

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Seven, Number Three

Interpellating Django: The Functions of the Gaze in Tarantino's *Django Unchained*

Abigail Fagan, University of Connecticut

Quentin Tarantino's latest film, *Django Unchained*, was released in theaters in December 2012 to widely varied criticism. The film follows the unlikely pairing of a German bounty hunter and a slave as they journey to reclaim the token damsel in distress through the 19th century American south, depicting the complicated American history of slavery in scintillating Tarantino fashion: augmented by lots of bloodshed, oftentimes slapstick violence, and the likely invented sport of "Mandingo" fighting, wherein slaves are forced to fight one another to the death. Tarantino's treatment of American slavery history has been in question since the leaked release of the script early in 2012, not only in terms of his right to develop this story, given the tension between his authority as a white director and the importance of this history to black Americans, but also due to his pairing of American slavery with the spaghetti western tradition evoked in his reappropriation of the 1966 white character of *Django*. Spike Lee reportedly refused to see the film at all, writing on Twitter, "American Slavery Was Not A Sergio Leone Spaghetti Western. It Was A Holocaust. My Ancestors Are Slaves. Stolen From Africa. I Will Honor Them" (rollingstone.com 2012). Still, in February 2013, the Academy awarded Quentin Tarantino Best Screenplay for the film and Christoph Waltz Best Supporting Actor for his depiction of the German bounty hunter, Dr. King Schultz.

Despite this mixed criticism—and in spite of the veracity of many of these claims and demonstrations—*Django Unchained* is an engaging rendition of a history that Americans often fail to recreate without attempting to exonerate our heroes from complicity in the brutality of the period. Tarantino's adoption of this history seems at once inevitable and counterintuitive given the hyperbolic violence of his filmography; while it is clear that Tarantino's rendition of the 19th century in the USA would glorify rather than avoid the violence of slavery, the pizzazz with which Tarantino violence is imbued certainly affects the message this violence conveys to the film's audience. In this essay, I read *Django Unchained* in conjunction with Jacques Lacan's discussion of the valences of the gaze in his *Seminar XI* and Slavoj Žižek's application of these theories to the real, symbolic and imaginary in his 2008 *Enjoy Your Symptom!* in order to understand how Tarantino's depiction of violence comments on the ideology that supported the institution of slavery and (supports) American racism.¹

Throughout the film, Tarantino condemns Hollywood for exonerating our cinematic heroes of the period (such as Abraham Lincoln in *Lincoln*) by providing them with 21st-century understandings of what it means to be intersubjective. In contrast, in *Django Unchained*, everybody but the German character of Dr. King Schultz is interpellated in the racist ideology that supports the institution of slavery, and the characters of the film, black and white alike, go to great lengths to preserve the ideology that rests on the subjugation of black Americans. In order to deal with this problem of interpellation in the film, this essay begins with the definition of the spot and the stain and the location of these valences of the gaze on Django and Schultz respectively. I then demonstrate how characters of the film routinely attempt to interpellate these disturbing embodiments of the gaze in order to protect their ideology from the challenge the gaze enacts upon the symbolic order, and finally I discuss these attempts at interpellation in terms of the violence of the film. In line with Žižek's application of the stain to Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" in *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, reading the violence of *Django Unchained* through the symbolic, imaginary, and real results in a conclusion to the film that is curiously overdetermined. The film simultaneously appears to suggest that: first, as the film's villain Calvin Candie asserts, 9,999 out of 10,000 black Americans are biologically servile; and second, both correlatively and oppositely, because one black American in this 10,000 will succeed in razing this system to the ground, the entire system is proved faulty.

