

Margot Klausner and the pioneering of Israeli cinema

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- 1 Ariel L. Feldstein, 'Filming the homeland: cinema in Eretz Israel and the Zionist Movement, 1917–1939', in Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg (eds), *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 4. On the complex relations between Zionist institutions and filmmakers and films, see also: Yaakov Gross and Nathan Gross, *Ha-seret ha-ivri: Praḳim be-toldot ha-re'inda yeha-ḳolno'a be-Yisra'el/The Hebrew Film: The History of Cinema in Israel* (Jerusalem: privately published, 1991), esp. chs 1–3; Hillel Tryster, *Israel before Israel: Silent Cinema in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, 1995); Joseph Halachmi, *Vi-yehi mah: Praḳim be-divre yeme ha-seret ha-Eretyisre'eli/No Matter What: Studies in the History of the Jewish Film in Israel* (Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, 1995); Moshe Zimmerman, *Simane ḳolno'a: Toldot ha-ḳolno'a ha-Yisre'eli ben ha-shanim 1896–1948/Signs of Movies: History of Israeli Cinema in the Years 1896–1948* (Tel Aviv: Diyonon, 2001); Ariel L. Feldstein,

Research on Israeli national cinema has often relegated the first Zionist and Israeli motion pictures to an ideologically naive – if at times artistically avant-garde – phase. The Jewish Zionist filmmakers working in Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century are frequently depicted as a generation of pioneers who struggled to gain recognition and financing from official Zionist institutions, often initiating and making, at their own expense, films that were a 'translation or adaptation' of Zionist ideas and visually expressed 'the Jewish return to the homeland and the redemption and birth of the "New Jew"'.¹ After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the films continued this tendency towards voluntary propaganda during its first decades, typically glorifying the new warriors who defended the State and who they contrasted with the nebbish 'old' Jews of the diaspora, while instilling orientalist constructions about Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews. Israeli motion pictures have been viewed as 'Zionist texts' that 'translate the Zionist master narrative into the specific modalities of the film medium'² and serve as a 'handmaiden to Zionist ideology'.³

This essay reconstructs the theoretical understanding of moving image media in the work of media pioneer and prolific author Margot Klausner (1905–75). I argue that while she framed her activities and ideas in what she understood as Zionist terms – that is, in an ongoing effort to build a Jewish nation state in Israel – this did not amount to cinematically expressing Zionist shibboleths and presenting an idealized version of the land and its citizens. Rather, for Klausner, moving images were part of a larger, intricate effort to create a new culture that was viewed neither as a

- Cinema and Zionism: The Development of a Nation Through Film*, trans. Merav Pagis (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012). For illuminating case studies, see: Joseph Halachmi, *Ruah Ré'ananah: Parashat ha-seret ha-tsiyoni ha-rishon be-Erets-Yisra'el 1899-1902/Fresh Wind: The First Zionist Film in Palestine 1899-1902* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2009); Doron Galili, 'Review of *Fresh Wind: The First Zionist Film in Palestine, 1899-1902* by Joseph Halachmi', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2010), pp. 451-53; Nicholas Baer, 'The rebirth of a nation: cinema, Herzlian Zionism and emotion in Jewish history', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2014), pp. 233-48.
- 2 Ella Shohat, 'Master narrative/counter readings: the politics of Israeli cinema', in Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (eds), *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 259.
- 3 Dan Chyutin, 'Judaic cinecorporeality: fleshing out the Haredi Male Body in Avishai Sivan's *The Wanderef*', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2014), p. 58. On Israeli cinema's difficulty in successfully transcending the boundaries of Israeli-Zionist ideology and traditions, especially prior to the 1980s, see also Nurith Gertz, *Sipur meha-sra'itim: siporet Yisre'elit ve-'ibudeha la-kolno'af/Motion Fiction: Israeli Fiction in Film* (Tel Aviv: Open University of Israel, 1993); Nitzan Ben-Shaul, *Mythical Expressions of Siege in Israeli Films* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997); Anat Zanger, 'Hole in the Moon or Zionism and the binding (Ha-Ak'eda) myth in Israeli cinema', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95-109; Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*, new edn (London: IB Tauris, 2010); Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* (London: Verso, 2014).

break with the world of the diaspora nor as a celebration of the new Jew. It was an ongoing dynamic process that sought to remedy a deficiency in Jewish and Jewish-Zionist culture, resulting from over-nationalist messianic tendencies and monotheistic patriarchy, by recovering a feminine polytheistic undercurrent in Jewish culture and history and through a queer blurring of gender, religious and national identities. Her vision for a national practice of moving images entailed breaking the boundaries of the national and incorporating the foreign in order to remedy the deficiencies of the local.

Klausner's theories are particularly resonant today, in light of contemporary interest in national and transnational cinema, queer and gender identities, trauma and memory, questions about Israeli identity and its 'others', the rise of women filmmakers in contemporary Israeli cinema, and an attempt to discover and translate media and film scholarship from outside the familiar canon. There is no doubt value in looking at her work in these contexts; it would be tempting to view her as a post-Zionist *avant la lettre*, as the uncelebrated symbolic mother of contemporary women directors in Israeli cinema, or as an early (maybe even the first) Israeli film theorist. Here, however, I wish to locate Klausner's work and thoughts within her own intellectual, political and spiritual horizons, before returning to the question of broader legacies towards the end of this piece.

Born into a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin, Klausner was involved in several major cultural projects in the Jewish settlement in Palestine and the State of Israel. In 1949 she co-founded Israel's major film studios and laboratories in Herzliya, the Israel Motion Pictures Studios, and served as its general director and later president (I refer to this studio as 'Israel Motion Pictures Studios', although its exact name and ownership structure has changed over the years) (figures 1-2).⁴ By 1974 it had expanded to include television production, had the largest sound stage in Israel, and was the principal supplier for Israel's national television channel. It could boast of having produced 100 feature films, 1000 documentaries, 850 advertisement films, 390 newsreels, 1100 video productions and 850 satellite transmissions in colour.⁵ Klausner was involved, primarily as producer and investor, in several key Israeli and pre-State Zionist films, including *Avodah* (Helmar Lerski, 1935), *Tomorrow Is a Wonderful Day* (Helmar Lerski, 1947), *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (Thorold Dickinson, 1955), *Ha-shoter 'Azulai/The Policeman* (Ephraim Kishon, 1971) and *Metsitsim/Peeping Toms* (Uri Zohar, 1973).⁶ Klausner never directed any films herself and her achievements as a screenwriter were minor. She wrote the screenplay for the short film *Jonathan and Tali* (Henry Schneider, 1953), co-wrote the screenplay for the feature film *Sabina veba-gevarim/Sabina and Her Men* (Peter Freistadt, 1966), and her short story 'The Lonesome' was the basis for the film *'Eshet ha-gibor/The Hero's Wife* (Peter Frye, 1963). The films were neither critically nor commercially successful, and though some of

Fig. 1. Klausner with builders during the erection of the studio in Herzliya. Courtesy of Mooli Landesman, Klausner's granddaughter.



4 Barbara von der Lühne, 'UFA-Stadt in Herzlia. Margot Klausner und die "Israel Motion Picture Studios Ltd."', *Filmexil*, no. 11 (1998), pp. 33–49; Amy Kronish, 'Margot Klausner', in Paula E. Hyman and Dalia Ofer (eds), *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* (Jewish Women's Archive, 2006), <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/klausner-margot>> accessed 7 April 2018; David Shalit, 'Sof la-hite'alemut me-halutsat ha-kolno'a Margot Klausner/'No longer ignoring film pioneer Margot Klausner', *Ha'arets*, 27 November 2015, <<http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/study/premium-12786189>> accessed 7 April 2018. In addition, a 1973 interview with Klausner is frequently cited as a source throughout Ora Gloria Jacob Arzooni's 1975 dissertation, published as *The Israeli Film: Social and Cultural Influences 1912–1973* (New York, NY: Garland, 1983).

5 Margot Klausner, *The Dream Industry: Memories and Facts. 25 Years of Israel Motion Picture Studios Herzliya Ltd. 1949–1974* (Israel Motion Picture Studios Herzliya, 1974), p. 8. The Hebrew version, *Tafašiyat ha-halomot*, will hereafter be cited as '*Tafašiyat*'.

6 Kronish, 'Margot Klausner'.

7 Shelly Zer-Zion, '*Habima*' be-Berlin/*Habima in Berlin: The Institutionalization of a Zionist Theatre* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew

her projects never materialized they are nevertheless indicative of her vision and theoretical understanding of moving images.

