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Critical Essay

### **Django Unchained Psychoanalysis**

Django Unchained is a movie that was released in the year 2012 and was set in the year 1858. The movie involves a slave who is called Django who was captured and sold away from his wife. The movie attempts to portray how slaves were often treated as inferior people or more like the properties of their owners rather than people. The movie depicts how slaves were often caught and sold off like any good, unable to marry and forced to work, taken from their loved ones and held against their will or even at times beat and raped.

Django played by Jamie Foxx, states how he had often sung to drown his sorrow and seldom to express his happiness and how crying for joy or singing for joy, whilst in the jaws of slavery, was alike and uncommon. The movie takes place two years before the civil war and Django the protagonist in the movie becomes a bounty hunter after being rescued by a German dentist named as Schultz, at the beginning of the movie. The only reason Django takes the job offer is because he thinks that there is no better job than killing white men for money, in fact, he states, 'kill white folks, and they pay you for it, what is not to like?' his rescuer Shultz, offers Django his freedom with seventy-five dollars in exchange to help him track down his previous owners the Brittle brothers. After managing to track down the Brittle brothers, Django decides to become partners with Schultz and continue with his job on the condition that Schultz agrees to help him rescue his wife, played by Kerry Washington, from slavery (Django Unchained n.p).

After hard work and a lot of researches, they manage to receive confirmation that his wife was transported to a well-known plantation called Candyland in Mississippi. They devise a plan to help rescue Django's wife from the plantation by telling the plant owner Candie, played by

Leonardo DiCaprio, which they have come to purchase one of his Mandingo fighters. The plan is however foiled by Candies' loyal senior house slave, played by Samuel L. Jackson, after he raises suspicion of the German bounty hunter and Django and goes ahead to tell his master Candie of their real intention. Candie demands twelve thousand dollars for the freedom of Django's wife, or he threatens to kill her. Shultz agrees to the deal, and as they go to shake hands with Candie, he shoots him dead, Shultz is also shot dead. Django is then punished for the gun fight that breaks lose by being sentenced to a mine to be beaten and worked to death while his wife Broomhilda, is locked away.

Django, however, does not give up and goes ahead to bribe the men transporting him into thinking that he is still a bounty hunter, he shows them the document he got after his first kill with Schultz and they believe his story and set him free. As soon as they set him free he kills them and returns to Candyland to rescue his wife. When he gets to Candyland, he kills everyone by blowing up the house and then rescuing his wife. Django and Broomhilda ride off the plantation on Django's horse as freed slaves.

Violence in the movie Django Unchained is neither realistic, threatening nor scary, as much as what the movie tries to portray is a real representation of what happened during the years of slavery, the director, decided to make it somewhat light and humorous for his audience (Tarantino n.p). The slaves were raped and forced to have sex with some visitors or even at times their masters. Women house slaves suffered much more than those who were sent to the field this was despite the fact that they were often given nice clothes, and they did not have to work in the sun all day. A good example, to evidence this, in the movie, is when Django first arrived at the Candyland plantation; he saw his wife being dragged from the hot box as a punishment for trying to run away. His wife was being dragged naked from the hot box into the

house and she had been in the hot box for over a week, they then ‘fixed her up’ and prepared her well so that she’d be able to sexually satisfy the German visitor because she could speak German. The humor the director used in the movie in many ways made light of the psychological trauma the slaves underwent during the period (Keizer 124).

Men were also used for sport to entertain the visitors, when Django and Shultz get to Candyland we are shown a scene where the Mandingo fighters are fighting, when one of them overpowers the other, Candie hands him a hammer and instructs him to finish the other one off, we also see Candy throw used up Mandingo fighters to his dogs. This was the kind of psychological trauma the slaves underwent that was made light off in the movie (Iyer 347).

We also see candy give a speech on phrenology, which refers to the detailed study of the shapes and sizes of the cranium or skull as a supposed indication of character and mental ability. He then went ahead and used the concept in phrenology to explain and justify slavery, saying that they are slaves simply because they are tamable. Another instance where the director made light of a scene that was meant to depict the trauma the slaves went through was the KKK scene which was meant to show what happened to black men or ‘nigga’ lovers when they do things that Django and the German did, the director made this scene funny and humorous despite the fact that it was a representation of real history and was a serious issue.

According to Alexander (47), trauma theory prompts a rethinking of the relation that exists between memory, film, cinema and history. He further states that the use of post-traumatic stress is utilized as the only link to an event. Thus, this statement speaks to film form in how an event or the consequences of it are used to apply trauma to a narrative. Alexander (67) also states that trauma theory borders the edge of returning cinema back to the model of passive spectatorship

and that the retention of fantasy of the tools, to dramatize and make trauma subjective are the only ways to prevent such an outcome.

