

أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية عند ألتوسير في مسرحية الطفل المدفون

لسام شيبيرد

م. حبيب لطيف كاظم القصاب  
المديرية العامة لتربية محافظة الديوانية، العراق

البريد الإلكتروني Email : [habeebalshamary@gmail.com](mailto:habeebalshamary@gmail.com)

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الحلم الأمريكي، الاقتصاد، الأسرة، أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية، الاستدعاء

**كيفية اقتباس البحث**

القصاب ، حبيب لطيف كاظم ، أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية عند ألتوسير في مسرحية الطفل المدفون لسام شيبيرد، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، شباط 2025، المجلد: 15، العدد: 2.

هذا البحث من نوع الوصول المفتوح مرخص بموجب رخصة المشاع الإبداعي لحقوق التأليف والنشر ( Creative Commons Attribution ) تتيح فقط للآخرين تحميل البحث ومشاركته مع الآخرين بشرط نسب العمل الأصلي للمؤلف، ودون القيام بأي تعديل أو استخدامه لأغراض تجارية.

Registered مسجلة في  
**ROAD**

Indexed مفهسة في  
**IASJ**



## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's Buried Child

### Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's Buried Child

Inst. Habeeb Lateef Kadhim Al-Qassab

General Directorate of Education of Diwaniyah, Iraq

**Keywords** American Dream, Economy, Family, Ideological State Apparatuses, Interpellation

#### How To Cite This Article

Al-Qassab, Habeeb Lateef Kadhim, Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses In Sam Shepard's Buried Child, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, February 2025, Volume:15, Issue 2.



This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License.](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

#### Abstract

This research is going to benefit from Louis Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) with the objective of the analysis of cultural and mythic ideology, the economy and the American Dream, family relations, interpellation and resistance, along with the effect of religion and decency in *Buried Child* as Sam Shepard's famous dramatic production. Through the practice of Althusser's theory, this analysis scrutinizes the way in which ISAs are shown and work in the play, stressing the intense connection amid power, ideological control, and resistance in a dysfunctional family background. By exploring the multidimensional relations and scuffles between the characters, the significance of obscured mysteries and appalling retentions, and the themes of dishonor, silence, and revelation, this inspection divulges the in-built ideologies that impact individual subjectivities and societal structures in Shepard's play. In conclusion, the article desires to argue the ways in which Althusser's pattern of ISAs transports a valued agenda for distinguishing the sophisticated system of ideological effects at play in *Buried Child*.

## المخلص

طبق هذه الدراسة نظرية لويس ألتوسير حول أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية (SAs) الفحص الأيديولوجيا الثقافية والأسطورية، والاقتصاد والحلم الأمريكي، وديناميكيات الأسرة، والاستدعاء والمقاومة، بالإضافة إلى دور الدين والأخلاق في مسرحية الطفل المدفون لسام شيبيرد. في ضوء نظرية ألتوسير، تفحص هذه الدراسة كيف يتم عرض أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية ووظائفها في المسرحية، مع التركيز على العلاقة الوثيقة بين السلطة والسيطرة الأيديولوجية والمقاومة في سياق عائلة غير متماسكة. من خلال دراسة التبادلات المعقدة والصراعات بين الشخصيات، وتأثير الأسرار المخفية والماضي الصادم، ومواضيع العار والصمت والكشف، تكشف هذه الدراسة عن الأيديولوجيات المتجذرة التي تشكل الهويات الفردية والهياكل الاجتماعية في دراما شيبيرد. في النهاية، تهدف المقالة إلى مناقشة الطرق التي يوفر بها نموذج ألتوسير لأجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية سياقاً مفيداً لفهم شبكة التأثيرات الأيديولوجية المتعددة الأوجه المصطلحات الرئيسية: الحلم الأمريكي، الاقتصاد، الأسرة، أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية، الاستدعاء

### 1. Introduction

In literary criticism, the exercise of critical theory is regarded as a suitable method for unveiling the central ideologies and power structures implanted in literary texts. In Shepard's Pulitzer Award-winning play, *Buried Child* (1978), Louis Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) is an engrossing outline through which we can analyze the complex relationship between of identity, family relations, and societal critique in America.

Althusser's notion of ISAs suggests that some social administrations, for instance education, media, and religion, along with family, are assumed as apparatuses through which ideologies are disseminated and people are interpellated into main power structures. By exercising this theoretical agenda in the investigation of *Buried Child*, an enthralling exemplification of a dysfunctional Midwestern family and their hidden secrets, we can figure out the ways in which ideological forces work in the domestic scope and beyond.

Through the characters of Dodge, Halie, Tilden, and Bradley, Shepard produces a story that shows the themes of isolation, deterioration, and the devastation of the American Dream, calling the audiences to defy the distressing heritages of the past and the misunderstandings of the present. As the play moves forward, resonances of bigger social and political misperceptions are unveiled, emphasizing the ways in which individual



## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*

psyches and familial relations echo bigger ideological clashes and social breakup.

