

**"Come along with me, reader, and don't fear for your weak heart":
Interpellation and the Author-Reader Relationship**

Abstract

This study explores direct addresses to readers of American and Israeli literature written in the late twentieth century. It examines the relations between narratology and ideology, i.e., the ideological meanings of how the narrator-cum-author addresses the reader. Unlike the generalized reader of most narratological theories (often referred to as “a metonymy of the text”), I view reading as a process of subjectivation, a complex reaction to the author's instructions. Feminist and post-colonial critics have already engaged the concept of resistant reading, one that would allow a reader to resist or deny the text's ideology. However, my use of Louis Althusser's conceptual framework facilitates a more detailed analysis of the reader's ambivalent struggle with the author's seductive propositions, which are voiced in the second-person. I aim to investigate how this textual strategy affects the reading process and the reader's sense of "subjectivation" vis-à-vis the author, using Althusser's concept of interpellation. Throughout my study, this concept itself will be expanded in order to be applied in distinct textual contexts.

Direct addresses by narrators to readers are one of the hallmarks of realist prose from the 18th century until the second half of the 19th century, but the phenomenon existed in ancient literature as well. It is generally possible to distinguish between two types of direct addresses. The first type consists of addresses in texts written in the third person by an omniscient narrator, behind the backs of his characters. The addresser supposedly represents the actual author, and does not exist as a character in the plot. Such addresses were relatively common in 18th and 19th century literature, but can also be found in texts from other periods. The second group includes direct addresses made by a first person narrator, introducing himself as the author of the text and participating in the plot as the protagonist. These addresses by a fictional character challenge the position and authority of the narrator in the guise of the author, thereby undermining the autonomy of the narrative and blurring the distinction between fiction and reality. For this reason, this type of address is relatively common in literature from the second half of the twentieth century, which is typically concerned with the disrupted relationship between fiction and reality.

This study will focus on the meaning of the second type of address made by a fictional character. The address can be direct, indicating that the reader is the recipient, or it can avoid mentioning the recipient with a general “you”. In both these cases, the reader interprets this as a personal address, since it always points to the listener, as Emile Benveniste claims. Therefore, when it comes to using the second person within prose fiction, the address is always double. On one hand, readers know that it is not personal, since the work was not written for them specifically, but at the same time, they feel as if it were meant for them. The address is to the fictitious reader within the text and to the actual reader outside it. This duality creates strong emotional involvement for readers and greater empathy than first or third-person writing.

Surprisingly, according to current narratological studies, texts that address their readers directly are not considered as "second person narratives". As Brian Richardson and Monika Fludernik claim, this genre encourages the reader to identify with the addressed "you" for only a short period of time. Eventually, however, it becomes apparent to readers that these are, in fact, monologues directed towards the protagonist, and not to them. This definition ignores the mechanisms of identification and subjectivation produced by the second person, the emotional involvement and intimacy created in the particular communication circle, and the effect on the reader's prolonged identification with the narratee. Thus, it avoids addressing complex reading possibilities and the ideological meanings of the second-person. This study aims to explore this lacuna – the ideological potential in the mechanisms of identification promoted by the second person address in literary texts, using the model of interpellation developed by Althusser and his successors.

The term *interpellation* was first coined by Althusser in 1969 to describe how subjects are constructed by ideology. It combines Marxist ideology with Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts of identification, and tries to elaborate on the connection between mental structures and social mechanisms. Interpellation is a call that "recruits" individuals and "transforms" them into subjects, made by an “Absolute Subject” – an “Other” who gives the subject identical components in the process of interpellation. This call may persuade the subject that it addresses him precisely and expresses his individuality, but it may also exclude him. In any case, he will be construed as a subject, since even a lack of response to the call constructs a subject position – the "bad" subject, the one who does not obey. Thus, both interpellations in this model, the successful and the missed, have the same effect of confirming the individuality and singularity of the subject.

