

KERET'S "LIVING-DEAD" AND THE SACRIFICE OF ISRAELI MASCULINITY

Adia Mendelson-Maoz

In Etgar Keret's short story "Yorim Betuvia" ("Shooting Tuvia")¹ the narrator tells the story of his dog, Tuvia, and the ways in which he manages to survive harassments and shooting. Tuvia was given to the narrator as a present for his ninth birthday. As a puppy, his barks "sounded more like a wheeze," but when he felt threatened he'd "give a deep, low kind of growl that didn't sound anything like a puppy," as if he "was impersonating some other dog."² When Tuvia grows up he snaps at everyone except the narrator, barking at dogs and people. The narrator's dad didn't like Tuvia from the first moment he saw him, and after Tuvia bites the narrator's sister, the father decides to get rid of him and throw him into a stream. Three days later, and after the narrator's tears had dried, Tuvia returns. He arrives at the narrator's school, dirty and smelly but acting as his usual self, barking at everyone and behaving in a crazy manner. From this point the story continues to describe the efforts of the father to get rid of this creature and Tuvia's miraculous appearances that follow. Thus, the Father drives more than a hundred kilometers away from home and leaves the dog there, but Tuvia returns, wagging its tail at the narrator, exhausted from the journey. And again, Tuvia does not change his manners, and attacks the

¹ Etgar Keret. "Yorim Betuvia." In *Anihu*. (Tel Aviv: Zemora Bitan, 2010), pp.11-15. Appeared in English as "Shooting Tuvia" in *The Nimrod Flip-Out*. Trans. Miriam Shlesinger and Sondra Silverston. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 23-27

² Etgar Keret, *The Nimrod Flip-Out*, 23.

grandmother, knocking her to the floor. When the father asks the narrator's older brother to bring his M-16 rifle from his army service, it is clear that Tuvia is not coming back. But in Keret's fiction, even a bullet shot to the head is not the end of the story: six months later Tuvia appears, waiting for the narrator at the schoolyard, as usual. This time something is wrong with his legs and his left eye is shut. Yet, as soon as he sees the narrator he seems very happy.

Tuvia is not a pedigree dog, neither is he beautiful nor strong. On the contrary, he is more like a street dog, impossible to tame, acting aggressively because he is frightened or perhaps because he just isn't a nice dog. However, he has one important quality – he is a perpetual survivor. Nothing can knock him down, nothing can kill him; he will pop up again and again, looking at the faces of his killers as if mocking their conspiracy to annihilate him.

Tuvia has much in common with Keret's male characters, even though he is a dog. He has a sort of stereotypically Jewish persona – always unwanted but with immense powers of survival.

In this article I aim to offer a new framework for discussing Keret's image of Jewish masculinity and particularly his design of the figure of the living-dead. Following an historical introduction regarding Jewish masculinity, I will show how Keret returns to the prototype of the diasporic Jew, offering an unstable masculinity that intertwines with the myth of the living-dead, and thus ridicules and subverts the Zionist concept of masculinity and enables pointed political criticism.

Jewish Masculinity and the Myth of the Living-Dead

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex. It goes without saying that he is a man."³ Clearly, this common conception that assumes that men (and especially white men) are supposed to have a stable identity, whereas women, on the other hand, are generally considered to be unstable, has gone through radical changes – from what was considered as steady masculinity throughout Modernism (in George Mosse's terms: "will-power, honor, and courage"⁴) to heterogeneous and changing concepts of the category "men."⁵ However, in the case of Jewish masculinity, instability has always been present.

For hundreds of years, European and East-European Jews were seen as an inferior minority. The anti-Semitic stereotype presented Jews as weak, miserable, humiliated and feminine. Several components of this image were created by the Jews themselves, who, as a minority wishing to preserve its identity, preferred to differentiate their communities from the *goyim* (non-Jews/gentiles) by depicting themselves as men of learning, not men of brawn. As Daniel Boyarin puts it, Eastern European Jews promoted an opposite view of masculinity – one that favored bookishness, gentleness and self-abnegation – over the violent image of masculinity in Western culture.⁶ Nevertheless, the perception of European Jews as weaklings was strongly linked to their place in the repressive society around them, which hindered their actions and often overtly or covertly persecuted them.

³ Simone de Beauvoir. "The Second Sex: 'Introduction.'" In *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Carole MacCann and Seung-kyung Kim (Eds.). (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 41.

⁴ George Lachmann Mosse. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

⁵ Chris Beasley. *Gender and Sexuality Studies: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 187.

⁶ Daniel Boyarin. *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4-5.

Towards the end of the 19th century, with the rise of Zionism, the need arose for a change in the image of the Jewish prototype. But whereas new national identities are usually formulated by opposition to an 'Other' who serves as an opposing pole, here the 'other' was not the *goy* or the anti-Semite, but an antiquated version of the Jew himself. Anti-Semitic stereotypes were on the minds of Zionist theorists who had been influenced by European revolutionary socialist and national ideas, emphasizing masculinity, activism, independence and devotion to the collective. Thus, the new Jew was formulated not in opposition to the European *goy*, but as its follower and reflection.⁷

Such was the case of Zionist thinkers Theodor Herzl, Leon Pinsker and Max Nordau, who believed that the creation of a modern male Jew would cure Jewish psychological and physiological inferiority. Herzl was convinced that Jewish physical weakness was an indirect cause for the anti-Semitism that was aimed towards the Jews. Pinsker depicted the Jewish people as non-humans who are perceived as ghosts, as the dead walking among the living.⁸ Nordau, who was a medical doctor and had been influenced by German physical training methods, argued for the need to create a "new muscular Jew"⁹: in order for the Jews to be able to escape their terrible destiny in the Diaspora, they needed to exercise and develop their bodies and to display their good health by their upright bodies.¹⁰ Hence, only a "new Jew" could lead to the creation of new nation, only he would be ready for the national mission of settling the land of Israel, working its land, fighting its enemies and achieving sovereignty.¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ Mikhal Dekel. *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 10.

