

# **Django Analyzed**

**How can we read the characters of Django and Dr. King Schultz  
in the movie Django Unchained?**

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## Introduction

This dissertation is focused on Quentin Tarantino's latest movie: *Django Unchained*. The movie was first released on 25-12-2012 in North America. It is centered on a troublesome part of US history; the time of slavery a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War. This movie is an interesting subject for the scholarly field of *American Studies* as it tells us something about the three pillars of *American Studies*: history, culture and identity. The portrayal of a story in historical times, although it may not be accurate, tells us something about US history. The movie itself is an aspect of contemporary US culture. The racial and gender aspects of the movie tell us something about US identity.

Indeed, the movie's effect on American society was significant, as the movie became the subject of much scrutiny about the frequent use of the word 'nigger' and the cruel violence portrayed. The subject of race had diverse effects on moviegoers. Some theaters were filled with blacks cheering on the revenge that the character Django takes on slaveholders. Another example was a black woman who felt discomfort when she went to see the movie and was faced with white audience giggling about the use of the word 'nigger'.

In this dissertation, I want to analyze what this movie means or *can* mean. I will do this by focusing on the main characters, which are Django and Dr. King Schultz. I want to search beyond the easily spotted aspects of the characters and find deeper layers in them. In other words, I will analyze how we, as audience, can read the characters of Django and Dr. King Schultz. This is the research question of the dissertation and answering it will enhance our knowledge about what this movie means or can mean. The story of the movie is, according to the Internet Movie Database, that "with the help of a German bounty hunter, a freed slave sets out to rescue his wife from a brutal Mississippi plantation owner".<sup>1</sup> But I believe there is more to this movie than this simple mission. In the first chapter I will analyze the theme of revenge. I will search for the motives behind Django's revenge and draw a comparison between his actions and actual slave revolts. I will also discuss the possibility of this movie being a counter-narrative on dominant US discourse. In the second chapter, I will focus on the theme of abolitionism, which in the US was a movement to end the institution of slavery. Here I will discuss if Django and Schultz can be read as abolitionists. I will also draw a comparison between Schultz and historical abolitionist John Brown. In both chapters I will discuss several scenes of *Django Unchained*.

By elaborating on these subjects I hope to answer my research question: how can we read the characters of Django and Dr. King Schultz?

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<sup>1</sup> Internet Movie Database, 'Django Unchained (2012)', <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1853728/> (April 4th, 2013).

## Chapter 1: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Vengeance

In this first chapter, I will analyze the theme of revenge in several scenes of *Django Unchained*. The theme of revenge is a big one in this movie, which can be seen from the tagline of the movie poster that changes a fundamental phrase of US identity by saying: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Vengeance.<sup>2</sup> I will look at the ways in which Django performs his revenge and what his motives are. To give this analysis a deeper layer, I will draw parallels with slave revolts that actually took place in American history. The point of this essay is to analyze how we should read the characters of Django and Dr. King Schultz in the context of revenge. In the course of the story that is being told in *Django Unchained*, we can see Django, with help of Dr. Schultz, as performing a slave revolt of his own; Django is a former slave set free who becomes a bounty hunter targeting slave owners. For this reason, a comparison between Django's revolt and historical slave revolts is possible. The way in which the literary revolt in the movie is portrayed, may be influenced by revolts that actually took place in history or may even imitate them. The research question of this chapter is: can Django be read as a proto-type slave rebel? As the title of the movie is *Django Unchained*, we can expect this movie to be about slaves rising against the system. Django becomes unchained; he is freed from slavery. Unchained sounds like unleashed, terms that give the viewer already an expectation of the revenge that will be portrayed. I will give attention to the question if Django's revenge is an individual or a collective process because this shows if his revenge is motivated by personal misery or by collective misery of all slaves.

I will begin with the first of the five scenes that I have chosen for this dissertation. The first scene of my choosing is also the first scene of the movie. I mainly picked this scene to support my thoughts on the theme of abolition, which will be discussed in chapter two. Still, there is also a first incident of Django's revenge found in this scene.

In this scene, we are made aware of the year in which the movie takes place. The year is 1858, two years before the start of the Civil War. Slave revolts had taken place in the Americas from the very beginning of the institution of slavery. However, in English America, there are no reports of slave rebellions until the latter part of the seventeenth century. Moreover, it was only in the early years of the eighteenth century that the different rebellions and plots became of considerable importance and of frequent occurrence.<sup>3</sup> The fact that this movie takes place two years before the Civil War, emphasizes the tumult in historical reality as well as in the movie about the institution of slavery and the very real threat of slave revolts for slaveholders. Why would this tumult enhance the

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> H. Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York 1943) 163.

possibility of slave revolts? In his book *American Negro Slave Revolts* Herbert Aptheker explains that there are certain precipitants of rebellion.<sup>4</sup> A precipitant was for example any event with only the slightest bearing upon the question of emancipation. Such an event was known to produce excitement amongst the slaves.<sup>5</sup> Many times the possibility of emancipation was exaggerated and produced sentiments that inspired rebellion. Another precipitant was the existence of a war. This was the case because war would draw military groups away from a given area and would therefore encourage slave unrest.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the coming into prominence of a revolutionary philosophy and the occurrence of mass upheavals were factors that led to slave unrest.<sup>7</sup> As these precipitants were in place in reality in 1858, we can expect them in the movie as well.

To go back to the movie, the years leading up to the Civil War were thus years in which slave revolts could be expected because the precipitants for rebellion mentioned above were in place. For example the existence of anti-slavery thought can be seen as a revolutionary philosophy. Therefore it is no coincidence that the Speck brothers in this scene, while trying to move their slaves, become fearful of a stranger appearing in the night. The brothers cock their guns and demand that the stranger states his business. Their fear that this stranger might be someone who means harm to their slave business is expressed when Dr. Schultz (the stranger) asks them if they are the slave-trading Speck brothers. "Who wants to know?" is their answer, indicating their skepticism. Schultz is looking for a slave from the Caruccan plantation and Django turns out to be this slave. As Schultz speaks with Django in a friendly and humane way; he asks his name and he calmly inquires about the knowledge of Django. The close-up camera showing both their faces indicates the intimacy of the moment and the relation between them about to unfold. The suspicion of the Speck brothers is aroused and they tell Schultz to "stop talking to him like that".<sup>8</sup> Schultz then tries to make himself innocent as he states that he is simply a customer trying to conduct a transaction. However, the Speck brothers have had enough of it, decline Schultz' requests and becomes aggressive. "Oh, very well" is Schultz answer as he then proceeds to shoot one of the brothers in the head and shoot the other brother's horse. This jaunty remark indicates that Schultz does not really mind shooting the slave traders. The Speck brother's fears of the intentions of this stranger turn out to be justified. Shooting the slave trader and the horse may not have been Schultz' first intention but maybe it was. More about this will be said in the chapter on abolitionism.

To shed light on the aspect of revenge in this scene, I turn to the point where Schultz unshackles Django and the camera is pointed at Django's foot

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<sup>4</sup> Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 79.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, 96.

