

Neo-Gothic Clairvoyance and Palingenetic Myth in Late Soviet Czechoslovakia and Post-Soviet Israel: Pavel Kohout's *The Premonitions of St Clara* (1980) and its Film Adaptations

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Background, Rationale and Framework

Pavel Kohout's bestselling novel *The Premonitions of St Clara* (*Nápady svaté Kláry*), whose first German edition was published in Hamburg in 1980, and first Czech edition in Toronto in 1981, describes a commotion caused by a psychic teenage girl called Clara in an unnamed Communist-run small provincial Czech town in the mid-1960s. My article traces how the novel and its adaptations – a 1980 German-language film by Vojtěch Jasný and a 1996 Israeli full-length feature by Ari Folman and Ori Sivan – transform a host of cultural *topoi* across a transnational setting, for different reasons and to varying effects. Such *topoi* include, among others, the clairvoyant child; the lustful male villain; and the unbeliever to whom the existence of the supernatural is eventually proven. Although Kohout's book and its derivatives do not involve vampires, doppelgängers, pedicides and haunted castles, in my opinion, they nevertheless qualify as (neo-)Gothic, because of the book's and the films' Gothic-like focus on remote settings (such as the Czech or Israeli backwaters) and on the mysterious, the violent and the macabre (as some of the female teenager's prophesies-come-true entail a flood and an earthquake).

Gothic is understood here as a genre that 'relies on the exaggeration of emotions, such as fear, terror and dread, the anticipation of horrors, and moments of hesitation or uncertainty to create its fearful atmosphere' (Bowers 2022: 4). While seemingly antithetical to literary and cinematic realism (i.e., something which aspires to be true to everyday life in minute detail), the gothic is, however, often absorbed and transformed by realistic and even satirical (i.e. hyperbolising) works of art, in such a way that it does not necessarily 'appear in the guise of its familiar conventions' (ibid: 8). Yet it still remains identifiable, which this article sets out to demonstrate.

The notion of Gothic has been closely linked to Freud's 1919 essay on the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*; see, for example, Owen 2011: 157-87), whose concept simultaneously encompasses something that is unfamiliar and something that has been revealed (see Freud 1955: 222-23). Kohout's fictional earthquake (which turns out to be a gas explosion in a school building) serves as a compelling manifestation of the uncanny, because earthquakes in the Czech Republic are rather infrequent (see, for instance, Skácelová, Skácelová and Havíř 1997), yet when they do take place (provided they are strong enough), they may well bring to the surface something that has hitherto been concealed.

It is perhaps pertinent to invoke here Friedrich Schelling's definition of the uncanny, repeatedly quoted by Freud in his essay (1955: 224, 241): "Unheimlich" is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'. Natural disasters are not the only incidents that Clara has premonitions about. Her inklings also help to reveal illicit love affairs among the town elite, in correspondence with Freud's vocabulary analysis of the usage contexts for *heimlich* (or 'covert', i.e. the opposite of *unheimlich*): 'heimlich love-affair, love, sin' (1955: 223).

Yet another Freudian feature places Kohout's book even further within the uncanny – and thus (neo-)Gothic – narrative. Essentially, Kohout pits a *sancta simplicitas* teenage schoolgirl against the adept middle-aged, mid- and low-level, Communist management, who have embraced modern-day atheism in preference to the centuries-old belief in the supernatural, treated by them as a prejudice of those with insufficient education and a relic of the recent unenlightened past. From this confrontation, Clara emerges as an unlikely winner. Her much older and seemingly more knowledgeable yet completely confounded and publicly humiliated counterparts could conceivably summarize the situation in Freud's own words: "We do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something actually happens in our

lives which seem to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny” (1955: 247-48).

Kohout wrote *Clara* in exile, after he and his wife Jelena Mašínová (who had first come up with the idea for *Clara* in the form of a 1970 film script when she had been studying at the FAMU film school in Prague) had been stripped of the Czechoslovak citizenship during their 1979 work-related trip to Austria. Free from the persecution and censorship by the Czechoslovak authorities, Kohout gave full vent to his satirical talent while combining an insider’s insight with an outsider’s outspokenness – and ridiculing not only his fellow Communist countrymen but also their USSR mentors. This allows me to consider *Clara*, in addition to its neo-Gothicism, a postcolonial text, even though it came out roughly a decade before the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union.^[1] After all, postcoloniality, among other things, refers to ‘diasporic circumstances [...] – from forced exile to “voluntary” immigration’ (Shokhat 1992: 102). Even before Kohout’s effective expulsion from Communist Czechoslovakia, his personal circumstances as an active (and actively oppressed) promoter of Prague Spring values in the midst of Czechoslovak normalization can be qualified as an internal exile (see Naficy 2001: 11, 53, 214) – and therefore, at an individual level, said to be engendering both anticolonial and postcolonial sentiments.

Furthermore, the Israeli film version of *Clara*, which moves the action to the near future of Israel/Palestine on the eve of the second millennium, has not only strengthened the book’s postcolonial aspects (with Palestine formerly belonging to the Ottoman and the British empires) but also added a post-Soviet twist to Kohout’s tale by turning its eponymous protagonist into a young Russian speaker from Crimea settling in Israel with her family in the course of the so-called Big Aliyah (or the Great Immigration) that brought over a million of ex-Soviet citizens to the country (see e.g. Siegel 1998) and thus, by some accounts, transformed it into a post-Soviet space.^[2]

As has been noted by Romanets (2019: 374), the Gothic genre is a “hybrid form that develops and changes its own conventions in accordance with newer [or older; A.R.] literary movements, trends, and writing styles”. This malleability is something that every so often makes the Gothic synonymous with the neo-Gothic, and akin to the hybridity of things postcolonial (including the post-Soviet). In Kohout’s book and its film adaptations, neo-Gothic tendencies manifest themselves through *Clara*’s engagement with the genre of hagiography and the Biblical parable of David and Goliath, rather than with Gothic novels proper. Eschatological motifs, as well as the palingenetic myth of a nation’s rebirth, play a significant role, too, which becomes especially noticeable in Folman and Sivan’s version. The fact that Kohout’s novel has been cinematized more than once lends *Clara* (as a sum total of the original text and its cinematic iterations) an added transformative value with regard to the neo-Gothic motifs the book contains. This added value is examined on the basis of Torop (1995), arguably the most comprehensive taxonomy of possible transitions from page to screen.

The Premonitions of St Clara (1981)

Clara is set in 1966, i.e., in the run-up to the Prague Spring, in a town called ‘S. on S.’, likely modelled on Sázava (about thirty miles south-east of Prague, on the shores of Sázava river, a Vltava tributary), near which Kohout and Mašínová have a holiday home. Numbering only a few thousand residents, the town initially grew around the monastery established in the early XI century by St Procopius of Sázava, a patron saint of Bohemia. Town S., however, is associated primarily with the fictional cult of St Clara the protector of Czech independence, who has one of the town churches dedicated to her (see Kohout 1991: 59, 157, 161, 205). St Clara dominates Kohout’s narrative so much that even a local landmark is called the Klariňák hill, while St Procopius is renamed monk Clarinus, whose miraculous deeds nevertheless retain recognizable features from St Procopius’s medieval legend, e.g., expelling a host of devils from a cave near the Sázava river (see Kohout 1991: 22, 162, 168; cf. Šmilauer 1959: 43, 51-52).