⁹ Max Nordeo. *Ktavim Tzioniyim* (Zionist Writings). Vol. A. (Jerusalem: Hasifrya Hazionit, 1955).

¹⁰ Raz Yosef. *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*. (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2004), 19.

¹¹ Tamar Mayer (Ed.). *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 15.

The "new Jews" were mainly born in Europe and immigrated to the land of Israel towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Their children, who were born into the reality of the Land of Israel, were natives and were nicknamed *sabra*, after the prickly pear bush brought to Israel from South America.¹² In the 1940s and 1950s the *sabra* myth referred to manifestations of the new national masculinity. It included physical as well as spiritual qualities, which corresponded to the shift in the image of Jewish manhood during the Zionist revolution. As such, the image of a new Jewish masculinity, expressed through descriptions of the *sabra*, operated according to R. Connell's normative definition of masculinity by providing a clear inventory of manly physical traits and modes of behavior.¹³ Thus, the Israeli youngster who wanted to become a man was supposed to undergo the physical and mental training according to the role-model of the *sabra*.

The *sabra* as a modern myth was designed to meet social and national needs, and was portrayed as close to nature and familiar with Israeli geography, a man of action who can toil the land and build the country, loyal to his friends and instilled with a powerful sense of ideological commitment and national responsibility.¹⁴ In times of national struggle, when many young soldiers lost their lives in battle, another attribute was associated with the *sabra* – the myth of national sacrifice. During the early decades of the twentieth century, particularly around the period of the 1948 war, the fallen soldiers were linked to the Biblical story of the binding of Isaac (the *akedah*). Yet, while in the Biblical text this myth reinforces the connection between the individual believer or community and God, in the modern rite of fallen soldiers, God's altar was replaced by a worship of the homeland.

¹² Anita Shapira. *Yehudim Hadashim Yehudim Yeshanim* (New Jews Old Jews). (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1996), 12.

¹³ R.W Connell. *Masculinities*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1995), 70.

¹⁴ Oz Almog. *Hatzabar* (The Sabra). (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 14-15.

In the Biblical story of the binding of Isaac, God saves Abraham's son. As Richard Rubenstein points out, modern Jewish scholars argue that the "fundamental lesson of the *akedah* was that the sacrifice of the first born was no longer required and that an animal was an acceptable surrogate."¹⁵ But if indeed the Biblical lesson was meant to oppose the sacrifice of human beings, why was this story so relevant to the mythization of the fallen? Rubenstein shows that the notion of sacrificing sons has never ceased to exist in Jewish culture. One example is the ceremony of *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son): a traditional symbolic ceremony in which the father is asked by a rabbi, on the thirtieth day after his son's birth, to choose between his son and his money. After the father states his preference he gives a symbolic sum of money and the rabbi declares that the exchange frees the child from the biblical trial and thus saves him. Moreover, during the long period in which the Jewish people lived in the Diaspora, this myth of the *akedah* was associated with Jewish martyrology. As people interpreted the Biblical story as a fable in which Abraham was so devoted to God that he was ready to sacrifice his son when ordered to do so, the story became associated with historical circumstances in which Jews prefer to lose their lives rather than be forcibly converted.

Later, in the land of Israel, soldiers were portrayed as courageous youths who risked their lives for the sake of the homeland. "Death has been framed socially"¹⁶ and thus, these soldiers "in their death, decreed us life."¹⁷ Many writers who adopted this

¹⁵ Richard L. Rubenstein. "What Was At Stake in the Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity?" *Shofar* 28: 3 (Spring 2010), 82.

¹⁶ Rachel Harris. *An Ideological Death – Suicide in Israeli Literature*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 71.

¹⁷ A government memorandum on Israel's first Independence Day shows how the *akedah* was embraced as a framework for national bereavement: "Today Israel will remember with a shiver of pride and appreciation its sons and daughters, the nation's heroes, who risked their lives in the battlefields and with their young, precious, pure and courageous lives, gave us our liberty. The nation will venerate their memory, bask in the glory of their heroism, and comfort the bereaved parents who were fortunate enough to witness *our acceptance of their sacrifice*." Quoted in Azaryahu Maoz, *Pulhaney Medina – Hagigot Ha'atzma'ut Vehantzahat Hanofslim 1948-1956* (Rituals of State – The Celebration of

model described these young men as *akudim* (bound), or as living-dead: the dead soldiers remain beautiful, ever-present and intact in the memories of the living, their male image remains untouched;¹⁸ they do not get old, they remain young and brave and powerful. Their pictures have an iconography context that preserves the ideal image of manhood.¹⁹

The myth of the *sabra* as the new Jewish Man, and later as the living-dead, was incorporated into ideological texts and disseminated via the educational system. However, literary texts have mirrored its complexities from the beginning, as debates on Jewish masculinity were a dominant component in the evolving Hebrew literature.

Independence and the Commemorations of the Fallen 1948-1956). (Sde Boker: Ben Gurion University, 1995), 11.

¹⁸ Poets such as Nathan Alterman, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Avraham Shlonsky and Haim Gouri, as well as songwriters such as Haim Hefer and Natan Yonatan and authors such as Yigal Mosenzon and Moshe Shamir all include aesthetic interpretations of this myth in their writings. Examples of this myth in Hebrew poetry include Alterman's "Magash Hakesef" (The Silver Platter) *Davar*, December 19, 1947. Re-published in *Hatur Hashvi'i 1-3*. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, 1973); Gouri's "Hare'ut" (Camaraderie) in *Mishpahat Hapalmah – Yalkut Alilot Vezemer* (The Palmah Family – Anthology of Stories and Songs). Haim Gouri and Haim Hefer (Eds.). (The Palmah Organization Press, 1977), 233, and "Hine Mutualot Gufoteynu" (Here Lay our Bodies) in *Pirhey Ha'esh* (Flowers of Fire). (Merchavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1949), 65; Shlonsky's *Shirim* (Poems). (Merhavyah: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1954); Yonatan's, *Shviley Afar* (Dust Roads) (Merhavyah: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1951). In Hebrew prose: Mosenzon's *Be'arvot Hanegev* (In the Negev Desert). (Tel Aviv: Trabeski, 1949); Shamir's, *Hu Halach Basadot* (He Walked through the Fields). (Merhavyah: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1947) and *Bemo Yadav* (In his Own Hands). (Merhavyah: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1951).

