



RESEARCH PAPER

**Ideology and Interpellation: An Althusserian Approach to Josh
 Malerman's *Inspection*: A Novel**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of interpellation in transmitting ideology as echoed in the American novelist, Malerman's *Inspection* (2019), in which a cynical group holds boys and girls separately to inject in them a falsified concept of reality. The purpose of this study is to reveal the working of the cynical group's dominant ideology on the children who believe in everything which is presented to them in the name of reality. Utilizing Louis Althusser's (1971) theory of ideology as a theoretical framework, this study highlights the dehumanizing vision of a capitalist group that exploits children to gain socioeconomic interests through ideological maneuverings and extermination of humane feelings from them. The group acts like an omnipotent force whose invisible ideological powers interpellate and mould the children according to their capitalistic agendas, making them puppets in the hands of their masters who play with their minds and emotions the way they deem fit.

KEYWORDS Capitalism, Dehumanization, Ideology, Interpellation, Repression

Introduction

The novel *Inspection* is written by a prolific American writer named Josh Malerman. He is a fantastic novelist, short story writer, singer, and film producer. He is well-known for his famous novel *Bird Box*, written in 2014, which became popular on Netflix in the form of a movie also named 'Bird Box'. The common themes of his novels are horror, fear, loss, revenge, desire, power, and guilt. Similarly, his renowned novel, *Inspection* weaves strands of multiple issues such as ideology, repression, dehumanization, strict surveillance and implementation of capitalistic visions on children. Moreover, the novel opens up in the scenario of two schools named 'Parenthood'. These schools are situated separately for boys and girls built up in the pine forest far away from the rest of the whole world by a cynical group led by Richard who presents himself as D.A.D. in the boys' school, while on the girls' side, Marilyn, as M.O.M is the presiding officer of the girls. This Parenthood buys 52 infants and then raises them under severe scrutiny. The most exciting thing in this novel is that the children are named on alphabets pattern like A, B, C, D, E, F, and so on. Likewise, these infants do not know who they are, but it is D.A.D. who decides their names and identities beforehand.

For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2014), the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. Marx describes feudalism, capitalism, and the role internal social contradictions play in the historical process. Marx and Engels initiated the theory called Marxism and Althusser's (1971) concept that the identity of a

human being is constructed through ideology and is pre-written for a man even before his birth, is central to the understanding of classical Marxism. Though, ideology has different definitions depending upon its context yet it has somehow similar meanings. Anyone can manipulate ideology according to his interest and this thing has been presented in the novel, *Inspection*. Because the ideology of the ruling class dominates the society and as a result, ruling people create their own set of ideas and beliefs which they can use as per their interest. Similarly, *Parenthood* is a close depiction of this form of ideology. D.A.D. runs it according to the instructions of the capitalists who give funds to him and after receiving them, he exploits the children by presenting his ideology to obscure the reality. Everything is written pre-planned and socially constructed and none can deny this fact as ideology and repression both are used to objectify the children. This idea is justified by the concept of ideology presented by French Marxist, Althusser (1971) in his seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" published in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. He is of the view that ideology is like an epistemological model and it hides reality from the working classes.

Althusser (1971) is of the view that the state is not always oppressive; rather, it possesses two ways to deal with the people, ideology and then repression. The *Parenthood's* owner, D.A.D, does the same when keeps boys and girls restricted in their schools and also disallows them to enter schools of the opposite sex. His primary purpose is to commodify children into perfect robots without any hindrance or distraction. The main protagonist on the boys' side is J, who has strong imagination and romanticism as he romanticizes everything. J reads the novel of Lawrence, who at last mentions the whole reality of the world to him whereas he is ordered to keep all the words like a bar, girl, car, city life, music, alcohol and dance hidden in his novel because such words can astray the children in their planned upbringing. The scope of this research is to explore the power of manipulated ideology and repression of children under the rule of capitalists. Through the lens of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), this research will highlight the issues of imprisonment of children, socially constructed truth and reality, and the power politics of cynical people. In the background of this premises, the study will be exploring how the children in the novel are interpellated through their masters who seemingly utilize the methods of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses to meet their ends.

Literature Review

According to Althusser (1971), "no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony" over its people through the State Ideological Apparatuses (p. 146). This point of Althusser's simplifies that there will be a day when the ruling class will be no longer in power because "the class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus... the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there" (p. 147). The working class would be free from the dominance of the bourgeoisie. While the poor people's class struggle appears within the ideology, this class struggle increases the chances of overthrowing the dominant ideology. Additionally, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) both refer to the broader study of ideology and repression. Althusser being a structuralist Marxist has taken this idea from Marx, who talks about the unending conflict between the ruling class (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat). Althusser says that the theory of ideology has two main tenets; ideology and repression. Ideology in its simplest form can be defined as "a set of beliefs or principles, especially one on which a political system, party, or organization is based" (Cambridge

Dictionary). It means that ideology is a significant part of any society and the state is the owner of the dominant ideology because it “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971, p. 162). So, ideology is a system of views through which people understand the things around them. Ideology is also very necessary to humans because they defend it consciously or unconsciously.