In 1966 in S. on S. lives a fourteen-year-old namesake of St Clara, called Clara Zimová, who becomes town-famous because she can foretell without fail anything she is asked about. Her predictions include a list of tasks to come up in a school’s math test, a policeman’s slip and fall, a winning lottery sequence, an unlikely location for a misplaced pair of glasses, the promise of a gift by father to daughter, an adulterer’s presence in a marital bed, the number and gender of the yet unborn children, as well as a (small) fire, a (mini-)flood and a (modest-size) earthquake (see Kohout 1991: 26, 28, 31, 33, 58, 73, 128, 166-68, 175, 198). Most prophesies turn out to be limited to Clara’s school environment only but materialize nonetheless, much to the embarrassment of the local Communist authorities, usually dismissive of anything supernatural yet unable to deny that “Clara Zimová’s premonitions carry the weight of the laws of nature” (Kohout 1991: 208). The chairman of the town council expressly forbids Clara “any further prophesizing” (Kohout 1991: 176) and advocates a rational explanation of her unearthly powers: “This child is undergoing puberty and has a wild imagination” (Kohout 1991: 177). Meanwhile, Clara becomes an object of veneration by the locals, some of whom apparently believe she is St Clara reincarnate, despite the fact that she is not at all pious and has not been to the church since her baptism (see Kohout 1991: 59, 155, 164, 180).

Yet Clara is not really a saint in the classical Christian sense, as her visions have nothing whatsoever to do with either Christ, Virgin Mary or any officially canonized holy person, and cease the moment she is kissed on the lips for the first time by a male classmate who fancies her (see Kohout 1991: 230). According to Petroff (1978: 35), who systematically analyzed the lives of medieval female saints (a hundred or so in total, mostly illiterate, of which about a half had been included in the multivolume

compendium *Acta Sanctorum*, 1643-1940), 'the psychic and visionary powers of women saints were qualities that only became influential in adult women, and they generally surfaced in women's lives after a long and solitary apprenticeship in the contemplative life'. Kohout's book ends before Clara reaches adulthood and we are told nothing about her devotion to praying. In fact, her revelations are usually incidental and prompted by interference rather than meditation. As she herself says, 'Had people not asked me questions, I would not have had any hunches' (Kohout 1991: 150).

Moreover, of seven stages in female saints' visions as identified by Petroff (in the ascending order of sophistication: purgative, psychic, doctrinal, devotional, participatory, unitive and ordering), Clara's predictions (partially) belong to only one (psychic). As stated by Petroff, purgative visions are usually brought about by fervent praying and mortification of the flesh. The doctrinal ones are visual parables resulting from uneducated women's unconscious absorption of the Christian doctrine. Devotional visions arise from directed imaginings of the lives of Christ and/or Virgin. Participatory visions stem from the seer's imaginary presence at the crucifixion. The unitive ones are based on sensing a union with the divine. And the so-called ordering visions depict a heavenly cosmic order. None of these can be found among the above-listed prophesies of Clara Zimová.

Even the psychic category does not apply fully. While at the psychic stage, the female visionary typically 'heard voices and figures telling her what to do. She had premonitions of the deaths and births of others. She foresaw political events and their spiritual consequences. She had revelations of the spiritual states of others and how she might help them to resolve their spiritual dilemmas. The messages always included directions as to the appropriate way to communicate her information, for as a cloistered woman (who was not supposed to speak to very many people), it was often difficult to share insights and revelations concerning others' (Petroff 1978: 36). By comparison, Clara Zimová's premonitions are limited in range but not communicatively, as she is not convent-bound and those wishing to ask her something have a free access to her.

Arguably the most famous saint with a name closely reminiscent of Clara's, Clare of Assisi (1194-1253, sometimes actually spelled "Clara"), responded to the call of God as a teenager (having heard a sermon by St Francis of Assisi), declared that she'd have no husband other than Christ, and established a female monastic order subsequently titled after her. S. on S.'s Clara did nothing of the sort, though, as by the end of the book, in the summer of 1969, she marries a Soviet military officer, while still being underage, and soon gives birth to a son (Kohout 1991: 233-34). As if to emphasize the difference between Clare of Assisi and Clara Zimová, one of Kohout's characters says (1991: 88-89): "Why would the town of S. have a clairvoyant now when it cannot even receive the second TV channel?", perhaps hinting at the fact that in 1958 Clare of Assisi was designated as a patron saint of television.

Furthermore, such a regular feature of sainthood as martyrdom is also manifestly missing from Clara Zimová's record. This is made obvious by a history teacher at Clara's school, who reminds the school staff, at a crisis meeting, of another teenage visionary virgin, St Joan of Arc (c. 1412-31). She was burnt at stake for heresy but canonized some five centuries later to become a patron saint of France. Reacting to this reminder, the school principal exclaims (perhaps making some reader feel that the satirical elements in the book are at times more potent than the gothic ones): 'What are you saying? Does it mean we should burn Zimová, too?' (Kohout 1991: 113).

Kohout's Clara is clearly a clairvoyant (as her name duly suggests) but not a saint. Why is she referred to as St Clara, then? This reference is of course ironic to a degree, given that it principally comes from the elderly female Czech peasants from the nearby area, who gathered next to Clara's parents' house upon hearing rumours about Clara's visions, and brought with them 'horses, cows, goats, sheep [...] [and] prayer books' (Kohout 1991: 155). On the other hand, it can be argued that in a secular state (whether Communist or non-Communist), a combination of selfless behaviour and prophetic insight, encountered in one and the same person, can be perceived as miraculous enough to warrant the appellation of a lay saint.

Besides, the way Clara treats her peers and adults (showing deference to everyone and always imperturbably speaking the truth) infers that the nature of her holiness may have something to do with the notion of *sancta simplicitas*, interpreted as innocence and purity rather than lack of sophistication. In this sense, Clara personifies the moral fibre that the school years with their yet unspoiled idealism and sincerity can sometimes be associated with. As Kohout himself puts it,

Oh youth! [...] Your [moral] laws are so simple and easy to understand! [...] God is my witness, if nations waged their class struggle according to the principles practiced by school pupils, they wouldn't have had so many dictators on their backs, and the invaders would have been circling around them like a gluttonous cat around an impregnable larder. What a pity that such a justice ends at the school gate! (Kohout 1991: 45)[3]

In *Clara*, Kohout employs and modifies not only selected elements of the lives-of-saints genre but also the Biblical legend of David and Goliath. Clara does not openly confront the authorities but nevertheless divulges their duplicity (e.g. by inadvertently revealing that a party secretary, meant to be a beacon of virtue, has an affair with a married woman); ridicules the Communist promise of universal happiness (by making almost the entire town aware of the winning lottery numbers); and undermines the Marxist claim to be the only truly scientific method of explaining and forecasting pretty much everything under the sun, by accurately predicting things large and small owing to her apparent supernatural gift. Clara's teachers, the police and the local government representatives are powerless to do anything about it.[4]



In an attempt to pacify the distressed town, the local council's chairman (whose father, incidentally, is a habitual churchgoer, see Kohout 1991: 131) enlists the help of a parson from the church of St Clara. Readers learn that instead of fighting the church or ignoring it, the town authorities in fact quietly work side by side with it most of the time. Thus, the twenty thousand crowns earmarked by the council for torches at the May Day celebrations were actually spent on fixing the damaged pipe organ at the church of St Clara, on the condition that every single Christian from the town parish would take part in the May Day rally. And in exchange for the parson's advice to parishioners that their offspring should join the Young Pioneers as soon as practicable after the confirmation ceremony, the authorities turned a blind eye to his Bible classes for children, attended by non-believers' descendants, too – to learn, *inter alia*, what it means when their parents say 'Sodom and Gomorrah' about their next-door neighbours (see Kohout 1991: 157, 163).

