

# ***Mumbo Jumbo* as a Counter-Ideological Novel: An Anti-Althusserian Reading**

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**Abstract** The relationship between literature and power structures has been at the center of attention and discussion. While Louis Althusser considers literature an ideological entity, Franz Fanon sees its liberating force. Althusser's insertion of literature in "Ideological State Apparatuses" is in contrast to Fanon's "combat literature." This paper adopts Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* as a touchstone to evaluate the applicability of Althusser and Fanon's understanding of literature to an African American novel. This undertaking is also concerned with literary theory, using literature to discuss the applicability of literary theory. It applies Althusserian key terms to study *Mumbo Jumbo* and expose the historical, cultural and religious inconsistencies in Althusser's definitions. Since Althusser emphasizes that dominant powers inundate history with illusion to present a favored version of the past, this study reveals how Reed de-illusions history to present a distinctive African American one. Regarding culture, it discusses how Reed is self-conscious about literature as an ISA and how he through expositions changes his literature into an anti-ideological entity. Regarding religion, *Mumbo Jumbo* is full of expositions of white Christianity as a religious ISA in the hands of the dominant powers. Such investigations come to the conclusion that *Mumbo Jumbo* is more inclined to Fanon's "combat literature" than Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses. It is possible to apply Althusserian philosophy to paradoxically detect the inconsistencies in it. Moreover, it is possible to conclude that Althusser has an inclusive approach to literature and does not take particularities into consideration and that his classification

is not complete.

**Key words** *Mumbo Jumbo*; ideology; counter-ideology; state apparatuses; combat literature

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## Introduction

When Althusser in *Lenin and Philosophy* (1968) classified literature as an “ideological state apparatus” (137), he incited various critical responses. As one of such forays, the present study aims at investigating such a labeling in overtly political writings as those of African American literature, with a focus on Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* has a hybrid nature in which historical, social, and political elements are interspersed with fictional devices. The fact that Reed refers to such historical events as the United States’ subjugation of Haiti, whites’ attempted suppression of jazz music, and the ubiquitous conviction that president Warren Harding had a black lineage indicates the novelist’s intention of going beyond merely writing a creative work. Also, because Reed includes PaPa LaBas in the novel as a figure who searches for black identity, the novel can be called a resisting entity against white hegemony.

Reed proves to be self-conscious about topical issues when makes connections between different epochs: “I wanted to write about a time like the present, or to use the past to prophesy about the future—a process that our ancestors called ‘Necromancy.’ I chose the 20’s because [that period was] very similar to [what was] happening [in the late 1960s–early 1970s]” (qtd. in Werlock 934). Emphasizing Reed’s solicitude for his time, Roxanne Harde remarks “*Mumbo Jumbo* is a tightly controlled allegory that draws from modernism its weapons, from postmodernism its tools, and negotiates, within the form, a hermeneutic of reverence for language’s spiritual impulse” (Harde 362). W. Lawrence Hogue enumerates three strategies

adopted by Reed that contribute to cessation with tradition: first, “Reed violates the conventional reader’s expectations by juxtaposing many texts and genres not traditionally associated with the novel”; second, “*Mumbo Jumbo* constantly challenges the reader through exaggeration, as a way of undermining the notion of an absolute truth”; and third, “an undermining of linearity” (94-95). All such comments reveal that Reed’s novel can act as a proper touchstone for evaluating Althusser’s insertion of literature as an ISA.

### ***Mumbo Jumbo* and the Question of History**

Althusser has repeatedly referred to the workings of history in the hands of the ruling power. Like alluding to all “realities,” when the ruling class alludes to history, it taints it with hints of “illusion” (Ferretter 79). Thus, what we receive as “history” is a construct made by the power discourse, removed from the harsh realities of societies. This fake and ideologically stricken narrative, which in Althusserian term is nothing but an ideology or an “Ideological State Apparatus,” is frequently attacked by neo-Marxists like Althusser who try to rewrite history from other points of view. Such an attempt can be properly seen as an anti-ideology, an attempt clearly detectable in *Mumbo Jumbo*.

