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THESIS:

The Spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone and their influence on the Hollywood Western

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INTRODUCTION

Even today critical attitudes towards the Western remain ambiguous. To English and American critics the genre contains repetitious themes and an overly simplistic morality. But many European countries - France for example - regard the Western as epitomising the best that western cinema has to offer.

Proponents of the Western vindicate it by saying that it portrays a turbulent and important time in American history; that it is in its historical dimension that the Western justifies itself as an artform. Nevertheless they acknowledge that much of the universal appeal of the genre lies in its mythic overtones. Detractors say that the Western is inaccurate in its depiction of history, that it is nostalgic rather than interrogative in its approach and that by striving to mythologise certain truths it has only succeeded in obscuring them.

Initially the traditional Western was an attempt to create a specifically American mythology, something that would help define the national identity and thus help Americans perceive themselves as being more than a collection of mere immigrants. In the political climate of modern America the idealogy associated with this myth making - of a new, classless society, of rugged individualism, and a personal sense of duty ("A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do") - has become more and more difficult to sustain, and the Westerns which perpetuated this philosophy - such as those by John Ford - now seem to lack credibility. In part this can be explained by the fact that the genre started to take itself

too seriously - and in the process became increasingly remote from its roots - thus producing 'Classic' westerns which while often pictorially beautiful were also implausible, slow moving and dull.

However even a reaction against this type of morally responsible 'epic' Western seemed doomed to failure. By attempting to subvert the genre and its preconceptions from within many American directors found themselves working against the fundamental appeal of the Western; its simplistic moral stance, and the inherent mythic appeal therein. As Pauline Kael said of High Noon amongst others; "..The message is that the myths we never believed in anyway were false."(1).

By the early '60's the genre seemed to have lost all momentum. What nobody expected was that the essential appeal of the genre - if not its moral rigour - would be recreated by a European, nor could any one have predicted the actual form such films would take. They would rely on a small cast of characters, a convoluted, schematic plot and a wholly unique vision.

Leone's background and nationality can be cited as an important factors in his success in the genre. His robust Italian approach, the lack of a political context to his early films, his unorthodox interpretation of the genre - in itself a product of his nationality, his role as an outsider - made it possible for him to explore themes not normally the subject of American Westerns - the Bounty Hunter as central character for example - and to ignore traditional Western Themes - such as the Cavalry versus the Red Indians. This approach, coupled with a unique visual flair, are why Leone's Westerns are still so popular even today.

In this Thesis I will attempt to examine what exactly made Leone's Westerns work - what the exact nature of their appeal was - and how they

differed from the classic Fordian Western. I will also examine how the Hollywood system absorbed and applied some of Leone's techniques and how the films produced by his imitators differed from those made by Leone himself. As I see it, a very specific cultural exchange took place - an Italian interpretation of an American theme. The irony lies in the fact Leone's films were to be reinterpretated - and imitated - by the very sources which he himself sought to exploit. The descendents of the Spaghetti Western, films such as The Wild Bunch or The Outlaw Josey Wales are both examples of the evolution of an idea, of a genre experiencing a form of renewal through plagiarism which is itself plagiarised in turn.

PART ONE: THE CLASSIC WESTERN.

Of all the great directors of the Classic Western it was perhaps John Ford who most characterised the ambiguities of the genre. John Baxter speaks of the "Remarkable breadth of his contribution to cinema, and the narrowness of its concerns." (2). Ford's concerns could be defined as a belief in a hierarchal structure with the military - i.e. the forces of law and order - occupying the top of the ladder, and woman, indians and blacks somewhere at the bottom. This interpretation of society underlies the bulk of his films. An overly simplistic perception of people was allied to a 'gaurded serenity, a sceptical satisfaction with the beauty of the American landscape' (3).

Bazin regarded Stagecoach as epitomising the ideal Western. He described it thus; - "An ideal balance between social myth, historical reconstruction, psychological truth, and the traditional theme of the Western *mise en scene.*"(4). He contrasted this against the emergence of the post-war 'super western' which lost narrative appeal in its desire to be idealogically correct. Certainly Stagecoach would seem to deserve much of the accolades heaped upon it. It is very much a Western in the classic mould, with all the staple ingredients associated with the genre - in terms of both the characters it deals with as well as in the themes which it explores - such as the cavalry versus the Indians. It even culminates in a shootout on the mainstreet. Yet these disparate elements are unified by a tightly structured plot - the journey of a group of characters to Lordsville via a Stagecoach. The early part of the film establishes the various characters. Hatfield the gambler (in reality the

dissolute son of southern aristocracy), The drunken docter, the banker, the salesman, the pregnant wife of a cavalry officer, the prostitute. Finally there is Ringo the Kid, played by John Wayne. Each has his reasons for wishing to reach Lordsville, Wayne in particular is motivated by a desire to avenge himself against the men who killed his father and brother. Dramatic tension is sustained in the first section of the film by the possibility of an indian attack. Subsequently Wayne pursues his vendetta in Lordsville, killing the three men who were responsible for the deaths of his father and brother.