Even the school director, proud to call his staff 'ardent socialists who have been guiding their pupils unswervingly towards a materialistic worldview' (Kohout 1991: 108), expresses his indignation in no other words than 'For the life of God!' ('Probohaživého!', Kohout 1991: 113). Thus, the old religious beliefs and traditions continue to influence the ostensibly atheist communist functionaries in the town of S. on a daily basis, albeit inconspicuously, and Clara's pronouncements help to bring this fact out onto the surface, thereby amplifying the novel's sense of the uncanny.

As for the postcolonial agenda (set by 'critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath', Shokhat 1992: 101), it can be discerned in a satirical description of two highly placed Communist party officials from the USSR, Anisim Ivanovich and Genrikh Fridrikhovich, on a fact-finding mission to Czechoslovakia shortly before the Prague Spring.^[5] The two are depicted as colonizers on the lookout for the signs of potential unrest among the indigenes: 'They felt like Gullivers in the realm of the dwarfs – yet with the mistrust that missionaries have towards savages, they anxiously examined whether these dwarfs could morph into giants' (Kohout 1991: 195). The dialogue between Anisim Ivanovich and Genrikh Fridrikhovich, in transliterated but untranslated Russian, occupies a full page and presupposes a decent knowledge of Russian in a Czech(oslovak) reader some thirty years after Czechoslovakia had been drawn into the Soviet sphere of influence. The colonized are expected to know the language of the colonizers – but not necessarily the other way round!

The Russian and Czech languages are different enough to be studied properly in their own right in order to understand both fully.^[6] Even though the two languages share some vocabulary, it does not entail that the denotation of the words they have in common is always identical. An example is *pitomets* (Rus) / *pitomec* (Cz). The former means 'pupil', and the latter, 'idiot'. Kohout plays on this homophonic pair in the following episode. When, thanks to one of Clara Zimová's premonitions, the S. on S. party secretary by the name of Fuchs is caught *in flagrante* with the wife of the school director, he has to run away naked before he is recognized, jump into the river and float a long way downstream.^[7] At the end of his swim he suddenly comes across Anisim Ivanovich, who is lounging on the river bank after having one too many the night before. For three years, Anisim Ivanovich was Fuchs's supervisor at a party cadre school in the USSR. Fuchs emerges from the river and yells in Russian: 'Anisim Ivanovich! I am your *pitomec* Fuchs!' (Kohout 1991: 196). Here, the homophonic double entendre could be likened to a Freudian slip, which amounts to an unintended self-disclosure. Yet another instance of the uncanny, the episode also belongs to the (post)colonial discourse by virtue of positing that the Soviets would not have gone so far in their colonial pursuits in Central and Eastern Europe, were it not for their faithful local collaborators.

The book's conclusion can also be deemed postcolonial, as Clara and her Soviet husband (a military officer taking part in the effort of the Warsaw Pact countries to suppress the Prague Spring) produce a son, 'in whose nature, his mother's rich imagination happily merges with his father's intransigence, which promises to bring some hope to both nations' (Kohout 1991: 234). It looks as if, in Kohout's view, the way out of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia lies not in a complete breakup with the USSR but in a different kind of union, based on love rather than the force of political expediency. The scenes involving Anisim Ivanovich, Genrikh Fridrikhovich, Fuchs and Clara's intermarriage, as well as the overall sarcastic anti-Communist tone of the narrative written by someone who was a committed and prominent Communist from his youth until his expulsion from the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1969, are commensurate with the definition of postcolonial as something 'characterized by tensions between the desire for autonomy and a history of dependence, between the desire for autochthony and the fact of hybrid, part-colonial origin, between resistance and complicity' (Chioni Moore 2001: 112).

Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara (1980)

Given that *Clara* the novel was partly inspired by a storyboard that Jelena Mašínová penned as an examination assignment at the Prague film school, it lent itself naturally to film adaptations. The first of these, *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* (1980, dir. Vojtěch Jasný), was a ZDF / Zagreb Film coproduction, made on the basis of the book's 1980 German translation, even before the release of the Czech original. It was filmed in the 16mm format, televised in Austria and West Germany and screened in film theatres in Yugoslavia (see Voráč 2004: 100).

Jasný (1925-2019), a prominent representative of the cinematic Czechoslovak New Wave, a multiple prize winner at Cannes and a Prague Spring supporter, had been a fluent German speaker since before the Nazi occupation (see Čulík 2004). After leaving Czechoslovakia in 1970, he settled in Salzburg to begin with, and worked (before moving to the US in 1984) predominantly in the German-language film- and TV-making environment. *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* emerged as a collaboration



with Yugoslav colleagues, because, as Jasný himself put it, 'old Zahreb looks quite similar to Prague and Yugoslavs are well familiar with the issues' raised in *Clara* (Uhde 1980: 17).

The film was shot in May 1979 in Zagreb (exteriors) and Hamburg (interiors), with a cast and crew that comprised, in particular, Austrian, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak actors. The role of Clara was played by the fifteen-year-old Katharina Böhm, the daughter of the Polish actress Barbara Kwiatkowska-Lass (who in 1959-62 had been married to Roman Polanski) and her second husband Karlheinz Böhm, also an actor (and the son of the well-known Austrian conductor Karl Böhm). The role of her father was played by the Czech émigré actor and producer Vladimír Valenta (1923-2001), known for his participation in the Oscar-winning Czech comedy drama *Closely Observed Trains* (1966). He left for Canada shortly after the failure of the Prague Spring. The hapless school janitor – the cause of the school fire and gas explosion – was played by yet another, more recent Czech émigré thespian and playwright, Pavel Landovský (1936-2014), widely popular as a comedian and character actor.

Watching *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* may easily lead to a mild case of cognitive dissonance, as, despite the German dialogue, the action clearly takes place in something closely resembling a Czechoslovak environment. The characters' original Czech names have been kept. The schoolchildren speak Czech in the opening scene and when they tease one another. The signage (e.g. the inscription on the headmaster's door and on the male toilet at school) is Czech, too. The songs accompanying the credits at the start and the end of the film, as well as those hummed by the janitor as the plot moves along, are also Czech. Brno and Prague are mentioned as bigger cities in the same land. Furthermore, there is no doubt that this land is Communist Czechoslovakia: the janitor reads *Rudé Právo*, teachers refer to each other as 'comrades' and the police car 'has the correct colour scheme and letters VB ["veřejná bezpečnost", or public security]' on it (Voráč 2004: 100). To quote Jasný again, 'with this film, it was as if I returned home' (Uhde 1980: 17).^[8]

It is obvious that the film is trying hard to stay faithful to Kohout's story. Only a few cuts have been made, e.g., concerning the book's numerous lyrical and philosophical digressions (see, for instance, Kohout 1991: 45, 111, 220). This is hardly surprising, because if kept they would likely sound overly moralistic and slow down the action too much. The party secretary's involuntary trip down the river and his hilarious chance meeting with his Soviet mentor also got dropped, as was the colourful figure of a local medical doctor (father to the boy who gave Clara her first kiss), who is experiencing a complicated love life of his own. These scenes, while entertaining in themselves, would probably seem unnecessarily detailed and could distract the viewer from the main plotline. As a result of the omission of the river happenstance, however, the postcolonialist overtones became subdued.



