

Uri Zvi Grinberg: The Politics of the Avant-Garde¹
The Hebrew-Zionist Revolution - 1924-1929

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I could have been unto my tribe and my land as a
harp,
singing of friendship, love and the desires of free
man.
But I am not; I am in greater contempt than
a mad jackal
In the vineyards of my brethren in Judea [...].

Time has poured blood on my eyes, on my hands
on my pen,
It has injected blood in the combinations of my
letters:
It is now in my song.

Sefer hakritrug veba'emunah (The Book of Denunciation and Faith), 50,10.

Uri Zvi Grinberg: The Grammar of Zionism

Uri Zvi Grinberg (1894-1981) lived at the crossroads of Jewish history, at a time when the Zionist movement was ambitiously caught in a process of bringing about a radical transformation aimed to alter the landscape and map of the history of the Jewish people and the individual, creating a new people and a new man.

Of all Hebrew poets in the twentieth century Uri Zvi Grinberg was the most political-ly committed. His political passion and struggle were at the very foundation of his poetry, profoundly imbued with the sense of his mission, rejecting violently an aesthetic value, an indwelling essence, detached from ideological interest and the messiness of history.

His writings blend intellectual sophistication with a powerful appeal to the emotions. They express his profound rancorous disillusionment with modern Western Christian civilization, termed "the kingdom of the cross," in which attraction and repulsion were intermingled and which he blamed for the horrors against the Jews. At the same time he nourished an obsessive revulsion against the Jew-hating Arabs, termed "the kingdom of the crescent", and hostility towards the international and Jewish bourgeoisie. This guided

¹ This article is a shortened version of one of the first chapters in Judith Winther's thesis, entitled "The Politics of Avant-Garde, Political Messianism and the Hebrew-Zionist Revolution. Uri Zvi Grinberg, the poet of the fractured politics and poetics of extremity. His writings in Eretz Israel between the two World Wars."

If not otherwise mentioned the translations of the Hebrew texts are mine. * All concepts marked with an asterisk are discussed fully in the main body of the thesis.

him directly and uncompromisingly into a total identification with the collective struggle of his people, interwoven with an explosive longing for an eschatological redemption.

Uri Zvi Grinberg saw himself as a member of a revolutionary cultural-political avant-garde, helping to bring about - through the medium of art - a fundamental reorientation of Hebrew society in Eretz Israel, understanding Zionism as a *Hebrew*² revolutionary movement tied with national-political messianism - an eschatological movement which "would establish a new Jewish culture in Eretz Israel that would revitalize and refine the soul of the nation to its former purity". (Shavit 1988a, 46.)

Uri Zvi Grinberg was drawn towards radical Zionist politics: active Hebrew messianism and messianic Hebraism. He understood Zionism as a secular messianic movement, trying to turn it into a political ideology, and trying to propose not only a program for a new understanding of Jewish history but also new guiding principles for Zionist activity.

Uri Zvi Grinberg was concerned with and focused on secular national messianism, meaning the redemption of a national body, rather than with individual messianism, which concerns individual redemption or with utopian cosmic eschatology, dealing with changes in the construct of the world.

Questions as to the real meaning of Messianism, its purposes, and the nature of the national redemption following the coming of the Messiah, have in the course of the generations become dominant and controversial theological and philosophical issues.

The emergence of Zionism, which contained an unmistakable "messianic" element, in the sense that it spoke of the redemption of the Jewish people in Eretz Israel, has at times been interpreted as a messianic phenomenon, which explains the ambivalent attitudes towards Messianism as an idea and a phenomenon.³

The attitude towards messianism and the relationship between modern Zionism and the messianic idea in its various manifestations is, thus, a highly complex issue which has formed the subject of historiosophic and historical discussions almost from the earliest days of Zionism. The question of the messianic source of Zionism, on the one hand, and the messianic contents of Zionism, on the other, continues to form the subject of vigorous polemics and research.⁴

Uri Zvi Grinberg's Zionist-messianic view must be perceived as different from all other opinions and streams within Zionism, as it understands the returning of the people to its land and its language as being the beginning of redemption, that is to say, an

² *Hebrew* or *Hebraism* is understood here as secular Zionism or secular national Judaism - that is, as Shavit puts it: "Secular nationalism or Hebraism consider culture and history and not religion as the focal point of the spiritual life of the Jews in their national homeland. Feeling distanced and alienated from the Diaspora Jew" (Y. Shavit 1987, 3).

³ In this context we should remember that national redemption, as understood by the Jewish people, differed from any other struggle for national liberation, since the realization of political freedom had to be preceded by a return to Zion. In other words, Jews first had to return to their historical homeland from the countries among which they had been dispersed, known as the ingathering of the Jewish exiles and the national redemption of Eretz Israel.

⁴ See, Y. Shavit 1991, 100-127; H. Hever 1991, 128-158; G. Scholem 1971; N. Lucas 1975, 21

actual implementation of the value system possessed by the Jew as the chosen one and the carrier of a mission, and whose essence is absolute and not relative-temporary. Uri Zvi Grinberg states that the messianic idea was in the heart of every Jew, even beneath the threshold of conscious awareness. " *Leverur svara ahat matmedet* (Clarifying One Steadfast Notion), Davar, 17/6 1925.

According to Grinberg's point of view the redemption of both the people and the Hebrew homeland is the fundament for the establishment of "The Third Kingdom of Israel" as a Jewish national end in itself and as an essential layer towards the redemption of the world in the Kingdom of God in the future.

The Zionist revolution is generally understood as "normalizing" the Jewish people, i.e. enabling the now dispersed Jews to realize their distinctive, inescapable national destiny. Essential to secular political Zionism was a thorough rejection of the political structure, economic relations and religious culture of East European Jewry. In principle, a *negation of the Exile - shlilat hagolah*. The very image of the "ghetto Jew" represented the essence of what was corrupt and soiling in Jewish life. Nor was this even a viable community, according to the Zionist analysis. Eroded by assimilation on the one flank and exposed to the ravages of antisemitism on the other, European Jewry was thought to be destined sooner or later either to wither or be swept away. The society being created in the Yishuv was conceived of as a new departure. The new kind of Jew, who was a citizen of this new reality, *was no longer named Jew but Hebrew*.⁵ He consciously defined his stance toward the world of power and the question of self-defence as the antithetics of the passive creatures stigmatized in H. N. Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter".⁶

Hebrew was regarded as the national literary language, with a responsibility to monitor the fortunes of the Jewish people as a whole.

Grinberg forced upon Zionism, generally understood as a national secular political movement, the image of a revolutionary messianic movement because of its revolutio-

⁵ Still missing a clarification of the genesis of the complex concepts *Hebrew* and *hebraism* in connection with Zionism, Luz's comment, among many others, is enlightening and valuable: "More than any other Hebrew author, Berdychevski (1865-1921) laid the foundations of a very powerful Zionist myth - the myth of 'the new Hebrew' (the use of the term 'Hebrew' rather than 'Jew' emphasizes the motif of departure from the past), which forms the most substantial element of his teaching. Although its lines are not absolutely clear-cut, its conflict with historical Judaism is clear, as is its relation to the Nietzschean idea of the 'super-man.' [...] The dream of the creation of the *new Hebrew* was naturally connected to the longing for the soil of the land of Israel and the renewal of Jewish independance, since only upon the ancient homeland could this be fulfilled. The experience of revolution and of rebellion was a kind of *messianic* one, embracing a religious pathos and a romantic longing for inner integrity and holiness stemming from life here and now within nature and within the world." (Luz 1987, 379-380.)

⁶ After the *Kishinev pogrom* (1903), Bialik published his poem "In the city of slaughter", wherein he depicted the horrors of the pogrom but also expressed shame that the Jews had not resisted their attackers: "For great is the anguish, great the shame on the brow, but which of these is greater, son of man, say thou ..." The powerful poem had a tremendous influence on Russian-Jewish youth and inspired it to form self-defence groups.

nary goals, as its goals embraced national-political redemption and cultural rebirth. *Malkhut Israel* (the Kingdom of Israel) was the vision central for the entire writings of Uri Zvi Grinberg.

Uri Zvi Grinberg conceived *malkhut* (kingship) as the return to the Kingship of David, and of the House of David as well as the heroism of the Hasmonaeans, and Bar Kokhva, the task being the restoration and triumph of biblical glory and potency, the restoring of the kingdom of Israel of the first and second Temples to pristine. While the messianic vision of the Kingdom of Heaven was in the background.

The Kingdom of Israel will be established within the natural borders of the soil on which the Jewish nation was born, and means the territorial concentration of all of Diaspora Jewry - not through a process of settlement, but through the liberation of the land from foreign occupation.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's grammar of messianic vision responds to a world of rupture and dislocation, of contradictions that center in particular on the issues of Hebrew sovereignty, the Arabs, the British, the collapse of the Jewish way of life by increasing anti-semitic ravages after World War I, the Russian Revolution. All threatening to explode Grinberg's designs.⁷

Uri Zvi Grinberg's experience of anxiety, conflict and dislocation was no mere background to his work but the substance from which his poems were constituted. His poems were an attempt to manage the forces which he perceived as being disintegrative of his vision of deliverance. Not a divine deliverance but a self-willed and self-achieved national greatness. As a poet Uri Zvi Grinberg positioned himself at the center of the diverse and contradictory energies of the Zionist-Hebrew revolution, seeking through his poems, prolific publicist works, debates, political work, to shape and direct the energies towards realization of his own very personally perception of Zionism as a messianic movement. Believing that it was possible to realize the Zionist revolution in the immediate future. And thus continually colliding with the gradually prevailing ideology of the Yishuv, the Socialist-Zionist, which he believed had become "petite-bourgeois" loosing its messianic fervor and providing thus explosive materials. The 1920's witnessed various forms of political crystallization: the development of a cultural center and the maturing of the Labor movements organizational and power foci in Eretz Israel. They were marked by a strong politicization of the Yishuv and testify to the emergence of the modernist Hebrew poetry in the twenties. *The Histadrut* (The General Federation of Labor), was established in 1920, and the Zionist socialist party, *Ahdut Ha'avodah*, was founded in 1919. Its Hebrew name means literally "Unity of Labor" or "United Labor", or

⁷ The political events which shaped the minds of Uri Zvi Grinberg and his generation either were revolutionary or reactionary impulses. The measure of death and destruction suffered by the Jews during World War I, the Russian Civil War, pre-World War II, was far greater than any previous calamity in modern Jewish memory. And much Hebrew literature between the two World Wars, describes an apocalyptic moment caught between the certain disintegration of European Jewish life and an unproved hope for redemption in Eretz Israel.

“Union of Labor”. Officially known as the “United Labor Party” it was the dominant workers' party controlling the Histadrut and later the Zionist movement.⁸

Up until the year 1925 the Zionist political system lacked a right wing. The majority of Zionists embraced liberal national views. The minority, which in the course of time would become the dominant political force, had a national, socialist and constructivist outlook that rejected reliance on diplomatic activity, on party politics, or on any single event or breakthrough.