Lacan teaches us that human experience takes place in three orders, the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. While the symbolic order is the primary focus and venue for *Django Unchained*, Django's rise to the triumphant hero of the film is predicated on his

internal—and therefore imaginary—images of himself, just as Schultz’s fall is predicated on his inability to symbolize his experience of the real. Indeed, it is Tarantino’s allowance for the real to destabilize the symbolic order or law that governs his film that makes the film so engaging. As Lacan asserts, the real order does not lay dormant, but rather manifests in images or feelings that we struggle to articulate. Lacan (1981: 72) writes that these manifestations develop visually as different valences of the “gaze,” the feeling that we are consistently under surveillance from an unascertainable point; although functioning within the symbolic order, we continue to recognize “the pre-existence of the gaze—I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.” The three different valences of the gaze are the spot or stain, the screen, and the lure, and they each function in accordance with different feelings of anxiety or desire. Whereas the lure is that inarticulable *thing* about another person which makes me desire her or him, the stain and the screen represent something amiss with the symbolic order; they are images of things that do not jive with the background or that seem to *catch* my own desires or fears and reflect them back at me. In Žižekian (2008: 4) terms, these valences of the gaze are “the leftover, the remainder, the object-excrement that escapes” “symbolic identification.” In other words, the gaze is the manifestation of cracks in the dominant ideology, the appearance of the real in the symbolic order.

In *Django Unchained*, both the spot and the stain are embodied in the film’s characters. Dr. King Schultz, for example, functions as the screen for the 21st century audience member, primarily in that, unlike every other character in the film, he believes that slaves and other black people are people, rather than commodities. Defining the screen, Lacan (1981: 96) writes,

The correlative of the picture, to be situated in the same place as it, that is to say, outside, is the point of gaze, while that which forms the mediation from the one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometrical, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque—I mean the screen.

Because the screen is that which stands between myself as the viewer and that at which I intend to look, it simultaneously screens from view that which I wish to see and catches my own perspective, reflecting it back at me. Schultz becomes the screen of *Django Unchained* by acting according to 21st century definitions of what it means to be human and treat other humans around him, in “play[ing] an exactly reverse role” to the symbolic order of the film and catching the responses of the 21st century audience in his image, ultimately providing within the film a venue for our—the viewers’—response.

In order to play this role, however, Schultz cannot simply reject the governing law of the film—the institution of slavery—out of hand. Instead, he mimics others who function within the

symbolic order; as a bounty hunter, Schultz capitalizes on slavery, earning his livelihood through the legitimized murder of a series of white men who have broken the law. After all, as Lacan (1981: 99) writes, mimicry does not require absolute adherence to that which one is mimicking: “Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled.” As the screen for the audience, Schultz mimics other characters of this time period, but his mimicry is necessarily faulty; he, uninterpellated, cannot intuitively follow the symbolic order, thus demonstrating to viewers the cracks in the ideology of the time period.

Although today’s audience of the film does not immediately know it, Schultz’s first failure to mimic adequately the symbolic order in the film takes place within the first ten minutes, when he tells the slave Django, played by Jamie Foxx, to mount a horse. Indeed, within these first ten minutes, Schultz’s instructions appear to be the most normal of a series of abnormal activities, during which Schultz attempts to buy Django, kills one of the slave traders who refuses the sale, hands his rifle to a slave, asking him to hold it, so that he can write out the bill of sale, and then rides off in his dentist’s wagon, the sculpture of a tooth atop his wagon comically wagging back and forth on its long spring. It is not until Django and Schultz enter Daughtrey, Texas 13 minutes into the film that we audience members realize that Schultz’s action of putting Django on a horse signifies his mere mimicry of the symbolic order of the American South in the 19th century, as well as his function as the screen for this current audience, which also presumes that a black man on a horse is nothing unnatural. As the inhabitants of Daughtrey, Texas come to their windows or look up in shock at the image of Django riding into town alongside Schultz on his cart, they point in awe: “It’s a nigger on a horse” (Tarantino 2012). In this moment, Tarantino forces his audience to reconcile this surprising cognitive dissonance by inhabiting the point of view of racist white people who signify black people as commodities. As the film proceeds, it becomes still clearer that every character in the film other than Schultz—even Django himself—accepts the symbolic order that signifies black people as slaves, a lesser race.