Yet the unavoidably hybrid (exilic and therefore international) circumstances of the film production (such as mixing the Czech script, directing and acting with Yugoslav locations and performers, as well as the use of both German and Czech languages) gave the book's uncanny atmosphere an additional boost when transferred onto the screen. Speaking of another German-language film by Jasný, Jan Uhde observes that the German dialogue in it 'looks as if it is dubbed' (1980: 14). In my opinion, this observation equally applies to *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* and provides a stark example of how the familiar (i.e., the Czechoslovak Communist reality) in the film turns into the unfamiliar (by being transposed onto the Yugoslav setting and vocalized through the medium of German language). This corresponds well with Freud's definition of the uncanny as 'something which is familiar [...] [but] has become alienated' (1955: 241).



Where does one place *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* in the context of film adaptations in general and (see the forthcoming last section of the present article) *Clara Ha-kdosh*, the Israeli cinematic modification of Kohout's *Clara*, by Folman and Sivan, in particular? Peeter Torop's classification of adaptations (1995: 132-33, 182-89), arguably the most comprehensive available, treats film versions of literary works as translation from page to screen. Given that his valuable book has not yet been rendered into English, here's a summary of its relevant sections, which will serve me as a principal guiding tool in categorizing, comparing and contrasting Jasný's and Folman and Sivan's film adaptations of Kohout's novel.

Torop calls "analytic" the translations that focus primarily on staying true to the original. Conversely, the so-called "synthetic" translations pay more attention to

transforming the original in accordance with the demands of the recipient culture. Whenever the translation process operates on the basis of a distinction between style and content, the content, in Torop's parlance, becomes "transposed", whereas the style becomes "re-coded". The term "dominant" implies a heavier dependence on the literary source than the term "autonomous".

Using this terminology, Torop identifies eight different adaptation types, which can partially overlap:

1. the macro-stylistic adaptation (or the dominant analytic re-coding) prioritizes the original source and its formal properties (among them are traditional adaptations of national classics which sometimes even manage to keep the narrator's point of view; e.g., *Lonely Human Voice / Odinokii golos cheloveka* by Aleksandr Sokurov, 1978-87, based on Andrei Platonov's novella 'River Potudan' / 'Reka Potudan');
2. the precise adaptation (or the autonomous analytic re-coding) focuses on the source's content and information (sometimes containing highly detailed source-related events and behind-the-scenes comments; e.g., *Father Sergius / Otets Sergii* by Igor Talankin, 1978, based on Lev Tolstoy's novella);
3. the micro-stylistic adaptation (or the dominant synthetic re-coding) focuses on the source's specific character, not necessarily the leading one (e.g., Nastas'ia Filippovna in *The Idiot* by Ivan Pyr'ev, 1958, based on Dostoevsky's novel), while often moving the action to a different time and place (e.g., *Throne of Blood* by Akira Kurosawa, 1957, planting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* firmly in feudal Japan)
4. the quotational adaptation (or the autonomous synthetic re-coding) gives preference to the author's (leit)motif(s), rather than specific titles (e.g., Lev Atamanov's 1957 cartoon version of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *Snow Queen / Snedronningen*);
5. the thematic adaptation (or the dominant analytic transposition) focuses on a source's theme, which consists of several motifs (see item 4 above); the action is also often moved to a different time and place (e.g., *L'argent* by Robert Bresson, 1983, based on Lev Tolstoy's story "The Forged Coupon" / "Fal'shivyi kupon");
6. the descriptive adaptation (or autonomous analytic transposition) focuses on the source's conflict, which is enhanced and generalized by all the available means of expression (e.g., *Farewell* by Elem Klimov, 1981, based on *Farewell to Mtera / Proshchaniye s Materoi* by Valentin Rasputin);
7. the expressive adaptation (or the dominant synthetic transposition) focuses on the genre, either modernizing a source or trying to make it timeless (e.g., *Maria's Lovers* by Andrei Konchalovsky, 1985, also based on Andrei Platonov's novella 'River Potudan' / 'Reka Potudan'); and
8. the free adaptation (or the autonomous synthetic transposition) is a decidedly individual interpretation of the source, which, paradoxically, may be closer to the spirit of the original than a more faithful adaptation (e.g., *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979, based on the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside picnic / Piknik na obochine*).

On the basis of what has been said about *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* in this section of the present article, it appears that Jasný's film should be categorized as somewhere between a macro-stylistic and a precise adaptation. On the one hand, Jasný tries to stay as close to his literary source as possible (at the expense of a couple of scenes and characters, as well as philosophical digressions, which, if retained, would make the film somewhat overloaded). On the other, Jasný's adaptation simply had to be autonomous, at least to some degree, as it was primarily aimed at the audiences outside Communist Czechoslovakia, to which the choice of German language as the prevailing means of communication clearly testifies.

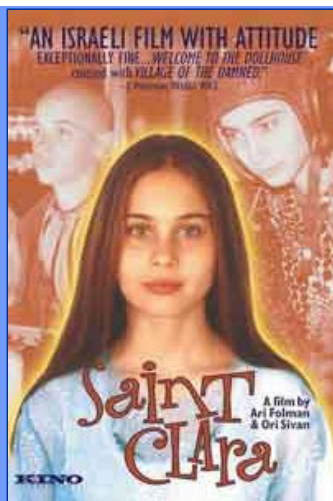
This characterizes *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* as a rather faithful version of Kohout's novel – which is not necessarily a compliment, especially in the light of the film's heterogeneity. It sort of falls between two chairs, torn between its desire to remain Czech and the impossibility to do so, while struggling to attract spectators in the process. A decent effort as it was, 'the Czech poetics here clashed with the production's cosmopolitan and [therefore] indistinctive nature. [...] Critics tended to interpret the film as a satire on socialist society, quite remote from the public in the West' (Voráč 2004: 100).

Saint Clara (*Clara Ha-kdosh*, 1996)

The other film adaptation of Kohout's book – *Clara Ha-kdosh* (Saint Clara) – was made after the success of the novel's Hebrew translation by Dov Kvestler (1986). At the production's helm was a directorial and scriptwriting duo of Ari Folman and Ori Sivan, who had been fellow students at the Tel Aviv University's film and TV department. Folman later achieved a wide recognition on his own with his full-length animated documentary about the 1982 Lebanon War, *Waltz with Bashir* (2008).

Unlike Kohout's book that goes back in time to tell the story set in 1966, *Clara Ha-kdosh* is an exercise in futurology. While the film was released in 1996, the action in it is dated 1999, i.e., on the eve of the next millennium. This allows for the introduction of eschatological motifs (absent from Kohout's original) which amplify the neo-Gothic atmosphere on screen. Here such motifs are closely linked to environmental concerns and include, for example, specially filmed TV warnings of possible nuclear disasters, as well as reports of viruses that destroy entire forests by consuming tree trunks from within. Besides, the





action has been moved to an unnamed small provincial town in Israel (Kiryat Gat, founded in 1954, thirty-five miles south of Tel Aviv, served as a principal exterior shooting location).

