NAPH 2021 KERET L'AGENT IMMOBILIER

The Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism of Etgar Keret in *The Middleman* [L’agent Immobilier]

1.

Author Etgar Keret epitomizes contemporary Israeli identity, as his cultural position and meanings within the national literary sphere give evidence to. His work consists of individual works of mostly short stories and of collaborative work in almost every artistic genre: Keret works with illustrators on children’s books and graphic novellas, with directors in film and theater, with musicians in the opera, and with choreographers in dance. He also participates in projects in which his work is adapted to a panoply of artistic genres. Keret conducts these collaborative projects in both Israel and abroad. Simultaneously, he is a recognized participant in global fields of particular cultural production, a member of the innovative frontiers of creative and artistic expression in modern culture” (Regev, pg. 6) he is a regular contributor to ---

Etgar Keret’s latest collaborative work *The Middleman* [L’agent Immobilier] sheds light on the author’s quality of reflecting cultural globalization while preserving Israeli cultural uniqueness, on How Keret’s oeuvre is situated withinglobal fields of cultural innovation but incorporates native elements alongside the global forefront; or perhaps vice-versa. I will elucidate this hypothesis by employing The term of aesthetic cosmopolitanism on how it becomes possible to flawlessly transpose Keret’s universe from an Israeli backdrop to a Parisian one and how Keret’s universe extends beyond the Israeli sphere even though rooted in Israeli culture.

## Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism (Motti Regev)

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism constitutes the global prevalent cultural production of artefacts which adhere to specific global style markers and coequal aesthetic taste and imagination but with a local twist; it is best manifested in the pop music sphere, where you have hip hop and rap (emanating from the USA) everywhere – in the Netherlands, Russia and India. And in Israel you would have it either combined with oriental musical motifs or endowed with local political protest content and so forth. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism does not engender a unified and homogeneous culture, instead, it creates similarity and phenomenological proximity between cultures while preserving cultural uniqueness and advocating difference and diversity. AC is one of the things that makes and reflects cultural globalization. Cultural producers situate themselves within global fields of cultural innovation; they place what they see as innovative elements at the forefront of global culture alongside traditional native elements in their work. When global innovation is integrated into local culture it continuously updates local culture and keeps it up to date with contemporary cultural trends, ultimately creating similarity and multicultural “phenomenological proximity” (the term was coined by John Tomlinson).

I seems to me that Keret’s postmodern poetics is the cosmopolitan aesthetic language he speaks. The Keretian universe is a postmodern one, with its insistence on ontological plurality, the breaking of narrative continuity and teleology, self-referentiality. A poetics that propounds the unmaking, disassembling, dismantling of conventionality, offers radical epistemologies, and abolishes fixed forms. It offers a critical engagement with the present it reflects the crisis of meaning, the crisis of the subject, of intimate relationships, Firstly, in its reflection of glocal trends in the West, of transnationalism, of shifts in the formation of the nuclear family, of interpersonal relations both within and outside the family and so forth Metropolitan, urban culture

## The second presence of AC in Etgar Keret is his multimodality and transmediation via collaborative work. the author as a collaborative artist blurs the lines between print and other form of publication, namely the stage and the video, audio and electronic text. I argue that working cooperatively, in partnerships makes the author better suited for the contemporary culture, immersed in virtual worlds and the innovative experimentation with mixed media and forms of new media.. Just as Keret’s miniscule short story medium suits contemporary culture’s consumers: short texts for a generation with a short attention span accustomed d reading on screens,. So is his multimodality: ADD CITATIONS FROM BOOK ON AC

From an aesthetic cosmopolitanism perspective, it is a “natural ‘step’ for narrative fiction. I in the sense that from a media history point of view, established literary practice and genres might no longer be able to ‘compete’ with new media and streaming technology and might therefore be no longer at the forefront of cultural change and innovation.” (Herbrechter, “Posthumanist literature” pg. 3) Cultural production in other media is the a form of AC

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Stance of being with the times – 13

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Advertent aesthetic cosmopolitans – 16

Regev, Motti. Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in Late Modernity. Polity, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, 2013.

2.

L’agent immobilier – describe in broad strokes

The French speaking 2019 miniseries *L’agent Immobilier* [The Middleman] is a collaborative work of Etgar Keret and Shira Gefen as writers and directors. (they have already collaborated in the film Jellyfish, which won the Palme d’or in 2007??) It aired on the Arte channel on May 7TH, 2020, and won the 2019 La Rochelle TV award for best scenario. It is available in Israel on Celcom TV. *L’agent Immobilier’s* original script was first submitted to and rejected by Israeli television networks, on the grounds of it being too artistic.

