

# Misreading the Tradition: An Intertextual Study of Influence through Filmmakers Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj

Cephas Prakash Raja R. C<sup>1</sup>, Dr. V. Rajasekaran<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur to Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 6000127, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur to Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 600127, Tamil Nadu, India

Correspondence: Dr V. Rajasekaran, Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur to Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 600127, Tamil Nadu, India.

Received: August 26, 2024

Accepted: February 27, 2025

Online Published: May 15, 2025

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n7p59

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n7p59>

## Abstract

Cinema is a dynamic environment that facilitates the exchange between directors and audiences, mediated through film, where artistic vision and interpretation engage with the narratives, visuals, and themes presented on screen. In this cinematic trinity, during the phase of viewer response, the creator's detachment becomes an interplay between the films and the audiences, leading to a pivotal moment in meaning-making as an expression of independent free will. This article explores the nuanced ambiguities within the cinematic realm, delving deeply into the complexities inherent in the meaning-making process. With meticulous focus, the article's primary objective is to discern the subtle yet crucial distinction between understanding and misunderstanding the concept of intertextuality, a central theme in film analysis. Through this investigation, the article probes into the diverse consequences of these divergent interpretations and emphasises their profound impact on audience perception and cinematic discourse. Additionally, the article scrutinises the intricate relationships intertwining filmmakers, films, and audiences in the elaborate construction of significance within the cinematic landscape. Within this analytical framework, a comparative analysis unfolds, drawing insightful parallels between two eminent directors, Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj. Through their shared cinematic space, the article aims to dissect and comprehend their filmmaking styles, narrative techniques, and thematic choices, elucidating the varying approaches to intertextuality.

**Keywords:** Misreading, Intertextuality, Implied reader, Actual reader, Intentionality, Defamiliarisation

## 1. Introduction

Any form of art expresses the creator's mind in understanding reality and nature. In contemporary times, films are a powerful medium of expression and entertainment, representing a richer and more evolved version of literature. Literary texts combine words to conjure visuals in readers' minds. In contrast, films project the director's vision onto the screen for the audience. Literature is considered diverse as it encompasses several perspectives focusing on multiple spheres, such as cultural studies, psychology, philosophy, regional literature, and subordinate literature. Popular culture is a subdomain of cultural studies that has attracted the attention of critics and researchers, paving the way for interdisciplinary research. "Popular culture in this account is distinct from both folk culture and high culture: unlike the former, it is mass-produced; unlike the latter, it is mass-consumed" (Kelly, 2014). Mass media, such as television and film, play a crucial role in popular culture, reaching a broad audience and significantly impacting the masses. Films have been granted an aesthetic status similar to painting and literature.

Novels, dramatic literature, or short stories, poetry, all have particular counterparts in film forms. Film influences literature and vice-versa. It also influences literary imagery in many ways, and each of these parts leads to other issues. These issues are about: the production of the films, the reception of the films, the production of the literature, the reception of the literature, writing and scripting, and reading and viewing. These practices however create a kind of interesting relationship between Film and Literature. The sociological impact which film achieves is as a result of the quality of available literature. Therefore, such impact leads to a shift in spectatorship and literacy, resulting to cinema's demand of equal time and attention when one argues about the relative value and meaning of Film and Literature (Onikoyi, 2006).

The influential relationship between film and literature reveals the connection between their literary and filmic aspects. The technical narrative elements in the film are analysed through the theoretical framework of the literary canon. Intertextuality posits that originality is not intrinsic to ideas or concepts but emerges from constant refinement. Each novel idea is, in essence, an offspring of pre-existing thoughts, enhanced with greater richness derived from its connection to the past. Intertextuality, as defined by Kristeva, unfolds as "a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). Despite Kristeva's clarification, this conception of intertextuality is often misinterpreted. She says, "The concept, however, has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing

to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of [art]literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of [art]literary system” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 15).

Misunderstandings of intertextuality frequently lead to copies or imitations. Nietzsche, in his work *Human, All Too Human*, shares his perspective on these 'copies'. He says, “We not unfrequently meet with copies of prominent persons; and as in the case of pictures, so also here, the copies please more than the originals” (Nietzsche, 1878, p. 178). This dilemma underscores the challenge of distinguishing the 'original' from myriad 'copies'.

The article aims to intricately differentiate between understanding and misunderstanding the concept of intertextuality, delving into its varied outcomes. To achieve this, it examines the interconnected relationship among filmmakers, films, and audiences in constructing meaning. In this context, a comparative analysis is conducted between two accomplished directors – Quentin Tarantino, renowned as the most influential director in Hollywood, and Lokesh Kanagaraj, a highly sought-after director in Indian cinema.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology adopted in the article is qualitative, employing Film Discourse Analysis, which involves meticulously exploring the meaning-making process by examining the symbiotic relationship between the creator and the reader. Discourse analysis refers to the linguistic understanding of a text, encompassing social, psychological, and cultural aspects. “Film discourse is analysed as a multimodal text, synthesising the fields of narratology, philosophy, cultural studies, and other domains” (Tryhubava, 2020). By utilising the method of Film Discourse Analysis, the article focuses on meaning-making through the theories of intertextuality and reader response. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of intertextuality and reader-response theory, the article intricately dissects the phenomenon of misreading through the esteemed directors Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj. By juxtaposing these creators, the article argues the relationship between tradition and misinterpretation. Utilising interviews and articles from Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj as primary sources, the article endeavours to elucidate the nuanced intersubjective dynamics between creator and reader.

