, finally, that is worse than death. There are no suicides. Death fascinates, and frightens, and is rarely the end - for one death provokes another, and revenge is sweet.

OBSESSIONS - REVENGE

"I will only ask whether such monstrous melodrama as the Revenger's Tragedy, with its hideous sexuality and its raging lust for blood, can be said to belong to civilised literature at all? I say it is a product either of sheer barbarianism, or of some pitiable psychopathic perversion."

William Archer

The Old Drama and The New

"It must never be forgotten that the whole genre has been created simply and solely to cash in on a tradition which is completely foreign to European culture. Superficiality is a viciously blind alley, and it seems to me that there can never be any depth where there is no understanding."

Richard Davis

Review of DEAD OR ALIVE

films & filming March 1969

There is certainly little depth to Tonino Cervi's excellent TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU - perhaps the best of the revenge Westerns. Its simple story, full of raging bloodlust and sexual obsession, is told at one remove. The bandit Elfego has raped and murdered Bill Kiowa's wife, and framed Bill for a robbery. Released from prison, Bill gathers the four best gunmen in the territory and goes after Elfego's band of Comancheros. Bill and his men kill the Comancheros. Bill beats Elfego to the draw. But just because the story is straightforward, and simply told, does not mean that its makers are necessarily superficial or lack understanding. On the

CASTING OF  
ELFEGO - T.N.  
= v. AWARE of  
YUTIMBO



contrary, the clean lines of the narrative, unencumbered by sub plots or moralising, suggest that the makers have a very definite concept: an awareness of the elemental nature of the revenge story, and a determination to convey it without diminishing its essential force. The pistoleros are all different, yet they are recognisable stereotypes (fat brawler, cocky kid, ageing sheriff, tricky gambler), and the unit they form is indivisible. Gone are the internecine struggles of the Dirty Dozen: the Magnificent Seven are a rabble by comparison. Bill and his recruits make a much more pleasing team than either, and the reason is this: that while both the American films are fundamentally action pictures, they seem determined to prove they are something more besides. Hence the inclusion of psychological detours involving the man of action as sadist (Telly Savalas in THE DIRTY DOZEN) or cornpone wiseman (Charles Bronson in THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN) - and such passages do not work. They fail to convince, because the scripts are poor, and the characters too sparsely-sketched to give them life.

The characters in TODAY IT'S ME are sparse as well, and the script is no more literate. It does not try to be. It aims not for incidental asides, but towards a pure narrative. Everything that happens advances the plot, if only by showing us the deadly mettle of its protagonists. There are many felicities en route, particularly among the supporting characters, but none of them distracts us for a moment. Stock types are delineated confidently, with a broad brush: we are left no doubt as to Elfego's villany. The action throughout is fast, furious and inventive. In particular, a long sequence where Bill and company pick off the Comancheros demonstrates a score of different ways to kill a man in a wood. Elfego is so suave and devious, with his samurai sword and shoulder holster, that we are as keen as Bill to see him meet his match. And so he does,

CHARACTER  
+  
ACTION  
becomes  
the same  
thing -

AS IN  
JACOBO  
TRASSOY,  
who  
can't be  
divorced from  
what he does...



though not before the avenger has snarled over him for a while. After the consummation of his revenge, Bill is understandably at a loose end. He thinks he'll head south. His men think they will, too. There is no condemnation, no questioning Bill's moral rectitude. Elfego and his gang are rotten to the core - the police and vigilantes having failed to destroy them, the task falls naturally to Kiowa. Yet somewhere near the surface (for the film has undercurrents) there is a question as to the effect the obsession has had upon the man: the man who at the beginning of the film told the warden "I don't have any feelings - except maybe hate," and who finally stands over Elfego's body with an expression not of relief or of release, but of surprise.

Though there is hardly an Italian Western which does not have some element of revenge, few films are so elemental in their treatment. TODAY IT'S ME and the meandering DJANGO KILL are poles apart. Generally, it is the less thoughtful picture that attempts to adopt the TODAY IT'S ME approach: NO ROOM TO DIE, DEATH SENTENCE and NAVAJO JOE are three such cases, where the hero's right is unquestioned, his consummation stony-faced. Each is a ~~different~~ example, structurally, of the three different narrative approaches to the revenge story. In NO ROOM TO DIE, an incident which happens well into the plot inspires the hero's bloodlust (in this case, the murder of an incidental Mexican). In NAVAJO JOE the outrage occurs at the very beginning of the film, with the pre-credits massacre of the hero's tribe. And in DEATH SENTENCE, we learn the motive for the mayhem gradually, through a series of flashbacks (here, a red-tinted sequence of dissolves depicting the murder of the hero's brother).

Generally the least satisfactory of the three approaches is the first - the introduction of the revenge motif quite late

in the game. It works efficiently in DJANGO and A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, where it is tinged with self-preservation: but it is more often hurled in when the plot is running down, (as in NO ROOM TO DIE) or as a means of piling on the agony for hero and villain alike (the death of Clay's friends in DEAD OR ALIVE). It is so broad a motif, in any case, that it can be found in most of the films.

The initial outrage is the linear technique adopted by Lizzani's Westerns and Corbucci's weaker films. It is the obvious premise for American-format pictures like THE HILLS RUN RED, RETURN OF RINGO and GARRINGO, though in each case a familiar style introduces radically different themes. DEATH RIDES A HORSE uses both the initial outrage and the subsequent flashback technique whenever the avenger runs into one of the men who killed his folks.

Flashbacks have proved the most inspired means of communicating a revenge motif. They are both in keeping with the prevailing mood, since they allow the taciturn hero to retain his mystery, and also serve as another means of distancing us from the proceedings - ensuring our appreciation, at the cost of our identification and involvement. Leone was the first director to use <sup>the device</sup> flashbacks to good advantage: three red and rainy flashbacks depicting the death of Colonel Mortimer's sister in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, creating a shared memory for Indio and the Colonel. The device is imaginatively used in TEXAS ADDIO, where the villain's memory is added to the hero's to give a very different impression of the crime (this is one of the few occasions on which the objectivity of a flashback is called into question, RASHOMON-style). Green-toned flashbacks, in medium-shot with very little cutting, depict Elfego's outrage in TODAY IT'S ME; and DEAD OR ALIVE uses the technique to illustrate Clay's fear that

he may die an epileptic like his father. In DJANGO KILL flash-frames and slow-motion recollections depict the return of the hero's memory. TEPEPA intercuts the doctor's slow-motion memories of the girl he loved, and whom he suspects Tepepa murdered: the same device is employed by Leone in his very similar DUCK! YOU SUCKER, for Sean's Irish idyll and betrayal. In DJANGO THE BASTARD, enigmatic sepia rifles spouting smoke precede the ghost-hero's memory of the Civil War. And in BIG SILENCE, two dark flashbacks depict the hero's tragic history: his throat is cut by two bounty killers who have murdered his family, severing his vocal chords; years later he catches up with them and exacts a suitable revenge.

The most successful use of the convention, as enigma and resolution in its own right, is Harmonica's memory in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. The first time he confronts Frank, all we see is a blurred figure coming slowly towards us, all we hear is the wind. The second time, the image is repeated, starts to sharpen. "Only at the point of dying" does the recollection gel into a younger, bearded Frank - about to make Harmonica the instrument of his brother's death. This extraordinary scene, moving from the suddenly recognisable Frank to the suffering boy, then pulling back and up till we realise that Harmonica's brother is standing on his shoulders, with a noose around his neck, in the middle of Monument Valley, is perhaps the most powerful and composed of all Leone's inventions.

At the same time, a man of Harmonica's ilk is almost the ultimate in implacable avengers - drained of all emotion "except maybe hate", certainly incapable of reciprocating the heroine's unhappy love. Revenge is still essential, but it is only one of several elements in a complex plot, one move on the chessboard. The real focus of interest in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST is not

the Good man but the Ugly character Cheyenne, and his ~~unnecessary~~ senseless death is its true tragedy. It is a small step from Harmonica to the ghost-heroes - inhumans who are instruments of violent destiny and nothing more.

Revenge is almost always an empty act. It brings no fulfillment; indeed it robs the avenger of his one purpose in life. In most cases consummation is followed by bewilderment and desolation on the hero's part - aggravated by the suffering he has already undergone. Dispair comes early for the hero of DJANGO KILL. Once Oaks is dead he falls into an apathetic stupor, and without a purpose he is easy prey for the scheming townsmen. The disinterest or dispair of the victorious avenger is, as I suggested earlier, a natural result of a convention which demands the hero's survival, when by rights he should be dead. Death is the natural end for the Jacobean revengers - it strikes Hamlet even as he is dealing it out to others, dooms Webster's hero-villains, and catches up with the hero of THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY (in one sense, as clear an exposition of the revenge drama as TODAY IT'S ME) just when he is boasting of his success.

INDICATE  
if I lived  
in when I  
could be dead.

The American Western, except in the "historical" outlaw stories, demanded the survival of the hero as an obvious affirmation of good's triumph over evil. If the hero died, it was because the Indians really did kill Custer, or because the day of the noble gunfighter (Jimmie Ringo, Tom Doniphon) was drawing to a close. In the Italian Western, Good may beat Bad, but Evil in a general sense continues to thrive: the corrupt towns prosper, the Revolution has yet to be won. Hence, though surface fidelity to the myth precludes the hero's death in most cases, his survival is precarious and pointless. The money is probably lost, his allies dead, his body wrecked.

A true "happy end" is found only in the consciously-American pictures - RETURN OF RINGO, where the hero is reunited with his wife and child; and THE HILLS RUN RED, where he gets a girlfriend and is made sheriff. Lizzani's earlier avenger, Requiescant, rides off aimlessly once his predestined work is done. Silence is doomed as soon as he takes his work too personally. In DEAD OR ALIVE, Clay is shot in the back just when he seems to have left his vengeful past behind. And a bullet is Sean's only release from haunting memories in DUCK! YOU SUCKER.

In a different way, Cheyenne's death provides the tragic catharsis of Harmonica's obsessive quest. He is the real hero, and his death is more shocking than Harmonica's would be, because it is so pointless. It is the Good, not the vital, vulgar Ugly, who is marked out for death. This is the theme of Peckinpah's <sup>+ *Walt's*</sup> PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID: a man only attains mythical status by climbing up the mound of corpses he leaves behind. In Peckinpah's movie the incidental Ugly characters (Deputy Bell, Sheriff Baker and Alamosa Bill) are likeable and sympathetic - doomed to die for the greater glory of his cold protagonists. PAT GARRETT is unique in Peckinpah's work in that it <sup>(perhaps that's so (C))</sup> actually undermines his familiar concept of death as the heroic summit of a man's life, particularly during the protracted demise of Baker. Baker is a jolly old man, a boat-builder, loved by his wife: he dies unnecessarily, helping Garrett add a few more notches to his gun. Throughout PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID, the heroic status of Garrett and ~~especially~~ the Kid is undercut by their contacts with vital Ugliers, and the end result is very Italianate. THE WILD BUNCH, though it uses a number of Italian conventions (heroes who are Good by comparison, who use iconic costumes and disguises, who live

by certain definite standards; abrupt explanatory flashbacks; a long build-up to the showdown), draws a very different conclusion from its glamorised depiction of the act of dying.

Sometimes the Italian hero has little obvious inclination to take revenge - particularly when he <sup>is the</sup> only victim of the wrong. Arizona Colt and Joe in FISTFUL are pretty tardy about going against the villain; and though he has been savagely tortured, Shango goes to great lengths to avoid violence once the War is over. In two of Leone's films, the hero deliberately tries to escape the revenger's role. Sean refuses to condemn the Doctor who betrayed their cause - "I won't judge you, Villega. I did that only once in my life." Villega judges himself, and refuses to jump from the dynamite-laden train: his pointless death, Sean muses, will ensure that the traitor is remembered as a "grand and glorious hero of the Revolution." And in MY NAME IS NOBODY, Jack Beauregard refuses to shoot the man who killed his brother: he takes instead \$500 for his passage to Europe.

↓ ✓  
but the  
gun is  
run out of  
putt...  
near end.

Where the avenger has no doubt about the justice of his quest, he is often given reason to hesitate. In TEXAS ADDIO, Burt is floored when he learns that the villain Delgado is the father of his brother Jim. He procrastinates and Jim is killed. Henry Price, the English doctor pursuing Tepepa for the murder of his woman, grows increasingly to respect the Mexican - we do not know whether Tepepa's death on the operating table is deliberate or accidental. And Nino dazzles Chuncho with the bright lights so successfully in QUIEN SABE? that when Chuncho kills him it is without knowing why.

? NO  
✓ YES

The act of vengeance is rarely quick and clean. At the very least, the moment before the shot is fired is spun out into a



TIMTY 4/ long reference  
to SANDERS @ end.

near-eternity, as in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE when Monco forces Indio to face the Colonel. Already the act is tinged with sadism. We have already observed the satisfied detachment with which Colonel Mortimer shoots a man for the reward: now it is not enough that Indio dies - he must know why he dies. "Does the name Douglas Mortimer mean anything to you?" This callow righteousness is of course Harmonica's predominant feature, and it is even more explicit in the pure revenge sagas. Requiescant and Kiowa cripple their adversary before killing him. Navajo Joe plans a lingering death a l'Indienne for Duncan. The avenger in FIVE GIANTS FROM TEXAS stalks around the wounded villain shooting him in the extremities, till one of his own men intervenes and delivers the coup de grace. Such paroxysms of violence forcefully recall the Renaissance material, and hence some of the more ferocious revenges of the Jacobean heroes - particularly Vindice in the REVENGER'S TRAGEDY, smearing the Duke's lecherous lips with acid and threatening to gouge out his eyes. Yet for most of the play, Vindice behaves with the calculation of a Colonel Mortimer, though growing increasingly disturbed by his own actions and their incidental results. For it is only by protracted calculation that vengeance can be undertaken years after the event. Ryan, the ageing outlaw in DEATH RIDES A HORSE, tells the young avenger

"Somebody once wrote, Revenge is a dish that has to be eaten cold. The way you're going, you're liable to end up with indigestion." <sup>1</sup>

Crouched in traditional cowboy patois, this is still the essence of the revenge story no matter where it is set. Ryan will not consider a partnership with Bill, although their goal is the same.

<sup>1</sup> Ryan's adage inevitably furnished a title for one of the later films, VENGEANCE IS A DISH EATEN COLD (1972)

"You've got too much hate in you,  
and sooner or later it's gonna force  
you to make a wrong move."

And so it does. So obsessed is Bill with getting even that he fails to Look Behind Him, and becomes the prisoner of the men he has sworn to kill. So, elsewhere, does Ryan. Each time one avenger is rescued by the other. The message is that of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, also scripted by Luciano Vincenzoni - that a calculated revenge must extend to partnerships when the odds are high (as in the Italian Western they always are). Hence, the introduction of the Ugliers into the revenge format.

That cold beats hot, is an adage of some American Westerns: SHANE, for instance, where the short-tempered Stonewall is provoked into a fatal gunfight by the cool gunfighter who insults the South. Generally, though, cold violence was an anathema to the American hero: righteous violence is (always) hot-blooded, probably regretted afterwards; premeditated killing the province of the villain and the Film Noir. But premeditated violence is what the Italian hero is all about. The man who kills in anger is most likely a minor-league villain, such as the irascible Pedro in DEATH RIDES A HORSE. True to its American format, THE HILLS RUN RED features a ranting hero of the <sup>Jimmy Stewart</sup> old school:

"Look at me, Seagall. Take a good, long look. Don't you recognise me? The man whose wife you killed? Who spent five long years in prison so you could wallow in your stinking money? That's why I killed your men. So one day I could see you crawling on your knees begging for mercy - and I could crush you like a worm!"



Jerry Brewster is too loquacious to fit the archetypal avenger's mould. Compare his speech with one by a villain, Garcia Mendez:

"In this life there are those who talk,  
and those who keep their hatred and their desire  
for vengeance hidden in their hearts. I promise  
you that I will discover who betrayed us.  
And I will kill him with my own hands."

Mendez is a bandit and a murderer - yet his words could ~~equally~~ be those of Requiescant or Bill Kiowa. In his intensity and quiet commitment, Mendez is the Italianate revenger par excellence.

DEATH RIDES A HORSE, with its avenging duo and opposing motives (Bill wants to kill the villains, Ryan to reduce them to penury), rings all the obvious changes on the revenge theme. The hero is far from sympathetic - at best, he is a prissy do-gooder, at worst his behaviour causes him and Ryan a lot of hardship. When Bill learns that Ryan was among the robbers who attacked his father's farm, he is all set to kill him with the others - even though it was Ryan who saved Bill's life that night. The older man, infinitely tired, has to beg to be allowed to help Bill against the gang. After which, he turns his back and refuses to fight again. Vincenzoni is openly critical of the uncompromising revenge ethic (the norm since his original screenplay for FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE): our sympathies are with the wry and grizzled Ryan, who would rather blackmail his former partners than see them dead. THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY (another Vincenzoni work) reduces revenge to the status of vindictive spite, as Tuco and Blondie play vicious tricks on one another to get even for past slights. Yet though their games are deadly, their behaviour is essentially childish. Tuco is even prevented from taking his revenge on Sentenza - Blondie has stolen his bullets while he slept.

(Some of the protracted  
desert scenes so CRUISEY  
in the long version (DVD)  
as to seem unbelievable)

The sourest of the revenge stories, and an interesting counterpoint to TODAY IT'S ME, is Massimo Dallamano's BANDIDOS. Like Bill Kiowa, sharpshooter Richard Martin needs assistance - but he needs it because he is physically incapable of handling a gun. His hands have been shattered by Kane, a former pupil. Martin takes under his wing a quiet young cowboy, on the lam from the law. He teaches the boy to shoot - and his progress is so extraordinary that Martin sees in him his former self, christening the boy "Ricky Shot." Ricky plays along with Martin and finally confronts Kane, ~~promptly~~ using his new skills to save Kane's life. The two men make a deal and Ricky rides off. Martin's plans are in ruins. Half-heartedly trying to avenge himself, Martin kills an innocent man and is shot in the back by Kane. Ricky gets second thoughts and faces the villain after all.

The film is tightly and ironically constructed. Every character is playing a double game, using the people he pretends to befriend. Martin's motives for teaching Ricky to shoot are purely selfish. Ricky joins Martin only as a means of getting to Kane, who can supply evidence to clear Ricky's name. Belatedly, he attempts to justify himself, scoffing at the very idea of vengeance by proxy -

"Never crossed my mind to face him.

It's a private fight between the two of you."

Martin's vendetta is just inept. He lugs a ~~sawn~~-off shotgun into the saloon and lies in wait behind the bar. He shoots the first person he sees - a young cowboy who resembles Ricky. ~~more than Kane.~~ Kane offers him a chance to reload, but Martin loses his nerve and tries to pour himself a drink. Kane kills him. Ricky's revenge comes too late to do anybody any good.

Vengeance never seems to profit anyone.

All it does for Ricky is to turn him into the sort of man that Kane was and Martin tried to be. It <sup>renders</sup> ~~leaves~~ Bill Kiowa empty and unfulfilled. It sends Requiescant wandering aimlessly into the desert. Colonel Mortimer leaves Agua Caliente already contemplating further violence - "Maybe next time..." In the Italian Western the mantle of avenger fits all too many shoulders, and mild men like "Ricky Shot" become what, without their knowledge and against their will, they were born to be.

OBSESSIONS - MADNESS

"All the world's mad, 'cept me and thee.  
And thou art a bit queer."

Lancashire proverb

Madness is not simply a recurring element in the Italian Western - it is a constant characteristic of almost every film. Generally it takes one of three forms - as a personality trait of the hero or the villain; as the principal characteristic of a subordinate; and as a general malaise.

The hero's madness is relatively controlled, and usually confined to the periodic outbursts of the revengers - in particular, Jerry Brewster. Far more common is excessive eccentricity on the hero's part. *Requiescant* has his moments of high passion - the scene with the skeletons, for instance - but is more often characterised by incongruous low comedy: he ties his gun to his waist with string, and spurs his horse on with a frying pan. *The Stranger in A MAN, A HORSE & A GUN* carries a pink parasol and rides a horse called Pussy. Often he suffers from a morbid fear - Clay's terror of epilepsy in *DEAD OR ALIVE*, Cat's fear of water in *GOD FORGIVES, I DON'T*, Django's horror of creeping creatures in *DJANGO KILL*. The heroes of the later films, when invention had long since supplanted imagination, are particularly quirky. *Apocalypse Joe* has a passion for Shakespeare and dresses like Hamlet; the bounty-hunter *Providence* drives a motorised wagon and looks like Charlie Chaplin. At the more serious end of the scale, most of the

avengers take perverse pleasure in their enemies' deaths - several instances of rampant sadism on the part of the hero have already been considered.

But just as the Good character is Good in comparison with the Bad, so he is essentially sane. Almost all the Bad men are sadists of the first order, who get kicks out of killing and sometimes kill without apparent reason (Gordo and Cisco Delgado, for instance). Some of them have a psychopathic chip on their shoulder - the most obvious being the Hunchback's in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. Others have more deep-rooted phobias: in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, a one-eyed bully called Wallace attempts to put Tuco's eyes out, and Johnny in GARRINGO wages a one-man war against the army because as a boy he saw his father court-martialed and shot. Most Italian villains display suicidal traits, and, like Ramon, have a tendency to laugh hysterically when killing someone. Unreasonable fixations obsess many of them. Often the Bad man is a fanatical racist. Mexicans are killed and humiliated regularly, without even the financial justification of the slave-traders in NO ROOM TO DIE. Elfego berrates Bill Kiowa for marrying an Indian girl - to underline his point he rapes and shoots her. Yet he is Japanese, a member of a proud warrior race with a sword to prove it, but just as much an outcast in the WASP West as the girl he murders. Corbucci proffers even clearer evidence of the paranoia underlying racism in NAVAJO JOE: the scalphunter Duncan, who earns a good living from the massacre of Native Americans, is exposed as half-Indian himself, his fanaticism the result of childhood traumas. Corbucci's villains are almost always racists as well as maniacs. Jackson in DJANGO and Jonas in THE HELLBENDERS are both Confederate officers with a pervading hatred of non-whites, not to mention women. Both are determined to keep the Confederacy alive long after the War

is over. Ex-Confederate officers seeking to perpetuate a xenophobic regime are favourite figures of villainy, in fact. While Jonas carries the flag into Texas, Requiescant's foe Ferguson raises it over Mexican soil. Wallace, the ravaging Southerner in THE PRICE OF POWER, seeks to rekindle the cause in Dallas - and attracts the patronage of powerful politicians whose true motives he cannot understand. In SHANGO, the ex-Confederate villain meets the equally popular ex-Confederate Good guy, when a Texas ranger charged with bringing peace to the furthest battlegrounds finds a mad Major barring his path. Here the villain's perception of reality crumbles completely: he knows the War is over but will not tell his men, he makes an alliance with a gang of outlaws to steal gold that does not exist, and dies among the bodies of his soldiers, convinced he sees the face of Shango on every one. Militarism and racism are constantly treated like psychopathic disorders, given the same prominence in the villain's make-up as sadism and schizophrenia. Whether or not the equation is sound, it strikes me as healthy.

The depiction of subordinate characters as lunatics is quite common. Often they are garrulous old timers who live alone and talk to themselves. Such types abound in Leone's films - in particular, FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, where the Prophet cheerfully admits that he has been driven crazy by the railroad that runs past his door. Such stock characters are nothing new, of course: a similar old man, with an almost identical speech, appears in the original novel of The Ox-Bow Incident, and like types have always been common in American Westerns. Gravediggers and undertakers are especially prone to eccentricity bordering on madness. The pattern was established, by way of YOJIMBO, with the character of Piripero in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS. Often the crazy man evinces much greater perception than the "straight"

characters. The hermit who sells Gary Hamilton a rifle remarks:

"I ain't seen shooting like that since the last tornado. And my bones tell me we got *another* one coming tonight."

In the same way, the senses of the mad villain are unusually acute. Indio claims to have known the traitor in his ranks from the moment he set eyes on him; and Luke Murdock, who suffers from epilepsy and manic depression, is the only man able to wound the wraith-like Django. Deranged clergymen appear from time to time - indeed, a Man of God could hardly stay sane or sober in the Italian West. Chuncho's brother El Santo wears a monk's habit and an Indian headband. Nino, not one for discerning subtleties, immediately asks if he is mad. In I WANT HIM DEAD, the military ethic has led many into madness, and we witness the execution of a deranged deserter, singing Dixie to the firing squad.