She is additionally known for her role in bringing Habima, which would become Israel's national theatre, to Palestine in the late 1920s and taking part in its management up to the mid 1930s.⁷ She was interested in psychoanalysis and the occult, founding the Israeli Parapsychology Society and publishing the monthly magazine *Mysterious Worlds: A Journal of Parapsychology* from 1968 to 1971. Klausner asserted that all her different efforts were aspects of the same domain (*thum*).⁸ For example she used media as metaphors for understanding the occult, such as likening people who can receive messages and thoughtwaves from the past and future to radio listeners and television viewers, and the technique of sensing the undulations of the cosmos to the modern invention of television,⁹ and claimed that spiritualism was her 'hidden saviour' in her struggle to create film and television studios in Israel.¹⁰

From the 1920s to the year of her death, Klausner published numerous works in German, Hebrew and English, including a two-volume study on the sources of drama with a psychoanalytic bent, memoirs, and many short stories that were often based on her life or previous lives. While her activities as a pioneering film producer and founder of the studios and with Habima theatre have been noted in historical studies, her literary and theoretical efforts have received almost no recognition. This is the first attempt to offer a reconstruction of her ideas as a framework for her activities.

Klausner was clearly committed to Zionism and the State of Israel. She viewed moving images as a tool in the service of the nation, took great pride in the studios that she founded, and notes in 1973 that Israel's Independence Day military parade had been recorded on videotape in colour and could be sent on cassette or broadcast to the entire world

Fig. 2. Klausner during the building of the studio. Courtesy of Mooli Landesman.



University Magnes Press, 2015); Shelly Zer-Zion and Jan Kühne, 'The German Archive of the Hebrew Habima: bureaucracy and identity', *Naharaim: Zeitschrift für deutsch-jüdische Literatur und Kulturgeschichte*, vol. 7, nos 1–2 (2013), pp. 239–60, esp. pp. 246–50; Tom Lewy, *ha-Yekim yeha-te'ateron ha-ivri/The German Jews and the Hebrew Theater: A Clash between Western and Eastern Europe* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2016). Klausner's work in film and theatre with her second husband is discussed in Moti Zeira, *'Ish 'ahavot/Man of Loves: The Story of Yehoshua Brandstätter's Life* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak Ben-Tsvi, 2005–06), esp. chs 8–12.

- 8 Interview with Yaron London in the Israeli Television's *Tandu*, 1 July 1974. The relevant segment of the interview is included in the documentary *Saga of a Photo* (2013), directed by Klausner's granddaughter, Mooli Landesman.
- 9 Klausner, *Me'orot ha-dramah/The Sources of Drama, Vol. II*, trans. Mordechai Yo'eli (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1971), p. 16; Margot Klausner, *Neshamot 'artila'iyyot: sipurim/Disembodied Souls: Stories* (Tel Aviv: Niv, 1963), p. 12.
- 10 Margot Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 94.

within minutes.¹¹ The 1949 Foundation Scroll of the studios declares that after witnessing the rebirth of the State of Israel, which is to be 'the workshop of Israel's spirit', it is still necessary to 'spread the light of our just cause all over the world', and that film can 'draw the attention of the nations' towards Israel's way of life because it is an art that 'reaches into all countries'.¹² Zionist films, according to Klausner, should not force the Zionist point of view on the world (or allow the world to alter Zionism), but rather should contribute to it. 'It is necessary', she writes in a diary entry from the late 1920s, 'to insert this new land, with its landscapes, songs and unique qualities, into the lexicon of the wide world'.¹³ Klausner is certain that the people of Israel would literally add words to the global vocabulary – Shalom, Kibbutz, Hora and Sabra. This ability to contribute to the world is not unique to the Chosen People, but follows the example of 'the Chinese who gave silk – their famous *crêpe-de-Chine* – to the civilized world [sic], or the Negroes [sic] who added the word "Jazz" to the international language after World War I'.¹⁴

This international role of the media led her to deduce a hierarchy of moving image technologies, so that Klausner claims that the talking film, which could convey the sound of Hebrew words, began a triumphant journey in the late 1920s that reached its zenith with the development of television,¹⁵ and that the truth has finally been revealed to her as it appears through the satellite that reaches the location of the Israel Motion Picture Studios and also the entire world.¹⁶ The significance of different media, then, is assumed in her writing according to their ability to serve the Zionist and Israeli struggle to contribute globally, and the value of technologies like talking pictures and satellite transmission is theorized accordingly.

That transnational cinema and television via satellite can and ought to be mobilized in the service of Zionism and the State does not mean that

- 11 Klausner, *Třááíyat*, p. 11.
- 12 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 26.
- 13 Klausner, *Yoman Habimah/ Habima Diary* (Tel Aviv: Mo'adim, 1971), p. 21.
- 14 Klausner, *Třááíyat*, p. 13.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 94.
- 17 Margot Klausner, 'motřv ha-'akedah u'Ve-'arvot hanegev/'The Aqedah motif and *In the Wastes of the Negev*', *Molad: yarřon medini ře-sifrut/ Molad: Monthly Review of Politics and Letters*, vol. 2, no. 12 (1949), pp. 379–80. On this essay, see Yael S. Feldman, "'The most exalted symbol for our time'?" *Rewriting "Isaac"* in Tel Aviv', *Hebrew Studies*, no. 47 (2006), pp. 253–73.
- 18 Margot Klausner, 'Phaedra ve-'ahayoteha'/Phaedra and her sisters', *ha-Tnu'ah le-'ahdut ha-'avodah* (hereafter cited as *TAH*), 7 June 1945, pp. 6–7.
- 19 Margot Klausner, 'Khasia ha-yetomah'/Khasia the orphan', *TAH*, 24 January 1946, p. 5.
- 20 Margot Klausner, 'Ketivat sipure hasrařah'/Writing film stories', *ha-'Ishah ba-medinah/The Woman in the State: A Journal for the Problems of the Woman and the State*, vol. 2, nos. 7–8 (1951), pp. 81–82.
- 21 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 101.
- 22 Ibid., p. 84.

for Klausner they can successfully transmit any message. Spiritualism, theatre and moving images are, she maintains, bound by a truth that may be at odds with pro-Israeli or Zionist sentiments, and she opposes propaganda messages when she believes them to be false. She attributes particular value to a truth that is not limited to the present and the local. In a review of an Israeli play, she defines 'artistic truth' as having to do with universal elements found in other cultures across millennia, and faults the play for not complying with this universal artistic truth.¹⁷ She notes that the importance of the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus has not ebbed for millennia and recurs in countless new forms: an ancient African myth; the Ugaritic stories of Baal, Anath and Mot; the biblical tale of Joseph, Potiphar and Potiphar's wife; the battles of the ancient Egyptian gods Osiris, Seth and the sun-god Ra; the Babylonian god Tammuz, his father Ashtoreth, and the goddess of the underworld; Oedipus and Jocasta; *Hamlet*. Ultimately this stems from the ability of the story to weave together the being of nature and the being of humans: it tells of the seasons, and the earth's ability to renew itself in the death and rebirth of the spring god, caught between the older woman who brings death and her younger innocent double; it is also a portrayal of the inevitable ageing of humans and the drama of young sons and daughters becoming the older fathers and mothers.¹⁸

While supporting Zionism, Klausner could not defend what she perceived as violations of these 'universal' artistic truths. Repeatedly, in her theatre reviews, she insists that propaganda can cause artistic harm and that the belief of the modern students of Plato that only morality and beauty should be presented is a mistake.¹⁹ Similarly she writes in the early 1950s that Israeli films should never be inaccurate and should not avoid describing difficulties and mistakes.²⁰ When discussing the failure of the film *Sinayah/Clouds over Israel* (Ivan Longyel/Ilan Eldad, 1966), the story of a Bedouin infant who is saved by an Israeli soldier after the 1956 war in Sinai, Klausner claims that she already felt during filming that it would not do well. She had learned that the film distorted the truth – that the infant's parents had been killed by Israeli bullets, one of which had injured the child as well. She had no doubt that a film based on the distortion of the truth would never make headway.²¹ Elsewhere in the same book Klausner ties the importance she attributes to truth to the cinematic medium: when projected, the film is enlarged tenfold and the tiniest mistake will reach enormous proportions; any forgery, lie or vagueness is therefore strictly prohibited. Honesty, she claims, 'is a must for those who use technology'.²² For Klausner, cinema's enlarged projection demands truth and clarity and the desire to disseminate Zionist propaganda cannot trump this trait of the medium.