In 1925 the Revisionist Party was established by *Vladimir Jabotinsky* (1880-1940) who had resigned from the Zionist Executive in 1923. Jabotinsky made the goal of a Jewish majority on both banks of Jordan River the central plank of his nationalist party. He prophesied a coming apocalyptic catastrophe for European Jewry and called for their immediate mass immigration to Eretz Israel. Following the Arab riots of 1929, the Revisionists gained considerable support in Eretz Israel as many Jews saw majority status and militant tactics as the only hope for avoiding future massacres. Elements of the radical Eretz Israeli Revisionists under the ideologue *Abba Ahimeir* formed the first units of a militant underground known as *Brit habiryonim* (Covenant of the Hooligans or Roughnecks), which was motivated by an acute form of (Grinberg's) secularized messianism and sympathetic to Italian facism (Ahimeir, 1966, 1988).⁹

Eretz Israeli Politics

[...] This land, the Hebrew God chose for atrocious torture as a sadist tormenting a woman's body
Covering her with leprosy from Egypt to the Syrian border [...].

⁸ The *Ahdut Ha'avodah* party was established in 1919 as a result of the merger between the right-wing faction of the Marxist Poalei Zion party, under the leadership of David Ben Gurion, and the “Non-Affiliated Group,” consisting of non-Marxist socialist groups drawn from the Second Aliyah, under the leadership of Berl Katznelson. *Hapo'el Hatzair* (The Young Worker) a populist party, a moderate left-of-center party, established in 1905 merged with Ahdut Ha'avodah to form Mapai in 1930. Mapai (*Mifleget Poalei Eretz Israel*, Palestine Workers Party) became the dominant party in the yishuv and from 1933 in the Zionist Organization. To begin with, *Hapo'el Hatzair* stressed individualistic values. Instead of ideological dogmatism. It emphasized the imperative of personal example. The party enjoyed the sympathy of intellectuals who were not its members. Its periodical, *Hapo'el Hatzair*, (since 1907) assembled a group of writers who could express themselves in their columns without being pressured to pronounce their political adherence.

⁹ *Ahimeir* (1896-1962). Following his immigration to Eretz Israel in 1924 he joined *Hapo'el Hatzair* (The Young Worker's Party), contributed to the Hebrew press. In 1928 he joined the Revisionist movement, within which he founded and headed a radical wing, *Brit Habiryonim*. Ahimeir, Grinberg and his close friend Yehoshua Heschel Yevin helped to lay the foundations for the revolutionary trend in Zionism, and reinforce its image as a revolutionary rather than a national political movement, with its principal and immediate purpose being the establishment of a Jewish state within the historical borders of Eretz Israel.

Uri Zvi Grinberg: The Hebrew-Zionist Revolution

Tur Malka (The King's Mountain), Hapoel Hatzair Vol.18 no.1-2, 12/10 1924, 33.

Uri Zvi Grinberg arrived in Eretz Israel on December 4, 1923 and considered himself a man of the "Third Aliyah", (1917-23), some would say the fourth. The Third Aliyah has been characterized by its messianic fervor and expectations. It followed the Balfour Declaration and took place during the Bolshevik revolution, which everyone expected would transform the world, at a time when there was much apocalyptic tension and impatience in the air. The atmosphere was ecstatic and feverish, though joy was often interrupted by the grief of failure. A shift in the tremendously exalted enthusiasm arising in the wake of the Revolution, was already taking place before and at Uri Zvi Grinberg's arrival.¹⁰

The utopian-messianic longings, dreams, visions and zeal which the members of the commune *Betaniyah* nourished about creating a new life in their homeland that would prompt their rebirth as human beings, illustrates strongly how the members eagerly accepted an apocalyptic breakthrough to a new age of Redemption.

The discussions and the thoughts voiced by the members of *Betaniyah* have been collected in a volume named *Kehilatenu*.¹¹ Many of the (book's) texts are burdened by heavily messianic terminology:

"The Almighty marks out a people of many millions and destroys a few hundred thousand of them. Others, also in their hundreds of thousands, He drags by force of terror, nostalgia and human instinct to their own homeland, that they find already settled by strangers who also have their own rights there. And from among this great passive mass, He chooses a select few hundred, perhaps a few thousand - and entrusts them with the messianic hopes of the people, of mankind."¹²

Uri Zvi Grinberg came to the land imbued with a prophetic missionary zeal and a profound awareness of his singularity as a modern Hebrew poet. He longed to be the voice of the Yishuv. At his arrival in the country he announced his coming in *Kuntres*:

"To my beloved overseas: I came safely to the land.

¹⁰ Anita Shapira values the 1920s as "years of small deeds," and indicates, to quote only a short illustrative passage: "After experiencing an economic crisis in 1923, it was soon caught up in a euphoric mood in the face of the first mass wave of immigration in 1924-1925, emanating from Poland. Yet even before that immigration made itself felt, the community was buffeted by the most profound economic crisis in its history, which soon developed into a crisis of Zionist self-confidence." (A. Shapira 1992, 131).

¹¹ *Kehilatenu*, 1922 collection, reissued with a commentary and illustrations by Muki Zur, Jerusalem 1988, 145.

¹² *Ibid.*, Natan Bistrizky, 155. Quoted in *Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era* by Yaacov Shavit 1991, 110.

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My address: Editorial Office of "Kuntres" Yafo, Tel-Aviv (E"i), Uri Zvi Grinberg. The newspapers abroad are requested to copy it."

In his preface to his own periodical *Sdan* no.1-2, 1925, 1, he writes:

The hour is very deep. I am aware of the holiness of this place: I am standing on the flesh of the dissected Jerusalem. All the terrible prophecies about her came true.

I feel fear, knowing how strong is the responsibility to write Hebrew after Ezekiel and how big is the bliss to be a Hebrew poet, who is born in Europe, and denies his birth there, because the voice of the race overpowered the Latin rhythm. The voice of the first Hebrew. [...].

The close connection between the lingual decision to write in Hebrew, "the blood tongue, and not in Yiddish, the mother tongue," deduced from the zionistic ideology, and the choice of Eretz Israel as the only place where it is possible to build a center for Hebrew culture is constantly emphasized by Uri Zvi Grinberg.

The reality of the Fourth Aliyah, which Uri Zvi Grinberg became a part of, was altogether different from the Third.¹³ While Grinberg shared a common fate and profound identification with the Third Aliyah, he nourished an entirely negative attitude towards the Fourth Aliyah, mainly the period between 1924 and 1926. During these years large numbers of lower middle-class immigrants arrived from Poland, shopkeepers, tradesmen and speculators. In his view it was an immigration entirely lacking in messianic drive, and was liable to swamp the minority pioneering vanguard.¹⁴

¹³ The *Fourth Aliyah* was often slightly referred to as the "Grabski Aliyah" after the Prime Minister associated with Poland's anti-Jewish fiscal policies. Waves of Jewish immigration that reached Eretz Israel between 1924 and 1928. Half of the immigrants of this period came from Poland, having been forced to leave that country by an economic crisis there and high taxation, aimed particularly at the Jews.

In addition to immigrants with pioneering aspirations, this Aliyah brought a considerable number of persons of moderate means, businessmen and craftsmen who hoped to pursue the same types of work in Eretz Israel.

The first phase of the Fourth Aliyah (spring 1924 - spring 1926) was characterized by economic prosperity. The second phase (1926-28) saw an economic slump, resulting in a sharp drop in immigration.

The period of prosperity was due to the boom in construction of housing for the newcomers, most of whom settled in urban areas. Many stores, workshops, restaurants, and small hotels were built, and speculation in building lots and apartment housing spread, making personal gain the main value.

Settlement funded by private capital tended to concentrate in areas where profits could be expected. The most popular area was the coastal strip, which already contained the infrastructure of Jewish settlement. Zionist political interests, however, required that a foothold be established in areas distant from existing population concentrations, overriding economic considerations.

¹⁴ While in the Western world in general there was an uprooting of the populace from country to city the tendency in Eretz Israel in accordance with labor ideology in order of regaining self-sovereignty, building up an independent economy, the strong emphasis on the interactive values of community and cooperation, was to transform the country into an agricultural society.

Uri Zvi Grinberg: The Hebrew-Zionist Revolution

In 1925 Uri Zvi Grinberg wrote:

[...] Because of our vision we fled to Eretz Israel. We fostered an idea in our blood. We shrivelled from only having the dream of redemption. We were not praying for an Odessa in Palestine. And we did not dream about the appearance of Nalevki on the shore of the Mediterranean.¹⁵ [...] Nalevki in Eretz Israel!! That means that it is impossible to get rid of exile, because it is inside us: a part of our Body! This exile which is compounded by its well-known shopkeeping, and which absolutely does not have a God, has swallowed the first Hebrew city, which is being built by the avant-garde of the Jewish proletariat. We have not seen with our eyes how the popular exile was formed as we we have been born into it, exiled from time immemorial. But we have seen the deformity of the exilic intimidated life, and we are acquainted with it down to the nails of our feet. Hence, alas, to experience the deformity also here, on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea! [...] In Warsaw I lived in the Jewish Diaspora, and here I found myself in the Odessa of little Palestine.” (And there is no end to the shopkeeping) [...]. *Sadna Dear’ah, Odesah bepalæstinah venalevkis* (Odessa in Palestine and Nalevki), 1925, 13-14).

It was the Russian experiment in socialism that gave hope and inspiration to a generation of pioneers in Eretz Israel. They were inspired by such charismatic and vanguardist revolutionaries as Lenin and Trotsky, as countless artists and intellectuals in Western Europe and the USA were. At that time, the dominant feeling was that there were emotional and psychological bonds between revolutionary Eretz Israel and revolutionary Russia, two partners, so to speak, in the same historical process.

At a time when a mixture of euphoria and messianic tension bound revolutionary desire to revolutionary radical politics, Grinberg sought tenaciously to enter into the political process by transmitting his utopian vocabulary. Consequently he associated directly with Ahdut Ha’avodah, as well as the community of pioneers in the Valley of Jezreel, identifying with the spirit of pioneering and becoming its ardent fanatic.¹⁶

Ahdut Ha’avodah was in those days the major labor party in the Yishuv, and the most doctrinaire one, closer to the revolutionary than to the reformist wing of socialism including orthodox marxist members. It attempted to mold its typically Eretz Israeli ideologies in accordance with what was approved in Soviet Russia. The central concept of the Ahdut Ha’avodah party in the beginning of the 1920s was the idea that it was possible to accelerate the pace of historical process the so-called *kfitzat-haderekh*,¹⁷

¹⁵ In Nalevki and the surrounding streets of Warsaw lived at that time tens of thousands Jews cheek by jowl, struggling for their daily bread. Here were more Jews than in the whole of Eretz Israel.

¹⁶ Of great interest is A. Shapira’s essay *Black Night - White Snow*. It “deals with the changing attitudes of the mainstream of the Palestinian labor movement toward the Soviet Union in the 1920s, primarily with reference to Ahdut Ha’avodah and its affiliates such as the Labor Brigade (Gedud Ha’avodah) and [...] Hapoel Hatzir.” (A. Shapira 1988, 145).

