

ment still intended to arrest him and put him on trial. There was the writer Adam Baruch, who devoted a chapter in his last best-seller to Maxim. For Baruch, Maxim served as a metaphor for the Israeli experience; he wrote that Maxim was a “poet, revolutionary, and freedom fighter.”

Also attending were Knesset members Azmi Bishara and Jamal Zahalka. From another era, there were the young people, including Yousef Asfour, a young Israeli Arab. When he would tell Maxim that he felt more Palestinian than Israeli, Maxim would protest, “But you are Israeli!” For Maxim, being Israeli did not mean being Jewish or a Zionist.

There were many other intellectuals, poets, and political activists, many of whom participated in readings of several of Maxim’s poems and short stories. Abu Mazen, the President of the Palestine National Authority, and Dr. Ramzi Khouri, who had been a close confidant and former director of the Presidential office of Yasser Arafat, both sent letters of condolence, which were read both in Arabic and in Hebrew at the ceremony [SEE Boxes, pages 42 and 43].

Maxim is survived by his sister, Evit Ghilan, and many



Maxim Ghilan visits Lyndon LaRouche (right), December 2004. EIR editor Jeffrey Steinberg is at center.

EIRNS/William Salisbury

friends and collaborators who will miss him dearly.

As Maxim said in his last interview to *EIR*, published on June 18, 2004: “It has been a very adventurous, and very frustrating life, but a very satisfying one, because I did precisely what I thought I had to do. There are very few people in the world who can say that.”

‘For Maxim, writing poetry was a matter of life and death’

An interview with Arik Eisenberg

Israeli poet Arik Eisenberg, founder of the Israeli literary review “Emda,” was a close collaborator of Maxim Ghilan beginning 1994. Since the 1980’s, he has published under the literary name Arik Aleph. Mr. Eisenberg’s books include “Avenu” (“Confession/Announcement”) (1994), “Map of a Beloved Homeland” (2001), and “An Evening After the War” (2003). His “A Wild Wanderer,” poems 1995-2005, will be released later this year. Mr. Eisenberg was interviewed by telephone for Fidelio by Dean Andromidas on Aug. 25, 2005.

Fidelio: Mr. Eisenberg, please tell us a bit about yourself and your relationship to Maxim and his poetry.

Arik Eisenberg: I first met Maxim in 1994, shortly after he returned to Israel from exile. After his return, he asked his long-time friend Professor Gabriel Moked, who is the editor of the oldest and leading literary review in Israel, called *Ah’shav*, which in Hebrew means “Now,” published since the late 1950’s, who had also published

one of Maxim’s books of poems in the early 1960’s, called *Ha’ed*, which means “Witness,”—to arrange for him to meet with some young poets. Moked chose me and a couple of other poets to meet with Maxim. This was the first time I met with him. He had just returned from exile, and was anxious to know all about Israeli poetry during the decades he was away.

Maxim took great interest, not only in what was hap-

pening here in Israel in the political side, but mainly in the literary circles, poetry in particular. And, in a very short while, he took interest not only in what we had to tell him about Israeli poetry nowadays, but in us, in me as a person, and in what I was doing. This was something I found very unique in Maxim, that when he talked with you, he seemed quite—no, not quite, he seemed *completely* committed to you, very interested in what you were doing, and how you could improve and fulfill yourself.

In 1995, a few friends of mine and I established a new literary review in Israel, called *Emda*, which is still publishing today. “Emda” in Hebrew means “position” or “standing,” and we invited Maxim to participate in this literary review. Shortly thereafter, Maxim himself established a political review, called *Mitan*. And this review of his, *Mitan*, had a literary section, and he invited me to participate in it.

Of course, we belonged to different generations: Maxim began to publish poetry in the early 1950’s, I began to publish poetry in the late ’80’s. But, in the last few years we became very close. It was on Maxim’s initiative, and I think that he found, and I found the same, affinities and similarities in our attitude towards political issues, as well as poetical ones.

Fidelio: Can you tell us something about Maxim’s place in the tradition of Israeli poetry and literature?

Eisenberg: Maxim was a very unique and special person. In fact, when we established this literary review in 1995, the only person from his generation that we could have a dialogue with was Maxim. I’ll refer to this later, but Maxim began writing poetry in the early 1950’s. He was part of the group now called the literary “Generation of Statehood,” or the “Statehood Generation,” the generation of writers who began to publish around the time of the establishment of the State of Israel in the early 1950’s. He was among a group of leading poets that included David Avidan, Natan Zach, Yahuda Amichai, and Maxim Ghilan. There were a few others, but this is just to mention the very best. He was, unfortunately, the only poet, the only writer from his generation that we, the new generation, could communicate with and have a dialogue with so easily and fluently. This had to do with his personality.