Therefore, ideology is like a clean glass through which a person sees the world. It is a collection of a person’s values, beliefs and norms (Cole, 2019). It is an idea that shapes human thoughts and actions, and it occurs on different levels, e.g., in groups, people and society. Ideology is not limited to a particular thought or behaviour and is flexible. Marx is considered to be the first philosopher who introduced the concept of ideology: “Marx’s approach to ideology was outlined in his theory of base and superstructure...the superstructure of society, the realm of ideology, grows out of the base, the realm of production, to reflect the interests of the ruling class and justify the status quo that keeps them in power” (Cole, 2019). Just like human beings are associated with certain ideologies as soon as they are born, interpellation also becomes part of their identities because it is the ideology that interpellates individuals as subjects: “Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects” and this means that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects...there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject” (Althusser, 1971, p. 170). So, Althusser’s interpellation or ‘hailing’ is an idea which hails the people into subjects and it is just like a person who is hailed by a traffic warden and he feels it necessary to respond to him.

In the same way, in the novel, when D.A.D. gives instructions to the children in Parenthood, the children follow them as they think that it is their need or may be obligatory to follow them. Ideology always manifests itself through actions which are carried out through imposed practices. Similarly, ideology is always present in society and it shows its appearance through different norms of society in the form of cultural rites and rituals. Althusser (1971) explains the institutions which have a great hold in presenting the ideology,

Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions... the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘schools’), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.) (p. 143)

Hence, this study would primarily focus on the interpretation of the capitalistic visions in dehumanizing children through ideology and repression. In the novel, the children’s commodification shows how the lives of the common masses are disturbed due to the capitalist class which uses its tactics for generating maximum production through installing ideological maneuverings.

Material and Methods

This article will analyze Malerman’s *Inspection* to investigate and scrutinize the role of ideology, repression, and capitalism in distorting humans’ perception of reality. This analysis of the novel will be based on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” derived from Althusser’s collection of essays, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. The study, therefore, focuses on the role of Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), ideology and interpellation in interjecting and hailing the children as subjects. The novel will be

thoroughly analyzed, examined, and investigated through the textual analysis method by interpreting it from Althusser's Marxist theory. So, the novel *Inspection* by Malerman is the primary source of this research and the textual analysis method will be used for the interpretation of the selected novel.

Textual Analysis: Ideology and Interpellation in *Inspection*

Ideology is part and parcel of any society. It is a very flexible term as it carries no fixed meaning and can also be called soft power. However, anyone can interpret it in his way. One thing is clear nobody is free from its claws. When a baby is born, he is confined within his ideology, and as he grows up into a person, he defends his ideology either intentionally or unintentionally. Another important thing is that any society cannot cling to a certain ruling ideology because any ideology does not stay long until the working class stands against it and replaces it. As Althusser (1971) says that "the proletariat must seize state power to destroy the existing bourgeois state apparatus and, in the first phase, replace it with a quite different, proletarian, state apparatus, and then, in later phases, set in motion a radical process, that of the destruction of the state" (p. 141). When ideology circulates in society and the ruling people take it into their hands, the working class is exploited in the end, "It is also possible that democracy, as an ideology and/or a governmental form, is also coterminous with capitalism, as democracy gives the 'illusion' that all people are equal and have equal power" (Claridge, 2017). This notion deceives the proletariat class which is why it keeps working for the bourgeoisie, which not only utilizes the poor people for its advantage but also deprives the people of their basic rights.

Similarly, in the novel *Inspection*, Richard as D.A.D., the master of Parenthood, is hired by a cynical group of capitalists who wants to raise great scientists, thinkers, engineers, and mathematicians without any distraction. To make them the world's best scientists and perfect human beings or robots, D.A.D. buys the children from the parents and designs everything in Parenthood as per his interest. The Parenthood consists of two tall buildings, one reserved for the Alphabet Boys and the other for Alphabet Girls. An interesting thing is that this couple assigns English alphabets such as A, B, C, D...and so on, to these children as their names. Those separated tall buildings are situated in the forest of pine trees in northern Michigan, where a toxic married couple named Richard (D.A.D) and Marilyn (M.O.M) concoct an evil plan to dehumanize the newly born children. While discussing their plan, Richard says, "If we do our job, Richard said, they won't want to search the woods. The woods was a vague idea then. Two towers in... the woods" (Malerman, 2019, p. 288). But Marilyn, M.O.M. on the girls' side, shows her doubt that if they do everything according to their plan and do extra monitoring of the children, that day will not be far away when the Alphabet Children revolt against the Parenthood. She says, "There may come a day when practicality outweighs philosophy. The idea is to prove that an undistracted mind will focus on its own. If we force that focus, via cameras and babysitters... what are we proving?" (Malerman, 2019, 288). This idea scares D.A.D. as he is funded by American capitalists who give him high funds so that he can buy children from poor parents (Malerman, 2019, p. 289). D.A.D. signs a contract with the parents that they will not come after their children because once they give them to Parenthood; they will not be able to see the faces of their children again. We see how repressive state apparatuses are being utilized on symbolic lines in the novel.