By employing this method, the article bridges the research gap by focusing on the directors' perspectives through the theory of intertextuality. It does not merely address film studies and literature in a comparative framework but it further asserts subjective perception and highlights the tradition of misreading through the directors Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In contemporary society, cinema has evolved beyond its traditional confines, reaching diverse audiences and establishing itself as a universally embraced medium for artistic expression and entertainment. Within the realm of commercial cinema, the dynamics between the director, the film itself, and the audience play a pivotal role in shaping the financial success of a cinematic venture. However, despite the director's crucial role in the creative process, their influence is often overshadowed by the demands and preferences of both the audience and the commercial considerations of the film. This shifting focus introduces an element of ambiguity surrounding the film's intended message or artistic vision, as the director's creative input may be marginalised. This interplay between the director, the film, and the audience significantly impacts a cinematic work's overall meaning and reception.

Drawing on philosophical concepts articulated by Plato and Aristotle, cinema can be examined through the lens of 'mimesis'. Plato's viewpoint suggests that artistic expression imitates the tangible world, reflecting the ideal world and creating a secondary departure from reality. Conversely, Aristotle's perspective defends the role of art by interpreting mimesis as the act of faithfully representing reality. According to him, imitation stems from an inherent human instinct, offering a profound understanding of the complexities intrinsic to human nature and the fabric of existence.

Filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj serve as subjects of study due to their strategic incorporation of artistic methodologies into commercial ventures, employing techniques like 'defamiliarisation'. Coined by Viktor Shklovsky, defamiliarisation seeks to render familiar objects unfamiliar, thereby prolonging the perception process and enhancing aesthetic experience. Through defamiliarisation, these filmmakers challenge conventional narratives and create innovative forms, fostering reinterpretation and recontextualisation of ideas across various texts, which is 'intertextuality'.

The article explores the intricate relationship between cinema and reader-response theory, examining how audiences interpret and engage with films. This examination places particular emphasis on intertextuality, as the director takes on the role of an audience member, actively interpreting or drawing inspiration from the works of other filmmakers. These dynamics blur the traditional boundaries between creator and consumer, enriching the cinematic experience with layers of interpretation and influence.

## 4. Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj

Quentin Jerome Tarantino, an accomplished American artist, is celebrated for his expertise across multiple facets of filmmaking. Beyond his roles as a director, screenwriter, and producer, he also explores the nuances of cinematography and occasionally appears on screen as an actor. Tarantino's diverse skills and significant contributions have made a lasting impact on the film industry, establishing him as a visionary and an influential presence in modern cinema. In an article by *Medium*, Murphy writes, “Quentin Tarantino’s impact on the world of cinema extends beyond just being one of the most famous directors. He has become an iconic figure whose name is synonymous with innovation and creativity in filmmaking. His influence can be seen in the works of countless filmmakers who is unique style and approach have inspired” (“A Deep Dive into the Directorial Style of Quentin Tarantino”, 2023).

The directorial journey of Quentin Tarantino began with the release of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), a film praised by critics, establishing him as “an exciting new voice in filmmaking” (“A Deep Dive into the Directorial Style of Quentin Tarantino”, 2023). However, his second, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), raised him to global prominence. “The movie earned widespread acclaim for its nonlinear narrative structure, sharp dialogue, and memorable characters” (“A Deep Dive into the Directorial Style of Quentin Tarantino”, 2023). Quentin Tarantino has directed nine films and announced his retirement from filmmaking after completing his tenth project. Some of his notable works include *Kill Bill* (2003-2004), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012) and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). Tarantino's illustrious career has been adorned with a plethora of accolades, among which are two prestigious Academy Awards in the category of ‘Best Original Screenplay’, recognising his exceptional contributions to cinema with *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Django Unchained* (2012).

Lokesh Kanagaraj, a prominent figure in Indian cinema, is widely acclaimed for his multifaceted roles as a director, screenwriter, and producer, primarily within the Tamil film industry. His cinematic journey commenced with his involvement in the anthology *Aviyal* (2016), marking his initial foray into storytelling. With the release of *Maanagaram* (2017), his directorial debut in feature films showcased his undeniable talent and visionary approach to filmmaking. Following the commercial success of his third film, *Kaithi* (2019), Kanagaraj pioneered the establishment of his cinematic universe, famously known as the Lokesh Cinematic Universe (LCU). “The Lokesh Cinematic Universe (LCU), also known as the Loki Cinematic Universe or Lokiverse, is an Indian media franchise and shared universe of Tamil-language action thriller films created by Lokesh Kanagaraj” (Wikipedia, 2024). The reason for creating Lokesh Cinematic Universe is that “...he [Lokesh] is building along the lines of Marvel and DC. Moreover, he believes that this cinematic universe will take Tamil cinema to the next level” (Subramanian, 2022).

