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The Early 1960s

Mid 1950s–early 1960s The economic boom
1961 *Mater et magistra* issued by Pope John XXIII
Vatican II Council
1963 John XXIII Church encyclical *Pacem in Terris* revokes excommunication of Communists
Aldo Moro (DC) premier of Center Left government
1964 *Piano Solo* coup extreme Right attempt led by General De Lorenzo foiled
1966 Flooding in Florence and Venice

Italian politics in the early 1960s was characterized by reformist trends. In 1962, the Socialist Party entered into a coalition government led by the Christian Democrat Aldo Moro in 1962 after another split between pro-Soviet and pro-Western factions in the Socialist Party caused by the PSI approval of NATO, which had prevented the Soviet Union from spreading west after WWII. There were reactions to this political trend from the extreme Right, in particular, in the failed coup attempt let by General De Lorenzo in 1964, spoofed by Monicelli in his film *Vogliamo I colonelli/We Want the Colonels* (1973).

Reforms extended to religious life in the country. When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, his successor Angelo Roncalli, John XXIII (1881–1963) (*il papa buono*—the good pope), moved to liberalize the Roman Catholic Church. John XXIII's Vatican II Council of 1962 sought to establish the Church as a source of spiritual and moral guidance for all elements of society regardless of political affiliation. The previous pope, Pius XII, had favored an Italian government that was more overtly pro-Catholic, like the rightist Franco and Salazar regimes in Spain and Portugal respectively, instead of the republican secular vision of government with a plurality of participation promoted by Italy's first postwar coalition, Alcide De Gasperi's DC Party. John XXIII's papal encyclical *Mater et magister—Mother and Teacher* (1961) brought the end of the universal use of Latin to celebrate the Catholic mass and was interpreted as a papal blessing on the Center-Left governments. John XXIII also removed Luigi Gedda as president of Catholic Action, weakening the organization's conservative wing. In 1965, John XXIII even ended the publication of its *Index* of prohibited books, infamous over the centuries for having censored the works of important thinkers including Galileo. The hold over Italian culture by

Catholicism would be satirized in the films of Fellini such as *8½* (1963). Changes in Italian society in the 1960s saw a decline in applications to religious orders and in church attendance. Some of the social functions performed the Catholic Church in Italy, such as hospital or elderly care and childhood education, would increasingly be assumed by private organizations or the Italian state. A new Concordat would eventually be signed between the Vatican and Socialist premier Bettino Craxi in 1984, which ended the Roman Catholic Church's status as Italy's state religion. Despite attempts by the Church to change, its strongest elements retained traditional values as demonstrated by the influence of the charismatic Francesco Forgione (1887–1968), a Capuchin friar known as Padre Pio, canonized by John Paul II in 2002. The most influential attempt to retain the traditional role of the Church was by groups such as the *Comunione e liberazione* (communion and freedom) founded by Don Giussani (1922–2005).

For a combination of demographic and economic reasons, such as the creation of the European Common Market, by the early 1960s an Italian contemplating emigration considered Italy's industrial north or northern Europe as a destination along with the Americas or Australia. During and immediately following the periods of highest immigration to America in the early years of the century, America had been a fixture in the works of intellectuals such as Elio Vittorini, Carlo Levi, Ignazio Silone, Mario Soldati, and Cesare Pavese. In the 1930s, the Fascist autarkic boycott of American films actually increased the appeal of seemingly youthful and modern American art. After WWII, Hollywood flooded the Italian market with films unreleased during the embargo years 1938–44 to the point that some critics talked about a dominating American cultural influence over Italy.[1] However, after WWII and particularly in the 1960s there was an eroding of the myth of America among Italian intellectuals. Writers such as Emilio Cecchi had already written of *America amara* (bitter America) and the disappointment at the contradictions of American society.[2] Actually anti-American sentiment has a long history in Italy and in Europe—from the opposition to American President Woodrow Wilson's insistence on national self-determination at the post-WWI peace negotiations, which led D'Annunzio to decry a *pace mutilate* (mutilated peace), to the propaganda of Mussolini's Fascist regime, which defined countries with representative democracies as decadent pluritocracies, to the hostility of the postwar international Communist movement, which found its desire to impose Communist dictatorships blocked by the military, economic, and cultural forces of the United States. By the 1960s, Italian intellectual *esterofilia* (admiration of foreigners), in accordance with Gramsci's theories about the importance of cultural hegemony, turned increasingly to the models of totalitarian dictatorships of the Soviet Union, Castroist Cuba, or Maoist China in reaction to American cultural influence.

