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# THE MOB AND THE MOVIES: A CINEMATIC HISTORY OF THE ALL-AMERICAN CRIMINAL

Andrew Graves

## Week 9: Crime and the Coen Brothers

### MARTIN SCORCESE

#### Themes

- Religious guilt
- Political corruption
- Deeply flawed humanity

#### Style

- Slow motion
- Freeze frame
- A gritty reality meets Hollywood veneer

### *GOODFELLAS* (1990)

#### MARTIN SCORCESE

- Directed by Martin Scorsese
- Written by Nicholas Pileggi and Martin Scorsese
- Based on *Wiseguy* by Nicholas Pileggi
- Produced by Irwin Winkler
- Cinematography by Michael Ballhaus
- Edited by Thelma Schoonmaker
- Though Scorsese had not intended to make another mob related film
- He read Pileggi's book while making *The Colour of Money*
- He recognized that it was a much more realistic take on organized crime
- Pileggi, a news reporter, had previously criticized *The Godfather* for its romanticized depiction of gangsters
- While Pileggi was assigned to work on the script, it took many drafts to perfect it, with Scorsese's input
- As the idea needed some Scorsese styling, they decided to share credit
- Scorsese, chose the parts of the book he liked and the plotted out a non-liner story structure

*"You want it fast? Okay, I'll give it to you fast. Real fast"*

**Martin Scorsese**

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## GOODFELLAS (1990) CONT...

- The film had much shorter scenes and more of them
- Scorsese had recently directed Michael Jackson's *Bad* video and brought some of that energy to the film

## USE OF CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Henry – (anti) Hero

Karen – The Princess

Pauly – Mentor

Tommy – The Shapeshifter

Jimmy – The Shadow

*“Goodfellas barrels along with unstoppable storytelling relish, its jukebox slams of pop music repeatedly convulsing the movie with sugar-rush excitement amounting almost to hysteria. It's not a movie with a formal three-act structure, it just unloads radioactively horrible and fascinating anecdotes in irresistible succession, and you watch Liotta's Henry gradually deteriorating as he becomes his own loyalest customer in the cocaine business.”*

**Peter Bradshaw The Guardian**

## QUENTIN TARANTINO

*"There has become a thing that's gone on, especially in this last year, where ideology is more important than art. Ideology trumps art. Ideology trumps individual effort. Ideology trumps good. Ideology trumps entertaining,”*

**Quentin Tarantino**

## STYLE

- Multiple influences
- Homage
- Non-linear forms
- Mix of styles/techniques – animation, manga, martial arts, spaghetti westerns, film noir etc.
- His films are often an entertaining ‘juke box’ of vignettes and separate character stories

## RESERVOIR DOGS (1992)

- Tarantino was working at Video Archives, Long Beach, California
- He had been working on a script and had intended to shoot the script himself on a budget of around \$30,000
- A black and white 16mm production
- The producer at that stage was Lawrence Bender
- Bender passed the rough script over to his acting tutor, who in turn passed it on to Harvey Keitel
- Keitel was so impressed that he agreed to come on board as co-producer, so that Tarantino and Bender could secure more funding

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**RESERVOIR DOGS (1992) CONT...**

- Keitel also paid to have casting sessions in New York
- They eventually raised over \$1.5 million

*“The number of killings in Quentin Tarantino's prize-winning "Reservoir Dogs" can't begin to compete with the hefty body count in Steven Seagal's "Under Siege," which is now the No. 1 box-office hit in the country. Yet everywhere "Reservoir Dogs" has been shown, people head for the exits during an extended torture scene in which an ex-convict (Michael Madsen) dances to a 1970s-rock song while tormenting a young policeman.”*

John Hart, *The Seattle Times*

- The decision not to include the heist was partly due to budgetary concerns but also it allowed the film to be about ‘other things’