¹⁹ Among the many studies in this field, see in particular Dan Miron, *Mul Ha'ah Hashotek: Al Shirat Ha'atzma'ut* (Facing the Silent Brother – On the Poetry of the War of Independence). (Jerusalem: Open University and Keter Press, 1992), and Michael Gluzman, *Haguf Hatziyoni* (The Zionist Body). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2007); Many literary scholars have written about the *akedah* in the context of Israeli culture and literature, including Gidon Ofrat (Ed), *Akedat Yitzhak Ba'omanut Ha'yisra'elit* (Itzhak's Binding in Israeli Art). (Ramat Gan: The Museum of Israeli Art, 1980); Arie Ben Gurion (Ed.), *Al Tishlah Yadcha el Hana'ar – Shirim Vedivrey Hagut al Ha'akedah* (Do not Lay Your Hand on the Boy– Poems and Essays on the Akedah). (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002); Yael Feldman, "Yitzhak o Oedipus – Migdar Vepsychopolitika Begilguley Ha'akedah," (Isaac or Oedipus – Gender and Psychoanalysis in the Metamorphoses of the Akedah). *Alpayim* 22 (2001), 53-77, "Shel mi Hakorban Haze, La'azazel? Aliyato Venefilato shel Avraham Ha'oked Bishnot Hahamishim" (Whose Sacrifice is it? The Rise and Fall of Abraham in the 1950s) *Mikan* 9 (May 2008), 125-57, and *Glory and Agony – Isaac's Sacrifice and the National Narrative*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Avi Sagi, "The Meaning of the 'Akedah' in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition." *Israel Studies* 3:1 (1998), 45-60; Glenda Abramson, "The Reinterpretation of the Akedah in Modern Hebrew Poetry." *Journal of Jewish Study* 41:2 (1990), 101-114; Ruth Kartun-Blum, "Me'ayin Ha'etzim Ha'ele Beyadi: Ha'akeda Kemikre Bohan Bashira Ha'ivrit Hahdasha" (Where do these Woods Come from – Binding Itzhak as a Test Case in Modern Hebrew Poetry). *Moznayim* 62:9-10 (1988): 9-14; Hillel Weiss, "He'arot Livhinat Akedat Yitzhak" (Comments on Yitzhak's Binding). In *Haakeda Vehatocheha: Mitos, Tema Vetopos Basifrut* (The Akedah and the Reproach: Myth, Theme and Topos in Literature). Zvi Levi (Ed.). (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1991), 31-52; Adia Mendelson-Maoz, "The Bereaved Father and his Dead son in the Works of A.B Yehoshua." *Social Jewish Studies* 17:1 (Fall 2010): 116-140.

Hebrew literature written in the late 19th century, mainly by male authors, grappled with the ideological national direction of Zionism and its connection to questions of gender.²⁰ Major canonical authors discussed Jewish masculinity and the male Jewish body, from Peretz Smolenskin, Judah Loeb Gordon and Mendele Mokher Seforim (Abramowitsch), through the works of Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Saul Tchernichowsky and Uri Zvi Greenberg, to canonical writers of the twentieth century such as Moshe Shamir, Nathan Alterman and A.B. Yehoshua, to mention only a few. As soon as the image of the living-dead took shape, in the 1940s and 1950s, it was immediately challenged, as authors exposed its complexity and its inner contradictions, and subverted it; for example in S. Yizhar's book *Yemey Tziklag* (Days of Ziklag)²¹ and in Haim Gouri's *Shoshanat Haruhot* (Compass Rose).²² Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards the living-dead has received much criticism.²³

²⁰ Michael Gluzman, *Haguf Hatziyoni*; Yaron Peleg, "Heroic Conduct: Homoeroticism and the Creation of Modern Jewish Masculinities," *Jewish Social Studies* 13:1 (Fall 2006), 31–58.

²¹ S.Yizhar. *Yemey Tziklag* (Day of Ziklag). (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1958).

²² Haim Gouri. *Shoshanat Haruhot* (Compass Rose). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1960).

²³ See: Amir Gilboa, "Yitzhak" (Isaac). In *Shirim Baboker Baboker* (Early Morning Songs). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuhad, 1953); Yehuda Amichai, "Akedah," (Akedah) in *Me'ahorey kol ze Mistater Osher Gadol* (Behind all This a Great Happiness is Hiding). (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1974), "Kah et Bincha et Yehidha" (Take your Son, your only Son) in *Patu'ah Sagur Patu'ah* (Open Closed Open). (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1998), "Hagibor Ha'amiti shel Ha'akeda" (The Real Hero of the Akedah) in *Sh'at Haheqed* (The Our of Grace). (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1982); Hanoch Levin, "Avi Hayakar" (Dear Father) and "Akedah" (Akedah) from "Malkat Ha'ambatya" in *Ma Ichpat Latzipor* (What does the bird care?). (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1987); Yitzhak Laor, "Hametumtam hazeh Yitzhak" (That Idiot Isaac) in *Rak Haguf Zocher* (Only the Body Remembers). (Tel-Aviv: Adam, 1985) and a later version in *Layla Bemalon Zar* (Night in a Foreign Hotel). (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1992).

Spineless Men

"Tsfira" ("Siren")²⁴ is one of the most popular stories by Etgar Keret. It is set between the two national days of commemoration – *The Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day* and *The Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers*. The protagonist and narrator, Eli, is a young boy who listens carefully to the story of a holocaust survivor who gives a talk to the kids at school during the *The Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day*. The antagonist, Sharon, is a strong boy who is missing school that day because he is trying out to become a naval commando. After the ceremony Eli sees Sholem, the school's janitor, crying. During the Holocaust he was a Sonderkommando, a death camp prisoner whose task was to dispose of dead bodies, and now, during Remembrance Day, he is full of pain and memories. Eli is unfamiliar with the term Sonderkommando and thinks it means that Sholem served in the naval commando – which he finds difficult to believe, since Sholem looks weak and forlorn – yet he has sympathy for Sholem; and when he discovers that Sharon stole Sholem's bike to celebrate his success in the try-outs, he approaches the principal.