The Economic Boom

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Italian economy grew dramatically, a situation that occurred in many countries in Europe. Italian industrial production would later become the seventh largest in the world as exports increased and

investments expanded. The European Common Market was established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 as an economic zone for countries protected by the NATO alliance opposing the Cominterm economic union of the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe. The European Common Market stimulated economic vitality by reducing trade barriers within Europe. The Italian government also extended the *autostrada* (freeway), system which encouraged car ownership and stimulated economic activity. The energy exploration efforts of Enrico Mattei (1906–62) helped overcome the country's dearth of natural resources through the development of domestic natural gas and the stipulation of oil refining and exploration contracts with oil producing nations. Mattei died in mysterious circumstances in a plane crash, an event adapted for film by Francesco Rosi: *Il caso Mattei/The Mattei Affair* (1972).

In hindsight, the rate of economic expansion in Italy between middle and late 1950s to the early 1960s was an epochal event. Between 1900 and 1950, the national income had only grown by 62 percent. In the following ten years, between 1950 and 1960, the economy grew by 47 percent, nearly equal the increase from the previous half-century.[3] The number of unemployed decreased dramatically from 1.8 million in 1956 to 623,000 by 1962. The boom was mainly an industrial expansion. For the first time the numbers of industrial workers surpassed those of agricultural workers nationwide, challenging Gramsci's theories about rural revolution. The boom was a largely northern phenomenon centered on the industrial and transportation hubs of Genoa, Turin, and Milan—Italy's so-called industrial triangle. During the boom period in the automotive or chemical industry, Italy became a technologically advanced nation. However these advances did not extend to much of the central and southern regions excluded from the economic expansion. Economic disparities translated into comparatively lower standards of living for southern laborers who sought employment in northern Italy or abroad. These conditions were examined in immigration dramas such as Germi's *Il cammino della speranza/Path of Hope* (1950) or Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* (1960). The differential in economic development between the industrial North and the more stagnant South led nearly hundreds of thousands of able workers to leave the south for the north. Emigration abroad continued as well with nearly over one million Italians leaving mainly for destinations in the Americas, northern Europe, and Australia between 1958 and 1963. Internal emigration led to attitudes of resentment and even racism toward southern Italians by northerners. Ironically northern Italian economic expansion depended on the south depleting itself of its most energetic citizens.[4]

Italian Cinema Boom

The Italian cinema of the late 1950s and even into the 1960s was characterized by market share increase against Hollywood. By 1960, Italian films had acquired nearly 50 percent of the Italian domestic market, a position unseen since before WWI. The vitality of Italian production in the 1960s owed much to retrenchment of the American film industry after antitrust legislation dismantled the Hollywood

studio system distribution network by not allowing American studios to own theater chains. Competition with television was also a key factor in Hollywood's retrenchment. State television broadcasting began in Italy in 1954. Household ownership of a television set however was still not a peninsula-wide phenomenon in the early 1960s. This delay allowed Italian producers to place products not only domestically but also to fill a void in the world market. The Italian cinema was in a position of increasing market strength aided by the continuation of laws requiring theaters to show Italian films a fixed number of days per year. Not only was Italian cinema commercially vital, but its greatest authors were able to reach a wide public. In 1960 in particular films by important directors were also box office hits with Fellini's *La dolce vita*, Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* and De Sica's *La Ciociara/ Two Women* finishing as the top three domestic films of 1960.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, foreign producers also came to Italy in high numbers. The Hollywood studio MGM had already shot a remake of *Quo Vadis?* in Rome in 1949. Throughout the 1950s, Hollywood producers were attracted to Italy as a location by American tax loopholes for producing films abroad. The technical expertise of Italian set designers attracted big budget Hollywood productions to the Cinecittà studios in Rome renowned for the artistic abilities of Italian set designers and wardrobe technicians. Italian colossal productions had been a staple of the Italian cinema from its earliest days and continued after the war with films such as *Aquila Nera/Return of the Black Eagle* (1946), *Fabiola* (1949), *War and Peace* (1955), and *La tempesta/The Tempest* (1958), and Alberto Lattuada and Richard Fleischer's biblical coproduction starring Anthony Quinn, *Barabba* (1961).This influx of activity known as "Hollywood on the Tiber" allowed many Italian technicians an opportunity to gain the experience and expertise essential to the boom in Italian film production in the 1960s.[5] Big budget Hollywood studio productions—*Ben Hur* (1959) and *Cleopatra* (1963) or coproductions such as *El Cid* (1961) and *Barabba* (1961)—were filmed partly in Rome's Cinecittà studios with the active participation of Italian designers and assistant directors. For example, Sergio Leone reportedly replaced William Wyler to direct the chariot race sequence of *Ben Hur* and although uncredited, codirected the peplum disaster film and Italian box office hit *Sodom and Gomorra* (1962) with Robert Aldrich.[6] This tradition of reliance on Italian craftsmanship has continued sporadically and would reappear decades later when Australian actor/director Mel Gibson came to Rome to enrich his film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), a film shot largely in Rome featuring Italian artistic iconography and craftsmanship.