One of the most prominent reasons why Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* refuses not to be read as an ideological apparatus is its intention to rewrite history. In fact, the novelist seems to be conscious that the history that has been bequeathed is tainted with power-based illusions and disregards such marginalized people as African Americans. As a result, he tries to give a differently unique version of American history in his novel. This issue is well-observed by Reginald Martin who believes:

Reed’s point is that ‘facts’ from history are often fabricated or too biased or incredible to be believed. Fact overlaps with fiction, and only when the two are juxtaposed can one see the similarities. Further, as in the case with religion, one believes what one wants to believe, regardless of the facts. One man’s fiction is another man’s fact, and who is to say which is which and whose fact or fiction is more valid? (Martin 90)

Reed’s consciousness of history is soon established by setting the novel in the 1920s, a very complex and controversial stage in American history: “1920. CHARLIE PARKER, THE houngan (a word derived from *n’gana gana*) for whom there was no master adept enough to award him the Asson, is born. 1920-1930. That 1 decade which doesn’t seem so much a part of American history as the hidden After-Hours

of America struggling to jam. To get through” (17). This “1 decade” is a time of political struggle for power where ideological and anti-ideological discourses were simultaneously present. In such an upheaval, the novel communicates the idea that creative works, which are taken ideological by Althusser, is more influential for change than non-creatives ones: “the nursery rhyme and the book of Science Fiction might be more revolutionary than any number of tracts, pamphlets, manifestoes of the political realm” (18). The fact that Reed prefers fiction to non-fiction, including political writings, lies in his lack of confidence in all political parties, even those that seem to be favoring African Americans. According to Lee Hubbard,

Reed believes that these ‘talented tenthers,’ led by Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates, have set up a black Vichy regime. (The French Vichy government collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.) ‘These blacks-Vichy-regime intellectuals don’t and won’t support black writers with viewpoints that differ from their own, such as black nationalist, multiculturalist and anyone who makes white people feel uneasy. It’s time for African-American writers to end the slave-master relationship.’ (27)

Contrary to Althusser, Reed seems to be believing that philosophical and political tracts do not lead us to real state of affairs and finally to black emancipation. Rather, they are apparatuses at the service of political, not public, ends. In Reed’s view, it is literature that acts as a popular genre and as an agency for African American liberation. This belief led to a popular rewriting of American history at a time in 1920s when Warren Harding was the president of the United States. In addition to the abundant references to Harding, Reed points to the preceding and succeeding presidents, Woodrow Wilson and Calvin Coolidge.

President Harding is present in *Mumbo Jumbo* most probably because of his “total lack of racial prejudice in a highly intolerant era,” because of being “devoid of racial or religious prejudices,” and because of proposing “an anti-lynching bill and an interracial commission to recommend ways to improve race relations” (Anthony, qtd. in Bishop 20). Since “the White House urgently suppresses stories of President Harding’s black ancestry” (Young 83), Reed’s novel resurfaces the issue and sheds light on it. In an explicit allusion, the novel informs readers that “Race Riots Between Whites and Negroes. The Whole Reflecting an Unhappy Country when Harding Became Its President” (24). In fact, the novel tries to indicate that the “Race President” does nothing to uphold negro ideals of emancipation:

I...I...How do you think that this Harding election will affect the Negroes, W.W.? Hinkle says in an attempt to change the subject.

