

PULP FICTION



AT 30

BY

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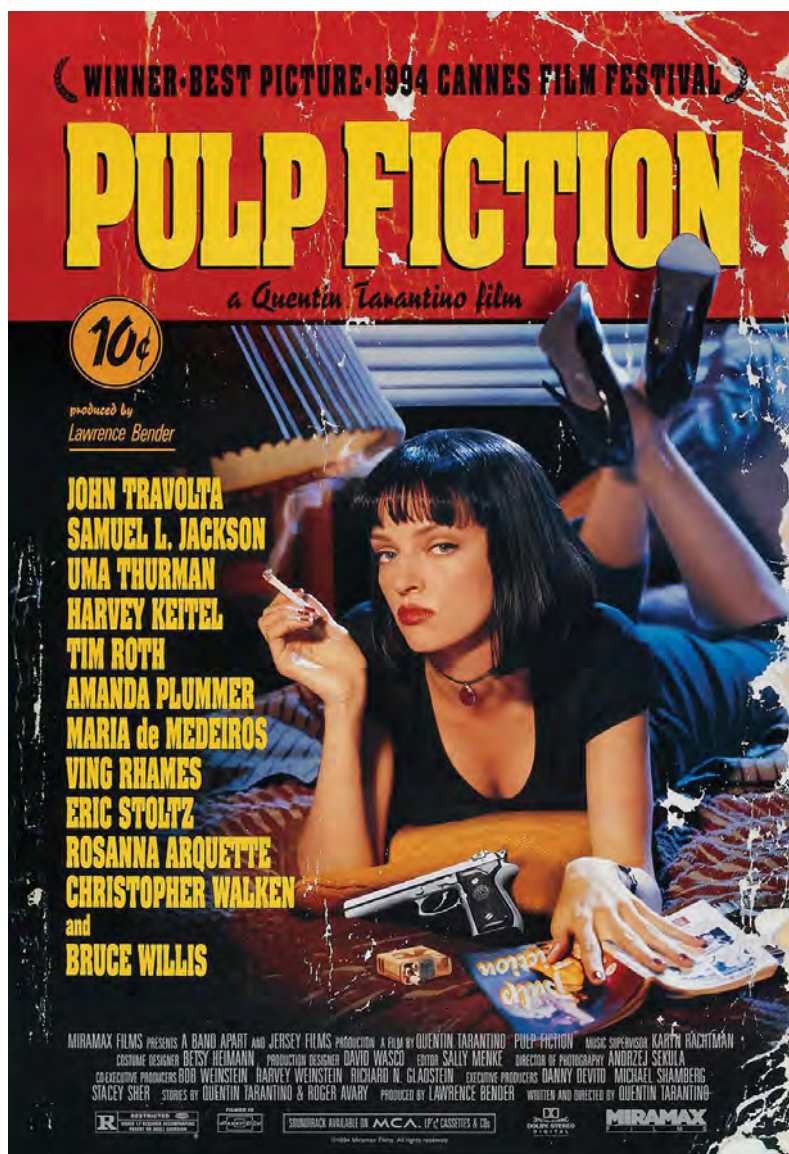
Let that sink in. I recently said it to someone, these days when I talk about the nineties, it's like when my mom talked to me about the seventies in the nineties. And then we laughed. And then life punched me in the face. In the nineties the sixties were thirty years ago, not the seventies. My mom never talked about the sixties. Why is it still worth to talk about a movie from the nineties? Is it because it was the last innocent decade pre-internet, pre-911? Pre-iPhone, pre-Amazon, pre-Netflix? Or is it that disgusting, horrible nostalgia, that's lurking behind every retrospect? Is it because we were young and things were that different when we first see this film? Let me help you out with the answer, it isn't nostalgia. It is like talking about the renaissance, or Hamlet, we have no fond memories of those days, what we have is respect. Respect, because with all of its controversial decisions, and with the problematic Miramax background support it was still able to create something that has waves to this day. And if the audience's and the industry's reaction is so strong that the whole decade shifts a few meters, then we have to have some respect - not for any person or product but - for the defying event.

We all know everything about **Pulp Fiction** at this point. There's nothing new to say. I won't mention the editing. Why should I, because it's an editors' magazine? How boring would that be? I won't mention Sally Menke, and how much Tarantino needed her input, like Hunter S. Thompson needed a sober edit... As she

said: Editing is all about intuiting the tone of a scene and you have to chime with the director. Enough to think about the "Hi, Sally!" greetings from cast members between takes, to know how much he appreciated her. It cut too short tragically, but their collaboration is iconic in film history. For generations to come, her work is an inspiration. I'm always grateful if a director has trust in the audience, when they don't have the urge to clear up everything, when they put their faith in us and allow us to explore and appreciate every aspect of filmmaking. **Pulp Fiction** is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get - true words from the movie that won the Academy Award for editing that year. Coming from a self-trained film history 'student', **Pulp Fiction** holds the essence of the art form and builds a playground for every cast member to showcase their best performances. These are the many layers we can pick from every time we rewatch.