A few days later Sharon and his friend discover who informed on them. They meet Eli and prepare to beat him, yet at that moment, "suddenly, out of nowhere came the sound of the siren. I'd completely forgotten that it was Remembrance Day for the Fallen."²⁵ Everybody stands still during the sounding of the siren and so do Sharon and his friend, but the narrator "walked to the hole in the fence and walked through slowly and quietly... I went on walking home through the streets with all the frozen

²⁴ Etgar Keret, "Tsfira." In *Tzinorot* (Pipelines). (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), 9-12. English translation "Siren" by Anthony Berris in *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God & Other Stories*. (New York: Toby Press, 2004), 67-72.

²⁵ Etgar Keret, *The Bus Driver*, 72.

people looking like wax dummies, the sound of the siren surrounding me with an invisible shield."²⁶

"Siren" brings two prototypes of Israeli masculinity: the narrator-protagonist, a sensitive boy who respects the Holocaust Memorial Day and has compassion towards elderly people, and the antagonist, a strong and violent kid who wants to be a fighter in the army. And while this stronger boy steals from a Holocaust survivor and brags about it, he stands still when the siren for the Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers is heard, without being watched or told to do so; the protagonist, on the other hand, is saved thanks to the siren, which he chooses to disregard. In this realist story, which brings a glance of magic, the narrator succeeds in freezing all the people around in order to escape his predator.²⁷ These two variations on masculinity, the narrator and Sharon, are prototypes of many of Keret's characters: the Diasporic Jew who tries to minimize himself as much as he can, and the macho who is a reminiscence of the *Goy*, physically strong and immoral, a man who harnesses his physicality and brutality to his devotion to his country. Between these two prototypes, Keret actively chooses the unstable, weak and cowardly version of masculinity, whether in characters of children and youngsters, soldiers, young men or fathers.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, ibid.

²⁷ This mechanism also appears in the story "Amodu!" ("Freeze!") from *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger (Missing Kissinger)*. (Tel Aviv: Zemorah Bitan, 1994), 139-141. English version "Freeze!" in the translation of Miriam Shlesinger *The Girl On The Fridge*. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 83-86.

²⁸ For characters of children and youngsters, see "Haben shel Rosh Hamosad" ("The Son of the Head of the Mossad") in *Tzinorot*, 45-48. English version in *The Bus Driver*, 95-100, translated by Miriam Shlesinger or "Hahavera shel Korbi" ("Korbi's Girl"); in *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 51-55, English version in *Missing Kissinger*, 70-73, translated by Miriam Shlesinger and Sondra Silverston. For characters of soldiers, see "Naylon" ("Vacum Seal") in *Tzinorot*, 86-88, appeared in English in *The Girl On The Fridge*, 37-40, translated by Miriam Shlesinger and Sondra Silverston; "Yamim Kmo Hayom" ("Days like Today") in *Tzinorot*, 134-136; for young men, see "Beni Bagaz" ("Teddy Trunk") in *Anihu* (Tel Aviv: Zemora Bitan, 2010), 56-59, appeared in English in *The Nimrod Flip-Out*, 83-86, and "Hakaytana shel Kneller" ("Kneller's Happy Campers") (Jerusalem: Keter and Tel-Aviv: Zmorah-Bitan, 1998), 45-107; English version in the translation of Miriam Shlesinger, *Kneller's Happy Campers*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009); and for fathers, see "Aluf Ha'olam" ("World Champion") in *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 30-32, *Missing Kissinger*, 37-40, or "Safa Zara" ("A Foreign Language") in *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 79-81, *Missing Kissinger*, 113-117.

Keret's protagonists are not only weak and forlorn, but also unsuccessful with women, and sometimes even take a passive and "feminine" role in romantic relations. In the story "Gilu'ah Tzihtsu'ah" ("Clean Shave"),²⁹ a love story diverts into an almost cannibalistic realm.³⁰ The story tells of a girl who loves her boyfriend, and of her boyfriend, who wants to have her and is willing to do everything for her, especially when she asks him to shave himself more, since his bristles hurt her body. He "shaved every day, twice a day even",³¹ and later continues to shave his eyebrows, and his chest. Eventually he notices all the others who had been there before him and still exist in her living room, men with no bones on whom she sits with pleasure, who tell him that there is "this guy is Safed who could pull them right out, backbone and skull and all [...] and she'd have it much nicer [...] just her smile as she sat on him was worth everything."³² The story is based on the metaphor of the person with no spinal column taken to extreme. Moreover, while being smooth, clean and with no body hair is perceived as a feminine attribute (and it is common for western women to take off the hair on their legs, body and face), here it is the man who is demanded to be smooth by the woman who controls him. Ironically, as is hinted by the implied author, the protagonist tries to convince himself that he masters the situation and that he is going to win the girl. This false belief is evident in many other stories by Keret, such as "Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger" ("Missing Kissinger"),³³ "Ilan,"³⁴ and "Anihu," while the exact opposite is actually taking place. In "Giluah Tzihtsuah," the girl is going to use

²⁹ Etgar Keret. "Gilu'ah Tzihtsu'ah." In *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 62-63. English version "Clean Shave" in *Missing Kissinger*, 87-89.

³⁰ Adia Mendelson-Maoz. "Situatzyot Kitzoniyot – Zva'atiyot Vegroteskiyot Bitziratam shel Castel-Bloom Vekeret" (Extreme Situations – The Horrendous and the Grotesque in the Works of Castel-Bloom and Keret). *Dapim Lemehkar Besifrut* 11 (1998), 269-295.

³¹ Etgar Keret, *Missing Kissinger*, 88.

³² Ibid., 89.