This article investigates the intersections of Althusser's theory of ISAs and Shepard's *Buried Child* with the purpose of discussing the complex net of power relations, intergenerational trauma, and cultural cynicism that permeate the play's story. By scrutinizing how the family unit acts as a small-scale version of ideological reproduction and resistance, this analysis means to show the layers of meaning implanted in the characters' communications, revelations, and silences.

### 2. Statement of the Problem

In *Buried Child*, a demanding subject is the consideration of how Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) can be applied to comprehend the multifaceted relations of power, ideology, and dysfunction within the ruptured family portrayed in the play. To achieve this goal, the present analysis is going to address the following questions: How do the characters in *Buried Child* exemplify and maintain Althusser's theory of ISAs through their relations, actions, and dealings? To what extent do the different features of the family structure in the play work as ISAs, affecting the characters' identities and preserving ideological control? How does the theme of buried secrets and traumatic pasts relate to the notion of ISAs and the interaction of power structures inside the family unit?

What role does the physical location of the farmhouse play in strengthening or destabilizing the ISAs at work in the play? How do the characters' efforts for agency and self-sufficiency interconnect with the procedure of ISAs, and what inferences does this have for understanding the bigger social critique depicted in *Buried Child*?

### 3. Significance of the Study

The application of Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to Sam Shepard's play *Buried Child* is really significant due to showing the complicated interaction between ideology, power relations, and personal identity in the realm of dramatic storytelling. By probing the hidden apparatuses of control and belief systems that trigger the characters' actions and associations in the play, this study presents a number of key significant points. For example, by benefitting from Althusser's notion of ISAs to the exploration of *Buried Child*, this study discusses how ideologies are not only dispersed through



## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



explicit institutions like the government and education but also pervade the intimate spaces of family life.

Besides, in light of ISAs, the investigation of *Buried Child* offers a critical assessment of the loss of the American Dream and the unpreventable outcome of historical obliviousness on the contemporary society. By presenting the layers of ideological reproduction and resistance in the play, readers are stimulated to defy the discrepancies among national narratives of accomplishment and the unadorned realities of failure, isolation, and suspicion depicted in Shepard's explanation of a decomposing Midwestern family.

Additionally, the practice of Althusser's ISAs in *Buried Child* gives us a structure for comprehending the dispersion of trauma, secrets, and silences across generations within the family unit. By inspecting the characters' psychological problems and ruined recollections, the study accentuates how individual identities are affected by historical heritages and social glitches. And eventually, this study highlights the lifelong significance of dramatic literature as a place for critical exploration and societal reflection.

### 4. Literature Review

#### 4.1. On the Play

Nash (1983) argues the link between folklore and irony in Shepard's *Buried Child*. In this study, Nash has referred to the way in which Shepard benefits from folklore motifs and imagery in an innovative or contradictory way so as to underline chief themes, challenge traditions, and engender meaning in his drama. This researcher has alluded to the several folklore features present in *Buried Child*, such as mythological citations, folk customs, or archetypal themes with the intention of understanding how these features contribute to the over-all atmosphere and thematic perceptiveness of the play. Furthermore, the study focuses on how Shepard uses irony as a literary device to destabilize traditional folklore narratives or beliefs. Nash discusses instances where folklore tropes are twisted, distorted, or rendered in a satirical light to transport profounder messages or appraisals (p. 486).

Nash investigates how folklore symbols and metaphorical references in *Buried Child* serve as tools for a better inspection of familial dysfunction, societal deterioration, or existential subjects. Nash correspondingly scrutinizes how Shepard's ironic practice of folklore interposes linear storytelling pacts or defies audience understandings. The article essentially revolve around how this narrative subversion augments the difficulty and indecision in the play's meaning (pp. 487-491).







## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



Opipari (2010) has also discussed the theme of shame and the idea of the family secret as presented in Shepard's *Buried Child*. Opipari has examined the theme of shame as an important problem in the dynamics of the dysfunctional family exemplified in *Buried Child*. He has similarly inspected how shame signifies itself in the characters' actions, interactions, and psychological circumstances. Opipari has discussed the chief family secret that lies at the heart of the play by mentioning how it forms the characters' lives and associations (p. 123).

Additionally, this article investigates the different ways in which the characters in *Buried Child* participate in silencing behaviors to defend the family secret and evade facing the shame related with it. Opipari has consequently discussed how this silencing preserves a cycle of dysfunction and suppression inside the family unit. The other important point is that Opipari explores the psychological inferences of living with a family secret and the toll it takes on the characters' psychological vigor and security (pp. 131-138).