Insanity as a malaise infects some of the outlaw families, but it is in DJANGO KILL that madness festers like a disease. Bystanders laugh as unarmed men are lynched; suspicion and manic hostility erupt the moment strangers appear in town. The hero hovers on the verge of madness, pacing the floor of his hotel room and washing his hands repeatedly in a bowl. Haunted by nightmares in which he is repeatedly shot and left for dead, Django can no longer cope with a violent world. On the one occasion that he does provoke a fight, it is without reason. The locals assume that he has "gone loco." Yet those around him are just as loco, many of them more so. Oaks and his bandits openly flaunt their stolen money, only to be strung up for their pains. The storekeeper Hagerman is pursued by devils, prays and quotes the Bible, and tries to foist his burgeoning madness on his wife. She is half-convinced she's

crazy and deliberately acts the part: just when we are ready to believe she is ~~really~~ sane, she plays with matches and burns the house down. Tumbler's household is fraught with sexual guilt and misplaced values. All their neighbours suffer from small-town xenophobia in extremis, and go on periodic witch hunts to see if there are strangers about. The arrival of two redskins is too good a chance to miss. Yet their paranoia is understandable when we learn that the surrounding countryside is dominated by Sorro, a perverted rancher who kidnaps and murders straying townsmen. The mad ~~but~~ logical climax draws Sorro into a shouting-match with his pet parrot, who answers him back. Sorro goes off his head and shoots Polly; Django shoots Sorro. Much dynamite and molten gold later, Django chooses a lull of semi-sanity to depart.

But there is no release. DJANGO KILL is a surreal critique of bourgeois fears and values. Its madness is our own.



OBSESSIONS - SEXUALITY

"Man shall be trained for war, and woman  
for the recreation of the warrior.  
All else is folly."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Thus Spake Zarathustra

Mrs Hagerman is unusual in the Italian Western in that, for a while at least, she has a romantic involvement with the hero. There is even a love scene, undertaken with Hagerman's connivance since he hopes it will induce Django to stay on and guard his gold. Theirs is a perverse relationship, to be sure, ~~shared by~~ <sup>that of</sup> a murderer and a lunatic: but it is a relationship, and as such a considerable rarity. The only love that normally exists is the avenger's, for a murdered relative. Traditional heroines figure only in the American-style pastiches, and ~~there~~ they are invariably insipid. The only women in the Dollars films are prostitutes, victims, and crones. When Leone introduces a woman as the principal character in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, she appears to be the antithesis of the traditional Western female - a prostitute who has married for money. Jill is tough, outspoken, and doesn't believe in fates worse than death -

"If you want you can lay me over the table and amuse yourself. Even call in your men. No woman ever died from that. When you're finished, all I'll need will be a tub of boiling water and I'll be exactly what I was before - with just another two-bit memory."

No Hollywood heroine ever felt, much less talked, that way. But Jill is honest, and more than anything ~~else~~ she wants to live. To do so she will sleep with the man who murdered her husband, sell her inheritance to the lowest bidder. She is a survivor, equipped for life in the Italian West better than any school-marm or earth-mother. Yet in the end, an earth-mother is what she becomes. She admits she would like to have borne McBain sons - it is up to Harmonica to make her feel love, up to Cheyenne to channel that love into a wider context. The hard-bitten city girl succours the railroad workers, bosom bared, and Leone's West attains a new dimension - the capacity for growth and change.

Even Jill's role is comparatively passive. And apart from her, sensible heroines who make a real contribution to the story are rare. One exception is Adelita, the bandit woman in QUIEN SABE? She is the only member of Chuncho's gang who distrusts their American ally: she retains a sane perspective, warning Chuncho not to get grandiose ideas about becoming a revolutionary. When her man Pablito is killed because of Chuncho's indecision, Adelita ups and leaves, demanding all the money he and Nino have in lieu of her share of the gold. She is almost a chorus figure, constantly reminding the others that for them Revolution is a business, not a cause; but at the same time she is as much a participant and a catalyst as any of the men. At best, though, it is the woman's role to be sensible rather than an instigator of action. Perhaps this is not quite as demeaning as it is in the American Western, since Jill's compromise and Adelita's hard-headedness put them on a par with the Uglies - always the most sympathetic characters in the films. But this is no justification for the frequent condescension towards, or exploitation of, women: the Italian Western is drastically lacking in a feminist perspective; its guilt is that of the cinema per se.

Generally, the hero has little to do with womenfolk. Occasionally he shows an interest in sex (Arizona Colt offers to avenge a murdered girl on condition that he can spend a night with her sister), but more often he is quite unattached, and unmoved by the saloon girls who hurl themselves his way. His most common contact with women is when, like Joe in FISTFUL, he sticks up for one who is being ill-treated. Indeed, the commonest woman's role in the Italian Western is to be abused. Rape and murder provide the regular motive for revenge, or simply differentiate the Bad from the Good. When Shango gathers an army of Mexicans to fight the Major, the villain Martinez buries their wives and daughters up to their necks in the street, and spills burning kerosene upon the ground. Women are whipped to death in DJANGO and TEXAS ADDIO: in the latter film, Delgado's men kidnap village girls and one man says of the captives, "Put them in with the others and give them a bath" - a throwaway line realised by the same director, Ferdinando Baldi, in BLINDMAN. BLINDMAN is sexist even for an Italian Western: a convoy of mail-order brides is hijacked by bandits; the women are stripped and soaked; their kidnapers are led by a lecherous lesbian called Sweet Mama, whom the Blindman strips and ties to a post; and so on.

Such instances are extreme, but the attitude they represent is a prevalent one. Only in Sergio Sollima's Westerns are women consistently treated as worthwhile human beings (Cucillo's various girlfriends give as good as they get, and the hero treats them with something approaching respect). Leone's attitude to women is generally negative: women ~~only~~ suffer in the Dollars films; Jill has to be led by the nose; and in DUCK! YOU SUCKER, Sean's Irish girlfriend is a rather ambivalent sex-object, while Juan has a father and many sons, but no wife or daughters. They are treated still worse in Lizzani's Westerns, particularly

REQUIESCANT, whose villains Ferguson and Light torture their women obsessively. Sergio Corbucci's mysogony is of a different order - virulent, but not easily categorised. His heroes are ~~always~~ attracted to a girl in trouble, and thus they doom themselves. Since women in Westerns are ~~always~~ silly creatures, they are invariably ensnared by the villain and oblige the hero to court deadly risks to save them. The prostitutes who figure in his films are of a different stock from the heroines, and always ready to stand up to villains and pernicious townspeople alike. The (cinematic) appeal of prostitutes is not difficult to fathom. They are a proscribed class, and hence have an affinity with the hero: in addition they are an exploited class, and a favorite Marxist symbol of the corruption wrought by capitalism. Corbucci is anything but consistent: he is a salacious moralist, a pacifist who despises hippies and weaklings, and while obviously quite fond of certain women, he delights in depicting their graphic humiliation and death. Perhaps he is Howard Hawks without the Hays Code. <sup>1</sup>

(2 WESTERNS in which the hero gets  
the girl: BIG SHOWDOWN + JOKO/VENGEANCE)

Women are not always the object of the villain's lust or hero's indifference. Nor are they necessarily items of decor. Now and then, female villains - their sexuality adding to their menace - feature in the films. The two women in DJANGO KILL are as malevolent as any of their male counterparts: in particular, Tumbler's mistress Lisabeth, who badgers her man into keeping his share of the loot, even if his kidnapped son dies as a result. \$1000 ON THE BLACK is the story of two brothers, both devoted to their ancient mother: but she dotes on only one of them, because he keeps her supplied with stolen jewelry, and despises the other, who has spent time in jail. Eventually, Bad Brother kills her -

<sup>1</sup> Indeed I think he is. Hawks' last Western, RIO LOBO (197), contains a strange episode where a beautiful woman's face is disfigured by the villain. Since his villainy is already established and she is no one's sister, the whole business has a Corbucci-like arbitrariness. And because this is an otherwise traditional American Western, the episode is not only gratuitous but disgusting.

to be shot in turn, not by Good Brother, but by another woman. The villanous banker in THE SPECIALIST is a woman, ironically christened Virginia; and the gorilla-like Sharkey in SABATA is just a tool of his malevolent mother, with whom the villains must negotiate to have Sabata killed.

There is an interesting tendency in these films, which if developed would have given us a whole new perspective on the West - a monstrous matriarchy, where thuggish arrogant males stride about and kill each other at the behest of ~~their~~ cunning ~~and intelligent~~ womenfolk. Yet very few Italians seem to have considered the United States a matriarchal society: strange, in view of all the other "evils" they willingly ascribed to it, but understandable if the West is not really the West at all, but an allegorical vision of contemporary Italy (in the same way that the 'Italian' court of the Jacobeans was a thinly-veiled version of the English one). It is, I suspect, a lot harder for a man to confess that he lives in a matriarchy, than it is for him to call his society corrupt and exploitative: such an admission is an implied confession of emasculation. Hence, conscious or unconscious, the Italian West remained as much a man's world as the American.

But if perverse motherhood was generally out, perversion per se was in. For the most part, the only characters who seem to lead a normal sex-life are the Ugliers. In DUCK! YOU SUCKER, Juan drags a weedy <sup>lawyer</sup> out of the stage coach and demands, "Can you make a baby?" The answer is obviously no, so Juan borrows the man's wife and proceeds to do so for him. Most of the Americano heroes seem to suffer from the lawyer's affliction. Monco ignores the randy hotelieuse; Harmonica shows no interest

in Jill even when he discovers her in the bath (and when Jill is played by Claudia Cardinale, that takes some doing); Nino tells Adelita he avoids women because he "doesn't want complications;" the villains derive amusement from the (inert) phallic implications of Requiescant's dangling gun. The Good guys are in many cases perfect candidates for Nietzsche's race of fascist supermen: their saving grace is that we are not expected to take them seriously. With only the impotent Good and the sexually sadistic Bad to choose from, it is not surprising that the women are more than a little perverse themselves. Here the lawyer's wife discusses the morality of the peon with a priest:

"I can imagine, father. Living in such... promiscuity. All of them in one room. At night. With the lights out. You never know who's next - mother, sister, daughter, goat..."

Shortly Juan proves how right she is, and of course she appreciates the demonstration. Juan's gaggle of sons attests to his sexual stability. So, in a different way, does Cheyenne's decision not to ravish Jill ("Ma'am, it seems to me you ain't got the idea"). She reminds him of his mother, and in his clumsy, sentimental way he hopes to court her properly.

In direct and obvious contrast to the sexual proclivities of the Good and Ugly, is the sexual deviance of the Bad. Sorro and the cowboys in DJANGO KILL are flamboyant homosexuals, an automatic symbol of stage and screen Evil until quite recently (today homosexuality is more often an excuse for limp-wristed sissy comedy, to my mind a somewhat more insulting stereotype). Curly in A PROFESSIONAL GUN is gay, but in common with Corbucci's villains, invested with a degree of dignity.



Implicit homosexual liaisons are legion - for instance, the suave sadist Delgado and his poncey English friend McLeod. The same can be said of many Good partnerships, and not only in Italian Westerns: but gay undertones are present in most heroic alliances, and only one - that of Nino and Chunchu in QUIEN SABE? - strikes me as intended to be taken as homosexual.

Sexual fetishes abound. Tumbler's son in DJANGO KILL is obsessed with the fact that his father has taken a mistress. In a scene straight out of Buñuel, he slips into Lisabeth's room and systematically tears apart her dresses and underclothes. No mention is made of the incident, but Lisabeth connives at the boy's death shortly afterwards. One of the villains in DEATH SENTENCE, an Albino called O'Hara, has a passion for gold which does not stop at the conventional prize - he spirits the blonde heroine off to a lonely cave and sits crooning over her, fondling her golden hair. Pollicut, the abject loan-shark of BIG SILENCE, is consumed by a ferocious desire to possess Pauline - principally because he has never "had" a Black woman. In a nice reversal of Hollywood's traditional horror of mysegenation, it is Pauline who is revolted by the prospect of relations with a lecherous Caucasian. Even DEAD MEN RIDE, a rather feeble FISTFUL OF DOLLARS rehash, comes to life when its svelte villain Redfield indulges in quite irrelevant, but villanous, fits of voyeurism. Perverse paternalism occurs more than once. Cisco Delgado is determined to force a reconciliation with the son he has never known, even if it means locking Jim away and having him thrashed. In RAINBOW, and outwardly benevolent grandee hires a bounty hunter to bring his wayward son home - in fact he intends to punish his unfaithful wife by crucifying her illegitimate offspring. Here, at least, the son is saved.

The reasons for the recurrence of sexual perversion in the Italian Western are various. Obviously, there is an element of piling on the agony, of rendering villains still more hideous, by alluding to some generally unpopular sexual activity on his part. Stengel's narcissism is one such element, grafted onto SABATA to make the Bad Worse. But in other cases - DJANGO KILL, BIG SILENCE, REQUIESCANT - the perversion is ingrained: a fundamental part of each film's horror. Actual frontier history provides no real answer. A woman's lot was certainly a hard one, particularly if she was a prostitute or an Indian, but generally the frontierswoman's sufferings were no greater than her man's. And in direct contrast, many Western women appear to have been treated with a degree of reverence unheard of in the Italian Western. The cowboy marriage in Owen Wister's The Virginian is, for all its mawkishness, probably more representative than the drunken (but ironically convincing) ceremony in Peckinpah's RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY. Lavish welcomes for new brides, such as Jill's reception in ONCE UPON THE TIME IN THE WEST, were no film-maker's invention.

But if the history of the West does not explain the perverse fascination of the films (there are simply no figures on the incidence of prairie gays), perhaps a different history does - once again, the native Renaissance. The contemporary actions of the Borgia court were bad enough. Garnished and enhanced by the re-telling, they grew monstrous - unspeakable things willingly spoken. Cesare Borgia instigated a score of murders and had regular sex with his sister. Duke Baglioni was likewise guilty of incest, having first murdered his father. Wives were abused and set aside in favour of courtesans, or killed by their husband's hirelings. Orgies involving every conceivable



sexual permutation, took place in all the noble palaces, not to mention the Vatican. Choirboys were castrated, rapists put in pies and fed to their parents. With such stories, fact or fiction, so firmly rooted in the sensational consciousness, it is hardly surprising <sup>that</sup> variations on them found their way into the Italian's Westerns. Just as ingenious sadism and sexual decadance had been a part of the peplums; and just as they would, in time, find their way into the thrillers and skinflicks which displaced the Westerns.

People like that sort of thing.

OBSESSIONS - RELIGION

"You should hear them in the Confessional.  
Can you imagine?"

The Priest in DUCK! YOU SUCKER

An atheist in a Catholic country, Pier Paolo Pasolini was sufficiently fascinated by the Christian myth to direct THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MATTHEW, easily the best of all the bio-pics about Jesus. Religious allusions appear throughout his work, as they continue to do in the films of the radical younger generation of directors that includes Bertolucci, Bellocchio and Petri. The concepts of martyrdom, of sacrificing one's life for a Greater Good, of death and rebirth, are dramatic in themselves, open to many uses and interpretations. At the very least, they can dignify a spurious film with the title of Allegory. Not surprisingly, the Italian Western dealt not only with the traditional religious trappings - preachers and pine churches - but with the motifs of death and resurrection, and with icons that were specifically Catholic. Often the allusion was spurious. Occasionally, it was profound.

Incidental characters with a religious function appear frequently. The first person Joe meets in San Miguel is the bell ringer, Juan de Dios. There is no priest in town, but there is a church. There is also, as we have seen, a sexton. There are coffins, there are crosses, there is an unholy trinity of brothers which Joe must destroy. In the later films, clergymen are regular participants: at first, Catholic priests and Protestant pastors share joint honours - but soon, as the concept of the urban West grows more established,

Protestants predominate and priests appear only in the Mexican Westerns. But Protestant ritual is treated in the most cursory manner (the reverend in REQUIESCANT prays in Latin!): the presence of a religious figure is more important than his dogma.

When they involve themselves in the action, clergymen always court disaster. For standing up to the villain, the priests in AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, NAVAJO JOE and DEAD OR ALIVE are murdered. In each case the death has further religious overtones: all three murders take place within the church (an obvious means of adding to the outrage of the act); one killer confesses his father was a priest, another cynically declares -

"Any priest that buddies up with an outlaw,  
I automatically excommunicate him -  
and ordain myself!"

The degradation of a clergyman is a means of demonstrating the Triumph of Evil. In DEATH RIDES A HORSE, we hear a church service in progress and a sign informs the community that The Bishop Is Coming; but the church in the outlaw town is derelict, its preacher an alcoholic dreaming of the Godly days before Cavanagh took control. Monasteries are regular targets for the villain's wrath: in BLOOD CALLS TO BLOOD the hero's brother is part of an order of massacred monks; in A HOLE IN THE FOREHEAD a monastery is overrun by bandits, the loot hidden behind the altar; and in TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME Stingaree's gang dress as monks, fooling a Mexican who declares "Once upon a time the brothers were saints. Now they're devils..."

At times, the priest's function is something other than a target. One of ARIZONA COLT's most interesting grotesques is its cockney pastor. Though he soon reveals himself a comic character with the obligatory turn-a-blind-eye/tote-a-rifle traits,

his introduction is quite bizarre. His sickly son Jack is in the saloon being treated to his first shot of red-eye, when in bursts a black-clad religious fury in a cardinal's hat - for all the world like Doctor Van Helsing hot on the Vampire's trail - ranting and flailing the boy with a whip. The cheerful inconsistency of the character is that of the film. Other prelates, all Protestants, provide elements of incidental oddity in several films: Mormon preachers are a particular favourite. In THE BIG GUNDOWN and MY NAME IS TRINITY much emphasis is placed upon their marriage customs, while JOHN THE BASTARD concentrates on prejudice and persecution, with its caravan of Latter Days hounded by the Cavalry and the Ku Kux Klan. In RUN MAN RUN, Cucillo goes so far as to join the Salvation Army and run a soup kitchen - his uniform affords a much-needed disguise and gets him into the vicinity of a blonde corporal. The Bad men also adopt priestly garb at times - partially to offend, partially because the trappings of the church appeal to the exotic tastes of the more eccentric villains. Baldwin, one of the villains in DEATH SENTENCE, dresses like a preacher and calls his gang his deacons. He rides off leaving the wounded hero to meditate on his sins. Yancey Hobbitt in BLOOD MONEY drives a church on wheels; one of the men hired to kill Sabata calls himself "Father Brown;" Indio preaches to his men from the pulpit of a ruined mission. Some of the Good men dress up too: among the later heroes we encounter REVERENDO COLT; and the bounty hunter hero of CHRYSANTHEMUMS FOR A LOAD OF CARRION (sic) disguises himself as a friar.

None of these characters has any real significance, other than as yet another instance of grotesque invention. Certain films, however, did consider the role of religion in a serious light - the most obvious being REQUIESCANT. A boy, the sole survivor

of a savage massacre, is adopted by an itinerant pastor, heading West. His wagon bears the words, "In God We Trust." Years later, the preacher's restless daughter Princy runs away - her adopted brother promises to bring her back. When he discovers her, she has become a prostitute. He sets out to redeem her from her fall from grace, but he himself has changed in the mean time. His instinctive execution of two stagecoach robbers, and his prayer for their departed souls, has earned him the name of "Requiescant" - and aroused a suspicion locally that the preacher's boy is not all he seems. Requiescant's attempts to negotiate for Princy's return are mocked and thwarted. She dies, and he is almost killed within a burning church. His mission becomes a crusade, and persecuted Mexicans flock to the avenger's side: the spirit of their leader Marquez is reborn within the body of his son. An outlaw priest, Don Juan (played by Pasolini) arrives - cradling a bulky "baby" whose lifted swaddling-clothes disclose a gattling-gun. There is nothing Christian about Requiescant's revenge, a fierce example of Old Testament lex talionis. But we are not expected to regard the villains as real people. According to convention, Light and Ferguson are embodiments of Evil. While most of the characters in an Italian Western are unrepentant sinners, murderers, thieves and fornicators, idolators one and all, the Bad man's Evil is of an entirely different order. Requiescant can no more pardon his enemies than God can make a truce with Satan. Forgiveness in such circumstances is neither human nor divine, but blasphemous - a negation of the natural order of things. This is the Revenge Tradition, where avenger and hellfire preacher are close kin, often one and the same. REQUIESCANT is both a cynical Christian parable and a message of predestination. More than any other hero, he becomes "what he was born to be." His destiny is sealed from the moment he ~~lays~~

lays hands upon a gun. I am not suggesting that the Christian myth necessarily has any validity for Carlo Lizzani, REQUIESCANT's Marxist director. But for him, as for many others, it is a set of symbols too powerful, and too tempting, to be ignored.

Religious characters have a different significance in the allegorical design of QUIEN SABE? Chuncho's half-brother, El Santo, is a rebel priest (presumably self-ordained, like the bandit in DEAD OR ALIVE) fighting for the Revolution. When the gang attacks an army outpost, he hurls hand grenades like holy water, shouting a Benediction. Locking the prison guards in an underground cell, Santo tells them "You will die very slowly...may God forgive you." Yet for all his grotesquerie, Santo has a serious purpose. QUIEN SABE? is a studied allegory about U.S. involvement in South American politics - more consistent than Pontecorvo's QUEIMADA! (both films were scripted by Franco Solinas) and less optimistic about the endurance of revolutionary ideals. Santo fits ~~very well into~~ the role of the Catholic priests who sided with the guerillas in the Sixties; and the point is underlined early in the film when he confronts a "good" priest administering the last rites to dying Rurales. The government priest attacks him for consorting with bandits, and Santo replies "Christ died between two thieves." Corrupt men of God who grow fat on peasants' offerings abound within the Mexi-Westerns. The priest in DUCK! YOU SUCKER offers to tell his traveling-companions a few of the choicer morsals he has heard in Confession.

One of the many ironies of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY is that Pablo Ramirez, brother of the outlaw Tuco, should be a priest. Yet Tuco's explanation has a ring of truth - that to survive, a young man of their stock could only turn to religion or to

robbery. "My way was harder" declares Tuco. It was he who supported the family while Pablo was at the seminary, his the greater sacrifice. Their confrontation juxtaposes the vitality of the bandit with the conventional sterility of the "good" citizen. Cynically, Leone has his priest resort to violence when Tuco calls him a coward. But their fraternal love is genuine. Tuco clobbers Pablito in return, then helps him up, shame-faced, and rushes out; the priest tries to call him back, whispering "Forgive me, my brother." They love each other as only Mexicans can in the films (compare the stilted fraternities of the gringos) - it is religion, not crime, that has drawn them apart. Pablo has taken to "acting" the way a priest should act. Leone and Damiani are both at pains to point out the gulf between the theory and practice of Christianity; Lizzani questions whether <sup>either</sup> ~~it~~ has any value at all.

Even when clergymen are absent (as they are in Leone's first two films), religious icons feature prominently. The Colonel reads the Bible and is mistaken for a preacher; Indio's gang gathers in a tumbledown mission; church organs and bells are an integral part of Morricone's score. In DUCK! YOU SUCKER Juan throws away his crucifix after the murder of his sons - Sean restores it at the end (an ambiguous gesture, since we are surely not expected to believe that Juan, alone, will find solace in the bosom of the church). Adobe missions are gradually outnumbered by timber frame churches - which <sup>become</sup> major centres of action in the later films. In one, Sabata's pal Banjo gives an impromptu organ recital. Graves and graveyards yawn throughout. Resurrection is a heroic motif in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS and MINNESOTA CLAY: Corbucci's DJANGO expands it into a full-blown convention, and there are few films in which a semi-miraculous comeback does not <sup>occur.</sup> ~~figure in some form.~~ Sartana, Sabata and the circus-heroes "die" regularly in staged showdowns, the religious connotations long forgotten; while other movies wallow in a sea



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EXISTS!)

of spurious religiosity - in A MAN CALLED SLEDGE, the hero's girlfriend is raped and murdered on the altar of a ruined church (wherein, as usual, gold is hid); he uses a crucifix as a splint for his wounded arm; and rides out of town past a returning funeral procession. Religious processions often provide memento mori. Skull masks and grotesque carnival floats feature in the fiestas of QUIEN SABE?, A PROFESSIONAL GUN and SHANGO.

The villain's blasphemies do not end with murdering vicars and dressing up as priests. The Rojo's dinner party in FISTFUL is posed like Leonardo's Last Supper - all the guests ranked along one side of a long table (Leone has surely seen Bunuel's VIRIDIANA), with Ramon as Christ. Quasi-religious music plays while Indio delivers his "Parable of the Carpenter" from the pulpit. In REVENGE IN EL PASO, a bandit sets himself up as father confessor and asks his prisoners when they were last guilty of Lust. The penance, no matter what they reply, is death. Christianity, no matter what the politics of the writer or director, is too culturally imbedded, too rich a source of symbols, too inviting a target, to be ignored.