³³ Etgar Keret. "Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger." In *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 13-15; "Missing Kissinger." In *Missing Kissinger*, 11-14.

³⁴ Etgar Keret. "Ilan." In *Pit'om Dfika Badelet* (Suddenly, a Knock on the Door). (Tel Aviv: Zemorah-Bitan, 2010), 96-98; Translated as "Ari". In *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*. Trans. Nathan Englander, Miriam Shlesinger and Sondra Silverstone. (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), 99-102.

her boyfriend and turn him into a stuffed animal in order to sit on him, as if he were a sofa; in other stories, the protagonists are being used by the women and dumped afterwards.

What is left for these weak men are two ways for gaining power – the first is the world of dreams and magic, and the second is the power of telling a story. The option of magic sometimes works, but usually fails, as in "Lahatut Kova" ("Hat Trick").³⁵ The other option may promise freedom and power, yet the protagonists who appear to be writers are always described as cowards who do not express themselves in their writing, but rather choose to write what is expected of them. In the story "Shidrug" ("Upgrade"),³⁶ the narrator discloses that he likes to talk and cannot stop talking. He can talk about everything, but he also needs to appease people, and so he says whatever he believes the people around him want him to say. In "Pit'om Dfika Badelet" ("Suddenly a Knock on the Door"),³⁷ the protagonist is being forced, with a gun to his head, to write stories.

Keret draws a world of unfair power games between these two options of masculinity: the first is the stereotypical bully and the other, to whom Keret is usually more inclined, is gentle, feminine and physically weak. However, while choosing the Diasporic image, Keret does not romanticize his protagonist, nor does he give him extra strength: he is not smarter than others, he does not pursue justice; rather, he is a babbler who tries to survive. And yet, in Etgar Keret's world, you can survive even when you are dead. Thus, part of Keret's challenge of Israeli masculinity deals with the charged ideological image of the living-death.

³⁵ Etgar Keret. "Lahatut Kova." In *Ga'agu'ay Lekissinger*, 21-23; "Hat Trick." In *Missing Kissinger*, 23-27.

³⁶ Etgar Keret. "Shidrug." In *Pit'om Dfika Badelet*, 153-156; "Upgrade." In *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*, 155-159.

³⁷ Etgar Keret. "Pit'om Dfika Badelet." In *Pit'om Dfika Badelet*, 7-10; "Suddenly a Knock on the Door." In *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door*, 3-8.

Keret's Military Tales

In Keret's first book, *Tzinorot* (Pipelines), there are three corresponding "Kokhi" stories: "Kokhi," "Kokhi 2," and "Kokhi 3" (in English "Shoshi," "Shoshi 2," "Shoshi 3" in *Gaza Blues*).³⁸ "Kokhi" tells of a very annoying soldier who cannot stop talking nonsense during combat in south Lebanon. For instance, he claims that there is a species of rabbits with tails that look like military antennas, and that this feature has almost led to their extinction. On a later occasion he tries to lift the soldiers' spirits in battle and suggests they play a pantomime game. Meir the Bukharin, who has been severely injured, is shivering on his deathbed. Kokhi praises him for doing a great pantomime of a blender. Zion, not bearing Kokhi's stupidity, shoots him in between the eyes. The narrator cries aloud "Are you crazy? You killed him!"³⁹ but as we have seen in Tuvia's story, in Keret's prose, being shot is not necessarily the end of the story. As the narrator whispers "it's like a bad dream," Kokhi echoes him and says "the sonovabitch killed me,"⁴⁰ and continues to talk as if nothing had happened. When the battle ends, the soldiers find the antenna-tailed-rabbits, which also appear to be speaking in human voices. The soldiers approach Kokhi and ask for his forgiveness, and Kokhi replays "forget it [...] we were all uptight."⁴¹

In the story "Kokhi 2," Kokhi is dead, with a bullet hole in between his eyes. Nevertheless, he continues to be a soldier in the narrator's unit. He teases everyone when he inserts his finger into his bullet-hole and shouts "I'm dead! Wavoo, I'm dead."⁴² Shlomo, who works at the kitchen, asks to be moved to another military unit since he is a Cohen and cannot come in contact with corpses (according to the bible, a

³⁸ Etgar Keret. "Kokhi"; "Kokhi 2"; "Kokhi 3." In *Tzinorot*, 20-22; 106-108; 127; "Shoshi"; "Shoshi 2"; "Shoshi 3." In Etgar Keret and Samir El-Youssef. *Gaza Blues*. (London: David Paul, 2004), 91-94; 97-100; 103-104, translated by Miriam Shlesinger.

³⁹ Etgar Keret and Samir El-Youssef, *Gaza Blues*, 93.

⁴⁰ Ibid., *ibid.*

⁴¹ Ibid., 94.

⁴² Ibid., 97

Kohen, Jewish priest, is not allowed to come in direct contact, or be in the same enclosed space, with a dead body). Yet Kokhi does not behave like a corpse; on the contrary, he continues to be annoying, asking to receive exemptions from his duties since he is a slain person, and in another occasion he spreads peanut butter all over the patrol jeep, claiming that it confuses the enemies' camels.

Moreover, in this second story we receive more information about Kokhi and his opinions. First we learn that Kokhi is a powerful character: not only does he have connections with high military offices, but he also has a unique relationship with the author, Etgar, so that Kokhi can influence Etgar to misspell the names of other characters and affect their destiny. Thus, the author-narrator, and others as well, prefer not to get involved with Kokhi, and to let him do as he likes. Later we learn that Kokhi was deeply hurt by the fact that Meir the Bukharin, whose life was eventually saved, moved to a non-combatant unit after recovering from his injuries. Kokhi sends a funeral bouquet to Meir's parents and argues that it would have been much nicer if Meir had died in Lebanon, and that the Bukharin do not have any aesthetic instincts. He even blames the author for not "ending the job" (and strangling Meir) before the help came to take Meir to the hospital. The third fact we learn about Kokhi refers to his name, which derives from the woman's name "Kokhava," since his parents expected a baby-girl and he was born instead. After he reveals this information to the narrator, he starts to dance and sing, while wiggling his buttocks.