Stagecoach was produced in 1939, yet it so completely epitomises the genre that one wonders how it was possible to improve upon it. The underlying ethos which Baxter has commented upon is still present however, and despite his sympathy for Ringo, it is easy to see that Ford's essential loyalties are to stability and to the establishment - in this instance represented by the virtues of the family unit. The heroine of the film is the young and pregnant woman who is travelling on the coach in order to be with her husband. She is not so much a heroine by virtue of her actions - she is essentially a passive character - but because of what she represents. During the journey she gives birth and the sight of the newly born child is what insprires Ringo and Dallas - the 'tart with a heart' to consider marriage. The implication is that accepted social institutions offer a means of redemption.

Warshow(5) identifies My Darling Clementine was one of the chief culprits in the decline of the Western. Yet My Darling Clementine contains a theme familiar to any who have watched a Leone spaghetti western - a character's search for revenge. The difference is in emphasis and the fashion in which the character achieves his designs.

There are two main characters in My Darling Clementine, Wyatt Earp and 'Doc' Halliday, played respectively by Fonda and Victor Mature. Together they form an uneasy alliance, but their motives are set in a broad social context and both men are essentially symbols for conflicting systems of values. Halliday represents the lawless element of the old west. Fittingly he is dying (of tuberculosis). Fonda represents the emergent forces of law and order. Although he is determined to capture the men who killed two of his brothers at times he seems to be motivated not so much by a desire for revenge as a need to see that justice is done. He is scrupulously fair in his dealings with the culprits - to the extent of permitting the chief perpetrator to go free. Ford conveys something of the community spirit that might exist in such frontier towns, and there is a great deal of emphasis on social occasions - dances, church services, the theatre - against which much of the drama is acted out. Fonda's treatment of woman displays a clear sense of establishment values. He is civil to Clementine Cotter because he perceives her to be a lady, but his treatment of Chihuahua is much more questionable. In this respect he personifies the values and spirit of the community of which he is part, and is thus its real hero, unlike the self destructive 'Doc' Halliday, a character who, while he might provoke our sympathy, is essentially an outsider, a man who has rejected society's values and is therefore beyond the pale.

The Searchers has been described as Ford's greatest Western. In it Ethan Pawley - played by Wayne - sets off in pursuit of the comanches responsible for killing his brother, and his brother's family.

Ethan is a man driven by his insatiable hatred of Comanches and indians in general. This emotion has come to dominate his life to the exclusion

of anything else. Ultimately it has effected his judgement. During one scene he shoots at random at a herd of buffalo simply because he believes by doing so he will deprive indians of food for the winter. The ostensible purpose of his quest is to rescue his niece Deborah, the only member of his brother's family to have survived the massacre. But throughout the five years that Ethan - and her brother Martin - have been searching for her, Debbie has adapted completely to the indian way of life, ultimately becoming Chief Scar's squaw. In Ethan's eyes this sets her beyond the pale and beyond redemption. When they find her, he initially tries to kill her but is prevented from doing so by Martin.
As with most Ford films there is a certain amount of emphasis on community rituals - dancing, funerals etc - and in some respects Ethan conforms to Ford's conception of what a hero of the old west should be; he has served in the army during the civil war for example.
But Ethan's hatred for Comanches set him apart from the rest of the community because it transcends the bounderies of common sense. In Stagecoach, Ringo the Kid is not strictly speaking an outlaw. This is made apparent to us when he recalls how the docter set his brother's arm. He is really just a wayward son of the extended family which Ford perceived any frontier community to be. Ethan is a much more sinister character, a bigot and a fanatic. Throughout the film it is suggested that his hatred has some justification; that the Comanches represent a threat which must be exterminated and that while following his own impulses Ethan is also fulfilling the needs of the community - in much the same way as Wyatt Earp did in My Darling Clementine. Most of the community seem to be in accordance with his belief that a girl who has become a comanche squaw is better off dead. Martin's girlfriend says as

much, and Captain Clayton orders a dawn attack on Scar's camp knowing that this will in all probability lead to the girl's death. The only person to defend Debbie's right to live is Martin, and he is depicted throughout the film as impulsive and none too bright.