Moreover she did little to conform to Israeli society or to ingratiate herself with its powerful elites. She was certainly not universally admired in Israel, and considerable animus and ridicule were directed at her and her career. She was accused, according to her own account, of having an

- 23 Margot Klausner, *Habima Diary*, p. 215.
- 24 Gross and Gross, *Hebrew Film*, p. 12.
- 25 I am indebted to Amos Mokadi, Klausner's son, for pointing out to me what he claimed, tongue-in-cheek, made her, at one period, the most famous person in Israel (personal communication, 2 August 2016).
- 26 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 94.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 28 Politically, the change would come only after Klausner's death, in 1977, with the rise to power of the Likud party; in many other fields however the influence of labour Zionism remained significant many years later.
- 29 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 86.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 89/*Tā'āsiyat*, pp. 67–68.
- 33 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 112.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 35 Margot Klausner, 'On the Hebrew theatre: a talk given by Margot Klausner Brandstatter at the May 1950 meeting of the Beverly Hills Chapter of Hadassah', Central Zionist Archives (Hereafter CZA), A493/9, p. 1.

intolerable tendency to lie.²³ A history of Israeli cinema acidly remarks that she writes about her great modesty in her own published memoirs;²⁴ the gibe is not entirely unwarranted, since for many years her name was very prominently displayed in the opening titles of one of the two national newsreels that all movie theatres in the country were required by law to show.²⁵ Perhaps most harmful to her reputation was her very public advocacy of parapsychology, which was, as she recognizes, greeted with sneers and sarcasm.²⁶

Klausner frequently points out in her publications what she sees to be the Israeli establishment's failings, the 'hard-heartedness of various Government Departments',²⁷ and the sometimes outright nepotism and corruption amongst Israel's then interconnected administrators, government officials, politicians, army, and influential worker's union the Histadrut – all tied to the labour Zionist elite that dominated pre-State and Israeli institutions throughout Klausner's lifetime.²⁸ Klausner protests that there were 'many revolting injustices' against the Israel Motion Picture Studios, such as delay of payments by government departments and political party institutions.²⁹ There was a bond of friendship between the Chairman of the Council for Education and Culture at the Histadrut and Geva, a rival studio and film laboratory that received all of their film commissions, ignoring what 'should have been of prime importance' to the workers' union, the fact that Klausner's studios, unlike Geva's, had a collective workers' agreement.³⁰ She complains that the budget allotted to films by the Israeli government could not even cover their costs,³¹ and that rival companies managed because they bought the film stock without paying customs duty and then, instead of returning the leftovers to customs, illegally sold them for exorbitant prices on the black market.³² She exposes how no Israeli film studio was chosen to cover the Eichmann Trial and instead the authorities hired 'an American cousin of one of our ministers'; in telling this, she confesses, her 'face is still blushing with shame'.³³ None of her staff was able to get a developing machine out of customs, and when Klausner herself managed to achieve this surprisingly quickly, she learned that the reason the customs officials were so obliging was her resemblance to Golda Meir: 'They thought I was her sister'.³⁴

Klausner viewed herself as a pioneer who was taking part in building the nation. She seemed to be attracted to pioneering itself, as an enduring effort and not merely as an initial phase. As she explains in a speech she gave in 1950, celebrating thirty-five years since the foundation of Habima theatre and imagining how the Israel Motion Picture Studios would be remembered thirty-five years hence:

it is hard to tell which days are the better ones; those early ones of dreams, struggle and disappointment, of being laughed at, being alone in poverty, and repelled – or those of later ones when fame has been established, but the quality of dreams, the vigor of action, and the creative power are on the decline.³⁵

- 36 Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 105.
- 37 Klausner, 'On the Hebrew theatre', p. 5.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 39 Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997); David Biale, 'Zionism as an erotic revolution', in *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 176–203; Michael Gluzman, 'ha-Kemihah le-heteroseksualiot: tsiunim u-miniyut be-Altneuland / 'Longing for heterosexuality. Zionism and sexuality in Herzl's *Altneuland*, *Te'oria u-vikoret/ Theory and Criticism*, no. 11 (1997), pp. 145–63; Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
- 40 Feldestein, *Cinema and Zionism*, pp. x–xi. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, 'galut be-tokh ribonut / Exile within sovereignty: toward a critique of the "negation of exile" in Israeli culture', *Theory and Criticism*, no. 4 (1993), pp. 23–55 and no. 5 (1994), pp. 113–32.
- 41 Margot [Klausner], 'Sheleg bahamsin / Snow in a heat wave', *Bamah/Stage: A Bimonthly [publication] on Matters of Theatrical Art*, no. 4 (1934), p. 28.
- 42 Biographies of Margot Klausner, CZA, A493/1. While some sources also mention education in political economy, it seems, from Klausner's own biographies and the material I could find at the CZA, that this was in fact practical experience at Leiser, her family's footwear business.
- 43 Margot Klausner, *Julius Klausner – eine Biographie* (Düsseldorf-Benrath: Verlag Kalima-Druck, 1974), pp. 8–10, p. 30. On the very complex relationship of the German

Far from trying to visually represent a well-constructed image of a new Jew and to serve the Zionist establishment, Klausner was devoted to dreaming, struggling towards an uncertain future and fostering creative powers. She was a pioneer, not in the sense of embracing a clear radical vision that she then attempted to realize, often at immense human or inhuman cost (a frequent characterization of the founding generation of Israel's strict and ascetic 'puritan oligarchy' who 'forced their will upon history'),³⁶ but rather as a thinker who was committed to openness and syncretism, believing that culturally Israelis were 'still wanderers in the desert, who have just set foot into the promised land' and who 'have to experiment, to find out by trial and error, what we shall aim at as the true expression of ourselves'.³⁷ This phase of the 'early days', she believed, entailed the inclusion of different pairs of seemingly opposing 'poles' or 'elements' – the cultures of the father and the mother, Cain and Abel, East and West, past and present, or propaganda and human psychological truth – which must both be included in order 'to retain their complimentary dynamism'.³⁸

Accordingly, Klausner's version of Zionism was in tension with some of the more familiar tenets of the movement. Zionist ideology called for the creation of a new Jew that would be the 'negation of the diaspora', particularly the sexually 'inverted' effete nebbish man and his counterpart, the virile, domineering balabusta woman.³⁹ The new pioneers in the Land of Israel, the halutzim, would, unlike the diasporic Jews, connect to nature and the earth and renew the ancient courage of the people of Israel.⁴⁰

For the most part, by contrast, the Jewish diaspora elicits Klausner's appreciation and she does not seem to be very concerned with negating it and creating a new 'Hebrew' (or 'Canaanite') identity. She insists that the Jews who came to the Land of Israel brought with them things and values from the diaspora, 'things that are greatly distanced from this land but are nevertheless ours and have become close to us: the lives of Jews in the exiles of Russia, America, Germany, and Poland and the rest of the Jewish diaspora'.⁴¹ Klausner never turned away from her Berlin childhood and her attachment to the German culture in which she was reared and the courses in Greek and history of art which she took at the University of Berlin from 1923 to 1925.⁴² Their influence seems to be echoed in many of her projects in Israel, including her interest in the occult and the arts.⁴³ She frequently mentions her connection with her family and other Jews in the diaspora,⁴⁴ and is especially proud of her acquaintance with Yiddish culture and her East European Jewish roots.⁴⁵ She is happy to illustrate affiliations with Jews who are not Israeli, and perhaps not particularly Zionist – Marx and Freud seem a suitable subject for an Israeli propaganda film in her view⁴⁶ – and she notes the prominence of Jews in film industries throughout the world,⁴⁷ never seeming to tire of mentioning important figures in the film world who are Jewish: Fred Zinnemann is characterized by her as 'a Jew from Galicia';⁴⁸ Otto Preminger as an 'Austrian Jew';⁴⁹ Ilya

Jewish immigrants to Palestine and Israel to their new environment and to Germany and German culture, see Moshe Zimmermann and Yotam Hotam (eds), *Ben ha-molado! Between Two Homelands: The 'Yekkes'* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History and Koebner Center for German History, 2006) and Ulrike Heikau, *Deutschsprachige Filme als Kulturinsel: Zur kulturellen Integration der deutschsprachigen Juden in Palästina 1933–1945* (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam, 2009).