In *Understanding Sam Shepard* (2012), Crank has discussed a number of the most complicated and enigmatic dramatic pieces of Sam Shepard. For instance, in chapter four of this book which is a meticulous examination of *Buried Child*, Crank has said that *Buried Child* envisions the slow closure of the family from the inside because of its struggling hard in order to hide some of the most disagreeable recollections of the past. Finally, it is concluded that this joint liability cannot work as the only union for family, and the play finishes with their secrets negotiated (p. 57). Crank has probed into this play's diverse productions and important themes like a perceptible struggle over defining one's authority in association with masculinity and the emotional legacy passed on from father to son (p. 60).

Roudané in *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard* (2002) has also offered useful information concerning Shepard and his plays. As said by this scholar, Shepard's characters are not that worried about social change; they are in fact more fixed on discerning some unaffected force in a world teemed with devastated families. They are mostly pushed by an undeveloped apathy and obsessed with simply enduring (p. 3). Overall, this collection, which contains seventeen articles by different American and European writers, analyzes the diverse features of Shepard's profession, including his plays, poetry, music, fiction, acting, directing, and film work. Such plays as *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*, as well as other lesser known but indispensably significant works are the main subjects of this book's analysis.

### 4.2. On the Theory

*Louis Althusser* (2007) by Ferretter starts with an introduction to Louis Althusser, including his life, academic impacts, and main philosophies. Althusser was acknowledged for his studies in Marxist theory, predominantly in the fields of ideology, structuralism, and the criticism of humanism within Marxism. One of Althusser's most well-known notions is that of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), which denote the institutions and practices through which ideologies are distributed and people are exposed to prevailing principles and standards. This book also looks into Althusser's examination of ISAs such as education, media, religion, and family (pp. 12-16).

Moreover, Althusser's theory of interpellation, which refers to the procedure by which human beings are hailed into subject positions by ideological practices, is a pivotal point of the study. It reveals how people come to adopt overriding ideologies and contribute to their own subjectification. Another important point is that the book notes the analyses and receptions of Althusser's work in the field of critical theory and Marxist studies. Researchers have engaged with Althusser's thoughts, both building upon them and criticizing facets of his theoretical agenda. The study also investigates Althusser's long-lasting influence on critical theory and contemporary thought. His philosophies continue to enlighten deliberations on ideology, hegemony, and social institutions, affecting intellectuals in different disciplines (pp. 18-20).

*Ideology & Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation* (2012) is considered as a significant book by the French thinker Louis Althusser, in which he refers to the complex link amid ideology, power, and the mechanisms through which ideologies are spread and implemented by people in society. The key argument of the study is on how leading ideologies help the well-being of the governing class and are cooperative in the maintenance of societal harmony and balance (pp. 1-5).

In *Ideology & Ideological State Apparatuses* (2012), Althusser claims that ideologies are not only loops of thoughts or values but are systems of exemplifications that govern how human beings perceive the world and their situation in it. Ideologies work to form the existing power structures, making them appear as communal sense or the natural order of things. As follows, ideologies act to reproduce the current situation and distribute the hegemony of particular societal groups over others (p. 8).

At the core of Althusser's research is the concept of "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) and "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSAs). ISAs suggest foundations such as the family, education, media, religion,





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's Buried Child

and culture, which circulate leading ideologies and ideals to individuals. These confrontations play a dynamic role in forming individuals' preconceptions, politics, and behaviors, bringing into line the welfares of the dominant class.

Althusser argues that ISAs function through processes of interpellation. Through diverse practices and services, ISAs turn human beings into subjects who adopt dominant ideologies and work in ways that reproduce the prevailing societal order. Likewise, Althusser means that RSAs, such as the police and the judiciary, enforce social customs and preserve order through pressure and subdual. Although RSAs are substantial in directing opposition and assuring obedience to dominant ideologies, Althusser stresses the more subtle and predominant role of ISAs in demonstrating individuals' consciousness and identity.

"Louis Althusser: Ideological State-Apparatuses and Subjection" (2013, pp. 147-178) by Rehmann correspondingly offers a meticulous inspection of Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and the apparatuses of subjection in society. The article discusses Althusser's groundbreaking study of how ISAs aim to spread principal ideologies and preserve social unison. It discusses how ISAs lead to the reproduction of social structures and the suppression of human beings through the internalization of dominant class ideologies.

Rehmann's study also concentrates on Althusser's theory of interpellation, which alludes to the procedure by which people are hailed or called upon to undertake particular subject positions in the ideological outline. The study actually probes how subjects are made through ISAs and how they come to identify with the morals, rules, and principles indorsed by dominant ideologies.

Additionally, the current research paper revolves around the link between subjection and power in the framework of ISAs. Rehmann has examined how individuals are subjected to ideological power and how this procedure strengthens the present power structures and social hierarchies. The study also inspects how resistance and agency play a significant role in defying central ideologies and suppression.