Why...it's funny that you should mention it, sir, they all call him the Race President. (96)

In his attempts at rewriting history, Reed insinuates the idea that the issue of race and the president associated with it is nothing but an ideological apparatus. Reed suggests that associating Harding with race is nothing but a specious attempt to interpellate negroes into American political ISA. This process of subjectification, through which individuals change into subjects, is a question that Reed asks in the novel: "when he was quoted as saying, 'The Negro should be the Negro and not an imitation White man,' what did he mean by that? Was that some kind of code he was giving to Blacks?" (181). Though occupying one of the most powerful positions in the world, the hybrid-race Harding turns out to be "merely a puppet president, his only acts of agency defined as black" (Harde 363). When Harding is finally assassinated by the Atonists, who finds his claims of race intolerable, in the course of "what has become known to historians as 'Harding's mysterious journey West'" (182), the whole majesty of American Presidency is questioned, because it turned out to be a position dominated by ulterior powers. The undermining of America's political system goes to the extent that the novel attacks Western political ISA and regards all the existing parties to be subservient to an absolutist power:

We weren't only a political cause but a cause that went to the very heart of Western Civilization. You see, there are many types of Atonists. Politically they can be "Left," "Right," "Middle," but they are all together on the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission. They merely disagree on the ways of sustaining it. If a radio show began touting the achievements of Western Civilization over civilizations of others there would barely be a letter to the station from anyone, anarchist or Calvin Coolidge Republican. (167)

*Mumbo Jumbo* suggests that such seemingly democratic parties as left and right are nothing but an ideological apparatus established and controlled by the state power. This keeps in line with Althusser's political ISA in which membership to these parties produces nothing but a spurious consent. In the words of Antony C. Sutton "[such] discussion and funding is always towards more state power, use of state power and away from individual rights" (Sutton 35). Thus, Reed informs readers that the seemingly political participation is not only a practice of individual rights, but also participation in the very process of state interpellation.

### ***Mumbo Jumbo* and the Cultural ISA**

In addition to exposing the workings of history as an apparatus serving the ruling class, *Mumbo Jumbo* is highly self-conscious of the ideological workings of art. This attitude is soon established in the novel in the opening pages of the novel in a ground-breaking commentary by the narrator: “Europe can no longer guard the ‘fetishes’ of civilizations which were placed in the various Centers of Art Detention, located in New York City” (15). The use of the term “fetish” for art, which refers to the institutional workings of art for the dominant ideologies, insinuates Reed’s attitude to the present state of the phenomenon in the contemporary world. Reed is quick in asserting that this matter has a history behind it, an assertion referred by some modern critics such as Walter Benjamin.

Benjamin argues that “the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of *art* with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function” (223-24). The “ritual function” Benjamin refers to is in fact equivalent to what Althusser sees as the material existence of ideology and its embodiment “in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (*Lenin and Philosophy* 112). In all its forms, the question that is important about art is to see what broader institution it serves: whether the ritual is at the service of nation or state. This question finds a historical answer in *Mumbo Jumbo*: “in Egypt at the time of Osiris every man was an artist and every artist a priest; it wasn’t until later that Art became attached to the State to do with it what it pleased” (200). Reed informs his readers that in ancient civilizations art contained codes of ethics serving humanity, while later serving the ideological desires of the State. Reed later emphasizes that this plague began with the conversion of Europe into Christianity: “Dionysus taught the Greeks the Osirian Art which lasted until the Atonists in the late 4th century B.C. convinced the Emperor Constantine to co-sign for the Cross” (204).

Reed obviously interprets art as a materially ritualistic presence that serves religion, which by itself is an ISA in the hands of the State. This general view of art is specifically narrowed down to refer to the state of African American literature when Reed satirizes the “secret societies” which contains existing publishing houses that situate “Black writers [...] under literary colonialism” (Hubbard 27). In the eyes of Reed, literary colonialism is so important that it can be equalized with other sorts of incursion: “Well the White man came into China, exploited our lands, raped our women, plundered our art” (102). While Reed rebukes white exploitation of art, he also criticizes people’s lack of taste for art:

Have you ever seen people line up outside a Van Gogh exhibit? When they get inside there are so many they can't even see the paintings, they just pass by like sheep or like mourners passing the tomb of a fallen hero, a bier, with the same solemnity. And the extent of their knowledge concerning Van Gogh is that he "cut off his ear." Man, it's religion they make it into. (104-105)