Schultz’s position as the only character in the film who is not interpellated by the ideology of slavery serves to dispel a myth of films that portray heroes of the time period as imbued with 21st century conceptions of intersubjectivity. Films such as the recently released *Lincoln*, for example, suggest that our heroes of the past somehow performed above and beyond the symbolic order of their period, recognizing that slaves were people despite the common belief that they were commodities. Tarantino’s film suggests instead that only characters who grew up outside this specific ideology are capable of recognizing the fallacies of

this order without experiencing a traumatic break of some kind. Indeed, the peripheral conflict of the film is the reinterpellation of Django from horse rider to nondescript black slave.

Interestingly, then, the character that functions as the screen in *Django Unchained* is responsible for turning Django into a Lacanian stain. Like the screen, the stain nerve-wrackingly demonstrates the gaps in the law we accept as our symbolic order. The stain is “that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness” (Lacan 1981: 74), an oftentimes anamorphic image that appears impossible to symbolize—and when recognized, challenges the symbolic order by presenting a glimpse of the real. Žižek (2008: 5) elaborates that the “stain disturbs ‘direct’ communication between the gaze and its ‘proper’ object, leading the straight gaze astray, changing it into a kind of squint.” Django on a horse represents just this, and the other characters of the film struggle throughout to take in this image of the stain in two ways—to allow themselves “to squint,” as Žižek writes, or to attempt “to get rid of [the stain] as quickly as possible” (Žižek 2008: 5).

These two methods of dealing with the stain—or interpellating Django—are enacted by two slave-owners in the film, Big Daddy and Calvin Candie. To these men, whose wealth, well-being, and meaningful existence are built on their use of slave labor, the appearance of Django on a horse forces them to confront a truth they must deny in order to support the institution of slavery: that if a black man can ride a horse, he must be a man as well as black. In order to prevent the dissolution of their ideology, both Big Daddy and Candie attempt to interpellate Django; they seek to signify the appearance of a black man on a horse in order to reduce his destructive capability of bringing the real into the symbolic order. In order to do so, both Big Daddy and Candie first articulate their ideology and then find a space in that ideology for the image of Django on a horse to inhabit.

Žižek (2008: 6-7) explains the psychological process these men must undergo in order to bring Django as the stain into their symbolic order: “In the network of intersubjective relations, every one of us is identified with, pinned down to, a certain fantasy place in the other’s symbolic structure....We can relate to these ‘people of flesh and blood’ only insofar as we are able to identify them with a certain place in our symbolic fantasy space, or, to put it in a more pathetic way, only insofar as they fill out a place preestablished in our dream.” Big Daddy articulates this process when Schultz pushes him to allow Django the freedom to move around his plantation without being treated like a slave; in order for his slaves to understand how to treat Django, he verbally creates for Django a place that *means* something on a plantation inhabited by enslaved black people and free white people. Big Daddy says,

“Bettina, sugar, Django isn’t a slave. Django is a free man, you understand? You can’t treat him like any of the other niggers around here, because he ain’t like any of the other niggers around here. You got it?”

“You want I should treat him like white folks?”

“No. That’s not what I said.”

“Then I don’t know what you want, Big Daddy.”...

“You just treat him like you would Jerry.” (Tarantino 2012)

While this explanation suffices for Bettina, it does not appease the film’s audience: thus far, we have only experienced the deep-seated binary of white:black/subject:object, and introducing a third character with whom to identify Django only continues to leave him outside of this binary construction. We don’t know if Jerry is white or black, subject or object, and this lack of context does not assist the problematization of these binaries. In other words, although Big Daddy appears to have interpellated Django, for the audience of the film he absolutely fails to, and Big Daddy’s ultimate attempt to kill Django and Schultz suggests that he is not comfortable with this analogy either. In failing to interpellate Django, Big Daddy performs as Žižek anticipates and instead “tries to get rid of [him] as quickly as possible.”

