

Pulp fiction film analysis

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Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction is a movie about time and violence and redemption. In its use of nonlinear narrative and through its excellent characterizations and dialogue, the film succeeds on many levels, not the least of which is through its ability to entertain throughout with visceral and often violent images, only to turn those very themes into food for thought as the film ends. Tarantino directs the movie with the famously fan-boy film gusto he is known for. Although he has never made a director audio commentary on his films, one suspects that it is almost unnecessary. His film's techniques are fairly simple: place skilled and well-cast actors in funky cool scenarios and give them great dialogue to speak. However, it is in the very structuring of the story and the placement of various elements to establish a world on film that both entertains and challenges that his films gain their power. Pulp Fiction, through its narrative, dialogue, sound, and editing comes to represent something that one might not have thought possible, a violent film about nonviolence. In this brief paper, each of these elements will be considered in order to show how Tarantino wields his cinematic tools in order to make a larger social point with a wildly entertaining film. Tarantino's use of narrative is perhaps the most important element in the film's success, and it is key to the film's larger message, which is that, in the end crime and violence don't pay. The reason this message may be missed upon first viewing is that the end of the film comes near the middle of the story. Through the use of a non-linear narrative, Tarantino skillfully weaves together three different stories so that a number of memorable characters are introduced to each other through their sometimes random, sometimes planned interactions with each other.

Characters appear and disappear in each other's storylines as the case requires, and since the timeline jumps back and forth, the viewer is left at the end to rethink the fates of all the major characters. The narrative is presented in such a way that some characters, such as John Travolta's Vincent, are alive and well in the segments in which they take center stage, only to be killed or injured in other segments in which they play bit roles. As one goes back through the broken up narrative and thinks through what happens to the characters, one concludes that, even though the crime and violence are treated in an entertaining and often funny manner, the fates of the characters are mostly undesirable. Only Vincent's colleague, Samuel L. Jackson's Jules, seems to walk away cleanly after he renounces violence and devotes his life to a spiritual quest. Through the use of parody and nonlinear storytelling, Tarantino is able to make this large point by showing the effects of the many characters' violent acts played out in glorious bloodshed on screen. Tarantino also uses dialogue to great effect in the film. His Biblical passages placed in the mouth of Jules sound commanding and mystical. His tender romance talk between Bruce Willis' boxer and his lover is both sentimental and believable. His wisecracking gangsters are funny and tough. In short, the narrative poetry of the dialogue works well with the narrative poetry of the non-linear storytelling. A large part of the reason that the film doesn't seem odd or alien with its cutting across timelines is the fact the dialogue seems simultaneously natural and engaging in a parodying way. The film incorporates the pop-culture credibility of its namesake, the pulp fiction that has entertained common people for years, even as the movie uses sophisticated editing to tell a larger story. The use of sound is critical to

the film's success. Both the music choice on the soundtrack and the use of naturalistic sound elements in the film serve to signal the action and engage the viewer. When Vincent dances with Uma Thurman's Mia, the wife of the gangster who employs him, in their house, the alarm goes off, signaling the danger to come. The television sounding in the background during a resulting heroin overdose scene adds to the chaos and confusion, as well as the ultimate humor and relief. The surfer-slash guitar of the film's theme song is entirely appropriate to the frenetic pace of the action and the funky cool of the film's positioning of pop culture. In all of these uses of sound, Tarantino shows himself to be as interested in the sensuality of sound as he is in the colorful assault of visual elements used in the film. Finally, the film's editing is excellent. By cutting the story in the way he did, Tarantino was able to present the film in the most entertaining way possible while still making a point about film and violence. If the use of the film's most endearing characters, Jules and Vincent, had not been used to bookend the action, the film may not have ended with the thoughtful point that it offered. Similarly, if the film had not shown the gangster Vincent to be so respectful and fearful of his employer, Ving Rhames' Marcellus, the scene in the middle of the action in which Marcellus is sexually violated by white racist predators would not have had the power that it did. Through the use of skillful editing, Tarantino is able to hook the viewer and push the story along, so that only after the film, in the conversation and thought that viewers have around the meanings, are the many implications fully explored. While the film is rolling, it is all the viewer can do to hold on tight and watch. While Tarantino's movie deals with a number of social issues, including racism and

sexuality, it is in his treatment of violence that the film succeeds masterfully. By parodying violence and making it a cinematically enjoyable experience, he lulls the viewer into an acceptance of the action on screen, only to pull the rug out from under the viewer and suggest that violence is bad through the final scene. In this sense, and through the skillful use of narrative, dialogue, sound, and editing, Tarantino tells a story we did not expect – an antigangster gangster film, a loving tribute to violence that ultimately rejects violence. Reference Tarantino, Quentin, dir. Pulp Fiction (Two-Disc Collector's Edition) (1994), Miramax.