American studios also set films in Italy initially attracted by the critical success of the films of neorealist directors such as De Sica and Rossellini or the box office success enjoyed by the racier imagery in titles from the neorealist catalogue such as De Santis's *Bitter Rice* and the popularity of Italian *maggiorata fisica* actresses such as Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida. A sense of nordic romanticism pervaded a spate of American productions set in Italy such as Vittorio De Sica's direction of Montgomery Cliff in *Indiscretion of an American wife* (1953), the Gregory Peck and Audry Hepburn film *Roman Holiday* (1953), David Lean's direction of Katherine Hepburn and Rosano Brazzi in *Summertime* (1955), the Clark Gable

and Sophia Loren vehicle *It Started in Naples* (1960), or the Rock Hudson and Gina Lollobrigida comedy *Come September* (1961).

The result of this increased activity was that the 1960s Italian film industry had talented and experienced professionals who would serve Italy's film industry for decades to come. Important Italian technicians honed their craft during this period including cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno who worked with Visconti on *The Leopard*; Otello Martelli with De Santis and Fellini, Vittorio Storaro with Bernardo Bertolucci; Tonino Delli Colli and Giuseppe Rotunno with directors Pier Paolo Pasolini, Sergio Leone, Fellini, and Roberto Benigni; Gianni Di Venzano and Ugo Pirro with directors Carlo Lizzani, Mario Monicelli, Lina Wertmüller, Francesco Rosi, and Michelangelo Antonioni. There were also noted film score composers: Fiorenzo Carpi (1918–97), Nino Rota (1911–79) the author of the sound track of Fellini's films as well as Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* films, Ennio Morricone (1928–), best known for his sound tracks to Sergio Leone's Clint Eastwood westerns, and later Nicola Piovani (1946–) known for his work on the films of Roberto Benigni.

The Italian film industry produced comedies, dramas, and episodic films with a new generation of actors—Nino Manfredi, Ugo Tognazzi, and Marcello Mastroianni—who joined the already established actor Vittorio Gassman and the actresses of *maggiorata fisica* fame—Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida—as box office draws. The Italian film industry also responded to the demand for Italian horror (spaghetti nightmare) films: Englishwoman Barbara Steele starring in Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio/The Mask of the Devil* (1960), *peplums* starring American muscleman Steve Reeves in films such as Piero Francisi's *Ercole e la regina di Lidia/Hercules Unchained* (1958) or *Le fatiche di Ercole/Hercules* (1958), spy films, reality documentary shocker films such as Jacopetti's *Mondo cane/A Dog's Life* (1962) series, and the spaghetti westerns by Sergio Leone (1929–89) including the Clint Eastwood trilogy *Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *Per qualche dollaro in più/For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *Il buono, il brutto e il cattivo/The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966).