"Kokhi 3" is a very short story. It takes place at a party, celebrating Kokhi's discharge from the army. There he tries to pester Etgar (the author), and slanders a book he had published. When Kokhi blames Etgar for being a nerd and brags that he can manipulate the narrative, the author cuts him off and the story ends abruptly.

Kokhi, much like other Keret protagonists, and like Tuvia the dog, is a very annoying person who has immense survival powers. His masculinity is full of contradictions. For instance, Kokhi's character holds a very strict interpretation of "dying for the sake of the country" – he believes that it is better for a soldier to die in battle than to be injured. In fact, he serves as an example of national bereavement. However, he does not display any militaristic or macho behavior, with his "womanly" name, the wiggling of his buttocks and his talking of rabbits. He is a dead soldier who celebrates his death every day and thus mocks the holiness of the myth of the "living-dead": with no pathos and dramatization, he demonstrates both the wounded body and its banality.

Keret's writing is packed with soldier characters that disobey the *sabra* myth. Most of his protagonists are physically weak and they are often annoying babblers; some try to "get laid" using cheap tricks, others are just nerds. They are forlorn but human. They are obliged by law to join the army, a place that is not fit for their personality. There, they meet their counterparts – commanders, who hold stereotypical machoistic attributes and are often described in a very negative way as rude, uneducated and inhuman characters who are ugly and bullying. These commanders are the ones who dictate the military actions, not with a sense of justice or compassion, but by their aggression and their eagerness to rule.

Several of Keret's male protagonists die throughout his stories. Some commit suicide, or die in various strange circumstances, but never in battle; yet they do not disappear after dying, and continue to have an active role in the narrative. Kokhi, for example, though shot by his friend during a military operation, continues to serve in the army.

Suicide is almost by definition a negation of strong masculinity. While it can be viewed, as in the case of the biblical character of Samson, as a choice of death for the sake of others,⁴³ typically it demonstrates an antithesis to the myth of heroism, for example in Amos Oz's "Derech Haru'ah" ("The Way of the Wind")⁴⁴ and in Yehoshua Kenaz's *Hitganvut Yehidim (Infiltration)*.⁴⁵ Keret's long story "Hakeytana shel Kneller" ("Kneller's Happy Campers") is abundant with people who had committed suicide and arrive to an afterlife world in which all the dead are living ordinary, meaningless lives. Mordy, the protagonist of the story, probably killed himself because his girlfriend preferred another guy, and Usi, whom he meets at a bar, shot himself while in military basic training. Harris shows the correlation between the opening sentences of Keret's story and of Ya'akov Shabtai's novel *Zichron Devarim (Past Continuous)*.⁴⁶ Tel Aviv, the "Hebrew City," is transformed into a place of the living dead,⁴⁷ and thus the theme of suicide indicates a wider ideological failure.⁴⁸

In other stories we find characters who are either nearly dead, or who are about to die, as in the story "Nylon" ("Vacuum Seal"). Here, the protagonist, Alon Hasin, suffers from his sergeant's rudeness and bullying behavior following his repeating failures to vacuum-seal his personal bandage as demanded. The sergeant shouts at him:

You're a piss-poor excuse for a human being, a piss-poor excuse for a soldier, and a piss-poor excuse for a vacuum sealer [...] I can't make a man out of you. Even god almighty couldn't do that. But I

⁴³ See Harris' discussion on Samson in chapter one of *An Ideological Death*.

⁴⁴ Amos Oz. "Derech Haru'ah" (The Way of the Wind). In *Artzot Hatan* (Where The Jackals Howl). (1965), 43-63; English version in *Where The Jackals Howl*. Trans. Nicholas de Lange and Philip Simpson. (New York: Vintage, 2009).

⁴⁵ Yehoshua Kenaz. *Hitganvut Yehidim (Infiltration)* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986). Appeared in English in the translation of Dalya Bilu, under the title *Infiltration*, (South Royalton, VT: Zoland Books, 2003)

⁴⁶ Ya'akov Shabtai. *Zichron Devarim* (Past Continuous). (Siman Kri'a, Hakibbutz Hame'uhad, 1977).

⁴⁷ Rachel Harris, *An Ideological Death*, 154.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 171.

can make a soldier out of you [...] good vacuum sealing is an inseparable part of being a good soldier.⁴⁹

Hasin, whose name hints at an ability to seal himself, to be immune and strong, works the whole evening to seal off his extra clothes, and when he is done he closes his eyes and starts sealing his body. He covers himself with a plastic sheet in a manner resembling what he was commanded to do with his personal bandage. From this point the story offers two possible interpretations: the first is metaphoric – assuming the sealing is a form of mental protection; and the second is literal – that Hasin actually takes the plastic bag and covers himself. The act of sealing with nylon hints to both an emotional distance as well as an actual choking. Later, when the basic training is over, Hasin takes a razor and moves it towards his neck's main artery as if to open the sealing. At this point, the story hints again at two opposite directions – opening the sealing or committing suicide. Peleg claims that this story exemplifies that situation "typical of many of Keret's heroes, [in which] the young man prefers to direct his aggression inward rather than engage with the outside world about it."⁵⁰ Clearly, the tension in this story brings the conflict of the soldier to the surface – the protagonist protects himself but it might be that the only way to escape the abusive situation is by committing suicide.

Military and semi military bereavements also appear in several of Keret's stories. In the story "Matrat Dmut" ("Target Board Figure"),⁵¹ the living-dead are used as "target boards" for soldiers' shooting-range drills; they are caged in the target boards and ready to be used and reused, as part of the army's economizing program.

⁴⁹ Etgar Keret, *Tzinorot*, 87; *The Girl On The Fridge*, 38.

⁵⁰ Yaron Peleg. *Israeli Culture between the Two Intifadas: A Brief Romance*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 74.

⁵¹ Etgar Keret. "Matrat Dmut." In *Tzinorot*, 89-90. The story has not been translated into English.

