

This Is Not a Character: Resemblance and Similitude in Etgar Keret's *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*

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Received 26 August 2013; accepted 25 October 2013

Abstract

The article is concerned with reading Etgar Keret's *Suddenly a Knock on the Door* (2010) for the character. Shot through with postmodern skepticism about the concept of character, Keret's stories are particularly well placed to net the contemporary sense of rupture between character and the affirmation of reality.

Keret's depiction of character is analyzed using Michel Foucault's distinction between Resemblance and Similitude, introduced in his book *This Is Not a Pipe*. Building on Foucault's distinction, I argue that Keret dismisses the old equivalence between resemblance and affirmation and brings pure similitudes and non-affirmative verbal statements into play, thereby creating the instability of character and a disoriented characterization. This principle manifests itself in a variety of techniques, in all of which the verbal objects, that are there seemingly representing character, even though they bear a resemblance to what we think is recognizable, are in fact misleading.

Key words: Character; Resemblance; Similitude; Foucault; *Suddenly a Knock on the Door*

Nurit Buchweitz (2013). This Is Not a Character: Resemblance and Similitude in Etgar Keret's *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 7(2), 101-107. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320130702.2868>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130702.2868>

It began with a kiss. It almost always begins with a kiss. Ella and Tsiki were in bed, naked, with only their tongues touching—when she felt something prick her [...]. They didn't kiss for a

few days after that, because of her cut. Lips are a very sensitive part of the body. And later, when they could, they had to be very careful. She could tell he was hiding something. And sure enough, one night, taking advantage of the fact that he slept with his mouth open, she gently slipped her finger under his tongue—and found it. It was a zipper. A teensy zipper. But when she pulled at it, her whole Tsiki opened up like an oyster, and inside was Jurgen. (Keret, 2012).

This excerpt from Etgar Keret's story "Unzipping" brings to mind Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe), a title which is strictly true—Magritte presents a painting of a pipe, not a pipe. Keret makes this very same simple yet interminable revelation about literature: with the sliding off of Tsiki's skin, revealing a new person inside, Keret states that there are no people between the pages, only printed words.

A critical commonplace is that postmodernism has finally led us away from our investments in the figure of the individual as the locus of meaning and literary criticism dismantled the idea of character already several decades ago.¹ Character, as a literary term can never be independent of contemporary constructions of subjectivity, thus it constitutes the manifestation of a change in the larger culture concerning the perception of self and the relations of self and world (Hall, 2004). In literature, such changes imply the disintegration of self, a disintegration that the reader experiences as a rupture from the traditional portrayal of character within the

¹ See [Docherty, T. (1983). *Reading (absent) character: Toward a theory of characterization in fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.] Docherty views the postmodern character as a linguistic element in the narrative, as opposed to those views of the character as an element distinguishable from narrative. For the particular case of Israeli postmodernist literature see [Herzig, H. (1998). *The voice saying I: Trends in Israeli prose fiction of the 1980s* (pp.39-48) (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Open University Press.] and [Taub, G. (1997). *A dispirited rebellion: Essays on contemporary Israeli culture* (pp.47-154) (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.] Both noted that characters' backgrounds are devoid of ideology, myth, and values and that they are subsumed in perfectly commercialized social codes.

generation of “an aesthetic of breaks and gaps, surfaces and masks, objectless in its irony.”²

In this article I attempt to read Keret's stories in *Suddenly, A Knock on the Door* for their depiction of character. Overflowing with postmodern skepticism about the concept of the subject, Keret's short stories are particularly well placed to capture the contemporary sense of rupture between character and the affirmation of reality. This rupture is obvious in a story such as “Stabbing,” in which an evident ontological break occurs;³ the characters prove to be ontologically full but epistemologically empty. In other stories, in which the portrayal of character is ostensibly stable, a trick will be played, minimal and almost undetectable in its inception but sufficient to render character ontologically insecure.

The theoretical lines along which I proceed to address the nature of character are aesthetic-formal, developed by Michel Foucault in the domain of art criticism. These terms allow us to examine how Keret's characters operate within the text and the rule of their inception.