¹⁷ “Shortcut” from a Zionist perspective. Jabotinsky (1880-1940) believed that the Zionist leadership could induce the British to pursue policies that would facilitate the establishment of a Jewish national entity in Palestine at an accelerated pace. In contrast, Weizmann felt that the opportune

“shortcut”, or “historic leap forward”, by the energetic efforts of a determined vanguard. To put it more clearly, a strong belief in skipping the stage of capitalist development - a necessary historical period according to traditional Marxist theory - and getting on with socialism prevailed in the years of the Third Aliyah with its utopian ideals. Socialism and independent Jewish government were, in their view, two interconnected and inseparable components. Uri Zvi Grinberg’s image of Zionism as a revolutionary rather than a national political movement triggered by messianic hopes, and inspired by eschatological ecstasy, coincided thus at this phase with Ahdut Ha’avodah - early in the 1920s, and only for a short period. It became Uri Zvi Grinberg’s actual historical model for the Jewish revival during the 1920s, and it furnished him with the necessary terminology:¹⁸

“The World Zionist movement moves away every day from its sources in lack of vision. [...] Meanwhile the so called anti-religious socialism - a mass movement - intentionally injects the poison of awareness unto the blood of the mass workers, and demands to destroy and desecrate holiness at the time of necessity. But, indeed, in its realization and in its economic institutions which are absolutely profane, in Soviet Russia, it is --- religiosity.

Trotsky writes about art in reverent awe and with all the seriousness which is to be found in the political program, because without an inward-directed religion and without thought, even a power like Rome, even Britain, *would not exist* [...].

Our Hebrew national movement should have been an important political factor and an avant-garde for a Hebrew-European culture. [...]” *Sdan* no.1-2, 1925, 10-11.¹⁹

It stood clear for Uri Zvi Grinberg that the Zionist movement - revolution, which he encountered and confronted in Eretz Israel, was a secular political national movement and not the eschatological revolutionary movement he hankered after, which “would establish a new Jewish culture in Eretz Israel that would revitalize and refine the soul of the nation to its former purity.”²⁰ And although the term Redemption was integral both

moment from a Zionist perspective has passed and he turned to an evolutionary modus operandi - a step by step policy, labeled “one more acre, one more goat.” See Shapira, 1988, 121: “[...] the evolutionary conception that time was based on the side of the Zionist project and that Zionist policy had to be oriented toward gaining precious time for the purpose of building the Jewish infrastructure in Palestine.”

¹⁸ Joseph Klausner (1874 -1958), the right-wing Zionist, spoke in the heady days of the 3. aliyah, of “Israel’s traditional spirit of prophecy” incarnated in “the desire for equality and social justice which is at the basis of Bolshevism.” (Lecture by Joseph Klausner, reprinted in Kuntres, 31/12 1919). Berl Katznelson (1887-1944) mentor of the Eretz Israeli Labor Movement and editor of *Davar*, when writing to his brother in America borrowed from the Soviet terminology at times: “[...] Ahdut Ha’avodah is “a kind of Palestinian Soviet of Workers and Soldiers [...]”” B. Katznelson to Haim Katznelson, Jaffa, 6/12 1919, *Igrot*, Vol.3, 226.

¹⁹ In quotations from U.Z. Grinberg works italics are Grinberg’s own unless it is stated that they are made by the author of this article (J.W.).

²⁰ Y. Shavit 1988a, 146.

Uri Zvi Grinberg: *The Hebrew-Zionist Revolution*

to Grinberg's ideology and to the Labor movement it gradually encapsulated different objectives. During the Fourth Aliyah and later, Redemption by the *evolutionary* approach and processes came to characterize both leadership and the rank and file of socialist Zionism. The so-called "redemption of the soil," "redemption of labor" etc. is encapsulated in the slogan: "another dunam (acre), another goat, another tree", while for the impatient Uri Zvi Grinberg, Redemption was tied up with a revolutionary ethos and activism, that would speed up the restoration of Judea to its ancient pride, the kingdom of Israel.

Revolutionary art and revolutionary politics

The fusion of revolutionary ideologies in the areas of politics and culture in the beginning of the 1920's was common and seemed natural enough. Many artists assumed a correspondence and a potential parallel between the artistic and political revolution, and their foremost aim became to weld the disruptive power of avant-garde art to the revolution. The goal of the avant-garde to forge a new unity of art and life by creating a new art and a new life seemed about to be realized in revolutionary Russia.²¹

Inspired by the potentiality of the future, the avant-garde formulated a new social role for the artist, one which would awaken those elements of society as yet unaware of the inherent dynamism of their culture, combat those forces which actively retarded change, and create an art that would provide new images and poetic forms appropriate to humanity's future.

The avant-gardists desired that aesthetic innovation not only provoke a radical alternation of art and consciousness, of the individual's manner of perceiving and expressing the new world, but contribute to the political transformation of society as well, believing thus that their aim in revolutionizing aesthetics was to prefigure social revolution.²²

The avant-gardist, *Expressionist** and *Futurist**, Uri Zvi Grinberg was strongly inspired and influenced by the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde* which since the Revolution, had, with some success, sought to establish itself as the representatives of the new order.

Like many other major avant-garde artists, Uri Zvi Grinberg took the claim inherent in the epithet, avant-garde, very seriously, namely, to lead the whole of society - the

²¹ The October Revolution was greeted as the longed-for fulfillment of - the Futurist dream. "The events of 1917 in the social field," wrote Tatlin, "were already brought about in our art in 1914 when the "material, volume and construction" were laid out as its 'basis'." (Gray 1971, 219).

²² In his article *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905) Lenin severed the vital dialectic between the political and cultural avant-garde, subordinating the latter to the party. Declaring the artistic avant-garde to be a mere instrument of the political vanguard "a cog and screw of one single great Social Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious avant-garde of the entire class". V.I Lenin, *The Re-Organization of the Party and Party Organization and Party Literature*, London (IMG Publications), 1972, 17.

Yishuv (the Jewish community in Eretz Israel) - toward new horizons of culture, and to create avant-garde art for his people. One could characterize it as an ethos of symbiosis between revolutionary art and revolutionary politics. He shared the conviction that art and literature are capable of reshaping, altering and revolutionizing individual human behavior, molding and constructing social consciousness and cultural institutions. Thus by bringing about the spiritual metamorphosis of each individual and of the entire Eretz Israeli society, it will contribute to the cultural-political transformation of society. Accordingly, the Hebrew-Zionist revolution demanded the transformation of the nature of art-literature, both regarding its traditional image and the role of the poet, as well as the composition of the audience.

Uri Zvi Grinberg saw his aggressive and dynamic cultural efforts as a part of reshaping all of the political and cultural values. Accordingly only a totally committed and mobilized history and a visionary literature, i.e., a literature promoting political awareness by undermining ideologically habitual modes of perception, could prepare the way for the creation of a *new Hebrew man*, and for fundamental changes in political organization and order. Thus promising the emergence of cultural and spiritual redemption - out of which *malkhut Israel* (The Kingdom of Israel) shall be born. The goal is thus the establishment not of "a 'national home' but of a kingdom, the Third Kingdom of Israel, which means a Hebrew homeland, containing all the millions of brothers and sisters of the dispersed race that needs gathering." *Klapei tish'im vetish'ah* (Against the 99), 32.

As *Malkhut Israel* was the vision central for the entire writings of Uri Zvi Grinberg, his goal and aspirations were, accordingly, to make his poetry an agent of that transformation. Or to put it more pointedly, for Grinberg avant-garde art was capable of politicizing the audience by changing people's nature through a kind of narrative persuasion or by directly intervening in and changing their environments.

The Zionist-Hebrew revolution provided a vehicle and a program of actual change. It offered a context for the poet Uri Zvi Grinberg's personal yearnings for a new order. It placed Grinberg in a perfect context within which his avant-garde concepts found a space to operate. It enabled him to entertain dreams of aiding in the overthrow of the exhausted or deformed existing political and cultural order, as he saw and understood it, and of the emergence of the new national and cultural order that he longed for.

The poem, the article, the manifesto, the advertising poster must be a cultural-social occurrence, concerned with the most urgent questions. The poem must be an arena for action, and Uri Zvi Grinberg turned gradually to a strategic use of the text in an attempt to infiltrate the wider culture.

At the time of Grinberg's writing in the twenties, the Zionist movement and the *Yishuv* in Eretz Israel were in swaddling-clothes. The state of development in the country and of the Jewish people was everybody's business; in particular it was the business of the writers. Thus thought Grinberg.

Subsequently, he experienced a conflict between his program of literature and art, on the one hand, and tradition, on the other, which he called "*the version of yesterday*". He realized that his revolutionary reality was profoundly different and incompatible with the orthodox position of his colleagues, whom he called: "*the poets of yesterday*". And

indeed the initial poetic goal must be to shift the creative focus of poetry from traditional poetic language: "the version of yesterday" towards "the version of today". *Klapei tish'im vetish'ah* (Against the 99), 4-10.

The Way Out - Demolish the Old Order

Those building a socialist Eretz Israel believed that they were shouldering the same burdens as the revolutionary Russians.

They were stirred by the upsurge of collective efforts and the ascension of control with which the Soviet leadership hoped to mold the Russian people and sweep them into the twentieth century.²³

Just as the Russian revolutionaries were ready to demolish the Old World to its very foundations and liberate it from the shackles of bourgeois morality, not refraining from the use of force, which the various brands of "shortcutters" - *dohkei haketz* - "millennialists" in Eretz Israel, like the Eretz Israeli vanguard pioneers, were also prepared to use when necessary.²⁴

The Leader. Lenin

Ahdut Ha'avodah's leaders' stress on praxis was strongly illustrated by their attitude toward Lenin.²⁵

²³ In 1924 Yitzhak Tabenkin (who belonged to the leading triumvirate of Ahdut Ha'avodah party (and afterward of Mapai) together with Berl Katznelson and David Ben-Gurion. They exemplified the ways in which the party's mainstream sought to cope with the revolution) declared: "[...] like the dictatorship of the proletariat over the national economy, cannot be reduced to outward control, to matters of 'ownership' or even of a common budget. The entire economy must be directed to meet the needs of the workers [...]. What is characteristic of communism, here and all over the world, in labor movement as a whole, is not equality between certain sections of the population [...] but the social control of the economy. For us, this means Histadrut control over the economic direction of the kibbutz." Y. Tabenkin, *Have'idah harevi'it shel ahdut ha'avodah be'Ein Harod*, 12-20 May, 1924, Tel-Aviv 1925/26, 59, 60.

²⁴ Political activism was prevalent clearly in Kibbutz Ein Harod, expressed by avant-gardist tendencies, where Tabenkin was making his constant references to *War Communism*. This avant-gardism, with its clear Leninist overtones, was by no means marginal. It was central to the thinking of important elements within Ahdut Ha'avodah.

²⁵ About ten articles dealing with the Russian leader appeared in the Hebrew labor press during the 1920s. - "As time passed, particularly after his death, he was variously described as the father of the revolution, the captain of the ship, a political genius and a man of socialist morals - and also as gravedigger of the revolution and as an ideologically lost soul." (A. Shapira 1988, 155).