Calvin Candie, alternatively, “squints.” The primary slave owner and antagonist of the film played by Leonardo DiCaprio, Candie begins interpellating Django by articulating his ideology as does Big Daddy. He says,

Where I part company from many of my phrenologist colleagues is I believe there is a level above bright, above talented, above loyal that a nigger can aspire to. Say, one nigger that just pops up in 10,000. The exceptional nigger....But I do believe that given time, exceptional niggers like Bright Boy [Django] here, become if not frequent, more frequent. Bright Boy, you are that one in 10,000. (Tarantino 2012)

While this statement also fails immediately to interpellate Django, Candie responds to this failure by remaining fascinated by Django for the bulk of the film, scrutinizing him in order to see whether or not his internal image of Django is appropriate. Django, putting on a stony act in order to achieve his goal, does not outrightly accept this interpellative gesture either, and neither do Candie’s black slaves or white servants. Indeed, Candie must consistently bring his slaves and servants to order, as they repeatedly attempt to destroy Django in order to prevent his appearance as stain from upsetting their ideology.

Django’s appearance as stain at this point in the film is also far more complicated than it is at the beginning; in Candie’s company Django has begun to represent two imaginary

characters in order to rescue his wife, Broomhilda, from her station as a house slave at Calvin Candie's plantation, Candyland. The first character Django represents at this point in the film is Siegfried of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. It is Schultz who designates Django as Siegfried. Having discovered that Django's wife, who was sold to Candie after she and Django attempted to escape their previous owner together, is called Broomhilda, Schultz tells Django a brief version of the Siegfried and Brünhilde myth. At Django's behest, Schultz says,

Broomhilda shall remain [imprisoned on top of a mountain] unless a hero arises brave enough to save her....A fella named Siegfried...scales the mountain, because he's not afraid of it. He slays a dragon, because he's not afraid of him. And he walks through hellfire, because Broomhilda is worth it....When a German meets a real life Siegfried, that's kind of a big deal. As a German I am obliged to help you on your quest to rescue your beloved Broomhilda. (Tarantino 2012)

The rest of the film follows the format Schultz here invents for himself and Django; after spending the winter earning a substantial amount of cash as a team of bounty hunters, Schultz and Django formulate a plan to rescue Broomhilda from Candie—the dragon of the myth, perhaps.

However, because Candie would likely refuse to sell a “nothing” slave like Broomhilda, who is worth no more than \$300 and lives far away from town on Candie's plantation, Schultz and Django invent the second imaginary character which Django begins to represent: a black slaver. In order to dupe Candie into selling Broomhilda, Schultz suggests that he and Django masquerade as buyers of a “Mandingo” fighter, a title Tarantino attributed to a sport of two slaves fighting to the death, following the 1975 film *Mandingo*. In order to do so, Django must act as though he too is employed in the procurement of slaves. Django hesitatingly describes the imaginary character he is to become, explaining to Schultz, “Ain't nothing lower than a black slaver” (Tarantino 2012). Thus, Schultz complicates Django's image twice over, moving Django's self-image into the imaginary order by first conflating Django's pursuit of Broomhilda with Siegfried's and then demonstrating that in order to sufficiently become Siegfried, Django must first act the role with which Django is more familiar, the black slaver.

For the length of the film during which Candie believes Django's black slaver act, he is fascinated by Django, but as soon as he discovers Django's original intentions, Candie offers Django a binary ultimatum. After a long speech, in which Candie articulates his phrenological beliefs that the black man's skull naturally leads to biological servility, he says, “Now Bright Boy, I'll admit you are pretty clever. But if I took this hammer here and I bashed in your skull with it, you would have the same three dimples in the same place as Old Ben” (Tarantino 2012). In

other words, if Django is not the one in 10,000 black men that Candie originally believed him to be, he is a creature biologically designed for slavery. Just like every other character in the film, with the exception of our screen, Schultz, Django accepts this binary upon which the symbolic order of slavery exists, and when he returns to the Candie plantation to save Broomhilda at the end of the film, he also verbally accepts interpellation in Candie's ideology. As he slowly kills Stephen, the house slave who ruined his and Schultz's elaborate plan to rescue Broomhilda, he says, "Every single word that came out of Calvin Candie's mouth was nothin' but horseshit. But he was right about one thing: I am that one nigger in 10,000" (Tarantino 2012). Despite the brutalities that have been inflicted upon Django and his wife Broomhilda, Django is not capable of rejecting the symbolic out of hand, but rather accepts it. This, as both Lacan and Žižek describe, is an example of the letter that inevitably arrives.