- 44 Especially in *Habima Diary, The Dream Industry, Julius Klausner and Shalosh nesi'ot li-Vrit ha-Mdatsot/Three Voyages to the Soviet Union* (Tel Aviv: The Israel-USSR Union for Mutual Cultural Ties, 1965).
- 45 Klausner, *Julius Klausner*, p. 30.
- 46 Klausner, *Three Voyages to the Soviet Union*, p. 45.
- 47 M[argot] K[lausner], 'Arba'ah sratim 'eretsyisre'elimi'/'Four films from the land of Israel', *Stage*, no. 8/9 (1936), p. 69.
- 48 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 55.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 52 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama, Vol. II*, p. 173.
- 53 Klausner, *Julius Klausner*, pp. 23–26.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 55 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama, Vol. II*, p. 208.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 208–09. See also Margot Klausner, 'Mikdash me'at'/'Place of spiritual importance', *TAH*, 13 September 1945, p. 6.
- 58 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama, Vol. II*, p. 209.
- 59 Margot Klausner, 'On the mysteries of the ancient', trans. Ilse Meyer, in M. Wulff (ed.), *Max Eitingon: In Memoriam* (Jerusalem: Israel Psycho-Analytic Society, 1950), p. 147. Among the relevant writers listed in the bibliographies of *The Sources of Drama* are Robert Briffault, Johann Jakob Bachofen

Ehrenburg – whose book title, 'The dream industry', Klausner borrowed for her own memoirs – is a 'Russian-Jewish writer';⁵⁰ and we even learn of Cecil B. DeMille that 'he became close to Judaism as a result of his preparations for his greatest film "The Ten Commandments"'.⁵¹ There is no tendency in her writing to view Israeli Jews or Israeli Jewish culture as superior or more central than those of the diaspora or to berate those who do not make aliyah.

For Klausner the Hebrew halutzim do not necessarily signify a return to ancient origins. As she remarks when writing about the biblical story of Cain and Abel, 'we are unable to grasp why the murderer of his brother had to have been, of all people, the farmer, who has become for us a symbol of national fulfilment'.⁵² Moreover, she acknowledges the continuity between herself and the non-Zionist members of her family. She characterizes the two sisters who were her grandmothers as clever, headstrong and domineering, marrying two mild (*weich*) and calm men whom they adored but tormented. Her great-grandmother, Rivka, is likewise depicted by Klausner as a majestic balabusta with a formidable appetite.⁵³ Klausner mentions that she inherited her fondness for gentle (*sanft*) men from her grandmothers,⁵⁴ thus suggesting that she – the new Zionist woman – and the two men she married – both Zionist men – were not exempt from the alleged gender inversion of diasporic Jews.

If Klausner is not committed simply to delivering Zionist pieties, what is the logic driving her efforts in making moving images? Klausner maintains that there is a deficiency in the Jewish tradition. While there is no shortage of dramatic material in the Bible, such as the binding of Isaac and the story of Joseph,⁵⁵ ancient Jewish ritual and the Jewish tradition inhibited the development of cathartic drama, which is the basis for theatre, and in later periods, literature and film.⁵⁶ The obligations and proscriptions of the Torah, notably the prohibition against making graven images, cannot be reconciled with the art of imitation, which is essential for the use of masks and the elementary principles of ancient or modern theatre.⁵⁷

Moreover, the origins of drama depend on a view that divides up nature into discrete forces that appear as separate personifications – that is, as the various gods that are at war with each other. For example, the earth might be personified by the character of the mother, winter by the figure of the old father, and spring by a son who dies and is resurrected. This, according to Klausner, is radically opposed to the belief in one spiritual god, the monotheistic concept of divinity.⁵⁸

Klausner particularly underscores that Jewish monotheism attempted to exclude the mother-goddess and all other feminine elements (or the 'female principle') that were part of the ancient worldview.⁵⁹ The greatest religious revolution in the history of the Mediterranean was the subjugation of the 'religion of the mother' to 'the law of the father', in which, for example, the mother of the gods Hera was subordinated to the position of Zeus's 'jealous wife'.⁶⁰ In the Jewish case, the goddesses were not merely relegated to an inferior post in the pantheon, but were

and Robert Graves. For a sophisticated reassessment of these ideas, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York, NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1993).

60 Margot Klausner, 'Yeshu be-'interpretatsyah pro-Yehudit ('al yetzirato shel Robert Graves) / 'Jesus in a pro-Jewish interpretation (on the work of Robert Graves)', *Mishmar*, 22 May 1947, n.p., CZA, A493/81.

61 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. II, p. 207.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 171–72.

subject to an attempt to remove them completely. The male Bedouin god that travelled with his nomadic tribe became the only god for the Jews and contributed to the formation of contemporary patriarchy. There was a colossal battle between the culture of the mother that was bound to the land and the nomadic culture with its patriarchal god, which ended with the victory of the god-father and the banishment of ancient matriarchy from Jewish culture. Klausner maintains that there was an ancient identity between the mother, the earth, the grave and death, and a close relation between the cult of the mother and the cult of the dead, which was one of the origins of ancient drama (due, among other reasons, to the use of death masks).⁶¹ The banishment of the feminine principle thus further alienated the Jewish tradition from the development of modern secular drama. Certainly this expulsion was never entirely successful – the very struggle between the two worldviews is reflected in the clash between Cain and Abel, the farmer and the shepherd.⁶² But in general Judaism, which was ruled by the god-father, excluded the feminine element, and thus left its Oedipuses and Hamlets motherless, foreclosing any development towards modern secular drama.

It is possible to read Klausner's work as an attempt to remedy this deficiency in the Jewish tradition and to ready Jewish Israeli culture for creating drama by countering the two factors that stymie its development. Many of her projects attempt to undo patriarchy by reintroducing the feminine element and to undo monotheism by breaking Jewish and Israeli cultural isolation, dispelling any sense of being a chosen and unique people who shall dwell alone. The latter put Judaism within a polytheist context, in which its god and traditions were only one of many, and also connected Jewish culture to other traditions in which drama did develop.

Much of Klausner's writing is focused on the 'feminine element', in which she includes the experience and significance of women as well as the more abstract concepts of mother earth, death cult and the great goddesses that Jewish patriarchy sought to expunge. Her fiction often features melodramatic tales of women protagonists who experience loss and loneliness. For example the short film that she wrote, *Jonathan and Tali*, is narrated by a woman doctor whose husband and son were killed in the war, and who addresses the camera directly and then continues the story, in which she takes part, in voiceover. In the close-knit agricultural village in which she lives, two Jewish refugee children, a brother and a sister, were adopted by two childless families after the Holocaust. Their biological mother, Anja Pinato, who was believed to be dead, is now looking for them and is living in a transit camp for immigrants in Israel (*ma'ebarah*). The action also involves men – it was the two fathers who discovered the siblings while serving in the Jewish Brigade with the British Army in Italy – yet the drama that unfolds during the film is largely between the women: the bereaved doctor who is narrating the story, the two foster mothers, and Anja, the biological mother, who is also a widow and who must choose whether to leave her two children

- 63 For a reading of the film in the context of the representation of Holocaust survivors in Israeli cinema, see Liat Steir-Livny, *Shete panim ba-mar'ah/Two Faces in the Mirror: The Image of Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Cinema* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2009), pp. 65–66.
- 64 The film and its failure are described in detail in Shalit, 'No longer ignoring'.
- 65 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. II, p. 133.
- 66 Margot Klausner, *Reincarnation*, ed. Ruth Eli (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1975), p. 82.
- 67 Margot Klausner, *Sappho mi-Lesbos: roman histori/Sappho of Lesbos: A Historical Novel*, ed. M. Seter, trans. A. Lubrani (Tel Aviv: Massada, 1945).
- 68 Margot Klausner, *Yosef be-Mitsrayim/Joseph in Egypt: A Biblical Play in Two Parts*, ed. Baruch Carou (Tel Aviv: Niv, 1965).
- 69 Margot Klausner, 'ha-Bodedim/'The Lonesome', in *Disembodied Souls*, pp. 94–100. It was adapted into the Israeli feature film *The Hero's Wife*, which has been read within the context of the representation of women in Israeli cinema in Régine-Mihal Friedman, 'Between silence and abjection: the film medium and the Israeli war widow', *Film Historia*, vol. 3, no. 1/2 (1993), pp. 79–89; and in the context of the representation of Holocaust survivors in Israeli cinema in Steir-Livny, *Two Faces in the Mirror*, pp. 89–91.
- 70 Synopses of the episodes can be found in CZA, A493/152. The documents relating to these episodes are dated July 1975.
- 71 On the Binding of Isaac motif in Israeli moving images, see Anat Zanger 'Hole in the Moon'; Zanger, 'Beaufort and My Father, My Lord: traces of the binding myth and the mother's voice', in *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, pp. 225–38; Itay Harlap, 'ha-'Oked ba'al haratson ha-tov/The victimizer of good will: anxiety, denial, and guilt in the television serial *Parashat Ha-Shavu'a*', *Mikan: Journal for Literary Studies*, no. 13 (2013), pp. 84–105.

with their new families in the prosperous village or to take them back with her to the transit camp and a life of want. Anja decides to leave, and says she will return once she has worked hard enough to prepare a decent life for them, but it is not certain that she ever will come back.⁶³

The protagonist of the feature film she produced and co-wrote, *Sabina and Her Men*,⁶⁴ is likewise a woman who lost the man she loved in the 1948 Israeli War of Liberation. She now runs a boarding house for men who have recently immigrated to Israel ('olim *hadashim*). She uses her connections, her powers of seduction and her business acumen to help the men become settled, then tragically they leave and sever their ties with her. At the end of the film she decides to sell the house, and walks away with an orphan girl who has decided to join her.