<sup>8</sup> Django Unchained 00:07:03

showing his wounds from the iron. Schultz tells him to “get up on that horse, also if I were you, I would take that winter coat that dear departed Speck left behind”. Django thinks about it for a bit, and then proceeds to walk in the direction of the coat. In slow-motion, he throws off his robe and we hear a ‘whoosh’. We see the muscled and beaten back of Django. Schultz looks up surprised and concerned as this happens, but he does not interrupt Django. This seems to imply Schultz realizing Django’s potential. These events point to the fact that Django is about to commit his act of revenge. The wounded foot and beaten back justify his revenge. Still, at first Django just walks to the coat, but the surviving Speck brother tells him: “Nigger, don’t you touch my brother’s coat”. Django stops, turns to the brother, and slowly but determined walks towards him. Django looks the Speck brother in the eyes and then he steps on the horse, putting pressure on Speck’s wounded body. Speck screams out in pain. Django then hurries to the coat and puts it on, as well as the boots. Then he gets up on the horse. He does not speak at all. It is his first act of revenge in the movie, although it is a careful one.

In the same scene, another act of revenge takes place in which Django is not completely involved. Schultz gives the remaining slaves advice to unshackle themselves and shoot the remaining Speck brother. First, the slaves are shocked, but then they turn to the Speck brother who immediately tries to talk himself out of this situation. The slaves do not respond and throw off their robes in a similar fashion in which Django did that. The slaves pick up sticks, then stand around the Speck brother and finally shoot him through the head. Django, who is already on his way with Dr. Schultz, all the while looks back while this takes place, showing his affiliation with the slaves and interest in what will happen.

Many commentators on American history have observed that Negro slaves displayed a considerable degree of contentedness and docility. To explain this some pointed to racial qualities.<sup>9</sup> This is also done in this movie itself later on when slaveholder Calvin Candie states that the “Negro” has a bigger area of ‘servility’ in the brain where whites have ‘creativity’. However, recently more scholars have denied the contentedness and docility that Negro slaves supposedly displayed.<sup>10</sup> The opinion was that this supposed docility kept the slaves from revolting. This is denied now and the amount of revolts that took place in the US South is actually seen as remarkable given the circumstances. It was not an easy thing to rebel against a system like slavery. But as the before mentioned precipitants point out, when given the opportunity, slaves would rebel. In this scene Dr. Schultz embodies these opportunities. Schultz sets them free and gives them advice on what to do with the slaveowner. He also portrays anti-slavery ideology by telling the slaves that they should travel north, to a more enlightened part of this country meaning: where slavery was not allowed. Django takes the opportunity, though not with great conviction. The other slaves make

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<sup>9</sup> Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

good use of the opportunity given to them and do not hesitate. Django seems to function on his own, although he takes interest in his former slave companions, which shows compassion. So his revenge in this scene is typical of a slave rebelling once given the opportunity. If he revolts on his own or with a group of slaves is unclear. His action against the Brittle brother is an individual one, but his staring at the other slaves while they take their revenge involves Django in a more collective process.

Moving to the second scene for the analysis of Django's revolt and revenge, I've picked the scene in which Django and Dr. Schultz have arrived at Bennett's plantation, where they are looking for the Brittle brothers.<sup>11</sup> A slave girl is commanded to escort Django around the property, which is an excuse for the latter to look for the Brittle brothers. The scene begins with Django and the slave girl Betina walking away from the 'big house' and ends with Schultz shooting the last Brittle brother. Django is supposed to locate the three brothers and then fetch Dr. Schultz to take care of them. However, Django will become carried away with his feelings of revenge. He asks Betina if she knows where the Brittle brothers are. It turns out that there have come three brothers to Bennett's plantation recently, but they use another name. Betina points one out, and Django takes a look at him through his spyglass. When Django sees him and recognizes him as one of the Brittle brothers, melancholic music starts playing. Shots appear with pale colors, indicating that we see a flashback. The music that we hear has the lyrics: 'looking for freedom'. In the flashback we see scenes of Django and his wife fleeing from their owners, interspersed with scenes after they have been captured. We see the Brittle brothers tying up Django's wife Broomhilda and whipping her with a lash. All the while Django is desperately trying to convince one of the Brittle brothers that running away was his idea, and that he should be punished instead of his wife. He also argues that Broomhilda is a house-slave and that therefore master Carrucan would not appreciate her being whipped and scarred. Django begs and begs, but the Brittle brother just looks at him smiling and finally states with a sadistic smile: "I like the way you beg, boy".

The flashback, in this scene and in other movies as well, has a function. Flashbacks are short and they use different colors than the rest of the movie. Usually they are shown in black and white or in pale colors, as is done in this scene. The flashback is often used as an explanation for events in the present. A flashback can be focalized in different ways: it can be seen through the eyes of the person having the flashback or it can be seen from a different standpoint. In this scene we see the flashback from a viewpoint outside Django. This is external focalization through which, in an indirect way, the internal focalization of Django is shown. The expressions on Django's face for example, show us how he feels on the inside. The flashback has a function for the character as well as for the

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<sup>11</sup> Django Unchained 00:31:46 – 00:38:16.

viewer. The character here, is reminded of the injustices done to him and his wife, which will undoubtedly arouse his anger and explain his revenge. The affect on the viewer is that he/she will sympathize with Django. The following actions of Django may not be 'good' perse, but because of the flashback we feel good about Django's revenge. In other words: it makes him the 'good guy'. The flashback has this effect in a greater way than words could ever have, because we tend to see images as showing the truth more than words.<sup>12</sup>

In the scene, we see that Django and his wife tried to resist slavery by fleeing. The main goal in the life of a slave was gaining freedom. As Aptheker points out, there were certain individual acts of resistance which, in a way, are part of slave revolts.<sup>13</sup> Gaining freedom could be attained by purchasing it through great perseverance in labor. Freedom could as well be gained by serving in the Army and Navy of the Republic during the War for Independence. Finally, there was the possibility of flight for freedom, which Django and Broomhilda tried. Success in fleeing depended on reaching a safe haven. Many succeeded with the help of the Underground Railroad. Between 1830 and 1860, 2000 slaves a year made it to freedom with the help of the Underground Railroad.<sup>14</sup> Acts of resistance could have the purpose of gaining freedom. At other times, for example by striking, they had the purpose of enhancing their working conditions. Finally, they could be aimed at revenge. Self-mutilation for example could shorten slaves' own misery and hurt their oppressors. There were also cases where arson and poisoning were the means of getting revenge. In fact, individual attempts at assassination or property damage were so numerous that it is almost impossible to number the times this occurred.<sup>15</sup> Django has performed an act of resistance in the form of fleeing, and as we will see in this scene, he now resorts to an act of resistance in the form of revenge. Still, fleeing can be seen as revenge as well because slaves were their owners' capital. By fleeing they were thus stealing from their master.

Django asks where he can find the other two brothers. Betina tells him that they are at the stable, punishing a girl for breaking eggs. Django asks if they are whipping her, revealing his sympathy for the girl and vengefulness for the Brittle brothers. As Django determinately walks towards the Brittle's the music is chaotic and tones become higher and higher, which symbolizes the arousal going through Django's mind and the revenge to come. Django calls out: "John Brittle!", just when the man is about to whip the slave girl. John Brittle looks around his shoulder surprised and we see Django standing firmly with his legs wide. The camera closes up towards Django while epic; tragic, heroic music is playing, emphasizing the revenge of the good over the evil. "You remember me?"

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<sup>12</sup> P. Verstraten, *Handboek Filmnarratologie* (Nijmegen 2008) 134-135.

<sup>13</sup> Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 140.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 140-141.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 142-143.



says Django, and he shoots John Brittle through the heart. After which he says: "I like the way you die, boy". These words show the significant amount of revenge in his action. Where John Brittle had power over Django before, the tables have now turned.