The phrase "suddenly a knock on the door," which is also the title of Keret's book published in 2010, is a banal image associated with the terrible moment when an army delegation comes to give the parents, wife or other family members the most terrible message – the message that their son, husband or father was killed in the battle. However, while Keret uses this stereotypical image, he removes all the honorable aspects of military bereavement. In the story "Yulia,"⁵² the narrator is a dead person who is looking at the face of his wife Yulia as she hears of his death and consequently opens the gas stove and commits suicide. At first, it seems as if he were shot on some kind of assignment, military or other, but a closer reading reveals that he had walked with an aluminum pipe in his hand and did not answer to the soldiers' call; apparently, they shot him because they thought he was holding a gun.

In another story, "Seder Helki" ("Partial Order"),⁵³ the narrator is a child who has lost his father during his military reserve service. The father's death was unheroic: he asked his friend to stop the jeep because he needed to urinate and then, while walking away from the car, he stepped on a grenade – "one, two, three boom"⁵⁴ – and lost his life. The narrator's mother and everyone surrounding the boy try to keep the image of the father as a brave fighter who fought till his last drop of blood, yet the grandfather tells a different story of the father, saying he was nicknamed "chicken" ("rabbit" in Hebrew) because he was a coward.

In the story "Simyon,"⁵⁵ an officer and a lieutenant stand at Orit's front door, informing her that her husband has died and that she needs to come with them to identify his body at the morgue. The entire story is built on the tension between the formal massage with its heavy burden, and the fact that Orit almost didn't know

⁵² Etgar Keret. "Yulia." In *Tzinorot*, 56-57. The story has not been translated into English

⁵³ Etgar Keret. "Seder Helki." *Tzinorot*, 77-82. The story has not been translated into English.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁵ Etgar Keret. "Simyon." In *Pit'om Dfika Badelet*, 23-27; *Suddenly a Knock on the Door*, 25-30.

Simyon, whom she married only to be exempted from military service. At the morgue, she is confronted with Simyon's gross smell, the same smell he had when he was still alive:

A green sheet covered his body up to his neck. His face was completely intact, except for a small hole no larger than a one shekel coin in his cheek. And the smell of the corpse was just like the smell of his breath on her face two years ago. She'd thought about that moment many times. While they were still at the falafel stand, Assi had told her that it wasn't her fault that Simyon had bad breath, but she always felt like it was.⁵⁶

Keret's living-dead are intertwined with the military setting, yet they undermine any sense of heroism or bravery. The living-dead resonate in Keret's male characters, which are in many cases annoying or even gross, as aforesaid; even when the dead are really dead, the stories focus on their smell or their cowardliness. Their death is usually brought on by mistake, by committing suicide or by being shot, sometimes by their own friends, but never by the enemy, and never in a military operation. If they achieve a kind of afterlife existence, it looks almost the same as the life they had: "this place is just like before you offed," says the narrator in *Kneller Happy Campers*, "only a little bit worse."⁵⁷

Kynicism and the Grotesque as Subversive Tools

As mentioned above, Keret is not the first to undermine the Zionist concepts of Jewish masculinity and the living-dead; many authors had dealt with these issues before, in prose and poetry, from S. Izhar to Yitzhak Laor. Yet here I wish to formulate Keret's distinctive poetic stance in this regard.

⁵⁶ Etgar Keret, *Suddenly a Knock on the Door*, 30.

⁵⁷ Etgar Keret, *Hakaytamna shel Kneller*, 73, *Kneller's Happy Campers*, 38.

Following my work with Heddy Shayit⁵⁸ and Nurit Gertz's work on the myth of masculinity in Israeli cinema⁵⁹ I wish to discuss a few different strategies of subverting the myth of Israeli masculinity. Following Nira Yuval Davis,⁶⁰ Gertz discusses two processes: *rooting* and *shifting*. I would like to offer a third term, *kynicism*, which was coined by Peter Sloterdijk in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*.⁶¹ *Rooting* marks a stage of an acknowledgment of the myth in Israeli culture, while being aware of its complexity and its inner contradictions. This is the primary stage of criticism, in which the myth is still fully potent but the seeds of its future disruption have been embedded. The new readings of Moshe Shamir's *Hu Halach Basadot (He Walked through the Fields)*,⁶² which reveal the novel's criticism of the *sabra* myth, can demonstrate this strategy. Here, *rooting* enables a critical gaze from the inside, assuming and even accepting the myth without being naïve and didactic, in a way which reveals its ideological cost.

The second stage is *shifting* towards the anti-myth. This strategy creates a shock or a disruption while presenting the anti-myth, and thus threatens the myth's original attributes. Yoram Kaniuk's *Himmo Melech Yerushalayim (Himmo King of Jerusalem)*⁶³ is a good example for this strategy. Kaniuk's novel portrays a distorted masculinity through the image of Himmo, a deeply rooted Mizrahi Jerusalem native, who is fatally injured and wants to die. Himmo represents the opposite pole of the *sabra* in terms of his origins as a Mizrahi Jew, his personal history and personality,

⁵⁸ "Sacrificing Israeli Masculinity in Hebrew Literature" was written by Shayit and Mendelson-Maoz for a book on Masculinity in the Middle Eastern Literature and Film, yet the project has not yet reached its final stage.

⁵⁹ Nurith Gertz. "The Myth of Masculinity Reflected in Israeli Cinema." In Glenda Abramson (Ed.), *Modern Jewish Mythologies*. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), 68-88.

⁶⁰ Nira Yuval-Davis. *Gender and Nation*. (London: Sage, 1997).

⁶¹ Peter Sloterdijk. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶² Moshe Shamir. *Hu Halach Basadot (He Walked through the Fields)*. (Merhavyah: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1947).

⁶³ Yoram Kaniuk. *Himmo Melech Yerushalayim (Himmo King of Jerusalem)*. (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 1966).

and through the graphic descriptions of his ruined body: no legs, arms or eyesight, with crushed organs and rotting flesh. The wounded Himmo is described as passive and helpless. Himmo's sexuality, described by the gaping mouth (symbolizing a feminine sex organ, enabling penetration), is clearly the opposite of masculine, *sabra* sexuality.