Lokesh's films have proven to be both crowd-pleasers and lucrative investments, satisfying audiences and investors. His ability to consistently generate strong Indian box office returns has propelled him to become one of the most sought-after directors in the industry despite having only a few films to his credit. Lokesh has been honoured with numerous awards for his cinematic endeavours. Among his noteworthy filmography are acclaimed *Master* (2021), *Vikram* (2022) and *Leo* (2023).

#### 4.1 The Parallels: Why Cinema?

Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj are not arthouse directors; they are commercial filmmakers who have achieved remarkable success with their films, earning praise from critics and audiences alike and achieving significant box office success. Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj are considered parallel subjects for study due to their similar filmmaking styles and techniques. “Kanagaraj is Tamil Nadu's Tarantino — his films are not only replete with gratuitous violence of fingers breaking, heads cracking and people blowing up into pieces, but also rich drama and dark humour” (Nath & Nath, 2023).

In an interview with Indian film critic Bharadwaj Rangan, Lokesh openly acknowledges his significant influence from Western cinema, particularly citing Quentin Tarantino and Martin Scorsese as major inspirations. He says, “...my peers made me see many films, I got to know Scorsese's filmography, Tarantino films. R-rated films that usually don't release here. I got to watch them” (Galatta Plus, 2023).

These kinds of films have inspired and influenced his filmmaking style, “lot of people say Lokesh's films are usually drugs, blood and is set in night” (Galatta plus, 2023). The stylistic approach to violence, characterised by the notion that ‘violence is fun,’ is commonly attributed to Quentin Tarantino. Lokesh associates his works with the meaning of Tarantino's violence, and he says:

You can't complain it's too loud going to a heavy metal concert. You know where you are going... If you come to my films, you will see violence.’ In another instance, when asked why there's so much violence in his films, he said, ‘Because it is fun’. Yes, there's fun in that. If we get to see two people stabbing each other in real life, we will turn our heads away because we know it is not fun. But in cinema, we just exaggerate that with music and all that for entertainment. Everyone knows it is not true. Just come here to watch a film and get entertained... that's all. That's how I see it. (“Lokesh Kanagaraj on His Growing Influence With Superstars”, 2022)



Figure 1. Lokesh Kanagaraj (Gallata Plus)

Akin to Quentin Tarantino, Lokesh Kanagaraj, too, weaves a tapestry of violence and revenge, employing these motifs as nuanced instruments to probe the intricacies of the human condition and power play within his films.

Lokesh's characters often inhabit morally ambiguous territory, residing in a grey area where their actions blur the lines between right and wrong. For instance, in his film *Master* (2021), a professor who struggles with alcoholism is consumed by guilt upon realising his role in the tragedy involving children, while in *Leo* (2023), the protagonist grapples with profound emotional turmoil after taking the lives of burglars with immoral intentions at his café. Tarantino, too, does this; his characters "...often reside in a morally ambiguous space, blurring the lines between right and wrong. This ambiguity adds depth to the characters and challenges the audience's own notions of morality" ("A Journey Through the Filmography of Quentin Tarantino", 2023).

Soundtracks, "Like American filmmaker Quentin Tarantino (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Kill Bill*, *Pulp Fiction*), Kanagaraj has a love for using "old songs, heavy violence and a hyperlink-style screenplay," said Rathna Kumar, director and writer for three of Kanagaraj's films, adding that there is definitely some inspiration" (Nath & Nath, 2023). Tarantino excels in selecting soundtracks that become integral to the identity of his films, seamlessly blending a diverse range of music genres.

Lokesh Kanagaraj's decision to leave the film industry after making ten films mirrors Tarantino's. Intriguingly, Lokesh's latest film, an adaptation of David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005), is titled *Leo* (2023), which coincidentally shares its name with Tarantino's son. Whether intentional or not, Lokesh's choices frequently align with Quentin Tarantino's.

Lokesh Kanagaraj was not an aspiring filmmaker; he states:

I never had a proper graph to begin with. You can tell that by my degrees and my line of work before this. I just stumbled upon a short film competition and made a film and the reception I got for it made me decide that this is my job. I felt that I was searching for this all along but by then I was 26-27 years old I was frustrated with 9-5 job and I wanted to escape it. I was also keen on not going for job and starting my own business. But I did not have proper financial backing. So all this took me to the cinema. (Galatta plus, 2023)

His lack of enthusiasm for his job and the positive reception of his short film motivated him to delve into filmmaking.

In contrast:

Little Q, as Quentin Tarantino's mother reportedly called him as a child, developed a youthful passion for writing stories and screenplays and for watching movies...Quentin spent much of his childhood scripting and staging elaborate games, recitations and plays (including annual Mother's Day dramas in which he repeatedly, but always apologetically, killed off his mother). He saw John Boorman's *Deliverance* when he was only nine years old and it seems to have marked an important milestone in his life; not only was it one of innumerable films he saw as a child, and later as a video-store employee and action-movie aficionado, it solidified in him a lasting appreciation for the emotional power of the cinematic experience, as one of his many biographers has observed: "he loved the visceral effect movies had on him, even when he didn't understand what was really going on". (Greene, 2007, p. 29)

Although entering the film industry for various reasons, both individuals have transformed the conventional filmmaking paradigm, emerging as exemplars within their respective film industries.