Apparently, *Mumbo Jumbo* self-consciously refers to art as a cultural ISA and considers people as passive agents who keep the ideological functioning going. In addition, Reed refers to the institutionalized nature of literary studies when he inserts a journal, entitled *Benign Monster*, in the novel whose board is sarcastically described as "an art director who likes Aubrey Beardsley, a flagpole sitter whose record is 10 days, 10 hours, 10 minutes, and 10 seconds, people whose feet fall asleep, 3 or 4 inside dopes, and muckrakers of Tammany Hall. The staff of the *Benign Monster*" (87). Reed's emphasis on the propagation of colonial values in white literary journals remind Étienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey's contention in "On Literature as an Ideological Form" about the transformation of aesthetic values of literature into domination effects in what Althusser calls "Ideological State Apparatuses," which is here schools and universities (Resch 215).

*Mumbo Jumbo* describes the ideological nature of art institutions. Furthermore, it demonstrates that they are managed by the agents of "Repressive State Apparatus." In one of such resisting expositions, the novel apprises readers of management of the Center of Art Detention:

Biff Musclewhite has reduced his status from Police Commissioner to Consultant to the Metropolitan Police in the precinct in Yorktown in order to take a job as Curator of the Center of Art Detention. (More pay.) He is sitting with 1 of his old colleagues, Schlitz "the Sarge of Yorktown," nicknamed affectionately by the police station he so often visited over the years. (48)

The policy adopted for the Center of Art Detention keeps in line with Althusser's argument that in modern societies Repressive State Apparatus are mostly held out of sight because the State does its best to attain the consent of its citizens through ideological apparatuses. When *Mumbo Jumbo* exposes that Biff Musclewhite, the former RSA agent, is not an ISA agent, it exposes how ISA and RSA are interrelated in societies, and aim at upholding the interests of the State. Remarkably, this unified agency does not lead to a genuine understanding of social mechanism; rather,

it holds individuals from the truth, even when they are exposed to a salvaging entity like art. The custody of Art Detention by an RSA agent deprives art from its true function. In the words of Harde, “With the detention centers, *Mumbo Jumbo* allegorizes the Western preoccupation with cataloguing fine art and hiding it safely away from the masses” (366).

Reed’s exposition of literature and literary journals in the hands of Western cultural ISA is an attempt to undermine the very hierarchical order on which the West, under the guise of science and rationality, is founded. This challenge is not directed at art and literature *per se*; rather, it is directed at their embodiment in Western cultural ISAs. This distinction is best communicated in the novel when it is claimed “We will make our own future Text. A future generation of young artists will accomplish this” (243). Such a claim of an idiosyncratic Text contains the belief that there are texts and each is a narrative dominated by a system of ideas. After exposing and undermining the Western narrative, Reed is after presenting his own typical narrative which is an anti-ideological, anti-Western discourse aimed at upholding the ideals of African American race.

Reed, as a result, makes art an apparatus that caters for the causes of marginalized races. For this cause, *Mumbo Jumbo* contains references to indigenous folk cultures and events such as Hoodoo which refers to a combination of various African religious practices generated by enslaved Africans in the New World (Katz-Hyman and Rice 170). This culture becomes an ideal that anti-ideological characters search for: “Yes, I want to learn more, pop. I’m thinking about going to New Orleans and Haiti, Brazil and all over the South studying our ancient cultures, our Hoodoo cultures” (245). Consequently, seeking Hoodoo popular culture, which is seen as “a survival of an era untouched by the atonizing, alienating effects of popular Western culture” (Harde 371) is a resolution to establish a counter-ideological discourse to oppose Western cultural ISA.

