




**"You Prefer Your Enemies Simple and Well Defined": Reading Anton Shammas' *Arabesques* as a Novel that Strategically Resists Interpellation**

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**Yiftach Ashkenazi and Omri Grinberg,**

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**Abstract:** Anton Shammas's 1986 novel *Arabesques* has been the subject of much literary criticism and on-going discussions in Hebrew literature circles. This article argues that existing interpretations of this work share a fundamental similarity to the extent that they assume *Arabesques* to be a novel whose primary aim is to depict a certain kind of subject, in accordance with the complicated emplacement of Shammas as a Palestinian writing in Hebrew. Against such interpretations, we suggest that *Arabesques* is better understood as a text that resists the process of subject formation as linked to Althusser's notion of ideology. Instead, Shammas explores the possibilities inherent in fictionality itself. Fiction, in our reading, is an alternative practice that opens up new possibilities for identity formations and for political criticism which are tied neither to ideology nor to the Althusserian interpellated subject. While departing from previous readings of the novel, these claims nevertheless stand in a line of descent with their predecessors.

## Yiftach ASHKENAZI and Omri GRINBERG

### "'You Prefer Your Enemies Simple and Well Defined': Reading Anton Shammas' *Arabesques* as a Novel that Strategically Resists Interpellation"<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Anton Shammas's 1986 novel *Arabesques* has been the subject of much literary criticism and on-going discussions in Hebrew literature circles (Shammas). This paper argues that existing interpretations of this work share a fundamental similarity to the extent that they assume *Arabesques* to be a novel whose primary aim is to depict a certain kind of subject, in accordance with the complicated emplacement of Shammas as a Palestinian writing in Hebrew. Against such interpretations, we suggest that *Arabesques* is better understood as a text that resists the process of subject formation as linked to Althusser's notion of ideology (Althusser). Instead, Shammas explores the possibilities inherent in fictionality itself. Fiction, in our reading, is an alternative practice that opens up new possibilities for identity formations and for political criticism which are tied neither to ideology nor to the Althusserian interpellated subject. While departing from previous readings of the novel, these claims nevertheless stand in a line of descent with their predecessors. The attempt here is to rethink the relevance of *Arabesques* today, almost 30 years after its publication.

Following an overview of the main interpretations of the novel that reveals them as ideological readings focused on locating a specific subject, we will delineate two key forms in which *Arabesques* resists the construction of subjectivities: the parody that appears in its "Teller" segment and undermines the possibility of constructing an ideological subject, and the breach of the autobiographical contract that appears in the "Tale" segment, which deconstructs the possibility of establishing a subject through the personal life story.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, we claim that Shammas does not only radically destabilize the ideological subject, but seeks to replace ideology with fiction. To conclude, we relate the significance of this reading to the wider field of Hebrew literature in which ideological readings are central.

The reading we suggest of *Arabesques* as a book that undermines the subject, bears significance beyond the interpretation of this in-itself important novel, offering insights and further potential applications in Hebrew literature studies. Our approach thus conveys how research about subjectivity in literature promotes closeness and exchange between different political streams and scholarly schools; it also further highlights how majority/minority relations are steeped in power-dynamics that interrupt any attempts to even examine them, as marginalized subjects' efforts of speaking-out, or writing-against, often result in the further entrenchment and even empowering of the very same mechanisms they confront.

#### The Poetics of *Arabesques*

*Arabesques* is comprised of two different parts: The Tale and The Teller, each of them themselves divided into several parts. The novel shifts from one part to the other throughout, separated by title pages which include mottos quoted from other texts. The first The Tale part is titled The Tale, the following ones are titled The Tale Continued, and the last one (Part Nine) is titled The Tale Concluded. The Teller parts are each followed by a colon and an addition that references a place related to the novel's narrative – for example: The Teller: Pere Lachaise. The parts contain chapters that run consecutively, forming a formal continuation shared between the different parts. The writing style of each part is different, each of them contending with different themes, though with certain overlaps.

The Tale is about the history of the Shammas family, starting from the middle of the 19th century when one of the forefathers left what is now Syria to the Galilee, and ending, supposedly, in the time in which the novel is being written. The Teller tells the story of the storyteller and of the people of the village; it is written realistically and includes (pseudo?) documentarian-historical descriptions,

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Hannan Hever, Sidra Ezrahi, and Louise Bethlehem, who supervised us in writing theses and seminars and have been sources of encouragement and inspiration. Yiftach would like to thank Yigal Schwartz for his guidance, encouragement and mentoring.

<sup>2</sup> The standard translation for the Hebrew "HaMesaper" and "HaSipor," are "the narrator" and the "the narrative." In his article, Hannan Hever uses these translations. But in the English translation of *Arabesques* that Shammas has approved the terms are "The Teller" and "The Tale." We will use these latter terms in the article.

performatively mimicking factual historiographic writing styles. This blurring of fiction and history is one of the main expressions of Shammas' postmodern writing strategy, which also includes parody, intertextual density, and the specific indistinguishing between the autobiographical and the fabled. The Tale also wanders at times into fantasy and folklore; elements of folktale and legend, as Hannan Hever claims, parallel the narrative structure *Arabesques*, in which stories do not appear chronologically but rather circularly throughout the temporal axis ("Hebrew" 52-3).

The Teller part of *Arabesques* is shorter. He describes a journey that takes place either in the present time, or near it. It begins in a cemetery in Paris, following the (story)teller's trip to a writing workshop in Iowa City along with, among others, a Jewish author named Yosh Bar-On, whose character was written based on A.B Yehoshua, a famed Israeli author who—as we detail below—was Shammas' friend until they had a significant—politically and literary wise—falling out. Other relationships present in this part are between the storyteller and Amira, a Jewish author of Arab descent, and between Bar-On and Paco, a Palestinian author from a refugee camp in Syria. Another character that appears later in the novel is of Michael Abyad, who may or may not be the novel's hidden author.

As Shai Ginsburg claims, the critical turmoil and heated critical exchanges with which *Arabesques* was met upon its release—some on-going to this day—are the result not only of it being written in Hebrew by a Christian-Palestinian, but of *how* it is written as a complex and rich work in which the author proved his control of the language and its writing (Ginsburg). Ezrahi notes that *Arabesques* challenge the difference between house-owner and the guest, the native speaker and outsider, home and grave (Ezrahi 96) As we show, almost every reading of *Arabesques* entails the claim that it is a novel that poses a poetic challenge to its reader and critic, emphasizing how the novel's prose critically influenced the widespread attention and critical acclaim it has drawn, as well stirred fiery discussions about it. One aspect of the challenge the novel poses is its linguistic register, which is very high and incorporates many words from historical high-registers of Hebrew that make reading the novel difficult even for skilled readers for whom Hebrew is a mother tongue. Famed literary scholar Shlomit Rimon-Keinan ("ha-Galot"), for example, has noted that when reading *Arabesques*, she had to use a dictionary several times to understand a few words.