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The Hebrew Revolution's model was Lenin - not the Lenin of marxist dogmatism or the Nep (New Economic Policy), but the uncompromising, utterly convinced, self-assured leader, molding history, untrammled by bourgeois morality, turning the future into the present. It was the Lenin who symbolized both the leader's ability to seize the historical moment and the power of the individual to stamp his signature upon history. Grinberg nourished a fervent admiration for Lenin, without reservations: Lenin was the activist who sees into the future, advances historical processes and understands the needs of the as-yet immature masses.

In 1924 (21 January) when Lenin died, Uri Zvi Grinberg wrote a kind of eulogy for *Kuntres* extolling the propagator of the great revolution:

Bevail Tur Malka²⁶

in Soviet Russia, where a delirious teaching was given. Bewail the red star which strikes partly, as its king was taken away: Lenin.

Out will the ruffians and loungers go and ask: *Dead? Is it possible?*

Yes! dead! Lenin!

What is this?! Mystery. Extraordinary realism. Dictatorship *joined by miracle, as well as splendor.*

And further: in every impermeable impossibility which is like a stone wall to man, there is one wonderful moment *when a porthole is opened.* Then it is possible to pass through to the other side ...

And Lenin knew the secret as well as when. Because of that he casted a glance, entered and was not hurt.

There was no one mightier than him in the year six thousand who ruled, terrified, and was loved as a father, by the barefooted (pioneers) as well.

Even *Emperor Napoleon* gave up in the Siberian snow.

**

In the Evangelism of working-class mankind, *Lenin glows* like a red magnet. One is almost seized with a magic aura of religiousness. Now it is already possible to believe in miracles and redemption, and in the ruling power of the One - this singular human being.

The heretic, ragged people who were spitting in the mosques will again become religious in the mourning of Lenin. Again they will go in a religious procession to the funeral. Bells will ring from the Kremlin, and he will be heard with religious trembling.

He shall be seen in the icon: Lenin. - -

It must be said: The flags at half mast in Moscow, are the fabric of the loyal workers in all countries.

The Hebrew proletarians stand on the Hebrew island facing Moscow in a salute to Lenin's funeral!

El ever Moskva (Facing Moscow), *Kuntres*, vol.8, no.15 (158), 25/1-1924, 5-6.

²⁶ Actually one of Grinberg's many nom de plume, "The King's Mountain" or "The King's Column".

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The intensity of the eulogy and its elevated style can be exemplified by the stratagem which intersperses the title of the article "*Facing Moscow*" in its last lines. It grants the title effectuation plus a visual-theatrical substantiation: The *Hebrew* proletarians stand on the *Hebrew* island *facing Moscow* in a salute to Lenin's funeral! While the double use of the adjective "Hebrew" gives the impression of the Hebrew pioneers' familiarity with Lenin's personality. Lenin who in the eulogy is described by means of terminology drawn from Jewish mysticism:

"Four learned men entered the garden, Pardes (which also means esoteric philosophy): Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher and Rabbi Akiva. One casted a glance and died; one casted a glance and was hurt, one tore out the shoots (became a heretic) and Rabbi Akiva came out well". *Hagigah*, 14.

Herewith Lenin becomes, one can say reluctantly, an object of religious cult.

What Lenin aspired to construct was not a bridging link between art and society but a single machinery that would control both. From the very beginning, and with Lenin's energetic support, Soviet cultural policy was to apply the slogan "Party Spirit" to the whole realm of culture. In Trotsky's words, "the only question was where we should interfere first". *L. Trotsky*, 221.²⁷

Uri Zvi Grinberg shared, in this context, the moral relativism in which the end justifies means, of Lenin and other contemporary leaders as Benito Mussolini, the so called "men of destiny."²⁸

²⁷ It was Lenin who institutionalized the Party as the vanguard of the Revolution in *What Is to be Done* (1902) and soon after in his article *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905) severed the vital dialectic between the political and cultural avant-garde, subordinating the latter to the Party. Declaring the artistic avantgarde to be a mere instrument of the political vanguard, "a cog and screw of one single great Social Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious avant-garde of the entire working class", Lenin thus helped pave the way for the later suppression and liquidation of the Russian artistic avantgarde which began in the early 1920s and culminated with the official adoption of the doctrine of socialist realism in 1934." A. Huyssen, 5-6.

²⁸ David Ben-Gurion, known for his political activism, saw Lenin as a man of "iron will, prepared to sacrifice human life and the innocent blood of infants for the revolution". He is an absolute tactical genius, ready to retreat from battle in order to fortify himself for a new attack, ready to negate today what he had confirmed yesterday and to confirm tomorrow what he had negated today. He won't allow a web of phraseology to becloud his thinking or allow himself to be caught up in the mesh of formulas or be tripped by dogma. His glance never swerves from naked reality, cruel truth and the real balance of power." A. Shapira 1988, 156, cited in Ben Gurion, *Zikhronot*, Tel-Aviv 1971, 254-255.

Culture Policy

The notion that culture policy is a potentially explosive force is emphasized constantly by Uri Zvi Grinberg. In the following he applies it energetically to the realm of literature:

[...] This mighty Kingdom, the Marxist one, which is cruel to every religion, chose literature, transformed it into a machinery and placed it at the head of the communist movement. And this literature (about its literary value I shall not speak this time), bore fruit. [...] Imagine: Communism could become sovereign without this machinery, only with a troupe of diplomats and the Red Army. Not in vain did Trotsky write what he has written about the poets of the Revolution.²⁹ The leaders of this movement knew that only the magic power of the chiseling literary word, on behalf of the proletariat's vision, was likely to become the dynamo which could *cross borders without permission* [...] Even the information about the cruelty and brutality executed there is not the kind of water that could extinguish the fires of platonic sympathy found in every country regarding the kingdom that is in the twilight of the miracle - [...]

But:

[...] Hebrew literature is like a bastard to the movement, like a *worthless object on the table*, and *childish luxury* even for her few *friends*. The end of such a riddled movement is annihilation, God forbid! And its literature - Is it a wonder? - Its end is degeneration and the *close up of the vision* [...]

[...] Is it a wonder, that we in Eretz Israel have deteriorated so deeply? *Having a messianic movement, but without any visionary literature* which should be the Ark of the Covenant carried at the head of it [...]. *Hatnu'ah vehasifrut* (The Movement and the Literature), Sdan no. 5 1926, 15-17.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's main and essential starting point is that Hebrew literature must be *messianic literature*; it has the function of being a redeemer, for it *transforms* the soul. Hence,

The Hebrew writer must express the Hebrew revolution, whose commandments are Zionism and Hebraism. [...] He writes literature which is none other than the creation of the Sturm und Drang of the *transitional process from extraterritorial Jewishness to State Hebraism*, such must be a *redeeming* literature subordinated in all its letters to those marching in the battle. [...] ³⁰ *Klapei tish'im vetish'ah* (Against the 99) 12.

Having taken this stand, Uri Zvi Grinberg writes:

I am unable to imagine the combatant Communism without an accompanying literature on every step, as also fresh bread becomes stale bread the next day. And when a public does not

²⁹ See Leon Trotsky, 1992 (1970).

³⁰ Grinberg battles with the prevailing notion that Judaism by its very nature is a non-territorial, or even anti-territorial, phenomenon.

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get the fresh soul-bread, is it not so, that it withdraws from the devastated literary heritage; and those who abandon it do not return; and the fate of such a literature is that of the fate of an ancient graveyard."³¹ *Klapei tish'im vetish'ah*, Against the 99, 5.

But all superlatives and praises of the Russian revolution were in vain. By 1925-26 it was apparent that a revolution in Eretz Israel was not yet in the cards.

In *Shomer mah mileil*, (Watchman what of the Night?³² or: Guardsman, What's New?) Grinberg sets forth complaining:

A tragic synthesis: We and the Russian revolution. And the synthesis is impossible neither in place nor in time [...]. The problems in our primitiveness are different from those, existing in Russia before the Russian revolution. Because we do not have a Hebrew spirit as there was a ready-made Russian spirit. We have - Judaism, a stabbed and befouled Judaism. A homeless Judaism."³³ *Davar*, 28/12 1925, 5.

Accordingly, the realization of Zionism is only possible in the same manner as it exists in the Soviet Union, where the rulers mobilized the whole cultural and educational apparatus in order to inject into the masses their ideas and thus to assure their loyalty and devotion to the revolution.³⁴

³¹ All the key positions in Russia's artistic life during the first years after the Revolution, were held by "left" and avant-garde artists. The People's Commissariat for Enlightenment - Narkompros was formed in 1917. The majority of members of the artistic board of Narkompros were Futurists and constructivists. During the first years after the Revolution Narkompros, IZO, etc. completely dominated the whole field of artistic ideology, education and administration. The artists who held executive positions within this system were truly granted the power to "construct everything anew" in accordance with their own theories.

³² Biblical translation: Jes.21, 11.

³³ Compare with Ben Gurion's records when visiting the Soviet Union in 1923: "How similar the economic problems of new Russia are to ours in Palestine. True, there is one small difference: Russia has a state and a government and the red army and vast natural resources while we have only our ideals and good will." *Idem* note 18, *Zikhronot*, 65.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's comrade Abba Ahimeir explained that Lenin persuaded the Bolshevik flank of the Russian intelligentsia, that it was an absolute necessity, not only to separate between morals and politics, but to subjugate morals to politics. - Thus forming the secret beyond his success. Contrary to him, Kranski the moderate socialist who was Russia's Prime Minister up to the October Revolution, did not understand that in order to change a society it is necessary to inject strong faith in some purpose into the people, so they would be prepared to sacrifice themselves for its realization. The democratic regime which Kranski established did not force the people to sacrifice themselves. Therefore nobody wished to die for him. Acting thus he enabled the usurpation of the ruling power. *Hapoel Hatzair*, vol. 20, no. 23, 17/3, 1927.

³⁴ In his articles from the same period (1926-7) Abba Ahimeir explains, that in a democratic regime, the control is always in the hands of the conservatives, and because of that, there is no possibility for a social change. According to Ahimeir, Benito Mussolini is the true heir of both Macini's and Garibaldi's national ideology. He understood the weakness of democracy, and because of that he

A Spiritual Dictatorship

The 1919 "*Program Declaration*" of the Petrograd collective of Communist-Futurists, KOMFUT, declared:

A Communist regime demands a Communist consciousness. All forms of life, morality, philosophy, and art must be re-created according to Communist principles. Without this, the subsequent development of Communist Revolution is impossible. [...]

From this theoretical basis they went on to demand that

[...] It is essential to wage merciless war against all the false ideologies of the bourgeois past. It is essential to subordinate the Soviet cultural-educational organs to the guidance of a new cultural Communist ideology.

It is essential - in all cultural fields, as well as in art - to reject emphatically all the democratic illusions that pervade the vestiges and prejudices of the bourgeoisie.

It is essential to summon the masses to creative activity.³⁵

The term "*Communist*" in the "Komfut" Program Declaration could be conveniently replaced by Grinberg's own concept "*Hebrew-Zionist Revolution*".

