10 Germi's *Seduced and Abandoned*: Inside the honor code

NOTHING COULD BE further from the spare, austere aesthetics of *Il posto* than the teeming, baroque one of *Seduced and Abandoned*, whose density of plot, exuberance of style, and overall triumph of artifice distance it radically from the neorealist revival that Olmi's film was said to herald.[1] Indeed, neorealism is never invoked by critics of *Seduced and Abandoned*, unless it is to lament how far Germi has fallen from the neorealist promise of his early career, or to marvel that someone who could make such ideologically committed films as *In the Name of the Law* (1949) or *The Path of Hope* (1950) could immediately thereafter embark on such blatantly commercial ventures as *The City Defends Itself* (1951) or *The President-Lady* (1952).[2] In *Divorce Italian Style* (1961) and *Seduced and Abandoned* (1963) Germi returned to Sicily, the setting for his two neorealist works, but this time it was to make the films that would give him an international reputation as an entertainer of the first order—a reputation that was to motivate at least one critic retrospectively to see in Germi's neorealist films hints of the commercial concessions and the love of spectacle that marred his early 1950s production and culminated in his great box office triumphs of the 1960s.[3] Indeed, if we look at *In the Name of the Law* and *The Path of Hope* in the light of his later commercial

[1] According to Kernan, this crowded, teeming quality is intrinsic to satire. See *The Cankered Muse*, pp. 7–8.

[2] See Gianni Rondolino, *Dizionario del cinema italiano, 1945–69* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), p. 158.

[3] Thus Bruno Torri sees in the early work of both Germi and De Santis a regressive and vitiating tendency to console and placate audiences by surrendering to their desire for spectacle. See *Cinema italiano*, pp. 38–39.

ventures, we can see how much the neorealist idea was compromised even then by the presence of active, effectual heroes and satisfying resolutions to the most unyielding social problems.[4]

In fact, the happy ending of *In the Name of the Law* is so at variance with the governing precepts of small-town Sicilian life that it contradicts Germi's own expository statements in the publicity material surrounding the film. "For the great part, it is scorched and arid," wrote Germi of Sicily, "a land where men live like anchorites in accordance with ancient, changeless customs."[5] If this is the case, how are we to be convinced that a judge from mainland Italy, newly arrived in the Sicilian town of Capodarso, can liberate the entire populace from subjugation to the combined tyranny of Mafia and feudal control which has victimized the inhabitants for centuries? Yet this is what Germi asks us to believe when the judge, Guido Schiavi, played by the popular star Massimo Girotti, conducts a public murder trial and wins the support of the whole town, as well as its Mafia leaders, to the cause of civil justice and rule by law.[6] The ending is such a falsification of the social and political issues Germi raises that it virtually cancels out the film's original *engagé* stance. When Fellini and Zavattini speak of the immorality, or at least the impropriety, of happy endings, they do so because films that pretend to resolve unresolvable problems lull the public into a false sense of complacency based on the belief that the world will conform to its fictional counterpart on the screen.[7] Germi's *impegno* is thus not only neutralized, but transformed into its ideological opposite in escapist solutions that encourage the public to abdicate responsibility for the real consequences of the problems so blithely dismissed.

Paradoxically, Germi feels no such need to sugar the pill

[4]See Leprohon, *The Italian Cinema*, p. 120.

[5]Quoted in Armes, *Patterns of Realism*, p. 135.

[6]Armes, *Patterns of Realism*, p. 137.