Similarly Klausner's forays into psychoanalysis and spiritualism feature narratives that focus on women's experience. She believes there is a 'parallel psychological law' to that of the Oedipal son's wish to usurp the father's place (on the throne and sexually with the mother), in which the ageing woman wishes to find a lover who will serve as a fusion of her ageing husband and her young son.⁶⁵ Klausner thus shifts the Oedipal complex's attention from male father and son figures to the experience and feelings of women who try to unite their roles as incestuous mother figures and adulterous wives. Her later focus on spiritualism did not entail abandoning this parallel psychological law, but could rather explain it through reincarnation, as she now claimed that 'the soul of a boy before birth chooses that woman for a mother whom he will find in some later life as mistress or wife'.⁶⁶

Throughout her writing there are numerous narratives that expand on the stories of older women attracted to younger men, thus complying with this parallel Oedipal law/reincarnation choice, such as Sappho and her intellectually inferior lover Phaon,⁶⁷ Potiphar's wife who lusts after Joseph,⁶⁸ and in the short story 'The Lonesome', Rachel, a war widow who lives on a kibbutz and who has an affair with Sasha, a Polish immigrant who takes her Hebrew class (figure 3).⁶⁹

One work particularly dedicated to unearthing the feminine elements that monotheistic patriarchy struggled to vanquish is a seven-part television series that Klausner was working on in the final year of her life, *Women of the Bible*. Episodes were devoted to Eve, Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah, Potiphar's wife and his daughter Asenath, the witch of Endor, Ruth the Moabite, and the adulteress and Jesus.⁷⁰ Judging from the handwritten synopses that she completed for all of the episodes, she was exploring an audiovisual way to reveal the feminine element still lurking in the patriarchal biblical text.

In the second episode, 'Sarah and Hagar', Klausner rearranges the biblical text in order to expose the feminine experiences that it attempted to expunge. The biblical story in the episode is that of God testing Abraham by ordering him to take his beloved son Isaac and sacrifice him, before an angel intervenes and Isaac is replaced by a ram.⁷¹ Whereas in the Bible this is the story of the father-and-son patriarchs and the

Fig. 3. Photo from the production of *The Hero's Wife* (Peter Frye, 1963), based on Klausner's short story 'The Lonesome'. Courtesy of Shaar Hagolan Archive.



(male) God's promise to multiply Abraham's seed after the latter proved his devotion, Klausner's episode is split into two parallel narratives: one adheres to the biblical text, while the second follows Sarah, Isaac's mother and Abraham's wife. According to Klausner, Sarah accompanies Abraham and Isaac, in tears, to the outskirts of Beer Sheba, where they live. She settles down under a palm tree as Abraham and Isaac continue on their journey to carry out the sacrificial filicide. Under the tree, Sarah reviews her life and especially the way she mistreated her handmaid Hagar. Klausner's synopsis rearranges various episodes that in the chronological biblical text had appeared earlier, so that they now become Sarah's flashbacks. Beyond this shift in the order of the events, however, Klausner does not alter the biblical text significantly for most of the episode. The soundtrack even includes a narrator who reads the biblical verses verbatim. In this rearranged version, Sarah recalls how, when she believed that she was unable to bear children, she gave Abraham her handmaid Hagar who conceived; yet when Sarah herself gave birth to Isaac, she insisted that Abraham send Hagar and her son Ishmael away. Sarah then comes to realize that the entire tragedy – the impending death of Isaac – 'is her punishment for her driving out Hagar'. She tears out her grey hair, beats her breast, prays for forgiveness, and lies almost unconscious on the ground. In the meantime, Isaac frees himself and runs to Sarah, knowing 'instinctively his mother's anguish'. He finds her unconscious under the palm tree, embraces her, and she is revived. Isaac and Sarah 'clasp each other in the eternal passion of mother-son love'. That which in the Bible appears as the story of male lineage and the father's covenant with a male god, is rearranged by Klausner to be the punishment and atonement of the woman Sarah for the way she mistreated another woman. It concludes by reinforcing the relationship between mothers and sons, uncovering the feminine element in the

biblical text and remedying the distortion of the 'true' story. Klausner thus creates drama in a narrative that involves both male and female elements in conflicts that are eternal: they derive from fundamental psychological truths and the parallel Oedipal law; they follow the logic of parapsychological reincarnations in which a mother alternates with a lover; and they serve as personifications of perennial natural forces such as the earth (by the character of the mother) and the spring and rejuvenation of nature (by her son who comes close to death and is 'resurrected'). Klausner thus demonstrates how the missing feminine principle could be reinstated within Jewish culture on the path towards the creation of drama.

A second avenue for remedying the absence of a dramatic tradition in Jewish culture is through ties across cultures and peoples. Although the Jewish tradition hindered the development of theatre, a form of Jewish drama did come about, according to Klausner, when Jews were in contact with other cultures,⁷² such as the dramas of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and Christian Europeans.⁷³ This suggests that, for Klausner, transcultural contacts were essential for the development of Jewish drama. Across her work she is committed to breaking the cultural isolation of the Jewish people or Israel and with it their sense of being incommensurably unique or 'chosen', yet without denying differences.

Thus her two-volume work on the origins of drama is in fact a cross-cultural analysis that highlights similarities throughout the ancient world: Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians and Canaanites as well as Judaism and Christianity are constantly brought together. Although an inquiry into the sources of drama could begin with ancient Greece, Klausner explains, she chooses also to turn to the holy plays and rites in Mediterranean cultures prior to the Greek period,⁷⁴ based on recent archaeological discoveries and the deciphering of ancient writings. For her these enquiries into the past do not serve the Zionist cause of proving the unique connection between the returning Jewish people and the land of Israel, or of bolstering contemporary Israeli-Zionist identity in long-forgotten traditions, events and Jewish heroic figures.⁷⁵ Rather they reveal 'the background of the Greek cultural world from its reflection in the book of the Bible', whereas up until these recent discoveries Athens and Jerusalem were seen as signifying completely contrary traditions.⁷⁶

While questioning privileged origins and incommensurability between cultures (especially Hebraism and Hellenism), the similarities that Klausner discovers do not efface the differences. The unique aspects of Jewish culture are related to the ancient prophetic strain within it which Klausner identifies as foreign to drama. Klausner argues that this messianic, national, educational and moral character of prophecy has persisted in Jewish culture and 'is the original creation of Judaism'.⁷⁷ It is, however, at constant war with non-Jewish, dramatic elements, so that there is an irresolvable battle within Jewish and Hebrew theatre.⁷⁸ The spiritual heirs of the prophets, the teachers of the people, are of the opinion that only national drama, the messianic element, merits the

72 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. II, pp. 180–81.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.

74 *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. I, trans. Ḥ. Hameḥri, ed. Natan ḥAgmon (Bistrizky) (Tel Aviv: Massada, 1953/4), pp. 9–11.

75 Cf. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

76 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. I, pp. 20–21.