*Mumbo Jumbo* adopts a counter-discourse to revive and rescue the very art that is now an apparatus in the hands of Western institutionalization. The attempt for this revival is repeated throughout the novel. In a very conspicuous effort, Reed designates Yellow Jack to compel Berbelang to “remember the vow, Berbelang, we are just going to return the things, not pick up their habits of razing peoples’ art. It isn’t Goya nor is it the painting’s fault that it’s used by Atonists as a worship” (131). This act of remembrance is in fact indicative of new view of art as a salvaging phenomenon than an institutionalizing presence. According to Linda Hutcheon, “On the one hand, [Reed] offers another totalizing system to counter that of white western culture: that of voodoo. And, on the other hand, he appears to believe

strongly in certain humanist concepts, such as the ultimately free individual artist in opposition to the political forces of oppression” (197-98). Reed, in fact, struggles to invest art with another function to “represent African American culture to different racial audiences” (Young 83). This appropriation of art for humanistic and salvaging purposes is in stark contrast to Althusser’s account of art as classified as a cultural ISA.

### ***Mumbo Jumbo and the Religious ISA***

Undoubtedly, one of the most ubiquitous elements in *Mumbo Jumbo* is religion. While religion is an ideological apparatus in Althusser’s philosophy leading to the interpellation of individuals, Reed seems to preserve a conscious stance against it by exposing its ideological functions. The workings of religious ISA are powerfully revealed through Atonists who worship the sun god, Ra, of Egyptian heritage; Atonists are those who follow the religion of Akhenaten. In addition, the novel explicitly alludes to the religions of the world. In another historical approach, Reed associates them all genealogically:

The Koran was revealed to Muhammed by Gabriel the angel of the Christian apocalypse. Prophets in the Koran: Abraham Isaac and Moses were Christian prophets; each condemns the Jewish people for abandoning the faith; realizing that there has always been a pantheistic contingent among the “chosen people” not reluctant to revere other gods. The Virgin Mary figures in the Koran as well as in the Bible. (41)

Such allusions do not consider religions as heavenly phenomena; rather, they finally refer to their institutional workings. According to Theodore O. Mason, Jr., Reed “wishes to loosen the stranglehold of the Judeo-Christian tradition on the cultural patterns of black people everywhere” (97). This is why the Jesus he describes differs highly from that bequeathed by the colonial discourse: “Nowhere is there an account or portrait of Christ laughing. Like the Marxists who secularized his doctrine, he is always stern, serious and as gloomy as a prison guard” (114). In fact, Reed struggles to disentangle his fellow people from the colonial Christ figure because “this burdensome archetype [...] afflicted the Afro-American soul” (114). Well-aware of the discriminatory and exploitative grip of white religion in African American society, Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo* exclaims:

Your Christendom was for serfs, for underlings and the peasants. You, the pope

and the king, were allowed to practice ceremonies which “deviated” from the rules of us as your flunkies. “Flatfoots,” you used to call us behind our backs ... You arrested us but some of us escaped. I came to America where I have been able to hold our little band together now scattered all over the globe waiting for this day ... this day when you would be forced to remit your errors. And now it has arrived. (79)

Reed’s assertion in this excerpt contains both an interpretation of Christianity and a revolutionary call in response to it. He avowedly indicates that Christianity is an unnatural religion for African American people. Since Christianity is a collection of imposed codes of ethics, the novel implies that it is nothing but an Ideological State Apparatus, solidifying the white dominance over colored people. That is why the novel associates rigid figures with practitioners of religious ISA: “You are no different from the Christians you imitate. Atonists Christians and Muslims don’t tolerate those who refuse to accept their modes” (41). Through such associations, Reed seems to be communicating the idea that religions are not vehicles of salvation and freedom; rather, they are apparatuses at the service of bondage and oppression. In his unique representation of history, Reed extends this view of religion to the whole Western history:

THE MU’TAFIKAH ARE HOLDING a meeting in the basement of a 3-story building located at the edge of “Chinatown.” Upstairs is a store which deals in religious articles. Above this is a gun store; at the top, an advertising firm which deals in soap accounts. If Western History were a 3-story building located in downtown Manhattan during the 1920s it would resemble this little architectural number. (97)