[7]See *Fellini on Fellini*, pp. 150–51; and Zavattini, "Some Ideas on the Cinema," p. 223.

in two unabashedly commercial films of his 1960s satiric production. Though *Divorce Italian Style* and *Seduced and Abandoned* lack the seriousness of neorealist form that typified *In the Name of the Law* and *The Path of Hope*, they do not oversimplify their social themes, nor do they offer facile solutions to the problems they unflinchingly confront. No one lives happily ever after in Germi's satiric Sicilian world, where Peppino Califano seduces and impregnates Agnese Ascalone but refuses to marry her because she is no longer chaste. *Seduced and Abandoned* chronicles the antics of both families to salvage their respective honor according to a code that entitles Peppino to wed a virgin while requiring that Agnese's waywardness be concealed from public notice by marriage to her seducer. To further complicate matters, Peppino is already engaged to Matilde, Agnese's older sister who, according to the Sicilian custom of marrying off daughters in chronological order, must be wed first. Fortunately, the girls' father, Don Vincenzo Ascalone, is able to arrange a hasty match between Matilde and the Baron Rizieri Zappala, an aristocrat fallen on hard times, whose crumbling palace ceiling has failed to hold up under his various attempts to hang himself from it. Except for a few rotten teeth, the Baron makes a presentable partner for Matilde, who accepts his offer of marriage once the new dentures are in place. Peppino, meanwhile, is hiding out in the village of Regalbutto in an effort to escape Don Vincenzo's marital pressures. To avenge his family's honor, Don Vincenzo sends his son Antonio to kill Peppino in a crime of passion that will land him a maximum of five years in jail, but Agnese overhears the plans and reports them to the police. In a tumultuous scene before the local magistrate, Peppino's guilt is established and he is imprisoned. Convinced by his parents that a criminal record would not enhance his career aspirations, Peppino relents and agrees to marry Agnese. Now it is Don Vincenzo's turn to play hard-to-get as he forces the Califanos to make all kinds of public protestations of Peppino's new marital hopes. This

involves a carefully staged "kidnapping" of Agnese before the eyes of the entire town. Now it is Agnese who rejects the match in an anguished gesture of self-assertion which results in physical and psychological collapse. Under the strain of it all, Don Vincenzo falls mortally ill, but refuses to let his death impede the nuptials to which Agnese has finally given her assent.

Though marriage may constitute the socially therapeutic ending of classical comic plot structure, as indeed it constitutes an amnesty for all manner of felonous behavior according to the penal code in *Seduced and Abandoned*, it will not offer a future of romantic bliss to Peppino and Agnese, for whom the wedding vows are a capitulation to the tyrannous code of familial honor. When Peppino slips the wedding band on Agnese's finger and she winces, she is reacting as much to the physical pain of too small a ring put on by too rough a husband, as to the emotional pain of consecrating a bad marriage. Nor is the effect of the ceremony limited to the unfortunate couple itself. In a parody of the classical comic ending, which should include all of the society in its affirmation of unity and the renewal of the social contract, Agnese's and Peppino's wedding has the opposite kind of ripple effect, sowing death and destruction in its wake. Thus Don Vincenzo dies, the Baron Rizieri tries once more in vain to hang himself from the crumbling ceiling of his decrepit estate, and Matilde ends up taking monastic vows as a last resort in a mystical version of the wedding ceremony being enacted by her sister and her ex-fiancé. Had he so chosen, Germi could have easily devised a comic ending in the classical tradition which would make his film the entertaining romp in quaint Sicilian social customs that many critics expected it to be. He could have allowed Peppino and Agnese to fall in love after all, so that their forced marriage would coincide with their own deepest wishes, despite the inhuman and mechanical requirements of the honor code. Such a comic ending would make the film an unproblematic consumer item

which would exploit Sicilian mores for their entertainment value alone and leave the public free from any distressing afterthoughts about social injustice. But instead, there is no happy resolution to placate the public conscience, and viewers leave the movie theater all the more disturbed because the generic indicators of the film had not prepared them for such seriousness of purpose.