The other slaves look awestruck at Django. This suggests that they are surprised that something like this can happen. As they see it happening before their eyes, it can be an example of the possibility of rebellion that they have. When the other Brittle brother tries to grab his gun, Django picks up the lash and starts to whip him furiously. This is another example of the tables that have turned. Django whips him as if he is a slave and Django is an overseer. When the Brittle brother lies perishing on the ground, Django picks up his gun. A lot of slaves have gathered around him. Django looks at them and says: "Y'all wanna see something?". He proceeds to shoot the Brittle until his gun is out of ammo. It is an individual act of vengeance but he involves the slave community in his actions. This can thus be seen as revenge by giving example to the other slaves Django thus involves fellow slaves in his revolt. Schultz arrives and Django points out the remaining Brittle who is riding a horse in the field. When Schultz shoots Ellis Brittle, Django smiles and says: "I'm positive he dead".

There is a lot of revenge in this scene. The question if Django's revenge is an individual or a collective process is an important question because it shows to which extent Django's actions are aimed at retrieving his wife or at avenging slaves. A lot of big slave revolts like Nat Turner's rebellion were a collective process in which a number of slaves planned and executed their revolt collectively.<sup>16</sup> However, we have seen that individual acts of resistance are also revolts or rebellions against slavery. Django seems to be acting on his own, although he gives attention to the other slaves in this scene and also in the first scene. In the first scene he looks attentively at the slaves who give him an example of taking revenge. In the second scene he himself gives an example of taking revenge to the other slaves around by saying "y'all wanna see something?" and then shooting the Brittle brother. So, indirectly, he makes his revenge a collective revenge of all slaves. However, personal motives for revenge are stronger in this scene. The cruel treatment that Django and Broomhilda had undergone under the hands of the Brittle brothers is Django's prime motivator in this scene. The slave girl who is being whipped for breaking eggs is in a similar situation as Django's wife is in, in his flashback. As Aptheker points out in his chapter on causes for rebellion, cruel treatment like these whippings and more severe torturing, were very much a reality in American slave-holding history. In fact, according to him the degradation, exploitation, oppression and brutality of the slave system, was in the end the fundamental factor provoking rebellion against that system.<sup>17</sup> The same is seen here in Django's rebellion.

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<sup>16</sup> M.B. Norton e.a., *A People And A Nation* (Wadsworth 2012) 272.

<sup>17</sup> Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 139.

After analyzing these two scenes, I would like to jump ahead to the final scene of the movie, which is the clearest example of revenge in *Django Unchained*.<sup>18</sup> However, in this scene it also becomes clear that Django has developed a racial conscience which is bigger than his one-man operations seem to imply. Django is still rebelling on his own, but he involves almost all black slaves in his actions in this scene. Personal motives seem to be moved to the background and collective motives are shown. Revenge is aimed more at the institution of slavery.

The scene starts when Lara-Lee Candie together with late Calvin Candie's henchmen and house-slaves Stephen, Cora and Sheba enters the Candie plantation house. They have just returned from Calvin Candie's funeral. Django turns out to be inside the house and walks up to the balcony where he overlooks the group. While doing this he states: "Y'all gonna be together with Calvin in the by and by", reacting on the religious song they are singing. Django shoots Candie's henchmen first. Here Django displays a personal motive of revenge as he shoots Billy Crash in his scrotum. Crash had threatened earlier to cut off Django's scrotum. After this, Django moves more to collective motives of revenge. He states: "Now, all you black folks, I suggest you get away from all these white folks." He shows his affiliation with the black people. Stephen is told to stay where he is because, according to Django, he is right where he belongs. Django sees him as a traitor of the black race, he is actually white in his eyes. Django proceeds to involve the two female house slaves in his action. He orders Cora to say goodbye to Miss Lara. "Bye, Miss Lara", Cora says. After this, Django immediately shoots Miss Lara. The impact makes her fly through the doorway out of sight. Although this is shown in a cartoon-like way, I believe it shows revenge on the institution of slavery as Django literally removes a slaveholder out of existence. The female house-slaves are told by Django to run along, so now only Django and Stephen are in the room. The things Django says to Stephen display his vengeful thoughts about the institution of slavery. Django refers to all the torture practices leading to death that Stephen had told him about. "You didn't mention knee-capping", says Django as he shoots Stephen through his knee. Django refers to the 76 years that Stephen has spent on the Candyland plantation. We see him walking down the stairs slowly, which affects the viewer as feeling the threat. Django's power is also emphasized by the camera standpoint, which is low and looks up to Django. He refers to all slaves that have come and went in these years. All these slaves have undergone the injustice in docility, but not Django. He indeed is the 'tenthousandth nigger', as Calvin Candie had said. He is the one that takes his revenge on the institution of slavery. Django proceeds to shoot Stephen's other knee and he walks away, leaving him to bleed to death. Stephen starts shouting at Django about how they will find him and 'fuck him up'. Django looks unmoved by Stephen's words. Then Stephen says

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<sup>18</sup> Django Unchained 02:35:41 – 02:42:00.

“This is Candyland, nigger! You can’t destroy Candyland!”. It indicates Stephen’s belief that slavery is an institution that can’t be overthrown. Furthermore he says: “We’ve been here, and always gonna be here in Candyland” and “Can’t no nigger go fight and kill all the white folks in the world, they gonna find yo’ black ass”. He tries to justify his own treachery and states that slavery will always exist. Django’s actions must be seen as implying the opposite because meanwhile, Django has lit the fuse of a pile of dynamite. While Stephen screams, the dynamite explodes and the whole plantation house is wiped away. This can be read as Django overthrowing the institution of slavery. Django looks at the explosion, standing firmly, hands on his hips. It emphasizes that he is proud of his work and that he wants to see the destruction of the institution.

Furthermore, Django’s process in his revenge from personal motives and securing his own freedom to overthrowing the institution of slavery can be compared to a same trend in the development of slave revolts. As Eugene D. Genovese points out in his book *From Rebellion to Revolution: Slave revolts by the end of the eighteenth century shifted decisively from attempts to secure freedom from slavery to attempts to overthrow slavery as a social system.*<sup>19</sup> Genovese states that many revolts began as more or less spontaneous acts of desperation against local or immediate conditions.<sup>20</sup> Django’s revolt starts in the same way. In the flashback discussed in scene 2, we see that Django’s rebellion starts with fleeing which was probably inspired by a certain condition, for example maltreatment of him and his wife. Genovese says that these revolts sometimes but not often passed into warfare against particular injustices.<sup>21</sup> This is also seen with Django, as he attacks the Brittle brothers who have caused him and his wife harm. A third phase appeared, Genovese states, especially during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, when revolts aimed at overthrowing slavery as a social system.<sup>22</sup> This turning point was caused by example of others, like the great black revolution in Saint-Dominique, by opportunity and philosophical thought. Django also makes the transition to attempting to overthrow the institution of slavery. The causes in his case may be represented by Dr. Schultz who gives examples, opportunities and ideas to Django. Django can thus well be read as a slave rebel in the traditional sense. Not only does he display similar motives for his revenge that actual slave revolts also had. The process of Django’s revolt even embodies the transition in actual revolts from spontaneous acts to warfare to overthrowing the institution of slavery that Genevose discovered.

