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Prison Area, Independence Valley

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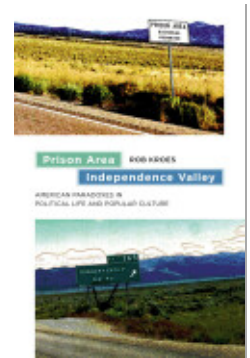
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A SPAGHETTI SOUTHERN: LANDSCAPES
OF FEAR IN QUENTIN TARANTINO'S
DJANGO UNCHAINED

YEARS AGO, IN *The Return of the Vanishing American*, Leslie Fiedler explored what he saw as the reemergence of the American Indian as a central character in literary writing.¹ His title may have referred back to the wistful construction of Native Americans as a vanishing race, most poignantly in Edward S. Curtis's photograph, captioned "The vanishing race," a photograph of a small group of Indians riding off into the dark, as if in a film's closing shot. But, as Fiedler reminded his readers, the news of the Indians' demise had been greatly exaggerated. They had returned to a number of fields of artistic imagination, in literature, in film, and more often than ever before as agents of their own representation. Never mind that their return could come in many guises; Fiedler recognized American Indian agency in the shape of the modern hipster, blurring the features of the returnee. Fiedler went on to suggest the space for their return as constituting one field for American mythology to play itself out alongside three others. He saw four main regional varieties in the American literary imagination. Next to the Western—crucially to do with the encounter between American Indians and white settlers—he distinguished the Southern, the Northern, and the Eastern. Obvious examples come to mind, such as Faulkner's im-

aginary South, or New England as imagined by Nathaniel Hawthorne. If they are separate genres, with their characteristic narrative tropes and typical heroes, we should guard against setting the categories too neatly apart. Fiedler himself blurred the lines of separation, recognizing the Red Man's features in the hipster who, one might argue, represented the new central character in the Eastern, the big-city novel. If Fiedler thus blurred the lines between the Western and the Eastern, Norman Mailer had gone there before in his creation of the White Negro, the hipster as a black inspiration, thus merging the Eastern and the Southern, and even the Western, into one inspirational hybrid. "A phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist—the hipster, (. . .) a frontiersman in the Wild West of American night life."²

Now where does that leave us? In a conceptual area, for sure, where regional mythologies meet, and mythical repertoires from the West, the East, and the South engage in mutual permutations. Not only was the hipster a frontiersman, he was also a Negro, as Mailer goes on to argue: "And in this wedding of the white and the black it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry. Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experience can ever be casual to him, no Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his walk." Living with danger from one's first day had been the defining feature of the American Negro's life in the South, a life that forms the submerged narrative of the Southern, always there, always suppressed, the dialectical opposite of the cavalier, or chivalresque, version of "civilized life" in the South. We shall have the occasion later on to revisit this dark, submerged narrative repertoire. But first let us take up Fiedler's suggestive hunch and consider how his four regional genres, in their entangled permutations, may have affected the face of America as it was projected domestically and abroad.

Blurring and blending the genres as Americans themselves may have done, they had at the same time a continuous interest in and awareness of boundaries setting the cultural regions

apart. They could even, playfully, make it a narrative theme and introduce an outsider's perspective into the story. A classic example is Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* At one point the author has a Northerner, in fact a Canadian, ask his Harvard roommate, who is from the South: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all."³ Similarly, in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a newspaper man, having pieced together the true story behind the commonly accepted version of who killed Valance, burns his notes adding this piece of wisdom: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

This is a lesson that Europeans may have taken to heart in their exposure to the American imaginary. Less astute in their knowledge and awareness of America's regional diversity, they may have played fast and loose with America's cultural characteristics. Caring not for facts, but for legends, they felt free to do their own blending and blurring, projecting onto the larger canvas of America what was of specific concern to them at any given moment. Thus, ahead of Norman Mailer, Jean-Paul Sartre could recognize his existentialist hero, a man of unreflective action, in the taciturn protagonists of the Hollywood Western.⁴ Similarly, he and other eager explorers of American culture, such as Boris Vian, saw a powerful example in the American urban vision of the hard-boiled novel—a subgenre of the Eastern, if you wish. The work was introduced in translation in a book series, founded by Marcel Duhamel in 1945 and published by Gallimard. The authors, most of them American, included Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Horace McCoy, William R. Burnett, Ed McBain, Chester Himes, Lou Cameron, Jim Thompson, Rene Brabazon Raymond (under his pseudonym James Hadley Chase), and Peter Cheney. It was known as the *série noire* after the black cover of the volumes. The word *noir* then traveled and came to describe the postwar Hollywood genre of crime films. The term *film noir* is commonly believed to have been first suggested, in 1946, by the French critic Nino Frank in the journal