Yet if Earp represents and reflects the values of the community, Ethan only epitomises them at their most extreme. My Darling Clementine ends with the implication that Earp will soon marry, consolidate his role as a piller of the community. The Searchers ends with Ethan returning the girl to the community, hovering hesitantly outside the doorway for a moment before turning and striding off into the desert, the door shutting slowly in his wake. The implication is that Ethan is himself a figure beyond the pale, an outsider who has transgressed the narrow values of the community, a restless soul whose all consuming hatred will give him no rest. This is one of the few occasions where a Fordian hero has been depicted in such a fashion and presumably the character was to serve as the inspiration for the loners and obsessives who people Leone's films. The fundamental difference is that Ethan is not an outlaw. He is only an outsider because he represents the values of the community taken to an irrational extreme.

In The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance Ford was to question the whole process of mythmaking in regard to the Western - something of which he himself was particularily culpable. Shot in black and white - despite being made in 1962 - the film has an elegaic quality and questions some of the most basic assumptions that underlie Ford's earlier work. In the film the idealistic young lawyer - played by James Stewart - attempts to confront the outlaw Liberty Valance. The film is an ironic commentary on the dubious heroism of such an action. Stewart's character is unprepared

and easy prey to Valance's more expert gunmanship. Ultimately Valance's death is brought about, not by the bravery of the lawyer, but by a local rancher, Tom Donophan, Stewart's rival in love, who is standing unseen across the street, and who guns down Valance in cold blood. Or so it would seem; Ford is ambiguous as to who indeed did shoot Liberty Valance. Both Stewart and Wayne fire simultaneously.

Wayne uses a shotgun - like a man putting down a wild animal - rather than the conventional hand gun, with its connotations of chivalry and fair play. The implication is that there is nothing heroic, nothing to be gained, by confronting such a person as Valance. He is simply an outlaw who should be killed in as perfunctory a manner as possible. Both sequences - Stewart's confrontation with Valance and Wayne's account of what actually took place - carry with them a certain conviction. We feel that this probably how it *really* was. Historical fact would seem to bear this suspicion out. Documentary evidence suggests that most Sheriff's preferred a doublebarrelled shot gun to a pistol, and many of them shot their men in the back.

The story is told by Stewart in flashback form as an elderly man remembering an era long gone. When he has completed narrative the newspaper men who had initially pursuaded him to recount the reasons why he arrived in Sweetwater - especially to attend Tom Donaphon's funeral - refuse to print the story. As one character puts it "When I hear the myth and the reality; I publish the myth."

Although the film is on one level an inverted homage to the heroic ideals of the traditional western and their decline - Wayne's murder of Valance may not be particularily courageous but in every other respect he is an heroic figure, and his *motives* for killing Valance (to ensure

the happiness of the woman he loves and the survival of the democratic process) are unimpeachable - on a certain fundamental level it seems as if Ford is finally, somewhat belatedly, acknowledging the inherent dangers of mythologising the reality that was the Wild West.

In a sense his career had come to epitomise the Western in all its contradictions; from the early naivete of Stagecoach, to this, his last and most ambiguous film.

With hindsight there is something apposite about Ford's symbolic farewell to the genre which had earned him so many accolades. By rejecting the whole process of mythmaking he had left the stage clear for one of his most erstwhile imitators to do precisely what he himself had rejected. This director was to take some of the principal tenets of the genre and gently parody them. While his films lacked Ford's moral rigour and tight plotting they would be directed with immense visual flair and a certain wry humour that could only be found in a European. This man, this obscure italian director of historical epics, was called Sergio Leone.

PART TWO: THE SPAGHETTI WESTERN.

We know that the first film in the 'Dollers' trilogy was based on a film by Kurosawa called Yojimbo. Another one of Kurasawa's films - The Seven Samurai - had already formed the basis of a cult western; The Magnificent Seven. A structurally simple plot - Eastwood's character plays two rival gangs against one another - A Fistful of Dollers lacks the finish of its successors, but all the ingredients traditionally associated with a Leone Western are here; the atonal score, explicit violence and powerful use of imagry.