Regarding this emphasis on the themes of revenge and revolt, I would like to introduce another viewpoint on how we could read Django, or the movie in its

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<sup>19</sup> E.D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution* (Baton Rouge 1979) 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 3.

entirety. I want to argue that *Django Unchained* can be seen as a post-colonial work in which a counter-narrative is being told which stands opposite to the master-narrative. I take Helen Tiffin's article *Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse* as the basis for my ideas.<sup>23</sup> The USA fits into post-colonialism although it differs from countries that have been colonized by a people and wherein thereafter the native people have reached independency and taken control again of their land. The USA started out as a colony and thereafter the European settlers reached independence, not the colonized people. However, Indians and Africans were colonized and later on were 'assimilated' in US society. This is why these peoples can represent post-colonial discourse. As Tiffin argues:

processes of artistic and literary decolonization have involved a radical dismantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses.<sup>24</sup>

A demand to construct a new or a recovered reality, or a counter-narrative, often accompanies such processes. Because of the brutality and cultural denigration that colonizers displayed against colonized, such a counter-narrative becomes desirable. Post-colonial cultures are, however, very much hybridized which causes for new narratives to involve elements of European identity. Post-colonial writers are maneuvering between these two sides. By counter-discursive strategies, they try to undermine dominant discourse.<sup>25</sup>

One of the strategies that post-colonial writers use is putting the European genre of the picaresque in post-colonial contexts.<sup>26</sup> The picaresque was a satirical genre in which a roguish main character of low social class lived by his wits in a corrupt society that he undermined. Here already, the resemblance with *Django* is striking. He is a character of low social class, namely an ex-slave. Together with Schultz he uses ingenious schemes to outwit the slaveholder society. The evil or corruptness of this slaveholder society is showed throughout the movie by degrading treatment of human beings.

In her article, Tiffin however focuses not on the picaresque genre, but on canonical counter-discourse. This strategy, she explains, is:

one in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> H. Tiffin, 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', in: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 99.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 100.

They took European texts, and tried to intervene in them. The 'counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dismantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified local'.<sup>28</sup>

This post-colonial strategy can be applied to *Django Unchained* as well. A canonical genre that is being subverted in the movie, is the genre of the 'Western'. The winning of the west, the cowboys and the frontiersmen were and are still seen as fundamental parts in the construction of U.S. identity. Theodore Roosevelt for example emphasized that the true American identity was found in the traditional backwoodsmen who won the west. Here, and in popular imagery throughout American history, these men were white. This is part of the master-narrative of the identity of the USA, which focuses on white Europeans. The Western, in which white cowboys generally play the lead, is being subverted in *Django Unchained* because during the movie, Django takes on the role of the white American cowboy. Django is however, of African descent.

I think the movie can be seen as representing a counter-narrative as it reverses the hierarchy of white above black; Django overtakes the identity of the white western hero. The movie undermines the white European master-narrative which is dominant in US culture. I would like to elaborate on a few aspects of the movie to embed my argument. A first example, which very much subscribes to the counter-narrative of the movie, is found in the tagline of the poster of *Django Unchained*.<sup>29</sup> Here it says: 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Vengeance', which is of course a degeneration of a fundamental phrase of US identity. This is the phrase found in the Declaration of Independence which marked the beginning of the United States' own identity and was of course: 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness'. As this phrase is such a fundamental piece of US identity, subverting it can be seen as providing a different discourse on US identity. The introduced word of 'Vengeance' refers to the vengeance Django takes on the white slaveholders, but can also be seen as speaking for all black people in the United States. Vengeful feelings can be assumed to be a part of their identity as many of them are the descendants of former slaves who are now living together with descendants of former slaveholders. Their identity is not enough heard in the United States' master narrative. So a piece of their identity, namely vengeance, is introduced into the identity of the United States, embodied in this 'slogan'. This is very much an example of counter-narrative in the way the term was mentioned by Tiffin. A fundamental piece of American identity is altered, containing a hybrid set of European and African discourses. However it

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<sup>28</sup> Tiffin, 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', 101.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix figure 1.

is not really part of the movie itself, but part of the framing of it. It forms an extra text.

One example of counter-narrative in the movie is found in the way that Django deconstructs the hierarchy between black and white. There are two clear examples of this which are both from the scenes discussed before. The first example is from the second scene I analyzed. When Django spotted one of the Brittle brothers, we see a flashback. In this flashback Django tries to convince one of the Brittle brothers that he should not torture Broomhilda. The response of the Brittle brother is: "I like the way you beg, boy". The word 'boy' and his ignoring of Django's arguments exemplify the hierarchy between them. It is a hierarchy present in the whole institution of slavery where adult blacks were called boy and gal by whites. Now, as Django takes his revenge on the Brittle brother and aims to shoot him, he speaks the words: "I like the way you die, boy". The hierarchy has been turned around as Django now holds the power and the Brittle brother has become the 'boy' in their relation. The term 'interpellation' by Louis Althusser could be applied here. Interpellation means that one's identity is formed by the way others call you or name you and if you respond to it. Django thus interpellates the Brittle brother's identity by calling him boy. It is a small example but as it deconstructs the hierarchy between black and white, I believe it is an example of counter-narrative.

Finally, in the last scene of the movie, Django overtakes white American identity. As Django is about to make his final revenge on the institution of slavery, he has put on slaveholder Calvin Candie's clothes. It is a metaphor of Django turning around the hierarchy between slave and slaveholder. Earlier he had donned fancy, non-black clothing. Now, he wears the slaveholder's clothes, now he is in charge. After he performs his revenge and the plantation house is blown to pieces, Django stands victorious. Franco Micalizzi's *Lo Chiamavano Trinita* starts playing and the lyrics can be applied to Django. The song is homage to the 'Western' hero as can be read from the following lyrics: '*He's the top of the West. Always cool, he's the best. He keeps alive with his colt 45.*' The affect on the viewer is that he/she now sees Django as having taken over this cowboy identity. He stands there with his cowboy hat and his fancy clothes as he mounts his horse, a true cowboy. Still, Tarantino plays with this as he deconstructs the entire genre of the western. A sort of double layer of irony is seen as Tarantino mocks the genre and the character Django mocks the cowboy. As the overtaking of white American identity is done in a mocking way it is dubious how serious we should take the counter-narrative that is thus formed. However I still believe we can read it as such. Later in the credits, a shot is shown in which Schultz says to Django: "You know what they are going to call you? The fastest gunner in the South." Sentences like this: top of the West, fastest gunner in the South, are typical cowboy hero descriptions in Westerns. The fact that a black person plays this character however, is not typical. It forms a counter-narrative in which a new reality is constructed, containing elements of the old reality. Based on these

arguments, I believe the character Django and the movie in its entirety, can be read as a post-colonial work in which a counter-narrative is formed.

## Chapter 2: Abolitionism Unchained

Besides revenge, there is another theme in the movie that this thesis will analyze with the purpose of attaining knowledge about how we should read the characters of Django and Dr. Schultz. This theme is abolitionism, which in the US was a movement to end the institution of slavery. In reality and in the movie, the revenge theme can be better applied to black people like Django. Abolitionism was a movement in which many white people participated and, as I will argue later, abolitionist ideas can be better applied to Dr. Schultz. The similarity between the two themes of revenge and abolitionism is that they both are directed against slavery. I will start this chapter with a theoretical framework of abolitionism, which will be used in comparison with the movie. Then I will analyze the scenes of the movie in which I detect a character's abolitionist thinking. Furthermore, a comparison will be made between Dr. Schultz and historical abolitionist John Brown: the chapter will thus focus on the question whether we read the characters of Dr. Schultz and Django as being abolitionists.