Since Althusser coined the term, the interpellation model was further developed by many theorists, mostly derived from Lacanian concepts. One of the most interesting suggestions was made in the 90s by Slavoj Žižek's "Slovenian Circle" and their model based on an exchange of enigmas. Žižek argued that the conventional analysis of interpellation takes into account only the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders, and completely ignores the Real. He claims that every interpellation includes a remainder that the Symbolic is unable to articulate, thus, it is unidentifiable. These interpellations stem from a feeling that "this isn't me", an identification failure that leads to a fantasy of individuality or to a social fantasy. Following the sense of misidentification by the Other, the subject can not only construct an alternative identity, but also the fantasy in which he is the absolute master of himself.

Žižek's concept of the subject that underlies the interpellation model is opposed to Althusser's concept. He perceives the subject as the primordial gap that is filled up by subordination to the identifying signifier. The subject is the void left after removing the content of discourse, that is, a failed symbolization, the point in which the interpellation is missed and the Real appears. Žižek finds that the female figure is closer to the empty and subversive position of the subject than the male one, because she is always portrayed with a series of characteristics assigned to her by the Other, which are incompatible. For Žižek, what reality is missing is the subject itself, the void from which ideology can be resisted.

In light of Žižek's interpellation model, Lacan's definitions of trauma and madness can be reinterpreted. As Lacan argues, trauma is characterized by the fall of Imaginary and Symbolic defenses, caused by encountering the Real. This is, in fact, the second phase in Žižek's interpellation model – the collapse of the Symbolic. If so, trauma is a failed interpellation, that only reached the second phase, in which the subject was not sutured back to the Symbolic order by a fantasy. The Lacanian ability to "transform trauma into tragedy" is precisely what renews the Symbolic order once again.

Lacan's definitions of madness and trauma are diametrically opposed. He argues that "A madman is not only a beggar who thinks he is a king but also a king who thinks he is a king." In other words, madness indicates the absence of the "remainder", the part of the Real that always evades identification with the signifier. This means total identification with a particular signifier, to the exclusion of all else. Therefore, someone who identifies completely with one signifier only (e.g., clerk, politician, writer, king) – and does not recognize the "remainder" that it does not include – is considered insane. Madness according to Lacan, therefore, is what I

would call an "overly successful interpellation" that causes the loss of the Real as a buffer between the subject and the signifier.

In this vein, interpellation is not a dichotomous event – successful or failed – but an event that allows for a continuum of possibilities for constructing subjectivity. Trauma is the ultimate failure, an encounter with the Real and the void of the subject, but there are many possibilities of success. Positive identifications preserve the remainder between the individual and the signifier, and a range of symptomatic successes bring the subject to total identification – madness. Both trauma and madness, a failed interpellation and an overly successful one, are types of failures. These will be the focus of my study, which examines texts that dramatize the identification mechanisms of reading, and this exposure leads to their disruption. Although I discuss certain cases of interpellation (based on second-person addresses), these texts may shed light on the reading process itself.

It is no coincidence that texts that dramatize failed interpellations become more common in moments of historical crisis. This work will focus on two such moments, one in American literature and one in Hebrew literature. The crisis of representation that emerged in the Western world after World War II is at the core of the American works discussed in this study. The failure inherent to the signifying chain and its instability are common topics in post-structuralism and postmodernism, in the works of Derrida, Barthes, Foucault and Jameson, for example. This disrupts the process of identification with a signifier over time and leads to all kinds of failed interpellations. The two American authors discussed reflect different aspects of the crisis of representation: the works of John Barth are parodies; while J. D. Salinger's works express traumatic failure as it relates to the question of testimony. Barth and Salinger's *oeuvres* are considered a turning point in American literature. I argue that, as a transitional link between modernism and postmodernism, they employed a novel approach to addressing their readers, one that broke with the conventions of their time.

The Hebrew writers in this study are Orly Castel-Bloom and Yoel Hoffmann, two of the most prominent representatives of early Hebrew postmodernism, emerging in the climate of crisis that followed the rise of the "Likud" in 1977 and the First Lebanon War in 1982. Those events linked the literature of that period with the Left, occupying the position of rebellion and resistance. In these years, the theoretical preoccupation with post-structuralism in Israel also began. In the early 1990s, the journal *Theory and Criticism* was first published, exposing the ideological role played by dominant representations on the social order. This critical

atmosphere is what Dana Olmert calls the "Oslo climate": an economic, political and cultural ambience that revealed the collective mechanisms of denial and repression, generated by the Oslo Accords and previous political and cultural events.

Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt finds the roots of these processes in the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War, which exhausted the socio-cultural program of the Labor Party, creating cracks in the Israeli consensus that led to a reexamination of Zionist goals and ways of achieving them. These cracks reached their peak after the Lebanon War, which left behind an unstable Israeli society that lost its security in its values and in its vision. This climate is reflected in various forms in the works of Castel-Bloom and Hoffmann and in their addresses to the readers.

The four chapters of the study will present, by means of short monographs, the different ways in which the failed interpellations occur, and examine how they influence the reading process in each of the texts. The chapters are divided into two sections according to the type of failed interpellation used by the writers. The first section deals with the works of John Barth and Orly Castel-Bloom as they use, in different ways, "overly successful interpellations" in a parodic manner. Their works reveal that figures of women often represent the collapse of the Symbolic order, the void of the subject, and embody the possibility of opposing ideology. The second section delves into the works of Jerome David Salinger and Yoel Hoffmann, who are closer to the unsuccessful and traumatic pole of the interpellation continuum, and show how traumatic relationships impede the possibilities of identification with the existing social order and with readers.

Both overly successful and failed interpellations produce a subversive effect through the crack in the symbolic-ideological order that makes accessible traces of the Real. In this case, success and failure are not oppositions but rather two ways in which a failure or a rupture can be created in relation to the existing order. By exposing the Real that the signifying system cannot grasp, subjects can be interpellated into understanding their alienated state, and thus create a desire for new master signifiers. This is the radical aspect of Žižek's interpellation model that is missing in Althusser's conceptualization, as highlighted by literary works examined in my research.

The study deals with the differences between English and Hebrew interpellations, as a result of the degree of inclusiveness of the second person address. Because Hebrew is a morphologically gendered language, an address in the second person will always miss some of the actual readers who will find it hard to fill the role of the narratee when pronouns like "אתה",

"אתם" (singular and plural "you" in the male form) are used. Thus, pronouns in Hebrew emphasize the gap between the identity of the actual reader and the recipient within the fictional world. As I illustrate, the inclusiveness of "you" in English (and in ungendered languages) has the potential for strong ideological effects. This is due to literature's ability to encourage us to identify with a generic "you" or even a powerful one, and later make us realize that we are filling a different subject position than we thought. On the other hand, the "narrative contract" can be abruptly broken when the address is missed due to exclusive pronouns, as in Hebrew and many other morphologically gendered languages. This impact can have critical implications for readers.

All authors in this study shatter the "narrative contract" which binds together author and reader, leaving the reader confused, frustrated, unable to fulfil the role assigned to her as the text's idealized recipient. What is the meaning of this failure and how does it reflect the state of reading in our time and age? What are the political, ethical and aesthetic implications of this "failed" narrative contract between author and reader? Why has reading come to this dead end in the writing of these authors? And are there any alternative reading processes that would allow one to defy the anticipated "failure" she is entrapped into? The texts I study dramatize and theorize the impasses of reading. By studying this rich and overtly complex literary corpus, this dissertation aims to understand more fully the narratological, ideological and psychological implications of such reading "failures."

The first chapter follows the ways of subject formation in the works of John Barth. His two earliest novels, *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958), explore interpellations that are "overly successful" and thus disrupt the identification process. *The Floating Opera* deals with interpellations inside the represented world, as well as interpellations that are part of the author-reader relationship. It addresses the readers outside the text, reflecting the paranoid manner in which they usually read, based on an oedipal positioning of the author as a father. Barth turns the tables by assigning the role of the father to the reader himself, thus making him aware of the fact that the author does not always have to be the *absolute subject*. Therefore, the reader can refuse the text-author by a "flickering reading". In his second work, *The End of the Road*, Barth deals mainly with interpellations inside the represented world, and functions as a theorist of interpellation. Thus, he demonstrates that paralysis and interpellation are the only two possible states of being. In both novels, subjectivity involves primarily a change in reading habits, and the protagonists resist any kind

of "paranoid" reading that links things obsessively by way of causality and meaning. Barth parodies modernist, capitalist and oedipal ways of reading, which perceive the author as the "father" of the text, through which the reader constructs herself.