In his book *This Is Not a Pipe*, Michel Foucault (1983) distinguishes between two very close terms, sometimes viewed as having the same designation—resemblance and similitude.⁴ According to Foucault, in both cases the object depicted is equal to reality—but in resemblance it strives to adhere as much as possible to the reality outside the text in order to represent it, whereas similitude disrupts the solid connection with reality so as to leave the objects represented hovering in an artificial, overtly stylized, space.⁵ Resemblance assumes a primary reference that tangibly exists “out there” in “reality.” It conceives of itself as mimetic, as attempting to comply with this very reference that organizes and qualifies the textual objects. What is external to the work of art serves as a model, as

an organizing principle, set of coordinates and hierarchies for the text; resemblance is a system where the text strives to affirm reality.

In similitude, on the other hand, the anchor of an external reference disappears, thus representation is violated. Textual data are dispersed unmethodically, and hierarchy is replaced by a set of lateral relations of similar objects—undefined, reversible relations. The result is “a displacement and exchange of similar elements, but by no means mimetic reproduction” (Foucault, 1983, p.46).

Foucault detects, through analyzing Magritte's paintings, a breach of a prominent principle that which “posits equivalence between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond” (Foucault, 1983, p.34), as if resemblance and affirmation cannot be dissociated.

Let us reconsider the drawing of a pipe that bears so strong a resemblance to a real pipe; the written text that bears so strong a resemblance to the drawing of a written text. In fact, whether conflicting or just juxtaposed, these elements annul the intrinsic resemblance they seem to bear within themselves, and gradually sketch an open network of similitudes [...] each element of ‘this is not a pipe’ could hold an apparently negative discourse—because it denies, along with resemblance, the assertion of reality resemblance conveys—but one that is basically affirmative: the affirmation of the simulacrum, affirmation of the element within the network of the similar. (Foucault, 1983, p.47).

Because resemblance is modeled upon an original, to which it turns constantly for affirmation, it is in fact an order of depth. Similitude's deployment, on the other hand, is set upon the surface, since it circulates within itself as an endless displacement, an exchange of similar elements.

Building on Foucault's distinction, I argue that an aesthetic principle in Keret's book *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* is that the characterizational poetical effort aims at similitude rather than resemblance, manifesting the feature Foucault detects when the artist “skirts the base of affirmative discourse on which resemblance calmly reposes, and he brings pure similitudes and nonaffirmative verbal statements into play within the instability of a disoriented volume and unmapped space” (Foucault, 1983, pp.53-54). The verbal objects seemingly represent character and bear a resemblance to what we think is recognizable, are misleading. As characters, they fail to affirm reality, since they remain incessantly confined within the boundaries of similar reproductions, each reflecting the other, ultimately indifferent to an external model and never seeking to affirm it.

The story “*Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*,” indicatively placed as the first in Keret's compilation of stories, that which gives the book its title, demarcates the aesthetic principle that this is not character but “character.” The narrative depicts a robbery of a story, but not in the physical sense of the word, as in the robbery of a printed text, it is the robbery of a story that has not yet

² Fuchs, E. (1996). *The Death of character. The death of character: Perspectives on theater after modernism* (p.6). Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Hence characters are usually read symptomatically, see [Smith, S. B. (1989). *Ideology and interpretation: The case of Althusser. Poetics Today, 10*, 493-510] on symptomatic reading. This symptomatic reading of characters as illustrations of the ideological “reality” that interpellates “who we are” is reminiscent of the concept that character may not be representative but illustrative, as Scholes and Kellogg distinguished many years ago, see [Scholes, R., Phelan, J., & Kellogg, R. (2006). *The nature of narrative* (pp.84-89). New York: Oxford University Press.]

³ By which “although it would be perfectly possible to interrogate a postmodernist text about its epistemological implications, it is more urgent to interrogate it about its ontological implications.” [emphasis in the original] in: [McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction* (p.11). London & New York: Routledge.]

⁴ Similitude applies chiefly to the correspondence between abstractions, whereas resemblance implies similarity chiefly in appearance or external qualities. Similitude is a visible likeness, when the image is doubled, whereas resemblance is being-like, a copy, a representation [Merriam-webster dictionary application, 2013].

