

13. *Pulp Fiction* reviewed by Roger Ebert in *The Great Movies*, 2002


Dialogue drives Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. It is dialogue of such high quality 1) a) which b) that c) who d) when it deserves comparison with other masters of spare, hard-boiled prose, from Raymond Chandler to Elmore Leonard. Like them, Tarantino finds a way to 2) a) do b) take c) make d) find the words humorous without ever seeming to ask for a laugh. Like them, he has combined utilitarian prose 3) a) by b) for c) in d) with rough poetry and wicked fancy.

It is Tarantino's strategy in all of 4) a) my b) her c) his d) their films to have the characters speak at right angles to the action, or depart on flights of fancy. Remember the opening conversation between Jules and Vincent, who are on their way to a violent reprisal against some college kids who have offended Marcellus Wallace and 5) a) steal b) stole c) stealing d) stolen his briefcase. They talk about the 6) a) law drugs b) drug laws c) drug's laws d) law's drugs in Amsterdam, what Quarter Pounders* are called in Paris, and the degree of sexual intimacy implied by a foot massage. Finally Jules 7) a) says, b) speaks, c) talks, d) tells, "Let's get in character," and they enter an apartment.

The movie is also famous for 8) a) her b) his c) its d) our circular structure. The restaurant hold-up with Pumpkin and Honey Bunny begins and ends the film, and other story lines weave in and out of strict chronology. But there is a chronology in the dialogue, in the sense that what is said before invariably sets up or enriches what comes 9) a) previously. b) after. c) there. d) then. The dialogue is proof that Tarantino has had the time-juggling in mind from the very beginning, because 10) a) it is b) she is c) there is d) he has never a glitch. The scenes do not follow in chronological order, but the dialogue always knows exactly 11) a) who b) what c) why d) where to fall in the movie.

Howard Hawks once gave his definition of a good movie: "Three good scenes. No bad scenes." Few movies in recent years 12) a) were having b) has c) have had d) are having more good scenes than *Pulp Fiction*. Some are almost musical comedy, as when Vincent and Mia dance at Jackrabbit Slim's. Some are stunning in their suddenness, as when Butch returns to his apartment and 13) a) surprising b) surprises c) has surprised d) was surprising Vincent. And some are all verbal style.

Pulp Fiction is the most influential film of the 1990s; its circular timeline can be sensed in films as different as *The Usual Suspects*, *The Zero Effect*, and *Memento* – not that they copied it, but that they were aware of the pleasures of experimenting with chronology. But it isn't the structure that 14) a) gets b) does c) becomes d) makes *Pulp Fiction* a great film. Its greatness comes from its marriage of original characters (essentially comic) with a series of vivid and half-fanciful events – and from the dialogue. The dialogue is the foundation of everything else. Most conversations in most movies are deadly boring – which is 15) a) because b) why c) as d) for directors with no gift for dialogue depend so heavily on action and special effects. The characters in *Pulp Fiction* are always talking, and always interesting, funny, scary, or audacious.



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

* A Quarter Pounder is a large hamburger on the menu at MacDonald's in the U.S.