L'écran français.⁵ The word is now common coinage among film historians on both sides of the Atlantic. The newly acquired taste in France for hard-boiled crime writing spawned a series of films, produced in the 1950s and early '60s, based on Peter Cheney's character of Lemmy Caution. Although now largely forgotten, the films were widely popular in a number of European countries and established the fame of lead-actor Eddie Constantine. Born in the United States and living in France, his American accent and laid-back acting style gave the films an ironic touch of Americanness that chimed well with the receptivity to things American in Europe at the time. They were action films basically, ending in long, almost festive brawls that left their locale a total ruin. Such cinematic magnetism as Constantine possessed fully came into its own later when Jean-Luc Godard, one of France's New Wave directors, used the Lemmy Caution character in his *Alphaville* (1965), a neo-noir science fiction film.⁶ With trench coat and cigarette, Constantine more than ever before recalled the Hollywood noir character played by Humphrey Bogart.

This is just one example of how Europeans, while adopting America's repertoire of regional-cum-cultural diversity, may have felt free to rearrange what had come to them according to their own rules of canon formation. They had done so before, in the interwar years, with American jazz music—for example, in France and Germany, developing critical standards and a critical discourse for ordering the field in high and low, in genres and styles, in good and bad. They would do so again, in the 1950s, with Hollywood films, recognizing first the hands of master film makers where no one had noticed them before, then taking their cue from Hollywood in what would be the New Wave, the *Nouvelle Vague*, in 1960s French film production. Never hampered by what came naturally to Americans—a sense of cultural mooring in one variety of regional culture or another, a sense of Us and Them within the national cultural landscape—Europeans could take it all in as interchangeable faces of one larger, imaginary “America.” This may have had particular force in the case of

the Western, a category that Europeans had long adopted to refer especially to films set in the West; yet it never kept them from seeing in the iconic faces of the West the all-American features that they carried in their heads. Recycled for commercial purposes, this rugged male face of the Westerner came to constitute the Marlboro Man, put in the service of a brand of cigarettes, but, more important, feeding the imagination, of Americans first, of people elsewhere later. As research has shown, to Americans the Marlboro Man represented the American West, to people elsewhere he came to be a generalized all-American icon.⁷ As imagined by non-Americans, therefore, the American West may offer greater leeway to fantasies, more room for imaginative play, than would come naturally to Americans. In their playful reshuffling of the deck, Europeans basically play a game that Americans have played before them. It was for Americans to blend and blur the lines of genre distinction first, for Europeans to follow in their footsteps. But they have done so with a vengeance.

The Eddie Constantine French pub brawl films—we might call them *Café Noir Easterns*—are now mostly forgotten. At about the same time Italian film makers would also take a leaf from America's cultural catalog and begin producing Westerns, giving their own twist to the genre. Frowned on initially and seen as less than B-movies by film critics in both Europe and the United States, many of the films are now considered classics and have moved up the charts of critical esteem. Collectively these Italian Westerns became known, disparagingly at first, appreciatively now, as spaghetti Western. They had their own authentic American hero, Clint Eastwood. Known from his supporting-cast role in the TV series *Rawhide*, in 1963 he grasped the opportunity to escape from his TV image. He signed on for the lead role in *A Fistful of Dollars*, a film to be shot in a remote region of Spain by the then relatively unknown Sergio Leone. The rest, to coin a phrase, is history.