One of the first things we notice about the film- in comparison to Ford's work - is the element of exagerration; Leone has taken the most identifiable traits of the Western and emphasised them. The heat, the dust, the peculiarly old fashioned fire arms.

This is extended to include the degree of violence - one of the most fundamental differences between a Fordian Western and Leone's work. Most Fordian Western unfold with all the inevitability of a greek tragedy. When violence finally erupts, there is a certain significance to who has been killed and why.

Compare this to A Fistful of Dollers. Inside the first fifteen minutes the Man guns down three men whose only real crime has been to frighten his mule. They, in their turn, were prepared to kill him, but simply weren't fast enough on the draw. Obviously not many people would be prepared to die for such trivial reasons. Because of the element of parody inherent in Leone's style, the violence of his films is casual and excessive. Perhaps for this very reason it doesn't emotionally touch

us. This is the Western as fairytale, as myth, and the characters have all the depth of characters out of a pantomime. This is part of their charm.

Leone piles excess upon excess. He does this with considerable style and relish. A group of mexican soldiers are massacred. An entire family smoked out of their homes and then killed one by one. In order to ensure the safe escape of the family who he has chosen to protect, the Man kills six bandits. This is poor arithmatic, no matter how worthy the cause. The lives of three people against the lives of half a dozen? More, ultimately, as the Man guns down the survivors at the climax of the film.

It might seem that, if Ford took the traditional ingredients of the Western and subverted them to idealogical ends, Leone has gone to the other extreme. He has taken all that is appealing about the Western at its most basic level and simply ignored any intellectual possibilities the genre presents. But to believe this is to ignore the wry humour that permeates the film, that is, if one discounts its visual style. There is a certain philosophy running throughout A Fistful of Dollers ; it is at once subversive, worldly and completely cynical.

The debt to Kurasawa is obvious, despite Leone's claims that both he and Kurasawa owe something to a nineteenth century novel called "A servant of two masters". Probably, to a lesser degree, both directors were influenced by Hammet's *Red Harvest*.

In Yojimbo, Sanjuro, a masterless Samurai plays two rival factions in a small town against one another, relying on his skill as a Swordsman to ensure neither side achieves undue advantage over the other. One household is dominated by a strong matriarch, the other by three

brothers. Sanjuro is befriended by a cynical inn keeper who feeds him without charging him. Hostages are exchanged. A woman is returned to her loving husband and Sanjuro gives them the money he has received as payment for his services in order to ensure that they will be able to set up a new life together, and so on and so forth.

Leone's version sticks very closely to the original story while introducing some additional sequences that don't greatly disturb the overall balance of the plot. Chiefly the massacre of a regiment of Mexican soldiers and the unsuing complications - Eastwood uses two of the bodies as bait to force a confrontation between both factions. Yet Eastwood's escape - the scene where he crawls along under the porch of each house to elude his pursuers while they pass to and fro just above him, and his subsequent escape out of the town inside a coffin - has been kept relatively unchanged.

Certain parallels can be drawn between the final sequence where Yojimbo confronts a man armed with a gun (he disarms him with a knife throw.) and Eastwood's confrontation with Ramon Rojo. In both cases the hero confronts a man armed with a superior weapon - the catchphrase on the publicity posters for A Fistful of Dollers ran; "When a man with a gun confronts a man with a rifle.....the man with the gun always loses."

Yojimbo is an important film because in it we see the genesis of the character, the Man with No Name. Sanjuro is vague about his antecdents when asked, and also about his age. He is preoccupied by money - at least, initially - but even though he is a masterless Samurai he has his own code of honour. He reunites the family who has suffered at the hands of one faction and also provides them with the means to effect their escape. The mystery surrounding the character's past, his absract sense

of greed, and his sudden and unexpected acts of altruism were all to become characteristic of Eastwood's persona in the Leone films. The one fundamental difference is that Eastwood's character is much more taciturn. He never states what his intentions are - unlike Sanjuro, who makes it clear from the outset of the film that he intends to play both sides, one against the other.

This additional development - the taciturnity of the character in the 'Dollers' trilogy - seems to have been the product of a joint collaberation between Leone and Eastwood. Leone said he found many American Westerns far too talkative. Eastwood says that when he read the script he suggested that his dialogue be pared down to the minimum - to heighten the mystique of the character.