TECHNIQUE - THE LOOK

The visual style of the Italian Western is unique. It had precursors, of course, and there have been many imitations. But a good Italian Western looks unlike anything else - no matter how much its currency has been counterfeited since. The obligatory use of Techniscope, with its wide aspect ratio, encouraged innovative depth in composition, with striking verticals (men, jagged mountains, buildings) breaking up the horizontal plane. The opening sequence of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, where a face intrudes in vast close-up on an empty landscape and ragged gunmen stride ~~in~~ out of the desert, is a classic illustration of the compositional technique. There is constant camera movement in the form of conventional pans and tracking shots, and more idiosyncratic moves such as 360 degree circling tracks, swish-pans and hand-held "subjective" shooting. At times the camera is a participant in the action, hit by fists, blinded by direct sunlight, falling and tumbling; at times it is distanced and objective; and on occasion it sweeps from one extreme to the other, as when Leone pulls back from a close shot to reveal an unexpected panorama. Zooms are used to similar effect, isolating figures in a landscape - distancing us from the scene more often than they draw us into it (in the Italian Western, as elsewhere, the zoom lens is the most open to abuse of all the film maker's tools). Disorienting juxtapositions of wide-angle and telephoto shots are common - particularly in Corbucci's films. Staging is precise, showdowns strictly choreographed. Editing is often frenetic: even in the more relaxed sequences there are no "long takes" - the opening of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE and the climax of TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW

YOU are stylised exceptions. Dissolves are rare, sudden jumps between scenes common, and flashbacks<sup>or</sup> often introduced without warning. The flashbacks run the whole gamut of disorienting techniques - distorting lenses, slow motion, jump cuts and colour filters. Colour is generally unbalanced, filtered or washed-out. Yet, of all the elements that contribute to the Italian Western's distinctive visual style, to my mind the most important is the production design.

One name, and one name only, is common to the early Westerns of Leone and Corbucci - Carlo Simi. Simi was art director on A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS and MINNESOTA CLAY, both of which used the same location, ~~a set at~~ Colmenar, west of Madrid, in the same year, 1964. The Colmenar set was a single street of wooden, anonymous buildings dominated by a two-storey adobe. When Leone hired the town it had not been used for some months and was in poor shape: windows were broken, signs had fallen down, and paint was bleached away. Simi chose not to refurbish the town, as most designers would immediately have done, but rather to retain and to enhance the disrepair. It is interesting to compare San Miguel with the "ghost town" in YOJIMBO - the "feel" of both is very similar. Even the dimensions of the sets are more or less the same. Donald Richie describes the YOJIMBO town as "one long street with houses on either side and at the end. A long rectangle, something like a football field."<sup>1</sup> Kazuo Miyagawa's photography emphasises the similarity to a sports arena, with telephoto foreshortening and shots directly up and down the middle of the street. There are more diagonal angles in FISTFUL than YOJIMBO - a composition Kurosawa and Miyagawa studiously avoided - but a photographer can only frame his compositions around his location. The Colmenar set was designed in the early Sixties

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Richie, The Films of Akira Kurosawa

for imitation American cowboy pictures, not for a remake of a Japanese samurai film. Kurosawa worked with sets made to order; Leone worked with what came to hand. In any case, it is the morality of the chambara film, rather than a stylised shooting trait of Kurosawa's, that persists through Leone's later work.

The outskirts of San Miguel were shot not at Colmenar, but in an inhabited village in Almeria - a location to which Leone and Simi were to return for their later collaborations. Colmenar reappears in MINNESOTA CLAY, and though the shooting-style is very different (Corbucci's fondness for wide-angle composition gives the town a much more spacious look) it remains almost as run-down as it was in FISTFUL. The set was used on and off throughout the Sixties, most notably in DJANGO KILL - but it was never better deployed than in FISTFUL, with Simi's minimally-dressed interiors and spartan street scenes, filled one day with airborne blossom, the next - incredibly - with fallen leaves.

1965 was the watershed year for the Italian Western, when Leone and Corbucci made two of their best, and certainly their most influential, films - FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE and DJANGO. Carlo Simi designed the sets for both, and in each case the look of the location is uniquely important to the story the directors tell. Prior to A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, no Westerns had been made in Almeria; the southern Spanish desert had been a location for LAWRENCE OF ARABIA and a few other American features. As Western terrain, though, the sierra country north of Almeria city is the next best thing to the American West itself - and in the early Sixties, power lines and metalled roads had not encroached upon it. It is rough plateau-land, carved by deep ravines and dried-up river beds. Little grows apart from gorse and low cactus; most days the sky is cloudless.

In the middle of the sierras, near a truck-stop town called Tabernas, Simi built El Paso, Texas. The new set was laid out to a thesis, on a plateau between two rows of hills - two streets converging on a broad square, buildings on every side. The buildings were of wood and occasional brick, chunky, ugly structures sticking up like lopped-off tree trunks. To render them less hideously square, he arched or gabled the false-fronts, added trellises and verandahs. The result is a crude baroque - the clumsily functional dubiously beautified. The effect is authentic, and unreal. El Paso is the imposing centre of a large frontier town, without industry, outlying buildings or shanty slums. A period photograph, cut off at the edges.

As with the ghost town in FISTFUL, this is just the West that Leone was trying to depict - a superficially gritty, realistic environment where nothing is real at all. A town in an Italian Western is not a town, ~~at all~~. It is part of the landscape, like a rock formation. It is not a place where people live, it is a place where an elect few conceal themselves and confront each other. El Paso seems to grow out of the plateau. It is the same sand-colour as the hills that rise behind it. In FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, the town is part of the desert, the desert part of the town.

Most of Simi's buildings were facades, squeezed together with the merest suggestion of roofs and side walls. About a third were practical to some extent, in the sense of having four sides and allowing photography from any angle. The three largest structures stood on the square. Two represented hotels - the hangouts of the rival bounty killers - and both had practical bars and foyers. The third was the Bank which Indio robs: the focal point of the town. It was a broad, buttressed adobe

adobe block, the colour of cement. Like the other buildings it just fell short of symmetry. "It's more a fortress than a bank" says one of the characters, and that is exactly what it looks like in the film: especially following our earlier glimpses of the fortress-prison from which Indio escapes.

Though it was built to the specifications of Vincenzoni's screenplay - there is hardly an alley or verandah that does not play some part in the choreography, particularly during the robbery sequence - Simi's set became hot property for later Westerns. Leone used it again in *THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY*, where it represents four different towns in separate episodes, and Simi made a real effort to alter its character. New frontages were added, and a false front turned the Bank into a hotel. Thereafter, only superficial alterations were made. New buildings came and went, and some of the more baroque trimmings were removed. A regular pattern of windows robbed the original structures of their asymmetry: even Simi's Bank was subjected to this treatment, giving its upper storey an overcrowded air. The only film which did the location justice (by which I mean made an imaginative contribution to, and original use of, Simi's settings) was the American Western *DOC* (production design by Gene Callaghan). Being flimsy constructions - even more so than their frontier prototypes - film sets rarely endure for long. One of the last films shot there was Ken Russell's *VALENTINO*: since then El Paso has deteriorated drastically. High winds have completely demolished several buildings, including the largest hotel, and left others little more than skeletons. None of the damage is irreparable, and some buildings including the splendidly-solid Bank remain untouched. But with the Spanish-made Western a comparative rarity, it is unlikely El Paso will be used again. Today its only inhabitants hang out in the Marshall's Office and sell soft drinks to tourists.

Simi's contribution was not confined to the construction of new locations, however. For DJANGO he undertook the complete renovation of an existing set in Italy - the Elios Films township east of Rome. The Elios set was a long street of jumbled, plain-faced buildings surrounded by rolling hills. It is not an inspiring location, though many of the better low-budget Westerns were shot there, and Simi's job was ~~almost~~ an extension of his work on MINNESOTA CLAY and FISTFUL: to make an obvious film-set look "lived in." The end result in DJANGO is a masterpiece - a town at the end of its tether, awash with mud, windows smashed, doors boarded, the road littered with fallen trees and broken timbers. This may sound a strange criterion for excellence, but an art director's job is to convey in visual terms the "message" of the film. DJANGO is a violent, overwrought attack on xenophobia and phony values. For it, Simi created the ultimate nowhere - a battleground which anyone with eyes can see is not worth fighting <sup>for</sup> ~~over~~.

The Elios set expanded as the years passed, acquiring a church and sidestreets. Leone used it for THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, and it features in TODAY IT'S ME, TOMORROW YOU and AND GOD SAID TO CAIN. Corbucci returned to it frequently: it was here that he made BIG SILENCE, dusting the street and porches with a "snowfall" of salt crystals. Gianfranco Parolini made Elios the base for the first of his Circus-Westerns, SARTANA, and in 1969 turned the town over to Carlo Simi for SABATA, the first of his innumerable sequels. New fixtures and street lamps appeared, and a proliferation of advertising signs, drawn from period photos, dotted the buildings. Not that Parolini's "Daugherty City" looks much like a real frontier town: it is a colourful, overcrowded parody, in perfect keeping with the film itself. By now Elios had become a versatile locale, and it remained the setting for ~~all~~ Parolini's other films, along with those of his disciple Giuliano Carmineo. To see how a sensitive designer can transform the same

location, compare a still from DJANGO with one from SABATA. In insensitive hands, it could look just like a film set - but in such hands real locations do, too.

Other construction took place in Almeria and Italy, most of it of a rather inferior nature. Another town was built outside Tabernas - three converging streets of crude one-dimensional frontages atop a hill. It is an ugly place, not in the sense of Simi's studied ugliness, and the repetitive finish of the buildings makes it a dead ringer for the back lot at Universal City. It was more popular with American producers (CHATO'S LAND, VALDEZ IS COMING) than with the Italians. Other sets rose in and around Rome: some in studios like Cinecittà, others in the surrounding countryside. Generally the ~~other~~ Roman locations were a poor second best - used when Elios was busy and the budget did not extend to shooting in Spain. There is a fatal "standard" look to most of them. A long wooden frontage, regularly spliced with doors and windows, without visible vestage of a roof, represents a row of houses. Window-panes are crudely opaqued to conceal the absence of an interior. But big budgets do not good pictures make, and several worthwhile pictures transcended the most tedious of these towns - FACE TO FACE, ARIZONA COLT and DJANGO THE BASTARD included. The visuals in such cases were often saved by inspired set decoration: Giulio Mafai's work was good if variable, and FACE TO FACE was decorated by Carlo Simi. Even more than Simi, however, the master of stretching minimal resources was a Spaniard, Jaime Perez Cubero. His settings saved Corbucci's HELLBENDERS from being routine; and his remarkable contribution to BANDIDOS and DJANGO KILL will be considered shortly.

Simi's next work for Leone took him into different territory. Although much of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY was shot in Almeria,

his principal construction work was done elsewhere - in the northern province of Burgos. Burgos is inland, rolling hill country, in places thick with pines. It was here that Leone shot the film's three biggest "set pieces" - the prison camp, the battle for the bridge, and the showdown in the cemetery. In each case the locale conveys the dynamic of the action. The camp is a cramped and static concentration in the middle of a monotonous plain: hills rise tenuously in the distance, suggestive of escape. The battleground conveys a stasis, too: we never glimpse the Confederates at close quarters, and the Union troops are entrenched behind barricades, round heavy gun emplacements. The accent is on mortars and warrens of trenches, on retreat rather than onslaught. It has been noted <sup>2</sup> that the disposition of Leone's troops recalls the trench warfare of the First World War. While this may be valid, I do not think one need be so specific - Leone's contention is that all war is static and ~~lacking in~~ <sup>devoid of</sup> progression: many of the engagements of the Spanish Civil War, fought close to Leone's locations, were equally entrenched. With his placing of heavy guns and seigeworks, instruments which dominate the actual participants in the battle, Simi makes the director's concept a visual fact. And after the battle, an army cemetery is our natural destination - as well as being an ironic comment on the preceding catalogue of gunplay and related mayhem. It is also a daunting and impossible prospect - an acre of anonymous crosses, one of which marks a cache of stolen gold. Simi's set conveys the vastness and anonymity and confusion, leaving at the dead centre a bare circle of calm parched earth - the magnetic focus for the three protagonists.

But THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY is the most picaresque of Leone's films, and it would be possible to cite every episode in the film

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Frayling Sergio Leone Cinema 6/7 August 1970



as an instance of his and Simi's collective genius. For the consummation of their collaboration, though, and as a remarkable example of the art director's potential as a storyteller, ~~I would~~ <sup>we must</sup> consider ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. Apart from three sequences shot in the United States, all the locations in Leone's fourth Western were Spanish. He had shot his previous railroad episodes here, on a stretch of track between Almeria and Granada, in Granada province. In the past, since none of his locations was equipped with a railway station, his practice had been to "cheat it" - that is to say, to cut from Colonel Mortimer getting off the train in Granada, to a shot of the pianist looking up as Mortimer enters the Colmenar saloon. In isolation, this trick works well enough (it was the standard American practice, even in train-oriented Westerns like HIGH NOON and 3.10 TO YUMA), but for a film about the great American railroad, where trains can be seen or heard throughout, cheating it just wasn't on. So beside the track, at a way station just south of Guadix in Granada, Simi built another town.

Flagstone, Ariz., is very different from El Paso, Texas. El Paso's essence is its security - the inherent feeling that it, and especially its Bank, have been around a while. Flagstone is the opposite - a young town, further West, growing up with the railroad, which may die once the railroad workers have moved on. Hence the transient look to so much of it, the piles of timber and half-built wooden skeletons, the sod-shacks and the tents. The West in ONCE UPON A TIME is changing, and Flagstone reflects that flux. One wide road stretches up from the station, bisected by another which parallels the tracks. The mixture as before, but with brick buildings fewer and less imposing. Only the furthest structures are facades. The Saloon is completely practical, with a large bar and several upstairs rooms. Existing Spanish buildings - barns and lineside

huts - were incorporated into the design. Flagstone is a town of too-wide alleys, of sprawling buildings that abound in gables, balconies and overhanging roofs. The Saloon, like the Bank in El Paso, is the focus - it draws the Good and the Bad together, and it is here that Jill attempts to dispose of her deadly legacy. I have never seen more accomplished work by Simi, nor production design more in keeping with the spirit of a film. Leone's revelation of the town was one of his characteristic visual surprises. The camera lingers on the platform: we have seen nothing of the town beyond. Finally, Jill tires of waiting for her husband and walks into the booking office. Tonino Delli Colli's camera cranes back and up, <sup>away</sup> from the door and over the sagging roof, and the Techniscope frame is suddenly crammed with a thousand details, with a bustling, smoking, dusty, sunlit city-to-be. Whatever our expectations, we could not have expected this.

Flagstone was Dallas the following year, in Tonino Valerii's THE PRICE OF POWER. The art director was Carlo Leva, Simi's erstwhile set decorator: his work is very good. His ~~His~~ Additional buildings gave the town a more settled air, blocking off the vistas of open country which one glimpsed continually in the emergent Flagstone. In view of his evident efforts, it is a pity that the authenticity of ~~the~~ design was let down by the director's poor deployment of ~~its~~ inhabitants. Nothing betrays even the best of settings worse than a gaggle of extras who don't know what to do with themselves. In THE PRICE OF POWER, and his subsequent MY NAME IS NOBODY - which he also filmed in Flagstone - Valerii's staging left a lot to be desired. On one showing, Leva seems a worthy successor to Simi: but the films of Valerii, Leone's old assistant director, have been variable to say the least.

Perhaps the youngest of the Spanish towns, Flagstone still stands. Most of Leva's urban facades have been removed and the railway station has disappeared. Though structurally sound, the set has been rendered doubly unreal - and pretty useless - by the tarmac road that now runs through its centre. Spanish roadsigns jostle with corrals and a barbed-wire fence. Still presiding, a legless Wooden Man - the carnival attraction from MY NAME IS NOBODY - watches the trains through a broken window.

Carlo Simi's last contribution to the Spanish landscape was also for ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. Unlike Leone's other films, which shift focus and location constantly, ONCE UPON A TIME revolves around ~~only~~ three points - Flagstone, Morton's Pullman car, and the McBain homestead. McBain's is a solid structure of interlocking logs, with a near-triangular frontage and wooden shingles. It is set in a shallow valley between Guadix and Tabernas, only a short gallop from El Paso. There is an aggressive concreteness about the building, which could be reassuring, but which, thanks to the dark stain of the wood against the tawny hills, gives it an air of menace. Dozens of farmhouses have been built for scores of Westerns, in Almeria, in Madrid, in Italy, in Yugoslavia, even in America. But McBain's is different - it evokes just the same sense of unease and insecurity as the ugly little township backed by the Grand Tetons in SHANE. El Paso was designed as part of the terrain; Flagstone was a compromise, a scattered growth, still spreading tendrils across the plain; McBain's is an intrusion - at odds with the landscape and ~~thus~~ inevitably courting disaster. That each location says something is no mere fancy on my part. It is the result of careful planning and consideration as to shape and colour; of lengthy collaboration between designer and director; and of constant liaison between designer and construction crew, dressers and decorators.

Compare the different feel of the two towns Simi built - or the feel of the same town in two different films, where a talented decorator makes it say two different things. The McBain homestead is a case in point. Our initial impression is that it is an intrusion on the landscape, isolated and endangered. Dramatically, our fear is realised when McBain and his brood are massacred by men in dust-coloured raiments, concealed ~~by~~ the undergrowth. The opposition of landscape and civilisation takes a concrete form. At the end of ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, the farm is no longer alone. Gangs of labourers swarm about outside, and a set of rails has almost passed the porch. Other buildings are under construction, and a row of engine-sheds - similarly shaped - dots the surrounding hills. The house has company, the landscape no longer predominates. As at the beginning of the film, we receive a visual impression: this time, that civilisation has encroached successfully, and the days of the desert are numbered. Which is, of course, the message of the film. ~~For~~ An art director, and this is Simi's strength, should not merely originate striking storyboards and sets - he should work to impress the mise-en-scene upon the visuals. Simi does this consistently and consummately. And in this sense, the mise-en-scene of the Italian Western - above all else a visual form - is as much Carlo Simi's as it is Leone's.

The construction and dressing of locations was only part of the art director's job. In addition to the purpose-built sets, Almeria and Granada furnished a number of "real" settings - white-walled streets and farmhouses, railway lines and bridges, plazas and squares in Almeria city, and of course the landscape proper. And there were still interiors to be considered - for it was, and is, customary to shoot most of the interior scenes

at studios in Rome. QUIEN SABE? is unusual in that it features a high proportion of location interiors; and Paolo Bianchini's I WANT HIM DEAD appears to have been shot entirely in Almeria - but the rule was otherwise. The advantages of studio work, particularly where a Western is concerned, are obvious. A moving camera requires a lot of space, tracks, rails, or a smooth surface for dollying. The more involved the set-up, the more fluid, and controlled, the environment must be. When, in Claudia Cardinale's bedroom scenes, Leone wanted a top shot through the overhead muslin of her four-poster, or to pivot the camera vertically through ninety degrees, "floating" walls and the absence of constricting ceilings were a necessity.

Hence decor and properties presented as much of a challenge to the film maker as the choice of suitable locations. Because the Italian Western boomed so suddenly (at a conservative estimate, nine Italian Westerns were produced in 1964, twenty-six in 1965, and forty-one in 1966 <sup>3</sup>) the sources that supplied the industry were taken by surprise. Unlike the Hollywood Western, <sup>for years</sup> /a relatively stable product, ~~if anything in a decline at the time,~~ the Italian Western was a rapid development of unforeseen proportions. Hence, the recurrence of the same locations and the same American-looking leading men; hence also the need to adapt existing non-Western props and decor, or to commission brand new material from untried sources. The Italian art director had to be more of an innovator than his American counterpart - for he was working with semi-suitable materials, or designing new ones to his own specifications.

This new regime is most apparent in the focal point of the Italian West - the firearm. A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS makes much of the relative merits of Colt and Winchester, the trademarks of the

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<sup>3</sup> The source of these figures ~~is~~ <sup>are</sup> the Unitalia Film catalogues, whose listings are far from comprehensive.

Good and the Bad: and here is the essential conflict between the relatively simple resources of the hero and the sophisticated technology of the villain - a staple element of the later films. FISTFUL also introduces the machine gun, an indiscriminate death-disseminator which Corbucci turned into a conventional prop. Often, the machine gun is treated as a curious objet d'art, with filigree fittings and complicated tripods. The one in RETURN OF RINGO bears a nameplate - "Butterfly." The hero's six-gun is regularly contrasted with more exotic hardware. In FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, Colonel Mortimer has a collection of pistols for every occasion, though little use is made of his armoury and for the final showdown he abandons his "cross-belly rig" in favour of Monco's traditional holstered Colt. Simi and Leva produced the Colonel's outfit, and for THE BIG GUNDOWN they extended the contrast, juxtaposing Cuccillo's throwing-knife, the gringo lawman's Colt, and the Prussian's silver six-gun, low slung in a counterweighted aluminium holster. Simi's firearms for THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY are particularly interesting: instead of conventional .45's he deploys the early "Navy" Colts and Remingtons, stock issue in the Civil War.

Gradually, the Good man's weaponry became as exotic as the Bad's. In DJANGO KILL, the hero fashions bullets out of gold because he's heard they sink deeper. The first gun in TODAY ITS ME is made of wood: Bill Kiowa has spent five imprisoned years practicing with it. Silence packs a Mauser Bolo (the film is set in 1892, the year the gun appeared) which Tigero steals when he is dead. The characters in the Mexi-Westerns pack all manner of foreign automatics. And the heroes of the Circus-Westerns, needless to say, have the most eccentric tastes of all. Sartana and Sabata share a preference for four-barreled Derringers: Sartana's is decorated with hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs; Sabata's has an extra barrel in the stock. Guns are



always being concealed in brief-cases, banjos, crutches and organ pipes. And no matter how many barrels or chambers a gun has, it rarely runs out of bullets. And the bullets never miss.

The most eccentric of all the shootin' irons, perhaps even an example of the how the early Westerns had to make and mend, is the blunderbus - a veteran of the Battle of Waterloo - in A PISTOL FOR RINGO. Juan Alberto Soler, art director on both the Ringo pictures, had a flair for incongruity (sweaty bandits in plush hacienda in A PISTOL; sweaty hero in plush bandits' lair in THE RETURN), and his quirky props gave provided much incidental humour. ~~In general,~~ <sup>Often,</sup> the films are fascinated not only by firearms, but by how they work. The heroes of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY and TODAY IT'S ME take time out to disassemble their pistols, listening with satisfaction to the clicks. In A PROFESSIONAL GUN, Polack is the only man who knows how to put together a machine gun: he, like several other Corbucci heroes, is a gun runner - an unthinkable profession for the Good guy of an American Western, but like bounty killing a legitimate enterprise in the Italian West.

Displays of sharpshooting, since they smack of practice rather than innate ability, are very rare. What shooting galleries there are, are usually bizarre - in particular, the ingenious devices Perez Cubero fashioned for the crippled gunfighter in BANDIDOS. In context, Cubero's complicated set-ups had an ironic value, since when Martin finally sets out after Kane, he resorts to a sawn-off shotgun. Though guns and their accoutrements are the most obvious of the Italian Western's properties, however, they are far from unique. Baroque bric-a-brac punctuates the films from FISTFUL on. Simi's decors for SABATA are particularly rich, including a player piano, a gramophone, mechanical duellists, and a spring-loaded

sword-ejecting cane. Stranger still, and a good deal more disturbing, is Cubero's work on DJANGO KILL: dressing here includes a torture chamber, a barrel organ, and a flute which fires curari darts. The Mexi-Westerns feature trappings of the modern age - automobiles, motorcycles, even aeroplanes - and occasionally they uncover something with a genuine native flavour, such as the straw coffins for the children in QUIEN SABE? (designed by Sergio Canevari).

Interiors are either genuinely baroque - richly hung and carpeted suites generally occupied by villains - or minimally decorated. Sometimes the latter, through their shambles and decay, attain a baroque quality of their own. The most memorable of the conventionally baroque interiors include Stengel's home in SABATA, Brokston's ranch in THE BIG GUNDOWN, and Morton's railroad coach: all work by Carlo Simi. The best of the baroque shambles include the Bad Brother's lair in 1000 DOLLARS ON THE BLACK, a ruined Aztec temple<sup>4</sup>; the assumed poverty of Hagerman in DJANGO KILL; the sod-hut Posada in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST; and the sparse saloon in BANDIDOS - necessarily vast, to accommodate Dallamano's ~~most~~ extravagant camerawork (such as fast close-up tracking shots that follow bottles sliding along the bar). Warehouses are popular for dark, confusing shoot-outs: several films climax amid the jumble of a storeroom.

At times dressing is so imaginative that it bears little or no relation to our concept of the "real" West; at others it is painstakingly authentic, as if posters, bottles and hardware had been drawn from the pages of an illustrated history book. And, all too often, the properties are as lacklustre as the pasteboard sets. It is sad, but traditionally

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<sup>4</sup> Cardone's film is, I believe, the only Italian Western to make use of "trick" photography in the form of a glass-shot. The temple, crouched at the foot of a weirdly-coloured rock outcrop, is almost entirely a painted miniature.



true, that in this context only a handful of films and two or three artists' names recur. The standard of art direction overall is still far higher than it had ever been in the American Western, but in the end it was down to the producers and directors - only a few of whom, Leone, Corbucci, Sollima, seemed to realise fully and consistently the importance of the designer's role.