⁵ In “The Four Similitudes”, the opening chapter of *The Order of Things*, Foucault introduces these two terms, yet he does not distinguish between them and uses them synonymously [Foucault, M. (1994). *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences*. New York: Vintage Books.]

been composed, an attempt to extract intellectual property not yet produced. Thus, the story being talked about in the narrative *is* the narrative itself⁶—it is read as a realization of the internal strain placed on the creative mind to go on producing stories. This strain is transformed into a concrete scene of an author facing a demanding reader, and the pressure is physical as the reader threatens the author with a pistol. Readers who embark upon the first paragraph of “Suddenly, a Knock on the Door” would probably readily apply their readership skills of analyzing fictional personages, reading characters as if they resembled full, individuated, psychological human beings. Such readers would ascribe the sentence I quote—“It’s hard to think up a story with the barrel of a loaded pistol at your head”—individual psychological content, reading the gun as figure of speech, an embodiment of the author’s internal anxiety over maintaining his literary creativity; but the gun is real. The scene is reproduced twice again, with slight variations: he is threatened two more times, by two other men, with a revolver and then with a cleaver, different fragments of reality generated by the same sensation. The scenario, thrice repeated evacuates character, since it is grasped as the literalization of the sensation of being internally or externally pressed to perform. The entire story is a *simulation* of that emotion. There is no resolution in the end, just a duplication of that emotion *ad infinitum*.

Going back to the story “Unzipping,” in which, shortly after the woman engages in her new life with the new man, she senses a zipper under her own tongue. What governs figuration is the ruse of literalization, wherein the character realizes the Hebrew idiom “to change one’s skin”, implying a complete turnover of character. This scene serves as a technique for breaking the association of similitude and resemblance, as one character becomes another, fulfilling the fantasy to live a new life, to start over, to change one’s reality, one’s partner but also one’s identity. As fantasies tend to remain eternally unsatisfied or else prove unsatisfactory when realized, she soon becomes dissatisfied with him too and contemplates opening her own zip, re-inventing herself. Once again, it is emotion simulated and not life represented. Again, since the interest is in emotion and not mimetic character, the narrative never reaches resolution.

Keret creates an unstable space in characterizational terms, and an overall sense of disorientation. Initially the characters’ verisimilitude appeals to a reader eager to witness human beings represented in narrative, as provided by the real-effect representation. However, they fail to become personalities (Gill, 1990), instead they turn out to be an event, something that is happening and whose

outcome is unpredictable.⁷ The deconstruction undertaken by Keret makes us rethink our seemingly uncomplicated relationship with fictional characters. While the text reveals an indifference to character as affirmation of reality, it epitomizes the possibility of their being as linguistic constructs, existing concomitantly a narrative and a metanarrative, a facticity and the negation of it.

Keret is able to dismiss the old equivalence between resemblance and affirmation by surfacing and literalizing his characters singularly in each story. Most stories in *Suddenly* focus on one portrait, presenting character in stasis, even when the narrative is dynamic; always a psychological starting point is the basis for textual development, wherein an initial affection, emotional stance or emotive tenet within the narrative is simulated. The characters form a similitude of appearances, all stemming from a generating principle, that reenact that very principle;

There are two characterizational streams that runs parallel to each other and often converge: the aberration of emotion and the bold omission of all motivation, speech, and gesture. aberrations when the text accentuates an emotion by slightly deviating from what is considered moderate or proportionate portrayal and goes on inflating and intensifying that emotion—as we have seen in the stories discussed before. The result is a deformation of portraiture, one cannot trace where it began, because it was a chain of intensifications, of similitudes gradually stemming from the emotional ignition point. Omission means that in many of the stories, even though no ruse seemingly is operated, at some point the act of choosing—which grants the human subject autonomy and freedom—collapses. The agency distances itself from individuals who act both freely and meaningfully within a coherent continuum, time and again confirming the fact that “the character as an existent entity with which the reader can enter into relation has ceased”.⁸ Since the ruse dismantles characters of their self-possessed individuality and their autonomic agency, the mimetic relation that may have existed between text and world collapses, deeming characters artificial constructions.

Keret’s similitude abides to a psychological starting point as the basis for textual development, wherein an initial affection, emotional stance or emotive tenet is simulated. The characters form a similitude of appearances, all stemming from a generating principle, that reenact that very principle; thus, each manifestation of character refers to this initial principle within the

⁶ This is the Douglas Hofstadter’s “Strange Loop” phenomenon, see [McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction* (pp. 119-121). London & New York: Routledge.].