As in politics, so in culture. It was considered necessary to replace such concepts as "democracy", "individualism", "tolerance", "free creativity" by strict ideological control on the part of the Party organs, "*a dictatorship of taste*" on the part of the artists of the most varied creeds, and a general organization of artistic life on the part of the State. In a similar vein, the first programme of the magazine LEF, drawn up by Mayakovsky, attacked those who wish to replace the inevitable *dictatorship of taste* by the Constituent Assembly slogan of general elementary comprehensibility.³⁶ Uri Zvi Grinberg was

revived Bonapartism. That is to say, like Louis Bonaparte before him, Mussolini succeeded by threat and violence to frighten the democratic and liberal parties, and yet get their legitimation of his regime. Ahimeir praised as well Joseph Pilsudski, also he a former socialist, who seized at the same time the power in Polen by military putsch. Hapoel Hazair, 27/8 1926, 42.

The fourth issue of *Art of the Commune*, 1918, the main Futurist journal, began with an article by Nikolai Punin - the chief editor - under the title *Futurism as State Art*, in which he stated: "We would not refuse if we were offered the use of the power of the State in order to realize our ideas [...]."

An answer to a question about the nature of these ideas was provided by Osip Brik, one of the main theoreticians of the avant-garde: "The answer is clear. The proletarianization of all labour, including artistic labour, is a cultural necessity [...]. And no amount of tears shed for supposedly vanished creative freedom will help." J. Milner, *Vladimir Tatlin and the Russian Avant-Garde*, Yale University Press, 1983, 144.

³⁵ Iskustvo kommyny, (*Art of the Commune*) no.8, 26/1 1919. Quoted from J. Bowlt, 1988, 164-166.

³⁶ LEF, no.1, 1923, 9. - Put concretely by Pavel Filonov: "Just like heavy industry and the Red Army, art must be organized and made into effective instrument that can be used as part of an integral State plan." cited in I. Misler and J. Bowlt, *P. Filonov, a hero and his fate*, Austin, Texas,

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aquainted with Vladimir Mayakovsky's works and felt a close affinity to him in passion. Both shared a poetic vocabulary including the depiction of violence, and claimed a "dictatorship" of "taste" or of "spirit."

Uri Zvi Grinberg regarded democracy as socio-political sloppiness. If he joined the workers' party, it was not for its socialism but for its pioneer role in the renewal of Eretz Israel. He did not accept the Bolshevik world view and rejected Communism. But he supported enthusiastically its operational methods. Communism understood to organize and dominate the proletarian masses, assuring their loyalty and devotion to the revolution, by mobilizing and controlling wholly and fully the cultural and educational apparatus. The Soviet Union was ruled by an ideologically motivated regime, "a regime dominated by a single idea, that does not allow deviations or dissonances. *Bish'at ein motza* (When there is no way out), Kuntres, vol.12 no.1 (234), 24/9 1925, 7-13.

It was a model to be imitated. Hence, in order to speed up the revolution tied with the messianic vision on the soil of Eretz Israel, it was necessary to control the spiritual sphere. And anything that could harm, or lacked blood ties with the messianic vision of the soil of Eretz Israel had to be censored: "and please don't come and bother us while we are working on the Kingdom of Israel".

Uri Zvi Grinberg propounded and developed freely and openly the dictatorial or totalitarian concept in the columns of the two labour publications, Kuntres and Davar. Since he perceived the return to Eretz Israel in eschatological terms, Zionism had to be a totalitarian movement in the spiritual and cultural sense, devoted to one holy purpose. He drew the implications and called for "*a Spiritual Dictatorship*" as Mayakovsky did.³⁷

The preparation of the individual for the fulfillment of any mission can still be carried through in an evolutionary and gradual fashion. But the preparation of the masses for the fulfillment of sovereign missions while they are in an incipient state of formation trying to take hold of their own soil - cannot possibly be done. It is impossible to compress the masses, like babies in tens of thousands, into a spiritual school. It can only be done by a directed spiritual dictatorship where the power of the word is biting. It must be forbidden, and even if only for a moment, to slacken the grip on the masses as they are not merely a proletarian class, but national conquering forces. There must not be any room for relaxation in their brain, so that it would be impossible to advance an idea which is other than the accepted ideal. The Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) should not only control the labour market but implement a dictatorship of the Eretz Israeli imperative ideal - a spiritual dic-

1983, 226.

³⁷ Vladimir Mayakovsky (1894-1930) a *futurist* artist whose rejection of the past forced him to accept the October Revolution, which he actively supported through his artistic work. Mayakovsky's maximalist temperament and hyperbolic tendencies led him to extremes of dedication, so by the 1920s his poetry became purely propagandistic. Uri Zvi Grinberg admired Mayakovsky's earlier lyrical powers, and was inspired both by the poetry and the man.

tatorship because everything must be done in the service of the Hebrew renaissance and in accordance with it. The eyes of the masses must be directed in accordance with a dictatorship towards Jerusalem and no other gentile town in the world. There is nothing greater than the Return to Zion of a shattered Judaism in the twentieth century, and the establishing of a Hebrew working class on the soil here."

But

Spiritual and cultural preparation must precede political and class preparation. An atmosphere of vision must be introduced into the inwardness and if not, no communal discipline can be established. The Soviet regime understood it and that is the source of its power: a burgeoning awareness*. The education of the masses in the light of the Soviet ideal is the principal thing - the endeavour of all the efforts and strength of the state machinery. The enthusiastic education which reaches "servitude" - "coercion" is the main element of dictatorship and its existence. It is not hard to prophesy strong degeneration among us, if deliverance does not turn up in good time. Kindly listen to me, leaders of Histadrut, its worthwhile for you to bow your head to the psychological aspects of the masses and, absolutely not to count on realizing the Zionist revolution with the help of the organizational structure which you have built. [...]

[...] The decisive matter in this time of trial [...] is a nation-wide social organization in accordance with an Eretz Israeli spiritual dictatorship: the collective spiritual assets in the sparks of the Hebrew Jerusalemite culture, which at any rate is universal. *Lematan diktaturah ruhanit* (In Favor of a Spiritual Dictatorship), Kuntres, vol.11, no.20 (232), 11/8 1925, 9-12.

Two years later Uri Zvi Grinberg pronounces:

The idea about the Return to Zion in the twentieth century, in its concrete and constructive form, detains in its foundations and in all its tiny parts, a deep purpose of mission, historical purpose and messianic symbolism, which no other liberation movement has anything similar [...]. And this deep purpose is the life teaching of our Eretz Israeli days and nights, from which we are nourished consciously or unconsciously - through the small pores of our skin. This life teaching constitutes our miraculous existence, in spite of all calculations pointing to despair. The distortion of this Hebrew idea, or its discharge of all its essential gravity comes to pass because of the lack of spiritual dictatorship which we are daily in need of, and because of this lack we become bloated with irrelevant axioms. When the process of the realization* of Hebrew pioneering is completed, then as in every other developed country, one part of the population will be able to drop its own ideology and undertake the realization of Hebrew pioneering, for the sake of its own fervent idea. Not now - I believe. No. It is neither the time nor the place." *Mimgilat hayamim hahem* (From the Scoll of Past Days) Davar, 1.4. 1927.

Reality can only be transformed, and national renaissance brought about by means of *political* and intellectual-spiritual coercion. And the final goal is not the establishment of a proletarian class but of a nation - a kingdom.

The Pioneers: The avant-garde of the Zionist revolution

The sanctification of *halutziyut* - pioneering³⁸

The most important ethos transferred from the socialist to the Zionist sphere was that of the avant-garde, 'the pioneer' - *halutz* - with the particular connotation with which socialist Zionism endowed it. The term designated an individual who devoted himself to the ideals of building up Eretz Israel by physical labor, primarily in agriculture.

The image of the pioneer - *halutz* - combined elements of self-sacrifice for the general good, and self-realization; in his daily life, the pioneer did not distinguish between theory and practice. The total consonance between the private and the public spheres, the totality of the fusion, subjected the individual to the authority of the reference group and created both strong emotional commitments and psychological constraints against abandonment of the framework.

It further implied the renunciation of material ambitions and of attractive opportunities of self-advancement in favor of hard physical labor with little expectations of material rewards.

Pioneering - *halutziyut* - was, therefore, in many instances an act of selfless dedication to a cause, with the pioneer identifying his personal happiness with the attainment of a national and social ideal.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's connections with the community of workers did not perforce stem from a socialist conviction. The joining with the Labor Movement grew out of social circumstances, taking the "decline of the West" for granted and describing Western culture as bourgeois, self-satisfied and smug³⁹ as well as from his identification with the values and myths of labor and pioneering spirit. It was a feeling of belonging to a charismatic collectivity, to the avant-garde of the Zionist movement in the years 1924-1928/9. During these years there was an ongoing dialogue between Uri Zvi Grinberg the avant-garde artist and his chosen vanguard - the pioneers - the charismatic revolutionaries of the Yishuv whom Grinberg wished to link to his radical praxis.

³⁸ Halutz (sg.), pioneer, halutzim (pl.), *halutziyut* - pioneering. The term *halutziyut* evolved in the wake of the arrival of halutzim, starting with the Third Aliyah, and was used intermittently thereafter until the outbreak of World War II in 1939. In its broader sense it implied a return to the Jewish Homeland with the aim of pioneering in what was then the most arduous pursuit, settlement on the land, reclaiming the land and farming it under the most difficult conditions. Hundreds were coming to the malaria-infested valley of Jezreel to resurrect it by their toil and sweat. Working the soil, draining the swamps, building roads, quarrying stone. Malaria was endemic.

³⁹ Hatzlav biyerushalayim (The Cross in Jerusalem), Hapoel Hatz'ir, 4/6 1924.

Gradually bringing them to a de-legitimation of their chosen political leadership and turning them to an alternative leadership.

Uri Zvi Grinberg conceived of the pioneers as constituting an antithesis of Jewish petit bourgeois ethos which he detested and loathed, a bourgeoisie which he found not only in the Diaspora but also in Eretz Israel. Grinberg saw any destruction of the bourgeois way of life, of bourgeois politics and culture, as a stage of the revolution:

They have surely disturbed us as much as they could" [...]. *Hamusag she'enenu* (The non-existent concept), *Sadna de'ar'a*, 6.

He hurled abuse at the bourgeois whom he saw as obstacles on the way to redemption.

Uri Zvi Grinberg identified with the ruffians of the world, the revolutionaries arising to destroy the existing society. He believed there was a common destiny linking all revolutionaries throughout the world with the pioneers in Eretz Israel. The world revolutionaries were arising to destroy the existing, corrupted society, and at the same time the pioneers, the bearers of the Hebrew revolution, strove to make the Kingdom of Israel a vital reality. In his view, the "divinity of ardor" was what inspired the former to storm the barricades and the latter to live in deprivation and poverty under the scorching sun of Eretz Israel. *24 sha'ot* (24 Hours), Kuntres, 17 l. Adar, 1924.