The second chapter delves into the function of interpellations in Orly Castel-Bloom's works, both as a dominant theme and as a mechanism to help the heroines deal with their interpellations by addressing readers. The chapter presents a social problem underlying the poetics of Castel-Bloom: she characterizes Israeli society as mad, one which produces interpellations that are "overly successful", resulting in the excessive identification of its individuals with narratives presented to them. From Israeli writers, who view themselves as "the watchman unto the house of Israel", to clerks and street sweepers, who are defined by their work, Israeli society perceives identity based on very strict social roles. This phenomenon produces an inflexible experience of identity, thus enslaving its individuals. In Castel-Bloom's world, the ones who suffer the most from this are women. This is the reason her protagonists turn to their readers, addressing them directly. Castel-Bloom creates various types of interpellations, while in each work there are different power relations between the narrator and her recipients: In *Mina Lisa* (1995), the heroine is empowered and forces silence on her readers, in "Folded" (1989) the protagonist asks for help from the readers as a compassionate female authority, while in *The Egyptian Novel* (2015) the heroine asks for an egalitarian feminine reading position. The various subject positions she creates for her readers point to the lack of connection between them and to the traces of the Real that underlie the subject, which she reveals (in line with Žižek's claim) precisely through the figures of women.

The third chapter follows the changes in the role of addressing readers in the second person in Salinger's works, presenting a transition from his early work, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) which invites readers to the text, and his latest work, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* (1963) which pushes them away. *The Catcher in the Rye* is based on a double address – to a recipient inside the represented world, and another outside of it. This coherent text, that does not "act out" pathology, stresses that the problem is not with the protagonist, but with social reality. This modernist text, precisely because of its adolescent nature and naive faith in literature's ability to teach us something about reality, can influence readers to act on the outside world. In contrast, the direct addresses to readers in *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, create a distinction between real and fictitious readers, produced by the melancholic incorporation of the reader imagined by the text. This requires the actual readers

to occupy a subject position they are unable to fill, a conflict which draws attention to the impossibility of communication between the author and his readers through the literary medium. The fundamental position of the postmodern reader, as I argue, allows us to rethink Salinger's place in the historiography of American literature, as the pioneer of writers who changed the status of the reader at a moment of transition. Due to the disappearance of academic discussion of his works since the early 1970s, another goal of this chapter is to re-introduce Salinger's works into discourse and research on an academic level.

The fourth chapter follows the development of Yoel Hoffman's perception of literature in various stages of his writing. As a translator and a writer, Hoffman developed a philosophy of literature that stems from his position on the boundary between East and West. He perceives every verbal communication as a complete or a partial failure, and he sees the literary act as a failed interpellation. This, perhaps, can explain why his writing is so esoteric and difficult for most readers. The chapter follows Hoffmann's journey in search of new forms of writing. In his first book, *The Book of Joseph* (1988), Hoffman presents a dichotomous-Western perception of reading, and produces a distinction between "good" and "bad" readers, as evident in the third story of the book, "The Train Speeds between Mountains and Rocks". The story illustrates, almost in a performative manner, the inherent failure of a writer's attempt to explain to his audience how to read his story. However, in his book *How Do You Do, Dolores* (1995), he undermines the hierarchy between readers, highlighting the potential sin and failure intrinsic to reading. Influenced by Buddhist concepts, his latest book, *Moods* (2010), presents new options for reading, offering redemption instead. Readers are asked to experience the text as a tangible and emotional experience, to skip over the meaning, and "enjoy the blues played to them".

The four authors at the center of the study present different forms of dialogue which takes place both inside the fictitious world (between the narrator and the reader as a construct of the text) and outside it, as a communication act between an Absolute Subject and an actual reader, interpellated into reading differently. In order to generate a change in the reading practices of actual readers, the texts problematize the power relations between author and reader and offer new ways of reading. These texts attempt to create an inter-subjective reading model, although ironically, many of them demonstrate the impossibility of such textual communication.