TECHNIQUE - THE FEEL

It is necessary to consider the use of Costume separately from the other aspects of design, since its application to the narrative is somewhat different. Costume in the Italian Western has two functions - to reveal, and to conceal. By this I don't mean plunge necklines and masks (though these occur), but rather that the way a character dresses supplies us with certain information, or an absence of information from which we can draw conclusions. A costume can say something positive - whether the wearer is wealthy, for instance - or something negative - that the wearer is an indeterminate element. In A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS we know by looking at John Baxter that he is rich and idle; the Rojas' dress indicates their vanity and group narcissism; their hired hands wear the garb of gunfighters. Joe's costume, on the other hand, is an aid to anonymity. His clothes are old and dirty, and he wears a Mexican poncho: he manifests no occupation other than drifter or loafer. Of course Joe is a redoubtable pistolero, and we, the audience, know it. What is important is that the other inhabitants of his world do not. His anonymity is the key to his survival. His dress allies him to no faction, puts him on neither side of the law, and hence enables him to assume any allegiance, to claim loyalty to either outlaw band. The Good man always looks anonymous, vaguely disreputable but not quite criminal. The pattern is established, and we can henceforth identify him by his poncho, shabby jeans and stubble - aware at the same time that the other protagonists are deceived.

In FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, Leone plays upon our costume associations. The introduction of each protagonist is via some iconographic item of dress - and often the iconography

is misleading. The first we see of the Colonel is a large black Bible. Like his fellow-passenger, we assume from the book and his funereal garb that he is a clergyman. But there is nothing priestly in the way he ignores the little man, or in his hawklike features when he lowers the book. The man in black is something else - a sinister gambler at best, more probably a villain. So far, the costume-game is routine stuff. It is the trick an American Western might have played (as in THE BRAVADOS, for instance - where the "undertaker" is really a jail-breaker). But Leone goes a step further, questioning the conventional logic with which we make such assumptions. He understands his iconography, and knows that shown certain things (a bible, a mean face) we will make certain deductions. He lets us deduce, and promptly proves us wrong. The "Cavalry" in FISTFUL is a band of outlaws in disguise; the minister/gambler is in fact the Good guy.

Just as we have contrasted their philosophies, it is worth comparing Leone's use of costume with Peckinpah's. Dress in Peckinpah's early Westerns is "realistic" in the sense that it is deglamorised - yet it continues to make obvious points about the men who wear it. In MAJOR DUNDEE the heroes Dundee and Tyreen dress and look the sort of men they are: the prissy, spit-and-polish Yankee, the cool and dignified Confederate. Blurred at the edges, they are recognisable stock types. More obviously still, Gil Westrum's dishonesty in RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY is mirrored by his bogus Buffalo Bill outfit and phony beard. Using American terms of reference, the characters in an Italian Western do not look like what they are. Monco dresses like a deadbeat, the Colonel like a minister, Indio like a peon with a si-si-sombrero. A new set of rules for identifying characters is being created. For the influence of the new convention upon the old, consider the opening of THE WILD BUNCH,

where an elaborate costume deception (bandits disguised as soldiers, "lawmen" who look like bandits) plays upon our expectations in just the same way.

Revelation and deception are not such simple terms as they first appear. A costume may reveal someone's identity to all and sundry, or to the audience alone. It may conceal his identity from his enemies or from all of us, and it may do so through anonymity or, more commonly, through a misleading association.

A costume which reveals the wearer's identity to all is most commonly a uniform - as worn by the Mexican troops in DJANGO and A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS. In other circumstances, a symbol of strength and security, in the Italian West a uniform indicates vulnerability. One does not survive by displaying colours and marching in ordered ranks, but by being inconspicuous and unpredictable. A military column courts disaster, and is invariably ambushed before it has marched a hundred yards. But if uniforms per se suggest weakness, para-military outfits often convey a sort of strength. Mexican bandits are immediately identifiable by their dress - sombreros, gaudy shirts, flared trousers, bandanas and bandoliers. Multiply the bandit's costume by a score or more, and you have a uniform: the regulation dress of Leone's and Corbucci's Mexicans. Most of this dressing was by Carlo Simi, but he did not originate the style - it has been the haute couture of the bandido since the Silents. Other outlaws affect characteristic outfits: Simi's ankle-length dusters for Cheyenne's gang have a surreal and alien quality, yet they were based on authentic period dress. The dusters, which are what everyone remembers best of ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, were extended versions of costumes Simi had already used in FACE TO FACE and THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY. They play an important narrative role as well - ~~since~~ Frank and his men wear <sup>dusters</sup> ~~them~~ in an attempt to have Cheyenne blamed for the

McBain murders. Cubero's costumes for DJANGO KILL have particular characteristic qualities: each group of protagonists is isolated by its clothes. Uniformed soldiers - in a state of pathetic undress - are massacred by two distinct sets of bandits, Mexican and American. The gringos then betray their former partners, only to be strung up in turn by the townsmen, who wear frock coats and aprons. At which point, Sorro and his gay "muchachos" turn up, dressed from head to toe in tight black dude-ranch outfits, trimmed with white lace. Questi's film grows more bizarre as it progresses: Cubero's costumes do likewise.

While some forms of dress have obvious connotations, others <sup>within the film</sup> have meaning only for the spectator. The most common is the poncho of the bounty killer or avenger - in its own way, as much a convention as the legendary White Hat. The poncho conceals the hero's person and his gun, but enables the spectator to make an affirmative identification. Similarly, the black undertaker-outfit identifies another sort of hero - calculating rather than instinctive, but equally able to claim allegiance to any faction. The man in black became the stock hero of the Circus-Westerns: in I'M SARTANA - I'LL DIG YOUR GRAVE, the man is so iconographically identifiable that the villain has only to don a black cloak to throw suspicion on the hero. In an inferior picture, all the costumes start to look like uniforms. Surprisingly, Simi himself has been guilty of this - the cast of TEXAS ADDIO look as if they all have the same tailor, which is quite distinctive but not what the <sup>plot</sup> ~~film~~ requires.

The use of costume as an icon, revealing the wearer's identity to us alone, is synonymous with concealing it from his enemies. But costumes which conceal the wearer's true nature from all concerned - including the audience - are a quite different

category. Whereas the rivals in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY don discarded army uniforms to facilitate their passage through the War zone, our first glimpse of Ramon Rojo leads us to assume he actually is an army officer; FOR A DOLLAR IN THE TEETH has a similar sequence where the bandits disguise themselves as a procession of monks; and we are unsure in ONCE UPON A TIME which gang is Cheyenne's, and which Frank's. The Circus-Westerns are particularly hot on disguises. Not only is the Bad man normally robbing his own bank, but he is doing it with the aid of bandits disguised as bank guards or soldiers. Sabata and Sartana dress their enemies up to look like them, and disguise themselves improbably as portraits and hat-stands. The Bad guys are always fooled.

Costuming in the Italian Western was never subtle - as the form played itself out, ~~they~~<sup>it</sup> became outlandish beyond belief. Sabata and Sean wear jackets lined with dynamite. Scalper Jack in SHANGHAI JOE has a frock-coat lined with knives, and ends up stabbing himself to death. Banjo in SABATA sports a catsuit festooned with bells. The mute sidekick in INDIO BLACK fires deadly ball-bearings from his boots (don't ask how). Luciano Vincenzoni's original script for DEATH RIDES A HORSE contained a bar-room sequence where the bouncers all wore powdered wigs and doublets: sadly, it was never used. Yet amid the profusion of outrageous, inventive, or simply silly costumes, one item is conspicuously lacking. I know of only two films where the hero chose to wear a bullet-proof vest, and in both - A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS and THE SPECIALIST - its value was eventually questionable. It has to do, of course, with being a Man. Even the Italian Western had rules - rules of dress included.

The other vital contribution to the "feel" of the Italian Western was made by the soundtrack - both the musical score and the incidental sounds themselves. The music is the most striking aspect of certain films, and many people who have never knowingly seen an Italian Western could whistle you the main theme from THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY. But it is important to bear in mind that there are two different sorts of soundtrack music: that which provides a backdrop, reinforcing the image and the action; and that which creates an atmosphere in its own right, independent of the images - but hopefully in tune with them. The former is exemplified by the forgettable "background" music of many Hollywood pictures and most television drama. The latter is well illustrated by Bernard Herrmann's scores for, say, PSYCHO and TAXI DRIVER: Herrmann's strings complement and enhance Hitchcock's film, and generate a tension Scorsese is quite incapable of creating.

The scores for many Italian Westerns are original, experimental and memorable, yet they belong for the most part to that category of music which underlines the visuals. Ennio Morricone's showdown themes are a classic example. The "Triello" which accompanies the final confrontation in THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, with horns, guitar and percussion over a full orchestra, is emphatic rather than contrapuntal. It supplements a tension that is already there, in the deliberate choreography and the increasing rapidity of the cuts. It does not create tension, in the way that Herrmann's pointed underscoring of the windshield wipers does in PSYCHO. In many cases, Morricone's music could create such tension, but generally it is not used to that end. An Italian Western score emphasises the action - whether it is a major theme which may determine the cutting pattern ("Il Triello" and the piece which accompanies Tuco's frenzied race to find the gold), or an abstract backdrop of sound (the Desert theme and the concrete



music which accompanies the stake-outs in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE and ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST).

When music is a counterpoint to action, it usually takes the form of a short motif for one instrument. Often the intention is parodic - as with the trill we hear when Joe shifts his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, or the shriek which cuts off Tuco's final torrent of abuse. Such a motif may recall some earlier occasion when music was actually part of the action - the gunfight theme in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE is introduced by the chimes of Indio's musical watch; the showdown theme in Sollima's THE BIG GUNDOWN begins with a few bars of Beethoven, recalling a scene where one of the participants played Für Elise on the piano and proposed a duel. Some of the most striking motifs - the bell that signifies the strongbox in El Paso, the organ over Indio's parable - are ironic commentaries on the action, investing the scene with extra richness.

It is in his "Dollars" music that Morricone demonstrates his greatest range - scoring for orchestra, solo instruments and voices. Some themes are repeated, others occur only once. Abstract visuals accompany his main themes - colour matte montages in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS and THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY, titles sliding in and shattering in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. The three scores have common elements - the use of distinctive "Western" instruments (acoustic guitar, jew's harp, cracking whips), chanting chorus and heavy percussion. In his other soundtrack music, one instrument tends to predominate - Spanish guitar with choral backing in DEATH RIDES A HORSE, wailing vocals in NAVAJO JOE, wind instruments in THE BIG GUNDOWN. If Morricone's later work is less interesting in its own right,



it is probably because so many of his more recent scores are variations on one basic theme, with little difference in instrumentation - DUCK! YOU SUCKER is one example, and the same is true of most of his non-Western soundtracks. Like the writers and directors, composers tended readily towards parody (note the American-style scores of the Ringo films, and Francesco de Masi's "Man From Nowhere" theme for ARIZONA COLT) and self-parody - evident in many sub-Morricone work and in some of Morricone's own scores (the incongruous watch-chimes in "Il Triello" and the Wagnerian allusions of MY NAME IS NOBODY).

All the music discussed so far comments on the action (the chanted vocals of DEATH RIDES A HORSE do so literally), but only as one element in a composite that includes visuals, choreography, sound effects and occasionally the spoken word. The one Italian Western score which actually presages action, rather than serving as a continuous commentary, is Morricone's ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. It is nothing new, of course, for a character to have his own musical theme; but in Leone's earlier films such themes had been only brief recurring motifs. In ONCE UPON A TIME, each of the protagonists - and there are five of them - has his or her own leitmotif. Jill's is the main theme - a lush orchestral work with a woman's voice over. Cheyenne's is earthy in the extreme - a tuneless piano and a man's whistle endlessly repeating the same phrase. Morton's theme is a piano with soft orchestral backing - superceded by the sound of lapping waves. The avenger's is a succession of prolonged, mournful wails on the harmonica, without the support of other instruments. And Frank's is a harsh piece for electric guitar, taken up at one stage by the trumpet. The five leitmotifs are used conventionally at times, as background to the character and some indication of personality (Cheyenne's theme is coarse and overstated, Harmonica's distant and enigmatic); but they also

serve to warn of the impending presence of a character, often coupled with a change of scene. For instance, after Morton's ambush has failed, Jill attacks Harmonica for saving a murderer's life. The atmosphere is already tense as he replies, "I didn't let them kill him, and that's not the same thing." She doesn't understand at first. Then suddenly his meaning dawns. "Sure" she says. "It's not the same thing." And all at once, though he is miles away by now, Frank's theme wells up on the soundtrack. "You get dressed" says the avenger. "It's time to go." And as the music builds, we cut to Frank, riding after Morton's train.

Here the music has taken the place of a visual, doing the work of an early cutaway or a dissolve (which Leone's sharp cuts had rendered almost obsolete). The purpose of the score is quite sophisticated: it works to create a picture rather than to supplement one. Similarly, at the end of the film the showdown theme is not a separate piece of music, but a combination of two leitmotifs - Harmonica's and Frank's. And the need for a visual to illustrate ~~Harmonica's~~<sup>Cheyenne's</sup> death is superseded by a sudden break in his theme once he has slumped forward out of shot. Apart from concrete music and the strains of a bar-room band, there are no themes in ONCE UPON A TIME but these of the principal characters. Quite deliberately, Leone presents his credits in silence - or, to be more exact, in the absence of scored music. The soundtrack of the film - exceptionally good, but essentially representative at the same time - treats sound effects as a score in their own right.

No words are spoken by the gunmen at the beginning of ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. The station master, his frightened jabbering an irritation, is locked in a cupboard. Yet there are sounds throughout. The incessant metal grating of a windmill. Heavy heels on planks. The plop-plop of water onto the felt of a

cowboy's hat. Cracking knuckles. The stifled chatter of a telegraph key. The buzz of a fly... We hear the approach of the train, long before we see the trail of smoke.

Sounds are all-important in the next scene: the sudden hush of the crickets is our first indication that all is not well - and when the gunfire begins, it is heard not seen, like the off-screen shots from FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE. As with the visuals, attention to detail is extreme but by no means naturalistic. Noises fade in and out with unreal emphasis - the click of a safety catch is louder than the beat of horses' hooves. In Flagstone, the railroad town, the sound of boilers and hissing locomotives penetrates all the noises of the street. Yet it too fades away, dissolving into distant wind, when we cut to Harmonica's obsessive memory. Natural sounds are always subordinate to myth - when Frank and Harmonica meet for the last time, the clatter of the railway gangs dies away till only the wind remains, and the wind becomes that of the final flashback. The same thing happens in DUCK! YOU SUCKER, when Sean is shot by Guttierrez. The din of battle - flames, explosions, gunfire - disappears, and all we hear is the crack of the automatic and the groan.

MY NAME IS NOBODY even parodies some of Leone's soundtrack conventions. The opening ambush is underscored by the ticking of a clock, every bit as relentless as the trackside windmill; and the cuckoo clock replaces the watch chimes. At the end, sound and visuals go off at tangents, as Beauregard's voice-over counterpoints the start of Nobody's solo career. Though ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST has been my principal example, it is not the only instance of a carefully-planned and wholly integrated soundtrack - nor is Leone's work unique in this respect. Morricone's scores for Corbucci (in particular, BIG SILENCE and COMPANEROS) are as good as any of his early work for Leone, and

his music for THE BIG GUNDOWN is if anything more versatile. And, strangely enough, although the English dubbing of the films is often appalling, the care with which their effects tracks are assembled puts most American features to shame. Leone has remarked more than once that his films are basically silent - that dialogue just adds a little emphasis. Little that is said in an Italian Western is of any real importance ("Just a man" speeches notwithstanding); even iconographic dialogue is curt and telescoped, usually abandoned in favour of a pregnant glance. But films without words are not necessarily silent films. The BIG SILENCE is that of the hero, not of windswept snowscapes echoing with gunfire and Morricone's strings.

Italian Westerns are in this sense cinema par excellence - just as much a composer's and a dubbing mixer's medium, as an actor's or director's.

SOURCES

"The best writer of Westerns was Homer."

Sergio Leone

BBC TV Interview 1976

In essence, the themes of the Italian and the American Western are the same: the conflict of recognisable Good and Evil, against a violent and unpredictable background. The approach to the conflict, its significance and its resolution, not to mention the means by which we make our moral distinctions, are quite different - and the Italian Western repeatedly calls the American's assumptions into question. Nevertheless, there are several American films to which the Italian Western owes a particular debt: for something more than stock characters and the gunfight convention.

One of these is HIGH NOON. Here the community is depicted not as a positive force, but as a rabble, weak and compromised. The townsmen have less interest in justice than in an untroubled existence. Finally they turn against their Marshall at a meeting held within the church. Whether or not this is an accurate picture of frontier life is irrelevant: HIGH NOON is important not as historical recreation but as allegory - in this case, of the American public's acquiescence to McCarthyism. Frank Miller and his gang represent the House Committee, Marshall Kane a witch hunt victim whom no one will support, and so on. Such allegory is a regular feature of the Italian Western - the films of Corbucci and Sollima are particularly consistent in this respect. The Italian image of society, as corrupt and set in its ways (rather than an optimistically-envisioned crucible), is HIGH NOON's. The rampant

cowardice and veniality, particularly of the leading citizens, are characteristic. One finds an equally pessimistic picture of the community in the similarly allegorical OX-BOW INCIDENT.

If the emphasis on positive virtue that characterises SHANE makes it an unlikely antecedent for the Italian Western, the "feel" of the film is often identical. SHANE is a morality fable, cast in a realistic mould. So is the Italian Western, where essentially straightforward moral conflicts are fought out against an authentically grimy backdrop. Shane is Good, the gunman Wilson is Bad, and they dress accordingly - in buckskin and in black. The Italians pare their characters down to bare essentials and dress them to suit. Blondie wears his poncho, Tuco shabby hand-me-downs, Angel Eyes black jacket and pants. SHANE's art direction<sup>1</sup> is in perfect sympathy with the script. Set against ~~the~~ range of snow-capped mountains ~~into which Shane finally disappears~~, is a disgusting muddy huddle of huts which the farmers call a town. The immediate environment is squalid, but its context is one of great beauty. Rarely in any American Western were the constituent parts so harmonious. Generally the different facets of a film (sound, picture, design, even individual shots) give the impression of having been conceived independently - particularly during painful cuts between stock shots and obvious studio "exteriors", for instance.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Designed by Hal Pereira and Walter Tyler.

2 This sort of thing marred B-Westerns and blockbusters alike. De Mille never left the studio if he could help it - even for UNION PACIFIC only stand-ins and the second unit went out on location. Almost all the "location" close-ups in ONE-EYED JACKS are process shots; in CHEYENNE AUTUMN a studio-bound Edward G. Robinson is ineptly matted into a location climax; and a long sequence in MACKENNA'S GOLD involves a confrontation between Gregory Peck, in a studio, and Eli Wallach, in the desert.

The extent to which integrated art direction contributed to the unique atmosphere of SHANE was only matched, in my opinion, by Carlo Simi's work with Leone. The painstaking care in composition, the use of sunlight and shadow, the deep focus shots, and the intelligent utilisation of locations (studio "exteriors" jar only once, at the thanksgiving dance) are all points SHANE and the best Italian Westerns have in common. And it was in the Italian Western that myth and downbeat realism were finally to gel.

Like HIGH NOON, SHANE is an anti-corporate picture. It contends that poor, isolated communities are good; established, mercantile ones evil. The latter, it seems, inevitably attract murderers and the scum of the earth. To complete the political picture, SHANE's township is the hangout of a rich rancher, determined to drive the sobbusters off his land. The world-weary hero appears to have seen it all before, to have fought against frontier tyrants and their minions in the past. THE BIG COUNTRY, for all its confused philosophising, tries to say something similar - but generally the American view of range warfare is that of THE LEFT-HANDED GUN and CHISUM: that there are saintly businessmen as well as sinful ones, and that the saints deserve our admiration. The intervention of a benevolent establishment is a regular facet of many American Westerns. The man from the State Department saves the Indians in CHEYENNE AUTUMN. The kindly sheriff in STAGECOACH gives the Ringo Kid a second chance. The cavalry arrive in the nick of time. That such intrusions are an affront to the Loner myth is something only the Italians seem to have realised.

It is possible also to find similarities between the Italian Western and American cult films like Nicholas Ray's JOHNNY GUITAR and Sam Fuller's FORTY GUNS. Both have certain themes in common



with the Italian Western: baroque decor and sexual ambivalence in JOHNNY GUITAR, sudden violence and perversion in FORTY GUNS. Neither ~~film~~ had much impact in Europe when released, though JOHNNY GUITAR - along with Ray's REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE - has acquired a retrospective following. I think their influence is probably confined to deliberate parody: both films are tongue-in-cheek in any case, particularly FORTY GUNS with its theme song "Long Legged Woman With a Whip." One "Cult Western" which did have some impact, though, is Brando's ONE-EYED JACKS. Its dishonorable, vengeful hero, covert motives, savage violence and sympathetic Mexicans, make it a plausible precursor for the Italian Western. What consolidates the debt is ONE-EYED JACKS' Resurrection motif: caught off guard by his intended victim, the avenger is publicly whipped, his gun-hand shattered with a rifle butt. Like Joe and Django, Rio is a long time recuperating - and as he recovers, his desire for revenge becomes obsessional. The film's ironic twist is itself Italianate: persuaded by the heroine not to go through with his design, the hero is arrested and nearly executed for a crime he did not commit.

Another Brando movie, VIVA ZAPATA!, provided the plot and incidental conflicts for most of the Mexi-Westerns. It has two heroes, a white-collar "Revolutionary" who sells out to the establishment (like Nino in QUIEN SABE?), and an "Ugly" - Zapata - who remains true to his ideals. At one point Zapata says of Fernando,

"Now I know you - no field, no home,  
no wife, no woman."

And this is exactly Chunchu's analysis of Nino. Other elements, such as the hero's execution of a close friend who has betrayed the cause (QUIEN SABE?, TEPEPA, A PROFESSIONAL GUN) and assassinations <sup>on a rainy night</sup> ~~at night in the rain~~ (DUCK! YOU SUCKER) are present in VIVA ZAPATA! Even the conclusion, with Zapata's followers refusing to believe that



he is dead, was borrowed by the Italians for TEPEPA.

Conscious allusions to American Westerns are particularly common in Leone's work. The exchange of prisoners in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS seems to be modelled on a similar scene in RIO BRAVO - the original allusion may well be YOJIMBO's, since Kurosawa called his chambara pictures "Westerns" more than once. FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE is packed with set-pieces that recall the American convention: the young gunfighter's partnership with the old, the piano that stops playing when a stranger enters the bar, the hero <sup>who muses</sup> ~~musing~~ on "buying a little place and settling down."

THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY's allusions are more specific - to the long walk down the street in RIO BRAVO, to the hospital and evacuation scenes of GONE WITH THE WIND. ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST starts with a set of homages to the American Western. Three mean-looking hombres await the arrival of a train (HIGH NOON); the hush of crickets and the flight of birds signals the massacre of the farmer's family (THE SEARCHERS); the avenging hero (Harmonica/Ethan Edwards) arrives too late. The railroad scenes invite many comparisons, and Jill's buggy-ride takes us straight into John Ford country - Monument Valley. Gradually, Leone abandons homage in favour of a concerted investigation of his own conventions, here and even more so in MY NAME IS NOBODY.

For all their surface grime, the Italian Westerns probably got no closer to the reality of the West than their American predecessors. A Western has no more to do with frontier history than science fiction has with science. The Italian hero is stubbly and none too choosy about the company he keeps, but he is still bound by a resolute code which prevents him from, say, shooting an unarmed man. Italian Westerns are every bit as mythological as

American ones. Motives differ, but the myth is constant. Films like BAD COMPANY and DIRTY LITTLE BILLY present a much more accurate impression of what life must have been like in those days, with their misfiring firearms and disease: but as they are not mythological, they are not really Westerns. Trevor Griffiths' play Comedians is about stand-up comics - but it is not a comedy.

The influence of YOJIMBO on its remake has already been considered. In a more general sense, Kurosawa's samurai pictures have ~~had~~ <sup>played</sup> an important part in shaping the philosophy of the films. They make distinctions between comparative evils - between the lazy, cynical drifter and his sadistic adversaries, for instance. Richie's analysis of the samurai in YOJIMBO and SANJURO - "a hero whose only virtue is a negative one: he is not actively concerned in being bad" - applies equally to the bounty killers and avengers. Yet both the samurai and the bounty killer prove themselves moral men: the end result of their activities is good, and not all that they do can be ascribed solely to self-interest. The summary introduction of violence, grotesque and almost comic, is another common element. And even Clint Eastwood's famous cheroot has a Japanese precursor - the toothpick Toshiro Mifune chews throughout YOJIMBO.