### 5. Methodology

Marxism refers to an economic and political philosophy which was initiated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism means that the main element of history is economics. In fact, Karl Marx's theory of society has its roots in the idea of class struggle and the split of society into the ruling class (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat). According to Marx, the ruling class regulates the means of production





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's Buried Child



and benefits from its power to retain supremacy over the working class by abusing their hard work for achieving their own financial benefits. Chikwado (2017) says that:

Marxism views the history of society as “the history of class struggle” in which the bourgeoisie or capitalist class, which replaced the feudal nobility will inevitably be supplanted by the proletariat, or working class. The capitalist flourishes by extracting surplus value or profit from the commodities produced by the working class. Marxist theory predicts that the contradictions and weaknesses within capitalism will cause increasingly severe economic crises and deepening impoverishment of the working class, which will ultimately revolt and seize control of the means of production. In the resulting classless society, the coercive state will be replaced by rational economic cooperation. Marxism greatly influenced the development of socialism. (p. 115)

Louis Althusser has expanded Marx's ideas by presenting the concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as an apparatus through which the ruling class applies its authority and replicates prevailing ideologies in society. ISAs include such institutions as the family, education system, religion, culture, and media, which form human beings' opinions, standards, and identities through ideology instead of direct oppression.

Concerning psychology ISAs could be regarded as psychosocial, since they seek to instruct methods of observing and assessing things, happenings, and class relations. Rather than articulating and enforcing order, through fierce repression, ISA circulate ideologies that underpin the authority of a dominant class. People have a tendency to be co-opted by terror of societal denunciation, e.g. derision and segregation (Althusser, 2024, pp. 299-300).

Also, Althusser's notion of interpellation plays an important role in understanding how ISAs function. Interpellation signifies the procedure by which people are hailed or called upon by ideology to undertake particular collective jobs and identities. Fundamentally, individuals are "interpellated" into distinguishing themselves as subjects of a specific ideological context, strengthening the current situation and preserving the domination of the ruling class. As stated by Althusser, the certainty that people (you and I) are subjects is an outcome of ideology. Althusser claims that interpellation has got two roles. One "recognition" and the other is "misrecognition" (Dolar, 1993, pp. 75-96).

It has to be also added that in *Buried Child*, I am going to reveal how the characters in the play are interpellated by various ISAs, like family structures, cultural principles, and societal anticipations, which determine their behaviors, visions, and exchanges. By examining the way in which





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*

these characters are placed in the ideological structures of society and how they fight against these systems of power, this investigation will deliver a substantial analysis of how Althusser's views of ISAs and interpellation are epitomized in the play.

### 6. Discussion

#### 6.1. Family as an Ideological State Apparatus

In Shepard's *Buried Child*, the family serves as a dominant emblem of an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as a result of epitomizing multilayered power relations and working as a place of ideological power. Through the viewpoint of Louis Althusser, we can criticize the family unit in the play and inspect how it acts as an apparatus for maintaining societal principles, while also presenting its inherent fiascoes and dysfunction.

One imperative aspect of the family as an ISA in *Buried Child* is revealed through Dodge's description as the head of family. Once he says, "Once, I held this family together with my own two hands, but now all I have is a shadow of what a father should be—feeble and buried beneath the weight of our secrets" (Shepard, 1978, p. 45). Dodge's power inside the family structure embodies the expected character of the father in the preservation of cooperative rules. However, his physical frailty and the buried secret of the family epitomize the failure of this traditional power and the family's incapacity to sustain its ideological efficacy. Dodge's futility in sustaining control and order represents a more important communal adjustment away from customary power measures and criteria.

Additionally, the family's dysfunction, as set by Tilden's degeneration and Halie's pretense, works as a sign of the relapse of conformist principles in the play. Tilden's failure into a state of expressive and psychosomatic corrosion highlights the termination of generational authority and the inability to transfer essential cultural instructions and dogmas. Furthermore, Halie's duplicitousness and sham divulge the disguise of decent control within the family, displaying the central deterioration of ethical standards and the obliteration of genuine familial relations, "In the daylight, I wear the mask of a devoted wife, but in the shadows, I weave the threads of deception that unravel our family's very fabric" (Shepard, 1978, p. 32). In a word, by showing the family as a spot of ideological control and viewing its dysfunction as a replication of the failure of traditional principles, *Buried Child* highlights the troubles of intergenerational associations, societal beliefs, and the challenges of conserving ideological uniformity in a quickly fluctuating universe.

As an example, we can mention the quote, "I don't know what's wrong with this family. I don't know what's wrong with me" (Shepard,



## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



1978, p. 55). This part, which is uttered by the character Vince, shows the breakdown of the family unit and the muddle that rises from it. I noted already, according to Althusser, the family is an ISA due to teaching standards, principles, and identities to its members. Nevertheless, in *Buried Child*, the family is portrayed as a place of dysfunction, secrets, and trauma, which results in a crisis of identity for Vince. His indecision regarding what is wrong with his family and himself specifies how the family's disappointment to sustain its ideological function generates a sense of estrangement and misperception.