Uri Zvi Grinberg wished to cement the pioneers, to whom he addressed his writing, into a social-political order that is being called upon to transform the country. In 1925 he compared the pioneers to priests building the temple sanctuary for those who would follow in their footsteps, to live in deprivation and poverty under the scorching sun of Eretz Israel. And accordingly he described the Jewish sovereignty he aspired to as "A kingdom of the barefooted on the sands." *Histaklut betokhenu* (Looking Within Ourselves), Kuntres, vol.11 no.19 (231), 2/9, 1925, 8-12.⁴⁰

Since Uri Zvi Grinberg saw the pioneers as the executors of the messianic vision, he actually saw himself as a member of the builders' camp, admitting though that many of the pioneers had preceded him in the country:

I confess, that you were stronger than me there in Diaspora. You preceded me, in your dream of fire which blazed: toward East. And you ascended (immigrated). [...]" *Yerushalayim shel matah*, Earthly Jerusalem, 50.

He identified with the pioneers' way of life, spirit and suffering, and his "I" coalesced into a "we:"

And what is kingdom and purple, what is ancestral home, a pure white bed and - tents, are sufficient *for us* if there is no storm ---- Hallelujah!
And sufficient *for us* are a cigaret, a burning candle and also a book. *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁰ Parallel themes and conceptions are to be found in *Yerushalayim shel matah* (Earthly Jerusalem), in *Eimah gdolah veyareah* (Great Fear and a Moon), *Tur Malka* (The king's mountain), *Hagavrut ha'olah* (Rising Manhood) etc.

Self-sacrifice, suffering and destitution was given exalted poetic expression in Grinberg's poems:

And we all are sitting here and writing in the night a holy lie (at this time the hands are swollen -) to a mother and wife:
Fair, fair is the country. The land flows with milk - Wonderful is the moon on the sea and vineyards -
And the son, the poor one, is not writing: at night he washes his shirt, and during the day, the burning heat consumes him, as he stands and digs. *Ibid.*, 51.

Grinberg conceived of the pioneers as some kind of a collective organism, subordinated to the common task of carrying out the single aim of constructing *not only* a new society-nation:

Because of their historical awareness*, the Hebrew workers in Eretz Israel are *necessarily* the national avant-garde of the liberation movement and its solution. Because they are the only ones who are bearing the realization of the idea of sovereignty of a remote nation, and they are those who prepare and settle in the land which is bought with money and blood. Such a proleteriariat under such life-circumstances is exceptional in the world. And it is not a matter for discussion [...]". *Tishtush hamusagim* (Blurring the concepts in the Labor Federation), *Sdan* no.3 1925, 11.

The task of every pioneer, being the vanguard of the new order, is thus to participate in the establishment of *malkhut Israel*: to make the Kingdom of Israel - a statehood for the Jewish nation, a living reality:

California is not Eretz Israel, and it is not because of its golden veins that we worship her soil
but because through her we hope to mend the flaws in our souls
We want to establish a government there, a government of justice and honesty, the Kingdom of God.
Not a heavenly kingdom, though, that encourages idlers and flatterers,
nor a heavenly kingdom based on robbery and injustice,
or a kingdom that sets nation against nation, and man against his brother,
but a kingdom of God, founded on physical work and the labor of one's hand.⁴¹

The bond between the land and the people has been vested with a kind of transcendental status, lying beyond the sphere of human volition.

The pioneers are implementing by their undertaking the beginning of the prophetic-messianic-national vision of the redemption of Judaism. In their simple, back-breaking work they are realizing the ideals in which the poet believes. Thus in his poems he

⁴¹ *Zva ha'avodah, sefer ha'retz - antologyah shel Eretz Israel* (The Army of Labour), ed. Ja'acov Fikhman. Tel-Aviv, 1927, 262. Translation quoted from Shavit 1988b.

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wishes to express their lives and the marvelousness and bitterness in them as well as his desire to be included with them:

Upon the sands, upon the outpour of a rocky curse, a small nation dwells; building sanctuaries to the sun
Lonely brothers like myself without a mother here in the wilderness.
You seekers after God and not gold in the rust here [...].
Therefore I consent to be a poet wandering among you always from Ashdod to Metulah under the cactus and the date tree's shade! *Yerushalayim shel matah* (Earthly Jerusalem), *Hitnazlut* (Apology), 51.

The pioneers are symbol of authenticity and integrity, a negation so to speak, of bourgeois reality and experience. Uri Zvi Grinberg feels admiration for them, never differentiated from or elevated above them, but one of them. And although *the pioneers* are obliged to be his audience, they attribute a special perceptual power to him. *They serve his self-transmutation*, his momentary, personal release from the agony of life, while through his art that embodies his authenticity, Uri Zvi Grinberg transmutes the lives of the pioneers. He awakens a new spirit of life in them and changes their despair about life into joy at living. Ecstatic experience replaces a sense of the futility of existence:

And my dream came late, like purification in the body of a sinner. *I have ripped my heart out from its nest and poured it into my whole body.*
Now I am wanderering among you, a people who dreamt about the sea and about the kingdom of the barefooted on sands, on rocks, under palm-trees
Until the dream comes true, and its end is bitter, and its end is marvellous: patched clothes, without socks, without a roof, blood and dust, song and poverty, wild dance, and quietly, quietly, quietly creeps the hunger; in every bone there is malaria, like the taste of wine, like the hope of the red thread going down to the finger nails. *Ibid.*, 50.

To be alive is to be part of this whirlpool, to nourish oneself with "Blood and dust, song and wild dance":

I know your longings, my eye envisages your blood when it is shining at the dance and when it is struck, it strikes hard
And from you howls wilderness [...]
The leavings of your bread taste sweetest to me. The jar water is wine to me.
Tranquility will brighten the tents because I called out every brightness.
Together with you and your land I shall raise a prayer to the heavens. I shall call ardently to the clouds that they shall open the udders and quench our thirst.
And with a hot whisper on the dryness of a lip scorched of yearning for the coming of the rain, as your land I shall say: Shalom, to clouds which are coming silvered

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And there became darkness on the sea and all through the night the waters rose ---.
Ibid., 50.

The ingredients of the pioneers' sacrifice led Grinberg to self-intoxication. He conceived of himself from time to time as a superman bringing to the more timid world of the herdman, to use Friedrich Nietzsche's distinction, a new kind of fire, burning away blinding darkness and affording new insight as well as sight, a new vision of what art as well as life can be - a comprehensive new enlightenment:

I study the alphabet in the holy tongue. I am a child. And now in my manhood I study to go on roads from one moshavah⁴² to another, and I pray to the trees planted by the best of my folk, like flags for the conquerors, still when I was in my father's blood, and he was a lad in his father's home! [...].

How I am to sing of Dganyah, and not of the conquerors' flesh: Their flesh became desert and the *desert* - flesh! [...].

The vision recognizes me here in *my hamsin* all the night: a body consumed with malaria, a body among some feverish bodies [...]

Proletarians in Eretz Israel called me to

be their bard and forced me to send softness and pleasantries - to Hell!

And like them to *quarry out from the rock an expression* - for their life. *Tur Malka* (The king's mountain), Sdan 1-2, 1925, 33-37.

Hence, the *Eretz Israel proletarians*, the pioneers, forced Uri Zvi Grinberg to be a revolutionary poet, to throw away the soft, delicate, dreamy bourgeois language and to adopt authentic revolutionary language, "to quarry an expression from the rock", which would break down traditional discourse and convey the complete renewal of reality. Uri Zvi Grinberg created dynamic, explosive patterns in his poems charged with the exhilaration of battle and primordial destruction, in accommodation with the goal of his vanguard vision.⁴³

⁴² Private farming village. The first village was founded in 1878.

⁴³ "[...] There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, meta-language is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical. Revolution is defined as a cathartic act meant to reveal the political load of the world: it *makes* the world; and its language, all of it, is functionally absorbed in this making. It is because it generates speech which is *fully*, that is to say initially and finally, political, and not, like myth, speech which is initially political and finally natural, that Revolution excludes myth. Just as bourgeois ex-nomination characterizes at once bourgeois ideology and myth itself, revolutionary denomination identifies revolution and the absence of myth. The bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; revolution announces itself openly as revolution and thereby abolishes myth." R. Barthes 1986 (1957), 146.

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The self-sacrifice, suffering, and destitution of the pioneers was given exalted poetic expression. Contemporary reality was formed, associated and presented by powerful visual metaphors. His vision was presented in military terms, in terms of strength, power, will and destruction, in proximity to intellectual-cultural currents that heralded the coming of *fascism**.⁴⁴

Rebellion expressed itself in images of energetic blood and flaming fiery revolution, which found an outlet in destruction and devastation.

The multiplication of violence emerged as the dominant trope in Uri Zvi Grinberg's poems of the 1920s. His verbal violence aspired to be no less than "dumdum bullets" fired at the nations of the world:

I am tired of expressions that are not like dumdum bullets, but like shots in the flesh of the dead." *Hagavrut ha'olah* (Rising Manhood), 1926, 10.

Blessed be my God, who is not willing to be dynamite that restrains a secret in the thickness of the mountain. *Ibid.*, 12.

Our words in Hebrew from Eretz Israel - are dumdum bullets against all the Gentile nations. *Ibid.*, 31.

"In Tur Malka (King's Mountain) I shall roar at my rocks: dynamite, rise, pour." *Tur Malka*, Sdan 1-2 1925, 35.

"My God my father in heaven! In the mountains of my land the lava restrains itself and my blood cries out:

Rise! I can't bear the rocky silence from my mountains hence and from my mountains in Syria

Because the thirst from the peaks of the world came down and stands on my sinews." *Sadna de'ar'a*, 1925, 30.

"And where is the man who will weigh on the pedlar's scales the weight of our lava". *Hagavrut ha'olah* (Rising Manhood), 1926, 18.

In 1929 the poet begs:

Help me, the God of my father, and grant my expression the power of an axe and the sharpness of a sword" *Levay lekelev bayit* (Attached House Dog), 1929, 13.

Uri Zvi Grinberg strove to make his poetry a vanguard banner, urging the pioneers - halutzim - in effect in his opinion a messianic avant-garde, whose "Steam-roller was

⁴⁴ In Marinetti's 1913 manifesto *Words in Freedom* we find him writing: "I fight the decorative and precious aesthetic of Mallarmé and his search for the rare word, the one indispensable, elegant, suggestive, exquisite adjective. I don't want to suggest an idea or a sensation with passéiste grace and affectation. I want rather to *seize them brutally* and *toss them in the reader's face*," R. Pioli 1987, 51-52. Which brings to mind the manifesto *A Slap in the Face of the Public Taste*, 1912, signed by Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh and D. Burluyuk (J. Stapanian 1988), 16-17.

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carried/like the chariot of the messiah ..." ⁴⁵, to further action, to expand energetically the activist scope of the Hebrew Revolution, promoting full spiritual and cultural rebirth.

And in fact, Uri Zvi Grinberg's poems became an arena for action. Words, expressions exploded like bullets in the bodies, smashing them:

Ascend, the song of rebelliousness, ascend because of Eretz Israel, as a gun splits the mountain in front of the strongholds of the death!

The God of Israel is not to be found in the sheer silence, our God is in the raging blood, in the ascending fire.⁴⁶

When the foundations of man are shaken like the foundations of earth." *Hagavrut Ha'olah* (Rising Manhood), 1926, 18.