In a filmic context, trauma can be defined as the layering of several experiences over a singular event. For instance in this movie, trauma is founded on a basis of slavery but is not exhibited without the use of multiple flashbacks and their contrast to the events of the present that are all emphasized both through using diegetic and visually. Trauma can be generated as a singular traumatic event in a movie or through small events based on the said event to maintain a continuous theme of trauma (discourse of trauma) as in *Django*. The significance of traumatic discourse, however, transcends the literal referencing of any particular experience of trauma, hence subjectivity, in this case, is not much of a concern, what only matters is that trauma is felt (Cheng 34).

In the movie, *Django Unchained*, the separation of Django from his wife and its consequences form the traumatic discourse of the film. In order to present a representation of slavery, the filmic discourse had to be a traumatic one, and as earlier stated post-traumatic stress is utilized as the only valid link to an event and so to well convey *Django Unchained* as a movie other than fiction, elements pertaining to post-traumatic stress had to be embedded in the movie's narrative without traumatizing the movie to a point of passivity.

Another instance that points to psychological trauma the slaves were subjected to was the racism as was depicted in the movie. We see Schultz demand that Django should be treated as an extension of himself. This scene brings into focus two important things, first the black man's dependence on his companion a white man for entry into places such as in that instance, discussion of plantation business also the level of racism that existed in that the slave owners did not distinguish between black people and property. This aspect is well brought out by Anne

Anlin Cheng in her book *The Melancholy of Race*, which discusses racial melancholia and clarifies the psychological terms organizing the dynamics of race and what politics can be voiced on those dynamics. We can use this book and the ideology in it to further understand the psychological grief experienced by the blacks and also explain the behavior of Candies' loyal slave, by his desire to attain the impossible perfection of becoming white. In the book, Cheng provides a framework for understanding the invisible aspects of racial subjection which in most cases are usually ignored by the conventional politics of claiming grievances against racial injustice. According to Cheng melancholia, is the word that comes closest to describe well the effects of racial subjection blacks went through under the whites' slavery (Cheng 56).

In the book *Melancholy of race*, Cheng manages to map out racial fantasy that enables her identify it as that which coalesces individual (psyche) with the social, ideological state apparatus. She goes further and says racial fantasy can be perceived as a bridge between individual and state thereby supplementing Althusser's theory of interpellation which a needed accommodation of the particularity of racialization (Cheng x).

The melancholy of race can well be used to define the stages Django went through in the movie, from melancholia where he'd always sing to drown his sorrows, to assimilation, where he was given the job as a bounty hunter, to identification when he realizes that he needs to stand up and defend both him and his wife symbolically shown where he introduces himself as Django and states the 'D' is silent and finally to love. These stages are reoriented and made clearer to help negotiate the thin space between a racialized subject and how the subject experiences grief over racial injustice; in focusing on the process of racial subjectivity. The reductive oppositions of oppressor vs. oppressed can, according to Cheng, be well replaced with far more open-ended and more creative concern for the unseen feelings and ideas that try to use grievances to express

themselves. By this, she ultimately asserts the productivity of melancholia as a theoretical tool because it accounts for the guilt as well as the denial of guilt, the blending of ignominy and omnipotence of racist imaginary. She emphasizes that the analysis of melancholia with regard to raced subjects must extend beyond the terms argot association with sadness. According to Cheng (20) racial melancholia is a sign of rejection and as a psychic strategy in response to that rejection. In the movie *Django Unchained*, we see that blacks were rejected as equal men or people by the whites and often considered as inferior.

Candie, the owner of the Candyland plantation, rejected blacks as equal people to the whites; he viewed them as inferior animals and used phrenology to justify his ideology or perception. This character can be best analyzed using Sigmund Freud's analogy of the Ego and the Id. According to Sigmund Freud (15), the Id is the primitive and instinctive component of personality. It consists of all the inherited or biological components of personality. The Id is thus described as being the unconscious and impulsive part of our psyche, which responds directly, and immediately to the instincts. The Id always demands immediate satisfaction which when granted we experience a feeling of pleasure but when denied we experience pain or un-pleasure, it is therefore not affected by reality or logic and is hence irrational. Additionally, the Id operates on the pleasure principle, which is based on the ideology that every wishful impulse should be immediately satisfied regardless of the consequences. It is thus fantasy oriented (Freud 23).

According to McLeod (n.p), the ego, on the other hand, is that part of the Id that has been exposed to the influences of the external world and is therefore modified. It acts as a bridge or mediator between the real world and the unrealistic id and is the decision-making component of personality. While the ego works by reason, the Id is always chaotic and totally unreasonable.