Abolitionism is a movement that has been present in American society since the nation's beginning. At first, mostly free blacks pushed for the end of slavery. They formed societies 'to petition legislatures, seek judicial redress, stage public marches, and, especially, publish tracts chronicling slavery's horrors'.<sup>30</sup> They worked actively to better the life of blacks and to promote the termination of slavery. Some also advocated slavery's violent overthrow, which caused fear throughout the white South and much of the North.<sup>31</sup> The violent overthrowing which figured in black anti-slavery ideology, was not to be found amongst the ideas of white abolitionists. Early white abolitionists were mostly gathered around places in the North with large Quaker populations. This religion emphasized human equality and nonviolence. Those influenced by it pushed for the gradual abolishment of slavery and for an end to the international slave trade. They aided African Americans but they still thought them being inferior, so they did not promote equal rights.

More often, these early white abolitionist were advocates of the colonization movement that began in 1816. The American Colonization Society tried to purchase slaves and relocate them, as well as free blacks, to Africa or the Caribbean. The movement was not sympathetic towards black people, as the white people simply tried to get rid of them. Some members also tried to strengthen slavery by ridding the South of troublesome slaves. Most black abolitionists denounced the colonization movement.<sup>32</sup>

A more radical white abolitionist group formed in the 1830s. They rejected the violent overthrow method but also the gradual abolishment and the

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<sup>30</sup> Norton e.a., *A People and A Nation*, 314.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 314.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 314.



colonization movement. Instead they demanded immediate, complete and uncompensated emancipation and they were called Immediatists.<sup>33</sup> William Lloyd Garrison was prominent in the movement and published *The Liberator* and founded the era's largest abolitionist organization: the American Antislavery Society. They were influenced most prominently by religion and also by African American abolitionist societies. They believed that humans, not God, determined their own spiritual faith by deciding whether to choose good or evil. They believed the millennium would come when all had chosen good over evil.<sup>34</sup> Because slavery denied slaves the ability to make choices, slavery had to end otherwise the millennium would never come. The abolitionists of this movement believed that moral suasion instead of coercion could end slavery. This white abolitionist movement welcomed men and women of all races and classes. They were active in raising money, collecting signatures, aiding escaped slaves and organizing fairs. Still, many white abolitionists treated blacks as inferior which drove African Americans to form their own antislavery organizations.<sup>35</sup>

Abolitionism led to opposition in the South because it would cause slave revolts. The South tried to block abolitionist ideas from entering their society. Aptheker points out that many people at the time, and also later commentators, believed that Abolitionist propaganda was responsible for causing slave revolts like Nat Turner's rebellion.<sup>36</sup> In the North there was no slavery, and many questioned its morality. However, there was also opposition in the North as people recognized cotton's vital economic role and because emancipation would lead to a massive influx of freed slaves into the North. Furthermore, many believed blacks to be inferior and incapable of being free citizens.<sup>37</sup>

To conclude this part, white abolitionists sought non-violent ways to end slavery, and were influenced by religion. Some black abolitionist promoted the violent demolition of the institution. Still, white abolitionist ideas, for example from Lloyd Garrison, have probably influenced slave revolts. Although white abolitionists wanted to emancipate black slaves, many still thought them as being inferior. With this in mind, I will now analyze possible abolitionist thinking and actions in scenes from *Django Unchained*. The focus in these scenes will be mainly on Dr. Schultz because I detect the most abolitionist influence in his character. I will point out the influence of abolitionism on his ideas, which is fairly obvious in the movie, but also on his actions of violence, which are not always so easily spotted.

The first scene I want to elaborate on was also the first scene that was discussed in chapter 1; the one in which Dr. Schultz first meets Django.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Norton e.a., *A People and A Nation*, 314-315.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, 315.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, 317.

<sup>36</sup> Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 108.

<sup>37</sup> Norton e.a., *A People and A Nation*, 317.

<sup>38</sup> *Django Unchained* 00:03:45 – 00:13:00.

scene is full of hints of Schultz's anti-slavery thought. I will not go over the whole scene again, as this was already done in chapter 1, but I will show my examples of abolitionist thinking. The first example is in the way that Schultz talks to Django. It is a normal conversation in which Schultz politely asks questions. In slavery, a conversation between a white person and a black slave would be very much one-way-traffic as it would entail only orders to the slave. This deviation is also noticed by the Speck brothers who tell Schultz to 'stop talking to him like that'. It must be said, however, that Schultz also participates in the slavery-discourse. This is seen in the way he greets the slaves at first: 'hello you poor devils' he says joyfully, which does not show a lot of sympathy. Then, when the Speck brothers deny a sale, Schultz says: 'don't be ridiculous, of course they are for sale', treating the slaves as material objects. Finally, when Schultz purchases Django he shouts out: 'sold American!', so he goes along with the habits of slavery. However, he says all these things humorously so perhaps we must read it as ironic criticism on slavery. Also, Schultz has to play by the rules in order to obtain a slave from the Caruccan plantation, who will help him locate the men he has to shoot for bounty.

Schultz' abolitionism is seen clearly when he shoots one of the Speck brothers and the horse of the other Speck. The Speck brothers told Schultz there would be no sale, and Schultz could have simply walked off. Of course he would not have his slave; his access to the bounty he is after. But is that really enough reason to shoot the slave trader? A bounty hunter would probably not shoot people for whom he would not receive a bounty. After all, bounty hunting is legal business and shooting innocent people would be illegal. So the reason for shooting the slave trader, apart from obtaining Django, is also that he despises slavery and the people involved in it. When Schultz is being held under gunpoint by Ace Speck he indifferently states: 'oh, very well then', and he shoots him. Schultz thus presents himself as caring little for these people. Also, when the other Speck brother shouts: 'my leg is busted!', Schultz simply replies indifferently: 'no doubt', again his performance shows little sympathy for the slave traders.

Schultz **does** show sympathy for the slaves. This is seen by a number things. First of all, when Schultz replies to the Speck brother who says that Schultz has killed his brother, Schultz says: 'I only shot your brother once he threatened to shoot me, and I believe I have 5 witnesses'. He says this while he counts the slaves. In a society such as the US South where blacks were excluded from everything, it is highly unlikely that they would be allowed to be witnesses. But Schultz sees them as such, which shows that he sees them as equals. Also, while he unshackles Django, Schultz again shows sympathy. He says to Django: 'that iron is nasty business', performing as feeling sorry for the wounds that the shackles caused Django. Schultz also asks another slave if he could hold his gun for a moment. By this we can see that Schultz trusts the slaves. The astonished look on the face of the slave tells it all, they have probably never heard a white

man talk to them like this and never saw a white man treating them as equals. Schultz thus establishes pathos with the slaves and with the audience of the movie because he appeals to emotions.

The final part of this scene shows abolitionism. Schultz turns towards the group of slaves who are still standing there in shackles and look astonished. He tells them that they have two options. The first is lifting the horse from the Speck brother and carrying him to the nearest town. The other option, which Schultz clearly sees as the best one, is: 'you could unshackle yourselves, take that rifle, put a bullet in his head, bury the two of them deep, and then make your way to a more enlightened area of this country'. He adds power to his words by throwing the keys to the slaves while he is saying this. 'The choice is up to you', Schultz says. But it is already very clear what they should do according to Schultz. Schultz proceeds: 'oh, and for the odd chance there are any astronomy aficionados amongst you, the North Star is that one', as he points to the star. So he already seems to assume that the slaves are going to pick option two. Also by pointing out the North Star he makes clear that the North is the more enlightened part of this country he named earlier, which of course is due to the fact that there is no slavery there.