Though critics have faulted Germi for his lighthearted treatment of these grave issues, it is the very incongruity of tone and subject matter that makes his argument so striking and forceful.[8] For Germi, laughter is not an end in itself, it is a weapon used to attack a system whose assumptions are taken to ludicrous extremes the better to demonstrate their folly and vice. "Such people there are living and flourishing in the world—Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless," said Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*. "Some there are, and very successful, too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that Laughter was made."[9]

It is the satiric mode that frees Germi to register the kind of social criticisms he was unable to make in his two avowedly neorealist films. If Germi is an incorrigible crowd-pleaser, as critics suggest, then that impulse to play to the audience which led him to *divismo* and to happy endings in his neorealist films is already discharged in *Divorce Italian Style* and *Seduced and Abandoned* by the gags and the intrigues of the plot. Having entertained his audience through such formal devices, Germi can then allow himself to engage in serious social commentary. Indeed, *Seduced and Abandoned* may be interpreted as Germi's palinode on his neorealist period and as a corrective to the false heroics and the facile resolutions that marred his good intentions in *In the Name of the Law* and *The Path of Hope*. *Seduced and Abandoned* offers a de-

[8]See *Commonweal*, 24 July 1964, 514; Robert Hatch, *The Nation*, 27 July 1964, 40; and Hollis Alpert, *Saturday Review*, 11 July 1964, 22–23.

[9]See William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 96.

flated, ineffectual, middle-aged version of the handsome young judge who came from the mainland to bring law and order to the Sicilians of *In the Name of the Law*. Whereas the judge in this neorealist film was not only the protagonist of the piece, but its hero in the true sense of the word—potent enough to change centuries of allegiances to Mafia and feudal power—the judge in *Seduced and Abandoned* is relegated to a minor role as a man incapable of replacing the primeval code of honor with anything resembling the rule of law. Though we are not told that he is an outsider to Sicilian culture, his intolerance of the islanders' baroque antics ("let's not dramatize") and his correction of Sicilian usage ("say *pranzo*, not *colazione*" for the noon meal) suggests that he is not a native product of the society he has come to judge. This demoted, powerless, aged version of the hero in *In the Name of the Law* amounts to a retraction, on Germi's part, of his earlier optimism and a surrender to the intransigence of the culture he no longer presumes to see changed.

But this judge represents more than simply a reworking of Germi's cinematic past—he is also a measure of the historical perspective that the filmmaker brings to his social analysis, giving the film deeper neorealist affinities than its slick, commercial surface would ever lead us to expect. By making *Seduced and Abandoned* no mere static representation of social custom, but an explanation of the historic conditions that made Sicily an outpost of reaction, the film conforms to Lukács's and Aristarco's requirements for critical realism. In the title *pretore* (magistrate) displayed prominently on the judge's door, Germi condenses some 2,200 years of Sicilian history—a history of domination by foreign powers and of permanent enmity between the populace and the ruling elite. When the Romans conquered Sicily in 241 B.C. they sent military governors or *praetores* to impose Roman law on the islanders. In the succeeding history of colonial subjugation to wave after wave of foreign rule, the enforcers of the law, be they Arabs, Normans, French, or Spanish, were always

seen as outsiders whose interests were not those of the Sicilians and whose authority was borne with indifference, if not outright hostility. In the face of constant external threats to the culture's integrity, Sicilians became rigidly conservative, clinging to their traditions with a tenacity bordering on fanaticism. Even when the island was wedded to the mainland in the Risorgimento, Sicily's habit of cultural introversion remained intact and the age-old suspicions held sway, as Prince Fabrizio of *The Leopard* tells the Piedmontese emissary, Chevally, when the latter comes to inform him of his nomination to a seat in the new national senate. "Having been trampled by a dozen different peoples," Fabrizio says of the Sicilians,

> they consider they have an imperial past which gives them a right to a grand funeral. Do you really think, Chevally, that you are the first who has hoped to channel Sicily into the flow of universal history? I wonder how many Moslem imams, how many of King Roger's knights, how many Swabian scribes, how many Angevin barons, how many jurists of the Most Catholic King have conceived the same fine folly, and how many Spanish viceroys too, how many of Charles III's reforming functionaries! And who knows now what happened to them all! Sicily wanted to sleep in spite of their invocations, for why should she listen to them if she herself is rich, if she's wise, if she's civilized, if she's honest, if she's admired and envied by all, if, in a word, she is perfect?[10]

