

# Exposing Althusser's State Apparatuses through Ishmael Reed's *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*

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## Abstract

The present research argues that it seems not all writers and their works may fall into an omnipresent ideology trap as Althusser conceives it; or unlike what Althusser holds, not all fictional characters are 'interpellated'. Therefore, this research gives focal attention to reconsidering Althusser notion of ideology and his Ideological State Apparatus, ISAs, especially the cultural ISA through a descriptive-analytical method. Reed's novel, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* (1967), enjoying circumstantial artistic, religious, ethnic, racial, and literary characters, presents protagonists who not only refute or subvert this domineering ideology but also reshape and redefine it, making it necessary to reconsider Althusserian definition of literature as a cultural ISA. The novel, parodying "the Afro-American tradition of first-person, confessional narratives" is read as a microcosm to repudiate Althusser's macrocosmic notions of reality. All through, the findings indicate that through the course of the novel, Reed subverts the dominant cultural and ideological discourse of American society through questioning the White standards from language and notions of reality to the ruling system.

## Keywords

Ideological State Apparatuses, Religious State Apparatuses, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, reality, interpellation.

## 1. Introduction

This research aims at discussing whether Ishmael Reed's *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* reflects one dominant ideology, as Althusser argues, or reflect on the opposing ideologies as well. It also seeks to find to what extent Reed's novel falls into the Althusserian definition of literature as the cultural ISA. The other question of research tries to answer is why Reed provides a good case study for discussing Althusser and how Reed's novel can refute and expose Althusserian ideology.

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Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Ishmael Scot Reed (1938 –) grew up in Buffalo, New York, where he went to school and attended university. He is an indispensable part of the Afro-American literary tradition. The main objective of his works is demonstrating the sophistication of the Afro-American experience quite different from the dominant literary tradition. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Afro-American fiction focused mainly on realistic presentation of black life and used known narrative techniques. However, Reed belongs to a different tradition believing that expression tool is just as important as the matter.

Although Reed's novels mainly aim at establishing an Afro-American aesthetics, his fiction ostensibly pictures the social condition of black Americans. In their introduction to *Ishmael Reed: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, Elizabeth and Thomas Settle express their angst over incessant racism and maintain that the personal experience of racism prevalent in Reed's works is menacing to many readers. "I am a member of a class which has been cast to the bottom of the American caste system, and from those depths I write a vision which is still strange, often frightening, 'peculiar' and 'odd' to some, 'ill-considered' and unwelcome to many" (xxii). Moreover, Reed's fiction, as Brucker holds, presents an "Osirian/Dionysian vision" and a "sensuous humanism as an appropriate cultural alternative for non-white Americans." His fictional reformulation of the American West, the Harlem Renaissance, the American Civil War, and present American politics, combined with ancient myths, and non-European folk customs are among his liberating heresies aiming at emancipating readers from the intellectual hegemony of the "Judeo-Christian tradition" (2).

At first glance, the subject of Reed's novel is familiar to readers of African American literature. It depicts a black man with a white background who is entangled in the snare of white society and powerless to appositely express himself as an autonomous individual. However, while the struggles of the blacks are typically dramatized in a set of clashes with the realities of their social, cultural, and political constraints, Reed resists these ideological realities by disrupting in the conventions of dramatic presentation. Conventionally, the literary representation of black expression is characterized by an air of seriousness. Reed, nevertheless, assumes an anti-serious approach to tradition; in doing so, he satirizes his fellow writers' internalization of white values who take the dominant convention seriously. While Reed is serious about black tribulations, his repudiation of serious art indicates his postmodern penchant by which the novelist refuses to be dominated by the ethics of former expectations and modes of expression.

This is predicted in Reed's emphasis on the deficient representation of self and language as the dominant symbol. For instance, the protagonist Bukka is introduced with a "GOLDEN BEDPAN... ENGRAVED ON THE BOTTOM" (45) and on having this taken off him at a later time, fell "to his knees and threw the kat all kinds of Al Iblson mammies

one after the other” (66). The broken, informal English as well as strange images used in the excerpt suggest how black experience is represented as an indefinite sequence of discontinuities and partings from white ethics and rationality. Instead of applying complex metaphors, refined prose, and allegorical signs, all of which in a significant number of black writers contribute to a representation of black experience, Reed uses discontinuity to repudiate “Europeanisation and instead provides surface meaning, literary ‘offenses’, fragmentation and grim laughter, exorcising ‘style’, ‘form’ and ‘meaning’ to clear enough literary space for the articulation of non-Western, non-white forms” (Dorling 291). Reed, nevertheless, assumes an anti-serious approach to tradition; in doing so, he satirizes his fellow writers’ internalization of white values who take the dominant convention seriously. While Reed is serious about black tribulations, his repudiation of serious art indicates his postmodern penchant by which the novelist refuses to be dominated by the ethics of former expectations and modes of expression.