An important point is that everything present in Parenthood plays a significant role in the upbringing of the children whether imaginary or fake. D.A.D. makes afraid the Alphabet Boys and Girls from the Corner which is a horrible place in the basement

of the Parenthood where the 'spoiled rotten' girls and boys are sent. 'Spoiled rotten' are those children who violate the rules of Parenthood and who try to question those things or want to know about new ideas which are prohibited. On the boys' side, there are two Letter boys named A and Z who have been sent to the Corner while in the girls' building, two Letter girls named J and A are dead due to their arrival in the Corner. Not only this, he introduces his fake diseases named Vees, Rotts, Moldus, and Placasoires to scare the children from the failed inspection; "The Inspections didn't begin when the Inspectors used their glasses. It began the second you walked through the door" (Malerman, 2019, p. 11). This shows that as soon as a boy or girl steps out of his or her door, his or her inspection begins. Likewise, D.A.D. has his entire team such as inspectors, cooks, wardens, writers, watchmen and security guards on his side so that strict surveillance of the children is ensured. Even, the teenagers do not have enough time in their washrooms while they can observe their body parts for a long time here in front of the inspectors Collins and Jeffrey. These inspectors use different tools to examine the bodies of the children minutely, "The Inspectors stood against the far wall, each with a hand on the magnifying glasses hooked to their belts. J had done this every morning of his life, every morning he could remember" (Malerman, 2019, p. 08).

This is the routine that continues for all the years the children survived in Parenthood. The Letter Children are not allowed to question anything rather everything is pre-planned. Those children, who try to ask about anything prohibited in Parenthood, are sent to the Corner. In this way, every child makes his perception regarding the Corner. When K knows the reality of Parenthood, she decides to visit the Corner and she thinks "Was the Corner cold? She'd bring her winter coat. Was it dark? A flashlight. Would she die upon entering the room? Would she turn to ice, turn to ash, turn to stone?" (Malerman, 2019, p. 294). So, every child holds his viewpoint about the Corner and nobody is sure about what sort of place it would be. Correspondingly, just like the Corner, Parenthood designs its falsifying realities to manipulate the children according to capitalistic desires. D.A.D. hires different people to make a fake cobweb of his capitalistic ideologies just to hide the truths from the Letter Boys and Girls. Parenthood also plays a role of a repressive institute or state that applies its fake ideology on innocent children who know nothing about the real world. As Claridge (2017) quotes Althusser's idea by saying, "These are institutions which generate ideologies which we as individuals then internalize, and act by. These ISAs include schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics...etc. These organizations generate systems of ideas and values, which we as individuals believe (or don't believe)". It shows the dominant institutions of society always frame various ideologies and then introduce them to the people. While its disadvantage is that the working class confronts failure as it does not know the actual reality and truth.

Moreover, to get benefits from the children when they will be turned into excellent thinkers, scientists, and mathematicians, D.A.D. only prefers his interests. He does not care for the Alphabet Boys and Girls rather he takes different steps to hide the reality from them. In other words, the Letter Children are the means of production for D.A.D. and as a result, he makes an imaginary relationship between the children with their existence. No matter how the children of Parenthood understand D.A. D's ideology, they need to ponder over their existence. Firstly, when they are toddlers, they do what is asked. Later on, an element of curiosity develops in them and it leads to their revolt against Parenthood. Perhaps, D.A.D. and M.O.M. forget that "there may come a day when practicality outweighs philosophy" (Malerman, 2019, p. 288). Their philosophy of experimenting on undistracted minds costs their lives in the end because sooner or later, the truth is revealed, "The long-married couple believed that their denials, bolstered by their money, would be louder at the end" (Malerman, 2019, p. 201).