What for Tomasi di Lampedusa requires a lengthy monologue (and this is only a fraction of the entire passage) Germi achieves in a single quip. While both parties of the Ascalone–Califano feud await a judicial hearing, they temporar-

[10]See Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York: Pantheon, 1960), pp. 212–13.

ily put aside hostilities as Don Vincenzo exclaims, "We have only one enemy," with an eye to the sign *pretore* on the magistrate's door. Before this embodiment of Roman law, the Sicilian parties to the dispute are united in their suspicion of a foreign ruling authority, preferring to keep silent according to the code of *omertà* and settle their accounts at home. "My family has an unimpeachable reputation," Don Vincenzo boasts later to the judge. "We've had a few violent deaths, but they've always been settled outside the law."

Though the richest in historical implications, the magistrate is by no means the only "foreigner" to watch the action in mute and impotent astonishment. There are two other official figures who share his outsider's perspective: the *carabiniere* marshal whose accent betrays his Roman provenance, and his assistant Bisigato whose youth and Trevisan origins suggest that he is a young draftee doing his military service in the South. If the marshal's extensive knowledge and tolerance of Sicilian folkways make him the spokesman for Germi's point of view within the film, and Bisigato's naiveté makes him the internal embodiment of our own perspective, then it is through their several exchanges that Germi is able to address us in a direct, comic-didactic way. "She says *no* and you write down *no*," the marshal says to Bisigato as the young man records Agnese's deposition. "You think you're in Treviso. Here *no* sometimes means *yes*," and vice versa we might add, after Agnese answers with an anguished affirmative when asked by the magistrate if she consents to the marriage with Peppino. Later, as the marshal and Bisigato deliberately leave town so the carefully contrived kidnapping of Agnese can take place without police intervention, the older officer explains to his assistant, "you are thinking, and you must not think. Marriage extinguishes all crime." When the marshal puts his hand over the Sicilian part of the map of Italy and says "better, much better" (he does so twice in the course of the film) and when Bisigato is

surprised by the camera in expressions of shocked disbelief during the hearing before the *pretore*, these reactions become mirrors of our own.

Were our perspective to remain aligned with that of the three non-Sicilian officials, then there would be nothing to detract from our comic pleasure in the machinations of this plot. Nor would there be any substance to the criticism that the comedy is marred by the violence of Don Vincenzo against his pregnant daughter.[11] Indeed, were we able to regard the Sicilians as radically "other," then we would maintain the emotional detachment prerequisite to comic pleasure, as Freud describes it. "The comic is greatly interfered with if the situation from which it ought to develop gives rise at the same time to a release of strong affect," he wrote in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. "For this reason it has been said that the comic feeling comes easiest in more or less indifferent cases where the feelings and interests are not strongly involved."[12] It is Agnese, of course, who does not allow us the luxury of such comic detachment. We sympathize with her not only because she is the sacrificial victim that her name suggests (Agnese = lamblike), but because she dares to violate the codes of her culture, going to the police to report the impending showdown between Peppino and her brother Antonio in defiance of the principle of *omertà*. In the delirium that precedes her final acceptance of the forced marriage with Peppino, she raves about escaping to Milan to become a servant, putting the greatest possible geographical and social distance between herself and her upper middle-class Sicilian roots. But Agnese is also very much of her culture, as Germi suggests during the opening titles of the film where her odyssey through the town weds her visually to it, with her black dress that accents the chiaroscuro effects of the sun-drenched streets, and her Greek profile that exempli-

[11] See Hatch, Review of *Seduced and Abandoned*, p. 40.

[12] See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 220.