Accordingly, Uri Zvi Grinberg, the bard of the Eretz Israeli proletarians, conceived of himself as a soldier in his so-called *Labor Army - Zva Ha'avodah*, actually known as *Gdud Ha'avodah* (Labor Battalion). Thus he ascribed to the avant-garde a military status, which is reflected in his presentations and formulations, by describing *Gdud Ha'avodah* as a messianic army.⁴⁷

And I am within the Labor Army (*Zva Ha'avodah*) on the shores of the Mediterranean, back - breaking labour, whose glory is orphanhood in the evening -the fire of cigarettes and blood in the eyes at its end, like diamonds in the garment of the kingdom of poverty.

⁴⁵ Hazon ahad haligyonot (A Vision of One of the Legions), 1928, 12.

⁴⁶ When compared with its actually source in 1 Kings the reversed analogy is striking: "[He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."] Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence." (1 Kings 19,11-12).

⁴⁷ *Gdud Ha'avodah* (Labor Battalion) - Pioneering group active in Eretz Israel during the 1920s. The group was initiated in Eretz Israel by a group of Joseph Trumpeldor's followers who were among the earliest contingents of the Third Aliyah to arrive from Russia after World War I. Whereas the immediate objective of this organization was to find employment for its own members and to secure work for thousands who were arriving after them, its long-range aim was to transform the workers of Eretz Israel into one great "commune" open for all and based on the common ownership of property and "equality of consumers". Each member of the battalion agreed to accept unconditionally the work assignments scheduled for him. The earnings of the individual or of the unit to which he belonged went to the central treasury of the battalion, which assumed the responsibility of providing the maintenance of all members on the basis of equality, independently of the quality or the quantity of the work performed.

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I am eating my bread with them, the bread of the Presence,⁴⁸
and above them and above me the big stars are standing upright.⁴⁹
All of them dreamt as visionaries and bards who did not write in the book but wrote
in the soul.
Writing deep rhymes on the board of history." *Yerushalayim shel matah* (Earthly
Jerusalem), 1925, 56.

The rhetorical intensity of the pathos in this passage, as in others, flows from the semantic tension created by the realistic description of the pioneers' suffering and the traditional lingual substratum, such as, "bread of the Presence", the stars above the Valley of Jezreel which are "Abraham's promising stars" and the stars in Joseph's dreams of greatness, thus exposing Grinberg's longings for the restoration of pristine splendor.

Uri Zvi Grinberg, the soldier, constitutes the pioneers as soldiers, legionaries, reincarnations of *biryonim* (*Roughnecks or Hooligans*) or as a Labor Army. Uri Zvi Grinberg's broad application of metonymy from the military realm, rich with historical references, goes back to the Revolts against the Roms under and after the destruction of the Second Temple. And manifests strongly Grinberg's belief that the pioneers actually constitute the troops who will fight against the Arabs and the British. Fighters who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the establishment of the kingdom of Israel.

Electrifying energies of his vision of deliverance and redemption adressed to the land and the vanguard pioneers explode in the following stanzas. Uri Zvi Grinberg is ecstatically attuned to sense representation. He captures the quintessence of reality in his awareness of internal as well as external states of being:

I have been saved miraculously from the gentiles, blessed be my fathers' God! And I
was not devoured by the worms on the land of the Slavs, a dissected Jew.
A great shining in the body --- I am so much a Jerusalemite! Also from my ribs the
light rejoices towards the messiah.
Let the blood which has been shed come and be gathered in the arteries!
Judae! Samaria! Galilee!
My mountains! My valleys!

⁴⁸ *Lehem hapanim* - *shew-bread* or *bread of Presence* (Lev.24,5-9; 1 Sam.21.1-6). Since the deity does not eat or drink, setting the table is a show of hospitality. "Presence", lit. "face". On a golden table at the entrance to the Temple twelve loaves of semolina bread were laid out, one for each tribe. They were a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, His promise of salvation (Ex.25,30).

The Sabbath for the observant Jew is a forestate of life in the messianic age. On that day he is given a new pure soul, the *neshamah yeterah*, fit for the company of the divine.

⁴⁹ Stars-kokhavim: Gen.26,3-4: "[...] and I will be with you and I will bless you [...] and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as *the stars of heaven*, and will give your offspring all these lands." And in Joseph's Dream of Greatness, Gen.37,9: "Look ... the sun, the moon, and eleven *stars* were bowing down to me [...]."

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My deserts and seas!

Ein Harod, Tel Joseph, and Bet Alfa, two feverish Dganiyot!

Jerusalem, the head phylactery, and the Valley, the hand phylactery!

Thirty-six⁵⁰ in all the kibbutzim in the glory of the God who is for all that feel sick at heart for the Kingdom!" *Hagavrut Ha'plah* (Rising Manhood), 1926, 13.

The kibbutzim in the Valley and the Eretz Israeli secular reality *in toto* are described here by metaphors belonging to the hallowed sphere - "phylactery(ies)". "The head phylactery" is juxtaposed with Jerusalem, the ultimate destination of national-religious yearnings. And "the hand phylactery"- the Valley of Jezreel, the road leading toward fulfillment. Whereas the pioneers resemble the thirty six righteous who keep the world in being, (*Sanhedrin* 97b), and are yearning for the kingdom within the borders which God had promised to the Patriarchs, for the king and for the Temple. As such, the enterprise of the pioneers in the Valley of Jezreel is granted a mythical, messianic dimension, encapsulated in

A little Kingdom at the sea, that the many who discovered her, [...] with my body like phylacteries [...]. *Tur Malka*, The King's Mountain, Sdan 1-2, 1925: 34.

And while the poet is watching the dancing pioneer women "after a working day of hardship and rejoicing enthusiastically", he kindles up and bursts out:

At last pioneers resembling the ancestresses [...] *one of them shall deliver us a messiah!*
Eimah gdolah veyareah, (Great Fear and the Moon), Heroica, 1925, 46.

The enthusiastic exclamation becomes strongly intensified by the scattering of the letters in the text. In *Heroica* written in 1925, Uri Zvi Grinberg merely points out that a messiah will be born in the pioneering community. First a couple of years later he uses the birth of the messiah politically*.

Poverty

The torchbearers of the Redemption, the pioneers - a sacred band - are like the Essenes, who lived spartan lives in the Judean desert. - Only through poverty and sacrificing themselves on the altar of the redemption of the homeland, are they able to implement God's kingdom on earth.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's poems are loaded with religious significance sanctifying poverty, penchant for the use of Christian motifs. Poverty is broadly speaking the symbol of that

⁵⁰ 36 righteous persons believed to exist unrecognized at all times. Their unknown existence in every generation is believed, in Jewish tradition, to keep the world in being.

stripping* away of spiritual inessentials which is part of the quest of the ascetic. It is the Evangelist's "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew* 5,3). "And every one who has left houses or brethren or sisters [...] for my name's sake, will receive an hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life" (*Matthew* 19,29).⁵¹

I was summoned to a dinner of the poor - and I came. I did not bring a piece of bread. I brought a red song:

Because I flayed the skin from my flesh and cut it in its fresh redness for the holy dinner:

And in my poem I say: The kingdom is yours, my poor ones in rusty Eretz Israel! There are golden crowns and they fall to the valley, smashed to smithereens; but there are yet others

which do not smash and they are in their halo *as long as their bearers are poor as the soil - -*

And those crowns, I vision now out of a vision about you my poor on my fields While sitting together at dinner, which *is holier than all that was on God's table* in Eretz Israel

And when you stand up to dance for the God of all pain-stricken. *Misifri Tur Malka, 1925: Lis'udat aniyim* (To the Dinner of the Poor).

The *Supper of the Poor* shrouded with holiness, imbued with sacredness and ritualistic, calls forth *The Parable of the Great Dinner* in *The New Testament*:

[...] One of the dinner guests on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat the bread in the kingdom of God!" Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time of the dinner he sent his slave to those who had been invited: "Come; for everything is ready now." But they all alike began to make excuses. [...] Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave: "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'" *Luke* 14,15-22.

⁵¹ See *Matthew* 19,20: "The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

The poor would inherit the earth, the rich must therefore be stripped of their property and this property distributed to all. Such ideas, in revolutionary situations, were connected with millenarism: that the time for Christ's return was at hand and that therefore the redistribution of property must begin at once.

Luke 6,20: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." *Perfect Poverty* is a classic medieval expression for spiritual development through stripping away to the essentials. For Master Eckhart it meant "stripping of the self, to put on the eternity of God", the one being a precondition of the other.

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The Dinner of the poor contains clearly the seeds of Jesus sufferings on the road that leads him to God. But Grinberg draws here also from Jewish sources like the Hasidic tales where the motif Jews-Kings (mainly on Sabbath) is present.

Uri Zvi Grinberg maintained:

I am as poor as you are,
But an ark for your labor: majesty and power to the poor, who shall once be sons of kings -- in the Haggadah." *Eimah gdolah veyareah* (Great Fear and the Moon), 1925, 50.

The poet's identification of the poor with the sons of kings can be found in the Zohar:

Rabbi Eleazar teaches that: "The kingdom of heaven is the Temple that sustains all needy--poor beneath the Shekhinah. [...]"⁵² *Zohar* I, 208a-208b, Tishby 1991 (1949).

In his powerful poem *Ra'av be'Eretz Israel* (Hunger in Eretz Israel), hunger and song, need and joy operate within one and the same framework:

Rejoice, my bowels, because of hunger in the land of the Prophets: No water in the brook.⁵³ Eucalyptus trees at the river.
No rolls for food on the branches.
And the delirious evening resembles the part of incision after the head, has been cut off; and the same smell...
And the evening like a camel in his great thirst descends and comes to the blood in murderous yearnings.
And set tables in the world in whitish festivity.
And lads are invited to the banquet in the light of chandeliers far away in the world [...]
Comfort ye, my bowels, eucalyptus trees in Eretz Israel are more precious than all the honey forests in Europe
and all the blessed barns with autumnal fruit
Here is the classical land of the *majesty of malaria* and the *vision of tuberculosis*
Because of that, lads and maids went out to plant these eucalyptus that are trees of desire

⁵² "The name *Shekhinah* is assigned first to Malkhut [...]. In aggadic literature the Shekhinah is the divine presence, existing and active in the world and among the people of Israel. It is identified in kabbalistic doctrine with the last sefirah in its capacity as the ruler of the world, and as "the assembly of Israel" in the realms above, a designation reserved exclusively to Malkhut." I. Tishby 1991 (1949), 371-373.

⁵³ *Jeremiah* 15,18: "Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail."

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longing for every swamp ---

Will you say, my bowels, that it is good, if rolls grew here and milk will sprinkle from palm to palm like a spring?

Hagavrut ha'olah, (Rising Manhood), 1926, 14. Italics J.W.

The oxymorons “majesty of malaria” and “vision of tuberculosis” are ascribed a new direction in the poem, stations on the road to redemption.