According to Freud, the ego operates according to the reality principle that helps it work out realistic ways of satisfying or meeting the Id's demands, often compromising or postponing satisfaction to avoid negative consequences of the society. Before taking any action, the ego considers social realities and norms, etiquette and rules in deciding how to behave. Freud (15) further states that the ego, just like the Id, seeks pleasure and avoids pain but unlike the Id, the Ego seeks to achieve this pleasure through a realistic strategy. Freud summarized the interaction of the two by stating the ego is likened to a man on a horseback who has to keep the superior strength of the horse in check. Additionally, Freud states that the ego is weak relative to the Id, and the best the ego can do is stay on or continue trying to point the Id to the right direction.

In the Movie, we see Candie, has the ideology that blacks are inferior due to the color as compared to whites. This according to Freud can be justified by the fact that he was born in a family that supported slavery of the blacks, and so he inherited this trait. We can, therefore, say that according to Candie, the fact that blacks were inferior to whites was something instilled in his Id, and he derived his satisfaction from the suffering of and pointless killing of the blacks. This can be evidenced or justified by the fact that he wanted to Kill Django's wife if she was not bought and he also handed over a hummer to one of his Mandingo fighters' to finish the other Mandingo fighter off (Django Unchained n.p).

Since the Ego tried to rationalize the actions of the Id and to ensure that the Id achieved or attained the satisfaction it so desires in a society acceptable way, it came up with the phrenology justification so as to try justify the slavery as practiced by Candie. According to phrenology, which involves the study of the skull, the shape and size of the cranium can be used to determine a person's attributes. Thus Candie believed that since a black man's skull was so shaped and so

sized, he was easily tamable and hence it was fit to treat them as inhuman or as animals that are good for not only working for white men but also used for sport (Hobson n.p).

A dialog on Racial Melancholia is also another article that corroborates with Chengs' analysis of racial melancholy. Cheng, like Han and Eng, also used case studies and cultural productions as evidence for melancholia, whilst according to Cheng, for a psychoanalytic theoretician racial melancholia is a useful methodological approach for analyzing the constitutive part that grief plays in racial or ethnic subject formation. While for the clinical practitioner, according to Eng and Han, racial melancholia can offer a deeper understanding of Asian American mental health issues in clinical practice (Eng 54).

While looking at the movie, Django Unchained, one cannot help but notice how racial melancholia affected both the dominant white and the other race the blacks. Eng and Han described racial melancholia as the dynamics that constitute the mutual definition of both the races through exclusion. They thus summarized racial melancholia as a complex process of racial rejection and desire on the part of the non-whites and the whites that expresses itself in abject and manic forms. Whilst the white American identity and their authority is secured through the melancholic interjections of racial others that it can neither fully accommodate or relinquish, the racial other, in this case, the blacks, also suffers from racial melancholia whereby their racial identity is imaginatively reinforced through the introjections of a never possible perfection and an inarticulable loss that is meant to inform the individuals' sense of their own subjectivity (Cheng Xi).

In conclusion an analysis of the Django Unchained through the racial melancholia perception, we note that the dominant white men requires the presence of the black or the racial other in order to uphold their authority which they arrive at only through the exclusion or



rejection of the blacks. Candie saw his superiority and excluded the slaves simply because they could not assimilate or become white and thus cannot become American. The blacks, in the movie, due to the fact that being white has been idealized, aspire to become whites yet they can never be as with the case of Candice loyal slave played by Samuel L Jackson. This inability to attain this perfection creates great racial injury and grief. By this, we can, therefore, use racial melancholia as framework to understanding how racial subjectivity is formed and hence further understand both the physical and psychological trauma experienced by the slaves in the movie Django Unchained.

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Django-Unchained is a Blogging Platform written in Python built using Django framework. This project was made for Fun!. We recommend use of VirtualEnv to run this project. Feel free to contribute. Things required to run this Django project. Python Pip. Django 1.6.1 or highier. Sqlite3. Fetching dependencies. A page for describing Characters: Django Unchained. As a Character Sheet, spoilers will be below. Main Characters Django Freeman A slave previously owned by "Django: I like the way you die, boy. In an exchange where he learns that "positive" means sure of what he knows, Django says that he is sure that Ellis Brittle is trying to escape on a horse. After Schultz shoots Ellis Django: I'm positive he dead. After he kills everyone in the manor save for Stephen. Stephen: I count six shots, nigga. Django and Broomhilda ride off the plantation on Django's horse as freed slaves. Violence in the movie Django Unchained is neither realistic, threatening nor scary, as much as what the movie tries to portray is a real representation of what happened during the years of slavery, the director, decided to make it somewhat light and humorous for his audience (Tarantino n.p). The significance of traumatic discourse, however, transcends the literal referencing of any particular experience of trauma, hence subjectivity, in this case, is not Django Unchained study guide contains a biography of director Quentin Tarantino, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. About Django Unchained Django Unchained Summary Character List Cast List Director's Influence Glossary Themes Quotes and Analysis the Introduction and the Brittle