As noticed, the play denounces the typical idea of the family as a fostering and calming unit. Instead, it shows how the family's secreted disturbances and fiascoes can mislead individual identities and maintain sequences of misery. Vince's difficulty to comprehend his place inside this fragmented family stresses the impression of familial ideologies on personal identity. As shown in the mentioned examples above, the family becomes a site of ideological struggle, where the anticipated standards of support and consistency are destabilized, bringing about cynicism and an exploration of meaning in a cracked reality.

### 6.2. Religion and Morality

In *Buried Child*, the character Halie stands for the intricate relationship between ideology, religion, and morality, serving as a symbol of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Through her character, Shepard condemns the way religious and moral ideals are exercised in order to cover the dysfunctional realities of the family structure and the fundamental secrets that threaten to reveal their societal disguise.

Halie admires her dead son Ansel, projecting onto him a faultlessness that mirrors her religious desires and moral principles. She often idealizes Ansel's life, depicting him as the personification of virtue and triumph. This admiration has two purposes: it supports Halie's own sense of identity and societal status while instantaneously concealing the family's profounder, obscurer truths. Ansel becomes a representation of what Halie desires to believe her family epitomizes, a foundation of pride, holiness, and ethical order.

Still, this romanticism is fundamentally clashing. Ansel, as a war hero and an epitome of triumph in Halie's narrative, is eventually just as defective as the rest of the family. Halie's repudiation to challenge Ansel's death and the consequences it has for her family also exemplifies how she practices her religious dogmas in order to avoid the reality of their situation. By preserving this flawless image, Halie protects herself from engaging with the trauma of loss and the ruin of her family life.





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



In *Buried Child*, religion functions as a substantial Ideological State Apparatus that aids to sustain order and ethics. Halie recurrently beseeches religious themes and standards, which echoes her longing for power in an otherwise muddled environment. She tries to enforce a moral agenda on her family, assuming that a return to conventional ethics will reestablish their familial honor. This is particularly apparent in her chats and ethical advices. Yet, the reality of her family's life starkly is in contrast with these standards; in fact, observing the betrayal, addiction, and ferocity that infuse their lives discloses the emptiness of Halie's assertions about virtue.

Shepard condemns this practice of religious ideology as a means of preserving societal unity. By employing religion and morality as apparatuses for rejection rather than sincere faith, Halie epitomizes the fiasco of these ideologies to build a maintainable or reliable sense of community and identity. The family's dark realities such as the alcoholic father Dodge's powerlessness to defy his letdowns, or the presence of the buried child signifying their secrets continue in spite of Halie's fraught struggles to disguise them with piousness and moralism.

Shepard's depiction of Halie shows the central illogicalities within the religious ideologies she embraces. Whereas she adheres to the optimism that these principles can anchor her family's honor, the truth is that they only work to excavate their seclusion and dysfunction. The play discloses that such ideologies not only fail to reunite the family's problems but also lead to a sense of disappointment, none more ostensible than in the distinction between Halie's aims and the family's lived experience.

Additionally, as the play unfolds, the discontinuation between Halie's moral pomposity and the family's terrible reality becomes more and more palpable. The façade she builds around Ansel and religious narratives eventually fails as the characters are forced to challenge their truths. Ultimately, Shepard underlines the boundaries of ideology as a sheer act of confusion, showing that religion, represented through Halie's character, becomes a useless tool of societal consistency.

The quote, "God's not going to help you. He's got other things to do" (Shepard, 1978, p. 78), spoken by the character Dodge, depicts a profound skepticism towards the importance of religion and the notion of divine interference in their lives. As stated by Althusser (2024, pp. 299-340), religion is one of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that affects individuals' opinions, ethics, and societal behaviors. Conventionally, religion is assumed to offer relief, control, and an ethical structure for people and families. However, in *Buried Child*, Dodge's



## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



declaration underlines a sense of desertion and disenchantment with religious belief.

Dodge's avowal that "God's not going to help you" echoes the existential desolation that encompasses the play. The characters are stuck in dysfunction, trauma, and deterioration, demonstrating that the moral and mystical foundations that should fortify them have shattered. This affirmation features the play's dissatisfaction with the decline of spiritual institutions to provide respite or tenacities in times of hardship. Actually, instead of offering a feeling of hopefulness or reclamation, religion is indicated as irrelevant in the face of their tough realities.