Thus Schultz actively aides the slaves in their escape to the North. Abolitionist were also often involved in helping slaves escape through the Underground Railroad, or helping slaves once they had escaped as we have seen earlier. Schultz' opinion about slavery and about slaves is clearly seen in this scene. He feels no sympathy for the slave traders, but he does feel sympathy for the slaves. Schultz stands negative towards slavery, which makes him an abolitionist. However, most white abolitionists did not resort to violence, so Schultz differs from them because he shoots the slave traders when this could have been avoided. More on this apparent deviation of traditional abolitionism will be said later in this chapter.

Another example of Schultz's ideas on abolitionism is found in the scene where Schultz and Django are being chased by a group of white Southern men who with their white masks represent some kind of precursor of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>39</sup> The group is being led by slaveholder Spencer 'Big Daddy' Bennett, the boss of the Bennett plantation where Django and Schultz have shot the Brittle brothers. Bennett and his henchmen apparently did not appreciate that Schultz and Django shot three of their co-workers, and plan to kill them. The group refers to Django and Schultz as 'that nigger' and 'that nigger-lover'. On horseback, they raid Schultz's dentist cart, but Schultz has anticipated this and has loaded the cart with dynamite. Django and Schultz are hiding in the bushes and when the group is gathered around the cart, Schultz fires a bullet in the dynamite. Schultz's indifference towards the slaveholder and his gang is emphasized by his jaunty remark: 'auf wiedersehen', after which he fires the

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<sup>39</sup> Django Unchained 00:44:28- 00:46:04.

bullet. The cart of course explodes and many henchmen and horses die on the spot. The camera turns to Django and Schultz. Django calls out 'whoa!' and laughs excitedly. Schultz nods and states: 'bull's eye'. The approval of both of them is thus recorded, showing their hatred towards these men affiliated with slavery and racism. After this, the rest of the group, including 'Big Daddy' make a run for it. Schultz and Django could just leave it at that, as the group now runs off and the danger has been avoided.

But this is not what happens. Schultz first calls the men cowards, in response to Django who says: 'look at them run', again showing his negative attitude towards them. Then Schultz starts to cock his gun and points it at 'Big Daddy' who is still struggling to get away. Django looks at Schultz puzzled and then looks at 'Big Daddy' concerned. It shows that Django had not expected that Schultz wanted to kill this man. Indeed, it is not necessary to do so. However, Django does not disagree with Schultz and patiently looks at 'Big Daddy', awaiting what will happen next. Schultz then lowers his gun, looks at Django, and asks him: 'would you care to?', while he offers him his gun. This is interesting because why does Schultz want Django to shoot 'Big Daddy'? Perhaps he wants to give Django an opportunity to take revenge on a slaveholder, or Schultz is trying to instigate rebelliousness against slavery in Django, or both.

Either way, Schultz now actively incorporates Django in his abolitionism. I call this act abolitionism, as it serves no purpose for Schultz to have this man dead, other than the fact that it wipes out a slaveholder, which is a step towards the end of slavery. Django is eager to shoot the man and takes hold of Schultz's gun. Django takes a long time aiming at 'Big Daddy' while Schultz tells him that 'Big Daddy' is getting away. But Django calmly says 'I got 'm' and when he shoots and kills the man, he determinately says: 'got 'm'. Schultz is pleased and sees potential in Django as he states smiling: 'whoa, the kid is a natural'. Django looks affected by what he just did as he quietly looks at his gun and then towards 'Big Daddy'.

Killing 'Big Daddy' did not have any purpose for Schultz except for abolitionism. 'Big Daddy' was not on Schultz's bounty hunter list and did not pose any threat to Schultz and Django as he was running off at a safe distance. The motivation for shooting 'Big Daddy' must come from anti-slavery thought. On top of this, Schultz incorporates ex-slave Django in his abolitionism as he lets him do the killing. The idea that abolitionists inspired slave revolts thus seems to apply to Schultz and this movie as well. By giving Django an opportunity for revenge, it seems like Schultz is instigating rebelliousness. Schultz sees Django's potential while Django still seems to feel slightly uncomfortable with his newfound talent and opportunity. This was seen by his hesitation and his quiet gazing at his weapon and his victim seeming to imply a 'what have I done?' thought in Django's mind. Anti-slavery and inspiring slave rebellion are aspects of abolitionism that are thus seen clearly in this scene. However, the use of violence was not normal amongst white abolitionists so this is still a difference.

The effect of the scene on the reader is that he/she sees Schultz as enjoying killing slaveholders and he tries to make Django feel the same. Schultz seems to be an active abolitionist who tries to instigate rebelliousness in a freed slave, namely Django.

As the plot continues, Django and Schultz agree to partner up for the winter as a bounty hunter duo. Then, after the winter is over, Schultz helps Django on his quest to free his wife Broomhilda. At one point Django asks why Schultz wants to help him. The answer is because he has never freed someone before and now that he has, he feels responsible for him. Furthermore, Django's quest to rescue his wife Broomhilda is similar to the mythological German story of Brünnhilde who is rescued by Siegfried. As a German, Schultz finds that he has to help this real-life Siegfried. Schultz and Django find out that Broomhilda is currently a slave on Candyland; the plantation of Calvin Candie. They form a scheme in which they portray themselves as being interested in buying a 'mandingo' fighter, a male slave who fights other slaves to death, for top money. Django plays a mandingo fighter expert who supposedly trades in these slaves and Schultz plays a wealthy man from Düsseldorf who wants to buy his way in the mandingo fighting game. Along the way they try to buy Broomhilda as well, and make the deal about the mandingo fighter be off. The information above serves to be able to understand the positions of Django and Schultz in the following paragraphs.

On their way to Candyland where Calvin Candie will show his fighters something happens which again shows Schultz anti-slavery thoughts.<sup>40</sup> This event is important as it also plays a role in the final scene I will discuss for this theme. Candie and the whole procession locate one of Candie's mandingo fighters who has run off and who is being kept in a tree surrounded by a group of 'rednecks' with their dogs. Candie's approach towards the runaway slave shows the inhumanity of slavery, which cannot be tolerated by Schultz. The slave, called d'Artagnan, states that he 'can't fight no more'. On this Candie replies: 'yes you can, you might not be able to win but yo' ass can still fight,' which shows how little Candie cares for the life of this slave. Schultz stays quiet and looks around concerned during the conversation that takes place. Candie tells the slave that he paid \$500,- for him, which means he wants five fights from him. The slave has fought three times and then ran off. The slave is sitting on his knees sobbing and tries to explain that he cannot fight anymore and tries to gain Candie's sympathy. But this, he will not receive. Candie stands up, turns from the slave and looks around the group. The camera standpoint was first on the sides of Candie and the slave. They were pointed towards each other and Candie even squatted before the slave and talked friendly. Now, as he stands up the camera moves to the back of Candie and shows the group he is talking to. His next sentence follows the conversation he had with the slave. The seemingly friendly and private talk is

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<sup>40</sup> Django Unchained 01:19:11 – 01:25:28.

thus only a show as he now appeals to all bystanders and is going to set an example for the other slaves. He says: 'still the fact remains that if I pay 500 dollars I want five goddamn fights, so what about my 500 dollars, huh?'. He then turns to the slave again asking him while shrugging his shoulders: 'what about my 500 dollars? You're gonna reimburse me?'. The slave sits on the ground helplessly, not knowing what to say. Candie leans over to him and says: 'you even know what reimburse means?', after which all of Candie's men start laughing. While this laughing continues the camera turns to Schultz' face who looks concerned and looks rapidly around. This indicates his nervousness about what seems to unfold. He looks for someone who intervenes in the matter.