## 2. Literature Review

Ishmael Reed’s fiction and non-fiction have been the subject of a variety of scholarly studies. What follows is a rather selective review of the significant studies on Reed’s fictional enterprises. For example, Amy Schmidt in “Horses Chomping at the Global Bit: Ideology, Systemic Injustice, and Resistance in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse*” argues that “Hurston’s portrayals of Voodoo place her in a tradition with Charles Chesnutt and Ishmael Reed, both of whom emphasize the religion as a practice of resistance” (187). To Hurston, though Voodoo is usually seen as resistance to racial exploitation, African-American religious rituals are also practiced to dismantle other forms of exploitation. By taking these examples into account, she indicates that just like white societies, the Caribbean culture is suppressing black women. Although not directly dealing with this Reed, the approach that Schmidt takes is in line with what the researcher is determined to undertake.

Along with her, Jerome Klinkowitz in “Fiction: The 1960s to the Present” (2010) reviewing Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* believes it is best read as an “anti-plantation tradition” novel, as it both draws upon the slave-narrative tradition and manages to “write against the long shadow cast by *Gone with the Wind* on popular memories of slavery, the antebellum South, and the Civil War era.” As a postmodern novel, it interrogates notions of mastery and master narratives of history; in a revisionist manner, it incorporates counter-narratives that have heretofore been blocked (370). The other scholar who has considered Reed’s works is Jeffrey Scott Ebbesen. In his dissertation titled “Ideology and its Others: The Postmodern Fiction of Ishmael Reed, Kathy Acker and Don DeLillo”, Jeffrey Scott Ebbesen starts by examining *Mumbo Jumbo*’s identity via Haitian Voodoo, which to him echoes the postmodern disintegration of identity and

authorship. Yet he argues Reed's fiction deals with modernist ideas as well. A continual criticism of history, policy, and ethics of dominant white society is what among other things makes him a modernist writer. Ebbesen notably uses postmodern assumptions and intertextuality to indicate that beyond the unified text, self, and genre, there is a ubiquitous "phallogocentrism", which is central to capitalism's oppression of both the poor and women.

Likewise, *Imagining Each Other: Blacks and Jews in Contemporary American Literature* studies the complicated ways in which the black American Jews picture each other in arts and literature, and delves into the relationship among the black American communities. Goffman illustrates the dramatic collusions, rifts, and dilemmas they undergo as they strive to assimilate and form their identity. He also discusses the indissoluble issues of ethnic divides and financial inequality that overshadows the Black-Jewish narrative. Addressing the 1960s and its socio-political upshots, the book unveils how these communities "view each other through a complex dialectic of identification and difference, channeled by ever-shifting positions within American society" (262). Through the works of Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Richard Wright, and Ishmael Reed, Goffman narrates the story of two groups with strong biblical and mythical links reincarnated in the contemporary world.

In "Ideological Tension: Cultural Nationalism and Multiculturalism in the Novels of Ishmael Reed" Jennifer A. Jordan concludes, Reed is not the first writer to need to rationalize the emotional pull of nationalism with the intellectual demands of other ideological positions. "Reed need not resist his ethnocentric impulses or apologize for his inconsistent response to Black Nationalism," Jordan argues. This very inconsistency reflects "the history of the African American literary tradition and places him in some excellent literary company" (57).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Marx and Engels saw ideology as containing all the ways and practices by which all people become cognizant of the production relations and their unavoidable resulting class struggle on which their society was organized. On the contrary, Althusser sees the superstructure as the driving force of all the dominant governments arguing that it is through the hidden working of these supposedly neutral and cultural-based constructions that governments secure their dominance and power. In *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (2102), Althusser emphasizes "the dominant class must transform its power from one based upon violence to one based upon consent. Through the free and habitual consent of its subjects, such a dominant class needs to elicit obedience that could not be maintained by force alone" (257).

Althusser's rereading of Marxism took place at a time when the school was nearly extinct in Europe and America. Althusser revived an approach that carried with itself obnoxious labels due to its disastrous solutions for humanity. To adapt it to the topical issues of the time, Althusser began a "symptomatic reading" of Marxism and presented his distinctive philosophy along the way. One of Althusser's focal points is the way he reconsiders Marxian basic levels. Marx and Engels saw societies in terms of structures functioning based on two primary levels: the base and the superstructure. While the former is economically driven, the latter refers to legal, ideological, and political institutions that guarantee the working of economy.