There may have been more practical reasons. The film was aimed at both the American and the Italian public. Given the inevitable problems with dubbing it made sense to keep the dialogue to the minimum. Eastwood says that the dialogue was oddly written - an Italian attempt at Wild West jargon which was not entirely successful. Bronson, who was offered the script before Eastwood, says it was the worst he ever read. He said he didn't know then what Leone could do with it. In this light, it probably seemed sensible to Eastwood that he insist on simplifying dialogue to the extent where any major stylistic flaws would be less apparent.

After A Fistful of Dollers - not in itself a characteristic plot for Leone to use - a certain consistant approach to theme and character emerge, as can be seen from For a few dollers more.

The successor to A Fistful of Dollers, this film introduces Colonel Mortimer, the character played by Van Cleef in a reluctant alliance with Eastwood's Man With No Name. For the first time the plot structure which

was to become typical of all later Leone Westerns is evident, and we can see now that Yojimbo constitutes something of an aberration within this framework.

In a traditional Leone Western there are three characters; the villain, the hero and the third man. The hero and the third character will usually form an alliance at some stage of the film. Ultimately there will be a confrontation between the villain and the hero. One of the three men is always of rude peasant stock. It is he who provides a sort of earthy vigour to the films. Sometimes he is the villain - Indio in For a Few Dollers More, but more often he is an ally of the hero - Cheyenne in Once upon a Time in the West and Tuco in The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly..

A larger budget ensured that For a Few Dollers More. was a marked improvement on the first in terms of cinematic technique. It is also a much more assured film. The distinctively visual style so characteristic of Leone is more evident than ever, particularily in his handling of character. Frayling has mentioned Leone's 'eblematic' approach to characterisation - the signature tunes and specific instruments which are used to introduce each character. What we also notice about the figures who people his narratives is their visual idiosyncrasies. In A fistful of Dollers, it is Eastwood who stands out, with his distinctive poncho. This is developed further in For a Few Dollers More, each of the three chief protagonists being visually distinct from the other. Van Cleef is white haired and dressed in black. Apart from the striking effect created by this contrast, his clothes - the black suit and long greatcoat - suggest a wholly different character from that played by Eastwood. The implication, as Frayling puts it, is of "The professional,

the collector of specimens."(6) In comparison Eastwood is still wearing his poncho. Indio, played by Volonte, and the third member of the trinity stands out by virtue of his hispanic appearence and peasant antecedants.

Frequently - here and in later films - Leone resorts to using some prop other than each character's distinctive dress; some recognisable trademark which will make his characters more easily identifiable and perhaps compensate for their lack of depth. Eastwood, for example, has his cigars, Van Cleef his pipe, Bronson a harmonica.

Perhaps one of the more curious features of The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, the third and final film in the trilogy, is the role played by Van Cleef. It becomes apparent at a certain stage that Leone has set this, the third film, at some time prior to the first two in an attempt to trace the history of the characters. Thus we learn why Eastwood's character wears his distinctive poncho - he stole it from a dying yankee soldier over whom he placed his own jacket - and so on.

We know from For a few dollers more that Van Cleef's character had been a colonel in the civil war, since fallen on hard times and thus forced to make a living as a bounty hunter. Although there is nothing to indicate that he and Eastwood have met before in For a Few Dollers More, neither is there anything to suggest that they have not; this is due to the reticance typical of any Leone's characters.

So, at the start of The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly it seems logical to assume that the character played by Van Cleef in the second Dollers film and in this, the third, where he is somewhat younger in appearence, are one and the same man. And there are obvious parallels - Van Cleef becoming an officer in the confederate army to cite one example.

Yet ultimately they emerge as two very different individuals. The Colonel is motivated by a certain code of honour; he is a man seeking to avenge the death of his sister. Angel Eyes - Van Cleef's *nom de guerre* in The Good, the Bad and the Ugly is a wholly different. Sadistic, greedy and ruthless he seems to care only for money. And of course in the final sequence Eastwood kills him.

Although many of the extras in the films reappear throughout the trilogy in a variety of different roles - a common feature of Italian cinema at the time - it does seem possible that Leone did originally envisage the Van Cleef character to be one and the same man in both films, but that Van Cleef's character in the third film gradually took on a sinister quality that ultimately rendered this impossible. It was simply too difficult to reconcile this grinning and sadistic killer with the dashing military figure of For a Few Dollers More.

Leone must have been aware that casting Van Cleef in two different yet highly similar roles might confuse his American public. The fact that he did not seem to care says something about his preoccupations as a director. Plot consistency was not of paramount importance to him. Ultimately his films were concerned with pace and creating a specific visual style - which they did, superbly - rather than a serious examination of human nature. Like the sicilian puppets which were their inspiration, the same characters were often used again in entirely new roles, and with only minor alterations to distinguish them from their previous performances.