Clara is a 13-year old immigrant from the Crimean peninsula, who came to Israel as part of the Big Aliyah five year previously with her family (now consisting of a mother, a father, a younger sibling and an uncle).[9] Folman and Sivan have changed the character's original surname Zimová to Chanov. This was presumably done in honour of the popular Ukrainian footballer Viktor Chanov, who played for Maccabi Haifa FC in 1990-93 and for Bnei Yehuda Tel Aviv FC in 1993-94, and provides an indication that Clara possesses a special talent with a broad appeal. (In Kohout's original and in Jasný's adaptation, Clara's surname begins with the final letter of the Latin alphabet

and therefore concludes Clara's class register, so that during the school investigation of cheating at the maths test she is spoken to by her teachers last, to make the intrigue more suspenseful for the reader/viewer.)

Clara's family has integrated reasonably well. Her father works at a local plant and everyone (except for the younger child who is too little to even walk) speaks serviceable if accented Hebrew, while using Russian at home.[10] Still, Clara (in the words of her classmate) 'lives in two separate worlds. She comes down to our world only when she has a good enough reason'. The lower world for Clara is mostly defined by her school, named after the sometime Israeli PM Golda Meir (1898-1978) and representing Israeli society in miniature. When Clara guesses in advance which exercises will be included in the maths test for her class of twenty-four and the class subsequently submits twenty-four sets of correct identical test solutions, the pupil-teacher relationship in this school turns out to be very similar to the one described in Kohout's book:

every decent citizen should be interrogated at least once in their life, and it is school that prepares future citizens for such an eventuality. [...] During interrogations, caused by smoking in a boys' toilet or the loss of a class register, pupils experience and learn whatever they will come across in the time ahead and the practical competences that will be required of them: skillful evasion and persistent denial, a fatherly reprimand turning into an existential pressure, betrayal as a mitigating factor and confession as the sole proof of guilt (Kohout 1991: 14).

The school principal and the maths teacher treat the test results not only as an outrageous case of dishonesty but also as a defiant act of rebellion: if it was about cheating alone, it would have been easy to avoid detection by providing a variety of answers, plausibly distributed among the pupils according to their ability, with a certain percentage of deliberate mistakes, different every time. The principal and the maths teacher are keen to find out who staged the rebellion. They interrogate pupils one by one in an attempt to intimidate them into either admission or denunciation.

The teachers are arguably less concerned about establishing the truth than about exerting their authority over insubordinate pupils who hate being at school yet have no alternative. Moreover, pupils, quite despite the insolent behaviour, are actually seen by their teachers as needing and wanting an older person in a position of authority. As the maths teacher says to Clara at some point, 'You only think you hate your teachers. You actually adore us. You adore me because I have power'.

At the same time both the principal and the maths teacher are portrayed as pitiful loners not enjoying the reality they inhabit. In order to impress, they lie to each other about their past adventures. The maths teacher claims that he won a simultaneous display match against the chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer while serving in the US Army during the Vietnam War (even though it is a well-known fact that Fischer had never been drafted). And the principal asserts that in January 1961 he had a one-night stand with Edith Piaf, of all people, and she wrote her famous hit 'Non, je ne regrette rien' about him, to mark the occasion (in fact, the song was composed in 1956 and not by Piaf but by Charles Dumont).

Another authority figure, a local police officer, the father of Clara's classmate, confides in his son: 'I'd like to know what my inmates are thinking while I beat the hell out of them [...], when they see my hand smacking their face at the speed of 120 km per hour'. Very little of what is listed in my two paragraphs above can be found in Kohout's novel, except for the somewhat less chilling interrogation scene in chapter II and the figure of the police officer, who, however, has a daughter, not a son, and is summoned to Clara's school to investigate the test fraud, while his Israeli counterpart isn't.

Why make all these spectacular alterations? It looks as if Folman and Sivan consistently channel and transform Kohout's criticism of Communist Czechoslovakia into their own (also satirically overblown) criticism of certain features in Israeli society as it had



crystallized by the mid-1990s: reliance on the military-like discipline and ethos (with former army commanders dominating the Israeli polity), as well as internal and external strife, coercion and violence, which culminated in the assassination of Golda Meir's one-time successor, the PM Yitzhak Rabin (1922-95).

This assassination clearly demonstrated to all and sundry that Zionist Utopia – once characterized by Meir (1975: 32, 30) as 'a society that would be better than what had been known in most parts of the world' and 'one place on the face of the earth where Jews could be free and independent – and [...] no one would be in want, or exploited or live in fear of other men' – was in a state of profound crisis. Israeli cinema reflected the situation accurately enough. If its early master narrative covered 'the story of the Zionist program, [...] Hebrew pioneers immigrating to Palestine, restoring the land to fertility, constructing a new society based on the New Jew, creating a new Hebrew culture, and finally the struggle against the Arabs' (Ne'eman 1995: 122), in the 1990s the film production in Israel displayed 'a clear bias toward an apocalyptic/dystopian inflection', partially attributable to 'Zionist utopianism's decadence' (ibid.: 119, 120), i.e. a marked decline of Zionist beliefs. *Clara Ha-kdosha* deals with such a decline, too. It manifests itself not only in the already named apocalyptical TV scenes but also in the sequence when the school's statue of Golda Meir (one of the founders of the state of Israel) is set on fire by iconoclastic pupils.[11]



These pupils spend their time out of school, in particular, by wading through a local swamp, just for fun. Swamps have a symbolic significance for the topology of Zionist achievements. In her memoirs, Meir recalls how on arrival in British-mandate Palestine in the 1920s, she and her husband joined a kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley, where 'much of the area consisted of the kind of deadly black swamps that inevitably brought malaria and blackwater fever in their wake. [...] The only people who could possibly undertake the job of draining the [...] swamps were the highly motivated pioneers of the Labour-Zionist movement' (1975: 63), for it was commercially unprofitable an undertaking for private farmers. The recurrent images of swamps in *Clara Ha-kdosha* are meant to indicate that 'Zionist pioneers [...] failed "to dry the swamps"' (Gershenson and Hudson 2007: 307), i.e., effectively botched their mission (or a sizeable part of it).[12]

As for the fight against Arabs, in *Clara Ha-kdosha* any Arabs, either militant or peaceful, are conspicuous by their absence. Yet their invisible presence is implied nonetheless, at least for those who know the history of Kiryat Gat. The town began its existence as an immigrant absorption camp[13] on the land adjacent to the former Arab villages of Iraq al-Manshiyya and Al-Faluja, which were depopulated in 1949 as a consequence of the 1947-49 Palestine War, known in Israel as the War of Independence.[14] By 1992, the Kiryat Gat town limits had spread onto the villages' territory.