Using Reed's novel to counter such an argument and finding examples from ISAs and RSAs which do not comply with what Althusser holds to dominant every society and culture are the key points that will be dealt with in this paper. To do so, the author seeks to present ideological and religious apparatuses in the novel which subvert the definition presented for the universal terms by presented and defined by Althusser.

#### **4. Ideology, American Dream, and the Distorted Reality**

Reed's first fictional production, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* does not contain the relative universality of his later works. The novel is primarily concerned with a topical social reality, but astutely represents how such realities are ideologically stricken. This strategy keeps in line with Althusser's contention that states refer to reality and history, but taint it with illusion. "in short, the 'lived' relation between men and the world, including History (in political action or inaction), passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology itself* (Althusser, *For Marx*, 2005, 233). To discuss the interaction of literature and ideology, Eagleton adopts a sociological, historical survey. After discussing the substitution of religion with literature in the Victorian age because of the failure of religion in winning the hearts of the masses, Eagleton proceeds to explain the ideological workings of literature. He observes, since literature deals with universals, it obliterates seemingly insignificant demands and desires, leading to the adoption of pluralistic attitudes among the masses; since literature tries to communicate the bourgeois civilization, it creates respect for middle-class accomplishments; and since literature is mostly a solitary practice, it precludes collective attempts for liberation (Eagleton 22).

The novel begins with the intention of being a satiric argument on Newark politics, but later the satire dissolves into the question of the American way of leading life within its compass. Since an ideological idol in American life is the core of the American Dream, the novel explores the epitomization of such an American approach to life in the struggles made by Bukka Doopeyduk to realize it. Since the idea of the American Dream primarily caters to white American individuals and as a result marginalizes the lower-class people, Reed as an anti-ideological figure is incisively critical of it. For this reason, Reed makes Bukka an

archetypal image of those black Americans who were interpellated by the promise at the cost of repudiating reality. The sacrifice of reality is the final cost of being interpellated to ideology and this is why Bukka is punished in Reed's fiction: readers see his transition from a situation of student Nazarene priest to a hospital agent and to a disillusioned black man whose destiny is nothing but death. Similar to the "imaginary" and "material" nature of ideology, its unconscious aspect is equally emphasized by Althusser:

Ideology is in fact a method of representations, but in most cases these representations are not connected with "consciousness": they are usually images and sporadically concepts, but it is primarily as *structures* that they impose on the vast majority of men, not through their "consciousness". They are perceived-accepted suffered cultural things and they perform functionally on men by means of a process that escapes them. (Althusser, *For Marx* 233)

As an interpellated character, Bukka might be exposed to reality, but this reality is infused with illusion. The ideological discourse of his time offers a logocentric figure called HARRY SAM (UNCLE SAM) whose function is to deprive individuals of their individuality; he forces them to a totalizing entity, an interpellating process that prevents the diversity needed to bring about a better world for African Americans. Exposed to this hailing figure, Bukka is represented as a passive man who devotes himself to SAM's standards and tenets, feeling the ideological pleasure and content that Althusser refers to: "I live in HARRY SAM. HARRY SAM is something else. A big not-to-be-believed out-of-sight, sometimes referred to as O-BOP-SHE-BANG or KLANG-A-LANG-ADING-DONG" (10). As he confesses, Bukka sees himself in the mirror of ideology, which is exemplified in SAM, and as a result feels a kind of gratifying membership in the process of interpellation. Althusser emphasizes that duplication and mirror-structure is an essential part of all ideology. In its interpellating process, "It is around this center, which functions as the guarantor of recognition, that ideology interpellates individuals into subjects, 'subjects the subjects to the Subject'" (Diken 23). In his definition of the relationship between ideology and history, Althusser breaks from the classical definition of ideology by Enlightenment. Habjan and Imlinger call Althusser's statement a "Marxian epistemological break with ideology [...] by Althusser" (30). Althusser believes that ideology is partly defined through the historical illusions that it presents and it is out of this process that science in Althusserian sense, i.e. the science of historical materialism, emerges. Althusser argues ideology does not "reflect" the real world but "represents" the "[imaginary](#) relationship of individuals" to the real world; the thing ideology represents is "itself already at one remove from the real". In other words, we are always within ideology because we rely on language to establish our "reality"; different ideologies are but different representations of our social and [imaginary](#) "reality" not a representation of the [Real](#) itself (14).

The characterization of SAM in terms of capitalist ideals is another indication of his ideological and interpellating function. SAM has become a successful man in realizing the promise of the American Dream which is itself a sign of ideological consent. He is represented as one who has been able to go through the course of poverty to prosperity. In this sense, Althusser says that “ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects” (170). Although presenting his example of interpellation in an earthly figure, he makes it clear that the “becoming-subject” is some prenatal process. Even before birth, it is certain in advance that a child will bear his Father's Name, and will therefore have an irreplaceable identity. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived (177).