This couple forgot that no matter how hard a person tries to suppress others, there comes a time when the repressed person responds with double strength. As Burt presents his letter to Richard when he expresses his fears along with the solutions that he thinks will be suitable for the certain ideologies of Parenthood, he says, "there will be a revolution waging in every one of our boys" (Malerman, 2019, p. 20). In this way, the revolt carried by Alphabet Children is like a form of the great revolution that abolishes the whole of Parenthood, its ideologies, and its capitalistic staff including D.A.D. and M.O.M.

However, the experiment of D.A.D. and M.OM proves fatal for themselves because after acknowledging the truth, the Alphabet Boys and Girls kill everybody in Parenthood. On the girls' side, K is an extraordinary child who perceives things meticulously and she is very skilled in sketching and drawing, "It wasn't only that K liked to draw, it was that she showed an incredible propensity for the craft at a very young age. At four years old, her rendering of the Turret was so precise that Inspector Krantz had thought it was a photo and brought it to Marilyn, concerned that someone had been photographing the Parenthood" (Malerman, 2019, p. 201). Her astonishing skill generates an element of fear in the mind of Marilyn, because "having seen K's work before, wasn't fooled for long. But there was a beat, an unhappy jolt of fear she hadn't felt in many years" (Malerman, 2019, p. 201). In reality, this is the result that Richard and Marilyn wanted but as soon as Marilyn sees the drawing of K, she feels a strange fear in herself. If K gets confused about anything whether it is related to Judith Nancy's book or anything else, she immediately draws that particular thing and carefully observes it. Different little things about the Parenthood around K make her suspect the Parenthood itself and then, about the other things as well. She goes to the Yard and the Orchard many times to see that specific spire and she is not afraid of being caught. She examines everything carefully to try to understand what is the purpose of Parenthood. Her curiosity leads to unfolding things in the end and she tells every Letter Girl the whole truth. Gradually, she becomes succeeded in untying the knots of lies, "K decided the walls of the Parenthood had gotten too thick, too tight. The space she'd enjoyed for so many years wasn't close to big enough anymore. It had become harder to breathe, juggling her anxiety, her bravery, and her desire to tell her sisters the truth. They lied to us. About what? About everything" (Malerman, 2019, p. 293). Suddenly, K finds that Parenthood is no longer a place that she wants rather she wants to enjoy her freedom. A striking feature of K's personality is that she not only wants her life free from any surveillance but she also wants to see her other Alphabet Girls and Boys be free from D.

It is one of the prominent ideologies of Parenthood that the real purpose of Richard and Marilyn is to dehumanize the children by imposing their ideas on them. The height of commodification of the children in the hands of Richard Master shows when Burt further suggests, "Richard and the Parenthood would be well served to either nurture the coming barrage of sexuality through abstraction or to (pardon) nip it off at the bud" (Malerman, 2019, p. 23). This is the extreme level of dehumanization of the Alphabet Children because to gain advantages from them, Richard decides to devoid the Letter Boys of their sexuality. After their brutal behaviour of Richard with the children, he comes up with another ideology that he will not introduce anything of the real world to them. For this reason, he has his own two writers on both sides of Alphabet Boys and Girls. Whatever both these writers write in their books, they are instructed sternly for this along with heavy money paid to them. They present falsifying realities to the Letter Children and create their imaginary world devoid of the real world. Even their books' names show an element of brutalization. For example, Luxley's books *Great Horses* and *Dogs and Dog Days* exhibit that Alphabet Children are not more than horses and dogs for D.A.D. He just wants to achieve his goal and he does not care for them; "Man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas" (Bates, 1975, p. 351). It means that

diverse kinds of ideologies which D.A.D. wants to interpellate into the minds of the children have come from the oppressor masters or capitalists. D.A.D. has not only deprived the children of their identities but has also designed their mentality to a certain extent, "But all the Alphabet Boys knew they came from the Orchard, having grown on the Living Trees (Malerman, 2019, p. 08). The Alphabet Boys and Girls are not told that they have been bought from their parents rather they are grown up with the idea that they were born on Living Trees.

Conclusion

Through his novel, *Inspection* Malerman has emphatically revealed the working of the capitalistic forces, repression and ideological maneuverings in distorting and manipulating reality and he, therefore, seems to be suggesting that there should be taken serious measures against those who run institutions like Parenthood, which is portrayed in the novel as a capitalist project designed to brainwash the minds of innocent people. Being representatives of capitalism, Richard and Marilyn exploited the labour class for the sake of the fulfilment of their invisible desires and ideologies. Hence, the inevitability of revolution is always there as the letter children/proletariats stood against the tyrannizing capitalist/bourgeoise regime that continued discarding their needs and interests. Through the Althusserian theory of Marxism, this study has explored the issues of ideology, repression and capitalism in the novel and their effects on society have also been examined by focusing on the physical and psychological conditions of Malerman's different characters.

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