Iraq al-Manshiyya's and Al-Faluja's original dwellers apparently did not leave of their own accord but were forced out by the Israeli military. This was not an isolated incident. Multiple evictions like these have put a blemish on the reputation of the young Israeli state almost simultaneously with its inception. Many Israelis understood it full well and felt rather guilty about it. Their collective pangs of conscience have been memorably verbalized in a 1949 novella by S. Yizhar (the pen name of Yizhar Smilansky, 1916-2006), the son of Ukrainian Zionists, born in pre-state Palestine and himself a participant in the War of Independence. The novella (part of the Israeli school curriculum since 1964, televised in 1978) is called 'Khirbet Khizeh', after a fictional peaceful Arab village that is being forcibly evicted, without any resistance, by an armed Israeli military unit.[15] The narrator (a unit member) says:

What hadn't they told us about refugees. [...] Everything was for the refugees, their welfare, their rescue... our [Jewish] refugees, naturally. Those [Arabs] we were driving out – that was a totally different matter. [...] Immigrants of ours will come to this Khirbet-what's-its-name [...] and they'll take this land and work it and it'll be beautiful here! [...] The people who would live in this village – wouldn't the walls cry out in their ears? [...] Would the new settlers not sense that the air here was heavy with shades, voices and stares? (Yizhar 2008: 107, 109-10)

These memorable lines are fully applicable to Kiryat Gat. The unseen but somehow felt vestiges of the initial residents of the lands in and near Kiryat Gat conjure up the impression of the uncanny in *Clara Ha-kdosha*, in addition to Clara's own 'uncanny powers to predict the future' (Gershenson and Hudson 2007: 307).

Golda Meir, whose portraits hang on a few walls in Clara's school and adorn the school uniform, was Israel's Minister of Labour in 1948-56, with a responsibility for housing and employment for the Jewish newcomers to the country. In her autobiography she admits: 'We used the houses of those Arabs who run away from the country in 1948 for new immigrant housing whenever we could' (Meir 1975: 230). A formidable stateswoman as she was, her standing has long been considered tainted for a number of reasons. She certainly has her own case to answer, as far as the Palestinian Arab depopulation is concerned. Yet the same can be said of quite a few other Israeli leaders of Meir's generation and younger. Why is it her who has been chosen by Folman and Sivan as a (questionable) role model to follow for the pupils at Clara's fictional school?[16]



The answer to this question may lie in Meir's certain biographical details, as well as her gender. Meir was born in Kyiv, Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire). She left with her family (including a sister called Clara) for the United States at the age of eight,

and then for Palestine fifteen years afterwards. In Palestine and later in Israel, Meir became a leading member of the Socialist Zionist movement and held several key political posts, both in the pre-state Jewish community governing bodies and after the state of Israel had been established. The first Israeli PM David Ben Gurion called her 'the only man in his cabinet' (Meir 1975: 89). She commented:

I very much doubt that any man would have been flattered if I had said about him that he was the only woman in the government! [...] [Yet] being a woman has never hindered me in any way at all. It has never caused me unease or given me an inferiority complex or made me think that men are better off than women (ibid.).

Moreover, for Meir her work in the name of the independent Zionist statehood was part and parcel of her feminist views and practices, and she was far from being alone in that. Summing up the collective experience of the like-minded women around her, Meir proclaimed:

It was possible to function as wives, mothers and comrades-in-arms, enduring constant danger and hardship not only without complaining, but with a sense of enormous fulfilment [...] doing more to further the cause of our sex – without the benefit of publicity – than even the most militant of suffragettes in the United States or England (ibid.: 40).

What does this all have to do with *Clara Ha-kdosh*, though? An explanation can be attempted after a brief look at the portrayal of recent female arrivals from the former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israeli media, manifest during the Big Aliyah.



Generally speaking, in the opinion of some observers, in such a portrayal "migrant women's bodies serve as symbolic ground for the playing out of national concerns" (Golden 2003: 97). The official policy of the state of Israel is to welcome all those Jews (and even their non-Jewish immediate family members, e.g., in case of mixed marriages) who wish to settle in the country, and promptly grant them full citizenship rights. However, the Israeli population at large in the 1990s (and even later) was understandably worried about the prospects of employing such a significant number of new arrivals, many of whom held higher education certificates and turned into serious job competitors, once (and sometimes even before) their Hebrew had become proficient. The ex-FSU women of reproductive age were specifically seen in some quarters as posing a danger to Israeli society's marital stability, as they outnumbered new male immigrants and the proportion of divorcees and single

mothers among them was apparently higher than the Israeli population's average.[17]

Thus, in the Israeli media at the time, a 'construction of otherness and the marginalization of [Russian-speaking immigrant] women [was observed] despite the formal national discourse of the inclusion of immigrants and of women in Israeli society' (Lemish 2000: 345). The ex-FSU female of reproductive age was regularly stereotyped as the Other and the Whore and only rarely depicted as the Exceptional Immigrant, i.e., a female 'who against all odds overcame obstacles and made it in Israeli society' (ibid.: 343).

It is obvious that, despite her tender age, Clara from *Clara Ha-kdosh* is one of those rare representations of the ex-FSU women as Exceptional Immigrants. The psychic powers she possesses enable her not only to guess which tasks have been set in the maths tests, and what the winning lottery numbers are (her father generously shares these numbers with his colleagues at work, and no one gets the prize money, as hundreds turn up to claim it). Clara also correctly predicts a local earthquake, even though the town's seismographic institute fails to do so. Because of that, as one of her classmates puts it, 'tomorrow morning, she will be the idol of the whole country'. In other words, her integration in Israeli society, already proceeding well on account of her schooling and confident command of Hebrew, will be acknowledged far and wide and recognized as serving society's benefit.



Moreover, since Clara as a psychic is expected to know what the future should be like, she is liable to play a leading role in helping Israeli society out of the crisis, which is allegorically described in the apocalyptic TV reports about the trees rotten to the core from within and being in danger of collapsing. Clara's most radical classmates constantly talk about staging a revolution – not so much to annihilate the existing order or turn it upside down but to accomplish what Project Israel was designed to achieve but hasn't. The earthquake (if interpreted as a culmination of the explosive internal Israeli conflicts) becomes an uncanny neo-Gothic allegory of this revolution,[18] and Clara, the revolution's symbol and figurehead.[19] With her Jewish-Ukrainian background[20] and uncommon spiritual potential, she is none other than Golda Meir 2.0, a new generation pioneer from the (former) Russian/Soviet Empire, out with a chance to relaunch Project Israel while avoiding the flaws that marred it before.

One of such flaws is a lasting inequality of various Jewish communities in Israel, which to some degree is determined by their origin. As Jews have been arriving in the country from all corners of the globe, there was little shared background among different Jewish cultural groups. On arrival, they were meant to forge one single



Israeli identity but this has not happened. Meir herself admitted that much when she wrote (1975: 220): 'What, in part, still preoccupies all thinking Israelis [is] how to weld together people who, on the surface, had so little in common and found it so hard to understand each other. [...] We tried, probably too soon, to turn the pressure cooker into a melting pot'. In today's Israel, at least seven cultural communities can be identified. They include, in particular, the 'secular Ashkenazi upper middle class, [...] the traditionalist Mizrahim (Orientals) [...] [and] the new Russian immigrants' (Kimmerling 2001: 8).

From a historical point of view, the Ashkenazi are the descendants of European Jewry; the Mizrahim, of Asian and African Jewry; and Russian, of course, is an imprecise but widely used umbrella term for natives of the FSU. For decades, the Ashkenazi tended to dominate Israeli society at the expense of other cultural groups, including the Mizrahim. When the Big Aliyah came to the country, it strengthened 'the greatly challenged myth of the "new Israeli" moulded after the European Ashkenazi Zionist image of the return to the [Biblical] homeland while continuing to threaten the growing resistance of the historically oppressed Mizrahim' (Lemish 2000: 344). This seemingly sets the new Russian immigrants against Mizrahim.