Bukka remembers that SAM’s father was “A self-made Pole and former used-car salesman”, and that his mother was a “low-down, filthy hobo infected with hoof-and-mouth disease” (10). The transition from such a family to prosperity is nothing but a great success for SAM, a change in fate that is predicted in the American Dream. Having his mother, another important archetypal figure, as a guide, SAM attains the summits of “top dog in the Harry Sam Motel and Master of HIMSELF” (11). The question of being “Master of HIMSELF” is an illusion that is implemented by Ideological Apparatuses. As Althusser points out, the idea of being free is ideologically informed as ideological discourses leave no room for any human agency. SAM is content with his state and feels that he dominates himself and his fate, but this consent is the very ideological one that Althusser refers to.

SAM’s ideological “consent” makes him associated with the Nation, the one which is the State. Thus, it is no accident that HARRY SAM is iconized in society: “A statue of HARRY SAM reigned overall, this time standing with his hands draped over two marvelous Victorian urinals” (19). In such an interpellating presence, the subject and the object are associated and mingled in a unified whole and the latter instills values in the mind of the former. In such an ideological relationship, Bukka finds an interpellated figure, i.e. SAM, as his prototype. In seeing himself in the mirror of SAM, Bukka tries to be absorbed by the very values by which SAM has attained prominence: he struggles to be “Master of HIMSELF” and achieves the very success that his prototype has achieved. This interpellating process is at times mentioned by Bukka: “I am flunking just about everything and plus I’m kinda restless. I want to get married and see what’s out in the world. Got to go, Polyglot” (12). While Bukka is represented to be a man of the quest, this quest is shown to be ideological in the novel by an emphasis on the lack of any individuality. The following dialogue between Bukka and his neighbor is a prime example:

In the hall the neighbor spoke to me. “You must be the couple that moved in here a few weeks ago.”

“That’s right. My name is Bukka Doopeyduk. What’s yours?”

“My mother lost my name in a lottery, Mr. Doopeyduk. Why don’t you jess call me the neighbor, and so’s you kin ‘stinguish between me and my wife, refer to me as M/Neighbor and my wife as F/Neighbor.” (22)

Bukka's neighbor has no name and he gives himself a name through the role he plays for Bukka, i.e. being his neighbor. Because naming is a way of giving identity to people, the fact of having a unique name means that the person has a distinctive individuality. Therefore, the neighbor states that his mother has lost his name in a lottery, indicating that identity and individuality are so adventitiously decided that can be missing in an instant. In this description, the lottery plays an ideological role. It is a distinctively Americanized practice which is a manifestation of the American Dream of prosperity. The case of the neighbor reveals that while the lottery can bring about a quick road to prosperity, it can also have a devastating result. In contrast to Bukka's emphasis on his distinctive identity, the neighbor's lack of any proper name is a blow to the idea of being "Master of HIMSELF".

The neighbor with his loss of identity acts as a foil to Bukka's search for individuality. This attempt at foiling is done to show how Bukka is in illusion in the achievement of mastery over his destiny. Though there are some occasions in which Bukka comes across people like M/Neighbor who may suggest the futility of seeking out individuality, he proceeds to struggle to be a person like SAM. As a result, he is a devout follower of SAM, and wholeheartedly believes in his uprightness. Although this devotedness may bring some ideological hope and consent for him, the very fact of being exposed to white values makes Bukka witness his sense of his true identity growing misplaced and corrupt. This racial identity is emphasized in the novel when it is mentioned that Bukka aims "to become the first bacteriological warfare expert of the race" (16). The tendency for achieving a place like that of SAM necessitates a move from rags to riches. Though this transition involves unfavorable undertakings, their realities are ideologically veiled through positive words:

What do you do for a living, Mr. Doopeyduk?"

"I am a psychiatric technician."

"What precisely does that involve?" (15)

The excerpt reveals that language which is expected to be a referential medium to reflect realities acts as a way to conceal them. In other words, language does not contribute to the clarification of realities but rather hides them through distortion of realities. This representation of reality is highlighted in the backdrop of Bukka's claim to have the scientific job of a "psychiatric technician" - which means he investigates feces, evacuates colostomy bags, and assists in administering electric shock treatment for those afflicted with a distorted sense of reality. Bukka's ability to get this job means that the protagonist should be aware of normal and abnormal approaches to reality, while he does not know it in his life, and as Collins argues, "the irony of Bukka's unreflective boast is a measure of just how uninformed he is" (427).

Encircled by ideological discourses, Bukka moves from one predetermined, interpellating role to another. Though he may think that this movement is done through his volition, it is a process of falling from an ideological pattern to another. For instance, when Bukka decides to leave college, he thinks that he is practicing free will, while he is falling into another ideological role:

“It’s all right, U2 Polyglot. I just stopped by to tell you that I was leaving school.”