The new genre soon had its own canon, based on its cinematic style, its musical scores, but most of all on its greater moral complexity, the unabashed violence of its stories, and the ambiguity

of its heroes. Often there was tacit critique of economic power and the corruptibility of man, which gave the films a faintly political left-wing feel. In its rapid rise to international success, the spaghetti Western inspired many to join its bandwagon, in hopes of joining the ranks of its uncontested masters: Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci. Of the two, Corbucci is the lesser known, yet as the maker of films such as *The Great Silence* and *Django* he is of lasting influence and inspiration to younger film makers. Of the two, Corbucci is also arguably the one who most radically overturned the Western genre's conventions, witness the ending he gave to *The Great Silence*. In a scene of unprecedented violence and cruelty, a bleak ending lacking any of the heroic features of so many Westerns' climactic confrontations, the sympathetic characters are gunned down by their opponents, a bunch of greedy bounty hunters.

Leone's career most clearly tells the story of the rise from marginal beginnings in the face of derision and snobbish rejection to ultimate recognition and the acknowledgement of his mastery. Working in a cinematic genre that he had taken over from America while using a film idiom recognizably his own, he took the resulting hybrid form home in his epic masterpiece *Once upon a Time in the West*, a lavish 1968 production filmed in both the American West and the south of Spain. And, as if for good measure, in 1985 he added *Once upon a Time in America*. It was a meditation on another aspect of popular American mythology, the role of greed and violence and their uneasy coexistence with the meaning of ethnicity and friendship. It told the saga of the many immigrants who, as a literal cast of thousands, allowed Leone, in a grand gesture of farewell, to add to his oeuvre a magisterial Eastern, a spaghetti Eastern if you will.

Quentin Tarantino's Django Unchained

Tarantino's latest film, *Django Unchained*, ends in scenes of horrific violence. The ending comes in two parts, in almost two dif-

ferent modes. In what seems a direct reference to Corbucci's *The Great Silence*, in its desolate bleakness, Tarantino shows his hero hanging head down, about to be tortured, even castrated. It is a dramatic reversal of the plot. Having successfully penetrated into the very heart of darkness—Candieland, a Mississippi plantation run by its ruthless and sadistic owner, Calvin Candie—Django, a free black man, and Dr. King Schulz, German immigrant, master trickster and bounty hunter, are close to accomplishing their self-assigned mission of freeing Broomhilda, the love of Django's life, from slavery.⁸ The mission itself, told with light and hilarious touches mixed in with ominous, blood-chilling flashes of slavery, is close to success, when the visitors' true intent is found out. Dr. Schulz, rather than giving Candieland's cruel master the sweet smell of victory, shoots him at point blank range, killing him. The two, Dr. Schulz and Django, stand no chance of escape. Dr. Schulz is killed on the spot, while Django, valiantly trying to shoot his way out of the mansion, finally finds himself out-gunned and surrenders. Next we see him hanging down, in an image reminiscent of so many lynching scenes, spelling what can only be the hero's—that is, the story's—end.

But Tarantino isn't quite done yet. With true trickster's ingenuity—a tribute to his German companion and teacher's mastery—Django frees himself and, with a load of dynamite, sets off to Candieland for the final reckoning. This is part two of Tarantino's ending, where he again takes up his favorite theme of the fantasy of revenge, as memorably done before in *Inglourious Basterds*. This time Tarantino reverses the Corbucci ending and shows Django slowly taking out the inhabitants of Candieland, one by one, clearly savoring the moment. He overlooks the scene of slaughter from a mezzanine, like the avenger who suddenly materializes from the hills in so many Western movies. He saves ultimate revenge until the last: with two shots he incapacitates Stephen, the slaveholder's trusted house slave and confidant, whose coldly observant eye had seen through Dr. Schulz's ploy before he informed his master. He is the ultimate Uncle Tom

turned traitor to his race. Left on the floor, he raves in impotent rage, while a burning fuse works its way toward the dynamite. Emerging from a sea of flames Django joins his Broomhilda like the victorious mythical German hero Tristan that Dr. Schulz had told him about. Once again narrative repertoires and genres merge relentlessly into one another. For good measure the reunited lovers ride off into the future to a musical score taken straight from yet another spaghetti Western, *They Call Me Trinity*.⁹ Its lyrics ring in the audience's ears when it gets ready to leave the theater: "He's the guy who's the talk of the town, He's the top of the West, Always cool, he's the best." Thus, the film is replete with markers of the Western genre, including its spaghetti Western variety. But never one to be pinned down easily in clearly denoted boxes, Tarantino joyfully confounds genres, when, for example, he has Dr. Schulz praising Django's prowess as a gunman, telling him that he will be known as "the fastest gun in the South."