In addition to its linguistic prowess, Rimon-Keinan notes other poetical traits that shape *Arabesques* as a challenge for the reader. One such example is the stream of consciousness or monologue form in which some of its chapters are written, where it is unclear who the speaker even is. Another one is novel's use of doubles, which strengthens its post-modernist character as it uses literary doubles that replace (at times fully, other times partially) other characters in it. A third and even more significant example, are *Arabesques* plays between truth and lies, as Shammas destabilizes not only the relation between his novel and history, but within the novel and the narrative world he himself constructs. Hever notes how this destabilization causes the reader of *Arabesques* to experience a loss of epistemological ground: whenever the reader feels as if a realization has been reached about the depicted events, the storyteller withdraws from this stabilization and presents a different truth ("Hebrew" 53). As we will show, *Arabesques* is overflowing with such "contractual violations," among them: between the autobiographical, the historical, and fiction; the historical, mythological, and folklore; and between the storyteller, protagonist, and author. These violations together form the two main ones: between the reader and author, and between the subject, text, and ideology.

### **Ideology and the Different Readings of *Arabesques***

To grasp the significance of *Arabesques*, it is crucial to understand its author's, Anton Shammas, subject position as a Christian-Palestinian citizen of Israel, publishing a novel he wrote in a level and style of Hebrew that astonished literary circles in Israel. To do so, in this section we will first become somewhat acquainted with the unique biography of Shammas, who was born in 1948 to a Christian-Palestinian family in Fassuta, a village situated in what is today Israel's north, just south of Lebanon. We then briefly sketch the background of and scholarly perspectives on Palestinian-Israeli identities, followed by a summary of the ways in which Jewish and Jewish-Israeli scholars have theorized Shammas' novel. Our main claim here is that, as relatively diverse as they are (at times even contentious towards each other), these readings share an epistemic urge to locate an ideological subject constructed by and through Shammas' writing.

*Arabesques* was the first (and so far, only) novel published by Shammas, but he was by no means anonymous up until that point; rather, he had an impressively vibrant literary career in both Hebrew and Arabic. In the late 1960s, already in his early 20s, he was the editor of the (Arabic) literary journal *A-Sharaq*. He published his first Hebrew poem in the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* in 1969; he would

go on to publish two collections of his Hebrew poems. He also published, with famed Israeli illustrator Dudu Geva, a children's book. Perhaps most importantly, aside from *Arabesques*, was his oeuvre as a translator, translating poetry and prose from Hebrew to Arabic, Arabic to English, and—what arguably contributed most to his prominence—from Arabic to Hebrew (Chetrit and Kochavi 951-2). His most notable endeavor was translating into Hebrew the works of Emile Habibi, engaging in what became a uniquely symbiotic relationship between author and translator that greatly contributed to Habibi's volatile acceptance in the field of Israeli literature (Hever, *Producing* 205-32).

Shammas' category of identity as "Arab-Israeli," or "Palestinian citizen of Israel," is one with implied status designations of citizenship, ethnicity, and nationality. Like Shammas, most Palestinian-Israelis were habitants, or are descendants of habitants, of Palestinian areas that Israel took over during the 1948 war, and subsequently became citizens of the newly established national-Jewish state but were not Jewish. This inability to take on the identity desired by the state, in conjunction with the supposedly equal-rights citizenship in the same nation-state with those whose identity does make them belong, creates the paradoxical state of the Israeli-Palestinian.

This forced molding of an inherently paradoxical identity is one of Israel's several prominent colonial elements, and yet scholarly work about Palestinian-Israelis replicates the theoretical conclusion that they are in a liminal state. This, mainly due to Palestinian-Israeli's relation to the Arab-Israel "conflict" and Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories specifically: on the one hand, they are citizens of a nation-state that does not view them as equal due to their ethnic-national-religious origins, suspects them and uses different modes and means of discrimination and marginalization; on the other hand, they are still citizens of this discriminating nation-state, unlike Palestinians from the occupied territories and beyond (as occupied non-citizens, and state-less refugees unable to return to their homeland, respectively). This liminal identity—on the subjective and collective levels—is paradoxically studied and discussed as simultaneously taken for granted, the subject of research, and part of its conclusions. For this liminality is the result of Zionism's urging of Palestinian-Israelis towards the confusion that typifies such states of being in-between (Bishara 507-22). This is his point of entry into a discussion about identity and nationality, as well as his end-point in contending with these issues vis-à-vis the (Israeli) state. Manar Hassan, in her critical discussion of "honor killings", also claims the status of Palestinian-Israelis as the result of the policies of rule in Israel: Israeli state mechanisms place Muslim Palestinian-Israelis in a position inherently conflicted, morally and legally, between local and Islamic traditions and the laws of the "democratic-liberal" Jewish state (Hassan 21). Other scholars coming from different disciplines and perspectives) share a similar claim about Palestinian-Israelis' liminality: by becoming conscious of it, the Palestinian-Israeli intellectual can resist the conflicting foundations on which the state of Israel is built and that prevent a normalization of these—and other—categories and statuses of identity.

Relating this brief historical background to Shammas' biography, we can understand his position as a Christian-Palestinian intellectual author writing in Hebrew as simultaneously highly volatile and with immense potential of undermining several different hegemonic stances, practices, and ideologies. *Arabesques* was written from a heightened position of liminality which was further intensified by Shammas' virtuous writing in the language of the occupier which, as we will show, enabled Shammas' effort to refuse to situate this text in any binary structure, including within the very liminal position it assists in carving. This becomes more remarkable when we realize that *Arabesques* was not the first book written in Hebrew by an author whose mother tongue was Arabi, which indicates that the book's prominence rests less on the empirical facts about its author and the formalities of its publication, and more on what the author does about and with these conventions.