Now, the Statehood Generation set the standard for modern Hebrew poetry and literature until today. Before the State of Israel was estab-

lished in 1948, poetry was mainly influenced by Russian, and a little bit by French poetry. Now, Maxim and his generation were mainly influenced in the 1950’s and 1960’s by Anglo-Saxon poetry, American and English poets like W.H. Auden or T.S. Eliot. And a little by German poetry, especially Brecht.

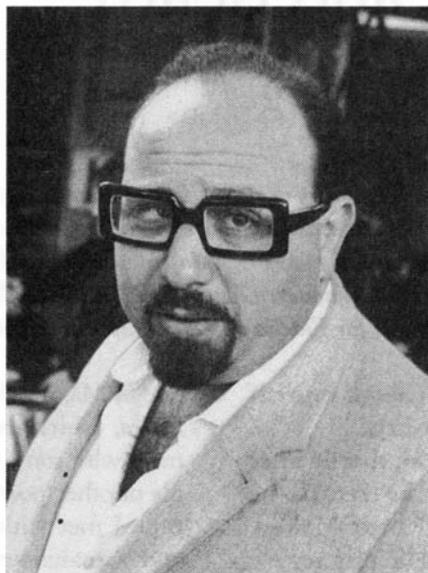
In the 1930’s and ’40’s, most of the poets wrote in verse, while the new poets from the ’50’s on wrote in what I would call free style.

There is another interesting point to make here: That the poetry before Israel was born in 1948, was more committed to political issues, especially the Zionist issue, than the generation that followed from Maxim onward. Maxim, from his beginning as a poet, was committed completely to his political beliefs.

So, Maxim’s place in the tradition of Israeli poetry is of extreme importance. As I said before, he was one of those poets who set the standard of modern Israeli poetry and literature. Unfortunately—and maybe this was one of the reasons he was so beloved by young poets like me—he never belonged to any establishment in Israel, and he paid a price for this. The fact that he did not belong to any university, to any literary establishment, meant that he was later neglected. Although there is a consensus that Maxim was an important poet, a true poet, an original poet, he remained largely neglected as a poet in Israel. This was also due to the fact that for many years he was not here. But even after his return, he refused to participate or to gain from the establishment, to gain from the wealth of the establishment. And that shows his credibility as a person and as a poet. He couldn’t be bought in any way. And I think we can say he was neglected as a poet and, of

course, he was quite hurt by this in the last years, that he was still neglected, even after his return to Israel.

Part of it was due to his political activities. Maxim was acting in defiance when he was talking to PLO representatives in the 1970’s. It was something that in Israel he could be thrown into jail for—unlike nowadays, when we are talking with everyone. So, he wasn’t fully appreciated for his political innovations, initiatives, and he wasn’t fully appreciated as a poet. This was mainly due to the fact that he could not be bought; he just refused to take any part in the Israeli Zionist establishment, even after his return to the homeland. So he was unfortunately neglected, although accepted as one of the



A young Maxim Ghilan, poet and political activist of Israel’s “Statehood Generation.”

important and original poets.

I can give you one little example. The leading Israeli left-wing newspaper is called *Ha'aretz*. It is a very good newspaper (I read it every day), and Maxim, not long after his return to Israel, decided to write an article, or a letter to the editor, which he wanted *Ha'aretz* to publish. And *Ha'aretz*, although a left-wing newspaper, refused to publish Maxim's letter or article. And I think it says a lot about *Ha'aretz*—because Maxim's activities, as well as some of his poetry, called for *action*.

Most of the people who read *Ha'aretz* in Israel are, of course, linked to universities, to economics, to political circles, these are the kind of people who read and publish in *Ha'aretz*. But what *Ha'aretz* does, in fact, is to say to the one who reads it, "Oh, I see these are horrible things that are happening in the occupied territories," for example, and then the reader goes on with his life. Now Maxim, in his poetry, especially in his poetry, but as well in his political activities, called for *action*. Someone who reads Maxim's political poetry very carefully—well, when I read Maxim's political poetry, it makes me uneasy. I just can't continue with ordinary life. But when you read *Ha'aretz*, you say "Oh, it is so terrible what is happening, but it's okay, I am part of the group that thinks that, yes, it is terrible, so we can go on living."

The point I want to make is, when Maxim's letter was refused by *Ha'aretz*, this was the same pattern which applied to his poetry. When one reads Maxim's political poetry, and not just his political poetry, something bothers you; you cannot just go on living the way you live in Israel, reading Maxim's poetry. One of his lines in his last book says, he would like that sex, not the death of sons, will rule this land. Sex, not the death of sons, will rule this land. Now, this is something that is not acceptable even in *Ha'aretz*.