77 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. II, p. 211.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

- 79 Ibid., pp. 210–11. See, for example, H. N. Bialik, 'ha-'Omanut ha-tehorah'/'The pure art', in *The Writings of H. N. Bialik and a Selection of His Translations, Vol. II: Stories and Literary Writings* (Berlin: Hotsa'at Hoveve ha-shirah ha-'eivrit, 1923), pp. 298–301. See also Klausner, *Habima Diary*, p. 140 for a further point of disagreement between them in this context.
- 80 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama, Vol. II*, p. 211.
- 81 Ibid., p. 215.
- 82 Ibid., p. 211.
- 83 Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, p. 246.
- 84 Klausner, *Habima Diary*, pp. 28, 46, 191, 195–98; Margot Klausner, *Sivan Storm: The Last Affair in the Life of Chaim Arlosoroff*, trans. H. Ben-Avraham, ed. 'A. T̄urai (Tel Aviv: Sifre Gadish, 1956), pp. 104, 106–07.
- 85 T̄ehilla Matmolin, 'Hazon u-ma'aś: šiyhah 'im marat Margaret Klausner-Brandstätter'/'Vision and deed: a conversation with Mrs. Margaret [sic] Klausner-Brandstätter', *Woman in the State*, vol. 2, nos 3–4 (November–December 1950), p. 44.
- 86 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 18.
- 87 Ibid., pp. 61–62, 101, 116, 132, 134, 137.
- 88 Ibid., pp. 131–37.
- 89 Ibid., pp. 126–27.
- 90 Klausner, *Disembodied Souls*, p. 40.

construction of a national theatre.⁷⁹ Actors and the audience, on the other hand, have always desired human drama.⁸⁰ The war between the two principles and the heretofore unsuccessful attempts to create a synthesis between them 'give a clear picture of the general spiritual crisis of Israeli Judaism'.⁸¹ If one day the artists of Israel manage to unite Jewish messianism with general human drama, Israel will be able to make a contribution to strengthening the spirit of humanity in the field of drama, 'as Judaism has done in many other fields'.⁸² Across her work in various artistic realms, Klausner is devoted to this attempt to reconnect Jewish culture to the world without losing the unique aspects of each culture, thus maintaining the two principles that she hoped could be synthesized.

Zionism has sometimes been accused of being a European colonialist project that strove to transplant western culture into the Middle East, creating a 'country "in" the East but determined not to be "of" it'.⁸³ It is therefore worth noting that for Klausner the Middle East was part of the world to which Jewish and Israeli culture should connect. Indeed when Klausner came to Israel in the 1920s it was under the British Mandate of Palestine and was part of a Middle East in which borders could easily be crossed. Travelling throughout the Mediterranean is a frequent trope in her writing, whether in her own biography or in stories of other people's lives.⁸⁴ In 1950 she even suggested – overoptimistically in retrospect – that her new studios' laboratory could be used for developing films for the entire Middle East.⁸⁵

Klausner invested a great deal of effort, according to her memoirs, in bringing international productions and co-productions to Israel and partners to her studios. She often seemed more interested in international recognition than in the reception of her work within Israel. She had a dream, early on, about making a film 'that would impress the Jewish and non-Jewish world'.⁸⁶ She assiduously notes in her memoirs the screenings and prizes at international film festivals and the films shown on television beyond Israel,⁸⁷ and rates Israeli directors by their international recognition and ability to sell their films abroad.⁸⁸

Klausner had a vision for an international production of twelve films – one a year – that would depict the most dramatic and best-known stories in the Bible. Their gala openings would be at the close of Israel's Independence Day each year. These premieres in Jerusalem would become attractions, like the music festivals of Salzburg and Bayreuth. The audience would include not only people in Israel but also Jews and gentiles in the diaspora. To finance the enterprise there would be a worldwide subscription for the whole series, with tickets valid in any cinema throughout the globe.⁸⁹

Similarly Klausner's memories from past lives accrue into queer lineages that do not maintain impenetrable borders or unvarying identities.⁹⁰ In her past reincarnations the same love story seems to have been repeated, sometimes between men and women (either of whom might be 'manly' or 'womanly'), sometimes between men, and

91 Klausner, *Reincarnation*, p. 103.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 105–28.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

94 Klausner, *The Sources of Drama*, Vol. I, p. 131. See also Margot Klausner, 'Sipuro ha-mufla' shel Edgar Cayce' / 'The remarkable story of Edgar Cayce', *'Olam ha-mistorin: yarhon le-parapsikholohiah va-anafeah' / Mysterious Worlds: A Journal of Parapsychology*, no. 2 (1968), pp. 35–36, 42, and 'Ta'alumat Atlantis' / 'The mystery of Atlantis', *Mysterious Worlds*, no. 8 (1969), pp. 7, 10, 42.

95 Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, trans. Anthony Berris (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), pp. 271–72.

96 R. 'Azaryah, 'Sratim Germaniyim be-khol kolno'a' / 'German films in every movie theatre', *Ma'ariv*, 21 April 1958, p. 2; 'A. Trempay' [Alex Carmel], 'Mikhtav 'el ha-tsenzor' / 'A letter to the censor', *Ma'ariv*, 8 May 1959, p. 7; 'Hamutar le-hatsig sratim Germaniyim?' / 'Is it permissible to show German films?', *Ma'ariv*, 2 October 1958, p. 3; Seth S. King, 'Israel softens curbs on films', *New York Times*, 26 October 1958, late edition, p. 25; Uri Keisari, 'ha-Tsenzor yeha-hatulah' / 'The censor and the cat [la chatte]', *Ma'ariv*, 21 November 1958, p. 2.

sometimes between parents and children. In various incarnations Klausner was Jewish, Christian, a priest of Isis in ancient Egypt, a priestess in Atlantis and a hermit in the Himalayas who yearned to unite with the soul of another man. She does note some stability, but it is one that at most follows the 'logic' of Freudian primary processes: many of her reincarnations, she writes, begin with 'Mar' – Maria, Martha, Margerite, Marushka and, of course, Margot.⁹¹ This crossing of boundaries of gender, religion, geography and sexual orientation is not accepted amongst all those who believe in reincarnation. In Klausner's research on reincarnation among the Druze,⁹² she explains that they are certain 'that a Druze will always be reborn as a Druze and never into another people; that there is no change of sex throughout a person's reincarnations, that is to say: – a man will always be a man, a woman a woman'.⁹³ Klausner's slippage across identities is a far cry from such ethnic and gender stability. It furthermore gives no room to prioritizing Israel or suggesting that the Jewish tradition holds a unique place in history. If she had to find one source for the beliefs and achievements of human culture, Klausner would probably not point to Hellenism or Hebraism, to Athens, Rome or Jerusalem, but rather to the advanced civilization of Atlantis, which conveniently no longer exists, can be claimed by no extant people, and whose culture had already been spread throughout the globe in antiquity.⁹⁴

This desire to connect the State of Israel to the world did not exclude Germany, despite its problematic status in Israel after the Holocaust. Perhaps the most notorious episode in which Klausner tried to strengthen the ties between Germany and Israel was her attempt to co-produce a film with German associates in 1958. In 1952 the reparations agreement with West Germany, signed by an unofficial Israeli delegation, was the subject of contentious political debate in Israel. Official diplomatic ties would only be established in 1965, and much of the cooperation between the two countries before that was not made public and was extremely controversial whenever it was exposed.⁹⁵ German-language films had only recently reappeared on Israeli screens in the late 1950s and could only pass the national board of review if they were Swiss, Austrian, or German co-productions with other countries such as Italy and France. By 1958 some writers in the Israeli press were expressing alarm about the screening of films in German, wondering why they were not being censored.⁹⁶ At the end of that year protesters associated with organizations of former fighters against the Nazis picketed venues showing German-language films, and the issue continued to be a cause for concern with the Israeli public and government.⁹⁷

Paying no heed to the Israeli sensitivity on this topic, something she had personally already encountered,⁹⁸ Klausner became involved in a co-production with Germany and director Georg Wilhelm Pabst, who had made two films during the Third Reich that were viewed by some as having conveyed Nazi propaganda. His problematic status as a