Thus, with such tongue-in-cheek, intertextual jokes strewn casually before the audience, is it more than fun that Tarantino is after? Is he more than the master joker out to surpass earlier Westerns in the comic mode? Undeniably there is much in his film to remind us of Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles*, as in the hilarious quasi-Ku Klux Klan posse getting ready for a raid, milling about on horseback fumbling with their white sheets, complaining they can't see from their slitted hoods. And doesn't Broomhilda von Shaft remind us of Brooks's Lili von Shtupp? Also, there is the hilarious unfinished, and unanswered question "What's a nih . . . ?" in response to the astounded exclamation, "Hey, the sheriff's a nih . . ." (an exclamation cut short by a clock chiming). Tarantino doesn't leave things up in the air. There are no clocks chiming to drown the n-word out. Tarantino's dialogues are full of the n-word, used by whites and blacks alike.

But my point is that Tarantino does more than that. For all his mixing of modes, genres, inspirations, he does break out of the cage of intertextuality and show us glimpses of an outside world

in its full sinister grimness, a world that is truly the South as lived by its black population. There are those like David Denby who don't see this. "Yes, of course, there were killers in the Old West and cruel slave masters in the South . . . but Tarantino juices everything into gaudy pop fantasy. I enjoyed parts of 'Django Unchained' very much, but I'm surprised that anyone can take it as anything more than an enormous put-on."¹⁰ I am not so sure. At one point in the film *Calvin Candie*, verbally enabled sadist that he is, holds forth on phrenology, a racist theory beloved by the Southern white elite, because it teaches that blacks were born to be slaves, as a genetically subordinate race. He tells this in answer to the question he himself raised before. Having grown up in the South surrounded by black people, like so many white people surrounded by far larger numbers of blacks, he wonders, "Why haven't they killed us all?" The answer as he sees it lies in race, lies in genetics. Tarantino sees things differently and uses his powers as a cinematographer to show what the true answer is to Candie's question.

In 2007, Tarantino discussed an idea for a form of spaghetti Western set in the U.S. pre-Civil War Deep South that he called "a southern," stating that he wanted "to do movies that deal with America's horrible past with slavery and stuff but do them like spaghetti Westerns, not like big issue movies. I want to do them like they're genre films, but they deal with everything that America has never dealt with because it's ashamed of it."¹¹ Tarantino later explained the genesis of the idea: "I was writing a book about Sergio Corbucci when I came up with a way to tell the story. . . . I was writing about how his movies have this evil Wild West, a horrible Wild West. It was surreal, it dealt a lot with fascism."¹²

Whatever the precise way this inspiration worked out, it allowed Tarantino to turn the "horrible Wild West" into the horrible South of slavery and racist suppression. He depicts racism in the South as a regime of fear that lurks everywhere, chillingly evoked on screen in scene after scene, with the mastery the au-

dience remembers from earlier Tarantino films, where sadist joy builds up, savoring every minute of it, before an ear gets sliced off—as in *Reservoir Dogs*—or brains get blown out that have first figured out what the French call a quarter pounder—as in *Pulp Fiction*. Such scenes of almost tangible terror take us back to Norman Mailer’s observation quoted before: “Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day.” Living in fear would be a more precise way to put it. It suggests settings replete with fearsome, literally dread-ful or fright-ful objects that send chills down one’s spine by merely setting eyes on them. It suggests scenes of loitering white people whose cold, evil eyes, like a Gorgon’s gaze petrifying everyone caught in it, monitor public space in the South. It is a monitoring gaze, though, felt only if one is a black person in the South and trained to respect the emblems and signs of the white man’s displeasure. Whites may in fact be unaware most of the time of the signal structures they have set up to regulate the behavior of blacks. They literally inhabit a different world. And it is Tarantino’s mastery to make his audience see those signal structures as if through the eyes of blacks. In scene after scene we feel our hair stand up in fear, being given a vicarious sense of life in the South as lived by blacks. If Tarantino has produced a Southern it is a topsy-turvy one, bringing the dark side of life in the South, and the submerged and suppressed narratives that go with it, into everyone’s full view.