### 6.3. The Economy and the American Dream

In *Buried Child*, the collapsing ranch is shown as a firm symbol of the failing American country side economy and the ideologies that have conservatively protected it. This circumstance displays not only the physical decline of the land but also the decay of the American Dream, which has long been linked with such concepts as assiduousness, individuality, and fortune through agriculture. The farm, which was once a symbol of wealth and aptitude, has become a location of abandonment and gloom, reflecting the bigger financial rust handled by rural America. The farm in *Buried Child* is expressive of a once-thriving farming model that has yielded to displeasure and failure. As the characters deal with their communications in this context, it becomes tangible that the farm's corrosion is not only physical but also representative of the fiasco of the American Dream itself. The land, which should suggest success, instead rebounds an outstanding sense of collapse and indifference. The crumpled gears, unproductive meadows, and the general sense of dereliction stipulate the breakdown of a financial system that once guaranteed triumph through hard work and strength of mind.

This rust could be understood through Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which acclaims that foundations (such as family, education, and religion) play an energetic role in upholding principal ideologies. The farm, as an ISA, reveals the ideology of the self-regulating farmer, a root of the American identity. Nevertheless, as the farm crushes, so too does the ideological outline that supports the view of the American Dream, presenting the frailty of these ideals while going through economic realities. The characters' fights on the farm underline the dissatisfaction with the agrarian ideal, as they defy the tough truth that the land no longer generates the fertility it once did.

Similarly, Tilden is regarded as a poignant disapproval of the monetary principles connected with efficiency and success. His continual, hitherto







## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



unfeasible, brawls to produce harvests denote the bigger catastrophes of the farming economy. Tilden's activities are full of commotion and melancholy, as he sticks to the fragments of a prolific past. Still, his weakness to give rise to any tangible values reflects the disparagement that many have gone through in the face of an economy that no longer appreciates productiveness with triumph.

Tilden's efforts can be regarded as a small-scale version of the greater economic system that highlights production as a measure of wealth. In a society that associates triumph with perceptible products, Tilden's disappointments become representative of the systemic problems that outbreak the agrarian economy. His struggles are not just personal fiascoes but rather a condemnations of the very ideologies that support the American Dream. The expectation that hard work will bring about achievement is destabilized by Tilden's reality; in spite of his work, the land stays rigid.

Likewise, Tilden's withdrawal from the land and the failure to produce can be perceived as an echo of the estrangement felt by many in a post-industrial society. As customary agricultural practices give way to mechanization and commercial farming, the individual farmer's role becomes more and more disregarded. Tilden symbolizes this struggle, stuck between the longing for a bygone epoch and the cruel truths of modern economic burdens.

At one point Dodge says, "...the land's gone to hell. It's all gone to hell" (Shepard, 1978, p. 32). This quotation describes the thoughtful feeling of loss and disappointment that infuses the play, predominantly regarding the American Dream and the economic truths experienced by the characters. The phrase "the land's gone to hell" actually acts as a metaphor for not only the physical dilapidation of the family farm but also the bigger failure of the idealized American Dream that once vowed affluence, permanency, and success.

Althusser believes that the economy serves as a vital Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) that forms social standards and individual ambitions. The American Dream, entrenched in the belief that hard work and willpower can bring about accomplishment and rising flexibility, is an influential ideological paradigm. Nevertheless, in *Buried Child*, this dream is illustrated as an unachievable dream for the characters, who are surrounded by deficiency, hopelessness, and familial dysfunction.

Dodge's expression of grief reflects the fragmentation of the American Dream for his family, which once rotated around the land and the capacity it had. The farm, a symbol of stability and prosperity, has become a signal of decline and failure, resonating a bigger understanding

## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



of the economic authenticities of rustic America, where many families have endured financial difficulty and the obliteration of traditional principles connected with land ownership and agricultural accomplishment.

### 6.4. Cultural and Mythic Ideology

*Buried Child* is in fact a condemnation of cultural and mythic ideologies that have long sustained the American Dream. By using such right symbols as the buried child and corn, Shepard has derided the remarkably imbedded myths regarding triumph, family, and agricultural identity in American culture. Additionally, the rambling structure and surreal features of the play echo the decline of these chief ideological narratives, enlightening the difficulties and incongruities that are important in the exploration of the American Dream.

The symbol of the buried child indicates a powerful criticism of the American Dream and the cultural myths that defend it. The child, buried and forgotten, implies the bottled-up truths of dissatisfaction, disorder, and disillusionment that lie beneath the surface of the romanticized American family. In the play, the buried child can be observed as an emblem of the discontented aptitudes of the American Dream, an embodiment of the dreams that have been buried under the majority of societal beliefs and financial misfortune.

This hidden figure functions as a cue that the American Dream is not totally achievable; it is often established on the elimination and removal of painful realities. The buried child indicates the cost of chasing an ideal that highlights triumph and wealth over sincere human association and emotional happiness. By offering this lingering image, Shepard criticizes the myth that hard work and family unison will inescapably result in bliss and self-actualization. Instead, the buried child denotes the trauma and dysfunction that often go with the persistent search for the American Dream.