- 97 Yehoshua Bitzur, 'Tutar hatsagat sratim dovre Germanit 'akh ye'ësru yevu' sratim mi-totseret Germanyah/'The showing of German-speaking films will be permitted but importing German-made films will be forbidden', *M'ariv*, 15 December 1958, p. 1; 'Be'ayat ha-sratim ha-Germaniyim nedonah ben šar ha-pnim u-netsige 'anaf ha-ko'no'a'/'The problem of German films has been discussed by the Minister of the Interior and representatives of the cinema branch', *Davar*, 16 December 1958, p. 4; 'Israelis pressure for ban on German films', *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 26 December 1958, p. 12; 'Abroad: Jerusalem', *Vochenblatt Canadian Jewish Daily*, 8 January 1959, p. 1; 'Protests prevent showing best film on Israel', *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 9 January 1959, p. 5; 'Shliah-Tsibur', 'Mah 'asur u-mah mutar?/'What is forbidden and what is allowed?', 'Igud 'anaf ha-ko'no'a: hoveret hasbarah/Cinema Branch Union: Information Booklet, no. 5 (1959), pp. 22–23.
- 98 See Lewy, *The German Jews and the Hebrew Theater*, pp. 145, 154–55.
- 99 Ze'ev Rav-Nof, 'Sofu shel Don Juan, review of Pabst's *Das Bekenntnis der Ina Kahr*, 1954'/'The end of a Don Juan', *Davar*, 21 September 1958, p. 5.
- 100 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, pp. 95–96.
- 101 Margot Klausner, 'Eulogie fuer G. W. Pabst', *Israel Nachrichten*, 14 March 1975, p. 10.
- 102 Yehoshu'a Gilbo'a, 'Natan he-hakham ye-hakhme Herzliya'/'Nathan the Wise and the Wise Men of Herzliya', *M'ariv*, 24 October 1958, p. 3.
- 103 'Ba'al hon Yehudi me-artsot habrit—ha-'hipuy' le-hasratat 'Natan he-hakham' be-Germanit 'al yede mekorav la-Natsim'/'A wealthy Jew from the United States – the "cover-up" for filming *Nathan the Wise* in German by an associate of the Nazis', *Herut*, 16 October 1958, p. 4.

filmmaker who had been, in the past, a 'brave fighter for brotherhood among peoples', and had made films such as *Westfront 1918* (1930) and *Kameradschaft/Comradeship* (1931) yet gone on to work within the Nazi regime, was known and reported in at least one film review in 1958 prior to the public announcement of Klausner's co-production.⁹⁹ According to Klausner's memoirs, she met film producer Seymour Nebenzahl while they happened to be staying at the same hotel in Berlin in the 1950s. Together they planned a film based on Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's eighteenth-century play *Nathan the Wise*, which would star Jewish actor Ernst Deutsch who was enjoying tremendous success playing the eponymous role of Nathan on the German stage at the time. They then contacted Pabst, a friend of Nebenzahl, to direct their project.¹⁰⁰ Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* is a paean to interfaith love and harmony in mediaeval Jerusalem. Lessing, whom Klausner describes as a 'great humanist',¹⁰¹ based the character of Nathan on his Jewish friend, the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, as was mentioned in the Israeli press at the time;¹⁰² according to Klausner, in an East German production his portrayal was modelled after Martin Buber.¹⁰³ In the play it is discovered that a woman thought to be Jewish is in fact the daughter of a Muslim father and has been baptized as a Christian. Her brother, not knowing her true identity, falls in love with her; he is a Christian Templar whose father was Muslim, and when he gets to meet the wise man who adopted his sister he learns that he does not hate the Jews after all.¹⁰⁴ Notions of blurred identities and appeasement – with a whiff of incest to boot – were not what many Jews in Israel at the time sought to associate with Germany. In Klausner's work, with her slippage across identities and her reincarnations, such ideas were par for the course.

When Klausner announced her initiative it was not well received, in part because it was believed to be an Israeli co-production with Germany, but also because of the accusation that Pabst had collaborated with the Nazis.¹⁰⁵ Israel's film and theatre board of review, which could approve or censor every film shown in the country, announced that it would not allow the screening of Pabst's motion picture (which had not yet been made).¹⁰⁶ Klausner described the attacks on her as a spoken and written witch-hunt that spanned the radio and the press (television broadcasting in Israel would only begin in the next decade).¹⁰⁷ One newspaper defined the project as an unbelievable infernal-diabolical caricature, a crude abuse of fresh memories at a time when the actual murderers were still walking among the living and the murdered millions were still lying before them. That the Germans would seek such a cultural-humanistic collaboration with Israel was understandable, the writer opined, but the eagerness of Klausner, her studios, and tacitly the Israeli government, to serve as the river in which Pabst could cleanse his tainted conscience and purify his dubious past was a shameful and tragic joke.¹⁰⁸

Particularly diligent and knowledgeable was Ze'ev Rav-Nof, the film critic for *Davar*, the daily newspaper of the Histadrut workers' union, and a member of Israel's censorship board.¹⁰⁹ He quoted from the *Knaurs*

- 104 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, trans. William Taylor (London: Cassell, 1893).
- 105 'Bamay sratim Germani yavo' le-hakhri'a be-farashat 'Natan he-hakham'/'German film director to arrive and decide in the *Nathan the Wise* affair', *Má'ariv*, 12 October 1958, p. 8; 'ha-Bamay Pabst, merashe ha-film ha-Geremani bime Hitler, la-árets: Yenaseh le-shakhne'a shelo' hayah Natsi.../'The director Pabst, one of the heads of German film during the Hitler period, to [come to] the country [Israel]: will try to persuade that he was not a Nazi...', *Herut*, 13 October 1958, p. 4; R. 'Azaryah, 'Lailah lailah/'Night after night, *Má'ariv*, 16 October 1958, p. 2; Ze'ev Rav-Nof, 'Seret Yísre'eli?/'An Israeli film?', *Davar*, 19 October 1958, p. 5.
- 106 'Natan he-hakham' be-vimuy Pabst ye'aser le-hatsagah/'The screening of *Nathan the Wise*, directed by Pabst, will be forbidden', *Davar*, 14 October 1958, p. 3.
- 107 Klausner, 'Eulogie fuer G. W. Pabst'.
- 108 Gilbo'a, 'Nathan the Wise'.
- 109 Rav-Nof is listed as a member of the Israeli film and theatre review board that was concerned with German films and made the decision not to permit any cooperation with Pabst in Raphael Bashan, 'ha-Tsenezor L. Grinshpoon: 'Af seret Germani lo' mtsag ba-árets/'The censor L. Grinshpoon: no German Film is being shown in the country', *Má'ariv*, 5 December 1958, p. 10; he is also listed as a member of the board in Ruth Bondy, 'ha-knisah li-mvugarim bilvad/'Adults only', *Dvar hashavu'a*, 3 August 1960, pp. 6–7, 11.
- 110 See Rune Waldekrantz and Verner Arpe, *Knaurs Buch vom Film* (Munich and Zurich: Droemersch Verlaganstalt Th. Knauer Nachf., 1956), p. 290, and Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, revised

Buch vom Film as well as from the 1949 edition of Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*.¹¹⁰ These sources portrayed Pabst as having accommodated the Nazis in at least one of his films during the Third Reich – *Paracelsus* (1943) – and Rav-Nof asked whether the director, who was 'given a denazification' in Austria and then made a pro-Jewish film, should be awarded a denazification in Israel as well.¹¹¹

In her memoirs Klausner writes that she knew 'from the first' that she had lost the battle;¹¹² however, she did not quite seem ready for defeat. She held press conferences and noted that after the war Pabst had made a pro-Jewish film (*Der Prozeß/The Trial* [1948]) and a film on Hitler's downfall (*Der letzte Akt/The Last Ten Days* [1955]).¹¹³ She wrote to Nebenzahl several times, urging him to send her material clearing Pabst as well as to contact the Israeli mission in Cologne on the matter (unlike Rav-Nof, she herself had not at the time seen Pabst's Nazi-era films).¹¹⁴ Klausner also wrote to Rotha, whose book *The Film Till Now* was used by Rav-Nof. She explained to him the situation and that she believed that the accusations against Pabst were erroneous. She asked Rotha to write a letter with his opinion, hopefully correcting his earlier statement in the book, so that he could thus prevent the derailing of an 'international film project, intended to strengthen the bonds of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" amongst the peoples'.¹¹⁵ Although Klausner tried to clarify the issue,¹¹⁶ and produced her evidence to the press and public, the detractors were not convinced. Rav-Nof wrote that Klausner had sent Israeli newspapers Rotha's response, which explained that the section in his book about Pabst during the Third Reich was written by his collaborator Richard Griffith, while Rotha had his doubts about the issue and believed that *Paracelsus* was a parody of Goebbels. Rav-Nof was not, however, concerned with the disagreement between Rotha and Griffith; he had seen *Paracelsus* twice and was certain that it glorified Nazi ideology.¹¹⁷ Either way, Rav-Nof concludes, if we must work with the Germans on a film, it would be better to find a director about whom not even a shadow of a doubt exists.¹¹⁸ An earlier newspaper piece explained that the whole squabble among the Israeli Jews about the degree to which Pabst served the murderous monster Goebbels, and whether he did so willingly or was coerced into being a Nazi, was ludicrous. There were hundreds and thousands of Pabsts and types of Pabsts: those who followed Hitler enthusiastically and those who did so by force; those who were one hundred per cent Nazi, or half Nazi, or a third or a quarter Nazi; those who served with a pure heart and those who served with no heart at all. 'All of these Pabsts of various types together are not worth the single teardrop of a mother, the grief of one Jewish orphan, the trace of the groan of one of our babies', the article argues passionately. 'All of the various Pabsts are not worth telling one of the survivors of the ghettos or death-camps: "restrain yourself, don't get so worked up"'.¹¹⁹ The precise facts that Klausner was trying to clarify about Pabst or the different possible interpretations of his Nazi-era films were irrelevant. For many

and enlarged edition, with an additional section by Richard Griffith (London: Vision, 1949), pp. 582–84.