The inhumanity portrayed by Candie's talk and by the laughing of Candie's men leads Schultz to stand up and say: 'I'll reimburse you'. The camera swoops over to Candie's face who extremely surprised asks: 'you will?'. 'Yep' says Schultz. Candie's suspicion is aroused as he wonders why someone would pay \$500,- for a slave in this condition. Why would Schultz, who wants to buy a champion mandingo fighter for a lot of money, want to buy this slave who is not worth anything? Of course the only reasonable explanation is that Schultz wants to help the slave, even save him from the punishment he will probably get from Candie. It is Schultz's anti-slavery thinking that makes him decide to intervene in the matter. Of course this behavior will bring Django and Schultz' quest of buying Broomhilda in danger because Schultz breaks character. Schultz' abolitionist thinking takes the upper hand and leads him to forget why they are here.

However, Django has not forgotten his wife and jumps in. He turns the story around, as he makes clear that Schultz is not really interested in buying this slave, he is just tired of the time being wasted and wants to move on. 'Ain't that right, doc?' Django asks Schultz with a determined look on his face. Schultz, realizing that he is bringing the mission in danger replies: 'you heard him'. Candie is still doubting the intentions of the duo so he walks up to Django, squeezes his eyes and asks him: 'now, seeing as you won't pay a penny for this pickaninny here, you won't mind me handling this nigger anyway I see fit?'. By saying this Candie is trying to find out what Django's true intentions are and if he does not feel sympathy for d'Artagnan. Django holds character and says: 'he is your nigger' with a stark gaze. Candie orders the 'rednecks' to let their dogs kill d'Artagnan while he keeps looking at Django. Django does not move a muscle but Schultz looks appalled as the slave is being torn apart by dogs while Candie's men are laughing. Candie notices that Schultz looks affected which is curious for a man who allegedly wants to see slaves fight each other to the death. He asks Django about Schultz' illogical behavior, who says that Schultz is just not used to seeing a man being ripped apart by dogs. 'You are used to it?' asks Candie. 'I'm just a little more used to Americans than he is' replies Django. After which he pushes Candie to finally move on to Candyland to see Candie's stock of mandingo fighters.

Django does not show much of sympathy towards d'Artagnan but this is because he is more focused than Schultz on the quest to rescue Broomhilda. In a later scene Django still takes his revenge on the 'rednecks' who fed the slave to the dogs, by killing them all, which indicates that he is not so egocentric and aims himself against the institution of slavery as well. But Schultz's abolitionism is stronger than his devotion to the quest in this scene. His attempt to buy a slave and free him of this maltreatment is an example of an act of abolitionism.

In the final scene I want to discuss here, Schultz's abolitionism again takes the upper hand. It is the scene after Calvin Candie has found out about Schultz and Django's scheme and the transaction of buying Broomhilda for \$12,000 is forced upon Schultz.<sup>41</sup> Candie and his lawyer are writing the transaction papers while Django and Broomhilda are standing together as onlookers and are smiling a bit. Schultz sits mulling in a chair, indicated by his nervous movements. A woman is playing Beethoven's *Für Elise*. Schultz could be worrying about all the money he has paid but we see shots of Schultz's face interspersed with shots of the slave d'Artagnan being torn apart by the dogs, so this is what he is thinking about. He feels bad about such inhumanity of slavery. The music starts to get on Schultz' nerves, probably because he deems this place not worthy of being filled with the music of a genius composer from his motherland. He tells the woman to stop playing and strides to another room. He is followed by Candie who asks him if he is upset about him getting the best of him. But Schultz says he was actually thinking about the 'poor devil' d'Artagnan who Candie fed to the dogs earlier. Schultz wonders what Alexandre Dumas would make of that situation. Candie does not understand, so Schultz explains that Dumas was the writer of *The Three Musketeers* wherein the main character was called d'Artagnan. Schultz thought that Candie must have been an admirer of the story as he named his slave after the character. Schultz again says that if Dumas would have been there today, Schultz would wonder what Dumas would have made of it. 'You'd doubt he approved, huh?' asks Candie. Irritated, Schultz replies: 'yes, his approval would be a dubious proposition at best'. Candie then states that Dumas must have been a 'soft-hearted frenchie'. Then Schultz states clearly: 'Alexandre Dumas was black!', anticipating that this would be new knowledge for Candie. So Schultz here tries to convince the slaveholder that blacks are equal to whites as a literary genius like Dumas, who Candie admires, is in fact black. The camera shows Schultz standing from below interspersed with Candie sitting in his chair. It gives this conversation its lecture ambiance. The other characters are all silently gazing at Schultz and Candie from the other room. Their opinion about Schultz' lecture is unclear. They can be moved by it or they can be shocked by Schultz' forwardness.

After making this clear Schultz turns to Broomhilda's papers, signs them and wants to leave and never see Candie again. Candie, however, is agitated by

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<sup>41</sup> Django Unchained 02:04:00 – 02:14:00.

Schultz's story about Dumas and about him saying he wishes to never see him again, so as Schultz, Django and Broomhilda are leaving he puts up his hand and says: 'one more moment, docter'. Candie says that for the deal to be truly done, the two parties need to shake hands. Schultz, irritated, refuses to do so, but Candie insists and claims that the deal is not done until the two parties have shook hands. Schultz does not believe that Candie would simply throw away \$12.000 dollars if he does not shake his hand. Candie, however, shows that he means it by ordering his henchman Pooch to shoot Broomhilda if Schultz will not shake his hand. 'Well if you insist', Shultz says smilingly and walks towards Candie. He does not give his hand but takes out his sleeve-gun and shoots Candie through the heart. The quest for rescuing Broomhilda would have been completed with the transaction. However, Schultz again puts his abolitionist ideas above the quest and decides to attack the institution of slavery by killing this major slaveholder. He knows this makes the deal void, puts Django and Broomhilda in trouble and will cost him his life. But his action indicates that he prefers attacking the institution of slavery over all this. When he turns around he is being held under fire by Pooch and shrugs his shoulders saying: 'I'm sorry, I couldn't resist'. He knows the consequences of his actions, which I mentioned above. So he gives a final apology to Django. Django's face is shown followed by Schultz' when he apologizes.

Also, Schultz' action now unleashes Django as he grabs Pooch's gun and starts to shoot people on rampage. Django kills a high number of white people working for Candie. The house is being shot to pieces and has now got blood all over it. This can thus be interpreted as an attack on slavery by a slave; a slave revolt. So, indirectly, Schultz has also instigated a slave revolt. The revolt is, however, a one-man action but because it is so specifically directed against slaveholders, performed by an ex-slave and it leaves the house or institution in ruins, I believe it still embodies a revolt.