Once Upon A Time in West has been seen as at once a monument to the Western and also the ultimate act of revisionism - particularily in the countercasting of Henry Fonda - who had played the Sheriff in Ford's My

Darling Clementine - as the blue eyed killer. It was the only time in an acting career which spanned over fifty years that Fonda was to play such a role. The film owes something to Johnny Guitar in terms of plot. In both films a house which is the future site of a new railway station - and ultimately, a new town - is of pivotal importance. There is a bandit of sorts - the 'Kid' - who is in love with the female owner, played by Joan Crawford. There is a stranger called Johnny guitar who was formerly a gunman but has hung up his holster and who now plays the guitar instead. At one stage in the film there is a confrontation between both men, Johnny Guitar refusing to be drawn into a fight, and strumming a tune much to the irritation of the Kid. But although Johnny Guitar has a certain surreal appeal, it has none of Leone's visual richness and the emphasis in the story is on the rivalry between the two female protagonists - Crawford and her nemesis, Emma, played by McCambridge. Guitar refuses to fight because he is trying to mend his ways, unlike Harmonica who does not want to reveal his prowess with the gun until he has confronted his brother's killer.

Once upon a time in the West is the first film of Leone's with a specific idealogical dimension to it; Morton, the crippled railway magnate. symbolises progress. Physically inadequate yet clever and manipulative he uses doller bills to achieve his ends. He is a harbringer of a system of values which will ultimately render the values of the frontier - which Leone perceives to be the values which make a man a 'man' in the true sense - obsolete.

There are echoes of The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance here, but what it is particularily curious is that the idealogical dimension which Leone has introduced is in complete contrast to that of the 'Dollers'

sequence, where there is no conflict between the various character's desire for money and their masculine code of values. Once Upon a Time in the West puts the ethos of the *machismo* and man's more mercantile impulses in direct conflict with one another.

The values of the true man are epitomised in the characters played by Fonda and Bronson. Although Fonda's character kills a child early in the film, we are drawn to his vitality. Continuously throughout the film analogies are drawn between this figure, powerful, dominant, and threatening and the pathetic figure of Morton, his employer. Fonda's appeal as a character owes much to Italian perceptions of acceptable masculine behaviour - vastly different from that of American audiences - and Leone's sympathetic treatment of him is only subversive *by the standards of the conventional Hollywood Western.* By Italian standards the killing of a small child by Fonda simply demonstrates the character's ability to do what is necessary, no matter how morally dubious.

If Leone's characters could all be said to possess props it is difficult to say what singles out Fonda. Perhaps his electric blue eyes alone constitute a prop. But Morton has his crutches, and Leone elaborates on this character by using a different sort of prop; that of metaphor. Robards says of Morton that he can always tell where he is because of the trail he leaves behind him - "Two beautiful shiny rails". Fonda further embellishes this by describing Morton outside the confines of the railay carriage in which he spends the majority of the film, as being "Like a turtle out of its shell." Like all Leone's props this is a neat and visually suggestive way of summing up Ergo's essential nature. He is the inadequate, the impotent, everything that Fonda, who is his

hired gun, despises; there is nothing so ultimately pathetic as a snail or a tortoise.

Thus the real protagonists are Bronson and Fonda, both men in the classic mould. Both despise money and rely instead on their courage, their willingness to take risks and their speed on the draw. Their duel at the end of a film, in the vicinity of where the railway line is being built, is in essence the ritual of a species nearly extinct. They whom Bronson describes minutes before this final confrontation as being - "That most ancient race." It is the first reference to the theme which underlies the whole film, in itself a paen to the traditional values of the *machismo*. It is also perhaps, the most overt reference ever made by a Leone character to the impulses which motivate and guide him.

Leone's inverted homage to the tradition of John Ford was to be further explored in the his next film; A Fistfull of Dynamite casts Coburn in the role of the Irish revolutionary down in Mexico - a direct reference to material already explored by Ford, but here treated with a wry cynicism. The political context is another symptom of the increasingly idealogical tone of Leone's work, although Leone's reference's to politics throughout the film are oblique and ironic. It is notably absent from the 'Dollers' trilogy, and sits somewhat uneasily on A Fistful of Dynamite; it could be said of Leone's films that they often function more successfully as entertainment largely because they *lack* any idealogical dimension.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPAGHETTI WESTERN ON THE AMERICAN WESTERN.