#### 4.2 Intentionality

In the article "The Birth of New Avant-garde," Alexander Astruc provides his critical perspective on cinema's essence and advocates for its necessary evolution.

The cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of camera-stylo (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language. (Astruc)

In short, Astruc contends that cinema serves as an artistic language, allowing creators to express even the most abstract ideas. He likens the camera to an artist's pen, a tool for illustrating thoughts. While commercial cinema has not reached such elevated artistic heights, it is gradually evolving in its unique manner, challenging traditional norms. Astruc advocates for cinema to be regarded on par with literature, a sentiment echoed in Quentin Tarantino's distinctive approach to the art form. In an interview article "Quentin Tarantino: It is a Corrupted Cinema", Tarantino says, "When I go and write my new characters, my pen is like an antenna, it gets that information, and all of a sudden these characters come out more or less fully-formed" (Tarantino, 2021).

Lokesh adopts a distinct approach to crafting a film. He initiates the process with an idea, narrates it to a select group of individuals, takes notes, and transforms these elements into a cohesive script. However, his concerns extend beyond the creative aspect, as he emphasises the financial aspects of filmmaking. According to him, the financial considerations weigh more heavily on his mind than the artistic endeavours

involved in filmmaking.

When I was working in a corporate bank. So I was doing ads as well. Irrespective of whether I was capable of doing that. No one's money gets wasted. So, you are only investing your time and energy and that's going to be your only loss. But mainstream cinema is not like that. It's someone else's money so you need to be more responsible. What will work for the audience? What'll give you a return or investment? You need to be calculative of all. (Galatta Plus, 2023)

Lokesh operates as a filmmaker with an 'objective' stance, deliberately crafting films that are 'objective' and cognisant of the audience's preferences. While this approach may align with commercial considerations in art, Lokesh's intentions are notably distinct from a purely capitalist perspective. His primary concern lies in the financial investment made by the audience, emphasising a conscientious awareness of their money despite his significant success in the commercial film industry. Lokesh states, "Numbers never gave me any high...I care about giving returns on the investment. I care about entertaining the people who pay 150 rs. for a ticket" (Galatta Plus, 2023). In this context, Lokesh appears to embody the principles of a Marxist filmmaker, placing a higher emphasis on prioritising people over product and profit. Tarantino also draws inspiration from people in his creative process, saying:

It's a writer's job not just to write about himself but to look at the rest of humanity and explore it – other people's way of talking, the phrases they use. And my head is a sponge. I listen to what everyone says, I watch little idiosyncratic behavior, people tell me a joke and I remember it. People tell me an interesting story in their life and I remember it (Tarantino)

As a writer with a 'subjective' perspective, Tarantino engages with inspirational elements, comprehends them, and replicates them in his films, resulting in vivid characters. Despite this subjective approach, both directors, including Lokesh, create 'objective' films by considering their audience. This intersubjective approach has been instrumental in securing success and acclaim for them within their respective industries.



Figure 2. Quentin Tarantino (Traven, 2014)

#### 4.3 Viewer's Response

Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky says:

Cinema is an unhappy art because it depends on money. Not only because a film is very expensive; but it is then also marketed like cigarettes. A film is good if it sells well, but if cinema is art then such an approach is absurd - it'd mean that art is good only if it sells well... The film for the large audience cannot be poetical. (Tarkovsky).

The commercial dimension of cinema places paramount importance on the audience, as the film's success is directly linked to the frequency of viewership, resulting in increased returns. In this context, audience engagement becomes a pivotal factor, influencing the financial outcomes of a film. The broader and more sustained the viewership, the greater the financial success of the cinematic endeavour. Consequently, filmmakers often tailor their approach to cater the preferences and expectations of the audience to maximise commercial viability.

The audience consists of the viewers and readers of a film. Mainstream viewers seek to establish a connection with the film to comprehend its narrative. This desire for connection transforms their perspective from a distant observer to an engaged participant in the

unfolding action. Consequently, the audience tends to experience the film from either a 'first-person' or 'second-person' viewpoint, often overlooking the critical 'third-person' perspective inherent to the film itself. This lack of perspective results in ambiguity in grasping the intended meaning, directly impacting the interpretation of the film's intentions.

In *Quentin Tarantino and Philosophy*, Robert Greene recalls a significant conversation between Tarantino and Robert Zemeckis, underscoring the importance of this perspective in cinematic understanding:

One of the more interesting Tarantino conversations I have read was one with Robert Zemeckis for the Los Angeles Times in which the two filmmakers mused over where *Forrest Gump* and *Pulp Fiction* (which competed against each other in 1994 for the Best Picture Oscar®) should be shelved in a video store:

“QT: (to Zemeckis) OK. Now if you owned a video store, what section would you put *Forrest Gump* in?”

RZ: You know what, I can’t answer that. I don’t know. Comedy? Drama? Adventure? They should have a video store section that’s unclassifiable movies.

QT: I was thinking, if I was working at the video store, I would imagine my boss would put it in the drama section, and I’d be making fun of him for doing that, saying, “People might look for it in the drama section, but you should make a stand and put it in the comedy section!”