⁷ See also Docherty’s discussion “that character never *is*, but is always *about-to-be*, endlessly deferred” [emphasis in the original text], in [Docherty, T. (1991). *Postmodern characterization: The ethics of alterity*. In E. J. Smyth (Ed.), *Postmodernism and contemporary fiction* (p.169). London: Batsford.]

⁸ Docherty, p.263. See also Docherty’s discussion of the implications on the temporal, spatial, and characterizational discontinuity on the construction of the reading subject in Chapters 2-4.

narrative and becomes a similitude of the other, going back to a governing principle. These characters are not designed to be a copy of people but to give shape to an emotive disposition.

For example, in the stories "What Do We Have in Our Pockets?" and "What, of this Goldfish, would You Wish?" the starting point for the depiction of character is an actual concreteness, based on an internal psychological reality, from which a slight deviation occurs. The narrative turns in the direction of the drift and soon logic collapses along with mimesis, for at this point the process impresses upon us the verbiage aspect of character and of the fictional world. The impression that something is wrong stems from the starting point. It is right then that the twist begins and things start going askew. The story "What Do We Have in Our Pockets?" recounts in detail the mundane items he always carries around with him:

The fact is that everything I have in my pockets is carefully chosen so I'll always be prepared. Everything is there so I can be at an advantage at the moment of truth. Actually, that's not accurate, everything's there so I won't be at a disadvantage at the moment of truth.⁹

Narrative development shifts from an expected focus on an individual characterized by the specific choice of objects he puts in his pockets to an overt simulation of a bizarre event in which all of the items come in handy. At this point character becomes principally an object of fascination as simulacrum, with the ruse underscoring its artificiality. Instead of becoming a personality the character acts out a general emotional position of "being ready for life," as the Hebrew idiom goes. Similarly, in the story "What, of This Goldfish, Do You Wish?" the goldfish is initially introduced as a metaphorical concept for individuation, stemming from Grimm's fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Wife":

Yonatan had a brilliant idea for a documentary. He'd knock on doors. Just him. No camera crew, no nonsense. Just Yonatan, on his own, a small camera in hand, asking, "If you found a talking goldfish that granted you three wishes, what would you wish for?"¹⁰

Nonetheless, the preference of similitude over resemblance is clear when a real talking goldfish appears in the story, constantly reminding the reader that what he is reading is not unadulterated reality. Instead of individuation, the reader tends to the general affect prevalent in the story; if ever anyone could find a goldfish, if ever anyone could be granted his wishes. In both these cases our incursion into the life of an individual is prevented and what we took for character is an acting-out of an emotion, proving that relieving characters from their traditional figuration does not harm their ability to be deep and meaningful. While the raw material and basis for the

story is some emotional position, the textual development is obligated solely to that emotion and not to mimetic representation. Keret creates characters that provoke a mixed emotional response, of gripping apprehension along with profound incredulity, but not identification, as with personalities.

Most stories in *Suddenly* focus on one portrait, presenting character in stasis, even when the narrative is dynamic; stories such as "Simyon" and "Not Completely Alone" present a set of duplications that accentuate an emotion, inflate and intensify it. The result is a deformation of portraiture, one cannot trace where it began, because it was a chain of intensifications, of similitudes gradually stemming from the emotional ignition point. In the story "Pudding," at the beginning of the narrative, the protagonist Avishai is kidnapped from his apartment by two unidentified men only to be dropped off at his parents' house and pushed inside. He realizes he entered the house as a schoolboy coming home from school yet without being incarnated into his old self as a child. While he is treated by his mother as a child and the background is outdated reflecting the time of his childhood days ("rotary phone")¹¹, it is "his balding head"¹² his mother pats. Very quickly, and without providing explanation, Avishai readapts to his own self as a child to so as to enjoy it once again, as the story reads:

In either case, there's no need to stress. He might as well eat first. Yes, after dinner is probably an excellent time to wake himself up. And when Avishai really gets to thinking about it, even when he's done eating, it's not exactly urgent. He can go to his after-school group first—he's honestly curious which one it is—and later, if it's still light out, he can play a little soccer in the schoolyard. And only when Daddy gets home from work, only then will he wake up... he could even stretch it out another day or two, until right before some especially hard exam.¹³

The ruse that evacuates character as resemblance is the disruption of the spatial-temporal continuum; Avishai hovers in a *hypothetical present*, which means that real time appears as "elsewhere," as if in a parallel universe. It is a case in which "the narrative fails to provide the human subject with a fully fleshed chronotope (a sense of past, present, and future), which is necessary for his meaningful intervention in the world. Instead of mimesis, character here simulates a yet again a contemporary psychological reality, as formulated by the men who grab Avishai in response to his questions: "'Who are you? What do you want?' 'That's not what you should be asking,' the driver says, and the brute at his side is nodding. 'What you mean to say is 'Who am I?' and 'What do I want?'" "Here Avishai is not a person but rather an acting-out, in a hypothetical space, of an emotion: the question of identity, self-fulfillment, and satisfaction.