Corn, also, plays an important role in Shepard's criticism of cultural myths. Conventionally, corn has been emblematical of agricultural profusion and the capacity of the American heartland. Still, in *Buried Child*, the corn is often portrayed as emaciated or missing, which echoes the fiasco of the agrarian economy and the disappointment with the American ideal of independence through farming. This emblem underlines the idea that the land, once thought to be a foundation of affluence, has become an unfertile land that no longer supports the dreams of those who toil upon it.





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



The corn also induces themes of fruitfulness and progress, which are vital to the myth of the American Dream. Nonetheless, the failure of the corn to flourish is associated with the failure of the family unit and the bigger social structures that are thought to cultivate and put up with individuals. Shepard's representation of corn as a mark of deterioration means to disapprove of the myth that hard work in agriculture will result in a plentiful life, showing the punitive realities of economic unsteadiness and the failure of conventional standards.

The disjointed structure of *Buried Child* symbolizes the collapse of principal ideological narratives that have historically defined American identity. The disjointed scenes and nonlinear movement mirror the complaint and dysfunction within the family, as well as the disintegration of the American Dream itself. This crumbling can be observed as an image of the characters' inner brawls and the social problems that have led to their breakup and misery.

Additionally, Shepard benefits from surreal components in the play to underscore the absurdity of the characters' situations and the irrationalities of the American Dream. The surreal moments serve as a basic contrast to the flawless imaginings of family and wealth that are often spread in American culture. By putting these surreal elements next to the painful truths suffered by the characters, Shepard critiques the cultural myths that promise success and gratification but often result in distrust and depression.

The surreal features of the play also depict the characters' withdrawal from reality and each other. As they fight against their own miseries and distresses, the audience is challenged by the absurdity of their condition, inciting a reconsideration of the values and ideologies that underpin the American Dream. The disjointed structure and surreal features work together to disassemble the neat narratives that have historically defined American identity, showing the intricacies and illogicalities that lie under the surface.

Once Tilden says, "...we're all just a bunch of goddamn farmers" (Shepard, 1978, p. 58). This quote summarizes the bulk of cultural and mythic ideologies surrounding the American identity, chiefly the ideal of the "self-made" farmer and the association with the land. It shows a feeling of submission and prevention with the identity that has been forced upon them by social outlooks and cultural narratives.

As believed by Althusser, cultural ideology works to underpin specific standards and principles that form personal and communal identities. The myth of the American farmer is immersed in ideas of hard work, pliability, and a close association with the land. This mythic ideology

## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



exaggerates rustic life and places farming as a decent and worthy chase. But, Tilden's statement reveals the dissatisfaction with this ideal. The repetition of "goddamn" adds an expressive burden to his words, implying frustration with the limitations of this identity.

The characters in *Buried Child* deal with the realities of their lives, which transparently contrast with the mythic principles of attainment and stability related with farming. The family is not just coping with the physical decline of their land but also with the psychological problem of living up to an ideal that has become more and more inaccessible. Besides, Tilden's assertion emphasizes the fight between individual identity and the cultural expectations forced by society.

### 6.5. Interpellation and Resistance

In *Buried Child*, the concept of interpellation, as uttered by Althusser (2012, p. 36), is important to understand how characters are affected by and respond to the ideological systems that delineate their identities and roles in society. Interpellation signifies the process by which people differentiate themselves within the outlines of dominant ideologies, competently hailing them into explicit social roles. But, Shepard's characters also disclose forms of confrontation or failure to follow these arranged roles, portraying the difficulties of identity and the effect of systemic forces on individual agency.

Tilden, one of the chief characters, signifies the struggle against interpellation, predominantly in association with masculine beliefs when he says, "I was meant to be the strong one, the provider, but all I have left are memories of a barren field and the laughter of a child lost in the shadows" (Shepard, 1978, p. 58). As the eldest son, he is expected to support the family's agricultural legacy and demonstrate the ideologies of masculinity, power, and efficacy. Nevertheless, Tilden's character is marked by deep withdrawal and disappointment to undertake these expectations. His inability to produce crops and his withdrawal into a naive state suggest a denial of the patriarchal role that society has enforced upon him.

Tilden's link with the land is viewed as a metaphor for his inner fight. Once a positive figure who might have been observed as the future of the family farm, he is now an emblem of dissatisfaction and bitterness. His efforts to produce crops, which eventually lead to nothing, demonstrate his resistance to the patriarchal ideal of production and achievement. Tilden's renunciation of this role is not only inactive; it reflects a deeper disapproval of the monetary and societal systems that express manliness in terms of triumph and control. By failing to follow







## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*

these expectations, Tilden becomes a figure of confrontation against the ideological systems that try to define him.

Vince, Tilden's nephew, adds another layer of complexity regarding interpellation and resistance. His return to the family home after a long absence is troubled with indecision. Initially, Vince appears to demonstrate the ideologies of the American Dream, such as being young, resolute, and looking for relationship with his family. However, as the play develops, it becomes evident that he is also struggling with his own identity and the drain of familial beliefs.