10. *Agnese (Stefania Sandrelli) breaks the Sicilian code of silence before the law by informing authorities of her brother's intention to murder her seducer.*

fies its tradition of Hellenic beauty. Indeed, only when she conforms to the dictates of her culture do we laugh at her—when she sleeps on a penitential bed of rocks, for example, or when she composes a letter to Peppino written in the purple prose of a sermon against concupiscence ("my sin . . . was to surrender to lust . . ."). It is the ambiguity of Agnese's position as willing victim of her culture, on the one hand, and a willful challenger of it, on the other, that gives Germi's satire its polemic force. Were Agnese merely a victim of the honor code, our comic detachment from her would be complete, and she would remain as remote from us as those other victims, Matilde and the Baron, sharing with them the self-delusions and the illogic that make the Sicilian characters as a group so radically "other." Were she successfully rebellious, however, and had she managed to escape to Milan, or at least to the mainland, according to her delirious wish-fulfillment fantasy, then the impact of Germi's social criticism would be considerably weakened and the film would become quite literally escapist. Instead, as the one Sicilian with whom we can identify, and as the one most tragically victimized by her society, Agnese maximizes the force of Germi's satiric attack.

The resulting sense of *impegno* is not all that allies *Seduced and Abandoned* with its neorealist predecessors. Despite the slick commercial exterior of the film, it shares a formal common denominator with neorealism in the regional theater that played so important a part in the ancestry of *Open City*. Indeed, the closest stylistic analogues to the highly verbal, thickly plotted, gimmicky satires of Germi would be the vernacular comedies of the de Filippos, for example, who make social customs their prime subject matter and local color their source of appeal. Though the brevity and density of its scenes and the plethora of visual jokes would be obstacles to putting *Seduced and Abandoned* on the stage, minor editing and shifts of emphasis would do little to mar the overall dramatic effect, and the theatrical medium might

actually enhance the busy, teeming quality of Germi's technique. In fact, *Seduced and Abandoned* is not only good theater, it is also *about* theater—the theatrical nature of Sicilian public life in general, and the theatrical maneuvers necessitated by the honor code in particular. Like Saliena of *Bread, Love, and Fantasy*, Germi's town offers the perfect setting for public spectacle, with its stage-like piazzas, its ready-made audiences at every street corner, and its penchant for gossip and scandal. Don Vincenzo is the stage director par excellence who takes fullest advantage of these indigenous dramatic possibilities for spreading abroad an idealized family image at great variance with the private truths which threaten to dishonor the Ascalone name. Thus the evening promenade serves as a kind of family bulletin in which Matilde's new status as the Baron's fiancée is broadcast to the town. Similarly, the serenade is used to publicize Peppino's courtship of Agnese as Don Vincenzo reveals when he asks the accompanist to turn up the volume on his electric guitar so that the whole town can hear his performance and draw the appropriate conclusions. Furthermore, when Peppino's parents finally agree to his marriage with Agnese, Don Vincenzo makes sure that they voice their consent loudly and openly for the greatest possible public consumption. In a more spontaneous performance, Don Vincenzo orders his family to laugh boisterously after leaving the *pretore*'s office to show their contempt for, and immunity to, such legal procedures. "If you don't laugh, I'll smash your face in," he adds under his breath, marching the family to an ice cream parlor to celebrate their alleged triumph over the law. Of course, the most elaborate staging of all surrounds the kidnapping of Agnese, which is nearly bungled when the wrong Ascalone daughter is seized by Peppino's henchmen. The subsequent reconciliation between the groom-to-be and his prospective father-in-law is just as carefully staged. "First I slap you, then you kiss my hand, then I forgive you," Don Vincenzo tells Peppino before the entire town, which has gathered to wit-

ness a religious procession in the piazza outside the Ascalone front door. As the family emerges on the second-story balcony to greet the crowds and to indicate that their honor has been salvaged, Agnese's expression betrays neither joy nor sorrow, but the same remoteness that is painted on the face of the angelic icon being carried in the procession below. Like the statue, Agnese, too, will find her place at the altar as the unwilling bride of Peppino and the sacrificial victim of her family's honor.