Links between the Westerns and earlier Italian cinema are understandable. All the major directors had worked previously on peplums, if only as assistants or screenwriters. Apart from Leone, they continued to work in other genres throughout the Western boom. Though Corbucci's Westerns were almost as influential as Leone's, they were only a small part of his enormous output - since his <sup>early</sup> work with Rossellini, he has directed something like sixty films. The ideology of the Westerns is that of many ~~of the~~ costume epics: a peasant mass is exploited

by corrupt courtiers, delivered by a mythical superman. One can get carried away with the parallel, however: the peasants in the peplums are often presented as idiots, whereas exploited Mexicans are generally somewhat sympathetic. The lack of concern for historical fact, bastardisation of existing myths and creation of a "new" mythology, are inherent in peplum and Western alike, as is the use of recurring names for the heroes, and the pairing of such characters in the later films. From Hercules, Maciste and Goliath to Ringo, Django and Sartana is but a small step. Elements of the spy films and action movies filter through as well, in the calculated schemings, double-crosses and technical hardware of the Westerns; and the contrived tortures and horrific episodes are those of Mario Bava's fantasies and Dario Argento's thrillers. Though their principal interests lay elsewhere, both contributed to the Westerns - Bava as director of ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK, Argento as co-scenarist on ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST and TODAY IT'S ME. An active commercial cinema, where specialisation in any one genre was almost unknown, encouraged the hybrid nature of the Italian Western. While this could, and did, produce many thoughtless formula pieces - it also ensured that many anti-conventional Westerns appeared, the work of directors whose principal interests were political, social, sexual, or even supernatural. This expansion of a genre's scope was the Italian Western's greatest strength.

Even the "Cinema as Art" left its mark upon the form. Leone's later Westerns are as rambling and personal as any of Fellini's films, and ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST contains an obvious allusion to EIGHT & A HALF - the opening sequence, structured identically to the scene where Guido waits in the station for Claudia, and she descends on the opposite side of the tracks. Leone's cameraman Delli Colli went on to work with Pasolini: thereafter he worked with Giuseppe Ruzzolini,

formerly Pasolini's photographer. Carlo Lizzani cast Franco Citti (OEDIPO RE) and Pasolini himself in REQUIESCANT - whose star, the American actor Lou Castel, later worked with Bellocchio, Chabrol and the German new wave directors. "Straight" actors of considerable stature - Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, Jason Robards, Gabriele Ferzetti and Romolo Valli - appeared in Italian Westerns, and Gian Maria Volonte (whom one critic called "Italy's best film actor"<sup>3</sup>) got his start in Leone's pictures after being blacklisted by Italian television. Bertolucci wrote the first treatment for ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST; Alberto Grimaldi, who today produces Bertolucci and Fellini, established himself by backing two of the Dollars films; Leone's screenwriter Luciano Vincenzoni is now a producer for De Laurentis.

Perhaps a contribution by Bertolucci or the presence of Pasolini does not make a cowboy picture Art. But I believe it calls into question the distinction critics still too <sup>readily</sup> make between "art" and "exploitation" films. Films exploit the senses more thoroughly than any other art form - and they have always been primarily a commercial medium. The obvious willingness of certain figures to work on either side of the supposed boundary, the body of common preoccupations, and the conscious cross references (Leone alludes to Fellini; Fellini makes a film dealing with an Italian Western) make that distinction dubious.

Non-cinematic sources are akin to those of any film with a historical basis, and just as tenuous. As we have seen, the Italian Western may recreate the "look" of the West authentically ~~at times~~ - but it is a long way from the historical reality. The main historical source for the films is the Renaissance: native Italian history which provided material for the fiction and dramatics of several nations. At times foreign adaptations

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<sup>3</sup> John Francis Lane, Long Live the Crisis. films & filming April 1970

of Renaissance legends have themselves been made into Westerns. A favourite dramatic source is HAMLET, which has been filmed as a Western twice: THE DIRTY STORY OF THE WEST, scripted by Corbucci and directed by Enzo Girolami, and IN THE DUST OF THE SUN, directed by Riccardo Balducci, both depict one Johnny Amleto's vengeance against his Uncle Claudio for the murder of his father. Other borrowings can be implied - several of the procrastinating revengers, particularly Burt in TEXAS ADDIO, have a Hamlet-like quality. The common inclination of the Jacobean Tragedy and the Italian Western towards devious revenge has already been discussed. JOHN THE BASTARD rings another set of classical changes: it is a loose adaptation of the Don Giovanni story, with its lustful hero eventually crushed by a falling statue in a graveyard.

A common trait is the allegorical use of contemporary material. QUIEN SABE? alludes constantly to South America and the C.I.A., and almost all the Mexi-Westerns invite contemporary reference. The most deliberate of all the allegories is probably THE PRICE OF POWER. A liberal President is assassinated in Dallas, supposedly by a disgruntled Negro, Jack Donovan. Donovan is killed while in custody, and his friend Bill Willer uncovers a plot by powerful business interests to seize control of government in the interregnum. The parallels with the Kennedy assassination are legion. Prior to his arrival in Dallas, handbills are distributed bearing President Garfield's photograph and the legend, "Wanted for Treason." Garfield is shot during an official drive through the city, pronounced dead shortly afterwards. At the enquiry, there is controversy over the source and direction of the fatal shots. It is established that the alleged assassin could not have fired two shots in quick succession - but by this time the fall guy is dead, murdered like Lee Harvey Oswald during a transfer between jails.

+ Be Stronower

THE PRICE OF POWER places Rush To Judgement in the familiar context of an Italian revenge Western. As a film it leaves a lot to be desired (action sequences aside, it is rather dull) but as a political document it is unique. It draws its own conclusions - that the assassination was paid for by Southern businessmen - and implicates a violent reactionary called Wallace and the Vice-President himself; and though Wallace is eventually shot by Willer, the film is uncharacteristically open-ended, with a government agent setting off for Washington to pursue the implicated politicians. The political analysis is not profound - THE PRICE OF POWER displays its colours openly, and its apportioning of blame is simplistic to say the least. But it is interesting for two reasons: as a bold precursor of the films the American Cinema was so slow to make (it is less meticulous than EXECUTIVE ACTION, but more entertaining; closer in its narrative approach to THE PARALLAX VIEW); and as a clear instance of the Italians' allegorical view of the West. The familiar cynicism about institutions of law and justice has a new bite when we realise that the picture is true, and not some pessimist's pipe-dream. THE PRICE OF POWER says as much about the political awareness of the Italian Cinema (and about the American Cinema's lack of same) as any of Francesco Rosi's contemporary documents.

The Mexican Revolution was of course the premise for a number of the films, from QUIEN SABE? on. The Revolution in question is generally that of Villa against Madero, but only QUIEN SABE? and TEPEPA lay much emphasis on historical fact. INDIO BLACK is set during Juarez' rebellion, O CANGACEIRO in Brazil (where it was actually filmed), but both would fit as readily into the QUIEN SABE? mould, and neither is without anachronisms. "If it's a revolution, it's confusion" says Sean in DUCK! YOU SUCKER, and confusion permits the film maker much license. Villa



and Madero are mentioned but never appear - instead we see fictional leaders like Elias and Don Jaime. Many episodes recall historical events, and the Ugly heroes - bandit expropriators for the rebels - are credible enough. Villa himself, Juan declares, was a great bandit before he chose to become a revolutionary. QUIEN SABE? is set at the end of the revolutionary period: an army train is marked with a "Viva Carranza" slogan, and Carranza was almost the last of the revolutionary heroes to become an establishment figure.

The appeal of the Mexican Revolution, with its turbulent politics, shifting allegiances and betrayed ideals, is obvious. Less obvious, but of some significance, are the parallels between the Mexican war, as depicted by the Italians, and the Civil War in Spain. Leone and Corbucci were in their teens when the Spanish War was fought. Brigades of Italian soldiers were in the front lines on both sides - fascist conscripts and republican volunteers. It was perhaps the only truly ideological war ever Europe has ever known, yet it was one of vastly confused loyalties. Though it began as a monarchist rebellion, it was seen by many - perhaps by foreigners most of all - as a revolutionary war, where peasants really did fight against landlords, democrats and radicals against the rule of a privileged elite. The police, the church and the bourgeoisie came out on the side of the fascists or went into hiding: the republicans were divided from the start, and interneine battles weakened their ranks: ~~cripplingly~~ short of arms, they were often forced to steal them from the enemy. For most of its duration, it was an entrenched war, with sieges and guerilla actions the norm.

~~Hardly any~~ <sup>Most</sup> of this ~~cannot be said~~ <sup>is true</sup> of the Mexican wars as well. It is not my intention to claim that the Mexi-Westerns are really allegories dedicated to keeping the spirit of the International

Brigades alive. But I do believe that a bitterness was engendered by the Spanish War, impossible in the case of the Mexican Revolution. For a middle-aged European, the Revolution is a fact of history somewhat more distant than the Great War - but Spain is a living memory. And the memory of how the constitutional Government was treated by the great powers - how Britain, France and the United States refused to allow any aid to reach the opponents of fascism, while Italy and Germany poured troops into Iberia and rained bombs on civilian concentrations - can only have inspired contempt and cynicism in the liberal mind.

Perhaps we should look to recent history for the roots of the Italian Western's radicalism - which is only that of the Italian Cinema itself. Perhaps in Italy's role, in these and subsequent events, lies an explanation for the cynicism and betrayed ideals which constantly recur.

The Westerns were a major part of a prolific industry. They cannot be considered in isolation from that industry, any more than the cinema as a whole can be isolated from the social and political facts that motivate it.



DECLINE AND INFLUENCE

"Le genre (à l'italienne) s'esoufflerait-il déjà?"

Jaques Zimmer, review of THE SPECIALIST  
Image et Son June-July 1970

It was comedy killed the Italian Western.

Strangely enough, when almost all American film genres had been subjected to pastiche and still survived. But the Italian Western was not a genre in the conventional sense. It was a view of a genre, as distanced and as critical of its source as the best of comedies. It was not a pastiche - too many other influences were at work as well - but the distinction was sometimes hard to draw, and many films floundered as a result. The morbid obsession of the best Italian Westerns was always tempered with a cynical and conscious undercurrent. Incidental humour was a constant. But a comic Italian Western was a contradiction in terms: sardonic wit and a fine feel for incongruity are not the same as knockabout.

Apart from the Franco and Ciccio spin-offs <sup>1</sup> there were no true comic Westerns till the late Sixties. The change was signalled by THE BANG-BANG KID, where a tongue-in-cheek narrator guys American and Italian conventions alike, and we cut constantly to fantasy sequences ~~where~~ <sup>with</sup> the villain as a Mediaeval robber-baron and the townspeople his serfs; and Giuseppe Colizzi's GOD FORGIVES - I DON'T. Colizzi's film sounds like a blood-luster of the old school, but after a misleadingly portentous massacre <sup>it</sup> turns into a languorous, jokey trek for mild revenge. The casting is significant: it is the first pairing of Terence Hill and Bud

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<sup>1</sup> Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia were a pair of Italian comics almost as prolific as Abbott and Costello, who starred in a string of genre parodies - peplums, spy films and Westerns. Their most studied was a cod Dollars film entitled IL BELLO, IL BRUTTO, IL CRETINO.

Spencer, erstwhile second-leads. The Good and Ugly combination is quite <sup>live's</sup> electric, though the inevitable comparison with Clint Eastwood and Eli Wallach shows how low the voltage is; and some comic episodes are actually funny, if often laboured - as when water-shy Cat repeatedly has to be carried on Earp's shoulders. Amid the clowning and surface exploration of relationships, the revenge motif is often forgotten, and the climax is most perfunctory - with the mad villain blown up by his own dynamite and the heroes setting off piggy-back once more.

Colizzi repeated his new formula with REVENGE IN EL PASO - actually pitting Hill and Spencer against Eli Wallach this time. The comedy is social, ~~this time~~, with coarse heroes humiliating wealthy villains in their swank abodes, and a background of big-city hotels permitted much baroque dressing. The same year - 1968 - Gianfranco Parolini made his extravagant SARTANA: the first of the entertaining and ultimately destructive Circus-Westerns. All Parolini's Westerns, like his war films and costume epics, revolve around some sort of circus act - the hero is adept at quick changes, sleight-of-hand and disappearing acts; robberies are accomplished with the use of acrobats; carnival sideshows, clowns and jugglers appear throughout. SARTANA is the mould, and all his films tell the same story: an invincible, black-clad hero, aided by a couple of devious sidekicks, outwits and eventually destroys a band of villains planning some devilish scheme (normally an embezzlement). Complex and overpopulated plots are built up, layer on layer, from this flimsy premise; and explained away in three line expositions such as -

"This time you made a mistake. Trying to steal a hundred thousand dollars from the army to buy land which the railroad must some day pay you for. All because of your greed and to satisfy your mania for greatness!"

The speaker is one of the crooked businessmen in SABATA. He and all the stock characters recur - punky kids, psychopaths, bounty-killers, cackling old-timers, malevolent old matrons, Mexicans, effete grandees. SABATA, Parolini's best, is an exotic formula pot-pourri (thanks largely to Carlo Simi running riot on the props) and great fun. The casting of the Circus-Westerns was prestigious in Italian terms, with regular appearances by grand old men like Lee Van Cleef, Frank Wolff, Klaus Kinski and Fernando Sancho. Unlike Colizzi's films with Hill and Spencer (the third of which, BOOT HILL, is set within a circus) the Circus-Westerns show no disinclination towards violence. Their body-count is quite enormous, and particularly plastic. The scores of cartwheeling corpses in a Parolini film are absurd, but at the same time the logical extension of a distanced and ironic attitude to death. It becomes entertainment pure and simple. Characters have the status of targets in a shooting-gallery; inspiration is confined to the number of ways a man can be shot at. Nor is the Circus-West particularly wild: the villains work within the system, the heroes are careful to stay on the right side of the law. Sometimes the Good man is suspected of being a government agent. And over all, low comedy presides - an opportunity for the villain to land face-first in his dinner is never lost.

In SARTANA's wake came the Circus films of other directors: Colizzi's BOOT HILL, and Giuliano Carmineo's Westerns with their mouthful-titles (A CLOUD OF DUST, A CRY IN THE NIGHT - SARTANA ARRIVES; HEADS YOU DIE, TAILS I KILL YOU - THEY CALL ME ALLELUYA; and so forth). Carmineo's films borrow freely from Parolini's, even their titles are amalgams of the old convention and the new, and both directors resort to the old device of American-sounding pseudonyms - "Frank Kramer" for Parolini, "Anthony Ascott" for Carmineo. But it was another Alias, "E.B. Clucher", who rang the Italian Western's death-knell. Clucher was Enzo Barboni, a prolific cameraman who had photographed DJANGO, TEXAS ADDIO and THE HELLBENDERS, and directed one film of his own (THE UNHOLY FOUR)

when in 1970 he took over the Hill/Spencer partnership and made MY NAME IS TRINITY. The relationship (slothful cowpoke and oafish brother) is more or less the same as it was in GOD FORGIVES, but henceforth fisticuffs and good-natured rough-stuff take the place of gunfights - the farcical supplants the morbid. MY NAME IS TRINITY is a mediocre film: the inevitable sequel, TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME, is much better - Trinity has a delicious habit of undercutting our conventional expectations simply by answering the rhetorical questions of his adversaries ("So you think it's going to end here?" "Yes I do."), and the brawls are nicely staged. But the films are comic commentaries and nothing more: most of the new breed ~~of new breed~~ of Westerns that followed them are not even that. Barboni directed another - MAN OF THE EAST, in which Hill played an indolent English lord - and scripted one of Carmineo's films, a characteristic opus entitled HIS PISTOLS SMOKED - THEY CALLED HIM CEMETERY. The familiar plagiarisms occurred: there was JESSE AND LESTER - TWO BROTHERS IN A PLACE CALLED TRINITY; and Michele Lupo, director of ARIZONA COLT and a string of sex-films since, made BEN AND CHARLIE - MY FRIEND, STAND A FOOT AWAY AT LEAST! Several other directors who had abandoned the form returned to make a comedy: Duccio Tessari (director of the Ringo films) made LONG LIVE DEATH - YOURS!; Giulio Petroni (DEATH RIDES A HORSE, TEPEPA) made the Tomas Milian vehicle AT TIMES LIFE IS VERY HARD, ISN'T IT PROVIDENCE?; Damiano Damiani (QUEN SABA?) directed A GENIUS, TWO PARTNERS & A CLOCK, starring Terence Hill and produced by Sergio Leone; Corbucci shot other Mexi-Westerns, tongue firmly in his cheek.

By 1973, the year of the first PROVIDENCE sequel, old-style Italian Westerns were a down-market curiosity - made with such low budgets and so little care that the appearance of an airplane in the sky was no longer cause for a re-take. The advent of

IS THIS A REF TO FERRARIS'S  
DON'T TOUCH THE WHITE WOMAN?  
MUST SEE THIS FILM! (1974)

Italianate Kung Fu and Bocaccio-porno killed off ~~even~~ the quickies. Even the comedies waned after a while, and the last big-budget knockabout was Parolini's WE'RE NO ANGELS (sic) - a twentieth-century Western featuring hang-gliders.

But the real Italian Western has a fitting epitaph. MY NAME IS NOBODY, directed in 1973 by Tonino Valerii, but co-authored and supervised by Leone, is a thorough exploration of the Italian Western to date. It is also, in a wider sense, a commentary on the creation of a myth - hence it contains more than one allusion to Peckinpah. The opening sequence is classic Leone: three hard-looking men ride into a grubby little town and terrorize the barber and his boy. They lay an ambush for Jack Beauregard, who comes in for a shave. And in one prolonged, immaculately choreographed shot, Beauregard guns all three down in slow motion - a technique Leone had used before, but which here seems a conscious nod to Peckinpah. Setting off for New Orleans, Jack crosses paths with a strange young man called Nobody. Nobody is fishing, unconventionally, waist-deep in a stream. His eyes travel from the fish to Jack - from one prey to another - and glow with recognition. Before Beauregard catches his boat for Europe, Nobody ~~is determined to~~<sup>will</sup> make him the greatest gunfighter in the West - by pitting him against one hundred and fifty outlaws in a stand-up duel.

The whole film is as as bizarre, as convoluted, as crystal-clear, and as deliberately allusive, as this. Nobody's plan is nonsense, and we sympathise with Jack when he declares "My only destiny is to get the hell out of here." Yet it is compelling nonsense, like the "Just a man" stuff in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST - the compelling nonsense of the Western Myth. ~~Hence~~ Nobody's dream comes true. Jack decimates the Wild Bunch, and we witness their defeat, frozen into the sepia pages of a history

book. And when Jack and Nobody face each other, as old and young gunfighters have always done, their confrontation is recorded - nay, choreographed - by a photographer from the local newspaper.

MY NAME IS NOBODY is the sort of Western a film buff might make - but it is the work of a consummate visionary and a practiced craftsman. It never goes overboard - although it falters now and then, in the circus sideshows and Trinity-style knockabouts. Above all it illustrates the attraction of a myth, the desire to let the impossible take place: Jack is "killed" yet he survives; Nobody makes Jack the greatest of heroes, and promptly becomes a greater one himself. Despite its comic episodes, NOBODY is a melancholy film, full of sadness at the death of the West it has depicted, at the death of the form it represents. "Someone like you's gotta go out with style" Nobody tells his hero. The Italian Western could not have had a more stylish epitaph.

No phenomenon as popular could have failed to influence the American Western. American capital financed a number of the later films (ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST, DEAD OR ALIVE, A MAN CALLED SLEDGE), and a trend for American Westerns in the Italian mode rapidly developed. HANG 'EM HIGH, Clint Eastwood's first American Western - not counting countless episodes of RAWHIDE - was an unhappy mismatch of American agonizing and Italianate ferocity. Cheap and nasty second features like CRY BLOOD APACHE and THE ANIMALS were ~~even~~ <sup>still</sup> less successful imitations; but Gordon Douglas' BARQUERO (1970) was a lively saga à l'italienne, with a dream-haunted, junkie villain, an Ugly by the name of Mountain Phil, and the weighty presence of Van Cleef. By and large, imitations made by other countries were just as doleful. The British Western CAPTAIN APACHE - shot in Spain



with a Spanish and American cast - was occasionally strange but mostly bad. Various Mexican productions attempted to combine Italian baroque with the graphic gore of the modern American Western: MARCADO was an opportunist instance with considerable flair (gay bandidos who play-act Shakespeare and get themselves tatoood); Jodorowsky's EL TOPO was a long tasteless pastiche of Leone and Fellini, lacking either man's taste or understanding of his material - critically it was a great success.

As we have seen, the Italians did not introduce visual realism to the Western. The influence of the form was to make a quasi-authentic period flavour the rule rather than the exception. The gritty American Westerns of the Seventies lack the blatant mythologising of the Italian films, but they share their down-at-heel concentration on dirt and decay. The Italians' use of violence was equally mythological, and this is one reason that so many attempts at emulation failed. Violence in the Italian Western is symbolic, not literal, constantly treated as one of the "games" with which it is so often juxtaposed. In the serious American Western, I think death has always been intended as "real." It is one thing for faceless Indians to bite the dust, quite another for Wilson to shoot a man without good cause in SHANE. And, as technology improved and censorship diminished, Hollywood was able to depict what dying was "really like." Jets of fake blood spurting out of explosive gunshot wounds never figure in the Italian Western, for they infer either that death is awful (not usually the Italian intention), or that, like a choreographed dance routine, it can be beautiful and glorious (definitely not the philosophy behind the Italian Western, where the true hero is the cunning bastard who survives).

Compare the massacre of Mexican soldiers in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS with the one which concludes THE WILD BUNCH. In Leone's film

the soldiers die to illustrate a point - that, however Bad Joe seems, the murderer Ramon is worse. In Peckinpah's, death is the point - the necessary and climactic ritual through which the heroes achieve their immortality. Both sequences are, in their own way, salacious and exploitative. But Leone's leads cynically to a moral conclusion; Peckinpah's is its own conclusion and consummation. Though THE WILD BUNCH owes some debts to the Italian Western, its depiction of violence is not one of them.

NO. IT'S A STYLISTIC DIFFERENCE ONLY. THE INTENTION IS THE SAME.

Similarly, American Westerns made in Europe bore only a surface resemblance to the Italians'. The earliest examples, (CUSTER OF THE WEST, SON OF A GUNFIGHTER) were wholly traditional; the later ones (DOC, THE HUNTING PARTY) were the offspring of Monte Hellman and Sam Peckinpah, not Leone. EL CONDOR, made in Almeria with a European production team, has a cynical moral tag with a blunt Italian edge, but the political awareness of more recent American features (DOC, PAT GARRETT, BUFFALO BILL & THE INDIANS) is the result of a general trend rather than Italian influence. Douglas' allegorical POSSE owes more to Watergate than to THE PRICE OF POWER. American attempts at Mexi-Westerns (100 RIFLES, PANCHO VILLA) have been particularly feeble: Kazan's VIVA ZAPATA! had worthy successors in Italy alone.

Yet the philosophy of the Italian Western resonates elsewhere: in some of the more anarchic political thrillers and the gangster films. Carlo Lizzani's CRAZY JOE tells the same story as his Westerns did, against a similar background of violent proscripsts battling wealthy criminals. And occasionally, a sequence or a character in an American picture recalls the Italian Western in its heyday. Two of the villains in Altman's McCABE & MRS MILLER - the ox with the voice of an Englishman, and the monstrous little boy - could have stepped straight out of a Corbucci film.



And the mad albino Bad Bob, from Huston's LIFE AND TIMES OF JUDGE ROY BEAN, is another such immigrant. Here is John Milius' description, from the published screenplay -

"A rider approached alone - silhouetted in the distance. As he drew closer it was seen that he was entirely dressed in black silk and leather. He wore shiny leather wristlets with silver and turquoise ornaments on them. His hat was flat and wide and there was a silver-rimmed rattlesnake band around it. He wore a pair of Colt six-shooters and a knife on his shining boots - the pearl handles of all were heavily notched. His eyes were dark and cruel, his hair long... On his saddle horn he had a child's skull mounted, his spurs were of the Mexican variety - long and sharp." <sup>2</sup>

How was the ride from Cinecittà, Bob?

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<sup>2</sup> John Milius, The Life & Times of Judge Roy Bean Bantam Books

EPILOGUE

"Every time I make a Western, I say 'This is the last.' I'm tired and irritable, I hate horses and the desert. I go back to town wanting to make a picture about a man who drives a car, uses the phone, and watches TV...