Landscapes of Fear

A recent study might serve as the travel guide to the American South as seen through the eyes of black people. In *The Properties of Violence: Claims to Ownership in Representations of Lynching*, Sandy Alexandre addresses this central question: “What (and where) is Arcadia to African Americans?”¹³ Can they fully share, on the same footing as whites, in the Western aesthetic tradition of awe in the face of nature as an emanation of the

Sublime? Do they share with whites the American pastoral ideal? Her book argues the opposite. She quotes Evelyn White's memorable phrase: "My genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings counters my fervent hopes of finding peace in the wilderness. Instead of the solace and comfort I seek, I imagine myself in the country as my forebears were—exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected—a target of cruelty and hate."¹⁴ This idea of a genetic memory, of a store of memories as warning signals shared by a group defined by its genetic—that is, racial—features defines Alexandre's intellectual quest. She traces what imprint the "polluting touch of the white man"—a phrase she takes from Angelina Weld Grimké's short story *Blackness*—has left on the Southern landscape. In Grimké's story the narrator confesses, having heard the story of a gruesome lynching, that no tree will ever be quite the same to him again. But as Alexandre makes clear throughout her book, this is how the black people's "genetic memory" got formed. She revisits a popular song ("Strange Fruit," written by the Jewish American teacher and poet Lewis Allen, and later made famous by the singer Billy Holiday) to introduce the reader to her central theme: the horrific gap between the idyllic landscape—where plants and trees bear real flowers and fruit—and the "strange and bitter crop" of swinging black bodies hanging from these same trees.¹⁵ Alexandre then looks at lynching photographs, from the National Center for Civil and Human Rights collection, published as *Without Sanctuary*.¹⁶ It powerfully and gruesomely expresses the extent to which lynchings have tainted the Southern pastoral, turning it into something unnatural and brutal that belies any bucolic claims. In chapter after chapter, revisiting black literary writing, she evokes this peculiar outlook, twisted and contorted by the remembered history of torment and cruelty. Whites may have been the agents of this regime, their eyes may have been the instruments of the lethal Medusa gaze, petrifying every black person it alighted on, yet these same whites have blissfully lived their lives in a parallel universe of chivalric gallantry and fine manners.

Alexandre's book convincingly traces the outlines of a genre of cultural representation that turns established views of "the Southern" upside down. It explores life in the South as experienced by its black people, thus literally opening the eyes of outsiders to "what the South is like" to its *black* inhabitants. And precisely this, I would argue, is what Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* manages to achieve. In addition to its many stylistic and genre quotations, its irrepressible and joyous intertextuality, it does consistently return to perhaps its central mission: giving its audience the feel of an American South, of a regime of fear and oppression as experienced by the oppressed. His narrative ploy—a true master stroke—for achieving this is having a free black man on horseback, riding rough-shod over the many hair-trigger devices planted by the white South. Identifying with this hero, whose very appearance, whose every step is a transgression, the audience is made aware of all the lurking threats and dangers besetting him. Riding into the small Texas town of Daughtry, Django is shown riding past hair triggers that would normally spell terror and retaliation. Thus, as the camera follows him, a noose appears, from right to left across the screen, hanging ready, while dumbfounded whites can do no more than mutter: "A nigger on a horse!" Entering a bar, there is a shout: "Get that nigger outa here." Django—and Dr. Schulz—ignore it. Later scenes in this journey to the heart of darkness recall the acts that have tainted the landscape forever in the black people's imagination. Lashings of blacks tied to a tree, a cowering black man up in a tree beleaguered by hounds, and later to be thrown before them to the sadistic joy of poor whites loitering around. In these sequences showing Django transgressing, trampling underfoot the entire rulebook meant to keep blacks in their place, there are hair-raising moments: in one instance whites, exuding anger, and still unaware of the true hierarchy that confronts them, tell Django, who is about to follow his German companion and their white hosts on horseback: "Name of the game is catch-up, not keep-up, nigger." Sadistic sniggering all around, before the true

relations of power dawn on them, and Django, now on horseback and in cool control, is shown looking down on them. Seen from similar camera angles, Tarantino goes on creating a series of transgressions that would normally have brought torture and death to the transgressor. They are each chilling moments, yet always at the same time moments of revenge and victory for Django. That makes it all, up to and including the final climatic moments of the film, a fantasy, a fairy tale. Yet at the same time it also takes the audience on a tour of what made (and can still make) racism work as a system of social control. That is what ultimately makes Tarantino's film a Southern, albeit one of a radically revamped nature, a Southern centering on Southern blacks, not whites. We might call this new genre flippantly Southern *noir*.