Such is the impulse to theatricality that no audience need be present at all to justify a dramatic recitation, as Peppino reveals in his virtuoso one-man performance of guilt and self-abasement. On the pretext of studying, Peppino has cloistered himself in his room with several days' growth of beard on his face and the radio blaring at top volume. "Who are you?" Peppino asks of his image in the cracked mirror above his bureau, "a man or a louse?" "You disgust me," he concludes, spitting at the reflection by way of proof. As if the sleazy, musical commentary were not enough to make us question the depth of Peppino's remorse, the speed with which he responds to the sudden arrival of the prostitutes in town—he requests 5,000 lire of his mother and races to the local hotel to be first in line for their services—casts some doubt on the sincerity of his recent penitential performance. But when Peppino meets his father-in-law-to-be in the lobby of the same hotel, still another performance is required of him. Now he must mask his true motives for being there and act the part of the serious-minded young aspirant to professional advancement, loudly asking the hotel clerk if Dr. Schiavone, his professor of forensic medicine, has arrived. Meanwhile, Don Vincenzo himself had been engaged in a performance of his own in concert with the other town worthies who had gathered to celebrate the prostitutes' arrival. While one self-styled expert in male physiology claims that men have 3,000 bullets to shoot in a lifetime, Don Vincenzo takes this verbal exercise in sexual exhibitionism to another order of magni-

tude when he argues that a real man shoots one bullet per day between the age of eighteen and sixty, making his arsenal at least five times greater than the earlier speaker would have it.

Any slight to personal or family honor is imagined as a public performance before an audience of sneering townspeople. Thus, when Matilde reads Peppino's letter of rejection, her first words are "compromised before the entire town," suggesting that she has internalized the choral voice of the community in her own estimation. This psychic appropriation of public opinion is taken to surrealistic extremes in two nightmare sequences: that of Don Vincenzo in which Agnese, dressed as a harlot, is married to a manacled Peppino in court; and that of Agnese herself who hallucinates repeated confrontations with jeering townspeople as she attempts to return home from court.

It is the code of honor that motivates the histrionics of the external actions as well as the inner psychodynamics of Germi's characters. The psyche becomes a stage on which the self performs for the self and that recitation is judged by the imagined standards of the community at large. The Baron, who is indifferent to appearances—he returns the false teeth bought at Don Vincenzo's expense when he realizes how the Ascalone's are using him to salvage the family name—is simply performing for a higher imagined audience, that of his peers, not that of the local populace. As an aristocrat, albeit one who has fallen upon hard times, the Baron's judging public will entertain standards of honor that go beyond those of white teeth, sweet-smelling breath, and indoor plumbing. "In poverty a man's dignity shines through," the Baron told Don Vincenzo on the latter's first visit to the crumbling palace. Later, when he rejects the new dentures, the Baron explains, "I have a dignity that you can't buy at any price," revising Don Vincenzo's exclusively material notion of honor with a concept of human dignity that transcends external appearances. While Don Vincenzo is content as long as the name

on the front door retains its aura of respectability, despite the fact that behind the door dwell a pregnant, unmarried girl imprisoned in her room, a cowardly son who develops boils at the mere thought of revenge, and another daughter doubly jilted for reasons she'll never know, the Baron has no front door at all to hide his abject poverty, nor are there any window curtains to prevent the neighborhood children from witnessing yet another failed attempt at baronial suicide.