But once I'm there I soon start thinking that in films there's nothing finer than a horseman on the horizon, against a red sky.

And so I carry on."

Sergio Corbucci

Image et Son

How, then, to evaluate the Italian Western?

In terms of the artists it produced, who work in other fields today? In terms of its philosophy? Or in terms of the films per se?

Its contribution to the personnel of contemporary cinema has been immense. Clint Eastwood made his name as an actor through Italian Westerns; his work as a director - and it is good work - shows a visual debt to Leone. Gian Maria Volonte, perhaps the best and certainly the most volatile actor in Italy today, was another Leone "discovery." Italian Westerns boosted the careers of Lee Van Cleef, Eli Wallach and Jason Robards, and introduced Italians like Tomas Milian, Gabriele Ferzetti and Terence Hill to an international audience. Klaus Kinski, who only in Hersog's AGUIRRE found a role worthy of his stature, came to light via supporting parts in Italian Westerns. Directors of photography

like Massimo Dallamano and Enzo Barboni were able to experiment with innovative composition and colour; one of them, Tonino Delli Colli, has since done ~~quite~~ outstanding work with Wertmuller and Pasolini. Though I have doubts about much of Ennio Morricone's recent music, some of his Western scores (in particular, the Dollars films, ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST and BIG SILENCE) are among the most original and inventive I have ever heard. Morricone's contribution to the Italian cinema is undeniably immense, and his score for Bertolucci's 1900 suggests that he is still capable of great things. It is hard to judge Carlo Simi on his Western designs alone, but I believe his talents to be vast and in most fields untapped: he and his Spanish contemporary Jaime Perez Cubero easily outstripped their American counterparts.

As far as directors are concerned, I consider Sergio Leone to be one of the most original talents the Italian Cinema has produced. And, excessive qualification be damned, I would call him the best Italian director of the Sixties. Which is not to demean the burgeoning talents of Rosi, Bertolucci and Bellocchio, nor the established masters. But Leone's cohesive creation of an imaginary multi-layered world, at once familiar and wholly alien, horrific, comic and absurd, is a unique achievement. His films have flaws, and he seems at present daunted by his past success, unable for a multitude of reasons to embark upon his gangster movie, ONCE UPON A TIME - AMERICA. Yet he is an auteur in the true sense of the word, and his creative/destructive potential is Wellesian.

Corbucci is a wild variable - at times so vulgar as to defy a second viewing, at times so intense and confident that his films are genuinely hypnotic. If Leone is the Italian Western's Ford, Corbucci is its Hawks - inconsistent and occasionally

awful, but sometimes good beyond all expectation: a talent never to be discounted. Sergio Sollima is similar to Corbucci. His worst film, RUN MAN RUN, is a good reason never to take Italian Westerns seriously; his best, FACE TO FACE, is an excellent subject for critical attention and analysis.

All philosophies are transient. That of the Italian Western is naturally no exception. Cynicism is not a solution to any problem: implicitly, it accepts a status quo and disparages positive action. At the same time as it presented a world of political corruption and social injustice, the Italian Western said, "there is nothing to be done about it." It contented itself with the righting of individual wrongs, never with the overthrow of a corrupt system per se. Such overthrow may underly the films, but it does not take place. Even in the Mex-Westerns, the Revolution is still to be won. Now this is a valid premise for agit-prop, but the Italian Western rarely functioned as such. Most often it accepted a corrupt set-up as the norm, and took potshots at the bourgeoisie instead. Its greatest contribution, to my mind, is its elevation of the positive survivor: not the negative, fascists-by-default of CABARET and SEVEN BEAUTIES, but the active Uglies - men and even women like Tuco<sup>+J.L.</sup>, who could remain true to themselves and avoid getting killed for someone else's principles. The distinction may not always be immediately apparent, but it is there, and it is the essence of the Italian hero. He survives because he lives off-centre, divorced from the demands of life within society. It is a fantastic premise, fundamentally anarchic: the true hero may not know much, but he knows enough to stay alive. He will not live according to the phony rules of others. He is honest with (if not about) himself.

As to the films themselves, these are the Italian Westerns which to my mind deserve recognition in their own right - FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE (because it is Leone's created world in its purest form, stunningly constructed), THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY (because it is a masterpiece of storytelling, a picaresque novel on celluloid, cruel and hypocritical as hell, and very funny), ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST (for all its flaws, the Italian Western par excellence), Corbucci's DJANGO and BIG SILENCE - perverse and monstrous films, offering nothing but despair, yet compulsive and more aware than any American Western of the period - Lizzani's REQUIESCANT and Questi's DJANGO KILL, because, whether or not they are great Westerns, these are great films. In fact the latter two transcend the Western mould completely: they are works as personal and as significant as anything by Buñuel, and they merit as serious a consideration.

I am very partial to Italian Westerns. I am not uncritical of them. But in the end, their inherent value and their influence outweigh what negative aspects they may have had. The Italian Western was bold, and different, and occasionally smacked of genius - and that, in films, is rare indeed.

Ten Thousand Ways to Die  
Alex Cox

FILMOGRAPHY

Forty-four important, interesting  
or irritating Italian Westerns.

Title used within the text is followed  
by alternative Italian and English-  
language titles, and Italian release  
date. Pseudonyms are listed only in  
the case of production crew.

d = director

sc = screenwriter

ph = director of photography

ad = art director      Cost = costumes

m = composer

lp = list of players

n/c= not credited

AND GOD SAID TO CAIN

E Dio Disse a Caino / Revenge At Sundown

1969

d Antonio Margheritti (Anthony Dawson)  
sc Giovanni Adessi, Antonio Margheritti  
ph Luciano Trassati, Riccardo Pallottini  
ad Mario Giorsi  
m Carlo Savina

lp Klaus Kinski (Gary Hamilton); Peter Carsten (Acombar);  
Marcella Michelangeli (Mary); Antonio Cantafora (Dick)

Released from prison, Hamilton takes his revenge on Acombar, who framed him five years before. In the course of one windswept night he destroys the villain's band and confronts him in his rancho stronghold, which burns to the ground.

An unusually gothic piece, with Kinski cast against type as the spectral hero. The best of Margheritti's Westerns, though he disliked making it and extra scenes were shot after he left the picture. The villains are uncharacteristically rounded, the script intelligent. Conventional exposition is ignored, and the film's unities are almost classical.

ARIZONA COLT

Arizona Colt / The Man From Nowhere

1965

d Michele Lupo  
sc Ernesto Gastaldi  
ph Guglielmo Mancori  
ad Walter Patriarca  
m Francesco de Masi  
lp Giuliano Gemma (Arizona); Fernando Sancho (Gordo);  
Roberto Camardiel (Whiskey); Nello Pazzafini (Kay)  
Corrine Marchand (Jane).

When Gordo organises a wholesale jailbreak, Arizona is the only prisoner who refuses to join his band. The townsmen hire Arizona to bring in Kay, Gordo's lieutenant; he does so at great personal cost. Against his better judgement, he liberates his ungrateful employers and takes his revenge.

Opportunist amalgam of DJANGO, FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE and the RINGO films. But as Arizona, Gemma is less sympathetic than he was as Ringo - and an early Good/Ugly relationship develops. Camardiel was one of Indio's gang in FOR A FEW, and played Sorro in DJANGO KILL.



BANDIDOS

Bandidos / Crepa Tu...Che Vivo Io! / Guns of Death 1967

d Massimo Dallamano (Max Dallman)

sc Juan Cobos

ph Emilio Foriscot

ad Jaime Perez Cubero

m Egisto Macchi

lp Enrico Maria Salerno (Martin); Terry Jenkins (Ricky Shot)

Venantino Venantini (Kane); Chris Huerta (Rigonza)

Crippled by Kane, his former pupil, sharpshooter Richard Martin runs a travelling sideshow. He attempts to turn his new student, "Ricky Shot" into a surrogate avenger - but Ricky betrays him and Martin dies. Ashamed, Ricky destroys Kane and his gang.

Intelligent, pessimistic revenge story with much incidental grotesquerie (a dying bandit terrorizes a saloon; the pianist is a bald woman). The photography is fluid, the lighting immaculate. Dallamano had photographed two of Leone's films, and this was his first shot at directing.

THE BIG GUNDOWN

La Resa Dei Conti

1966

d Sergio Sollima

sc Sergio Donati, Sergio Sollima, Franco Solinas

ph Carlo Carlini

ad Carlo Simi

m Ennio Morricone

lp Lee Van Cleef (Corbett); Tomas Milian (Cucillo);

Walter Barnes (Brokston); Fernando Sancho (Segura)

Lawman Jonathan Corbett is hired to track down Cucillo, accused of rape and murder. During the pursuit, Corbett learns that the guilty party is in fact the son of his employer, Brokston - and he sides with Cucillo against his boss.

Sollima's first Western - an excellent cat-and-mouse story with political overtones. The bandit/revolutionary was to become Milian's stock role. Social commentary (Corbett's senatorial ambitions, the poverty of Mexicans and Mormons) is worked painlessly into the narrative. A hurried sequel, RUN MAN RUN, was far less successful.

BIG SILENCE

Il Grande Silenzio

1968

d Sergio Corbucci  
bc Sergio Corbucci, Bruno Corbucci, Mario Amendola  
ph Silvano Ippoliti  
ad Ennio Michettoni  
m Ennio Morricone  
lp Jean-Louis Trintignant (Silence); Klaus Kinski (Tigrero);  
Luigi Pistilli (Pollicut); Frank Wolff (Sheriff);  
Vonetta McGee (Pauline); Mario Brega.

Silence, a mute gunfighter, is hired to protect a ragged band of farmers from the local banker's bounty hunters. He falls in love with Pauline, whose husband Tigrero has murdered. Eventually he kills Pollicut, the banker, and accepts Tigrero's challenge. But Tigrero shoots him in an ambush and massacres the farmers.

Corbucci's most tightly-constructed and relentless Western. For Trintignant, Silence was "mon role préféré"; Kinski had never been better. Ippoliti's photography of Alpine wastes and mean interiors is impeccable, Morricone's score unusually restrained. For distribution in Scandinavia and the Middle East, Corbucci shot an alternative ending, in which the Sheriff rescues Silence and Tigrero is killed.

BLINDMAN

Blindman

1972

d Ferdinando Baldi

sc Tony Anthony, Pierro Anchisti

ph Riccardo Pallottini

ad Gastone Carsetti

m Stelvio Cipriani

lp Tony Anthony (Blindman); Ringo Starr (Candy);

Agneta Eckemyr (Pilar); Magda Konopka (Sweet Mama)

A blind gunman, escorting fifty nifties to a mining camp, loses his cargo to a bandit, Candy. He follows on his seeing-eye horse, Boss, and after much hardship recovers the girls - only to have them hi-jacked by the Mexican Cavalry.

The low-brow equivalent of MY NAME IS NOBODY, BLINDMAN is another old hand's adios to the Italian West. Anthony, star of the "Stranger" films (FOR A DOLLAR IN THE TEETH, A MAN A HORSE & A GUN), produced; Baldi was a veteran of several mediocre Westerns. Their film is vacuous, violent, and at times inspired. Ringo Starr had always wanted to play a cowboy - he was originally to have composed the score, but only one song survives ("Blindman" - B side to his single "Back Off Boogaloo").

As on other noteworthy occasions, the inspiration for BLINDMAN came from the samurai genre - in this case the perennially popular Zatoichi, the blind swordsman, portrayed originally by Shinatro Katsu.

BLOOD MONEY

Blood Money / Lung hu tsou t'ienya

1974

d Antonio Margheritti (Anthony Dawson)

sc Barth Jules Sussman

ph Alejandro Ulloa

ad n/c

m Carlo Savina

lp Lee Van Cleef (Dakota); Lo Lieh (Wang);

Julian Ugarte (Deacon Hobbitt); Goyo Peralta (Indio)

A gringo and a Chinaman, first in competition and finally in partnership, follow a trail of tattooed women to a cache of hidden gold: killing off American and Mexican bandits wholesale on the way.

The very end of the cycle, and completely worthless in its own right, BLOOD MONEY illustrates the Kung Fu movie's many debts to the Italian Western - in plot, characterisation and composition. Lo Lieh is a poor substitute for Tomas Milian, and the action - part gunplay, part martial arts - proceed according to the traditional formula. The final image, of Van Cleef departing in a rickshaw, is uncomfortably apt.

DAY OF ANGER

I Giorno dell'Ira

1967

d Tonino Valerii

sc Ernesto Gastaldi, Renzo Genta

ph Enzo Serafin

ad Pietro Filippone cost Carlo Simi

m Riz Ortolani

lp Giuliano Gemma (Scott); Lee Van Cleef (Talby);

Walter Riller; Al Mulock; Benito Stefanelli.

Scott, a down-and-out, is befriended by the gunfighter Frank Talby. Together they clean up a corrupt township. Scott becomes increasingly dissilusioned with Talby's behaviour - in fact a personal vendetta - and shoots his mentor in a duel.

Valerii had been Leone's assistant on FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE: this was the ~~first~~<sup>second</sup> film he directed. Discounting MY NAME IS NOBODY, it is perhaps Valerii's best - a classic theme, given an unmistakably Italian treatment. Perhaps, ~~also~~<sup>also</sup>, an early pointer to the socio-political pretensions of THE PRICE OF POWER.

DEAD OR ALIVE

Escondido / Dove Vai Ti Amazzo

1967

d Franco Giraldi  
sc Ugo Liberatore, Alfredo Antonini  
ph Aice Parolin  
ad Massimo Capriccioli  
m Carlo Rustichelli  
lp Alex Cord (Clay); Robert Ryan (Lem Carter);  
Nicoletta Machiavelli (Laurinda); Mario Brega (Kraut);  
Aldo Sambrell (Jesus Maria)

Clay, an outlaw, seeks shelter in the bandit town of Escondido, and runs into trouble with Kraut. Weakened by an operation to remove an old bullet from his spine, he still manages to kill Kraut and obtain an amnesty from Governor Carter. He rides off a free man and is shot dead by bounty hunters.

Giraldi had directed two serio-comic Westerns (SEVEN GUNS FOR THE MCGREGORS and the sequel SEVEN BRIDES FOR THE MCGREGORS) when he made this pessimistic piece. Clay is not so much fated, as dogged by the most absurd bad luck. There are several ingenious set-pieces, and the ending is a fine joke in its ironic context.

DEATH RIDES A HORSE

Da Uomo A Uomo

1967

d Giulio Petroni  
sc Luciano Vincenzoni  
ph Carlo Carlini  
ad Franco Bottari, Rosa Sansone  
m Ennio Morricone  
lp John Phillip Law (Bill); Lee Van Cleef (Ryan);  
Luigi Pistilli (Walcott); Jose Torres (Pedro);  
Mario Brega (One-Eye)

For different ends, Bill and Ryan hunt down the same gang of outlaws - who killed Bill's folks and framed Ryan fifteen years before. When Bill discovers Ryan was a member of the gang, he tries to kill him but finds himself unable to.

A clever script and impressive use of Almeria locations more than compensate for Petroni's slack direction. The villains are a pleasingly monstrous crew, and the revenge theme is constantly undercut by Ryan's pragmatism - abandoned at the end.



DEATH SENTENCE

Sentenza di Morto

1968

d Mario Lanfranchi

sc Mario Lanfranchi

ph Tony Secchi

ad Giancarlo Bartolini Salimbeni

m Gianni Ferrio

lp Robin Clark (Cash); Richard Conte (Diaz); Enrico Maria  
Salerno (Montero); Adolfo Celli (Baldwin); Tomas Milian (O'Hara)

To avenge his murdered brother, Cash tracks down the men who wrongly accused him of a robbery - the rancher Diaz, the bandit Montero, the albino O'Hara and the outlaw clergyman Baldwin.

The ultimate in picaresque film-making, short of the compilation movie. Four separate stories, all reasonably different, with a common hero and revenge pretext. The Baldwin and O'Hara episodes are the best. The casting showed imagination - Milian and Salerno, both familiar hero figures, play the bad guys.

DJANGO

Django

1965

d Sergio Corbucci  
sc Franco Rossetti, Jose Maesso  
ph Enzo Barboni  
ad Carlo Simi  
m Luis Enriquez Bacalov  
lp Franco Nero (Django); Loredana Nusciak (Maria);  
Jose Bodalo (Rodriguez); Eduardo Fajardo.

A gun runner, Django, makes a deal with the revolutionary general Rodriguez. When the latter is slow in paying for his supplies, Django makes off with the money - but he and his girl Maria are caught and tortured. Rodriguez and his men are massacred by the gringo Jackson, whom Django contrives to kill.

Corbucci's masterpiece - a cruel morality fable of monsters at war with each other and with the world. Barboni's photography was never better, and thanks to his constantly changing lenses and perspectives, DJANGO is the most distant - as well as the most violent - of all Italian Westerns.

DJANGO is a lot like Corbucci's first Western, MINNESOTA CLAY. It is a lot like all his other Westerns, too - and since Corbucci was, as much as Leone, the father of the Beast, DJANGO is the Italian Western par excellence. It is intensely cruel, anti-clerical, pyggy, and infested with religious symbolism: in one priceless scene, the evangelical pastor/bandit falls into the hands of Mexicans who cut his ear off and force him to eat it ... and then they shoot him dead. Everybody in the film is dirty and, to some degree, despicable: monsters at war with each other and the world. If there is a fate worse than death (and the Italian Western knows there is), Django suffers it - an empty avenger crippled and alone in the boneyard as the end titles roll.

DJANGO KILL

Se Sei Vivo, Spara / Gringo Uccidi

1967

d Giulio Questi

sc Giulio Questi, Franco Arcalli

ph Franco Delli Colli

ad Jaime Perez Cubero

m Ivan Vandor

lp Tomas Milian (Django); Piero Lulli (Oaks); Milo Queseda  
(Tumbler); Paco Sanz (Hagerman); Roberto Camardiel (Sorro);  
Marilu Tolo (Flory Hagerman)

Left for dead by his treacherous partner Oaks, Django is nursed by two Indians. Oaks' gang is overpowered and lynched by vigilantes: Django arrives in time to kill Oaks for a reward. The townspeople vie for possession of the stolen gold, and the rancher Sorro murderously intervenes. All but Django die.

When Joe pits the evil townsmen against each other in A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS, he knows what he is doing. Django is a helpless witness. And through his eyes, we see an evil world feed off itself and die. Moral and didactic without offering a solution, Questi's Western is disturbing, bitter, and perhaps the most important of all the films.

DJANGO THE BASTARD

Django il Bastardo

1969

d Sergio Garrone

sc Sergio Garrone, Antonio de Teffe (Anthony Steffen)

ph Gino Santini

ad Giulia Mafai

m Vasco/Mancuso

lp Anthony Steffen (Django); Paulo Gozolino (Rod Murdock);

Rada Rassimov (Anita)

Three Confederate officers who betrayed their troops are haunted by a mysterious gunman, Django. When two are dead, Django reveals to the third that he was one of the massacred command - and after a long night of violence, consummates his revenge.

Similarly structured to AND GOD SAID TO CAIN, with the same delayed and incomplete "explanation," DJANGO THE BASTARD leaves little doubt that its hero is a ghost. Its use of Steffen's familiar persona - dour, hollow, with a penchant for sudden appearances and disguise - is significant. Considerably more stylish than NO ROOM TO DIE, which Garrone and Steffen made the same year.

DUCK! YOU SUCKER

Giu la Testa! / A Fistful of Dynamite

1971

d Sergio Leone

sc Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Donati, Sergio Leone

ph Giuseppe Ruzzolini

ad Andrea Crisanti

m Ennio Morricone

lp Rod Steiger (Juan); James Coburn (Sean); Romolo Valli  
(Dr Villega); Rick Battaglia (Santerna); Franco Graziosi  
(Don Jaime); Antonio Domingo (Col. Gutierrez)

A bandit and an I.R.A. munitions expert see in each other a means to an end - Juan Miranda wants Sean Mallory to open the Mesa Verde bank; Sean wants Juan to serve the Revolution. But Juan's dream is not realised - the banks hold only political prisoners - and Sean, dying, doubts the value of what he has achieved.

Not the definitive Mexi-Western it could have been: it borrows too heavily from QUIEN SABE? and TEPEPA. Leone did not want to direct, and his original casting (Jason Robards as an aging Juan, Malcolm McDowell a youthful Sean) would have given their relationship a very different balance. Leone's preferred title, ONCE UPON A TIME - THE REVOLUTION, was used only for the French release.

The crew is a miniature Who's Who, with some notable absentees. Carlo Simi was replaced by Crisanti, Tonino Delli Colli by Ruzzolini. Second-unit photographer was Franco Delli Colli, who shot DJANGO KILL. Vincenzoni, Donati, Morricone and editor Nino Baragli were Leone regulars. Given unusual prominence in the credits were Benito Stefanelli, Leone's stunt co-ordinator (and a supporting actor) and the director Antonio Margheritti, in charge of special effects.

FACE TO FACE

Faccia a Faccia

1967

d Sergio Sollima  
sc Sergio Donati, Sergio Sollima  
ph Raphael Pacheco  
ad Carlo Simi  
m Ennio Morricone  
lp Gian Maria Volonte (Brad); Tomas Milian (Beauregard);  
William Berger (Sirringo); Gianni Rizzo (Williams);  
Aldo Sambrell (Zachary Shot).

Brad Fletcher, a consumptive university professor, is kidnapped by Beauregard Bennett, an outlaw. Brad is fascinated by Beau; Beau lets him stick around. As the bandit grows more human under his influence, Brad assumes control of the gang. The roles are reversed - and Beau has to shoot Brad to prevent further bloodshed.

Sollima's second Western questions the conventional distinctions - Italian and American - between Good and Bad. In common with the later films, it exposes the hollow centre of the "Good" gringo, next to the Ugly's vitality and capacity for change. The W.A.S.P. community, as in BIG GUNDOWN, is bent only on vigilante justice and revenge: its banker hires Bennett to defraud his customers, and the ultimate establishment figure - the professor - proves the most corrupt.

A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS

Per un Pugno di Dollari

1964

d Sergio Leone (Bob Robertson)  
sc Sergio Leone, Duccio Tessari  
ph Massimo Dallamano (Max Dallman)  
ad Carlo Simi (Charles Simmons)  
m Ennio Morricone (Dan Savio)  
lp Clint Eastwood (Joe); Gian Maria Volonte (Ramon); Pepe Calvo  
(Silvanito); Marianne Koch (Marisol); Wolfgang Lukschy (John  
Baxter); Antonio Prieto (Don Miguel); Mario Brega (Chico);  
Benito Stefanelli (Rubio); Josef Egger (Piripero).

A drifter, Joe, sells his services to two rival gangs - the Rojos and the Baxters - and precipitates a cataclysm. Badly wounded, he returns to San Miguel to clean up the surviving clan.

For his Western remake of YOJIMBO, Leone approached Richard Harrison, James Coburn and Charles Bronson before casting Clint Eastwood - on Harrison's advice. Shooting was interrupted for some time when the money ran out; and the finished picture was not an instant success. In time came vast profits, and - much later - qualified critical approval. FISTFUL began the Italian Western boom; it contains all the essential elements of the form, the core of Leone's repertory company and production team, and its influence was inestimable.

FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE

Per Qualche Dollari in Più

1965

d Sergio Leone

sc Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone, Fulvio Morsella

ph Massimo Dallamano

ad Carlo Simi

m Ennio Morricone

lp Clint Eastwood (Monco); Lee Van Cleef (Colonel Mortimer);  
Gian Maria Volonte (Indio); Josef Egger (Prophet); Klaus  
Kinski (Hunchback); Mario Brega (Niño); Aldo Sambrell  
(Cucillo); Luigi Pistilli (Groggy); Benito Stefanelli  
(Hughie); Roberto Camardiel.

Two bounty hunters, Monco and the Colonel, are after the same prey - the maniacal killer Indio. Monco dissolves their uneasy partnership when Indio slips through their fingers and robs the El Paso Bank - but they rejoin forces in Mexico. Monco forces Indio to face the Colonel, whose sister he raped years earlier - and their business venture is satisfactorily concluded.

An original script (Vincenzoni's first Western); a bigger budget; a stronger cast; new locations - FOR A FEW is in every way superior to FISTFUL, but it could not have been made without it. Like Eastwood and Volonte, Van Cleef and Kinski had been bit-players. Both became major stars. Indio's gang (Kinski, Sambrell, Brega, Pistilli, Camardiel and Stefanelli) provided a villainous repertory for every Italian Western thereafter. Several new conventions are established - the uneasy alliance, the bounty killer hero, and in particular the obsessive flashback.