Maxim was most original as a poet, in the way he could combine and mingle the public and private domains. What distinguished Maxim from any other poet of his generation is, that his poetry derives from his love, his passion, his desire for the land, for the country. His love of the land, of the country, was the main factor. Even though he was in exile for so many years, he still continued to write in Hebrew, and it was this love, this passion for the country and the land, which made him such a credible critic of Israeli society and Israeli politics. Because, for Maxim, writing poetry was not just an arena for producing aesthetics, or ethical views, or even ideological views. For Maxim, writing poetry was a question of life and death, that I know for sure. And he was most original in his ability, as I said before, to combine the private and public domain, and when you read his erotic or his last poems, you find that he uses a masculine termi-

nology, and while writing political poems, he uses a lot of compassion and tenderness.

Fidelio: What do you see as the relationship between Maxim's political development and activity, and his poetry? For instance, how did his own movement from the Nationalist camp to the peace camp affect his poetry?

Eisenberg: You know that before Israel was established in 1948, Maxim was part of a terrorist group, one of the extremist groups, the Stern Gang. Now, what I can see in it was, that Maxim was always a freedom fighter. In his views he was always extremist, and he always fought, first of all, for the underprivileged. Before the Israeli state was born, the Jews in Israel were the most underprivileged, so he fought for them the hardest way he could. After the state was born, Jews in Israel, especially after '67, were no longer the most underprivileged. The Arabs became the victims, so he not only identified with the victims, but he fought for their freedom and their equality. So, we can draw a straight line from his activity before the State of Israel was born as a member of the Stern Gang, until he became a member of the peace camp. He was first of all a freedom fighter, a fighter for freedom.

By the way, we must say that, nowadays, political issues are not very much reflected in Israeli poetry and literature, and of course this was one of the reasons why Maxim was a little bit neglected. Although there are a few professional poets who write what you would call political poetry, Maxim, in his political poetry, differed from any other political poet I know in Israel, in the way he gave a new dimension to his political poetry. This dimension, I mean a mythical dimension, a timeless dimension, he gave his political poetry—a visionary dimension, which is lacking in all other political poetry that is written in Israel today.

You know, in Israel today a lot of people, even some of my friends, are seeking passports from foreign countries, mainly the European Community passport, or a Canadian passport, or an Australian passport. But Maxim did just the opposite. While others seek a foreign passport, he sought the passport of the State of Israel. And, while in exile for so many years, he insisted on writing in Hebrew, and the return to his homeland meant a lot to him. This goes to the credibility of his poetry and his writings in general. By the way, if I had to define his poetry, although it contains a lot of love of his country, at the same time, he *despised* it. He said, this is his homeland, Israel, but he refers to Israel also as an enemy state, an enemy land of his. This dual attitude is found in many of his poems: That he is both in love with Israel, the state and the land, and at the same time, he despised the politics, he despised the establishment.

Unfortunately, I myself am not as committed politically as Maxim, not as explicitly a political poet as Maxim was. But then, he was a very unique person, if you knew him (and I understand you did know him, Dean). Unfortunately, he is neglected because of his political activities and his poetical activities. He paid a price for his activities, a real price. Many of us who are holding the right positions, etc., are not willing to take— He was truly committed to his beliefs; not that we are not, we are. But

he was willing to pay the price. He could have been a gigantic figure in literature here in Israel, and in the political arena. But he preferred to be true to his beliefs.

Fidelio: That is exactly true. There was no separation of his political from his personal life.

Eisenberg: Exactly. That is what I feel about his poetry. There is no separation between him and his poetry, and him and his political views.

Five Poems by Maxim Ghilan

One of the leading Israeli poets of the "Statehood Generation," Maxim Ghilan was awarded the Prime Minister Levi Eshkol Prize for Literary Excellence in December 2004.

Patriotic Song

So the need is strong and steady to write down
and say it all
To firm up and to have ready the completed
protocol
Jogged down fast in helpless hustling on a sand
dune's shifting wall.

So it's always good to create, to start things, and
do some sowing
even when your seed is salt and from it no fruit be
growing
Not just swim: a mighty geyser, a tall fountain
proudly blowing.

Loving passes, always passes, writings stay as
carved in stone.
All deeds of graceful love-trysts fade away and are
soon gone.
So do let us, in cold stables, sadly rut, just flesh
and bone.

Rumors run wild: only stronger than the organ in
the wedge
is plain dying. So let's live on, at the grave's sharp
dusty edge.
In the ways of Hebrew ancients and according to
their pledge.

Stand as one. The most important of all useless
fights and facts
always, always are those doings drawing curtains,
the last act.
Let's be clever, never get us a black cat sold in a
sack.

Let's not blame our desire, when the deed ends
and is done
like a ring inside the pocket of a boy, stood up,
alone.
Come, let's go back to the battle. Let's begin. The
sword is honed.

—adapted from Hebrew by the author

Leaving

She is leaving. She is thieving
away and he has not been told
yet
But the cat is awake, the cat watches
the threshold. Bold
songs draw her away
to the shadows. Her drive
is the need to survive. No star, no lord alive

will keep her from running away.
Yet her old master still holds mighty sway.
She runs to her savior.

Behold
the hammering in her head
Instead of haven, fearful clouds.
Yet isles say yes, grey rocks