Eventually, the theatrical metaphor for the honor code gives way to an even more disparaging one when Don Vincenzo presents his lawyer cousin with a medical report of Agnese's condition. "Tumor?" asks the cousin. "No, honor," answers Don Vincenzo in a rhymed near-equivalent which expresses Germi's own prognosis for the members of a society prey to the fanaticism and ill-logic of the honor-crazed. Like the tumor, honor is a terminal illness, as Don Vincenzo's funerary inscription suggests. The obituary "honor and family" carved on his tombstone could read as the cause of death, as well as the ideals to which he dedicated his unnaturally shortened life. Pathology abounds in the story, in Antonio's boil, in Agnese's delirium, and in Aunt Carmela's litany of symptoms recited with morbid delight before Don Vincenzo's interview with his lawyer cousin. "Lucky you who can eat and drink," she tells Don Vincenzo and her husband as she serves them refreshments. "I have gall bladder problems, rheumatism, high blood pressure, and worst of all, I'm constipated." As a walking textbook of medical symptoms, not only does Aunt Carmela demonstrate the hypochondria of a culture excessively interested in the problems of the flesh, but she becomes the physical embodiment of the moral decay that requires the elaborate maskings of honor, respectability, and family name. At the core of it all is emptiness, deterioration, and death—the emptiness of Don Vincenzo's funerary bust, the deterioration of everyone's health—mental, dental, and otherwise—and the suicide to which the honor-crazed consign themselves, whether intentionally or not. In all the mad

scheming and denying, in all the obsession with morbidity and death, what is forgotten is the promise of new life—that of Agnese's future child and of the couple whose eventual marriage should signify a new start in a renewed social order. It is the vast disparity between what marriage should represent in a classical comedy—reconciliation, unification—and what it represents here—the failure of everyone's hopes but Don Vincenzo's—that constitutes Germi's final satiric blow. In fact, the entire plot can be seen as a parody of classic comic structure wherein the couple's marriage is prevented by a blocking figure, usually that of the woman's father, who is finally brought around to accepting, if not sanctioning, the union. Here, instead, the father does everything in his power to facilitate the union, while the blocking figure proves to be the lover, who refuses to marry the lady he himself has seduced because she is no longer chaste. Such a structural analysis of the way in which *Seduced and Abandoned* parodies classical comedy reveals yet one more aspect of Germi's satire: how the ethos of honor literally works against itself in making Don Vincenzo—the proponent of the marriage—and Peppino—its adversary—enemy agents of the same behavioral code.

Indeed, parody emerges as Germi's predominant expressive technique in *Seduced and Abandoned*, governing both its style and its thematic content.[13] In the scene of Antonio's departure for Regalbutto where he will avenge his sister's disgrace, Germi parodies the conventions of the western, while Don Vincenzo's speculations on the identity of Agnese's seducer are borrowed from the stylistic repertory of the thriller. The film even has moments of self-parody when the four Ascalone women strut down the street to the same tempo and music of the earlier prostitutes' promenade, with all the scathing social commentary that such a comparison implies. More elaborately, the film parodies itself in the replay of the

[13] On the prevalence of parody in the satiric mode, see Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 233.

original seduction scene according to Peppino's self-serving account of it before the *pretore*. With the slightest shift in detail, Peppino is able to retell the damning episode in his own favor, making Agnese the sleazy, cigarette-smoking predator that he originally was. It is Peppino's misfortune that the effect of parody in general is to reveal how different, and hence inauthentic, the copy is from the original, and to focus our attention on that disparity. Much of the film's humor is predicated on our awareness of the parodic discrepancy between *Seduced and Abandoned* and its generic exemplars in the thriller, the western, and most importantly, the classic comedy. Germi puts this parodic discrepancy to thematic uses by suggesting that the honor code itself deprives the protagonists of the consolations of a true comic resolution.

Those who argue that *Seduced and Abandoned* is too humorous to support the weight of serious social criticism on the one hand, and too serious to permit untrammeled comic pleasure on the other, have missed the point of Germi's satire, which is to parody the conventions of comedy by showing how the honor code blocks its happy issue. In so doing, Germi is able to make the kind of incisive social commentary that his neorealist films paradoxically lacked. Only by manipulating and exploiting the forms of commercial cinema could Germi at once satisfy the need to entertain that made his Sixties satires products of their times,[14] while registering the social criticism that made them worthy vehicles of neorealist *impegno*.

[14] Accordingly, Micciché calls Germi "the most inspired and brilliant author of the middle-brow film of the first half of the 60's." See *Il cinema italiano degli anni '60*, p. 80.

Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism

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