For any video store owners out there, when *Pulp Fiction* comes out, I want it in the comedy section! If I come in and *Pulp Fiction* is in the drama section, that’ll be the last time I go into your closed-minded video store!

RZ: Well, would you put *Pulp Fiction* in the action section?

QT: There’s not that much action in it!

RZ: See, but you know, you can understand why they would put it there—

QT: Oh, I can totally see.

RZ:—because they would think it’s like a caper movie.

QT: See, one of the things that I think about both of the two movies is the fact that, whether you like them or not—and both of our movies are movies you either embrace or you put at arm’s length—when you saw them, you saw a movie. You’ve had a night at the movies; you’ve gone this way and that way and up and down. And it wasn’t just one little tone that we’re working to get right.” (Greene & Mohammed, 2007)

The excerpt suggests a misalignment between the author's intention and the audience's interpretation. Tarantino categorises the film as a 'comedy' based on his perspective, intending for the audience to adopt a similar viewpoint when engaging with the film. This underscores the subjective nature of cinematic interpretation, where the creator's intention may not necessarily align with the audience's reception, leading to a potential disparity in understanding and categorising the work. Tarantino actively seeks to influence how viewers perceive the film by labelling it a 'comedy,' emphasising the role of the creator in shaping the audience's perspective.

As the author suggested, the gap in comprehending the true essence diminishes when the perspective shifts. In this framework, the creator embodies the first person, the creation represents the second, and the viewer, who observes the creation, adopts the third-person perspective. To grasp the meaning, the viewer intentionally disassociates the creator and endeavours to establish a connection with the creation, situating their perspective within either the first person or second person framework, seeking significance through this lens. Barthes delves into this separation of the author from their text in "Death of the Author," asserting, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes, 1977, p. 148).

The deliberate act of the viewer in eliminating the author from the text gives rise to gaps in comprehending the material. In this context, the viewer assumes the role of the creator by attributing meaning to these gaps. Termed 'textual gaps' by Iser, these lacunae are filled by the reader through ideation. The effectiveness of this process is evident in the returns garnered when the reader convincingly and thoughtfully fills these gaps.

#### 4.4 Misreading

T.S Eliot, in his essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919), writes:

...if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand, and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. (Eliot, 1919, p. 1)

The broader implications of tradition remain inadequately investigated, often leading to misinterpretations and the generation of short-lived imitations within the tradition. To properly understand the tradition, Eliot says, "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity" (Eliot, 1919, p. 1). Understanding the historical context of tradition concerning the present is crucial for unlocking individual talent and transcending traditional norms. A lack of comprehension or misconceptions about tradition in popular culture has resulted in mere replication.

An article titled “Harold Bloom: A Map of Misreading” by Jeanne Willette provides an excerpt of Bloom’s view on the necessity to comprehend the tradition:

Only a great writer will challenge that fortress of certainty. He will see that a father is himself a son; he will also see that his own work must be protected not only from writers who will come after it, but also from the powerful authors that precede him, who remind him by their strength of their prior authority and his filial secondariness. Such a vision immediately plays havoc with the stability of texts and authors, indeed with the whole order of culture. The past becomes an active intervention in the present; the future is preposterously made just a figure of the past in the present. (Willette)

Bloom states, “Writers learn to write by reading and adapting their predecessors” (Wood, 2019). Tarantino is a notable illustration of comprehending both the contemporary and his tradition. However, instead of elevating it, he replicates it—a fact that Tarantino acknowledges and accepts, “I steal from every movie ever made... If my work has anything, it’s that I’m taking this from this and that from that and mixing them all together” (Lynch). As an example, in the movie *Pulp Fiction* (1994), the sequence featuring Uma Thurman and John Travolta dancing is, in fact, a recreation from Federico Fellini’s *8 ½* (1963). Tarantino says, “Sergio Leone was a big influence on me because of the spaghetti westerns.” (Mcintosh, 2016, p.228). His films like *Django Unchained* (2012) show this influence. Nevertheless, not just Sergio Leone, “Tarantino also derives inspiration from films across all languages. In a chat with director Anurag Kashyap, Tarantino once revealed that he was inspired by Kamal Haasan’s 2001 film *Aalavandhan* for the animated sequence in Kill Bill” (“When Quentin Tarantino Was Inspired by Kamal Haasan’s Film”, 2019).

Kamal Hassan's mastery of filmmaking has served as a global inspiration, influencing minds worldwide, including Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj. Lokesh openly acknowledges being a 'fanboy' of Kamal Hassan, whom he regards as a significant source of inspiration in his filmmaking journey. Many of Lokesh's characters are inspired more by Kamal Hassan's appearances than their actual character traits. In the 2021 film *Master*, the attire and plot setup resemble Kamal Hassan's *Nammavar* (1994), although the characterisations and approaches differ. Similarly, in *Kaithi* (2019), Kamal's *Virumandi* (2004) inspires the protagonist's appearance. While Lokesh's debut film, *Maanagaram*, garnered attention and praise, subsequent films have declined his standing among viewers. His latest film, *Leo* (2023), received a mixed response from critics and audiences. This decline may be attributed to the challenges of misinterpretation in the evolving landscape of his filmmaking career.