As I demonstrated previously, Keret's work illustrates negative images of the *sabra* as well – in his characters' weakness and passivity, their ugly appearance and their physical defectiveness. It may seem at first sight as if Keret's characters are stereotypical, but in fact they are full of contradictions, and create a defamiliarization of common images. Keret also brings extremely plastic images: Kokhi likes to put his fingers inside the hole in his head, Uzi (from "Kneller's Happy Campers") walks around with two scars marking the bullet's entry and exit wounds, Simyon's smell and appearance in the morgue are gross, and the living-dead caged inside the target board are constantly being shot at. However, Keret's strategy is different than Kaniuk's: in Keret's stories, dying is not at all dramatic, but a phase in life, meaningless as the phases before and after, and the dead do not benefit from their situation (not even by transferring to a different military unit). Moreover, as Peleg argues, in Keret's stories even dead soldiers and "the Israeli Defense Forces acquire the quality of a show, an amusing diversion."⁶⁴ Thus, as in Kaniuk's work, Keret annuls the sterile body and brings the blood, the disfigurement of the body and the smell; he shows that the military dead are not as aesthetic as Kokhi claims in his discussion on the case of Meir the Bukharin. Yet, unlike Kaniuk, Keret does it with a twist of humor and banalization.

⁶⁴ Yaron Peleg, *Israeli Culture between the Two Intifadas*, 69.

In order to analyze Keret's technique, I wish to use the third strategy: *kynicism*, a term that relates to post-modern fiction, and is based on a differentiation made by Peter Sloterdijk between cynical and kynical criticism. According to Slavoj Zizek, Sloterdijk's "kynicism presents the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm."⁶⁵ Whereas "the classical cynical procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology – its solemn, grave tonality – with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime *noblesse* of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power,"⁶⁶ *Kynicism* is a form of criticism in which the medium of the message is of importance. It uses physicality and concreteness through lewd, vulgar and rude commentary to belittle the ideal, which is always perceived as lofty.

"Kyon" is Greek for "dog"; the philosophy of *Kynicism*, in this context, may be called dog philosophy, a term which accentuates the physicality and naturalness of the critical utterance. Sloterdijk discusses the classical Greek example of Diogenes's public masturbation, which was an attempt to ridicule Plato's theory of Eros and to uproot the entire foundation of Western philosophy.⁶⁷ *Kynicism*, therefore, involves behaviors which are unacceptable, at least in public. These acts suggest an acknowledgment of the ideological fakery which we all commit, and an unveiling of the natural which lies beneath it, thus trading brevity, seriousness and abstraction for a carnivalesque and playful description.

Keret constructs incoherent fiction in which realism and fantasy are intertwined. He tests "the limits of human experience [...] and deliberately violate[s]

⁶⁵ Slavoj Zizek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. (New York: Verso, 1989.), 29.

⁶⁶ Ibid., ibid.

⁶⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 101-102.

social norms through scandalous or criminal behavior,"⁶⁸ breaking taboos in order to provocatively raise social and political issues. The father who went to urinate and was killed by a grenade, Kokhi's provocations, the smell, the repelling descriptions and the spineless men – all reveal the fakery of the Zionist ideology that had cultivated an image of new masculinity. By presenting controversial relationships between the physical and the political, Keret undermines the abstractness of ideology – which produces, for example, a beautiful image of a dead person. By ridiculing and vulgarizing the body, and by showing the body's primordial functions, he refuses to glamorize it, even if it is dead. Keret uses grotesque images in order to inject dangerous, unstable, threatening and transforming meanings, and derail our automatic systematization.

Much has been written about the grotesque. The term originally referred to the visual arts but later was applied to literature as well. Forms of the grotesque are hybrid combinations of objects, plants, animals and human beings.⁶⁹ Grotesque bodies evade coherent definitions and borders⁷⁰ and form dismantled and suspended hierarchic categories. Clearly, Keret's spineless men may be considered as part of this hybridity of man-plant-object. Bakhtin defined the grotesque body as a body that is "not separated from the rest of the world": "parts of the body that are open to the outside world, [...] the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose," articulate "pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking and defecation."⁷¹ Kokhi's hole in the head creates the same illusion of the opening of the body towards the world. In "Nylon," the borders between the body and

⁶⁸ Brian McHale. *Postmodernist Fiction*. (New York: Methuen, 1987), 172.

⁶⁹ Wolfgang Kayser. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Translated by Ulrich Weisstein. (Toronto and New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company), 1966.

⁷⁰ Sara Cohen Shabot. "Towards a Grotesque Phenomenology of Ethical Eroticism." *Women: A Cultural Review* 24:1 (2013), 62-70.

⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26.

the world are blurred: while trying to shut out from the world, we discover how vulnerable and open the body is. Moreover, the open body is always "in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body,"⁷² and thus "in the grotesque body [...] death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation."⁷³ Here, indeed, Keret's living-dead show us that dying is not the end of the story.

Keret draws his living-dead with their blood and smell and unattractiveness, and accompanies these descriptions with a sense of banality. The meaninglessness of death and the characteristics of the dead annul any possibility for them to turn into Zionist symbols; they are just an unlucky bunch of individual people who need to urinate from time to time. However, their forlornness is also their ticket to survival. Consequently, Keret's concept of masculinity is much more radical than it seems at first glance: as a result of all the Zionism and the machoism in Israeli society, Israeli men have turned into grotesque images, either of one-dimensional macho oppressors or of weak pitiful Diasporic Jews. And while the first is a twisted formation of the *sabra*, which in fact dominates the army and dictates its nature, the second, the anti-thesis of the *sabra*, will not protest and present any moral agenda but rather be occupied with his own personal survival (like Tuvia the dog). Thus, according to Keret's dog philosophy of *kynicism*, the Jewish Diasporic masculinity will always be revived, with a lot of violence, banality, ugliness and humor, and with a total lack of glorification.

⁷² Ibid., 317.

⁷³ Ibid., 322.