- 111 Ze'ev Rav-Nof, 'ha-Bamay hameyo'ad shel 'Nathan he-hakham' shitef-pe'ulah 'im ha-Natsim'/'The presumptive director of *Nathan the Wise* collaborated with the Nazis', *Davar*, 14 October 1958, p. 3.
- 112 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, p. 98.
- 113 Rav-Nof, 'An Israeli film?'
- 114 Margot Klausner to Mr Nebenzahl, letter 8 October 1958; cable 12 October 1958; letter 16 October 1958; all in *Nathan der Weise* files, 4.3-05/17-0, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. The Israeli purchasing mission in Cologne functioned as its representative in Germany prior to the establishment of official diplomatic ties.
- 115 Margot Klausner to Paul Rotha, the British Film Academy, 4 November 1958, *Nathan der Weise* files, 4.3-05/17-0, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
- 116 See her letter to the press in Margot Klausner, 'Hoda'at 'ulepene hasratat ha-Yisra'el'/'Announcement by the Israel Motion Picture Studios', *M'ariv*, 30 October 1958.
- 117 On *Paracelsus*, see Régine-Mihal Friedman, 'Ecce Ingenium Teutonicum: *Paracelsus* (1943)', in Eric Rentschler (ed.), *The Films of G. W. Pabst: An Extraterritorial Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 184–96, and Sheila Johnson, 'Ideological ambiguity in G.W. Pabst's *Paracelsus* (1943)', *Monatshefte*, vol. 83, no. 2 (1991), pp. 104–26.
- 118 Ze'ev Rav-Nof, 'Hemshekh hapulmus 'al 'bdot Pabst'/'The continuation of the controversy over Pabst', *Davar*, 23 November 1958, p. 5.
- 119 Gilbo'a, 'Nathan the Wise and the Wise Men of Herzliya'.
- 120 Margot Klausner, 'Rishme masa'/'Journey impressions', *Cinema Branch Union*:

Israelis at the time, a co-production with Germany and a celebration of Pabst were, if not utterly intolerable, at the very least far too early and impossible within their generation.

Pabst never came to Israel and the film was not made. By mid 1959, in a column she wrote for an internal industry journal about potential co-productions, Klausner clarified that while West Germany should have been listed alongside France, Austria and Yugoslavia as one of the most suitable countries for cinematic co-productions with Israel, it was not included because of the 'political relations'.¹²⁰ She had not, however, ceased her collaboration with Pabst. In later writings Klausner expresses her admiration for him, explaining that he was 'the father of modern realism in the European film' and directed, among others, *Die freudlose Gasse/The Joyless Street* (1925) and *Die 3 Groschen-Oper/The Threepenny Opera* (1931), and made anti-Nazi and pro-Jewish films after the war.¹²¹ While giving up on filming *Nathan the Wise*, Klausner continued working with Pabst on a different project: a cinematic adaptation of her novel about Sappho of Lesbos, for which they wrote a screenplay treatment; it too was never filmed.¹²² In 1975, during a week of screenings of German silent films in Israel, Klausner published a eulogy for Pabst, who had died in 1967. She had by then seen Pabst's two films from the Nazi era, which she describes without acknowledging that they might have been related to Nazi propaganda, concluding her discussion of Paracelsus (the historical figure more than the film) by portraying him as a soldier who fought for freedom of the spirit. She still expresses some hope that their joint screenplay about Sappho might one day be produced and perhaps even shot in Israel, where Lesbos could be reconstructed 'marvellously' (*herrlich*).¹²³ Although Pabst was no longer alive, Klausner did not abandon all hope of realizing in Israel a joint project that would be connected with one of the great filmmakers of pre-Nazi Germany and would contribute to bringing Israeli art into contact with non-Jewish drama.

For Klausner, moving pictures, together with her other interests such as theatre and parapsychology, could work to serve Israel and Zionism, but not by uncritically delivering propaganda and visually translating well-known Zionist bromides. Rather they were part of an effort to create Israeli Jewish culture and drama, synthesizing ostensibly opposite poles with a view to contributing to world culture. This entailed understanding the significance of a universal, transcultural truth for art and projected images, a hierarchy of moving-image technologies that begins with talking pictures and culminates with border-crossing satellite transmissions, and undoing the Jewish tradition's patriarchy and monotheism to clear the way for the development of drama, which demanded unearthing its feminine elements and the forging of transnational ties.

Throughout this essay I have assumed that Klausner's theory can be no less complex and revelatory than our own conceptual frameworks, and I have used it to explain her work. While Klausner believed she could recall, imagine and elucidate past and distant cultures, she did not try to reduce them to her own world or to downplay differences. If we are

Information Booklet, no. 6,
24 July 1959, pp.12–13.

- 121 Klausner, *The Dream Industry*, pp. 96–97.
- 122 Ibid., p. 99. Klausner's correspondence with Pabst and Grete Basch-Freund from 1959, after the *Nathan the Wise* episode, are in the *Sappho von Lesbos* files, 4.3-05/17-0, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. The treatment is in CZA, A493/22.
- 123 Klausner, 'Eulogie fuer G. W. Pabst'.

- 124 Jean Epstein, 'Magnification', trans. Stuart Liebman, *French Film Theory and Criticism a History/Anthology, Vol. I: 1907–1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 235–40; Bill Nichols (ed.), *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

to follow her, it would be wrong to attempt to force our own categories onto her work and to ignore her originality, contradictions, silences and occasional outlandishness. Although she was very much a Zionist she was also critical of some aspects of Zionism and of the Israeli establishment, and did not possess many of the traits attributed to the movement. She told stories about women and took on managerial roles but did not seem particularly committed to empowering women in general, while her female characters (including herself in her memoirs) were often featured in melodramatic tales of suffering and failure. She never used her claim that the same soul can be reincarnated as either male or female to formulate a detailed theory of sexual orientation or gender.

Does Klausner offer us an early instance of 'Israeli film theory' from beyond the Euro-American centre of the discipline? Her ideas no doubt developed as a response to the demands of trying to create drama and cinema in a Jewish state and in its service. But Klausner's desire to pioneer a new culture for Jews through foreign collaborations and international recognition, as well as her parapsychological fugues into distant reincarnations, repeatedly entangled her in complex transnational networks in which the Jewish point of view could be sublated and Israel could be relegated to a peripheral node. If we are to follow her theory, it would be difficult to view it as simply 'Israeli'. Her ideas on magnification and the cinema screen might bring to mind Jean Epstein's essay and her interest in the occult could be comparable with Maya Deren's turn to possession in her theory and art.¹²⁴ Biographically Klausner was hardly a product of the indigenous Sabra or Palestinian world, and she did little to mask this fact. She remained attached to her Berlin education and never severed her ties from German culture. In that context, we might view her in relation to other Central European Jewish exiles in this period, such as Rudolf Arnheim, Béla Balázs, Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner. Like them, her connections to filmmaking and cinema were diverse (including writing fiction, screenplays, criticism, theory and history) and like some of them she had an interest in Hellenism and attributed a fascination with the occult to German culture and particularly the Weimar era. It suggests not only that the history of Israeli cinema goes through Berlin and Frankfurt, but also that a sojourn in Tel Aviv can add a new perspective on these non-Israeli Jewish intellectuals. Klausner certainly upsets some of the ways in which her generation has been characterized in the history of Israeli cinema. Perhaps her most important legacy is to show how even a pioneer in the service of creating a new national cinema can question that very term.

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