“Nous sommes partis du paradoxe d’un agent immobilier sans domicile fixe, qui dort dans les appartements qu’il est censé vendre, ne trouve pas sa place dans le monde et va essayer de reconstruire sa relation à sa famille et à son passé” (Nurbel, Jean-Christophe. “Critique : *L’agent Immobilier* avec Mathieu Amalric et Eddie Mitchell”. 7-5-2020 COPY LINK [Accessed 26-4-2010] )

“We set out from the paradox of a homeless real estate agent, who sleeps in the houses he is supposed to sell, who does not find his place in the world and will try to rebuild his relation with his family and his past”

It is Keret's universe , which speaks the postmodern language, including the an ontological break (the world- behind -the -next -door, is the same building 40 years before) and a self-reflexive element (a short film which is a mise-en-abyme followed by a meta-poetic dialogue exchange). Keret’s recurring motifs of the piggy bank and a magical goldfish appear here too. More than that, the series is devised as a well-wrought short story – concise, confined to mostly one location, it concentrates on one venue, around which the plot revolves with a limited number of main characters and recurring minor characters that appear time and again. The narrative structure is characterized by the tension between variety and unity, separation and connection, fragmentation and continuity, SPECIFY

The Tone is cocasse = bizarre, comic, quirky (comic) Insolent, incongruous, with a creeping sense of the atmosphere being heavy and weighing down on us. As in Keret’s stories, it is convention-defying , An overall “interrogating and even pushing of limits” which is the typical postmodernist stance (Linda Hutcheon, 1999, 7-9). Also is present here the vulnerable hero, Self-destructive, or Well- intentioned but maladroit, who constantly gets thrown off the track by the intrigue.

The Organizing principle is that “things get out of hand” “Les éléments nous dépasse” (3, 03:06), “C’est une situation qui a dégénéré״ (3, 34:34). The protagonist’s world is tearing apart bit by bit, this is figuratively demonstrated by his clothes – décousu, which gradually become undone, unstitched, disjointed. “Tu n’a vraiment pas de chez toi” (3, 03 :24) (you don’t have a place of your own/ you have no home) is what his daughter tells him in disbelief, this is the essence of the story. Although he is a Proprietaire, a property owner, he has no place of his own in the sense of lacking a sense of belonging, he is proceeding without a specific goal, purpose or direction. Owner in the figurative sense, of owning your life, of being in control of things, able to exercise your agency. Not the dilapidated home is at the center, or his bizarre temporary lodging arrangements, but the sense of exercising control over his life, of meaning and direction. Builds on the double signification of agency – as a profession and as a philosophical term, a subject position of being able of shape one’s life. The agent with no agency

Olivier is in an incessant state of his relationships being undone, unstitched, incoherent, disjointed, disconnected, random and rambling.

Relationships are at the heart of the narrative, they are hard to sustain: family ties (mother, father, daughter, his marriage). This is foregrounded already at an early stage in the narrative,

This is poetically incarnated as the systematic inversion of scenes from the main road to the margins. Always veering to the side: . The primary route is systematically skidded to the sideways, and draws attention to itself.

A realtor presents an apartment, attention is shifted to the conjugal dispute of the potential clients in a glimpse into their marital relations

An appointment with a lawyer for reading the late mother’s will, attention is shifted to the lawyer's wife telling him off for his eating habits, a glimpse into his marital relations

After falling down the stairs the protagonist awaits his turn to be interrogated at the police station, attention is shifted to the adjacent seat where a person stabbed in the back who is trying to resolve problems with his girlfriend a glimpse into his marital relations, always marital problem.

Moreover, every scene is in a state of disjunction, by

Obstacles (things that malfunction in relationships and around his real estate)

Paradoxes (things that are supposed to be different)

Misunderstandings (that the lawyer is deceased is met with disbelief) mistaken for the father of the young girl in the 70s apartment

All is deconstructed, disfigured, disassembled, dismantled, disjointed, disconntected

Olivier’s condition of general malaise is affiliated with postmodern fluid societies, of one who experiences his life as unattached fragments. These are existential problems, of a generation-x baby boomer in a post-everything world. sources of all this a global culture, In fact, the plight of the protagonist and the denouement are disconnected from specific political or economic circumstances but associated with poor life choices and a general culturally based condition. Abides by issues stemming from the the cultural logic of late capitalism or the society of experience. . AC subdues national emphases and addresses several audiences simoultanously. It is global universe.