Bloom asserts that misreading is a prevalent aspect of any artistic expression, stating, "Reading is misunderstanding, misreading is writing, and writing is misreading" (Tan, 2020, p. 824). Building on this concept and its impact on the author, Bloom explores the theme in his work "The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry" (1973), where he delves into the distinctions between 'strong misreading' and 'weak misreading.' According to Bloom, “The younger poet deals with this anxiety by “strongly misreading” the more powerful predecessor, to be able to swerve away from his massive and obstructive presence. The weak misreader is the poet who gives in to that anxiety of influence. But all poets, strong or weak, are misreaders of their predecessors because there is no easy, disinterested way to read one’s ancestors, just as there is no easy, disinterested way to be a child of one’s parents” (Wood, 2019).

Tarantino exhibits characteristics of a 'strong misreader,' comprehending his cinematic past and replicating it based on his understanding. Conversely, Lokesh Kanagaraj leans towards being a 'weak misreader,' succumbing to the 'anxiety of influence.' Many of his films draw direct inspiration or influence from others, as seen in *Kaithi* (2019), similar to the uncredited influence of John Carpenter's 1973 American action thriller *Assault on Precinct 13*. This act of borrowing without credit raised questions about Lokesh's credibility, and his reluctance to acknowledge it contributed to a gradual decline in his standing. Despite being a 'weak misreader,' Lokesh has carved out his niche and gained recognition in the Indian film industry.

Misinterpretation is not confined to authors alone but extends to readers as well. In their attempt to unravel the film's meaning, visual readers often comprehend an interpretation that diverges from the intended significance. This phenomenon underscores the intricate nature of cinematic interpretation, where diverse perspectives and subjective experiences contribute to the multifaceted meanings that viewers extract from a visual narrative. The potential for misreading lies in the authorial intent and the individual lenses through which readers approach and interpret visual storytelling. As an example, Lokesh attempts to create films with an anti-drug message, yet the narrative he presents paradoxically conveys a meaning contrary to his intended anti-drug stance. In an interview, when questioned on his stance on glorifying drugs, he said:

When they say glorifying drugs... if I make a film where I claim that consuming this drug will give you superpower, then I should be ashamed of it. All my heroes are fighting for a drug-free society. So, we have to end up showing what the drug is... And I don't accept mine are violent films. They are action films. It is a genre that is prevalent across the world. We all remember our action heroes... I just don't concern myself too much about the criticism. (“Lokesh Kanagaraj on Glorification of Violence”, 2023)

#### 4.5 Implied Reader and Actual Reader

The surge in technological advancements, including the prevalence of social media, YouTube, and OTT platforms, has immensely expanded individuals' exposure to global cinema, enabling them to explore films from various languages and cultures. Despite the enriching experience this exposure provides, it simultaneously poses a challenge in deciphering the true meaning of films. Wolfgang Iser points out the considerable 'subjectivism' of the reader, which can lead to distortions in understanding. In his classification, Iser distinguishes between the implied reader and the actual reader, emphasising the intricate interplay between the reader's subjective interpretation and the film's intended meaning. This dynamic relationship highlights the complexities of navigating diverse cultural and linguistic cinematic landscapes

in the digital age.

Wolfgang Iser states, "An implied reader is a hypothetical figure who is likely to grasp most of what the author intended." When an author writes a book or article, they do so with certain readers in mind, believing that those known as the implied reader will understand or appreciate the metaphors and ironies inherent in the text. ("The Implied Reader vs Actual Reader", 2017).

A film crafted in a specific language and cultural context is naturally tailored for an audience of that particular linguistic and spatial milieu. It is intended for those individuals to engage with and appreciate. However, the accessibility of foreign films has given rise to a broader audience, creating more implied viewers who seek a connection with the film to decipher its meaning.

This expansion in the viewer base transcends the traditional boundaries of language and culture, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to associate themselves with films that might initially be considered foreign to them. In this context, the implied viewership becomes crucial in bridging cultural gaps and fostering a more global understanding and appreciation of cinema.

Tarantino tailors his cinematic creations to an audience immersed in his native language and cultural context, comprising the primary viewers who share his linguistic and cultural nuances. The intended meaning undergoes a twofold distortion when perceived by the implied reader, who not only severs the creator from the creation but also misconstrues the cultural subtleties embedded within. For instance, *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is meticulously crafted for an American audience, where the viewer's experience markedly differs between an American and an Indian audience. This implied reader often falls into a 'weak misreader,' interpreting the text through the lens of their existing knowledge base. Lokesh's *Leo* (2023) is a vivid illustration, shedding light on the intricate process where meaning can dissipate amid insufficient understanding, translation challenges, and interpretative nuances.

In the quest to bridge the divide between the film and its audience, triumph lies in the art of ideal reading. "The ideal reader is the one who would perfectly grasp what the writer seeks to convey and harmonise with the writer's ideological stance and life perception" (Lobo, p. 18-19).