The scene is thus a clear example of Schultz' abolitionist aspects. It starts with showing his anti-slavery thought by bringing to the attention of Candie that Dumas was black. He also refuses to shake hands with the slaveholder, showing his resentment towards Candie and slavery. Then, he becomes so carried away that he risks it all just to shoot the slaveholder. Finally, his action provokes a slave revolt by Django. While it is clear that Schultz is anti-slavery, there are still differences between him and white abolitionist in history. Schultz believes blacks to be equal to whites while many of the white abolitionists still believed blacks to be inferior. Also, Schultz again resorts to violence, which was not done by white abolitionists. However, there were some exceptions in historic abolitionists. A white abolitionist who did resort to violence was John Brown who together with white and black abolitionists raided Harpers Ferry in the famous John Brown's Raid. Interestingly, this raid took place in the exact same year as the latter part of this movie takes place in, 1859. To further analyze if we can read Schultz as an



abolitionist, I'd like to make a short comparison between Schultz and John Brown.

Where most white abolitionist did not resort to violence, John Brown's Raid in 1859 was a plan by a white abolitionist to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia and use the weapons to start an armed slave revolt. John Brown was the leader of a group of abolitionists, white and black, who raided Harpers Ferry. I am not going to elaborate on all the details of the raid. It took a period of preparation and was it carefully planned. When the raid happened, it started well but Brown did not achieve what he had planned. The anticipated slaves that would rally to their cause did not come and they were soon under attack by townspeople and marines. In the end John Brown was hanged following the raid on December 2, 1859.

After studying John Brown's Raid, I found some similarities between him and Schultz. First of all, John Brown was the plotter of a fantastic scheme to rid the country of slavery.<sup>42</sup> In *Django Unchained*, Schultz is also the plotter of fantastic schemes. For example: he portrays as being somebody else and wanting something else when he looks for the Brittle brothers and he tricks Candie to get to Broomhilda. Another thing was that John Brown had a famous beard.<sup>43</sup> Schultz is at one point named by Candie as the 'man with the exceptional beard'. Brown shared another characteristic with Schultz as he had had different jobs.<sup>44</sup> Schultz also had a changing career path, as he first was a dentist and then a bounty hunter.

A difference between the two is that Brown was religious and of Schultz we do not know if he is religious but we have no reason to believe that he is. In the years of 'Bleeding Kansas' Brown proclaimed himself as an instrument of God's will and he deliberately and brutally murdered five pro-slavery men along the banks of Pottawatomie Creek.<sup>45</sup> Schultz was not religiously inspired but he also targets pro-slavery men, in fact he kills a number of them deliberately and without necessity. John Brown's actions, specifically his raid, aroused popular passions in the North as well as in the South to the point where compromise was impossible. It led to a wave of emotionalism, which furthered the breach between North and South. Schultz's actions, especially when he kills Candie have a same trigger effect as they unleash Django on his revolt against the Candyland plantation, which is a metaphor for the whole institution of slavery. Southerners were shocked by John Brown's actions. For years they had defended their institution of slavery against abolitionists. But the anti-slavery agitation had always been non-violent. Now John Brown changed all that. He had put

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<sup>42</sup> National Park Service History Series, *John Brown's Raid* (Washington 1976) 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Norton e.a., *A People and A Nation*, 380.

<sup>45</sup> National Park Service History Series, *John Brown's Raid*, 6.

violence into abolitionism.<sup>46</sup> As we have seen, Schultz also incorporates violence in his abolitionism. The most striking similarity between Brown and Schultz is that they both died as a martyr.<sup>47</sup> Both of them risked their life to attack slavery, and they both lost their lives in the actions they performed. A note of Brown just before his execution has become famous. The note says: "I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty, land: will never be purged away; but with Blood. I had as I now think: vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed: it might be done."<sup>48</sup> I think that Schultz has the same realization just before he shoots Candie. He thinks to himself: I cannot let this man live, blood must be spilled no matter what the consequences are. Maybe Schultz at first also thought that he could battle slavery by freeing a slave here and there, but now, he kills the slaveholder and instigates more bloodshed through Django.

What I made clear in this chapter is that we can indeed read Schultz as an abolitionist. He may not have fitted the normal picture of white abolitionists at the time entirely; he is not religiously influenced, he uses violence to achieve his goals and he did work together with blacks but he did not see them as inferior. The example of John Brown, however, makes it clear that there were other kinds of abolitionists. In addition, as the comparison between Schultz and John Brown made clear, Schultz is more an abolitionist in the tradition of John Brown. I incorporated the character of Django in this chapter as well and although his actions are aimed against slavery, and are not always personal revenge, he still remains a less clear example of an abolitionist than Schultz. To conclude, I think that Dr. Schultz can be read as an abolitionist and he incorporates Django in his abolitionist actions and influences him with his ideas. If Django is an abolitionist on his own is however less clear. I think he is more a revolting slave than an abolitionist.

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<sup>46</sup> National Park Service History Series, *John Brown's Raid*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Norton e.a., *A People and A Nation*, 381.

<sup>48</sup> National Park Service History Series, *John Brown's Raid*, 60.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was enhancing our knowledge about what the movie *Django Unchained* means or can mean. I tried to attain this goal by analyzing the two main characters: Django and Dr. King Schultz. The research question that I tried to answer was: how can we read the characters of Django and Dr. King Schultz?

Chapter one made clear that we can read Django as a slave rebel in the traditional sense. We saw his vengeance and the actions this incited grow throughout the movie. His revenge took the form of a slave revolt most clearly in the final scene, where Django blows up the institution of slavery. There were a lot of similarities between Django's revenge and actual slave revolts. Both needed certain precipitants for them to happen and in the movie these were mostly represented in the form of Dr. Schultz. Django's revenge seemed an individual process at first, but as I have made clear with some examples: Django incorporates other slaves as well and makes his revenge a more collective process. Personal motives did play a big role but this was also the case in many slave revolts as all the horror slavery entailed for slaves was the prime motivator for revolts. There was also a similarity between Django's developmental process in his revenge and the development of slave revolts. Both moved from securing one's own freedom and being incited by personal motives to overthrowing the institution of slavery for the collective good.

We can also read Django and the movie in its entirety as forming a counter-narrative. My arguments about the tagline and about Django's actions have shown that the movie can be seen as representing a counter-narrative as it reverses the hierarchy of white above black; Django overtakes the identity of the white western hero. The movie undermines the white European master-narrative which is dominant in US culture.

The second chapter was focused on abolitionism. It showed that we can read Dr. Schultz as an abolitionist. Examples to support this were given about his anti-slavery thought, about him targeting slaveholders without necessity, about his sympathy for slaves and disdain for slaveholders, about him instigating rebelliousness in Django and thus giving abolitionist propaganda and finally about him putting abolitionism above the mission to rescue Broomhilda. The differences between Schultz and white abolitionism made him not entirely fit in the traditional picture. But as the comparison with John Brown made clear, Schultz was more of an abolitionist in the tradition of John Brown. He adds the violence in his abolitionism leading to *Abolitionism Unchained*. While Django clearly portrays anti-slavery thought, I did not find strong evidence to see him as an abolitionist. He is more a revolting slave than an abolitionist.

To conclude a conclusion, I elaborated on three different views on reading the characters and the movie. But one does not necessarily exclude the other. I believe Django can be read as a traditional slave rebel with a supporting role

performed by Dr. Schultz as he embodies the precipitants for rebellion. Then, Schultz can be read as an abolitionist with a supporting role performed by Django as he is the focus of Schultz's abolitionist propaganda. Finally, the movie in its entirety can be read as a counter-narrative on the dominant master-narrative in US culture.

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## Appendix

Figure 1:



<sup>49</sup> 'Tagline Django Unchained', <http://www.ineedmyfix.com/2012/11/13/life-liberty-and-the-pursuit-of-vengeance-django-style/> (February 27, 2013).