Yet *Clara Ha-kdosha* contains a hint that a harmonious relationship between these two cultural groups is possible. In one of the film's final sequences, two men walk their domestic animals together through the town largely deserted by its dwellers who have fled from the earthquake. The men are Clara's schoolmaster (played by Yigal Naor, a descendant of the Iraqi Jews, i.e., a Mizrahi) and her uncle (played by Israel Sasha Demidov, who came to Israel from Moscow in 1990). Just like Clara's schoolmaster, her uncle is also a fantasist (he imagines that his lover Natasha died of radiation poisoning, while she in fact left him for someone else). Otherwise, it is hard to imagine two individualities that could be more different. Still, the two men stroll leisurely into the sunset, in a manner that betrays mutual sympathy, while one teaches another a song in a language which his interlocutor does not comprehend.



Similarly, the fact that by the end of the film Clara enters a love relationship with her Ashkenazi classmate Tikel points at the chance of a happy union between the new 'Russian' immigrants and the well-established Ashkenazi, too. Assimilating into Israeli society through a sexual bond between a new 'Russian' immigrant woman and an Israeli man (but rarely the other way round)[21] has been a film cliché in Israel since at least Eitan Green's *Lena* (1980), which describes the experience of recent 'Russian' arrivals in Israel in the immigrant wave that preceded the Big Aliyah. The cliché has been further developed in such films as Arik Kaplun's *Yana's Friends* (1999) and *The Schwartz Dynasty* (2005) by Amir and Shmuel Hasfari.



For Avi Santo (2005: 26) such onscreen romances involving FSU natives signify 'class-cultural partnerships with members of the larger Ashkenazi population (of which most FSUs [genetically] are a part) [...] [and] often hint at a shared class-cultural sensibility'. However, normally these romantic couplings take the form of an asymmetrical relationship in which female 'newcomers are instructed in [...] what it means to be an Israeli' by their native-born male partners (Golden 2003: 90). In *Clara Ha-kdosha*, however, Clara and Tikel's romance is clearly one of two equals. It can be even claimed that here it is the FSU female who's superior.

Clara and Tikel's partnership of two well-meaning innocents is also a union that should help Israel reinvent itself. This undertaking is not meant to be easy and is nothing short of a miracle (hence the demand for Clara's supernatural qualities). It is not coincidental that the feature film that Clara and Tikel watch in the cinema during the earthquake is called *Raise the Titanic* (1980, USA/UK, dir. Jerry Jameson). Yet Tikel is cautiously optimistic. When Clara and Tikel share their first kiss while the cinema is falling apart around them during the transformative earthquake, Tikel says to her: 'It's only Richter 4. It'll end soon'.

Conclusions

Let us briefly summarize the commonalities and differences between Kohout's novel and its two film adaptations. Jasný's version, to all intents and purposes, provides a fairly straightforward visual illustration of the book, irrespective of the fact that its Czech content sits uneasily with its German/Austrian/Yugoslav mode of expression. As for the Folman and Sivan version, 'while adapted from a Czech [...] story [...] and directed by Israelis, [it] features several FSU cast and crew members in key creative positions,[22] and allegorically addresses the Russian immigrant experience' (Santo 2005: 40), i.e. presents a genuinely radical departure from its literary source.

If Jasný's film on the Torop scale is located somewhere between a macro-stylistic and a precise

adaptation, Folman and Sivan's version is definitely a free one. Kohout's plot and some characters are still recognizable, despite many alterations (Tikel, for example, derives from Tikal, Clara's classmate who takes a strong interest in her but does not marry her in the end; his father, however, is a medical doctor, not a policeman, although the episode with Tikal's mother who cuts her long hair and thus reignites his father's desire for her is preserved). Still, despite the film title, the original's all-important religious motifs have been expurgated from *Clara Hakdosha* and replaced by secularized eschatological/apocalyptic references and 'an identification of the irrational with the positive and progressive' (Owen 2011: 179), to borrow a felicitous phrase applied to an altogether different neo-Gothic motion picture.

The book's ending has also been modified. Clara's marriage to the Soviet military officer may expedite a change in the future relations between the Czechs and the Russians (damaged by the suppression of the Prague Spring), suggests Kohout. Clara's love affair with Tikel may result in a rebirth of the Israeli nation, imply Folman and Sivan. Another significant change in the Israeli version is that there is no indication that Tikel's kiss divests Clara of her magic power.^[23] On the contrary, there is a feeling that this power would be put to good use by Israeli society, which needs it badly to reform itself. Thus, Kohout weaves into his novel the equally balanced elements of a postcolonial and a post-Soviet discourse (wishfully thinking ahead when Czechoslovakia may cut itself loose from the Soviet bloc), while Folman and Sivan do the same but in a slightly different order of priority. For them the influx of ex-FSU migrants to Israel aids the country in rejuvenating its gene pool and purifying Zionist traditions (this forms the more pronounced post-Soviet angle), in order to rectify the mistakes of the past, e.g., with regard to the Palestinian Arab population, notably absent from the narrative (this shapes the less obvious postcolonial angle).

Clara Hakdosha is perhaps best understood in the context of palingenetic myth of rebirth, as defined by Roger Griffin. Such a myth is frequently in demand in the so-called ideocracies, i.e. political systems 'dominated by the primacy of a particular idea (a totalizing vision or grand récit) of historical development which serves as the basis for realizing a new society' (Griffin 2014: 279). Ideocracies do not necessarily equal totalitarianism or authoritarianism:^[24] 'pluralistic liberalism can also develop ideocratic elements [...] [and] neat distinctions between ideocratic and democratic societies cannot be drawn' (ibid.: 279-80). For obvious reasons, Israel with its Zionist foundations aimed at mobilization of the masses, creating a new type of society and a new man (the New Jew), undoubtedly qualifies as an ideocracy.

In the evolution of ideocracies, there may come a point when its

nomos (total world-view and law) no longer provide a coherent sense of communal meaning, purpose, and reality. At this point [ideocracies] enter a liminoid state (experienced as crisis, chaos, anarchy, decadence, decline, or the end of time) which is resolved either by the collapse of that society, its absorption into another, more powerful culture, or its internal, endogenic renewal. [...] Characteristic of cultural regeneration is the emergence of a propheta (a charismatic leader) who embodies the vision of a new nomos (a new sect, new religion, new principle for making sense of and re-ordering society) as the basis of a new society (ibid.: 285).

It is clear that, young as she is, Clara from *Clara Hakdosha* embodies precisely this type of charismatic leader, promising Israel a bright new beginning, with Tikel as her mate to start a virtuous offspring. (The side story of Tikel's parents, also secondary school sweethearts, demonstrates that puppy love may actually last a lifetime.)



How was such a dramatic reconceptualization of Kohout's book received by the audiences and by Kohout himself? It can be said that the gamble taken by Folman and Sivan when they broke away from their literary source has paid off. At the Ophir award ceremony (Israel's equivalent of Oscars), *Clara* received six prizes: for the best director, the best film, the best female role, the best male role, the best editing and the best soundtrack (specially composed by the 'prince of Israeli rock' Berry Sakharof). *Clara* was also named as the best feature film at the Haifa international film festival. At the Karlový Vary international film festival *Clara* was awarded a Special Jury prize. The film (mostly shown in Israeli cinemas and on TV) even passed the strictest test possible and gained a retrospective approval from Kohout and Mašinová. They were not involved in the adaptation process and got presented pretty much with the fait accompli when a film cassette with *Clara* on it was delivered to their mailbox. Surprised as they were, they liked what they saw.^[25] This can serve as a proof, if one needs one, that free adaptations, no matter how far they deviate from the original and thus take additional risks, can also be a success.