Ultimately, the semantic essence of a text emanates from the symbiotic interplay between the author's deliberate intent and the discerning interpretation of the reader. This intricate interweaving of creative purpose and audience perception contributes to the profound intricacies of meaning embedded within the literary work. It underscores the dynamic synergy wherein the author's design converges with the reader's discernment, giving rise to a nuanced and layered comprehension that transcends the literal confines of the narrative.

## 5. Conclusion

The article elucidates the intertextual interplay among the triad of theatre: the audience, the director, and the film drawing insights from the works of filmmakers Quentin Tarantino and Lokesh Kanagaraj to illuminate their enduring impact on societal perceptions and cultural narratives.

Across diverse artistic domains, intertextuality permeates, with inspiration as its keystone. At the same time, the genuineness of the artwork fundamentally hinges on the director's adeptness in transcending imitation and infusing it with originality. Intertextuality, fertile soil for creativity and ingenuity, empowers directors to interweave a tapestry of diverse influences and allusions, thereby fashioning a singular artistic vision. A director's deft handling of intertextual elements profoundly enhances the intricacy and profundity of the artwork, propelling it beyond mere replication towards genuine artistic resonance.

When approached within the context of tradition, 'misreading' emerges as a refined artistic pursuit, fostering reinterpretation and reimagination while interrogating established norms. This deliberate engagement with cultural and artistic heritage contributes to the dynamic evolution of artistic traditions. As Soviet Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky suggests, "A book read by a thousand people is a thousand different books" ("A Quote by Andrei Tarkovsky"), underscoring the myriad interpretations of a text among viewers and highlighting the significant influence wielded by audiences. To fully apprehend the nuanced meaning of arthouse and commercial films, viewers must cultivate a discerning perspective, embracing the director's cinematic vision while maintaining their viewpoint. Furthermore, the advancement of cinema is intricately linked to the growth of filmmakers, the creativity and innovation within the medium, and the changing preferences of audiences, shaping the transformative trajectory of cinema and accentuating the continual interplay between creative expression, cinematic evolution, and audience engagement.

## Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

## Authors' contributions

Dr. Rajasekaran V (Corresponding author) was responsible for the study design and revising. Cephas Prakash Raja R.C (first author) was responsible for the manuscript content and analyses. All authors (first and corresponding authors) read and approved the final manuscript.

## Funding

Not applicable.

## Competing interests

We declare that we have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work

reported in this paper.

#### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

#### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

#### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer-reviewed.

#### **Data availability statement**

No data are available.

#### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

#### **Open access**

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

#### **Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

#### **References**

- “Lokesh Kanagaraj on Glorification of Violence: ‘We All Remember Our Action Heroes...’ (2023, October 10). *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from [indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/tamil/lokesh-kanagaraj-on-glorification-of-violence-we-all-remember-our-action-heroes-8976619/lite](https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/tamil/lokesh-kanagaraj-on-glorification-of-violence-we-all-remember-our-action-heroes-8976619/lite)
- “Lokesh Kanagaraj on His Growing Influence With Superstars: ‘Vijay’s Thalapathy 67 Will Be 100 per Cent My Film’”. (2022, December 28). *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from [indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/lokesh-kanagaraj-vijay-thalapathy-67-8348339/lite](https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/lokesh-kanagaraj-vijay-thalapathy-67-8348339/lite)
- “Quentin Tarantino News and Biography”. (1963, March 27). *Empire*. Retrieved from [www.empireonline.com/people/quentin-tarantino/#](http://www.empireonline.com/people/quentin-tarantino/#)
- “Quentin Tarantino: ‘It’s a Corrupted Cinema’”. (2021, May 19). *The Talks*, [the-talks.com/interview/quentin-tarantino](https://the-talks.com/interview/quentin-tarantino).
- A Journey Through the Filmography of Quentin Tarantino: Themes and Style. *Movies DM - Know Behind The Movies*. (2023, August 09). Retrieved from [moviedm.com/2023/08/09/a-journey-through-the-filmography-of-quentin-tarantino-themes-and-style](https://moviedm.com/2023/08/09/a-journey-through-the-filmography-of-quentin-tarantino-themes-and-style).
- A Quote by Andrei Tarkovsky. *Goodreads*. Retrieved from [www.goodreads.com/quotes/1210852-a-book-read-by-a-thousand-different-people-is-a](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1210852-a-book-read-by-a-thousand-different-people-is-a).
- Andrei Tarkovsky: A Poet in the Cinema (1984). *IMBD*. Retrieved from [www.imdb.com/title/tt0366908/characters/nm0001789](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366908/characters/nm0001789).
- Astruc, A. The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo. *Newwavefilm*. Retrieved from [www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml](http://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml)
- Barthes, R., & Stephen, H. (1977). The Death of the Author. *Image-Music-Text*, *ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA10872380*
- Bloom, H., & Mann De Paul. The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry. *Comparative Literature*, 26(3), 269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1769856>.
- Cronenberg, D. (Director). (2005). *A History of Violence* [Film]. Benderspink Media.
- Director, M. Murphy. (2023, July 25). A Deep Dive Into the Directorial Style of Quentin Tarantino. *Medium*, Retrieved from [medium.com/@markmurphydirector/a-deep-dive-into-the-directorial-style-of-quentin-tarantino-fd1448dc4de2#](https://medium.com/@markmurphydirector/a-deep-dive-into-the-directorial-style-of-quentin-tarantino-fd1448dc4de2#)
- Django Unchained*. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, Weinstein Company, 2012.
- Eliot, T. S. (1982). Tradition and the Individual Talent. *Perspecta*, 19, 36–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048>
- Galatta Plus. (2023, October 07). Lokesh Kanagaraj Interview With Baradwaj Rangan | Leo | Thalapathy Vijay | LCU | Subtitled. *YouTube*, Retrieved from [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GephkkzFwFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GephkkzFwFA)
- Greene, R., & Mohammed, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Quentin Tarantino and Philosophy: How to Philosophize with a Pair of Pliers and a Blowtorch*. Retrieved from [openlibrary.org/books/OL18292984M/Quentin\\_Tarantino\\_and\\_philosophy](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL18292984M/Quentin_Tarantino_and_philosophy)
- Kanagaraj, L. (Director). (2017). *Maanagaram* [Film]. Potential Film Studios.
- Kanagaraj, L. (Director). (2019). *Kaithi* [Film]. Dream Warrior and Vivekananda Pictures.