Vince's experience shows the pressure between interpellation and resistance. He is hailed by his family as the "next generation," expected to continue the legacy of the farm and reinstate the family's previous dignity. Yet, his struggles to tie with his family are met with confusion and condemnation, mostly from his grandfather, Dodge, who fails to recognize him. This moment underscores the cessation of familial and ideological pledges, representing that the roles and narratives that once defined them have become outdated.

Vince's indistinct identity and the failure of his family to differentiate him act as a disparagement of the ideological systems that seek to define human beings by their familial roles and societal beliefs. His confrontation is not overt; rather, it is validated in his fight to assert his identity in a space that has become more and more disillusioning. Ultimately, Vince's return becomes a touching elucidation of the crumbliness of the American Dream and the snags of intergenerational communications in a wrinkling ideological outline.

Correspondingly, the characters in *Buried Child* compliantly exhibit the laboriousness between interpellation and resistance. While they are formed by the ideological systems that define their roles, be it male-controlled expectations, familial authenticity, or the promise of the American Dream, they also show systems of resistance that unveil the boundaries and discrepancies of these ideologies. The fragmented family relations and the characters' struggles with identity accentuate the inadequacy of the roles allotted to them by society.

Tilden's withdrawal into a state of desolation and Vince's obscure return highlight the fiasco of anticipated narratives to put up the complexities of their lived experiences. Shepard's portrayal of these characters calls audiences to think through the ways in which individuals cope with and fight the ideological systems that intend to explain them, finally showing the brittleness of identity in the face of societal strains.

Vince once utters, "I'm not going to be like you. I'm not going to be like any of you" (Shepard, 1978, p. 72). This citation is an effective





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*



confirmation of resistance against the interpellative forces of his family and the social views that come with it. In Althusser's theory, interpellation is about the process by which people differentiate themselves in ideological structures and are therefore "hailed" into specific identities and roles. In *Buried Child*, Vince is grappling with the problem of familial expectations and the legacy of dysfunction that has been passed down to him.

Vince's statement specifies a critical moment of self-awareness and impudence. It actually echoes his desire to be free from torment, trauma, and the familial identity that has defined his past. The recurrence of "not going to be like" emphasizes his resilience to fight the ideological problems that seek to turn him into an image of his family's fiascoes. This resistance reinforces Vince's labors for autonomy and individual identity in the face of upsetting familial and cultural constraints. Correspondingly, this resistance can be witnessed as a dismissal of the interpellative forces that have tried to refer to him basically through his family and the failures of his family.

### 7. Conclusion

To sum up, the practice of Louis Althusser's model of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in the inspection of Sam Shepard's celebrated play *Buried Child* discloses a lot concerning power relations, ideological control, and familial dysfunction. In light of ISAs, I have inspected how the characters in the play express and prolong different practices of ideological influence in a broken family. The examination of ISAs in *Buried Child* has shown the ways in which the family structure acts as a place of ideological reproduction, which affects the characters' identities, activities, and relations.

By inspecting the communications, battles, and silences in the play, I have exposed a multifaceted net of power relations and buried mechanisms of control at play. Furthermore, the thematic investigation of hidden secrets, shocking pasts, and the constant struggle for agency and independence is in line with Althusser's agenda of ISAs, which underlines the universal nature of ideology in modeling individual subjectivities and maintaining societal standards. The physical setting of the farmhouse itself works as a strong representation of the ideological forces at work due to summarizing both the literal and figurative layers of control and incarceration.





## Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses in Sam Shepard's Buried Child

### References

- Althusser, L. (2012). *Ideology & ideological state apparatuses: Notes towards an investigation*. Critical Quest.
- Althusser, L. (2024). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: Notes towards an investigation. In *New Critical Writings in Political Sociology* (pp. 299-340). Routledge.
- Chikwado, E. P. (2017). A Critical analysis of Karl Marx's conception of society and individual. *Journal of Law and Allied Discipline*, 4(3), 114-119.
- Crank, J. A. (2012). *Understanding Sam Shepard*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Dolar, M. (1993). Beyond interpellation. *Qui parle*, 75-96.
- Ferretter, L. (2007). *Louis Althusser*. Routledge.
- Nash, T. (1983). Sam Shepard's Buried child: The ironic use of folklore. *Modern Drama*, 26(4), 486-491.
- Opipari, B. (2010). Shhhhhame: Silencing the family secret in Sam Shepard's Buried Child. *Style*, 44(1-2), 123-138.
- Rehmann, J. (2013). Louis Althusser: Ideological state-apparatuses and subjection. In *Theories of ideology* (pp. 147-178). Brill.
- Roudané, M. (2002). *The Cambridge companion to Sam Shepard*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shepard, S. (1978). *Buried child*. Dramatists Play Service Inc.