What Fantasy, What Revenge?

It is good at this point to engage in one final comparison and to remind ourselves of what real transgressions of the Southern codes for proper black behavior, in the not too distant past, have meant for the transgressor. Sandy Alexandre devotes one chapter of her book to the sad case of Emmett Till. He was a black boy, born and raised in Chicago. A photograph shows him as a free-spirited young man, with a winning expression of enterprise and self-confidence. He appears as the embodiment of someone who had lived the dream of the North that had led so many blacks to leave the South in two great waves of migration northward, cast in the light of an Old Testament exodus to a land of freedom. Although not without initial misgivings, in 1955 his mother judged the time had come for Emmett to have a taste of the white world's ways of sending their children to summer camp, to enjoy life in the "great outdoors" and get an education in pastoral enjoyment. It was not to be. Unaccustomed to the ways of the Jim Crow South, Emmett Till, who had allegedly wolf whistled to a white woman, was atrociously murdered and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. As his mother would write

later, “[F]or a free-spirited boy who lived to be outdoors, there was so much possibility, so much adventure in (the wide-open spaces of) Mississippi Mississippi represented freedom.”¹⁷ It turned out the opposite way. In his comportment, Emmett Till had brought a bit of Chicago with him to Mississippi, and such interspatial/interideological mixing just would not be tolerated by the likes of Emmett’s murderers, who had their own strictly schematic understanding of the mutually exclusive differences between the urban North and the rural South.¹⁸ In her tireless efforts to have the heinous crime brought out before a general public and to expose Southern racism for what it was, particularly after the murderers had been quickly acquitted by a local all-white jury, Emmett’s mother used two photographs to particularly great effect, one the “before” photograph of the dapper young man, the other taken after Emmett’s dead body had been spit up by the river, bloated and mutilated almost beyond recognition. This photographic reconstruction of the tragedy reinforced a reading of the cultural contrast between the North as a safe haven for dreams of freedom versus the South as the land without sanctuary. Thus, the gruesome story of Emmett Till was rendered especially powerful because its photographic record reinforced the paradigmatic reading of the contrast of North versus South. It did so because Emmett Till was a Northerner who had stepped outside the boundaries of his sanctuary, and who, because of his ignorance of the unwritten code of black compliance enforced by the cold, Gorgon gaze of the white community, ended up as a cruelly murdered victim of the South, forever frozen in the picture of his bloated face.

This story, it may be clear, is a tale of real events mixed in with illusions and dreams, such as visions of the South as a good place for a black Northern city boy to spend the summer, or of the North as the new land of liberty. Yet the tragedy as it took place was real enough, and so was the revenge of Emmett Till’s mother. Relying on gruesome photographic evidence she unrelentingly dragged the South before the court of international public opin-

ion. Through photographic mediation she managed to bring to life, not her son, but an international community of shared grief and indignation. Surely, this was a virtual community, yet one that could manage to change the course of history and sustain a civil rights movement as it was taking shape in the United States.

Is it conceivable that such a twisted story of illusions and fantasies, having real effects, might have been on the back of Quentin Tarantino's mind when conceiving of his film *Django*? Could similar stories of American regions and regional cultures clashing have informed his fantasies, not of a Northerner, but of a Westerner trespassing on Southern cultural turf? Could, for that matter, the stories of the freedom rides from the North invading the South in the early 1960s have resonated with him? Are there echoes of *Mississippi Burning* in *Django*? For someone with Tarantino's intertextual mind the answer to all of the above is most likely yes. Much more strongly so than in his previous revenge fantasy *Inglourious Basterds*, there certainly is a seething anger in *Django* that runs parallel to the anger that inspired Mamie Till's revenge, or that sizzles through *Mississippi Burning*. More clearly than ever before in his work, Tarantino may have broken out of the pleasure garden of intertextual and cross-genre games and turned his talents to the injustices and torments of the real world. Is Tarantino getting real?