The Wild Bunch could be said to be the first film by an American director to clearly bear the mark of Leone's influence while being recognisably the work of a different director.

In it the ageing outlaw, Pike (William Holden) and his band hope to pull off one last coup when they are hired by a mexican general to rob a supply of arms from a munitions train.

Many of the themes explored by Peckinpah throughout the film are recognisably derivative of Leone. The strong emphasis on a masculine code of values. Peckinpah's subversive choice of a central character. But it is the debt to Leone in cinematic terms which is particularily apparent. Peckinpah employs the same visual rhetoric in his use of close ups, in the pacing of the film - it is two and a half hours long - and in his overall attention to details. Here too we find the same use of explicit violence, often filmed in slow motion to provide additional impact.

But the similarities in approach only serve to heighten the contrasts. Leone's films have a strong element of self parody - particularily in the 'Dollers' sequence - which allows us to remain emotionally uninvolved. They are in essence 'fairytales', and the characters are archtypes rather than flesh and blood individuals.

Peckinpah's treatment of character is much more realistic. Pike is a complex man, an ageing outlaw living by his own code of values - a code shared by his men - who has become increasingly aware that he is an anachronism. Throughout the film he is forced to confront various

symbols of progress - a car, a machine gun - which serve to remind him of this truth. Peckinpah's depiction of Pike may remind us of Frank and Harmonica - Once Upon a Time in America had been released the year before - but as a character he probably owes more to Tom Donaphon in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance. There are other differences too; whereas Leone's characters are solitary individuals thrown together by chance and/or mutual need, and whose masculinity is defined by their self sufficiency, Peckinpah's exploration of masculinity is principally concerned with how men function *as a group*. Each of whom is clearly defined throughout the course of the film.

Leone directs his talents principally towards story telling. His characters enact traditional mythic roles. Peckinpah's vision is much bleaker and the morality of his characters - because they are 'real' people - more complex. Leone's unique visual flair has in its turn been subverted to explore themes far more serious than he could ever have anticipated.

The Wild Bunch is an important film because, unlike Eastwood's two films - High Plains Drifter and The Outlaw Josey Wales it cannot be traced directly back to Leone. The fashion in which Peckinpah used certain key features of Leone's technique is the first indication that Leone was beginning to exert an indirect but formative influence on the evolution of the popular Western; that he was no longer simply a isolated phenomena.

It seems fitting that the last film I shall examine was directed by the man who was himself crucial to the success of the Spaghetti western. Eastwood made his directorial debut in 1972 with High Plains Drifter . This was followed in 1976 by The Outlaw Josey Wales . The films are

obviously influenced by Leone. They also owe something to Don Siegal, another director whom Eastwood had worked under. In The Outlaw Josey Wales Eastwood himself was to gently parody the role he had played in Leone's 'Dollers' trilogy. There are certain similarities between the Man and Josey Wales; both are taciturn characters, particularily in comparison to the people whom they seem to attract - think of Tuco in The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, and one can see a certain resemblence to the talkative indian chief who befriends Josey. Eastwood has substituted the cigar for chewing tabacco, and the poncho associated with his role in the 'Dollers' films is absent, but Josey possesses all the same speed on the draw.

Yet in every other respect the film parodies the themes which were so characteristic of Leone. Josey loses his wife and son at the beginning of the film, and resolves not to form emotional attachments, yet throughout the course of the narrative he accumulates a group of hangers on and misfits who save his life on more than one occasion. This is in direct contrast to the Man, a loner who trusts no one. Indeed it would seem that Eastwood is arguing the exact opposite; and saying that no man is an island. The film begins as a story of revenge - a familiar theme to both Ford and Leone - but as Josey finds himself the centre of a little community, he begins to question the point of such philosophy. He is forced to defend himself anyway, but a character from a film directed by Leone or Ford would have hunted down the culprits rather than waiting for the culprits to come to him.

Visually the film explores the American landscape in all its breathtaking variety - making a Leone Western look monotonous in comparison - and the range of characters whom Josey encounters are

recognisably American types, rather than the cyphers typical of a Leone film. The debt to Leone is principally in the wry humour which permeates the film, the air of realism - that is, the attention to detail - although in this instance it seems to be focused primarily on the landscape, and in the character of Josey Wales, a parody which would not have been possible were there not an original *to* parody.