Much of the critically acclaimed experimentation in art cinema was aided by the strength producers derived from the profits in genre production in westerns and comedies (the top five Italian films of 1965 were all spaghetti westerns). In some of these genre productions and even in art cinema, the Italian film industry relied on the technical shortcuts familiar from the neorealist period, such as using post-synchronous sound allowing producers to hire multinational casts who would have box office appeal in their country of origin. Thus, at times the casts of some Italian films did not have even a common working language since casts were chosen to appeal in different countries. The case of the interaction between Clint Eastwood, who did not speak much Italian, and Sergio Leone, who did not speak much English, is a case in point. Federico Fellini was noted for tales of having actors count from one to ten instead of saying lines since the dialogue would be added post-production. At times Italian actors even assumed anglicized stage names in the hopes that the film would pass as a Hollywood production all ever the world. For example, the first prints of *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) reportedly gave the director Sergio Leone and much of the cast anglicized names. The star

and director of the *Trinity* western series, Enzo Barboni and Mario Girotti, spent their careers working under the anglicized names E.B. Clucher and Terence Hill.

Commedia all'italiana (Comedy Italian Style)

In the boom years of Italian cinema also featured the genre of the *commedia all'italiana* (comedy Italian style) with characters from different social classes whose interaction resulted in brilliant social satire. The physicality and humor in Luigi Comencini's *Pane, amore e fantasia/Bread, Love and Fantasy* (1953) series starring De Sica, Loren, and Lollobrigida had themes of natural sexual energy that recalled the Italian *commedia dell' arte* theatrical traditions and its sources in classical Roman and Greek theater. These currents had been a vital part of the Italian theatrical comic tradition from the use of Plautian imagery and themes in the Renaissance comedies of authors like Niccolò Machiavelli or in the short stories of Giovanni Boccaccio. In these stories physicality and youth and the power of nature served as a breaker of class barriers. The early films of the *commedia all'italiana* maintained the vibrant style of the neorealists but added comic and visually pleasing elements in films like Risi's continuation of Comencini's *Pane, amore, e* (1955) series or in Risi's *Poveri ma belli/Poor but Beautiful* (1957).

A foundational film of the *commedia all'italiana* style is Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti/Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958) penned by the scriptwriting team Age (Agenore Incrocchi), Cecchi D'Amico, and Furio Scarpelli (figure 6.1). The film is a parody of Jules Dassin's French thriller *Rififi* (1954), a story of a failed heist with doomed protagonists in the tradition of French *policier* crime films. In *Big Deal on Madonna Street*, Monicelli parodies the fatalism of the French crime genre with a story about a team of bumbling antiheroes who abandon the caper once they discover a freshly cooked meal of *pasta e ceci* (noodles and chick peas) in the refrigerator of the house they unsuccessfully tried to rob.

Monicelli's film adapts the ancient character types from the theatrical tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* to the cinema. Beppe, the failed boxer played by Vittorio Gassman, has much in common with the *commedia dell'arte* stock character of the Capitan, derived from the *miles gloriosus* of classical comedy. The *miles gloriosus* is a self-appointed leader who claims foreign origins so that he can assume a higher status and expert knowledge unavailable locally. The *miles gloriosus* also claims to be a great soldier but is a danger only to himself and is ready to change sides at the hint of danger. In *Big Deal on Madonna Street* Beppe pretends to be a rich, sophisticated, educated northerner. But he fails as a boxer after a show of false bravado and is demasked by Nicoletta, the Venetian maid of the house he is planning to rob. In the *commedia dell'arte*, the Captain often works in tandem with Pantaloon, an older figure. Pantaloon and the Soldier cook up schemes that inevitably fail after they betray each other for love or the promise of riches. The equivalent of Pantaloon in *Big Deal on Madonna Street* is Cosimo, physically older than the rest of the gang (except Campanelle) and the original mastermind of the heist, he is tricked and betrayed by Beppe.

Figure 6.1 Vittorio Gassman (Peppe) and Totò (Dante Cruciani) in Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti.*

The rest of the cast of *Big Deal on Madonna Street* recalls the *commedia dell'arte zanni* (clowns). In the *commedia dell'arte* theatrical tradition each *zanni* clown can represent a different geographical region of Italy. The regional stereotypes in *Big Deal on Madonna Street* struck a common chord in the Italian popular imagination during the massive intra-national emigration of the postwar period. The most recognizable of these is the *Pulcinella*-like character, Dante Cruciani, the Neapolitan safe cracker played by Totò. Totò started his career impersonating *Pulcinella* and his character in *Big Deal on Madonna Street* has many of the same attributes of the Neapolitan *Pulcinella* character who often has a secret and a large family. Another *zanni* clown is Campanelle who recalls the *commedia dell'arte* clown Harlequin, the eternally dispossessed worker from Bergamo. Campanelle, like Harlequin, dresses in baggy pants; he keeps a low center of gravity and is constantly searching for food. Ferribotte, the Sicilian emigrant, seems to be a Sicilian *zanni* who always keeps the women in his family hidden under lock and key.