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All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.



Notes

1] I share the view that 'Russia and then the Soviet Union exercised powerful colonial control over much of the earth for from fifty to two hundred years, much of that control has now ended, and its ending has had manifest effects on the literatures and cultures of the postcolonial-post-Soviet nations, including Russia' (Chioni Moore 2001: 123).

2] As the Israeli journalist Lily Galili has put it in 2011, 'For many years the joke was that Israel had become the 51st state of the US. Instead we have become just another Soviet republic' (Sherwood 2011).

3] In another contemporary neo-Gothic Czechoslovak film about a female visionary 'on the threshold between childhood and adulthood' (Owen 2011: 163), *Valerie a týden divů* (*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, 1970) by Jaromil Jireš, based on the eponymous novel by Vítězslav Nezval, 'young characters [also] are, in contrast to their elders, generally loving, virtuous, resourceful and creative, and thereby suggest the possibility of an alternative social order based upon freedom, mutual cooperation and play' (ibid.: 180).

4] *Clara's* plot is likely to have been partially influenced by the 1965 Czechoslovak film *Bílá paní* (*The White Lady*, dir. Zdeněk Podskalský), based on a story by Karel Michal, itself a transformation of a popular medieval legend (see, for example, Jirásek 1959: 211-17), primarily associated with Perchta of Rožmberk (c. 1429-76). In this neo-Gothic comedy, set in the 1960's provincial Czech town, a castle's ghost (not a saint but merely a female do-gooder of mature age, dressed in white) goes around fixing minor jobs for townsfolk, e.g. installing a running water at an old inhabitant's dwelling, a pavement outside a school, a fence around a farm, etc. This is something that the Communist authorities should have done but are incapable of doing, because of the planned economy's systemic malfunctioning. The authorities are seriously perturbed by the miracles yet are powerless to put paid to the White Lady's activities.

5] Czechoslovakia had of course been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire once, but it is its belonging to the Soviet bloc that provides the immediate (post-)colonial context for Kohout's novel.

6] Kohout himself (1991: 196) is mistaken in his belief that the Russian word 'pitomník' means 'student', whereas in fact it signifies a place where animals or plants are bred and nursed.

7] This of course is evocative of Clarinus's miracle of exorcizing the devil and drowning him in the river S. (see Kohout 1991: 22), partially inspired by the legend of St Procopius of Sázava.

8] To indicate this, in *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* Jasný used Kohout's mention of the Zima family's superintelligent cat that acts as a messenger (1991: 24), to self-reference his own 1963 satirical film *Až přijde kocour* (*When the Cat Comes*), awarded a Jury Prize at Cannes and dealing with a psychic tomcat. For more on parallels between *Die Einfälle der heiligen Klara* and *Kocour*, see Voráč 2004: 100.

9] Neither the sibling nor the uncle feature in Kohout's book. In it, the extended Zima family is represented by a grandmother.

10] The statement that Clara's family "speaks among itself in Hebrew" (Gershenson and Hudson 2007: 312) is incorrect.

11] This episode originates in the school fire that spreads from a burning cigar forgotten by the school janitor in a bird effigy (Kohout 1991: 73, 75-78). In the book and in both film adaptations, Clara's timely premonition saves the school from total destruction.

12] There is a long Israeli tradition, going back to the British Mandate period, of portraying, on film and elsewhere, the cultivation of the Promised Land by its Jewish settlers as an effort that has made the barren terrain bloom. This achievement looked especially significant in the light of the fact that in Europe Jews had been banned from agriculture for hundreds of years (see, for example, Shohat 1989: 29, 31, 158).

13] Nearly 700,000 Jews, many of them Holocaust survivors, arrived in Israel in 1948-51 (see Meir 1975: 212), which doubled the pre-Independence Jewish population of Palestine. This is comparable to the Big Aliyah demographic effect in the late 1980s-mid-1990s.

14] Almost 600,000 Arabs left Palestine during this period (Meir 1975: 231).

15] The novella's TV adaptation, by Ram Loevy, visualizes 'the evacuation and deportation of innocent civilians followed by the blowing up of their houses against the background of the most pastoral scenery' (Ne'eman 1995: 126) as a morally reprehensible act that has haunted one of its Israeli perpetrators (the reminiscing narrator) for years.

16] Kohout's novel (1991: 15, 17) also mentions a statesman's portrait on a wall in Clara's school in S. on S. – an unnamed President of the Republic, presumably Antonín Novotný, who fulfilled such a function in Czechoslovakia in 1957-68.

17] In the 1990s, up to 15 percent of the 'new-immigrant females age 15 and older were divorced compared to 3 percent of Israeli Jewish women' (Lemish 2000: 335). Single mothers among the then new arrivals comprised '8 percent of households' (ibid.).

18] In the words of Clara's classmate, 'tomorrow morning, [after the earthquake,] we get up and start everything from scratch. Like the pioneers who dried up the swamps'.

19] The need for revolution is acutely felt not only at the grassroot level but at the top, too. Clara's headmaster (a character symbolizing higher authority) also speaks of revolution, with Clara and him in the lead. He says to her: 'I'll be Danton and you'll be Marianne', referring to the female image from Delacroix's famous 1830 painting *Liberty Guiding the People*.

20] Gershenson and Hudson (2007: 307) posit that *Clara Ha-kdasha* 'portrays Clara as non-Jew and essentially renders her ethnically Russian'. I disagree. It is true that Jewishness as a religious concept is missing from the film altogether. There is not a single rabbi or synagogue in sight (contrary to the important function that church, priests and the Christian notion of sainthood perform in Kohout and Jasný). Yet Jewishness in its secular Zionist form is very much present, and it is entirely possible that Clara's Crimean provenance is mentioned to remind the viewer about the USSR's (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to organize an alternative to the Jewish Palestinian movement, in Crimea in the 1920-30s (for more on this, see, for example, Evgenii Tsymbal's 2006 documentary *Krasnyi Sion / Red Zion* and Mogarichev 2021). The image of Clara's mother holding her younger child in her lap (presumably provided to contest the claim that Clara is a 'witch') may well be treated as a reference to the traditional iconography of Virgin Mary and Christ – but weren't these two Jewish in the first place, anyway?

21] A truly exceptional case is *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2002) by Lena and Slava Chaplin, which recounts a tragic love story between a 'Russian' Jewish man and

an Arab woman in Haifa.

22] The role of Clara was played by Lucy Dubinchik; her mother, by Evgeniya Dodina; and her father, by Ronald Heilovsky – all FSU-born actors with Russian as their native tongue. The principal cameraman, Valentin Belonogov, also came from the FSU.

23] Gershenson and Hudson (2007: 307-08) think otherwise but this is pure conjecture on their part, in my opinion. I found no evidence to support their claim in *Clara Ha-kdosh*.

24] For my preferred definition of totalitarianism, as well as the differences between totalitarianism and authoritarianism, see Walzer 1983: 105-06.

25] Pavel Kohout in his telephone interview with me on 21 February 2022.

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