

## Pulp Fiction

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Quentin Tarantino's catalog of films act as a montage of violence, strung together by complex characters, overexaggerated visuals, and immersive aesthetics. So, what better movie to analyze for violence in films than Tarantino's cult classic, *Pulp Fiction*? This film is regarded as a modern classic and is considered to be a staple in pop culture. Tarantino has a way of masterfully weaving together moments of genuine comedy, whip-smart dialogue, and editing techniques that soak up the otherwise unbearably gory violence that drive his films. If it weren't for these redeeming elements of story, his films would be nearly unwatchable, and *Pulp Fiction* is no exception. With the entirety of the narrative centering around drug lords and gangsters of Los Angeles, there is no doubt that this film is graphically, unsettlingly violent. But what makes this film stand out aside from its violent nature is the way its structure offsets it. Told non-linearly, the movie's narrative is not depicted chronologically. But rather than coming off as choppy and episodic, this way of formatting a movie actually allows the audience to grow deeper emotional connections to both the storyline and the characters themselves. Tarantino's ability to show gratuitous violence in a way that is simultaneously horrifying yet palatable for viewers *and* allows them to seek connection to the film is what makes *Pulp Fiction* so well-renowned.

The role of violence in this film is multifaceted. Many of the characters appear to be desensitized to the ever-present violence that occurs throughout the film. For instance, Jules and Vincent revolve their entire lives around creating violence and mayhem, however never seem to be affected by it. That is, until an incident occurs leading Jules to believe that he has been saved by divine intervention. It is in this moment that Jules immediately decides to quit his life of crime. However, Vincent does not feel impacted by this and sees it solely as a freak accident. He proceeds with his life as a hitman with no extra thought, only to meet his fate at the business end of Butch's gun.

This same disregard for violence is seen in characters such as Butch and Marsellus. Butch, agreeing to throw a boxing match in a deal made with Marsellus, double-crosses Marsellus, wins the fight, and goes on the lam. During the fight, Butch knocks out his opponent, to the point of death. When asked how he feels about killing an innocent man, Butch has no feelings whatsoever. Over the course of the plot, Butch makes decisions that cause the viewer to question his sense of morality. However, at a critical point in the film, he is faced with a chance to either escape brutal torture or go back and rescue Marsellus. In a beautifully understated internal battle between right and wrong, Butch decides to save Marsellus. Marsellus, on the other hand, makes his living in grimy violence. As the "big boss" of the film, as well as the one common thread between seemingly unrelated characters, he deals with his affairs matter-of-factly. His air of realism gives him little room for remorse when things get ugly. Only when he falls victim to twisted abuse does he falter, causing him to later give grace to Butch for saving him when, under typical circumstances, he would likely have him killed. Each of these transformations add dimension to the characters and bring a contrasting sense of morality to the level of violence depicted.

The acts of violence themselves shown in *Pulp Fiction* are considered gratuitous, however the manner in which the movie is shot allows for a more comfortable viewing

experience. The audience is not directly observing the brutality, yet is very aware of what is happening. I do believe that if this movie were not as graphic, it would lose some of its luster. The violence carries the undertone of the story and drives the narrative along, so it would have a very different feel with less violence. Ironically, the role of violence actually contributes to the ways that each character transforms and experiences a change of heart. Additionally, the majority of the violence occurs during the day, adding an unsettling element of danger to settings we would typically find safe. However, the film's unique structure, characters, and plotline still make for an effectively engaging movie, so it would not be a total loss without it.

While blood-lust is very real, it cannot be justified. I find it morally wrong for a person to find entertainment in seeing characters brutally slaughtered, when the exact same action could have been just as effectively communicated through a stylistic yet slightly censored shot. Violence as a stylistic device is acceptable and definitely propels stories forward, however only to a certain extent. When senseless death or harm is shown onscreen in the most excessive, unfiltered format possible, it no longer serves the story and loses purpose.