Usually a rare competent character in the *commedia dell'arte* is the maid Colombina. In *Big Deal on Madonna Street* the maid Nicoletta, like the *commedia dell'arte* Colombina character, is sharp-witted, quick speaking, and demasks and demotes Beppe. As the only rational and lucid character in the cast everything depends on Nicoletta/Colombina's participation. The figure of a dominant female in Italian popular cinema capable of subverting existing economic and societal power structures derives from the ancient tradition in Italian comedy from the

commedia dell'arte and the *novellistica*; a Marxist reading of the *commedia all'italiana* is possible in which the hegemonic class prevents new ideas, such as women's liberation, by advocating ideas or conditions based on the previous order.

Big Deal on Madonna Street appeared at the height of the Italian economic boom of the late 1950s, when the working classes gained the chance to experience a more materialistic lifestyle. Ironically during a period of such economic change the most popular form of Italian cinema, the *commedia all'italiana* (comedy Italian style) relied heavily on the archaic roots of the Italian literary and theatrical tradition. The return to stock characters in the cinema was a comfort, even a reassurance of cultural identity in the impending consumerism, migration, and continuing industrialization of the Italian economy. In the last sequence of the film, Beppe hides from the police by entering a construction worker queue where he will work as a salaried laborer as did so many Italians of the period.

Many films in the early 1960s had plots that recalled the *commedia dell'arte* story lines or *novella* (short stories) tradition including Gianni Puccini's *L'attico/The Penthouse* (1962), *Una vita difficile/A Difficult Life* (1961) by Dino Risi about a giornalist who cannot maintain a family and decides to become the servant of a rich man, the episodic film *I mostri/15 from Rome* (1963) by Dino Risi, *Le ore dell'amore/The Hours of Love* (1963) by Luciano Salce. Other films featured direct social commentary on the changes brought to Italy by the boom. In Carlo Lizzani's adaptation of Luciano Bianciardi's novel *La vita agra/The Bitter Life* (1964), a miner played by Ugo Tognazzi fired from his job in southern Italy comes to Milan to blow up the offices of the company that fired him. He is eventually integrated into the boom economy as an advertising man, leaves the girl he met in Milan, and brings his family north to be part of the new economy.

A key film in this period was Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso/The Easy Life* (1962) scripted with Rodolfo Sonengo (figure 6.2). The film is a mix between a road movie and a beach/vacation film that provides a snapshot of the changes in Italy in the economic boom years. Critics have commented that the true star of *The Easy Life* is the convertible sports car driven by Bruno (Vittorio Gassman) a man interested in perpetuating his youth despite a failed marriage and teenage daughter. The car is a symbol for the dynamism, sexual vitality, and unpredictability of the social changes unleashed by the economic boom of the times. Bruno's values of speed and casual encounters are fatal to the naive law student Roberto (Jean-Louis Trintignant) who loses his bearings once the protective veneer of tradition is removed from his life. Roberto becomes tragically embroiled in a culture that rewards youth, consumption, and speed, themes and trends that would increasingly dominate Italian culture into the new millenium. *The Easy Life* also echoed intellectual concerns about consumer culture from literary figures such as Edoardo Sanguinetti and Elio Vittorini.[7]

Part of the *commedia dell'arte* and *novellistica* story line is the tendency to emphasize female physical and economic dominance with a corollary portrayal of the male as an inept fool. Such themes were brilliantly conveyed by De Sica in another episodic film *Ieri, Oggi, Domani/Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1963) and in *Marriage Italian Style* (1964) based upon De Filippo's play *Filumena Marturiana* or in the multi-director effort *Boccaccio '70* (1962) by De Sica, Fellini,

Figure 6.2 Jean-Luois Tritignant (Roberto) and Vittorio Gassman (Bruno) in Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso/The Easy Life* (1962).