In this manner, Reed turns the “3-story building” into a microcosm through which a whole history is reflected. The “gun store” he refers to is in fact a symbol of the Repressive Apparatus in Western world that is justified and covered by religious ISA and advertisements, consumerism, and similar capitalist apparatuses. Reed also censures all who ignore the ideological workings of religion and act as protectors of the political institutions. For example, in another historical concern, Reed calls John Milton the “Atonist apologist extraordinary himself, [who] saw the coming of the minor geek and sorcerer Jesus Christ as a way of ending the cult of Osiris and Isis forever” (207). The novel emphasizes that Milton “worked for Cromwell, a man who banned theatre from England and was also a hero of Sigmund Freud”

(208). Reed's allusion to Freud is in fact another attack on the apologist workings of intellectuals who merely preserve the status quo: "Much later came another Atonist compromise, Sigmund Freud, who refined the rhetoric of the Church and eased the methods of dealing with the problem" (208).

The question of religion as an ISA is also reflected in one of the most important incidents of the novel, i.e. Papa LaBas's quest. As a central character of the novel, Papa LaBas is simultaneously a priest, a detective, and a reader who initiates a fairly mystical mission to discover a secret sacred text that reconsiders the wholeness of Western civilization through the perspective of the black experience. Following the search for the Book of Thoth during the course of *Mumbo Jumbo*, this middle-aged, black private detective finds out that the valuable Text of the Work has been ruined. The novel tries to suggest that the Atonists, who hold a powerful ideological stance, are responsible for such disappearance.

To present his unsettling and expository criticism, Reed assigns Papa LaBas the role of a detective to solve the mysteries. This expository role is significantly given to a priest of Cathedral and an evangelist who himself can have an ideological stance. Remarkably, Papa LaBas acts reversely and has in fact an anti-ideological presence in the novel. In his search for the "text," LaBas realizes that anthologies as the "work" of Jes Grew, disclosing a general view of affairs, tend to begin with the historical knowledge, which is always tainted with politically illusory facts. LaBas's foray into the detection of the "text" seems to be an archetypal mode analogous to the search for the Holy Grail, a search that is alluded in the opening of the third section of the book: "*EUROPE HAS ONCE MORE attempted to recover the Holy Grail*" (13). When the archetypal search is embodied in LaBas's struggle, his grail becomes "the Book [which presumably] was buried beneath the center of the Cotton Club" (227). This burial can be an anti-ideological exposition of the fact that Western Civilization knows nothing about history. Though the destiny of the Book remains enigmatic in Reed's novel, it keeps bearing significance all through:

By the end of the novel, the sacred book has still not been recovered. In fact, it may be lost forever. But that doesn't mean that the Jes Grew is done for. The spirit of life suggested in the sacred Text will be preserved nevertheless. And it's this spirit which endows the black man with a heritage that the white man is without. It's this Neo-HooDooism which will save the black man, and save all of those who embrace it, from the spiritual wasteland which modern living is creating. (Boyer, 27)

One can claim the Book is an anti-ideological presence in the class struggle of whites and blacks within religious ISA. The presence of the Book is intertwined with the persistence of LaBas, who stands for an inquisitive African American. Though he remains busy with his work until the close of the novel, LaBas will, very similar to the Sacred Text, persist, because his investigation suggests that the Book is still present, and this very act of investigation ensures the ongoing process as Labas signifies. The fact that the Book is not found can have significance because of the emphasis on the oral aspect of African American identity. In an interview, Reed argues that “memory ends where writing begins” (Dick, 335). In fact, Reed refers to a resisting feature of African Americans: “by not writing down their language the people of West Africa were able to preserve their values and their religion” (Dick, 334). Reed’s contention insinuates the fact that religion as a set of values and codes is to be felt and therefore cannot be internalized through a written system. This is emphasized in the novel when LaBas “discover[s] that the aesthetics is always changing and that its evolving form is integral to it” (Jablon 26). This emphasis on the oral tradition and the volatile nature of aesthetics is an attack on the institutional nature of religion.