⁹ Keret, p.87.

¹⁰ Keret, p.117.

¹¹ Keret, *Suddenly*, p.49.

¹² Keret, p.49.

¹³ Keret, p.49.

The fictional space provides a chance to go back to the beginning and start over; to return to childhood under the complete care of mother. To temporarily halt uncertainty, choice, struggle and all the inevitable vicissitudes which are markers of grown up lives, intensified in and by the society of consumers.

The story leaves him there, stuck in this artificial space, denying him the quality of developing into a personality.

And it is emotion, neither cognition nor behavior, that reflects the current emotional turn. ¹⁴ Often it is an emotion that expresses what is regarded as non-consensual, repressed, uncanny, abject; affective modes set free in and by contemporary culture. Thus we see narratives divulging experiences defined by self-pity, despair, self-consciousness, debasement and disappointment. These are affections that emanate from the crisis of the individual and of subjectivity, well described in contemporary theory (Diken, 2009). The extreme emotions reflect the collective psychology of contemporary Western society, in which any lifestyle is normative, extreme consciousness is legitimate, and where there is a constant demand and obligation for happiness, self-fulfillment and experience (Brinkmann, 2008). Just as the “wrong” body would be exhibited in freak shows and circuses, Keret exhibits cultural deformations while expropriating characters and relieving them of their allegiance with mimesis.

Moreover, since within the social imaginary of the society of consumers “experiencing has become its own justification”¹⁵ and “identity is no longer determined automatically from birth [...] but must continually be performed and expressed”,¹⁶ all characters in the stories reveal the derivative anxiety of un-fulfilled life-experience and the rush of self-invention. As identity formation and re-formation turns into a lifelong task, and as all products in a consumer society, including one’s personality, come with a built-in obsolescence, Keret’s characters are signs of social contradiction, a site of strain, fear and anxiety. In illustrating the convictions and sensibilities of its time, Keret is signifying an essential quality and value;¹⁷ in this sense Keret’s stories are contemporary par excellence, since the contemporary, according to Agamben, is “a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it [...] it is that relationship with time that adheres to it through

disjunction and an anachronism” (Agamben, 2009).

Moreover, in Keret’s stories emotional conflict and identity crisis are a spectacle, rendered visible and sensational, also treated melodramatically. The kitsch design of character proves once again the aesthetic principle of favoring similitude over resemblance in stories with extreme emotional charge –deserted men, lonely women, forbearing children, mourning persons (“Not Completely Alone,” “One Step Beyond,” “Big Blue Bus,” Mourners’ Meal”). Keret’s figures simulate the collective psychology of our cultural age. The overall effect of the ensemble of stories is the totalizing force of acting-out these emotional dispositions, as if the text were an oscillator wherein affection is inserted and the writer starts playing with it to see where he can go with it. It is not life that is described in the stories but its simulation.

In the eponymous story “The Polite Little Boy,” similitude is at play with the text revealing itself as comprising a series of duplications of one impression; it is set as a triptych. The polite child holding a flying model plane is the connecting cord between the pictures. The first scene takes place indoors, witnessing his parents’ nasty argument; the second is set outdoors, suffering the occasional verbal harassment of a young female neighbor; the epilogue is indoors in the evening. The outdoors scene is a duplication of the scenes indoors: all pictures perform the bitterness expressed by caustic verbal expressions, from the perspective of little boy. This is a model child being depicted, obeying his parents and, by way of duplication, following the technical orders to build a model aircraft, demonstrating “model” behavior of the polite child. This is not an initiation story, as we never know what the boy thinks, feels, or how he is affected by events. He is surfaced, his portrayal restricted to being in control while the whole world is getting out of control. Within this collapsing perspective the subject loses its agency, no longer galvanized by confrontational structures (with his parents or other members of society). The child’s behavior, which could be the sign of agency, is repeatedly minimally informative, all the time devoid of internal development but for a chain of scenes that one is a similitude of the other. On the one hand, Keret does maintain a framework of traditional portrayal mainly by presenting not narratives but portraits, meaning a static state of mind of character. On the other, he disrupts this portrayal, eliciting an incessant sense of opacity and dead end.