Monicelli, and Visconti. The film's title is an explicit reference to the debt of the *commedia all'italiana* and the earlier tradition of the Italian short comic tale, the *novella*, by authors such as Giovanni Boccaccio.

A main actor of the *commedia dell'italiana* who perfectly represented this type of comic masculinity was Alberto Sordi (1920–2003), who began as an extra on Gallone's *Scipione l'Africano* (1937) and went on to act in nearly 150 films including Fellini's *Lo sceicco bianco/The White Sheik* (1952) and *I vitelloni/The Young and the Passionate* (1953) and De Sica's *Il giudizio universale/The Last Judgement* (1961) and *Il boom* (1963). Sordi is best remembered for playing an Italian male overwhelmed by the expectations of society (figure 6.3). In Steno's *Un americano a Roma/An American in Rome* (1954), Sordi parodied American sloppy eating habits, bizarre dress, and fascination with technology and machinery in a meeting between *commedia dell'arte* buffoonery and Fordism. Sordi lampooned the divide between the traditional indolence of a *commedia dell'arte* clown and the rigid expectations of various professions in films such as Mario Soldati's *Policarpo, official di scrittura* (1959), Luigi Zampa's *Il vigile/Traffic Policeman* (1960), Elio Petri's *Il maestro di Vigevano/Teacher from Vigevano* (1963), and Luigi Zampa's *Il Medico della mutua/The Family Doctor* (1968), *Il Prof. Dott. Guido Tersilli* (1969) by Luciano Salce, Monicelli's *Un borghese piccolo piccolo/An Average Man* (1977). In De Sica's *Il boom* (1963), a parody of the new consumer culture, a desperate Alberto Sordi decides to sell one of his eyes in order to keep his new consumer goods. Sordi also

Figure 6.3 Alberto Sordi in Antonio Pietrangeli's *It happened in Rome.*

used his comic talents in a foray into the mafia drama *Il mafioso* (1962) and in historical dramas like Mario Monicelli's WWI drama *La grande guerra/The Great War* (1959). Sordi also appeared in several films that deal with the plight of homesick Italian immigrants—*Un italiano in America/An Italian in America* (1967), *Bello, onesto, emigrato in Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata/Girl in Australia* (1971)—themes later played to perfection in Franco Brusati's *Pane e cioccolato/Bread and Chocolate* (1973) starring Nino Manfredi as an Italian immigrant struggling in Switzerland.

Italian films of the 1960s also examined the peculiarities of the culturally and geographically separate south, in for example, like Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana Divorce Italian Style* (1961), *Sedotta e abandonata/Seduced and Abandoned* (1963), Monicelli's *La ragazza con la pistola/Girl with a Pistol* (1968), Lattuada's *Il mafioso* (1962), Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* and Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1959). These films displayed the contrasts between a modern industrial culture of a posteconomic boom Italy and the feudal social and economic codes of the Italian south.

The early 1960s also featured a current of films that revisited Fascist and wartime themes. This genre of films was the heir to the neorealist concentration on the war and the Resistance as an event that formed the essence of the postwar republic. But by the 1960s the heroic themes of films from the 1940s came to include more ironic and tragicomic depictions of Italy's struggles during and

transition from Fascism. For example, the 1961 box office champion Luciano Salce's *Il federale/The Fascist* (1961) starring Ugo Tognazzi is the story of a committed Fascist who must ironically shed the layers of the virile Fascist rhetoric on which he based his personality as the regime falls. Other films in this current included *La lunga notte del '43/The Long Night of '43* (1960) by Florestano Vancini, *Anni ruggenti/Roaring Years* (1962) with Nino Manfredi, Giorgio Bianchi's *Il mio amico Benito* (1962) starring Peppino De Filippo, *La Marcia su Roma/The March on Rome* (1962) by Dino Risi, *Tutti a casa/Everybody Home* (1960) by Comencini in which Alberto Sordi plays an Italian soldier confused about which side the Italian army is on after September 8, 1943. More in the tradition of neorealism are *Il generale della Rovere/General Della Rovere* (1959) by Rossellini starring De Sica as a small time swindler who assumes the identity of a heroic imprisoned general during the Resistance or *Le quattro giornate di Napoli/The Four Days of Naples* (1962) by Nanni Loy about resistance to Nazi occupation in Naples with a title that refers to the struggles in Milan during 1848 nationalist revolts.