It works even now that we are 30 years older, perhaps because it doesn't live in the nineties. It lives in a cinematic world that does not age. I had a teacher at university who was in his late 70s and had a film history class where the

topic was **Pulp Fiction**. He talked about the script and at one point read a scene for us. He warned us he won't read the swear words as he said "those do not belong to our academic level of studying." I learnt a lot in those days, mostly about how would Jules sound if he was an older, white, snob, from Eastern Europe. Without swearing. Nice practice to be honest. Jerry Seinfeld said he only swore once on stage, when the character needed it. Cursing feels like a cheap shot, so he avoids





them, and when he feels like only a swear word could save a joke, well, that joke is not good enough. Every curse word has its right to exist in **Pulp Fiction** but the story would not collapse without them. The story does not need them, the characters do. Everything is connected.

It wasn't the first time I heard about **Pulp Fiction** from an unusual source. In the mid-2000s I had a summer job as a student at a construction site and one of the builders mentioned, he saw this Bruce Willis movie the day before, where he plays a boxer, and he has to lose a match, but instead he kills the other guy in the ring and now he is on the run and everyone is after him. The shovel stopped in my hand. Ground-breaking summary. Hey, I saw this painting yesterday, there is a woman on it and no one can tell if she is smiling or not. Isn't it great? Tarantino lifted a handful of artistic film so-

lutions from underground films to the mainstream. So, do I really need to mention how this movie brought back techniques, tools from film classics, how it resurrected long lost ideas, styles, how it recalled (mimicked) the greats of the seventh art? And he did that so well, the gap between arthouse film and mainstream disappeared for a second. We all know that.

First time I saw **Rabid Dogs** (1974/1998) from Mario Bava, I was at a medieval castle at a film festival in Itri, Italy. It was the late noughties, and they screened scenes of the movie on the wall inside the castle. It just ran in the background casually, like a lightshow. The story was secondary, there were no subtitles, but it would've been hard to read them on the candle lit brick wall anyway. It felt like Tarantino's hazy VHS memory from an impossible timeline. Although the movie was made in 1974, for financial reasons it was shelved for



more than 24 years. 50 years later it is considered Bava's masterpiece, and the bloody, violent car hijack still finds its audience to this day. The Italians have a real blood connection to Tarantino's world.

It wasn't only cinema that influenced **Pulp Fiction**. I came across the book *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* by George V. Higgins when the late, great Anthony Bourdain chef, writer, legend mentioned in an interview as one of his favourite books. Then later I heard Tarantino and Scorsese mention it too. Conversation 101. To learn how to write about small town crooks, who are desperate to change their life for the better while they going through everyday problems like the rest of us. In this way we can relate to them easily, so we might think we are in a well-known story structure and forget that these are violent underworld figures who are not afraid

like Bourdain or Tarantino. These conversations can help to develop the characters, but their main function is to set the pace of the narrative and to help tone shifting, from a casual, funny simple chat to violence, aggression, tension. Familiar isn't it?

When I was younger, whenever our conversation with my dad reached the point where I said, well I don't know, he immediately replied - half serious -, you have to make up your mind, you've got to have an opinion, remember what happened to Marvin in **Pulp Fiction**. I learnt really fast to have my own opinion even when things are not black and white. We are going to talk about this movie for a long, long time. And if anyone ever says anything about the blood and the violence, I have to assume that they have never read ancient Greek tragedies or Shakespeare. Or the Bible. Or



to break the law. With this he makes us lower our guard and as the tension builds, we have a false feeling of safety so the action, the violence is more shocking. The element of surprise is much stronger. The jokes taste better.

One of the chapters starts with two cops talking about the right way to make a cheese sandwich, so it won't taste like two big pieces, of bathroom tile with some mastic in between. It goes on a few pages, how important to use the right kind of mayonnaise, and where to put it. There is a character called Jackie Brown, but that's not where the connection lies. Higgins worked as Assistant U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts for several years, he heard many criminals trying to dig their way out of trouble by talking and talking. For him it was ammunition for his crime novels, and inspiration for people

watched a Sam Peckinpah movie. Some movies try to be more than what they are. **Pulp Fiction** is the other way around. Tarantino's attention to detail on every level makes it a perfect film school goldmine, disguised as a violent action comedy.

I recently rewatched it, and I have to say the non-linear structure is the least exciting part of this film. Although it did one great thing for the movie. It's on a loop. It never ends. At the end Vincent Vega is still alive. And the movie just started.