“Leaving school? Why how can that be, Bukka?” [...]

“You’re one of the best Nazarene apprentices here. Why, you’re on your way to becoming the first bacteriological warfare expert of the colored race.” (12)

U2 Polyglot struggles to keep Bukka interpolated in what Althusser calls the educational ISA, though Reed informs readers that Bukka mostly fails his classes. The insistence on remaining in the educational system and the reminder “becoming the first bacteriological warfare expert of the colored race” is nothing but to keep Bukka interpellated. However, Bukka’s desire to “see what’s out in the world” is nothing but being trapped in another ideological discourse. As these examples reveal, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, like other novels by Reed, contains the dominant theme of exposing how reality is the part and parcel of ideological discourses. All ideological institutions including language, family, and education produce the kind of reality that serves the consolidation of State Apparatuses.

##### **5. The Religious State Apparatuses: An Innocent Practice?**

As a predominant interpellating entity, the concern for the religious ISA is repeated in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*. This concern is a common ground in nearly all of Reed’s novels to indicate that religion as a seemingly innocent practice is seriously involved with furthering ideological discourses. Religion is a center around which other phenomena including culture and the arts revolve. This centrality is emphasized in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* by the fact that Bukka is provided with the chair of the bishop of Soulsville, an event which is once again decided by HARRY SAM.

While Bukka is frequently represented as an interpellated subject manipulated by HARRY SAM, he is paradoxically given agency in the story when he is offered the position of the bishop of Soulsville. However, since this position is allotted by HARRY SAM, Bukka’s agency of the religious ISA is nothing but an illusion of having agency. This illusion is emphasized by HARRY SAM’s repetitive use of “I” in his description of Bukka’s agency and the indication that this “I” is to be assigned to Bukka:

I look through my binoculars and see everything flying over there in NOTHING which is ME Now, I been looking ... at Soulsville and I’m not happy with what I see. The people seem to have a lot of FRUSTRATION, ANXIETY and DESPAIR down there. ... Go down there in Soulsville and tell them IT’S GOIN’ BE ALL RIGHT, BY AND BY IN THE SKY (89).

Since Bukka sees himself in the mirror of HARRY SAM, the “I” HARRY SAM confers upon Bukka is an interpellating identity that gives an ideological role to Bukka. This ideological agency is predicted in the novel from the very opening where Bukka is portrayed associated with religion: “That afternoon we sat in the front row of the Church of the Holy Mouth, a big Byzantine monstrosity that stood smack in the middle of Soulsville” (16). Reed portrays his protagonist among ideological discourses of religion to stress the omnipresence of religion in human experience. However, before being assigned the agency of the religious ISA, Bukka overtly expresses his discontent over the metanarratives, such as fraternity, coming from religious institutions:

“Me too,” said the other orderly, turning to me as I buttoned my shortsleeved white shirt. “Doopeyduk, you heah ‘bout the man come in the hospital last night jessa screamin’ and hollin’?”

“No,” I answered coldly, not wishing to encourage fraternizing with the other orderlies from Soulsville whom I considered lowly ruttish lumpen. (44)

In this excerpt, Bukka feels to be an interpellated subject exposed to ideological discourses. The word “fraternizing” is a metanarrative that is frequently an indispensable part of ideological discourses. Such grand-narratives not only do not result in emancipation but also create bondage in the very people whom they have interpellated. It is this bondage that Bukka as a potentially interpellated character tries to evade. Nevertheless, when Bukka is later to be given agency in the religious ISA, he proves to be satisfied in the very metanarratives from which he tried to evade:

“But now I think he’s lost his drive, that certain spark. Seems a little gumless and stick-to-itiveness without. I want you to take that job. Go down there in Soulsville and tell them IT’S GOIN’ BE ALL RIGHT, BY AND BY IN THE SKY.”

“Say it again, SAM,” I said, not wanting to jumble my first assignment as Nazarene Bishop. I was overjoyed! (92)

Bukka now uses the word “overjoyed” when faced with the ideological contention “IT’S GOIN’ BE ALL RIGHT.” What HARRY SAM as an interpellating figure recommends about Bukka’s association with the commoners in Soulsville is the very “fraternizing” that Bukka feels dissatisfied with. However, once Bukka feels he has agency in the process of fraternizing, he bristles with the feeling of being “overjoyed.” This sense of overjoy keeps in line with Althusser’s contention that ideological discourses are a locus where “consent” in subjects is implemented. When Bukka fails to have agency in the religious ISA, he feels “discontented” with the related metanarratives, but when he is associated with it, the metanarrative in questions turn into satisfying concepts. Thus, it is natural

to see the interpellated Bukka cheerfully repeating the very words HARRY SAM puts in his mind: “Upstairs in the huge guest room I decided to spend the night going over lines to be delivered to the audience of Soulsville. ‘IT’S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, BY AND BY IN THE SKY. ... IT’S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, BY AND BY IN THE SKY’” (93). Once embracing the role assigned to him, Bukka finds himself rejoicing in feelings of satisfaction:

But I couldn’t concentrate; my mind was still aglow from the wonderful news from the summer’s festival. I lay in the bed with my hands supporting my head, dreaming about what direction my career would take. What would the other Nazarene apprentices think of me now? A Bishop of Soulsville and only twenty-three. I would be one of the youngest, if not the youngest, Bishop in the history of out-of-sight. I rose and went to a mirror. Primping and preening myself I reflected on what kind of Bishop I would be. (93)

Bukka has achieved the Althusserian “consent” in his association with the religious ISA through the ideological status of HARRY SAM. He is so manipulated by his hero that he at times acts as a justifier of the status quo. For instance, when he talks about the controversial issue of celibacy in Christianity, Bukka justifies HARRY SAM the dictator in this way: “SAM had no real hard-and-fast rule about celibacy. In fact, most of the Nazarene Bishops were celibate by inclination rather than by dogma or coercion” (93). While the question of celibacy is generally taken to be a dogmatic practice, the interpellated Bukka in his justifying mission tries to show it to be a practice freely assumed by bishops. This justification is at the service of freeing HARRY SAM’s church from any accusation of being involved with ideology and interpellation.

The agency HARRY SAM is invested within the religious ISA is also discernible in the character of the Reverend Éclair Porkchop who introduced himself in this way: “I am Eclair Porkchop, head of the Church of the Holy Mouth. I am sorry to detain you but I had to do some work downtown for SAM” (17). Also, similar to Bukka, Porkchop is caricatured in the novel through the fact that he is a well-fed preacher and is given religious authority in a very ridiculous way: “The newsreel was an account of the previous week’s events: the choking of SAM’s valves by bantam roosters’ feathers, the dislodging of these feathers by Rev. Eclair Porkchop and his subsequent coronation as Bishop of Soulsville” (53). As the excerpt reveals, the donation of a religious agency to Porkchop is decided by the laughable act of curing a problem for HARRY SAM. By pointing out that “Rev. Eclair Porkchop whose star was rising fast in SAM” (16), Reed further accentuates how HARRY SAM is capable of manipulating religion in various characters in the world of the novel. Here, Althusserian political views regarding ideology such as ideological and repressive state apparatuses, and interpellation are used to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive study of Reed’s novel.

## 6. The Cultural ISA: From Experience of Entertainment to Instillation of Ideology

As it was pointed out, Reed in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* is concerned to expose how reality is filtered through ideological apparatuses to be finally distorted for serving power structures. One of such filters that manipulate realities to achieve the desired domination is the arts. This exposition which is frequently repeated in other novels by Reed serves to demonstrate that beyond the simple experience of entertainment, there runs an instillation of ideology. This is best exemplified in the explanation of one of the characters of the novel, Arboreal Hairyman, who speaks about his attendance at the cinema: "I was in attendance at the public cinema viewing some film of the uprising from which our leader emerged victoriously and this young man debated some rabble who were speaking ill of the faith. I've not seen such a display of valor in all my years" (57). The story that Hairyman narrates represents an interruption in the class coalition, which is manifested in "the uprising," and the attempt by the hero, who is designated as "our leader," to restore order. The attendee who is interpellated in the cinema finally states "I've not seen such a display of valor in all my years."

The arts and the ideological discourses they produce is a recurrent obsession for Reed. In all his writings, the author "attacks what he sees as an illegitimate 'literary industrial complex,' whose keepers train 'politicians how to think,' with disastrous results" (Collins 422). To resist such ideological discourses, Reed not only writes but also organizes (Collins *ibid*). What Reed organizes is a reconsideration of the role of the arts through exposing their collusion with industry and politics. In his resistance against the kind literary practice that caters to Ideological State apparatuses, "Reed in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* savagely parodies the typical pseudo-autobiographical form and substance of the black novel" (Duff 139). Thus, what Reed exposes in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* as the cultural ISA is the practice of writing autobiography as a frequently practiced genre in African American literature. This parody is soon established in the novel when Harry Sam's mother advises him at her deathbed:

"Looka heah, SAM," his mother said before they lifted her into the basket and pulled the sheet over her empty pupils. "It's a cruel, cruel world and you gots to be swift .... But before I croak, I want to give you a little advice."