CITE NEW REFERENCES

Episode 4, 27:00 – 29:23 from the pov of AC:

The context: we are going to see Olivier, our hero, and his business associate, a loan shark interested in real-estate who enters into a contract with Olivier to buy from him an apartment building he inherited from his mother , he offers him 5 million Euros for the property, under the condition that it will be free of tenants. In the meantime, he loans Olivier 5 thousand Euros. Olivier changes his mind about the sale when he realizes he is at home there (“je suis chez moi ici” [4, 13:42]) and now, according to the terms of the loan, he must pay back 90 thousand Euros. Thanks to hints from an object from the alternative past (a piggy bank) a hidden treasure in the form of a gold ingot is discovered Deus Ex Machina and allows him to redeem himself from the contract;

The confrontation takes place at a *chez-lui*, from one owner to the other. For the first time Olivier confronts someone, stating his will straightforwardly and assertively. Before he was merely reacting, retroactively, belatedly. The possible world, from which the ingot came, resolved problems in the present, with the hero transforming into a handyman, able to stitch the fragmented pieces of his relationships. “Je suis là pour réparer ce qui était abimer” (4  38 :14) -

Obviously, the loan shark is Jewish, perhaps Israeli, as he converses in Hebrew with his son. He is the good bad guy, the honest gangster, the kindhearted thug, the bully with the kind demeanor (does not want to accept any money on top of what is owed him, willing to postpone a payback rendezvous with Olivier because the latter has to go to an event at his daughter’s school and even drives him there) adding to the comic, bizarre tone of the narrative. He opens the door on Saturday morning, the first thing he likens the early visit is to a call girl’s one. The shirt he sleeps with is adorned with an IDF print.

This Reflects an acknowledgement and incorporation of a global universe, global cultural tastes and passions in television and cimena, a specific field of cultural production in which gangsters are often depicted as belonging to specific ethnic groups (eastern Europe, North Africa and the middle east). and cosmopolitan multi-cultural exchanges.

As a series turning to the French speaking international audience it reflects a post-national late-capitalist transnational homogeneous culture, where emblems and signs flow freely from one culture to the other and cultural appropriation is ubiquitous. Signs and emblems are visual, aural, embedded within the narrative or serve auxiliary purposes.

Throughout, Soundtrack includes American Hip-Hop Rock music soundtrack (2, 36:00), the man with the knife in his back is wearing a Mind the Gap T-shirt, . The new owners want their apartment to be renovated according to Japanese architectural models (episode 2, 04:01), Australian chocolate (2, 26:00) is hailed as the best in the market, The daughter’s friend is a black girl (2, 43:42) + inserting in French the English words “too much”, “cool”, the transnational world of labor immigration with two Polish janitors who do not speak English. And, a citation from Chinese ‘philosophy’ (in first encounter with the old tenant) – crisis and opportunity in Chinese are one and the same word, which is in a nutshell what the narrative is all about, but not explicated with Western terminology (Kairos, perhaps).

For a French audience, L’agent Immobilier reflects a postmodern, post-national, stance. It treats charged signs with irreverence and sets the signifiers of Long standing representations of the Other free: the stereotype of the Jewish moneylender and its anti-Semitic connotations. Just as a black gorilla statue as a garden decoration is installed, echoing colonialism and imperialism.

## AC practitioners, as explained, inhabit both arenas – the local sphere and the global one. The meanings attributed to the series by Israeli spectators are particular and specifically local culture-based.

Israeli culture is characterized by a very strong national narrative, with the IDF, the Holocaust and the Jewish religion its prominent components. These items are thrown into the pool of cultural objects that are dismantled of their cultural solemnity, irreverently and are the source of jokes and pastiche.

The IDF emblem signifies of the power of the state, patriotism, belief in Israel’s raison d’etre and right-of-way, here turned bedwear and worn by the gangster, the loan shark. The Shabbat and the call girl are conflated. And earlier, another Jewish emblem makes an appearance, the inscription “God to whom vengeance belongs” אל נקמות . The Hebrew letters are inscribed on the knuckles of one gangster who comes to intimidate the hero. He ultimately punches the hero with his fist, on which the letters are tattooed, thus they are dismantled of their figurative meaning and relegated to their strict denotation.

In other places

Zimmerman – black humor on concentration camps (exmp. 3, 16:58) EXMPS

There are also inside jokes sprinkled all over, available only to the knowledgeable Israeli audience. The moneylender’s child is played by Lev Keret, Etgar Keret’s son. Keret and his brother, whom we know from Keret’s short stories and intimately from his memoir The Seven Good Years, play the two Polish janitors. Both are Polish, indeed, descendants of Polish Jews who survived the holocaust. The two are by Zimmerman, a fellow resident at the retirement home, as “antisemetic Polacks” (FN). And the piggy bank, a saving box in the shape of a pig, is named Zimmerman, an unmistakably Jewish name.

## In his prose writing in Hebrew Keret conveys a fundamental suspicion in the adequacy of sign systems, creating semiotic subterfuge in order to expose the trouble with the signs/signified and to counter national axioms. Keret’s stance is about suspicion, not rejection; it is on how these regimes of truth weigh on the personal lives. Resistance to signs, suspicion of those signifiers with excessive meanings that claim and hold formative power.

Even if in French, French produced and part of French cultural production, Keret’s series is Israeli. Indeed, French critics did not identify Israeliness in the series, but its obvious for an Israeli audience. AC, as a key feature in Keret’s poetical universe, produces cultural proximity which enables his poetics to function in diverse cultural environments while maintaining its unique national identity as embedded within it.