Shammas became a prominent figure in literary circles in Israel, forming friendships with many other authors, Palestinian and Jewish. One of them was A.B. Yehoshua, with whom Shammas carried a conversation over the pages of an op-ed section in an Israeli weekly newspaper, about the questions of Arab identity and the national identity of the state. The exchange soon became decisively unfriendly: Shammas' stance was that Israel should do away with its ethnic definition as a Jewish state and recognize a new identity, Israeli, one that he too—as a Christian-Palestinian—could be part of. Yehoshua refused to let-go of Judaism as the crux of the Israeli-national, claiming that the state of Israeli must be Jewish and Shammas, as a minority, must either accept this or relocate to a Palestinian state (that Yehoshua claimed to be in favor of establishing). The exchange soon became personal, leading Shammas to claim that there is no significant difference between Yehoshua and the notoriously racist politician, and then highly visible, Meir Kahane (Hever, "Hebrew" 58).

This exchange was satirized by Shammas in *Arabesques*, with Bar-On as a character that was a thinly veiled parody of Yehoshua. Hannan Hever, one of the most prominent scholars of Hebrew literature,



referred to this parody as part of his reading of the novel. Hever was the first to point at the importance of *Arabesques*, and his critique has shaped the discourse about Shammas' novel. Hever's reading is part of his project of reviewing and theorizing the Hebrew canon; his framing of *Arabesques* relies on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature suggesting Shammas' writing fits the characteristics originally developed to analyze Franz Kafka's writing (Deleuze and Guattari 13-33).<sup>3</sup> Among the key points raised by Hever, is that the deterritorialization (of language) is effectively present not just by the fact that Shammas, as a Palestinian, writes in Hebrew, but through his virtuosity in the language. The deterritorialization of space itself is constituted by how Shammas makes present the Palestinian space as paralleling that of the majority space – Jewish territory.

Per Hever, the collective identity that is not universal is explicated in *Arabesques* mainly through the folk-tale that is part of the Tale. By narrating the plot in the form of an arabesque, Shammas poses an alternative to the Jewish-national historical timeline. The undermining of the national story is expressed in *Arabesques* through a combination of the various means described here, in addition to the novel's more-or-less humorous contention with the confrontation between the majority's national story and the minority's story. The rejection of the Oedipal complex is present in Shammas' satire of Yehoshua and his writing, that replaces the Oedipal dynamics with a master/slave relationship. This relationship also distinguishes *Arabesques* from the model of minor literature suggested by Deleuze and Guattari: by multiplying versions of the same characters that become models, and various narrative worlds, Shammas uses the master/slave relationship to create an independent—arabesque-based—form of minor literature. These doublings, and their negations, combine in the cyclical structure of the arabesque to make contrasts infinite. Thus, they create an option that does not exist in the model suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, where negation itself serves as the point of conclusion/termination.

Michael Gluzman's reading of the novel also relates to the use of (major) language by a subaltern subject. By analyzing one vignette from *Arabesques* to suggest a wider reading of the novel, Gluzman placed the relationship between minority and majority at the center of his article. Relying on postcolonial theories, Gluzman claims that Shammas's intertextual re-reading of Haim Nahman Bialik's (the national Jewish poet) poem *The Pool* is a political appropriation of the song. Gluzman concludes his paper by suggesting that Shammas' mimicry does not only function outwards, but also inwards: it resolves the internal alienation of the hybrid subject, thus allowing the author to go into exile, first internal-exile and then external (Gluzman 327-47).

Ginsburg's aforementioned reading of *Arabesques* further developed Gluzman's identification of the intertextual ties between Shammas and Bialik in relation to exile, which, in Ginsburg's reading, lies at the core of *Arabesques*. Ginsburg extrapolates the connection between Shammas and the Jewish bookshelf, especially Bialik, by extensively surveying the context in which Shammas was writing and the hostility directed at his hybrid identity. This relation, however, is neither absolute nor exclusive. By the Jewish bookshelf there is the Arab bookshelf, that migrates with the family from one place to another. Focusing on the transition from allegory to parody and the postmodern elements in *Arabesques'* complex structure, Ginsburg suggests that Shammas' identity lies in the novel's transitions between translations (of the Jewish bookshelf to Arabic, of the Arab story to Hebrew, of the *Arabesques* plot set in Iowa--the American Midwest—to the Middle East). Ginsburg claims that just as language is located in translation, for Shammas' native-land and identity are found in exile.

Lital Levy's reading of *Arabesques* also suggests that its multi-layered literary structure enables a construction of a hidden intertextual dimension. Levy claims that despite the novel's intertextual relationship with Hebrew literature, an interpretive narrowing of the novel to this context (that also promotes the emphasis on certain elements of the novel, such as the Yehoshua parody) overlooks that *Arabesques* is first and foremost a Palestinian novel written in Hebrew. For Levy, it is thus more relevant to compare Shammas' novel to two other novels, Habibi's *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, and Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun (Bab al-Shams)* – both written in Arabic (Levy 10-26). Yael Feldman also objects to the emphasis placed on *Arabesques* as part of Hebrew literature, but makes a different claim reading Shammas as a Palestinian author is inaccurate, since *Arabesques* conveys the identity of the Christian minority, which is a minority within a minority (Feldman 373-89). Only in Hebrew, claims

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari claim that minor literature—based on their analysis of Kafka's literary works—is the mirror image of the majority's literature, which tightly lumps together ethnicity, territory and language, while minor literature undermines this "major" literature by undoing these ties. When an author from a minority position writes in the language of the majority, s/he deterritorializes both language itself and space (non-metaphoric territory). It also undermines other conventions of major literature such as rejecting the Oedipal construct, and speaking for the particular collective rather than suggest that the individual's tale is a representative and universal narrative.

Feldman, could the minority to which Shammas belongs express itself since "the Christian minority is the 'Jew' of the Arab world." Feldman bases herself not only on Shammas' ethno-religious background, but on the characteristics of the novel itself: the postmodern structure of *Arabesques*, that resists conclusive interpretation, is a complex (and often repressed) expression of the Christian minority as the ultimate victim and of the historical memory it carries, that can only appear in coded ways that at times contradicts itself.

These various readings stem and depart from and build on each other, each utilizing a different reading strategy and understands the novel within a different context. Despite their differences, we can find a set of commonalities shared, mainly in their eventual discussion of the sort of subject Shammas is able to construct. The readings differ in their definition of this subject's identity: Israeli Palestinian? More Arab, or more Christian? Perhaps Jewish? Is this really a postmodern literary subject whose identity rests on a literary act?