Such films marked a slow but perceptible transition as Leone's talents were recognised and absorbed into mainstream Hollywood cinema. When it came to the Western, or other similar genres, many directors - Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch is a good example - were heavily influenced by Ford when it came to theme and content, but drawn to Leone's expressive visual style. A successful marrying of two distinct styles had been achieved.

SUMMARY.

If I have dwelt at length on the visual aspect of Leone's cinematic style - his habit of conveying character through dress, through the use of props etc. - it is because I believe Leone makes his points primarily by using a form of visual rhetoric. It is only by examining his films from a visual and pictorial point of view that we will gain an understanding of his concerns and the fashion in which they differ from those of the traditional Western.

Unlike Ford, Leone films his characters using a great deal of close ups, contrasting scarred, lined and pockmarked faces against the bleak desert landscape with the obvious if unspoken comment that a harsh enviroment creates harsh men.

Ford's characters - with the exception perhaps of Ethan Pawley - usually occupy the middle distance, and are often depicted against the crowded backdrop of a saloon. In comparison to the usually deserted world which Leone's character's inhabit, Ford's world seems full of life and a certain rude vitality. To Ford, man's triumph over the west was the triumph of community spirit. The outsiders - such as Doc Halliday - die off or are drawn back into the fold when their needs and the values of the community coincide - Ringo and Dallas in Stagecoach.

Thus the visual differences which mark both Director's approach are also symptomatic of a much deeper idealogical difference. Leone's characters have been marginalised by society. Their code of values has little to do with community spirit and a great deal to do with what constitutes an acceptable code of masculine behaviour - the necessity of retribution

for example. They have no loyalties except to themselves, and their motives lack any broader social context except in the most peripheral sense. Whereas Ford is interested in what qualities make a man a good citizen - his perception of masculinity is closely allied with a sense of social responsibility - Leone is more interested in what makes a man a 'man' in the oldfashioned sense of the word.

I have said that I believe Leone's films convey information primarily by visual means. Yet, from a historical perspective what is ironic about the seeming visual solidity of Leone's work- this attention to detail - is that it was often historically inaccurate. The appearence of the towns which The Man arrives in rarely appear particularily western. They resemble the kind of chalet towns common along the Italian border. The gatlings which the confederacy uses in The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly were not invented until some time after the civil war. Earlier on in the same film Eastwood prepares to shoot his new partner free from the noose - by means of a telescopic sight. Many of the handguns - particularily in the earlier films - were created by the simple expedient of attaching a longer barrel to a modern pistol.

In this light it is easy to acknowledge the superiority of Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch or Eastwood's The Outlaw Josey Wales on the grounds of historical accuracy; after all these are American films directed by Americans, and who better qualified to examine their countary's prevailing idealogy, the myths which had become enshrined in the American consciousness?

Maybe so. Nevertheless Leone's films still continue to exert their appeal. Why?

I have cited the numerous differences between Ford and Leone in terms of theme and cinematic approach. I have not examined their similarities, which were many. As is often the case, parody became an inverted form of homage, and that Leone's films resemble Ford's in countless ways should be obvious. Behind this there was a certain similarity of temperment. Both men recognised the inherent importance of myth. People have cited Ford's Westerns as being more 'realistic' in their treatment of the Wild West. Ford's films may possess a greater appearence of historical accuracy - unlike Leone, he had access to the country and the terrain where many of the events he filmed had actually taken place - but in his themes and in his treatment of character, Ford's films sought to mythologise certain realities in much the same way as Leone.
And it is this trait in particular which singles out Leone and the nature of his appeal. While being inaccurate to the truth, the reality that was the 'Wild West', Leone's films are true on a more fundamental level; a mythological level, and perhaps it is on the level of myth that the Western functions most successfully.

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LIST OF FILMS

1. 'Stagecoach'- *John Ford*
2. 'My Darling Clementine' - *John Ford*
3. 'The Searchers' - *John Ford*
4. 'The Man who shot Liberty Valence' - *John Ford*
5. 'Yojimbo' - *Akira Kurosawa*
6. 'A Fist full of Dollars' - *Sergio Leone*
7. 'For a few Dollars more' - *Sergio Leone*
8. 'The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly' - *Sergio Leone*
9. 'Once Upon a time in the West' - *Sergio Leone*
10. Johnny Guitar'
11. 'A fist full of Dynamite' - *Sergio Leone*
12. 'The Wild Bunch' - *Peckinpah*
13. 'The Outlaw Josey Wales' - *Clint Eastwood*