GARRINGO

Garringo

1969

d Rafael Romero Marchent  
sc Joaquin Romero Marchent, Giovanni Scolaro  
ph Aldo Ricci  
ad Jose Gallardo  
m Marcello Giombini  
lp Anthony Steffen (Garringo); Peter Lee Lawrence (Johnny);  
Jose Bodalo (Sheriff Klaus)

Since he saw his father court-martialed and shot, Johnny has had a pathological hatred of soldiers, whom he kills every chance he gets. Lieutenant Garringo is released from jail and told to bring him in alive - but the young outlaw is killed by his own gang first.

Unsteady amalgam of the American and the Italian, scripted and directed by Spaniards. Perhaps the best of the Marchents' films. The violence is Italianate; the sub-plot American; the misty opening montage of Johnny's childhood strange and elliptical. Constant juxtapositions of hero and villain in similar actions or activities suggests a clear understanding of how basically alike they are.

GOD FORGIVES - I DON'T!

Dio Perdona - Io No! / Blood River

1967

d Giuseppe Colizzi

sc Giuseppe Colizzi

ph Alfio Contini

ad Luis Vasquez, Gastone Carsetti

m Carlo Rustichelli

lp Terence Hill (Cat); Bud Spencer (Earp); Frank Wolff (Bill);  
Jose Manuel Martin (Bud)

After a violent train robbery, Cat Stevens suspects his old enemy Bill San Antonio is not dead after all. He and an insurance investigator, Earp Hagartay, discover him holed up south of the border; and Bill is quickly dispatched.

First of Colizzi's serio-comic Westerns, partnering Mario Girotti and Carlo Pedersoli, aka Hill and Spencer. Photography and art direction were good throughout the series - Carsetti later designed the gothic settings for BLINDMAN. Portentiously, the last of Colizzi's films, BOOT HILL, takes place within a circus.

THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY

Il Buono, Il Brutto, Il Cattivo

1966

d Sergio Leone

sc Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone, Age-Scarpelli

ph Tonino Delli Colli

ad Carlo Simi

m Ennio Morricone

lp Clint Eastwood (Blondie); Lee Van Cleef (Angel Eyes/Sentenza);  
Eli Wallach (Tuco); Aldo Guiffre (Captain Clinton); Luigi  
Pistilli (Father Ramirez); Mario Brega (Wallace); Al Mulock  
(Elam); Benito Stefanelli; Aldo Sambrell

Three ne'er-do-wells learn independently of a vast cache of stolen gold - but none of them knows enough to find it by himself. Tuco pals up with his enemy Blondie against the greater evil, Angel Eyes. Together they drift in and out of the Civil War, till they arrive at the Sad Hill cemetery - where scores are settled and the gold unearthed.

Initially entitled THE MAGNIFICENT ROGUES, this is Leone's most original and entertaining film. Simi's sets are among his best, and Delli Colli's photography is superb. Note once again the inspired casting, the authentic feel of faces and places, the masterful choreography and geography (the walk-down in the shell-shocked town, the path from the river to the graveyard). The English-language version lacks some twenty minutes, mostly scenes involving Lee Van Cleef. Which is a pity.

THE HELLBENDERS

I Crudeli

1966

d Sergio Corbucci

sc Alfredo Antonini (Albert Band), Ugo Liberatore

ph Enzo Barboni

ad Jaime Perez Cubero

m Ennio Morricone (Leo Nichols)

lp Joseph Cotten (Jonas); Julian Mateos (Ben); Norma Bengell  
(Clare); Al Mulock (the Beggar); Aldo Sambrell (Pedro)

A fanatical Southerner, Jonas, massacres a troop of Yankee soldiers and steals their gold - funds to keep a post-war Confederacy alive. Jonas' small army suffers Pyrrhic victories against Mexicans, lawmen and Union regulators, and his sons kill each other off. Jonas dies too, and the money is lost.

Jonas is a fleshed-out version of Django's adversary Jackson - Corbucci's view of the Civil War is more overtly political than Leone's (and less impressive than Leone's deliberate refusal to differentiate between North and South). There are bizarre highlights (the coffin episodes and the riverside climax), and the film is superior to Antonini's THE TRAMPLERS, made back-to-back with Cotten in a similar role. Note the presence of Al Mulock as a beddragled maniac: it is his face that appears in enormous close-up in the opening shot of THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY.

THE HILLS RUN RED

Un Fiume di Dollari

1966

d Carlo Lizzani (Lee W. Beaver)

sc Mario Pierotti

ph Tony Secchi

m Ennio Morricone (Leo Nichols)

lp Thomas Hunter (Brewster); Henry Silva (Mendez); Nando  
Gazzolo (Seagall); Dan Duryea (Getz)

While Jerry Brewster is in jail, his partner-in-crime Seagall buys a ranch and allows Brewster's wife to starve. Released, Jerry takes revenge on Seagall - assisted by Government agent "Winnie" Getz.

Though the plot is more or less the same as REQUIESCANT's, Lizzani's treatment could not have been more different. THE HILLS RUN RED looks like an American Western, and most of the time the imitation is quite passable. Its best moments, though, are Italianate: Brewster's rampant masochism, the ambush "in a cemetery called Austen;" the death of Seagall. Seen as anything other than a pastiche, much of the film would be extremely tedious.

I'M SARTANA - I'LL DIG YOUR GRAVE

Sono Sartana - Il Vestro Becchino / Sartana, Angel of Death 1969

d Giuliano Carmineo (Anthony Ascott)

sc Tito Carpi, Enzo Dell'Aquila

ph Giovanni Bergamini

ad n/c

m Vasco/Mancuso

lp John Garko (Sartana); Frank Wolff (Buddy Ben); Gordon Mitchell  
(Baxter Red); Klaus Kinski (Hophead); Jose Torres

A bank is robbed, and suspicion cast upon the bounty killer Sartana - who sets out to discover who has framed him. He is helped and occasionally hindered by Buddy Ben, an old amigo; and pursued by all his colleagues. The true villain is the bank manager. Ben and Sartana relieve him of the loot.

Carmineo's first Circus-Western (his previous work included an interesting remake of GARDEN OF EVIL, entitled FIND A PLACE TO DIE). The pace is fast, the list of guest-stars long, the style bravoura, and the film devoid of meaning. In four years, Kinski had become such a star that the producers deemed it inadvisable to kill him off: he winks at Sartana and exits, promising they'll play another hand some day... Carmineo has a lively mind, though some of his conventions - wild rolling of the camera when someone is shot, for instance - are irritating.

I WANT HIM DEAD

Lo Voglio Morte

1968

d Paolo Bianchini

sc Carlos Arabia

ph Ricardo Andreu

ad Roman Catalayud

m Nico Fidenco

lp Craig Hill (Clay); Lea Massari (Loma); Jose Manuel Martin (Mallek),

Mallek, an arms manufacturer, intends to prolong the Civil War by assassinating the delegates at a secret peace conference. Clay, whose sister has been raped and murdered by one of Mallek's men, catches up with the killer and wrecks the plan. The plotters wipe each other out.

Atypical in several ways. The Good man is saved by a woman, with whom he falls in love. She survives to the end. The script is good, with surreal moments integrated into a straightforward plot - the execution of a mad deserter; the ride into the war zone, a plateau littered with smoking cannon and the occasional corpse; Mallek's money blowing on the breeze. The images are composed with the care of a TV commercial (which the film resembles).

MINNESOTA CLAY

Minnesota Clay

1964

d Sergio Corbucci  
sc Adriano Bolzoni, Sergio Corbucci  
ph Jose Fernandez Aguayo  
ad Carlo Simi  
m Piero Piccioni  
lp Cameron Mitchell (Clay); Georges Riviere (Fox); Ethel Rojo  
(Estella); Antonio Casas (Jonathon); Fernando Sancho (Ortiz)

Framed by Fox, Clay breaks jail determined to prove his innocence before recurring attacks of blindness destroy his sight for good. Two gangs court his support: when Ortiz' outlaws are destroyed, Clay goes after Fox and his men.

If Corbucci were a trully great director, he would have managed to transcend his material (a tedious American-style FISTFUL OF DOLLARS) in the manner of a Questi or a Leone. Instead, he is sporadically ingenious, and his first Western is mostly a bore. An auteur nonetheless, Corbucci introduces several characteristic themes (physical disability, mutilations, warring outlaw factions, Gringo as villain principal, salacious violence towards the womenfolk) - all of which he refined in his truly great DJANGO. The American version lacks some six minutes, freezing frame on Clay's apparent death and so discarding the original happy end.



MY NAME IS NOBODY

Il Mio Nome e Nessuno

1973

d Tonino Valerii

sc Fulvio Morsella, Ernesto Gastaldi, Sergio Leone

ph Giuseppe Ruzzolini, Armando Nanuzzi (U.S.A.)

ad Gianni Polidori

m Ennio Morricone

lp Henry Fonda (Jack); Terence Hill (Nobody); Jean Martin (Sullivan)  
Piero Lulli (Sheriff); Leo Gordon (Red); R.G. Armstrong (Honest  
John); Mario Brega (Pedro); Benito Stefanelli (Porteley)

Ageing gunfighter Jack Beauregard is plagued by a hero-worshipping  
"Nobody" who wants him to face the mighty Wild Bunch alone.  
Nobody steals a gold-laden train and provokes just such a showdown,  
then helps Jack to win and to escape to Europe.

Conceived and supervised by Leone, MY NAME IS NOBODY is his epitaph  
to the Italian Western, disguised as an elegy to the West itself.  
Though flawed (particularly in its knockabouts à la Trinity),  
it is worth watching for one episode alone - where Jack, all avenues  
of escape closed, waits resignedly by the tracks for the Wild Bunch  
to run him down... and is overtaken instead by legendhood.  
This sequence was filmed in Spain - other locations included  
New Mexico, Colorado and the New Orleans waterfront.  
Ernesto Gastaldi was a regular screenwriter, only slightly less  
prolific than Luciano Vincenzoni and Franco Solinas; but this was  
his only collaboration with Leone.

MY NAME IS TRINITY

Lo Chiamavano Trinita

1970

d Enzo Barboni (E.B. Clucher)

sc Enzo Barboni

ph Aldo Giordani

ad Enzo Bulgarelli

m Franco Micalizzi

lp Terence Hill (Trinity); Bud Spencer (Bambino); Farley Granger  
(Major Harriman)

Trinity finds his outlaw brother, Bambino, posing as sheriff in order to steal a herd of horses. He half-persuades, half-tricks Bambino into siding with a Mormon community whose land the horses' owner covets.

Barboni, Corbucci's early cameraman, borrowed Colizzi's team of Hill and Spencer for his second Western as director. TRINITY is a good-humoured, non-violent, rather slow parody of the socially concerned Westerns of Sollima. Spencer is a talented comedian of the slow-burn variety; Hill's comic talents are less obvious, though his role as outlaw's conscience was used to excellent advantage in MY NAME IS NOBODY. The sequel, TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME, is more inspired and funnier.

NAVAJO JOE

Un Dollaro a Testa

1966

d Sergio Corbucci

sc Mario Pierotti

ph Silvano Ippoliti

ad Aurelio Crugnola

m Ennio Morricone (Leo Nichols)

lp Burt Reynolds (Joe); Aldo Sambrell (Duncan); Fernando Rey  
(Rattigan); Nicoletta Machiavelli (Estella)

Duncan and his scalphunters find their income drying up now that the Indians have been pacified. They take to robbing trains, only to be foiled by a mysterious Indian, Joe. His gang decimated, Duncan learns that Joe is the sole survivor of a tribe he massacred. The two men kill each other.

Corbucci made three Westerns in 1966 - NAVAJO JOE, HELLBENDERS and the unmemorable /JOHNNY ORO (RINGO & HIS GOLDEN PISTOL). Apart from BIG SILENCE, all his films are marred by incidental silliness: here is is an improbable sub-plot involving the familiar cardboard bourgeois. The film has good points - Corbucci's contempt for the townspeople is boundless, and some of the grotesquerie (Duncan uses a mirror to shoot random citizens behind his back) is up to par. Burt Reynolds called NAVAJO JOE "the worst experience of my life."

NO ROOM TO DIE

Una Lunga Fila di Croci

1969

d Sergio Garrone

sc Sergio Garrone, Antonio de Teffe

ph Franco Villa

ad Pietro Liberati

m Vasco/Mancuso

lp Anthony Steffen (Brandon); William Berger (Preacher);

Mario Brega (Miguel); Riccardo Garrone (Fargo); Nicoletta Machiavelli (Maya).

A cabal of corrupt businessmen, led by Fargo, is smuggling Mexicans into the United States for use as slave labour. Two bounty killers, Brandon and Everett Murdoch, alias the Preacher, join forces to stop the trade - which takes a while, since Murdoch is in league with Fargo.

Routine remake of FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, enlivened by an original and timely premise - cross-the-border traffic in illegal immigrants. The more ponderous aspects are undercut with parody, and there is a nice irony in the casting of a Black as Fargo's right-hand man. But the film does not live up to its conception, and some of Garrone's habitual traits (e.g. very low angles on Steffen as he shoots) are over-used.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST

C'era Una Volta Il West

1968

d Sergio Leone

sc Sergio Leone, Sergio Donati, Dario Argento, Bernardo Bertolucci

ph Tonino Delli Colli

ad Carlo Simi

m Ennio Morricone

lp Claudia Cardinale (Jill); Charles Bronson (Harmonica); Jason Robards (Cheyenne); Henry Fonda (Frank); Gabriele Ferzetti (Morton); Frank Wolff (McBain); Keenan Wynn (Sheriff); Marco Zuanelli (Wobbles); Paolo Stoppa (Sam); Lionel Stander (barman); Jack Elam, Woody Strode, Al Mulock (gunfighters at station).

Frank massacres a family whose land the railroad must cross en route to the Pacific. He tries to frame Cheyenne, a local bandit, and buy the property for his boss the magnate Morton. But the land is inherited by Jill, a New Orleans prostitute, and Frank is dogged by an enigmatic man with a mouth organ. Cheyenne and Morton gun each other down, and Frank returns to face Harmonica, the brother of a man he murdered years before.

Considered by some to be Leone's best film, and certainly his most prestigious. It turns gradually from a homage to the American Greats (HIGH NOON, SHANE, THE SEARCHERS) into an exploration of Leone's own convention. Casting is against type and expectation - Fonda plays the villain, guest stars are killed off at the very beginning. Simi's and Delli Colli's work is flawless; Morricone's score is justly famous. This said, the film is pretentious and ~~lacking in~~<sup>lacks</sup> the sardonic edge and mad exhilaration of the Dollars films. But nothing could excuse the savage cutting of the English-language print by Paramount: the commonly-available English version is quite unintelligible.

A PISTOL FOR RINGO

Una Pistola Per Ringo

1965

d Duccio Tessari

sc Duccio Tessari

ph Francisco Marin

ad Juan Alberto Soler

m Ennio Morricone

lp Giuliano Gemma (Ringo); Hally Hammond (Ruby); Fernando Sancho (Sancho); Nieves Navarro (Dolores); Antonio Casas (Major Clyde); Jorge Martin (Sheriff)

A bunch of robbers shelter from a sheriff's posse in Major Clyde's ranch. Their leader, Sancho, demands safe passage back to Mexico. Ringo, a young gunman, is paid to infiltrate the bandits' ranks and raise the siege.

The best of the American pastiches, RINGO is full of uncharacteristic mid-shots and lays a somewhat ambivalent emphasis on the benefits of civilisation and the rule of law. Here are all the nice incongruities dealt out so heavy-handedly by the TRINITY films: sweaty frontiersmen disrupting aristos at dinner, refinement in the midst of mayhem. The Gemma/Sancho contretemps was the basis for ARIZONA COLT, and their jockeying for power has a Good v. Ugly air.

THE PRICE OF POWER

Il Prezzo del Potore

1969

d Tonino Valerii

sc Massimo Patrizi

ph Stelvio Massi

ad Carlo Leva

m Luis Enriquez Bacalov

lp Giuliano Gemma (Bill); Van Johnson (Garfield); Warren Vanders (McDonald); Rai Saunders (Jack); Fernando Rey (Pinkerton); Benito Stefanelli (Sheriff); Pepe Calvo (Dr Strips); Antonio Casas (Pa Willer)

When President Garfield is assassinated in Dallas, Bill Willer sets out to clear Jack Donovan of guilt. Jack is murdered with the complicity of the crooked Sheriff, Jefferson, and Bill uncovers a plot to overthrow the government. Reluctantly, he joins forces with a government agent, McDonald.

A painstaking allegory in the format of a revenge Western. The necessary assumptions (almost universal racialism, total corruption of the police, distrust of forces of authority) are already those of the Italian Western, and the Kennedy parallels are clear. The photography and score are good, the art direction excellent, but - in common with most of Valerii's Westerns - script and direction plod.

A PROFESSIONAL GUN

Il Mercenario / The Mercenary

1968

d Sergio Corbucci

sc Luciano Vincenzoni, Franco Solinas, Giorgio Arlorio

ph Alejandro Ulloa

ad Piero Filippone, Luis Vasquez

lp Franco Nero (Kowalski); Tony Musante (Paco); Jack Palance  
(Curly); Giovanna Ralli (Columba); Edoardo Fajardo (Garcia)

Sergio Kowalski, alias the Polak, hires himself out as a strategist to the revolutionary expropriator Paco Roman. Polack's enemy, Curly Briggs, finds work with the Mexican Government; Paco kills him, falls out with Sergei, and the pair are nearly executed - but survive to go their separate ways.

Childish Mexi-Western: Corbucci's usual political concerns are unimpressively explicit, and there is as much silly comedy as there is sadism. Most interesting as an example of Luciano Vincenzoni's work - it has much in common with his Dollars scripts and DEATH RIDES A HORSE: fragile partnerships, long, testing desert treks, Good and Ugly parting best of enemies, and a bullring motif for the climactic showdown. Solinas and Arlorio used a similar theme for QUIEMADA! and Corbucci's COMPAÑEROS is a scene-by-scene remake.



QUIEN SABE?

Quien Sabe? / A Bullet for the General

1966

d Dimiano Damiani

sc Salvatore Laurini, Franco Solinas

ph Tony Secchi

ad Sergio Canevari

m Luis Enriquez Bacalov, Ennio Morricone

lp Gian Maria Volonte (Chuncho); Lou Castel (Niño); Martine Beswick (Adelita); Klaus Kinski (Santo); Jaime Fernandez (Elias)

Bill Tate, aka Niño, falls in with the bandit Chuncho, who supplies the Revolution with arms. Chuncho grows politically committed as his gang die off; Tate assassinates Chuncho's hero General Elias - the job for which the Government has hired him. Chuncho follows the American to Mexico City and after much prevarication kills his friend, no longer knowing why.

The model for all the Mexi-Westerns, none of which came near to it in intelligence, interest or insight. The allegory is pertinent and sustained, but never intrudes (as it does in PRICE OF POWER, say). The Good man is morally inferior to the Ugly: a theme implicit in Leone's films and developed by Sollima in FACE TO FACE. Franco Solinas wrote the screenplay for Pontecorvo's BATTLE OF ALGIERS, before embarking on a string of Mexi-Westerns - of which Damiani's was by far the best.

REQUIESCANT

Requiescant

1965

d Carlo Lizzani  
sc Adriano Bolnoni, Armando Crispino, Lucio Battistrada  
ph Sandro Mancori  
ad Enzo Bulgarelli  
m Riz Ortolani  
lp Lou Castel (Requiescant); Mark Damon (Ferguson); Barbara Frey  
(Princy); Nino Davoli (Light); Pier Paolo Pasolini (Don Juan);  
Franco Citti.

When a clergyman's daughter runs away from home, her adopted brother follows - and finds her a plaything of the vicious Light, Ferguson's right hand man. Discovering that Ferguson massacred his family years before, young "Requiescant" leads the Mexicans to destroy Light and Ferguson and their works.

Morbid, fatalistic precursor of DJANGO KILL: teeming with religious symbols and characters on the verge of madness, REQUIESCANT is picaresque, intense and tightly-constructed. A comedy of the blackest kind - if one had to choose one film to prove that the Italian Western was not solely Leone's, REQUIESCANT would serve very well.

THE RETURN OF RINGO

Il Ritorno di Ringo

1965

d Duccio Tessari

sc Duccio Tessari, Fernando di Leo

ph Francisco Marin

ad Juan Alberto Soler

m Ennio Morricone

lp Giuliano Gemma (Ringo); Fernando Sancho (Esteban); Hally Hammond (Hally); Nieves Navarro (Rosita); Antonio Casas (Sheriff); Jorge Martin (Paco)

Ringo returns from the Civil War to discover that he is supposedly dead, and his wife Hally is betrothed to Paco Fuentes - leader of a clan of Mexicans who have overrun his home town. After much deliberation, Ringo confronts Fuentes and his men, and restores order to the W.A.S.P. community.

Tessari's pastiche sequel to A PISTOL, made with an identical cast and crew but some reshuffling of roles. There is a welcome critique of the revenge convention, with Ringo first planning to assassinate his wife, then trying to persuade her to sneak away with him. Of course she won't, and his Return - peon's rags exchanged for spotless Cavalry drill - is classical American heroism. The spectacular finale compensates for dull patches and the prevalence of "heartwarming" characters (funny old man/woman/Indian) à l'américaine.

SABATA

Eh, Amico... C'e Sabata - Hai Chiuso!

1969

d Gianfranco Parolini (Frank Kramer)

sc Gianfranco Parolini, Renato Izzo

ph Alessandro Mancori

ad Carlo Simi

m Marcello Giombini

lp Lee Van Cleef (Sabata); William Berger (Banjo); Pedro Sanchez  
(Carrincha); Franco Ressel (Stengel); Gianni Rizzo (O'Hara);  
Marco Zuanelli (Sharkey)

A plot by wicked businessmen to rob their local bank is thwarted by the mysterious Sabata, who demands a reward in return for his silence. Their attempts to kill him end in failure, and aided by a raggedy band of followers Sabata raids the Stengel ranch and confiscates the money.

The best of Parolini's Circus-Westerns, thanks to Carlo Simi's extravagant inventions and to the presence of Lee Van Cleef, effectively guying his own Italian Western persona (in particular, "The Colonel"). Many regulars feature in the supporting cast - ~~particularly~~ notable are Spartaco Conversi, a familiar face from countless films, and Marco Zuanelli, who played the idiot henchman Wobbles in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST.

SARTANA

Sartana

1968

d Gianfranco Parolini (Frank Kramer)  
sc Gianfranco Parolini, Renato Izzo  
ph Alessandro Mancori  
ad Giorgio Desideri  
m Piero Piccioni  
lp John Garko (Sartana); William Berger (Lasky); Sidney  
Chaplin (Stewall); Gianni Rizzo (Hallman); Fernando  
Sancho (General Tampico); Klaus Kinski (Morgan)

A complex scheme by bankers Halman and Stewall to rob their own premises and incriminate Tampico's bandits, is foiled by the intervention of a black-clad stranger, Sartana. The thieves kill each other off, and Sartana - whom they had thought dead - resurfaces to dispatch the survivors.

Parolini's second Western (his first was JOHNNY WEST), but his most characteristic work - jaunty, vacuous, overpopulated, jammed with acrobatics and explosions. Its plot and characters were borrowed by all the subsequent Circus-Westerns: and the role of Sartana was recreated by Garko and others ad infinitum.

SHANGO

Shango(o) - la Pistola Infallibile

1970

d Edoardo Mulgaria (Edward G. Muller)  
sc Edoardo Mulgaria, Antonio de Teffe  
ph Gino Santini  
ad Giulia Mafai  
m Gianfranco di Stefano  
lp Anthony Steffen (Shango); Edoardo Fajardo (Major)

Shango, a Texas Ranger, is sent to restore order after the Civil War. One pocket of resistance remains - a Confederate outpost staffed by Mexican bandits and Southern troops who think the War is still in progress. After much abortive negotiation, Shango unites the local populace against the military.

Like Sergio Garrone, Edoardo Mulgaria made a series of low budget Westerns, most of which were rather poor: SHANGO was shot back-to-back with Garrone's DJANGO THE BASTARD, using the same star and production crew. Its view of the Civil War is conventionally jaundiced, its villains and its violence traditionally patterned. What distinguishes SHANGO is its unreal aura - heavy even for an Italian Western. The narrative is full of unexplained events and odd juxtapositions which the inevitable flashback fails to clarify. Neither Good nor Bad seems to have any motivation; in fact both (Shango scabbling like an animal in the mud, the Major with his paranoid delusions) are more than a little mad.

THE SPECIALIST

Gli Specialisti / Drop Them - Or I'll Shoot!

1969

d Sergio Corbucci  
sc Sergio Corbucci, Sabatine Gruffini  
ph Dario di Palma  
ad Riccardo Domenici  
m Angelo Francesco Lavagnino  
lp Johnny Hallyday (Hud); Francoise Fabian (Virginia);  
Sylvie Fennec (Sheba); Gastone Moschin (Sheriff);  
Serge Marquand (Boot); Mario Adorf (El Diablo)

Hud's brother has been lynched by the good citizens of Blackstone. Hud returns to find out who really robbed the bank, and the bandit El Diablo raids the town in search of the stolen money - which is in the hands of Virginia, owner of the bank. El Diablo and Virginia are killed, and Hud is badly hurt. He burns the money, sees the townspeople humiliated, and rides away.