Beyond these disagreements, lies the agreement upon which they rest and that these readings of the novel by Jewish or Jewish-Israeli scholars share, perhaps finding it difficult to escape the epistemic stance of colonizer despite some of these scholars' reflexive efforts: *Arabesques* is a novel that produces an ideological subject. This thread of subject-centric interpretation can be related to how "Western" literature, since the 19th century, has taken part in the building of national and bourgeoisie ethos (Barthes). Another explanation relates more specifically to the division of power in the colonial context, between the "west" and "de-developed" nations, which Gayatri Spivak claims was represented in and constructed by discourses in which the subject played a prominent role (Spivak 21-78).

It is this shared perspective that leads us to center our analysis on the function of ideology in *Arabesques*, in an attempt to destabilize this unarticulated centrality of the ideologized subject in the readings of Jewish or Jewish-Israeli scholars of *Arabesques*, ideological subject positions that we share with them. Our definition of ideology will be based on that of Louis Althusser: "[ideology is an] imagined representation of the imagined relation of individuals to the materiality of their living conditions." Althusser's goal was to understand this imagined representation through the practices that produce it, in which the power of ideology lies. These practices depend on the process—or rather: moments—of interpellation, that turn the individual into a recognized discursive subject. This Althusserian perspective is useful here since it relies on praxis and asks how ideology *works*: we set-out to distinguish the different ways in which Shammas actively wrote not against *an* ideology, but *against ideology* as a system of meaning-making, thus radically undermining binaries of poetics and politics, speaking and writing, language and practice, ideology and aesthetics. Furthermore, Althusser's approach does not distinguish or hierarchize between one ideology and another; thus, it enables us to contend with the inherent volatility of the national (and other) histories in which *Arabesques* comes into being. Lastly, the Althusserian connotation of ideology with subjectivity relates subject's desires, the state and nationality with material realities, thus annulling the implied necessity of assessing which had the most enduring influence on the literary text.

Our reading of *Arabesques* through ideology as the main analytical device, is ultimately not radically different from other readings that highlighted how the novel's subversive poetics refuse one-dimensional interpretations (cf. Ginsburg, Hever, Gluzman, and Levi). We do differ from these important scholars in one crucial aspect: the subject. These previous readings share an underlying assumption that Shammas' novel establishes a particular ideological subject (post-Zionist for Hever, post-colonial literature for Gluzman, post-modern for Ginsburg, and post-colonial for Levi). Our reading suggests that *Arabesques* is a novel that seeks to undermine the concept of subject itself, by refusing instances of interpellation. A similar claim has been recently made by Shlomit Rimon-Kenan; however, despite these similarities between this present paper and hers, the crux of her discussion is how *Arabesques* undermines literary conventions.

Our reading will examine two central literary elements in *Arabesques*: parody (present in The Teller parts) and autobiography (present in The Tale), and how they display poetic strategies that aim at avoiding interpellation, and the process of becoming-subject; thus, we present a reading that counters the above presented shared and agreed upon interpretation of Shammas' effort to reach a conclusive subjectivity. This analytical trajectory leads us to an examination of why and how the readings of the novel by Jewish-Israelis adopted ideological readings, and the ways in which Shammas tried to a-priori undermine such critiques.

### **The Arab as a Literary Solution – Parody and the Escape from Interpellation**

At the center of the Teller section in *Arabesques*, is a writing workshop in Iowa City that the narrator and a Jewish author named Yosh Bar-On take part in. In their very first meeting within the novel, Bar-On shares his political-literary cause with his Palestinian colleague, and the readers are made aware of the storyteller's relation to it:

I am writing a new novel. With an educated Arab as it's hero", he told me. "I don't think I'll ever have this kind of opportunity again—to be under the same roof with a person like that in ideal conditions of isolation." I regarded him with astonishment and said, "We have one little problem. I don't think of myself as what you people call 'an educated Arab', I'm just another 'intellectual', as you call your educated Jew's.... He immediately began to apologize that he hadn't express himself properly. All I want is to get to know you from up close" he said, "while at the same time preserving a certain amount of aesthetic distance between us, for a sake of objectivity, you know".  
"I shall try my best not to disappoint you." (137)

Here, satire is as dominant as Shammas ever lets it be, since it performs the task of political satire by exposing the gap between what a person says and between what s/he think and actually do satire here displays what lies underneath Bar-On's liberal desire to write a novel about a Palestinian – a pretentious, contemptuous perception of the Arab as object (Feinberg 144). Shammas goes on to further clarify this stance of the Jewish-Israeli author, with the gaps evolving into the climactic scene in which Bar-On decides to abandon the author and choose another Arab from the workshop as his object of writing. This leads to the following dialogue between Bar-On an Irish participant in the workshop:

Spotting us, Bar-On, drew his companion over and challenge me is tipsy voice: "My dear friend, you are henceforth released from my fear of my open notebook, because I've found a new hero!"  
Liam, amused by this twist of fate ask, "But what has he done to you? " meaning me.  
"That's it", Bar-On replied. "He hasn't done thing to me, that's the problem. His compatriot here speaks much more to my heart that he does. He forces me to respond and take a stand toward him. You have to bear in mind that he is still a pure Palestinian, whose strength resides in his simplicity and his lack of cynicism."  
"I think you're just making life easy for yourself," said Liam." You prefer your enemies simple and well defined."  
"Maybe so", said Bar-On, "but my former hero does not define himself as my enemy, at least not in the accepted sense of the Word." (168)

But exposing the gap in relation to the Arab-other does not only appear in segments of *Arabesques* in which satire is most dominant. The parodic chapter, in which an imitation of Bar-On thoughts appear (whether as a stream of consciousness, or as a parody of one), exposes the gap between the desire to write about an Arab and how he is *actually* treated in practice as an object: "I can't remember where it was I read about the Arab as a literary solution. But it will come, ah yes, it will come. Some lurking critic like a mole planted in my path will accuse me, in learned and rigidly reasoned article that my Arab is nothing but a solution to me personal problems and not to the problems of the fiction" (91). This segment is a parody of the writing of A.B. Yehoshua, resurrecting—through parody—the critique pointed at Yehoshua by Mordechai Shalev about the former's novel *Facing the Forests* (Shalev). forming a literary matrix that, as Gluzman and Hever claimed, exposes the ethnocentric character of Hebrew literature. By issuing a demand to the Arab author to tell him his story, Bar-On's character draws itself towards the what psychoanalytical theory defines as the childish need to be humiliated and to humiliate, which is a recurring trope in satires (Feinberg 211).