- Kanagaraj, L. (Director). (2020). *Master* [Film]. Seven Screen Studios.
- Kanagaraj, L. (Director). (2022). *Vikram*. Raaj Kamal Films International.
- Kanagaraj, L. (Director). (2023). *Leo* [Film]. Seven Screen Studios.
- Kelly, M. (2014). "Popular Culture". *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press.
- Kristeva, J., & Moi, T. (Eds.). (1986). *The Kristeva Reader*, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA00525868.
- Lobo, A. G. *Reader-Response Theory: A Path Towards Wolfgang Iser*. Retrieved from <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/5476170.pdf>
- Mcintosh, A. (2016). *The Quentin Tarantino Handbook*, Emereo Publishing.
- Nath, A., & Nath, A. (2023, February 20). Lokesh Kanagaraj Is Tamil Tarantino. His Hit-machine Universe Is Ready and Ripe. *ThePrint*. Retrieved from the [print.in/feature/lokesh-kanagaraj-is-tamil-tarantino-his-hit-machine-universe-is-ready-ripe/1383075/](https://print.in/feature/lokesh-kanagaraj-is-tamil-tarantino-his-hit-machine-universe-is-ready-ripe/1383075/)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich W. (1878). *Human, All Too Human*, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA29421514
- Onikoyi, T. (2006). Film and literature: Connections and disconnections. *Unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*.
- Subramanian, L. (2022, June 18). Vikram Director Lokesh Kanagaraj Is Building His Own Cinematic Universe. *The Week*. Retrieved from [www.theweek.in/theweek/leisure/2022/06/18/vikram-director-lokesh-kanagaraj-is-building-his-own-cinematic-universe.amp.html](https://www.theweek.in/theweek/leisure/2022/06/18/vikram-director-lokesh-kanagaraj-is-building-his-own-cinematic-universe.amp.html).
- Tan, J. On the Theory of Misreading. *2020 International Conference on Social Science and Social Phenomena (ICSSSP2020)*, 824–827. <https://doi.org/10.38007/Proceedings.0001182>.
- Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1992). *Reservoir Dogs* [Film]. Miramax Films.
- Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1995). *Pulp Fiction* [Film]. Miramax.
- Tarantino, Q. (Director). (2004). *Kill Bill Vol. 1* [Film]. Miramax Films.
- Tarantino, Q. (Director). (2005). *Kill Bill Vol. 2* [Film]. Miramax Films.
- Tarantino, Q. (Director). (2019). *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* [Film]. Sony Pictures.
- The Implied Reader Vs the Actual Reader. (2017, November 19). *Media Literacy Blog*. Retrieved from [abduddayyaan.wordpress.com/2017/11/19/the-implied-reader-vs-the-actual-reader](https://abduddayyaan.wordpress.com/2017/11/19/the-implied-reader-vs-the-actual-reader).
- Traven, J. (2014, October 14). Quentin Tarantino: The Inspiration For Pulp Fiction [Video]. *YouTube*, Retrieved from [https://youtu.be/t5KkI\\_YS4ug?si=DhSPlkj\\_sBMqnkQw](https://youtu.be/t5KkI_YS4ug?si=DhSPlkj_sBMqnkQw)
- Tryhubava, D. (2020). Film annotations as an object of discourse analysis. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.08.165>
- When Quentin Tarantino Was Inspired by Kamal Haasan's Film. (2019). *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from [indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/tamil/when-quentin-tarantino-was-inspired-by-kamal-haasan-5901680/lite](https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/tamil/when-quentin-tarantino-was-inspired-by-kamal-haasan-5901680/lite).
- Willette, J. *Harold Bloom: A Map of Misreading Art History Unstuffed*. [arthistoryunstuffed.com/harold-bloom-a-map-of-misreading](https://arthistoryunstuffed.com/harold-bloom-a-map-of-misreading).
- Wood, J. (2019, October 16). Misreading Harold Bloom. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from [www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/misreading-harold-bloom](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/postscript/misreading-harold-bloom)