The Spaghetti Western of Sergio Leone

Italy's most accomplished director of westerns, Sergio Leone, came from a cinematic family. His father had worked as an assistant to Pastrone and discovered Bartolomeo Pagano, the actor who played Maciste in *Cabiria*. Leone had worked as an assistant director on De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*, appearing in the film as an Austrian seminary student in a brief cameo role. Leone first made his mark as a director in the peplum genre with a remake of the sand and sword standard *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompeii/The Last Days of Pompeii* (1959) and *Il colosso di Rodi/The Colossus of Rhodes* (1960). But he truly found his calling with the western. In certain aspects Leone recalls the career of writer Emilio Salgari (1862–1911), who wrote popular adventure novels at the turn of the last century but reportedly never actually left Italy. Leone apparently did not speak adequate English, yet he seemed to have a visceral understanding for the storyline of a good western.

Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* displays the diverse cultural influences running through Italy during the 1960s. The film is a remake of Akira Kurosawa's Samurai drama *Yojimbo* (1961) as a western starring American television star Clint Eastwood; however, Leone has insisted that the source for the film is a *commedia dell'arte* play by Carlo Goldoni *Arlecchino il servitore di due padroni/The Servant with Two Masters* (1745). In Leone's film Clint Eastwood plays the drifter Joe, a trickster figure like Harlequin from Goldoni's play who plays one powerful family against another to his advantage (figure 6.4). Another Italian source for the hero in the film, Joe, is Gian Piero Bonelli and Aurelio Galeppini's' still popular comic book series *Tex*, whose protagonist is an ordained Navajo chief, a government Indian agent, and a Texas Ranger.[8] With such credentials he has the backing of all opposing factions in the American West—the subjugated Indians, the local authorities, and the federal government. This polyvalence also gives Tex the ability to play one side against another in order to defend the oppressed.

Figure 6.4 Eastwood (Joe) and Marianne Koch (Marisol).

In *A Fistful of Dollars*, Joe liberates indigenous townsfolk from their Anglo (Baxters) and Iberian (Rojos) overlords. This outsider setup is a repeat from Leone's earlier film *The Colossus of Rhodes* (1961), where the hero is often a slave who champions a subjugated community against their overlords.[9] The *commedia dell'arte* roots of Joe's laconic nature in *A Fistful of Dollars* seem to parody the Protestant work ethic. George Steven's western hero in *Shane* (1953) as played by Alan Ladd mends fences for the pioneer family in his spare time. Leone's Joe in *A Fistful of Dollars* seems indolent but he is also highly skilled and cleverer than his

adversaries. The theme of the lazy but clever male would reappear in the Italian western in the *Trinity* series starring Terence Hill, where the protagonist's skill with a gun is matched only by his desire to sleep.[10]

The success of Leone's westerns starring Clint Eastwood *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *C'era una volta il west/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) cowritten by Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento, and *Giù la testa/A Fistfull of Dynamite* (1971) and their scores by Ennio Morricone spurred other Italian directors to display their talents. Tonino Valerii made the western spoof *Nobody Is My Name* (1973). Enzo Barboni directed the *They Call Me Trinity* (1970) series. Other Italian directors of westerns include Sergio Corbucci with *Django* (1966), Damiano Damiani's *A Bullet for the General* (1966). The profitability Italian western actually became central to the economic viability of the Italian film industry.

Leone's treatment of the foundational myth of American western, his use of graphic violence influenced Hollywood directors' approach to the genre. Leone had cast Henry Fonda, the hero of John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) as a child murdering outlaw in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968).[11] Films such as Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) or Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) reviewed the ideological certainties of the American western. Leone's camera style and shot selection like his shot choice in the final shootout sequence of *A Fistful of Dollars* from the perspective of Clint Eastwood's right boot, or his minute attention to physical detail and extreme close-ups changed the style of popular cinematography brought the refinement of the long-shot style of art cinema to a popular genre. Critics have noted how Leone's attention to detail and reliance on Enrico Morricone's scores give his films an almost operatic tone. Other critics have noted that the spare and crude essence of Leone's film style and narrative is a result of his exposure to neorealism.[12]