Bar-On's character is thus shaped and displayed as incredibly childish. Eventually, the combination of his child-like lack of self-control and his other more adult-like impulses lead Bar-On to act in violence in a poetry reading event (Shammas 204).

As mentioned above, Hever claims that *Arabesques* is a novel that replaces Oedipal relations with those of the master/slave. Hever relies here on Mordechai Shalev who claimed that it is Yehoshua's writing, that Shammas is quite evidently responding to, demonstrates a castration anxiety. Hever also referred to Yehoshua's psychological position in *Facing the Forests*, which Shammas opposes, as narcissism. In his discussion about the problematic relations between minority and majority identities in Yehoshua's writing, Gluzman provides a similar yet importantly different psychological description. The distinction lies in Gluzman's reliance on Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory to frame the relationship between the Jewish majority and Arab minority, emphasizing elements of mimicry that inherently relates to parody (Gluzman 343). This reading perceives the Oedipal complex in an uneven power-relation dynamic through a stereotype adapted into a fetish (that is: an object of desire that neutralizes castration anxiety (Bhabha 115)).



The reading suggested here of parody and satire (and, also, mimicry) in *Arabesques* turns away from existing critiques of the novel and their reliance on the psychoanalytic and postcolonial terms of narcissism and mimicry. Rather, we use here the psychoanalytic theory of sadism and masochism, first and foremost because we find Bar-On's character as subtly but distinctly different from that of a narcissist. While a narcissist aspires to serve his ideal-self, Bar-On's figure might be externally perceived (by other characters in the novel) as conflictual and full of indeterminacies (politically and psychologically), but he himself is presented as unaware of any such discrepancies. When he is forced by those around him to face his internal conflicts, Bar-On does not understand and freezes in response. Bar-On does not perceive of any contradictions between his self-perception as a moral being, and his search for a "pure Palestinian", nor does he realize why he must control his urges. It also appears that he steals letters (and a manuscript) of the Teller for his research for his own novel (Shammas 150).

Beyond Bar-On's overlooking of the conflicts of his conduct, he derives pleasure from his treatment towards the other, especially when it comes to his own writing. When the storyteller describes the novel Bar-On is working on, he uses terms of domination and power: "[...] I thought about Shlomith, and about the two of us in a story by Bar-On, two lost characters whose fate, on the paper and otherwise, is in his hands, at the mercy of his whims [...]" (Shammas 136). Bar-On is framed here—through the eyes of the storyteller—as sadistic, while setting himself up as masochistic<sup>4</sup>. In the previously quoted segment from the poetry reading, Bar-On displays his sadism when he confuses his sexual attraction to Amira, a Jewish-Arab author, with violence. A similar confusion can be found in his decision to withdraw from writing about the storyteller, where Bar-On alternates between love and hate. Bar-On's character is thus characterized as sadistic through *Arabesques'* parodic and satiric elements.

In parallel, the storyteller is characterized as masochistic. In many of the satiric vignettes, the storyteller describes how he accepts Bar-On's "rules" and longs for relations with him, though those border on abuse, and at times become abusive. One example is the storyteller's response to Bar-On's decision to abandon him and find more "pure Palestinian": "[...] But instead of being happy about my freedom [from Bar-On] I was feeling let down. To put it precisely I was feeling betrayed" (Shammas 169).

The masochistic yielding to Bar-On's sadism does not surface only in the dramatic moments when he yearns to return to his abusive relationship with him. The parodic sections where the storyteller writes from Bar-On's consciousness can also be understood as an expression of masochism, as the teller accepts and takes upon himself—interpolates—the discourse of Bar-On as the sadistic Jewish-Israeli, even if that discourse is targeted at the storyteller. He speaks Bar-On's orientalist language that aims to represent the Arab soul as an assemblage of superficial images: "[...] This time I going to sculpt a well-rounded character. A nice hefty Arab, human and warm. A demitasse of cardamom coffee, with all that it implies [...]" (Shammas 82).

Another expression of the ways in which the author takes upon himself Bar-On's perspective, in a submissive and obedient manner, appears when the storyteller decides to meet Michael Abyad, whose life story is significant for that of the Teller's, describing his feeling while relating to Bar-On's hypothetical racist suspicions:

I sit down again, ashamed. At myself, at having allowed Bar-On to invade my life once more. Here I am sitting with someone who has recently met with two people who are dear to me, whom I'd like to see face to face and talk to, and instead of asking him about them, I panic and worry about whether Bar-On is going to think about that there's an attempt here to recruit me into the rank of a "hostile organization" [...] (257)

<sup>4</sup> It is important to clarify that we refer here not to the cultural representation of sadism and masochism which, for example, is discussed by Michel Foucault. Rather, our discussion is based on Sigmund Freud's theories of the two. Freud and other psychoanalysts following him see sadism and masochism as phenomena that are significant beyond their sexual elements, which is one of many ways in which they are expressed. Therefore, when we use these terms, we do not mean them as a clinical or sociological diagnosis, but as a theoretical framework. According to Freud, sadism and masochism are expressions of various situations in which the libido is transformed from an expression of life instincts (Eros), to an expression of the death drive (Thanatos). Sado-masochism is thus linked to different phases in the Oedipal complex, especially the Super-Ego. Per the Freudian schematic, at the end of the Oedipal conflict (due to the anxiety of being castrated by the father) the Super-Ego is internalized and becomes the mental faculty in-charge of conscience. It represents society and diverts desires into acceptable expressions. Most of the sado-masochistic spectrum is due to different mis-internalization: the sadist—that Freud often notes is one who as a child witnessed his parents having intercourse—confuses libido with Eros and Thanatos, and develops a subjective and violent perception of morality. The "feminine" masochist, however, seeks to recreate and amplify the scene of castration, identifying with the female position, and renouncing the resolution of the Oedipal conflict. The "moralistic masochist" is a person who internalized the law and sublimations in such an extreme manner, that s/he can no longer divert destructive desires outwards so s/he abuses him/herself (often without sexual dimensions).