In addition to questioning white religion in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed is critical of those fellow African Americans who directly and indirectly substantiate Christ in their writings. The substantiation in question refers to the Black Christ image that became popular among African Americans. By imagining this image, these people were coerced to attain “an unconditional affirmation of blackness” (Ware 51). Though this attempt was a black politics for opposing exploitation and otherness, Reed explicitly rebukes it in the novel:

The young poet Nathan Brown, LaBas felt, was serious about his Black Christ, however absurd that may sound, for Christ is so unlike African loas and Orishas, in so many essential ways, that this alien becomes a dangerous intruder in the Afro-American mind, an unwelcome gatecrasher into Ifé, home of the spirits. Yes, Brown was serious, but the rest were hucksters who had invented this Black Christ, this fraud, simply in order to avoid an honest day’s sweat. (114)

In spite of the political workings of the assumption of a black Christ, Reed spurns the idea because it necessarily confirms the existence of Christ and Christianity. As he strongly challenges American religious ISA, he does not envisage any image of Christ in any form and for any purpose. This is the anti-ideological stance that he overtly adopts all through *Mumbo Jumbo*, making him and his production aloof from ideological discourse.

### Universality of *Mumbo Jumbo*

So far, it has been argued that Reed's expository approach to Western tradition makes his fiction dissociate itself from Althusser's designation of art and literature as an "ideological state apparatus." By opposing Western history through his fiction, he demonstrates that Westerners' seemingly neutral account is nothing but a fiction. In the words of Mason, "Reed's sense of history devolves from an understanding that the historical 'facts' as we understand them are wholly fictions propagated by the masters of high Western culture" (98). While it can roughly undeniably be argued that Reed undermines Western claims of presenting a neutral account of events, i.e. history, the important question that arises is to figure out the extent of universality of Reed's undertaking.

As it was pointed out, *Mumbo Jumbo* furthers the ideals of African American people against white hegemony in American society. This interaction of the novel with the real world is a crucial point emphasized by Reed: "My reading leads me to believe that Hoodoo—or, as they say in Haiti and other places, 'Voodoo' or 'Vodun'—was always open to the possibility of the real world and the psychic world intersecting. They have a principle for it: LegBa (in the U.S., 'LaBas')" (Dick 62). The insertion of these terms and figures in his storyline means that Reed attempts at connecting his fiction to "the real world" he mentions. Now it is time to know that the intended "real" encompasses humanity in general or revolves exclusively around African American experience.

Franz Fanon, a postcolonial critic who argues for the emancipatory nature of literature, argues that for the attainment of "combat literature," universal goals need to be extracted from native cultures. It is this stage that "rouse[s] the people" (*Wretched* 159). When LaBas is assigned the role of a black detective, *Mumbo Jumbo* proves to be explicitly concerned with native cultures. However, the novel seems to be going beyond indigenous concerns. The inclusion of Atonists as powerful ideological entities who have historical presence with no specific geographical signification gives the novel a universal aspect. In addition, such remonstrative attempts as the inclusion of "Partial Bibliography" in a fictional production, which in the words of Erik D. Curren "parodies both scholarly claims to authority and the literary use of cultural documentation" (145), indicate Reed's criticism of the whole tradition of ideological documentation. This claim is acknowledged by Harde's astute observation that calls Reed's production an "immutable Text" because of its allegorical iconoclasm (362)

## Conclusion

Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* incorporates formalistic methods such as metafiction, an obvious expository voice in the text, an unrestricted practice of incredulity and comicality, as well as deconstruction of naturalizing tradition in writing. These disruptive devices are conducive to tendency for universalism, transforming the text from an "ideological state apparatus" to a "combat literature." The writer's voice is overtly present in the process of production to represent the voice of the marginalized, to rewrite history from a subversive perspective, and to expose and undermine the long-established Western cultural and religious ISA. Though Papa LaBas's expedition is in the first place African American in nature, it gains a universal aspect when it is found to be allegorical. Thus, *Mumbo Jumbo* can be taken not as an indigenous art, but as a text for all humanity which struggles to act as an anti-ideological discourse.

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