The attraction to similitude by omission goes hand in hand with a putative lack of narrative desire,¹⁸ or rather lack thereof, in the dual sense of telling a story of desire and of using desire as a total function for creating the dynamics of signification. Desire sets narrative in motion. However, what emerges as an impetus that searches for its objects in Keret’s stories, is not an image of a desire that acquires shape, thus contradicting the idea of the

¹⁴ This term refers to the re-establishment of emotions as the locus of evaluation in people’s eyes and to the new scholarly interest in emotions that runs contrary to and is critical of past presuppositions that emotions are not materially important (see for example the works of the Israeli sociologist Eva Ilouz).

¹⁵ Brinkmann, p.92.

¹⁶ Brinkmann, p.92.

¹⁷ Smadar Shifman has recently argued that Israeli postmodernism is never devoid of external signification, as Israeli writers lack the privilege of being detached from reality.

¹⁸ Brooks, P. (1992). *Reading for the plot: Design and intention in narrative* (pp.37-61). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Brooks describes narrative as a form governed by the reader’s and the character’s desire.

subject as a center of desire and shifting the equilibrium toward similitude. Sometimes the characters are not even endowed with a proper name, and go by general appellations such as 'father' and 'son' ("Snot") or 'the black man' ("Pick a Color"), marking the distance from realistic representation.¹⁹

For the literalization of character, Keret also draws on the resources of metafiction to parody and lay bare the essentially literary nature of closure. The visionary moment at the closing of the story stems from nothing and leads to nothing and is rendered obsolete in a culture suffused with simulacra. Such depiction of character makes it impossible for the reader to extend to the characters the customary passport of a free-standing ontological base. In the closure of "The polite little boy", the boy responds to his father's apologetic words with a formal "I know. Thank you."²⁰ Could it be that the boy is unconvinced? The story gives no indication to such a "modernist" reading seeking to discover developmental coherence. It is a classic example of postmodern disjunctive irony, marking a rupture of the complicity with representative affirmation, since it elicits no personalized response to previous events, just a continuum of the narrative game.

Notwithstanding, in Keret's case one thing follows another without necessarily following *from* it, while individual events are often non-events or ironizations of commonly represented types of events. In most stories things just happen, a subject is incarnated into a guava ("Guava"), a woman's twenty-eight lovers all go by the name Ari ("Ari"), a hemorrhoid develops to such an extent that it suffers from a man ("Hemorrhoid"). Corresponding computer games and cyberspace, Keret inserts some *avatar* into fictional space to follow it rolling; this is hinted at in the story "Cheesus Christ" when the character thinks: "In real life, the minute they told her that her baby was retarded it was as if a GAME OVER sign in neon lights was flashing in the air above her head."²¹ Throughout the book Keret foregrounds his metafictional interest, making no false claims to representation but rather to misrepresentations, and pushing portraiture to the point of pastiche.

The story "Mystique", too, is an episode. Two strangers sit side by side on a plane, when one realizes that the other—I quote - "steals his lines," but in advance. What might, up until the second paragraph, be grasped as a coincidence, is gradually intensified until it strikes

as duplications: both have wives who adore the perfume *Mystique* by Guerlain, and both have travel agents named Eric willing to lie for them to cover infidelities. Keret inserts an overt reference to stage behavior; characters appear as if on stage to say their lines. As such, it is a ruse that deprives characters of resemblance; it is an inversion of agency. The key to deciphering this is the understanding that it is not *life* depicted but a *depiction*. *This, is not a pipe / character*: indicates that the narrative proper is mediated. The coincidence is not mystic at all; it is artifice. Thus, *Mystique*, the particular perfume desired by the wives, is not a piece of reality but another duplication in the text, this time lexical duplication; As the codes of characterization are made transparent, a new prominence is given to the medium, flaunting the character's fictionality.