To understand mimicry that relies on sadism, we make use of Jacques Lacan's article on Marquis de Sade, in which he tries to locate the relations between Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, and between Sade's writing, and explains it as stemming from a specific central commonality: in both cases, the subject reaches self recognition through the other. For both, so claims Lacan, the universal law relies on pleasure (moralistic or sexual) and power. In-fact, the subject the holds-on to the universal law, seeks to obtain universal validity for his personal desires. Furthermore, for both Kant and Sade, the other is responsible for validating the law and is the law's object. The practice of the law works on the other, and is built upon turning it from object to subject and vice-a-versa. Sade's law and Kant's law both do not admit that desire is the motive for action, but in both this is a false pretense, since law is inextricable from desire (Lacan 645-69).

Lacan's association between sadism and universalism helps us in better understanding Bar-On's character as it appears in the parodic and satiric elements in *Arabesques*. His entire presentation as both violent and comic relies on how Bar-On's super-ego, that fails to distinguish between Eros and Libido, is further radicalized by his failure to distinguish between private and universal law. This is presented as a matter of nationalism, when his particular Jewish terminology is projected upon the teller: "My Jew will be an educated Arab. But not an intellectual" (Shammas 91).

The projection of a Jewish past on the Palestinian other is part of the majority's position as a national minority, as suggested by Hever, but for Bar-On the Arab might be an accessible object for such a projection, yet is certainly not the only one. Bar-On's intermingles the private and the universal before others as well, imposing this comingling on his surroundings with little consideration of what others want. Bar-On the sadist can, based on this interpretation, empathize with Palestinian acts of "terror," experiencing violence as pleasure, but fail to understand when someone throws a can into a pond, because he perceives his private moral as universally valid.

The sadist can then use or not use the Arab for his own needs, and the Arab's cooperation can fill those needs, just as the Arab's opposition can fulfill, in other cases, the sadist's desires. In this case, the Arab other, or: Arab others, are those upon whom the law is applied and whom it addresses, and so they must act in accordance and validate it. Furthermore, Bar-On's sadism is further emphasized as his relation to the storyteller oscillates between viewing him as object and subject, one moment recognizing him and his story and the other seeing the storyteller as an object that must serve Bar-On.

The sado-masochistic model serves here to extract from *Arabesques'* parody the ways in which it displays the master's motivations and psychological considerations, and how the master utilizes ideology and the practice of interpolation. More importantly, this parody undermines the master's efforts by rejecting the subjectivity it enables.

## The Autobiography

In this section, we examine the ways in which Shammas constitutes the violation of the contract that makes autobiography possible. This violation appears already in the motto of *Arabesques* first part's title page, in which Shammas quotes Clive James: "Most first novels are disguised autobiographies this autobiography is a disguised novel" (qtd. in Shammas 1).

If we accept Jacques Derrida's claim that the motto's role is to provide the artwork's vocabulary (Derrida 7), then Shammas' choice of motto is an expression of his strategic manipulation of autobiography: Shammas plays with it, creating a façade of an autobiographical agreement (between reader and author) that is violated when the unity of identity of the storyteller, author and protagonist is undermined. This autobiographical element will be articulated here as critical to the novel's undermining of ideology, using Lejeune's theory of autobiographical writing, which claims that there are clear-cut characteristics of autobiography and there are no statuses of in-between—or: liminality—between autobiography and everything else: a text is either autobiographical or is not (Lejeune).

For Lejeune, autobiographical writing is prose written in retrospect by a "real" person, who constructs a plot in which their personal life and unique personality are central. From this definition, Lejeune draws several structural characteristics that relate autobiographical writing to literature:

- *Form of language*: a-narrative b-in prose
- *Subject treated*: individual life, story of personality
- *Situation of the author*: the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical

- *Position of the narrator*: a-the narrator and the principal character are identical b-retrospective point of view the narrator (Lejeune 5).

Autobiography is thus a literary genre that works based on the principle of "all or nothing" that, as noted, constitutes a text as either autobiography or as not-autobiography. Hence, when a reader encounters a text, they must distinguish between autobiography and all other genres. This decision is what Lejeune called the Autobiographical Pact: the mutual understanding between reader and author that the author's name, storyteller, and protagonist are identical, even if this relation is only implied (Lejeune 24).

Lejeune makes another point that is fundamental to our paper, regarding the psychological role of the Autobiographical Pact: it is a practice that relies on the mirror stage and draws its power from the unification between the I, language, and body. Culturally-historically, Lejeune shows how autobiography relates to the bourgeois ethos that turned the individual into a central term in culture and society. Autobiography, which confuses between the author and a "real person" more than any other genre—through the Autobiographical Pact's melding into one of storyteller and protagonist—is an effective instrument in constructing the individuals' bourgeois consciousness, and can be assumed to have contributed to its rise in prominence. We can understand the Autobiographical Pact also practice of interpolation. That's construct two subjects: the narrator and the reader.

### **The Autobiographical Pact and its Transgression in *Arabesques***

When The Tale part of *Arabesques* is read in line with Lejeune's theory, it appears not to fit the definitions of an autobiography since this part is written in the form of narrative prose, from a retrospective position in which the personal life of the person writing are the crux and where he identifies himself as the protagonist. But, the autobiographical pact is present and valid in this part – since the story is told in first person and ties between the teller and a figure with a central role in the plot. The same character is identical, or so it seems, to the author whose name is written on the book. Or, at least, this is how it appear to be in the following segment, in which the protagonist's family name explicitly appears as identical to that of the author (Shammas 14).

The autobiographical pact created by The Tale part in *Arabesques*, stretches into, according to Lejeune's theory, the autobiographical space – it provides the reader with the sensation of encountering a model of reality. The storyteller quotes letters and other sources to build credibility of the story, which is, supposedly: his life story. He also uses memory and the inability to remember or know (as described by Lejeune) to add his story another dimension of credibility and authenticity: "[...] Uncle Jiryees left his son behind, but he took the mijeez to Argentina, and if after all there was someone there to give him a glass of water as he lay daying, did the bubbles of memory rise in his mind?" (15). Based on the same model, and according to Lejeune, the The Tale part constructs a truth that represents both the personal life story and a story that conveys a picture of a broader reality. As we have shown, this reality was observed by some as the generalized collective voice of the Arab minority in Israel. Others read it as the collective representation of a more specific minority: Christian-Arabs in Israel.