"Always be at the top of the heap. If you can't whup urn with your fists, keek urn. If you can't keek urn, butt urn. (10-11)

This advice given by Harry Sam's mother seems to have some predecessors in literature in general and African American literature in particular. One of the most familiar pieces of such advice is seen in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Early in the novel, the central character comes across the final words of advice made by his dying grandfather's addressed to his son:

On his deathbed he called my father to him and said, "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." (120)

Emphasizing the workings of representations in the process, Althusser states that men are made to believe that what they do is the result of their free will and are deceived in accepting false realities as their own realities and he argues that ideology does this through hidden layers to institutionalize these false realities in their consciousness:

They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men 'live' their ideologies as the Cartesian 'saw' or did not see – if he was not looking at it -- the moon two hundred paces away: *not at an as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world'* -- as their 'world' itself [...] Men live their actions, usually referred to as freedom and 'consciousness' by the classical tradition, in ideology, *by and through ideology*; in short, the 'lived' relation between men and the world, including History (in political action or inaction), passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology itself*. (Althusser, *For Marx* 233)

All through Ellison's novel, these words of advice turn into an ideological discourse that finds centrality on different occasions. Whenever the protagonist of Ellison's novel comes across instances of assuming a unique identity, these words reverberate in his mind. Since the grandfather had assumed an ideological agency in the family institution, the recurrence of his words in the protagonist's mind can be taken as an interpellating process in the Althusserian term. The fact that the protagonist frequently wrestles with the grandfather's words reacting to it by embracing them at times and spurning them at other times reveals how he experiences the process of interpellation. Acknowledging that he is "still plagued by his deathbed advice .... I can't figure it out; it escapes me" (497), the protagonist indicates the fact that his individuality and his search for the unique identity is, at least partially, determined by the ideological agency and that he has to embrace the advice in the final analysis.

The nature of advice in Ellison's novel is characterized by a belief in the possibility of exercising free will. Ellison and other African American writers seemingly assume that subjects are capable of deciding what course to follow independent of any enforcing power that deprives individuals of their agency. Reed, who is constantly preoccupied

with the impossibility of any human agency amid ideological discourses, describes a scene in which the mother of a despot, i.e. SAM, advises his son how to survive in an aggressive world. Those who have read the two novels can easily detect the relationship between the two and can consider Reed's novel as a parody of Ellison's novel. Reed parodies the advice in Ellison's novel to stress his disbelief in human agency, contemplation, insight, and linearity of experience (Duff 139-140).

Since Reed is overtly opposing ideological institutions of any kind, it is possible to argue that his act of parodying Ellison's novel indicates his lack of optimism in envisaging any possibility for achieving identity among the interpellating ideological discourses. This is manifested in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* when readers come to see that Bukka's attempts at attaining his desired identity mostly fails. This means that though Reed's reiterated parodying of the advice in Ellison's novel is comical, it tragically communicates the fact that individuals' involvement with ISAs leaves no room for any act of practicing free will and achieving unique identity. Thus, according to Reed, the faith in the possibility of having a true understanding of oneself and others is a false consciousness in Althusserian terms which in the final analysis is nothing but an illusion.

Reed's attempt at parodying another African American novel shows his dissatisfaction with the practice of literature by his fellow black writers. In Althusserian philosophy, literature is classified as an Ideological State Apparatuses. Similarly, Reed seems to be arguing that the kind of literature practiced by his fellow African Americans contributes to the ideological conviction that man is capable of having the power of decision over his courses and exercising free will. However, the very exposition of the ideological nature of the contentions of Ellison's novel in *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* dissociates Reed's novel with the accusation of being an ISA. Reed exposes that the pseudo-autobiographical works like that of Ellison are not autobiographical as autobiography presupposes the existence of agency in reflecting realities of the world. Since there is no such an agency, the very belief in writing an autobiography is illusory. Reed's parody of an ideological trend and conviction in the African American novel turns his writing into a counter-ideological discourse.

The protest against the ideological function of the arts is also indicated in the plotline of *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* in which Bukka is shown advancing to media personality. Though art is seemingly an innocent and autonomous practice, Reed emphasizes that it is closely associated with wealth and capital: "That night a limousine came to my loft and brought me up here where SAM introduced me to some of the most powerful people in art circles. Finally, I had such a demand for hoopla hoops that they began selling them in the A&P" (93). Bukka's entrance in the world of the art is once again decided by SAM and his ideological status. Similar to his association with the religious ISA, Bukka is once again interpellated in the ideological discourses. This is further highlighted in the novel when the marginal issues of one of the performances to which Bukka contributes are described:

Cipher X threw up his hands and said, “Be patient, fellows. I’ll answer all your questions in my news conference.” He took me by the elbows—the fuken elbow grabber with sterling high cheekbones—and escorted me through the throng of well-wishers toward his office. We had difficulty getting through. The Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences from the University of Buffalo with a surfboard tied to his back and a long petition hanging from his hands accosted us. (73-74)

One may claim that in his involvement with the interpellating process, though Bukka agrees that he has willingly chosen the course of the arts, he is pre-decided by white Ideological Apparatuses, the ones that give the black agency as long as ideological myths of the ruling ideology is furthered. However, due to his audacity, he has the potential to become another HARRY SAM. Yet, he is finally vanquished by the machinations of white hegemony and black servility: Bukka’s end is tragically doomed with torture in the hands of the free-lance pallbearers who are made up of white liberals and silent blacks and who are shown to be as never inhibiting the martyrdom of heroes, only idolizing them following their demise: “Hundreds of eyeholes encircled NOW-HERE. It was the Free-Lance Pallbearers. (Better late den never.) They had come to cut me down.” (105). Once a political upheaval eventually takes place, the new political establishment speaks in Chinese with a familiar, clear-cut message: “SAVE GREEN STAMPS” (106). Then, Reed informs his readers that a true emancipatory change is never achieved in the world of the novel as all are finally subjected to State Apparatuses whose institutional structure interpellates the very discourse of change. It is this impossibility for achieving any change that is best encapsulated in Bukka’s final words “What’s the use?” (105), an expression that is repeated three times throughout the novel. When this expression is uttered by a man who feels to have agency in the religious and the cultural ISAs, it is possible to conclude that the black agency is always overshadowed by white hegemony.

Besides the aforementioned concerns for the cultural ISA, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* shows other cultural solitudes through criticizing the way the seemingly salvaging practices is interpellated. For instance, Reed depicts the character Polyglot, dean of Harry Sam College, to demonstrate how he is involved with writing an article on “The Egyptian Dung Beetle in Kafka’s Metamorphosis” in an attempt to “add an element of experience to his paper” (12). Also, the novelist portrays the editors of a magazine called Poison Dart who are busy with the establishment of a symposium on the place of the black writer in present-day society with such subjects as “Should he glare at Charlie? Should he kinda stick out his lower lip and look mean? Or should he just snag at Charlie’s pants legs until his mouth is full of ankles and calves and he gets the sweet taste of Max Factor on his tongue?” (75) Though such attempts are shown to be serious at the beginning, their ultimate failure transforms the attempts into the grotesque experience.

Black thinkers represented in this way are absurd and grotesque in Reed's view as they have internalized white culture without taking into account the possibility of the white culture's bearing on the black experience. Reed also ridicules the whites because characters like Polyglot demonstrate an academic sense of remorse which comes from dissociation from reality. The scholarly attempts of people like Polyglot are a kind of psychological compensation for the lack of knowledge of down-to-earth realities. However, they once again fail because their understanding of reality is mediated by forces external to them and their cultural attempts turn out to be nothing but the advancement of an illusory approach to reality.

For Althusser, Philosophy, like religion and ethics, is only ideology; it has no history, everything which seems to happen in it really happens outside it, in the only real history, the history of the material life of men. Science is then the real itself, known by the action which reveals it by destroying the ideologies that veil it: foremost among these ideologies is philosophy (Lenin and Philosophy, 21). Althusser emphasizes that what we see in the factual world is determined by the ideological discourses implemented in our minds through the unconscious adoption of them. This means that people's relationship with the outside world is not the genuine one, based on a neutral judgement; rather, the relationship in question is imaginary whose form and validity are determined by the ideological discourses of each society.

## **7. Conclusion**

The ideological mechanism that Althusser describes is applicable to the workings of American society, which traditionally produces its national literature intending to include the communal western icon while excluding marginalized voices. The American apparatuses impose white values on their envisaged history, while simultaneously, softly designating resisting discourses as "Otherized" entities. It is due to this Otherization that Reed attempts to reinstitute the marginalized voices through art. Thus, his art and literature are no longer a cultural ISA; rather, it is a counterculture that resists history as an ideological discourse. In this study, the appearance of the ruling ideology in political, religious, and cultural ISAs explores how a seemingly innocent practice like religion and culture can contain the values of the ruling class. Reed's philosophy of combat literature is in exposing the components of myth to make them work against themselves. While the ideological dominance through mythicizing phenomena inevitably misrepresents reality, Reed in reaction distorts the distortion to produce resisting literature. Knowing that there is a small group of men who dominate the politics and culture in this country whose point of views reigns, Reed in *Free-Lance Pallbearers* uses the strategy of challenging mythologizing to resist the ideological discourse; this resistance is done to produce combat literature. Thus, once again, Reed's strategy of expository criticism is at work to save his novel from being an ideological apparatus.

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