An Italian Western full of Frenchmen, ~~and~~ nowhere near as bad as the (overly-sensitive?) French critics claimed. As in BIG SILENCE, which it resembles, the real villain is the businessperson: the Sheriff is a jolly dupe, the bandits likeable grotesques. The action sequences, always Corbucci's saving grace, are superb - particularly a savage knife fight in the saloon (editing by Elsa Armanni). Johnny Hallyday, an ageing pop star, was roundly slated in the French reviews, but dubbed into American he is a perfectly acceptable taciturne. Virginia is, outside of DJANGO KILL's mad women, the most horrific portrait of American womanhood that the form produced. And Corbucci even squeezes in another pet hate, the Hippie.

TEPEPA

Tepepa / Viva la Revolucion!

1968

d Giulio Petroni  
sc Giulio Petroni, Franco Solinas  
ph Francisco Marin  
ad n/c  
m Ennio Morricone  
lp Tomas Milian (Tepepa); John Steiner (Price);  
Orson Welles (Cascorro); Jose Torres.

Henry Price, an English doctor, produces the revolutionary leader Jesus Moran - "Tepepa" - whom he suspects is the murderer of his girlfriend. Growing to know and respect the Mexican, he starts to doubt the justice of his revenge. Tepepa dies at Price's hands during an operation to remove a bullet - deliberately or accidentally, we never know.

A successful marriage of the sprawling Mexi-Western and the intimate revenge story. If it owes a lot to QUIEN SABE? and VIVA ZAPATA! (especially the Good/Ugly relationship with its secret sourness), it is the source of much that is good in DUCK! YOU SUCKER. The treatment of guilt and comparative worth ("What is a woman compared to the Revolution?") is interesting; and one Orson Welles makes a fair substitute for Edoardo Fajardo as the Mexican General.



TEXAS ADDIO

Texas Addio / The Avenger

1966

d Ferdinando Baldi  
sc Franco Rossetti, Ferdinando Baldi  
ph Enzo Barboni  
ad Eduardo Dorre; Cost Carlo Simi  
m Anton Abril  
lp Franco Nero (Burt); Cole Katosch (Jim); Jose Suarez  
(Cisco Delgado); Jose Guardiola (McLeod); Luigi Pistilli  
(Hernandez)

Lawman Burt Sullivan decides it's time to arrest Delgado, who murdered his pa when Burt was seven. His kid brother, Jim, tags along - only to discover he is Delgado's son. When Burt tries to capture the villain, it costs Jim his life.

A dull revenger, very influenced by DJANGO - Barboni backlights Nero's profile in just the same way as he did in Corbucci's film, and Simi's (rather poor) costumes are reminiscent too. Some baroque touches - Delgado's ornate dining-room, his organ-recitals in time of stress - are pleasing, and the sub-villains Miguel and McLeod are good grotesques. The shooting of young Jim is characteristically arbitrary, and very welcome.

TODAY IT'S ME - TOMORROW YOU

Oggi a Me - Domani a Te!

1968

d Tonino Cervi

sc Dario Argento, Tonino Cervi

ph Sergio Offizi

ad Carlo Gervasi

m Angelo Francesco Lavagnino

lp Brett Halsey (Bill); Tatsuya Nakadai (Elfego); Bud Spencer  
(O'Bannion); William Berger (Moran); Wayde Preston (Milton)

Bill Kiowa gathers a small corps of gunmen and sets out to kill Elfego, who framed him for a robbery and murdered his wife. He does just that.

Skeletal revenge story fleshed out with cruel comedy and inventive visuals. The settings are splendidly downbeat, the passions high, and autumnal colours give the film the same "period" tone as the sepia filters of Altman's Westerns and THE MISSOURI BREAKS - without the self-consciousness of the latter films. Cervi was mooted to direct a follow-up, TODAY WE KILL - TOMORROW WE DIE, but it never materialised: perhaps unfortunately, since Italian Western sequels (FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, THE RETURN OF RINGO, TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME) were often better than their originals.

### CHRONOLOGY

(Note - this is not a complete listing of Italian Westerns, but rather a chronological summary of the films mentioned in the text, and other works by significant directors, between 1964 and 1973.

The principal films discussed will be found in the Filmography)

1964

A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS Per Un Pugno di Dollari Sergio Leone  
MINNESOTA CLAY Sergio Corbucci

1965

ARIZONA COLT Michele Lupo  
DJANGO Sergio Corbucci  
FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE Per Qualche Dollari in Più Sergio Leone  
JOHNNY WEST Johnny West il Mancino Gianfranco Parolini  
ONE SILVER DOLLAR Un Dollaro Bucato Giorgio Ferroni  
A PISTOL FOR RINGO Una Pistola Per Ringo Duccio Tessari  
REQUIESCANT Carlo Lizzani  
THE RETURN OF RINGO Il Ritorno di Ringo Duccio Tessari  
TIME FOR A MASSACRE Tempo di Massacro Lucio Fulci  
SEVEN GUNS FOR THE MACGREGORS Sette Pistole per i MacGregor  
Franco Giraldi

1966

THE BIG GUNDOWN La Resa dei Conti Sergio Sollima  
CJAMANGO Edoardo Mulgaria  
DJURADO Gianni Narzisi  
DYNAMITE JOE Dinamite Joe Antonio Margheritti  
FIVE GIANTS FROM TEXAS Il Cinque della Vendetta Aldo Florio  
FOR A DOLLAR IN THE TEETH Un Dollaro tra i Denti Luigi Vanzi  
FOR 1,000 DOLLARS A DAY Per Mille Dollari al Giorno Silvio Amadio  
THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY Il Buono, Il Brutto, Il Cattivo  
Sergio Leone  
THE HELLBENDERS I Crudeli Sergio Corbucci  
THE HILLS RUN RED Un Fiume di Dollari Carlo Lizzani

1966 cont -

KILL OR BE KILLED Uccidi o Muori Tanio Boccia  
NAVAJO JOE Un Dollaro a Testa Sergio Corbucci  
QUIEN SABE? Damiano Damiani  
RINGO & HIS GOLDEN PISTOL Johnny Oro Sergio Corbucci  
SEVEN BRIDES FOR THE MACGREGORS Sette Donne per i MacGregor  
Franco Giraldi  
A TASTE FOR KILLING Per Il Gusto di Uccidere Tonino Valerii  
TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS BLOOD MONEY 1000 Dollari per un Massacro  
Romolo Guerrieri  
TEXAS ADDIO Ferdinando Baldi  
THREE GOLDEN BOYS Tre Ragazzi d'Oro Enzo Peri  
TIME OF THE VULTURES Il Tempo degli Anvoltoi Nando Cicero  
THE TRAMPLERS Gli Uomini del Paseo Pesante

1967

BANDIDOS Massimo Dallamano  
DAY OF ANGER I Giorni dell'Ira Tonino Valerii  
DEAD OR ALIVE Escondido Franco Giraldi  
DEATH RIDES A HORSE Da Uomo a Uomo Giulio Petroni  
DJANGO KILL Se Sei Vivo, Spara Giulio Questi  
FACE TO FACE Faccia a Faccia Sergio Sollima  
GOD FORGIVES - I DON'T Dio Perdona - Io No! Giuseppe Colizzi  
THE HANDSOME THE UGLY & THE DAFT Il Bello, Il Brutto, Il Cretino  
Giovanni Grimaldi  
HATE FOR HATE Odio Per Odio Domenico Paoletta  
JOHN THE BASTARD John il Bastardo Armando Crispino  
A MAN A HORSE & A GUN Un Uomo Un Cavallo Una Pistola Luigi Vanzi  
THE MAN WHO KILLED BILLY THE KID E Divenne il Più Spietato  
Bandido del Sud  
1000 DOLLARS ON THE BLACK Mille Dollari Sul Nero Alberto Cardone

1968

BEYOND THE LAW Al Di La Della Legge Giorgio Stegani  
BIG SILENCE Il Grande Silenzio Sergio Corbucci  
BLOOD CALLS TO BLOOD Sangue Chiama Sangue Luigi Capuano  
THE COST OF DYING Quanto Costa Morire? Sergio Merolle  
CRYSTALHEMUMS FOR A LOAD OF CARRION Crisantemi per un  
Branco di Carogne Sergio Pastore  
THE DIRTY STORY OF THE WEST Quella Sporca Storia del West  
Enzo Girolami  
EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF Ognuno per Se Giorgio Capitini  
FIND A PLACE TO DIE Joe, Cercati un Posto per Morire  
Giuliano Carmineo  
GET A COFFIN READY Preparati la Bara Ferdinando Baldi  
A HOLE IN THE FOREHEAD Un Buco in Fronte Giuseppe Vari  
I WANT HIM DEAD Lo Voglio Morte Paolo Bianchini  
KILL THEM ALL AND COME BACK ALONE Ammazgali Tutte e Torna Solo  
Enzo Girolami  
THE MOMENT TO KILL Il Momento di Uccidere Giuliano Carmineo  
ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST C'Era Una Volta Il West Sergio Leone  
A PROFESSIONAL GUN Il Mercenario Sergio Corbucci  
RAINBOW (THE LONGEST HUNT) Spara Gringo Spara Mario Amendola /  
Bruno Corbucci  
REVENGE IN EL PASO I Quattro dell'Ave Maria Giuseppe Colizzi  
RUN MAN RUN Corri Uomo Corri Sergio Sollima  
SARTANA Gianfranco Parolini  
A SKY FULL OF STARS FOR A ROOF E per Tetto un Cielo di Stelle  
Giulio Petroni  
TEPEPA Giulio Petroni  
TODAY IT'S ME - TOMORROW YOU! Oggi a Me - Domani a Te! Tonino Cervi  
VENGEANCE Joko, Invoca Dio e Muori Antonio Margheritti  
THE WRATH OF GOD L'Ira di Dio Alberto Cardone

1969

AND GOD SAID TO CAIN E Dio Disse a Caino Antonio Margheritti  
ALIVE - OR PREFERABLY DEAD Vivi - O Preferablimenti Morti  
Duccio Tessari  
BOOT HILL La Collina degli Stivali Giuseppe Colizzi  
DJANGO THE BASTARD Django il Bastardo Sergio Garrone  
THE FIVE-MAN ARMY Un Esercito di Cinque Uomini Don Taylor /  
Italo Zingarelli  
GARRINGO Rafael Romero Marchent  
I'M SARTANA - I'LL DIG YOUR GRAVE Sono Sartana - Il Vestro Becchino  
Giuliano Carmineo  
A MAN CALLED SLEDGE Sledge Giorgio Gentili  
NIGHT OF THE SNAKES La Notte dei Serpenti Giulio Petroni  
NO ROOM TO DIE Una Lunga Fila di Croci Sergio Garrone  
O CANGACEIRO (THE MAGNIFICENT BANDITS) Giovanni Fago  
THE PRICE OF POWER Il Prezzo del Potore Tonino Valerii  
SABATA Ehi, Amico - C'e Sabata. Hai Chiuso! Gianfranco Parolini  
THE SPECIALIST Gli Specialisti Sergio Corbucci  
THE UNHOLY FOUR Ciak Mull - l'Uomo della Vendetta Enzo Barboni

1970

ARIZONA COLT LETS FLY AND KILLS EVERYBODY Arizona Colt Si Scatenò  
E Li Fece Fuori Tutti Sergio Martino  
ARRIVA SABATA Tulio Demichelli  
COMPANEROS Vamos a Matar, Companeros Sergio Corbucci  
GOOD FUNERAL, FRIENDS - SARTANA'S PAYING Buen Funerale Amigos -  
Paga Sartana Giuliano Carmineo  
INDIO BLACK (THE BOUNTY HUNTERS) Indio Black sai che ti Dico - Sei un Gran Figlio Di...  
Gianfranco Parolini  
MY NAME IS TRINITY Lo Chiamavano Trinità Enzo Barboni  
ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK Mario Bava  
SHANGO Shango(o) - la Pistola Infallibile Edoardo Mulgaria  
VENGEANCE IS A DISH EATEN COLD La Vendetta e un Piatto che se  
Serve Freddo Pasquale Squitieri

1971

APOCALYPSE JOE Un Uomo Chiamato Apocalisse Joe Leopòlido Savona  
A CLOUD OF DUST, A CRY IN THE NIGHT, SARTANA ARRIVES Un Nuvola di  
Polvere, Un Grido di Morte, Arriva Sartana Giuliano Carmineo  
AT TIMES LIFE IS VERY HARD, ISN'T IT PROVIDENCE? La Vita, A Volte,  
E'Molto Dura... Vero Provvidenza? Giulio Petroni  
DEAD MEN RIDE Il Sole Sotto Terra Aldo Florio  
DUCK! YOU SUCKER Giu la Testa! Sergio Leone  
LONG LIVE DEATH - YOURS! Viva la Muerte - Tua! Duccio Tessari  
THE RETURN OF SABATA E'Tornato Sabata... Hai Chiuso un Altra Volta  
Gianfranco Parolini  
TRINITY IS STILL MY NAME Continuavano a Chamarlo Trinità Enzo Barboni

1972

THE BIG DUEL Il Grande Duello Giancarlo Santi  
BLINDMAN Ferdinando Baldi  
DEAF SMITH & JOHNNY BARS Los Amigos Paolo Cavara  
HERE WE GO AGAIN, EH PROVIDENCE? Ci Risiamo, Vero Provvidenza?  
Alberto de Martino  
THE J & S BUNCH La Banda J & S - Storia Criminale del Far West  
Sergio Corbucci  
MAN OF THE EAST E Po Lo Chiamaro io Il Magnifico Enzo Barboni  
A REASON TO LIVE, A REASON TO DIE Una Ragione per Vivere, Una  
Ragione per Morire Tonino Valerii

1973

MY NAME IS NOBODY Il Mio Nome e Nessuno Tonino Valerii  
MY NAME IS SHANGHAI JOE (TO KILL OR DIE) Il Mio Nome e Shangay Joe  
Mario Caino



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AUSTEN, David            10,000 DOLLARS BLOOD MONEY    Review in  
 films & filming    May 1968

Not really a review (only two sentences are  
 devoted to the film), but an early summary and  
 critical evaluation of the form, by the most  
 consistently interesting of its advocates.

"    "            CONTINENTAL WESTERNS    films & filming    July 1971

A brief history of the Italian Western and an  
 incomplete but invaluable checklist of 172 films,  
 drawn from the Unitalia catalogues.    Inaccurate  
 captioning of several illustrations.

DURGNAT, Raymond        THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY    Review in  
 films & filming    November 1968

Intelligent appreciation of the film and the  
 form by a major critic.

FRAYLING, Chris        SERGIO LEONE    Cinema (London) 6/7    August 1970

Short discussion of the Dollars films (Frayling  
 considers ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST "thematically  
 isolated"), marred by some inaccuracies, but  
 generally thoughtful and provocative.

JAMESON, Richard T      SOMETHING TO DO WITH DEATH    Film Comment March/April  
 1973

A detailed examination of Leone's visual style,  
 with particular reference to ONCE UPON A TIME  
 IN THE WEST.    Perhaps the best article available  
 on Leone.

KAMINSKY, Stuart L THE GROTESQUE WEST OF SERGIO LEONE  
Take One January/February 1972  
Rambling, useful piece - particularly  
valuable for its division of Leone's  
characters into Good, Bad & Ugly.  
(The same issue contains extracts from an  
anecdotal interview with Leone, which formed  
the basis for a French coffee-table book LES BONS  
LES SALES LES MECHANTS ET LES PROPRES DE SERGIO LEONE).

" " ONCE UPON A TIME IN ITALY - THE ITALIAN WESTERN  
BEYOND LEONE Velvet Light Trap 12 Spring 1974  
A rehash of Kaminski's Take One article, relating  
it to certain non-Leone films. Misprints and  
factual inaccuracies abound.

WALLINGTON, Mike ITALIAN WESTERN - A CONCORDANCE Cinema  
(London) 6/7 August 1970  
Very economical and intelligent over-view of the  
Italian Western. Enough material for an article  
several times the length.

#### BOOKS

EVERSON & FENIN WESTERNS - FROM SILENTS TO THE SEVENTIES  
Penguin Books  
"Italian Westerns & Samurai Films" chapter.  
Incomplete but interesting critical history,  
favouring non-Leone films: rather pretentiously,  
the authors refer to them only by their Italian  
titles.

PARKINSON & JEAUVONS A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF WESTERNS

Hamlyn 1972

"The Spaghetti Westerns" chapter.

Condescending, hostile piece consisting of paraphrased extracts from the Monthly Film Bulletin and uncredited borrowings from David Austen.

SARRIS, Andrew

CONFESSIONS OF A CULTIST

"The Spaghetti Westerns" chapter.

A reactionary, unperceptive essay in two parts, reprinted from the Village Voice. Sarris softened his attitude enough to include Italian Westerns in his "top ten" (Velvet Light Trap 12).

STAIG & WILLIAMS

ITALIAN WESTERN - THE OPERA OF VIOLENCE

Lorrimer 1975

Principally a book for soundtrack buffs (there is a photo of one of the authors sitting on Ennio Morricone's sofa). The text is disorganised and pitted with inaccuracies, though the section on Leone is worth reading.

This Bibliography deals only with principal books and articles in English. Other English-language sources are the Unitalia Film catalogues and the Monthly Film Bulletin (BFI, London): the French magazine IMAGE ET SON has featured interesting articles and perceptive reviews, as has BIANCO E NERO (though the Italians warmed far less to their Westerns than the French).

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KID VENGEANCE, a tedious retelling of  
DEATH RIDES A HORSE, and TWO BULLETS  
FOR A LONG GUN, a camp rehash of THE  
GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY."

Filmography - REQUIESCANT - FOR 1965 READ 1967

Filmography - TEPEPA - ADD: ad Guido Josia

Chronology - AFTER BANDIDOS<sup>(1967)</sup> Massimo Dallamano ADD  
THE BANG BANG KID. Bang Bang Luciano Lelli

Grim tales are told by and about many American actors who worked on the Italian Westerns. Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds tend to dismiss the films they made (as does Gian Maria Volonte); William Berger (SARTANA, SABATA) was harrassed by the Italian police and imprisoned for a ~~comparatively~~ minor drug offence; Frank Wolff (veteran of BIG SILENCE and ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST) committed suicide in Italy.

Hence it was a pleasure to end my researches with a talk to Lee Van Cleef, perhaps the most prolific of all the "foreign" leads. Van Cleef - whose career spans the decade between FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE and BLOOD MONEY, including spin-offs like BARQUERO and KID VENGEANCE - had many positive reminiscences about the form in its heyday.

A selection follows...



LEE VAN CLEEF: I came into this town in a stage play called Mr Roberts. Stanley Kramer saw it and put me in a picture called HIGH NOON. The first time I went into his office he told me to go fix my nose and I told him to go fuck himself. So he told me that instead of playing the second lead I would have to play one of the silent heavies. I said fine - silent is the best way I play.

In fact in the middle of the picture Fred Zimmeman the director said "I want you to say howdy or something to Ian Macdonald when he's getting down off the train" and I said I didn't think I should - I've been playing this silent and if I open my mouth one iota it's going to destroy the strength of the character. And he agreed with me.

Most actors like to talk a lot - I don't. I read scripts and I cut the dialog down to the barest essentials. I've always done that.

Q: Is that what you'd call an approach to acting?

LVC: There is no approach to acting other than sharpening your tools. You learn how to use a sword, stunt fighting, how to use your voice, how to dance - all this is sharpening your tools. It's a basic necessity for all actors. But I don't think too many actors are doing that today.

Q: Of the American parts you played, which were you happiest with?

LVC I got happiness out of every damn one I did. I'm not just saying that to sound off - I really did. Even the old Range Rider series, even Space Patrol on TV.

We had some fun with them. I got knocked out in one - some old character actor hit me on the head with a plastic gun and down I went. And we were doing that live.

Q: How did you meet Sergio Leone?

LVC: Leone came over in 1965, looking for one of two actors he had in mind for his second Western. The moment we met he made up his mind and said, that's it - that's the guy to play Colonel Mortimer in FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE.

Well I wasn't going to argue with him - hell, I couldn't pay my phone bill at the time. I went over and did the thing, I paid my phone bill, and exactly one year later to the day - April 12th 1966 - I was called back to do THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY. And back-to-back with that I made THE BIG GUNDOWN. But now instead of making seventeen thousand dollars I was making a hundred-and-something: which was Leone's doing, not mine. And I was doing leads and heavies in Italy from then on.

Q: What was the set of an Italian Western like?

LVC: It's a lot of fun. I tried to learn the languages, Spanish and Italian and German, not too successfully. Working on a European set isn't a hell of a lot different from working on an American set. I think the Europeans are a lot more spontaneous, more artistic to some degree. But I don't think that they have the technical talent we have here in the States. Here people have been trained much more specifically - they know exactly what they're doing. The Europeans are perhaps slower, but in the end damn near as good.

Q: How much did the characters you played differ from the ones in the original scripts?

LVC: The one area which I disagreed with in the Italian scripts was the dialog. There was too much of it. I'd be given a goddam half-page paragraph and say, look, I can get this across in two words. Maybe it's a difference in the languages, but I had to rewrite every damn scene I

was in. I reduced the whole thing - cut it down to a "Hello" or a "Pardon me, ma'am." A lot of actors think that the more words they have, the more attention they get. That's bullshit. I make people look at me. I don't have to say a lot of words.

Q: Did Leone speak much English in the early days?

LVC: On FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE, no. He did the next year. Now he speaks it almost fluently. But it caused no problems - I understood exactly what he wanted. It was an instinctive thing. He would demonstrate a little bit, and there was always an interpreter on the set. But I knew from the script what was expected of me. The next year, he'd learned more English and we got along even better. He would walk through what he wanted done, then I'd do it my way... and he always accepted the difference.

Q: Did the Italian directors play music on the set?

~~I've heard they did.~~

LVC: I never experienced that. But Leone did play the Morricone scores for me, beforehand. It didn't help me any. I don't act to music, not unless I'm doing a musical.

Q: Did making two films back-to-back create any problems?

LVC: No. Different parts doesn't mean a thing - not for somebody who think's he's an actor. THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY was strictly a heavy, just a mean son of a bitch - nasty because he could smile doing it. THE BIG GUNDOWN was a surly character, but not a heavy. The guys behind me in that picture wanted me to become a politician, but I had no such aspirations and I erased that from my mind as an actor.

Q: Do you have any regrets about the Italian Westerns you made?

LVC: No. I don't care where I work - films are an international business, not just an American institution. You go where the work is. It can be in my own back yard, Israel, Spain or Yugoslavia. We may have the greatest technical efficiency in the world, but our artistic values are not necessarily the best.

Q: You rate the art direction in European pictures?

LVC: Yes. And the timing. Editing is where Leone's really at the top. His timing is great - our own directors are involved in the editing, but they don't do it. Leone does it himself, he's inspired by it, he even had me come into the cutting room while he was putting THE GOOD THE BAD & THE UGLY together, to show me something he'd done. It was a beautiful experience.

Q: Did he ask you to be in ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST?

LVC: I turned it down. I don't remember now exactly why. I didn't like the way it was written.

Q: What about the Circus Westerns, the SABATA films?

LVC: They're sort-of-serious, but they also hinge on being spoofs. I enjoyed them, but they weren't like the Leone films. I don't think it's Parolini's fault - it's as much the fault of the script. I did as good as I could. But if things aren't in the script you can't direct them and you sure can't act them. You can try to add to it as best you can, but if they aren't there to begin with you got a wee bit of a problem. They looked like they were going to be all right. I turned INDIO BLACK down on the script, and they got Yul Brynner instead. I didn't like it when I saw it on TV.

Q: Around that time you made BARQUERO.

LVC: BARQUERO was done in Colorado. Jack Sparr was going to direct it, but he was killed location hunting, in a plane crash. Gordon Douglas took it over. He's a good speed director, makes good television shows; and Warren Oates wasn't anything to sneeze at. But... I think Forest Tucker and I goofed on that one.

Q: You wouldn't play another role like that?

LVC: I'd like to do more comedy. But I think my basic forte is still the heavy. I'd love to do a comic lead, a musical.

Q: You paint in your spare time, so obviously you have an eye for composition. Does directing interest you?

LVC: Definitely. My brother-in-law's got a script which I would love to direct. It's a half-ass comedy called WET PAINT. I'd play one of two parts - Wet Paint himself, or a guitar player who comments on the action. And if I could direct it I'd be very happy. But the economics of the business don't always allow you to do what you want. Clint Eastwood's directing though... We'll see what happens.

LEE VAN CLEEF  
talking to Alex Cox  
10 May 1978