And yet, *Arabesques* still violates the autobiographical pact. For example, by conflicting itself several times. Such conflicts also reach the heart of the autobiographical pact: the identity between the author, the storyteller, and the protagonist. In addition to the possibility the Anton Shammas is the author, storyteller, and protagonist, two other possibilities emerge. One, in which there is another Anton Shammas that either died in his childhood in Lebanon or was kidnapped from his parents:

"Who is that?" she asked my cousin, when she saw her greet me warmly.  
"have you already forggotten Anton?"  
[...] "But Anton died of a disease!"  
"Now she say's that she never saw the body" [...]( 62)

Based on this story, Michael Abyad is actually Anton Shammas and is the author who hands the protagonist with his manuscript:

I came back to America and I began to write my fictiit autobiography. I didn't tell anyone about it...And few day's ago Larry told me the members of the International Writing Program were going to be visiting him. I glnace absently at the list of the members , and I swa my fictitious name there. Which is also your name.

take this file and see what you can do with it. Translate it. Adapt it, add or subtract. But leave me in. I didn't take time to arrange the materials. I haven't even found a title for it...(259)

Another option that the book actively surfaces is that Yosh Bar-On, the Jewish-Israeli author discussed at length here, is the storyteller and author of this work. This is implied in monologues representing Bar-On's consciousness when he is writing the life story of an Arab in third-person (Shammas 86).

In another chapter, Bar-On considers writing in first person the autobiography of the Arab and fool the readers. The same possibility arises in the next segment—whose first part was already quoted—when Bar-On asks the author to tell him his autobiography for Bar-On's own literary needs, a demand to which the author replies: "I thought, Maybe before he wakes up I'll prepare an imaginary autobiography for him, a tale convincing enough to shield me from his critical eye" [... ] (Shammas 137).

Shammas then plays with the autobiography. He creates a face of an autobiographic pact, but then he breaks the rules. The autobiographic pact is violated when the identity between storyteller, author and protagonist is destabilized, through several options that are all equally likely (or, equally unlikely). When it is left unclear who is the author, who is the storyteller, and who is the protagonist, it also remains unclear what at all happened and if it has anything to do with broader realities.

There are certain parallels between what we describe here and the above discussed role of masochism in parody and satire. In both cases, these are literary mechanisms that place the subject in the center. In both cases, the subject is part of a ruling system of the majority over the minority. Therefore, in both cases, *Arabesques* response is similar. As in *The Tale* part that adopted psychological discourse—to the point of satirical ridiculousness—the question of the *The Teller* also entails the complete submission to the ruling discourse, the one that demands the autobiography. Here too, total acceptance (which is expressed in the above quoted opening motto) is what allows Shammas to challenge the ruling discourse and to renounce the literary conventions, offering fiction in its place.

## Fiction

Rimon-Kenan defined fiction as any text that does not seek to describe events that took place in reality (*Narrative* 2-3). She explains that this is a wide definition, which does not include the literary complexity found in writings that intentionally play with the range between fiction and documentary. *Arabesques* is precisely this sort of novel; however, despite its complexity and plays on truth, when the relation to fiction in *Arabesques* is examined, a clear stance can be identified – of fiction as another world, that opposes *ideologically and poetically* the documentary and historical worlds. So, by intermingling these elements within the text to the point of indistinction, the novel climaxes in the complete separation between them to re-regulate the political and poetic as simultaneously blended together and as separate and independent (of each other):

For even after I had looked through the gate that has been left ajar had seen what was on the other side and had succumbed to temptation of opening the gate itself, I never imagined that I would find myself I, like the heroes of *A Thousand and One Nights*, confronted by an infinite number of doors, and every door concealed behind it additional doors. Through the gate of fantasy I had entered into the tunnels and the secret places of the past, and in my imagination the partition between what there is and what is hidden had already fallen [... ] (72)

*The Tale* part is littered with stories that clearly belong to a world which isn't real: "In the middle of April, as he later realized, the work was finally done. The djinn came and sat around his table and examined the pair of shoes from every angle" (168). This shift into fiction makes historical events that the village's people have been through during the 1948 war, such as Jewish forces entering the village 1948, are presented so that it is impossible to distinguish between myth, folklore, and historical reality:

[...] And thus they stood, the soldiers of the Jaish El-Yahud on the one side and the inhabitants of Fussuta on the other, until from somewhere a mijwez was whipped out and the to its strains the men who had come back from the fields arrange themselves in a semicircular rhythm of the melody. They broke into the "Dabkeh Shmaliyeh", a wild Galilaeian dabkeh [... ] (122)

Through fiction, Shammas described the cleverness of refugees, or through refugees, the terms he uses to describe the code of conduct of refugee-ness, that shape the parallel dynamics between the being-refugee and the difficulty of staying: "*The refugee wisdom that I've acquired over the years has taught me that this Michel Abyad would be well to retain that name*" (58).

This is not the only case in which traumatic events in *Arabesques* are presented as a fictional tale that shifts between reality and myth. Often times, this movement occurs, as in the quoted segment above, between fiction (or The Tale) and the refugees and their conduct, that may seem from the outside as without logic, absurd:

That was the morning of Friday, April 23, 1948. Haifa had already fallen. My father put out the shoes in a burlap sack and set out his way. In the port a boat was taking on some of fleeing Arabs who would come to be known as Palestinian refugees in the course of time and their wandering. When my father heard that the boat was heading for Akka, he climbed aboard and squeezed in among them because from Akka he could get to the village. A man who was standing next to him asked if the burlap sack was all he was planning to take along on the journey. My father stuck his hand into the sack and pulled out the pair of shoes, as if he were pulling a djinni out of the sealed bottle. The man stared at them, enchanted. "I'll give you everything I have in exchange of them", he said, and pulled out a dank wad of bank notes and stuffed them into the pockets of my astonished father [...] (187-188)

The same relation between fiction and refugees is often times presented as one that denies, a-priori, the historical credibility of the story and prevents the addressee from knowing what did, in-fact, take place. The inability, or to be exact: unwillingness, of the story to determine—historically, concisely and somewhat objectively—what had happened, does not express a denial of the reality of 1948—the Palestinian Nakba—or Palestinians' suffering. When Yehoda Shenav wrote about the books of Elias Khoury, he claims that the separation Israelis make between historical knowledge and fictional stories of the victims, serves hegemony and enables the erasure of history (Shenav).

The practice described by Shenav can of course be understood as ideological practice. Ultimately, through history, a national subject is construed and constructed. The fiction which blurs the distinction between past and present, that undermines historical truth, also undermines this subject and the very possibility of its making. In this sense, Shammas' strategic use of fiction relates to the two other strategic elements described.