Suffering crowned with the radiance of holiness and splendour has a backing in the *Zohar*, I, 202b-203a, in the section discussing the Shekhinah:

“Now come and see. From the day that the Temple was destroyed there has not been a single day without curses. When the *Temple* was still *standing*, the people of Israel would perform their rites and bring offerings and sacrifices. And the Shekhinah rested upon them in the Temple, like a mother hovering over her children, and all faces were *resplendent with light*, so that there was blessing both above and below. And there was not a single day without blessings and joys [...]. Now that the *Temple* is *destroyed*, and the Shekhinah is with them in exile, there is not a single day without curses, and the world is cursed, and there is *no joy* to be found, above or below.” Tishby 1991 (1949), 406-407. Italics J.W.

The Shekhinah can only dwell in places where there is joy and blessing and not where there is sorrow and lamentation. The poet longs to hasten a final redemption, the return of the Shekhinah from exile and thus raising Israel from the dust.

The malaria and tuberculosis are phases on the way to hasten the final redemption:

But in time to come the Holy One, blessed be He, will raise the assembly of Israel from the dust, as it has been explained, in order to make the world rejoice in everything, as it has been said, “I will bring them to my holy mountain, and make them rejoice in My house of prayer”. Ibid.

Grinberg yearns for the spreading of the radiance of the Shekhinah in Eretz Israel and for her power to become active:

The bonds that the Shekhinah has with Israel in her role as the divine mother of the nation, and as “the Assembly of Israel” in the realms above, are expressed even more emphatically in the development of the idea of the exile of the Shekhinah, which originated in rabbinic aggadah. “Come and see how beloved Israel is to the Holy one, blessed be He, for wherever they are exiled the Shekhinah is with them [...] and when they are redeemed in the future the Shekhinah will again be with them, as it is said, “And the Lord, your God, will return, with your captivity” (*Deut.30,3*). Tishby 1991 (1949), 382.

Transition and political turn The New Vanguard

Grinberg was unable to accept the snail's pace of change, what he termed the "slow evaporation of our messianism" (*Shomer mah mileil*). *Min hameshuka umin haoleh* (From the Sunken and the Rising), Davar 19/6 1926.

In the late 1920s, as the political tensions in the Yishuv mounted, Uri Zvi Grinberg became increasingly conscious of the gap between labour ideology and the actual conditions of Yishuv life as he saw it, and found himself increasingly antagonistic to the labor movement. The step to radical politics did not even require a shortcut.

I am not a prophet in Zion, but:
Maybe a housedog and maybe a jackal
who smells the disaster and barks in time --.
Kelev Bayit (House Dog), 1929, 53.

And I and my companions are starving for bread and starving for the kingdom
simultaneously [...].
Hazon axad haligyonot (A Vision of One of the Legions), 1927.

The Arab riots of 1929 marked the end of one fase of Grinberg's Eretz-Israeli development and the beginning of a new fase. The Yishuv and the Zionist movement entered the era of radical reconstruction. The poet left the labor movement and joined the Revisionists. A movement/party where poets-prophets and not politician were considered the referees of the nation, the true legislators of the people. His central vision focusing on *malkhut Israel* was central to the entire Revisionist Movement. His poetic-prophetic creation, his messianic vision was thus perceived as being integral to the nation's political creation.

Uri Zvi Grinberg's active engagement with the revisionists gave him a sense of political power. His commitment to revisionist ideology gave him an ideological and political framework in which he could apparently function and a sense of political power. As of May 1930 he appeared regularly in the Hebrew Revisionist press and a year later, was the leading candidate on the Revisionist slate for the Zionist Congress, second only to Vladimir Jabotinsky, the chief ideologue and founder of Revisionism.

The Revisionists had their own language, forms, rituals, and symbols through which to speak and act and Uri Zvi Grinberg's new vanguard of the future became hence *Betar* (Revisionist Zionist Youth Organization) and *Irgun Tzva'i Leumi (Etzel)*,⁵⁴ while he himself became the *Prophet* of the movement. A revolutionary poet-prophet of all Jewish people, no longer of the swampdraining and road-building pioneers.

⁵⁴ Eretz Israeli military organization formed in 1931, by the Revisionist A. Tehomi, as a non party group, organized on a purely military basis and trying to stress military training and discipline. The rank and file of the organization consisted of members of *Betar* and *Young Revisionists*.

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Like chapters of prophecy my days burn in all their revelations
And my body in their midst is like a lump of metal to be forged.
And above me stands my God the blacksmith hammering mightily:
Each wound that time has cut in me opens its gash
and emits the pent-up fire in sparks of moments.
That is my fate, my trial, until evening falls.
And when I return to throw my beaten lump upon the bed,
My mouth - a gaping wound.
And naked I speak to my God: You have worked with rigor.
Now night has fallen; come - let us both rest.
Anakreon 'al kotev haitzavon (Anacreon at the Pole of Sorrow), 30.

Biographical Outline

Uri Zvi Grinberg was Born in Bilkamen, Eastern Galicia in 1896, at that time an "Austrian" province which was restored to Poland in 1916. He was a scion of illustrious Hassidic Yiddish-speaking families on both his paternal and maternal sides.

He made his début in 1912 at the age of sixteen, as a neo-romantic poet writing both in Hebrew and Yiddish. His first poems were published between 1912 and 1914 in *Snunit, Der Yidisher Arbeter, Hashiloah and Ha'olam*.

He drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1915, serving on the Serbian-Montenegrin front. Shortly after his conscription he published his first volume of Yiddish verse, *Ergits oyf felder*. (Somewhere in the Fields) 1915. Grinberg was deeply shocked by the war atrocities, and the experience of the horrors and terror of trench warfare left an indelible mark on him.

In 1918 Grinberg deserted from the Austrian army, returning to Lemberg-Lvov, the city in which he grew up and witnessed the pogroms perpetrated by Poles, in which his father's house was also destroyed: "Where I stood to be stabbed in the sight of my family one Sabbath morning." *Eimah gdolah veyareah* (Great Fear and the Moon).

The following years were marked by crisis and he moved from Romanticism to Expressionism/Futurism*, which is clearly reflected in his next two volumes of Yiddish verse, *In tsayms roysh* (In Time's Roar, or: In the Rush of Time), 1919 and *Farnakh-tengold* (Evening-gold, or: Twilight Gold), 1921, introducing thus the Expressionist Idiom and spirit into Yiddish poetry.

In 1920 he became a member of the *Khaliastre* (The Gang), a group of young Yiddish Expressionist - Futurist poets who burst upon the Yiddish literary scene in Warsaw in the early 1920s in revolt against traditional literary trends led by Peretz Markish, Melekh Ravitch and Uri Zvi Grinberg. In 1921 his revolutionary Expressionist volume *Mefiste* (Mephisto), elicited strong reactions.

Between 1922-1923 Grinberg founded and published in Warsaw - Berlin the Yiddish periodical *Albatros* with an avant-garde mainly Expressionistic orientation. He also published Hebrew poems in *Hatkufah*. In November 1922 Grinberg escaped to Berlin

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where he stayed for 12 months. Here he met Else Lasker-Schüler and published no. 3-4 of *Albatros*.

In 1923 *In tsaytens roysh* is republished in *Krig oyf der erd* (War on the Earth). Grinberg looked outside Germany and outside Europa for the realisation of his ideal and swung publicly from a radical Yiddishist cosmopolitanism to an equally radical Zionism. He directed his activity as a politically committed intellectual towards promoting the Hebrew-Zionist revolution and settled in Eretz Israel in December 1923 at the age of 27. His formative experiences were thus primarily European. His fiery poetry was published in *Kuntres, Hapo'el Hatzar'ir and Davar*. - His first Hebrew volume *Eimah gdolah veyareah* (Great Fear and the Moon), appeared in 1925, the second, *Hagavrut ha'olah* (Rising Manhood or: Masculinity rising) in 1926. Between 1925-1927 he edited his own periodical *Sdan* (Anvil) and in 1928 he published a volume of literary criticism *Klapei tish'im vetish'ah* (To the/Against the Ninety-Nine).

Uri Zvi Grinberg's work gradually assumed an extremely nationalistic character, visualizing the destiny of the Jewish people in terms of the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel along Messianic lines.

In 1928 and 1929 he published two volumes at his own expense *Hazon ahad haligyonot* (The Vision of One of the Legions), 1928, where he called for the establishment of a Jewish armed force, and *Ezor Magen une'um ben hadam* (The Protected Region and Saith the Son of Blood), 1929, which are actually political tracts in verse. In the same period, he succeeded, however, in publishing two volumes through central publishing houses, *Davar* and *Hedim: Anacreon al Kotev ha'itzavon* (Anacreon on the Role of Melancholy), 1928, and *Kelev Bayit* (House-dog), 1929.

In 1929, after the Arab Riots and dissatisfied with the slow pace of Zionist realization, Grinberg broke with the Labor movement and joined the Revisionists under Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1930.

From May 1930 he appeared regularly in the Hebrew Revisionist press and a year later was the leading candidate on the Revisionist slate for the Zionist Congress, second only to Vladimir Jabotinsky, the chief ideologue and founder of Revisionism. It was as delegate to congress that Grinberg returned to Europe and it was then that Jabotinsky withdrew in anger from the world Zionist movement.

The great outpouring of articles he produced in the same period indicated that in the aftermath of the Arab riots he felt that the newly emergent political realities demanded quite different strategies and practices from the former kinds.

Grinberg's political commitments brought him in the thirties to Warsaw (1933-39) as an editor and writer for Revisionist Zionist newspapers, where he edited the Yiddish Revisionist weekly *Di velt* (1933-1934) and then became a regular correspondent for *Der moment* (1938-1939). By the end of the decade writing poetry had given way almost entirely to Yiddish articles documenting the coming crisis and pleading with Polish Jewry to flee Europe. His last extremely politically aggressive volume before World War II, where he violently attacks the opposition, is *Sefer hakitrug vехаemunah* (The book of Denunciation and Faith), 1937.

With his journalist's pass and his Palestinian passport, Grinberg was able to escape from Europe two weeks after the Nazis marched into Warsaw in 1939, and arrive home in November 1939.

His family - father, mother, sisters and their families - stayed behind and perished in the World War II Holocaust.

In Eretz Israel during the years of World War II, Grinberg, who had been extremely prolific until then, published nothing at all. By the late forties a steady stream of poems on the destruction of the European Jewry began appearing in newspapers and journals, and it was clear that many of them had been written during the years of ostensible silence. In September 1951 *Schocken Publishing House* issued a volume in addition to many others; it was called *Rehovot hanahar: Sefer ha'ilyot vehakoah* (Streets of the River: The Book of Dirges and Power). 'Streets of the River' is the single most important work on the Holocaust in Hebrew Literature and was awarded the Bialik Prize in 1955.

In 1949, Grinberg became a member of the First Knesset representing the Herut (formerly Revisionist) party. He continued to write vast numbers of poems and articles during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in newspapers and periodicals, not to be collected during his lifetime.

His last and fragmentary work was a preface consisting of remarks to Arnon's bibliography (1980), a year before his death in 1981.

Grinberg was actually awarded the Bialik Prize three times: in 1948, 1955 and 1977; the Israel Prize for literature in 1957 and the Prime Minister's prize in 1970.

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