

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

stand out from troubled seas of pain.
Look at her nipple sticking out
Under thin cloth. It is plain
to see she's on her way
at the very last moment, on the very last day.

She leaves behind a life and packs
slowly a cheap canvas bag. Her hand

Short Leave

An urban girl-soldier strides along the boulevard
On her shoulder a huge rucksack full of dirty
clothing
Smiling to herself, she shifts the straps
Cute idiot
She whispers to herself
Was it a love-memento?
He came, full of pride, brought her a gift:
The ear
Of a man caught in battle.

A young girl-soldier strides happily
A huge bag full of dirty linen on her back
On her way to her mom's home
To the washing machine
Along Nordau boulevard on a Friday's eve
Far from him.

—*adapted from Hebrew by the author, 10/15/04*

Marching Through Virginia

for Jeff and Michele

In the Old Courthouse, in Virginia,
Guests sit before white-tablecloths
Ladies in many-ribboned lacy dresses
Somewhat balding gentlemen, impeccably suited
Men with aggressive beer-bellies
And sexy women with too much make-up.
The giants also dine here
Six feet two, slicked-down blond hair
Slim from obsessive running, each morning
On the Potomac bridge
French-style food served on huge plates
With no particular taste, emphasis
On quantity, not quality, to justify

mindlessly strokes the small beast's fur. She courts
her future. Yet her thoughts
are for him, who owned her in days past,
She runs away and leaves. At last.
Yes, but the cat
blue-eyed and sad stares at the Mistress
as she steps over her doorstep walking fast.

—*adapted from Hebrew by the author*

Two Small Tigers

Two small tigers, sleek with living joy
Walk along King George street
Sharpen their claws on an African ficus tree
Transplanted to a Tel Aviv alley.

Traditional black stripes
Twin green glances
One daring, one less forward
Softly cruel, gliding on—
Not quite yet women, soft and fresh
Tiptoeing high-heeled into our hearts
Along a street in Tel Aviv.

—*adapted from Hebrew by the author*

Absurd high prices. Californian wines
Too-mild mustard.
Small talk:
The right to bear concealed weapons
And the duty to shoot down
Whoever steals into your home.
(Six rooms, garden, your dog and Mitsubishi
but not a single magnolia blossom.)
I have my own hand-gun
She exults, her satisfaction wholesome.
Me too. Me too. Me too.
Her manicured hands hold
Fork and knife, dangerously steady.

In the Old Courthouse, in Virginia
A beefsteak stain on my thick napkin.
The blood is brown, has dried
Quickly
With the passing of time. Talk
Sliced up by laughter and smiles
Self-satisfaction and hate
For anything alien. Down-curving lips
Hint
At hidden contempt
For whoever lives
Across the sea. As for me
My host says, I'd like them to stay
Away
Among themselves. Anyway
In private, as in public
I say: the Republic
Is my country's cause and goal.
I like
To spend my time with someone
Like myself. No doubt.
(I do not shout, *Skool, à la santé
De la République.*)

He gets up, walks
To the shiny restroom
Along the walls of a past
Covered with Mahogany, and I remember
Bert Brecht and Kurt Weil.

In a while:
We're in the South. (His mouth
grim.) Here it's all grass and tree. Free
Far from New York.
Washington's friend, Lee
Did not commit treason
Came back, throwing caution
To the winds to fight for his plantation
His family and slaves.

Before the opulent eating-house
That once was the Old Courthouse
In Virginia stands a memorial:
A brazen soldier, a volunteer
In the Confederate army.
Old-fashioned rifle, still-sharp bayonet
Brazen too, well-met
In this Southern town. A funny hat.
Locals and visitors
From the North throw
Nostalgic glances at the past. At last
They leave behind Dixie's brave soldier

Who fought and died for the right
To own slaves.

In the Old Courthouse, in Virginia
You get a huge menu full of goodies
With fancy names, all with the same taste.
Distracted,
I listen to far-away thunder
Bearing on us
From darkened skies, in Iraq
Or just Alaska.
The Weatherman has not decided
Yet.

In the prestigious eating-house
That was the Old Courthouse, in Virginia
Time seems to have frozen
The past for two hundred years. In the South
As in the South. But on the second floor
A banquet hall is named
In honor of General Sherman
Who invaded the state at the head
Of the Unionist army with
—God forbid us—Black
Soldiers, burning and looting
Plantations, slaughtering
White settlers, rebels
Against the Union. And in my brain
Like soft rain
The old marching song with its refrain
Glory, Glory Hallelujah
That still shatters complacent Virginia
Confronting the South's God-given right,
Still in good shape
That says it is all right to own, to rape
To kill and take
Who is not white.

Regardless the mess. History
Is deep and long
And Sherman's marching song
Twists down in the same whirlpool
With that of
The little Confederate soldier
Into the State's mixed bloodstream
Where the only color is red
Into Black Memory's dream
When a former slave remembers,
When he was master of all he saw.

Leesburg, Virginia, February 22, 2005
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