In his analysis of Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Lacan describes why the letter always arrives to its recipient and how the recipient *becomes* the recipient due to the letter's delivery. In his discussion of this analysis, Žižek likens the arrival of this letter—or the signification of the signifier—to Louis Althusser's description of interpellation: this is the same "logic by means of which one (mis)recognizes oneself as the addressee of ideological interpellation" (Žižek 2008:12); in answering the call, one suddenly signifies within this new symbolic order. However, Žižek continues to demonstrate that this first definition of the letter arriving is simply how this interpellation takes place in the imaginary order: Django imagines he, like Siegfried, is simply one in 10,000—a hero—and he strives to fulfill the actions of what he expects that internal image of himself to perform. The arrival of the letter also functions in the symbolic and the real orders, suggesting that interpellation of this kind is inevitable, that Django indeed has no choice whatsoever in accepting Candie's designation of "one in 10,000."

However, Dr. King Schultz *does* eventually absolutely reject the symbolic order of slavery, demonstrating the only kind of action that Lacan termed a "successful act:" an absolute rejection of the symbolic order and the resultant move into the real (Žižek 2008: 37). To Lacan, the act was best demonstrated by Antigone, who criticized the symbolic order, knowing that it would result in her death; her rejection of the symbolic resulted in the loss of her life and signification within the symbolic order and was thus a very *real* suicide. Schultz's decision to make a similar act begins as he, Django, and Candie's slaves and servants caravan to Candyland. Along their way, they come across one of Candie's fighting slaves, D'Artagnan, escaping up a tree to avoid the dogs that Candie's white servants have unleashed on him. Schultz, recognizing the precarious situation this slave is in, offers to pay for the slave in order to save his life, but Django rejects this offer in order to prevent Candie from suspecting that

Schultz is too soft to actually be in the Mandingo business. Django interrupts and tells Candie he can do what he likes with D'Artagnan: "He's your nigger" (Tarantino 2012). Unlike the bulk of the violence in the film, when the dogs rip D'Artagnan apart, the camera angle serves to shield the audience from the extent of the violence, either moving so close to the dogs that their actions are almost indistinguishable or moving to view this violence from behind the bodies of Candie's men. This occlusion of the violence only serves to make it more brutal. Like the audience of the film, Schultz is moved to look away, and after witnessing the violent temper of Candie when he discovers that Schultz's and Django's proposition to buy a black fighter has been a ruse, Schultz begins to experience flashbacks to the dogs' violence; Schultz's inability to reconcile this violence demonstrates that while Candie and Django have seen dogs rip men apart before—often enough that they can *symbolize* this violence, that this brutality has a meaningful place in the symbolic order—Schultz cannot; he has experienced the trauma of the real. Moreover, in these flashbacks, Schultz and the audience of the film witness a more brutal depiction of D'Artagnan's death, accompanied both by D'Artagnan's screams and face contorted in pain and by a harpist playing Beethoven's "Für Elise." The dissonance of these two sounds demonstrate Schultz's inability to symbolize the trauma of watching a man being ripped apart by dogs and moreover his inability to condone a symbolic order that legalizes and legitimizes Candie's treatment of black people.

Although it appears that Schultz will be able to accept the events up until this point without rejecting the symbolic order out of hand, when Candie persists that a handshake is necessary to seal the deal, Schultz throws off the symbolic order entirely, and in a room full of armed men, shoots Candie through the pretty white flower he wears over his heart. In the silent moment before he is thrown off his feet by a barrage of gunfire, Schultz turns to Django and demonstrates his full awareness that in rejecting the symbolic order, he is also committing suicide: "I'm sorry," he says. "I couldn't resist" (Tarantino 2012). Schultz's apology here is necessary in considering his suicide the act. As Žižek (2008: 68) writes,

This 'withdrawal' of the subject from the Other is what Lacan calls 'subjective destitution': not an act of sacrifice (which always implies the Other as its addressee) but an act of abandonment which sacrifices the very sacrifice. The freedom thus attained is a point at which we find ourselves not only without the other *qua* our neighbor, but without support in the Other itself—as such, it is unbearably suffocating, the very opposite of relief, of 'liberation.'