At the same time, it seems, fiction is not only an optional undermining of the discourse of ideology, or: ideology itself – not as manifested in one way or another, but as ideology. Pavel, who studied fiction while separating it from myth and ritual, conceived of fiction as the option to constitute an identity that is not built on the subject but on community (Pavel 145). Todorov made similar suggestions, when he wrote of the traditional narrative of *A Thousand and One Nights*. The same identity relies neither on fiction nor on ideology and subject, exists in and is present throughout *Arabesques* (Todorov 69-79).

### **The Resistance to Theory and the Interpretive Context**

In the history of Hebrew literature, a central trend was the effort to create the new subject of a national-secular Jew (Shaked 85-7). This concluding segment will focus on how critical interpretations of *Arabesques* have been driven by a desire similar to that theorized by Spivak, that of the intellectual for representation<sup>5</sup>In this novel, the desire to represent does not stem from a belief that the subject is made completely subaltern and cannot represent itself, but rather a desire to create an Arab subject and make it present in the public and literary spheres. Hannev Hever, for example, does not conceal his will to represent, and re-present, the voices missing from discourse, a will present in his essay about *Arabesques*. In a different essay, Hever emphasizes the critical role of the scholar in struggling against the marginalization of certain voices ousted from the literary canon.

Re-presentation, the making of the voice of the other present vis-à-vis the literary canon, is important not only for the other, but for Israeli political discourse. Gluzman objects to the utopian element in Hever's reading of *Arabesques*, instead pointing to how Shammas makes the Arab present;

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<sup>5</sup> Spivak emphasizes the two different verbs used, in German, by Marx to represent the lower(ed) classes: to describe the political representation of a political group in the public and political spheres, Marx uses the verb "Vertretung," and to describe the philosophical act of an intellectual's representation of the same public – re-presenting or making present-again – he uses the term "Darstellung." Marx' linguistic distinction, claims Spivak, expresses the ways in which Marxist critique perceived of the role of the intellectual. The intellectual bears the responsibility of representing the voice of the lower(ed) classes and make it present until that class, which cannot represent itself politically (since it has yet to develop class consciousness) will set itself free from false consciousness and can then represent itself. For Spivak, as mentioned, this displays how often those who sought to oppose mechanisms of power eventually served it, when they strengthened subjectivity as a construct as they represented the subaltern in a way that justified power.



thus, Gluzman himself makes the Arab present and compares these acts to the and the Arab subject to Bialik, the national poet of the Zionist movement. Ginsburg claims that the central political act attributed to *Arabesques*—the lifting of masks off from the ethnocentric discourse in Israel—is imprecise, since the same racism was already known. The self-perception of Hebrew literature as liberal (which is also expressed in the acceptance of Shammas' translation) is no more than a hollow image. Ginsburg suggests that *Arabesques* sustains the failure in advance through parody and post-modern identity, while mocking allegorical representations and using the language of grace. The same failure, at the same time, enables the appearance of a new identity.

Despite the significant difference between Hebrew literature and literature in South Africa during apartheid, certain similarities between the two can be sketched in terms of attitude and interpretive rhetoric (Bethlehem 1-20). Writing about South-African literature during Apartheid, Louise Bethlehem noted how, despite the difficult and intense struggles between literary and political circles, they still agreed about the role of literature and how that role should shape writing. They all agreed that literature has a political role, and that it should favor realistic literature that represents reality as it is and cries the political cry. To explain this agreement, Bethlehem uses the term "rhetoric of urgency" – a widespread sensation of crisis and urgency that creates an agreement about forms of representation.

A similar sense of urgency can be located in Israel when we examine the ways in which *Arabesques* was read and discussed as urgent reactions to the novel's undermining of Zionism's perpetual extending of its formative urgencies. The novel's urgencies appear in how *Arabesques* engages in parody. For example, in Bar-On's monologue, when the Jewish author reaches the following conclusion: "There has to be an Arab this time, as some sort of solution to some sort of silence. An Arab that speaks the language of Grace, as Dante once called it. Hebrew as the language of Grace, as opposed to the language of Confusion that swept over the world after the Tower of Babel collapsed" (92).

When we examine the object of parody, A.B. Yehoshua, his writings and the ways in which Israeli hegemony understood them, we can locate the same sense of political urgency, that views literature as a moral tool that must face political reality and cry before it. This is evident, for example, in Gershon Shaked's reading of *Facing the Forest*. In a manner similar to the conditions Bethlehem described, the shared rhetoric that exists in the literary discourse in Israel, at least in the case of *Arabesques*, produces a certain agreement with regards to the desired literary code. In apartheid South Africa, the code was realistic. In *Arabesques* and the Israeli discourse about it, the options are more varied. The desire for realism is present, paralleling willingness to accept other genres, grotesque or parodic, and post-modern writing more broadly. There is an overall agreement around the will for literature to create an identity, constitute a subject, responding to what has been defined here, following Althusser, as the practice of ideology.

As we suggest, *Arabesques* goes against this sense of urgency and the will to activate (in different ways) the practice of ideology. Apart from the way in which this reading, as we hope, remains loyal to *Arabesques*'s call, it conveys the importance of the novel that dually critically exposes the practices of power in both Israeli political discourse, and in the interpretive discourse of Hebrew literature in Israel. Perhaps most importantly still, we point to the sophisticated ways in which *Arabesques* destabilizes these practices. *Arabesques* can thus be read a novel that seeks to re-situate fiction in "traditional" narrative (as defined by Tzvetan Todorov), relying on the historical to undermine interpellation into ideology. This is present, for example, when the author hands-over the novel – rather than handing-over his life and identity, he releases them from the clutches of ideology and helps literature find a way out:

I fabricated for him [Bar-On] a parting from Shlomith, upon which I embroidered several heartrending details. He whipped out his notebook and began to chronicle my love for the redheaded wife of an army officer, who in the throes of legal battle with him other the fate of their son. And as the story grew longer and more intricate, I became more and more aware of the delights of dissembling, the joy granted those who take the liberty to enchant with their imaginary lives. And Bar-On pleased with the clear understanding we had reached of our respective roles, said he hoped we would enjoy this experience equally. While all this was going on, I was thinking about Proust and Al-Hamshari how vivid the man sitting next to me would be if he knew what odd twinning and pairing were running through my mind. (137-138)

This "way out" is one in which all practices of ideological interpretation that construct subjectivities through psychology or autobiography, can no longer function. In its place comes fiction, where Proust and al-Mashri, the lie and the truth, and—to a certain extent—the Arab and the Jew, are one that is simultaneously possible and impossible.

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