Keret's approach reflects Giles Deleuze's ideas on figuration. Like Foucault in *This Is Not a Pipe*, Giles Deleuze (2003) also addressed the question of representation of character in paintings. Investigating the visual poetics of Francis Bacon's figures, Deleuze makes a direct bond between his concept of art as waging war against the cliché and the "liberation of figures from figuration,"²² Theoretically, the figure poses a constant problem for fighting against the cliché, since

Figuration exists, it is a fact, and it is even a prerequisite of painting [...] there are psychic clichés just as there are physical clichés—ready-made perceptions, memories, phantasms. There is a very important experience here for the painter: a whole category of things that could be termed clichés already fills the canvas, before the beginning.²³

Theoretically, the figure poses a constant problem for fighting against the cliché, since "the figure is still figurative; it still represents someone (a screaming man, a smiling man, a seated man), it still narrates something."²⁴ Such figuration can never be completely eliminated, since it is the strongest element to which meaning is ascribed, rendering reality significant. Precisely because figuration can never be *completely* eliminated, it is the most powerful textual element in breaking free from the cliché and the formulaic,

Keret does not regard the faithful verbal representation of character as the prerogative of his art; rather, his prerogative is the exploitation of all the possibilities available in the process of bringing language words and print together.²⁵

¹⁹ Docherty observes, "the lack of consistency in the use of the proper name gives a lack of consistency, or depth, to the characters; there is no illusion, and no attempt at foisting the illusion, of these characters being three-dimensional entities which can be seen in any ding of voluminous space, either as physical historical beings or as metaphysical psychological 'depths'." [Docherty, *Reading (absent) character*, p.79.]

²⁰ Keret, p.57.

²¹ Keret, p.23.

²² As coined by Tom Conley in the afterword to the book (Deleuze, p.132).

²³ Deleuze, pp.71-72.

²⁴ Deleuze, p.79.

²⁵ Of course this feature is not unique to the depiction of character but is a general rule of Keret's poetics, as noted by most reviewers of *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*. See [Kellogg, C. (2012, April 8). Book review: *Suddenly, a Knock on The Door*. *Los Angeles Times*.]; [S. Almond. (2012, April 13). Who's there? *The New York Times*.]; [Sansom, I. (2013, February 23). *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* by Etgar Keret—Review: This collection of short stories brims with invention. *The Guardian*.], and others.

Abusing resemblance while breaking away from the cliché is hinted at when time and again as Keret inserts in the stories ironic reflections suggesting an awareness of the efforts to catalogue and classify his writing, thereby revealing the reflexivity of the text. Throughout the text he scatters markers that draw our attention to the precedence of simulation—"Creative Writing" with its reflections on story ending, between soul-piercing and banal: "Write a story about just that—about how unnatural it seems and how the unnaturalness suddenly produce something real, filled with passion. Something that permeates you, from your brain to your loins."²⁶("What Animal Are You?"); "You can think of the game as a sort of path of Rorschach blots that encourage you to use your imagination as you progress toward your goal" ("A Good One"). Life depicted in the text is paradoxical, the more you are aware of characters' existence as individuals the more you acknowledge their inexistence.

In the story "Lieland" a man is made to face his lies that have come true in "a different place, but a familiar one too."²⁷ The protagonist is a liar, lying comes very easy to him. Lying could also be taken for making up stories, omitting the moral charge, and it takes precedence over reality. Keret foregrounds the metafictional intent by referring to Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode," in which the character is inserted into written words, and in the last sentence is chased by a hairy Spanish verb;²⁸ there, "[...] they met a hairy, hunchbacked lie, evidently Argentinian, who spoke nothing but Spanish."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Keret's mode of figuration in *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* advocates characterizational techniques that corrupt the old equation between resemblance and reality. On the one hand, probably Keret has deep relations with the notion of the primal importance of stories to human experience since he clearly foregrounds the superiority of story to reality. At the same time, along with evacuating character, Keret's stories focus on the collective affective states prevalent in the society of consumers and shaped by it, exposing its ambivalent nature in which the decisive component is a dispersed emotional wretchedness.

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²⁶ Keret, p.185.

²⁷ Keret, p. 12.

²⁸ Allen, W. (1991). The kugelmass episode. *The complete prose of Woody Allen: Without feathers, getting even, side effects* (p.360). New Jersey: Wing Books Random House. "He had been projected into an old textbook, *Remedial Spanish* [...] a large and hairy irregular verb—raced after him on its spindly legs."