Therefore, both Schultz's knowledge of his immanent death and his recognition that this act will likely result in his and Django's failure to save Broomhilda are necessary tenets of this act.

Schultz does not allow himself to be killed in an attempt to recognize the Other, but rather rejects the existence of the Other altogether and succumbs to the real, wherein neither Other nor Ego exist.

Despite the veracity of Schultz's act, however, his death does not have much effect on the symbolic order of the film as the characters within the film view it. Django's situation becomes dire for a few scenes, but none of Candie's family nor staff question the rightness of the events; they simply express the desire to punish Django as brutally as possible. Žižek's (2008: 52) analysis of Tito's rejection of communism and Stalin in 1948 provides us a possible reason for the ultimate flatness of Schultz's act:

With their 'No!' to Stalin, Tito and his companions crossed their Rubicon without being sure of what awaited them on the other bank, of what would become symbolic order: the greatness of an act depends strictly on the place *from which* it was accomplished. In other words...Tito's 'No!' had such a subversive impact only because it was pronounced *by a Communist*, only because he resisted Stalin *as a communist*.

Alternatively, Schultz is a European rejecting the *American* institution of slavery, a distinction that Django makes very clear when Schultz attempts to prevent the slave D'Artagnan's death. Thus, just as Tarantino questions the message promoted by other films about the period which attempt to exonerate their heroes from the atrocities of slavery, Schultz's act suggests that protest by outsiders—by 21st century viewers, for example—has little to no impact on the events of the past.

Following Schultz's act, moreover, we 21st century audience members lose our screen, and the violence escalates accordingly to an almost comic pitch. The firefight that follows Schultz's death results in blood literally coating the walls of the plantation house. After capturing Django at the end of this fight, Candie's family and servants threaten to castrate Django, a classic Tarantino move, and they nearly do so before selling him to the most brutal slavers they can think of. He then returns, triumphant, laden with two guns and a pile of dynamite; he enacts his revenge with spectacular and comic violence. Mimicking Siegfried walking through hellfire to save Broomhilda, Django kills all the white people in the plantation house, as well as Stephen, the head house slave, without a problem. Indeed, his bullets are so powerful, that when he shoots Lara, Calvin Candie's sister, she is whisked from the room, swept off her feet as though Django had fired a cannonball into her midriff. Without Schultz functioning as screen, today's audience is provided no signal that communicates how we ought to understand these final scenes, and it appears that without this screen, the violence of the film moves firmly into the imaginary order. Django kills everybody involved in Broomhilda's ownership and Schultz's

death, not because their actions were wrong or because he is rejecting the symbolic order of slavery, but because, as Siegfried did, he must overcome the worst in order to win his bride.

Moreover, in accepting Candie's letter—in saying to Steven before he kills him, “I am that one in 10,000”—Django moves into the imaginary order by accepting a role that ought not to exist. As Žižek (2008: 14) writes of the letter that always arrives in the imaginary, “when this call ‘arrives at its destination’ in me, I automatically misrecognize that it is this very act of recognition which *makes me* what I have recognized myself as—I don't recognize myself in it because I'm its addressee, I become its addressee the moment I recognize myself in it.” Thus, Django is more right than he knows when he says that Candie spoke nothing but “horseshit.” The position of one in 10,000 would not exist without Candie's articulation that it does, but very problematically, when Django accepts the call of one in 10,000 he *legitimizes* Candie's symbolic order. In saying that he is one in 10,000, he tacitly agrees that the other 9,999 are just human commodities.

However, Žižek's reading of the letter arriving in the symbolic order complicates this simple reading of the end of the film as racist, just as the very different audience response does. While some audience members laugh at the wild violence of the end of the film, many are also silenced by it. As Žižek (2008: 10) writes,

When the letter arrives at its destination, the stain spoiling the picture is not abolished, effaced: what we are forced to grasp is, on the contrary, the fact that the real ‘message,’ the real letter awaiting us is the stain itself. We should perhaps reread Lacan's ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’ from this aspect: is not the letter itself ultimately such a stain—not a signifier but rather an object resisting symbolization, a surplus, a material leftover circulating among the subjects and staining its momentary possessor?

Thus, Django as the stain of the film does not simply reify racist ideology by accepting Candie's letter at the end of the film. Instead he demonstrates that a symbolic order that predicates its law on the repression of half of its citizens also welcomes its own downfall.

Although the violence at the end of the film is ridiculous in its cinematic portrayal, it through no ridiculous means results in complete destruction of Candyland. Using the weapons available to him at the time and firing on mostly unarmed people, Django successfully kills each of the slavers in the house, and proceeds to raze the house to the ground, leaving a wasteland behind him. Although this absolute destruction is predicated on Django's conflation of himself with Siegfried, this rewriting of the Siegfried myth suggests that *real* violence, real destruction, accompanies any hero's actions. More importantly, Django's acceptance of the call to be one in 10,000 suggests that while 9,999 repressed people operate within the system, one is equipped

to truly promote destruction of the system itself. Although Django does all of this in triumphant cinematic fashion with which the 21st century audience is all too familiar, an element of the real remains in his complete destruction of Candyland: “What ultimately interrupts the continuous flow of words, what hinders the smooth running of the symbolic circuit, is the traumatic presence of the Real: when the words suddenly stay out, we have to look not for imaginary resistances but for the object that came too close” (Žižek 2008: 27). Within the violence that appears so comic at the end of the film remains enough of the real violence Schultz witnessed before his death. Although the film suggests that everybody but Schultz is able to bring the trauma of violence into the symbolic order, the film ends with the real deaths of every character we have come to know, except for the hero, Django, and his damsel, ultimately suggesting that the entire symbolic order is faulty and can result only in utter destruction.

Still, although Django accepts the station of one in 10,000 at the end of the film, it is our 21st century screen, Schultz, who turns Django into the stain in the first place, suggesting—contrary to many of the events of the film—that a third party *is* necessary in order to raze any ideology from the inside after all. What does this mean for us, the audience to the film? Perhaps that, as Žižek and Althusser insist, short of dying, ideology is not something we escape. Although viewing history from new and alternative perspectives is an important project, seeking to rescue our heroes from the past and suggest that they were not interpellated in the dominant, brutal ideology of the period allows Americans to sugarcoat a history we would rather avoid. However, another reading is possible. Perhaps instead the film is saying, take heart; we do not operate in a closed system, but instead meet Germans, from time to time, who put us up on a horse and ask us questions we hadn’t considered.

Regardless of our reading of these encounters, the ending of *Django Unchained* remains overdetermined. While I favor the latter reading of the conclusion to the film, the reading that suggests that the entire system was faulty and could only result in the complete destruction of Candyland, there is no doubt that the ending of this film is problematic. It is too easy to leave the theater with the first impression, that while Django was a phenomenal character, in the end, according to the statistics of the film, there are 9,999 black people in the world who are biologically servile. Many critics and audience members have been asking whether *Django Unchained* is a racist film since the script leaked online early in 2012, and while the answer is naturally more complicated than the question, I suspect the conclusion to the film too easily answers the question both ways.

ⁱ Although there's certainly a wealth of Žižekian commentary on the gaze and its valences in other of his texts, the thematic development of *Enjoy Your Symptom!* is key to my argument here, especially in terms of Žižek's application of the stain to Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" and I have chosen therefore to put the three texts of Seminar XI, *Django Unchained*, and *Enjoy Your Symptom!* in isolated conversation.

References

Lacan, J. (1981) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by A. Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Spike Lee Calls 'Django Unchained' 'Disrespectful,' 2007. Available at:
<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/spike-lee-calls-django-unchained-disrespectful-20121227> [20 September 2013].

Tarantino, Q, director (2012) *Django Unchained*. The Weinstein Company.

Žižek, S. (2008) *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. New York: Routledge.