

## *“Where are you from?”*

I was born in Czernowitz. The war broke out nine months later. The Russians bombarded the city. I learned to run before I could walk. The First World War shoved me one thousand miles to the west, from Czernowitz to Vienna. The Second World War, which for me began on March 13, 1938, brought me seven thousand miles further west, from Vienna to Ecuador. I was a westward moving Eastern Jew, and I said to myself: two more wars like these and I will again be back in Czernowitz.

In 1943, in Ecuador, I applied for a travel document for foreigners. Under the rubric “Nationality,” the Ecuadorian official filled in “German.” I protested. . . . “Why do you deny being German? After all, you have an expired German passport!” “It was forced on me,” I responded. “My homeland was invaded. I am Austrian.” The man looked at me sympathetically and said, “Austria doesn’t exist any longer. Where were you born?” “Let’s not get into that,” I implored; “it will only complicate matters.”

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CHERNIVTSI, UKRAINE, SEPTEMBER 1998

On our first walk through the city once called Czernowitz, a woman stopped us on the street. She spoke Russian, then switched to Yiddish. Her dyed light-red hair, with gray roots showing, her heavy makeup, the threadbare outfit she was wearing, and her worn-out shoes were as striking as the fact that there were Jews, speaking Yiddish, on the streets of this Ukrainian city. “Where are you from?” she asked my mother. We were carrying cameras and looking at maps—obvious tourists—and she no doubt wondered whether we were from Israel, the United States, or Germany. In response, my mother emphatically pointed to the ground: “From here, Czernowitzer,” she said in



Figure 2. Lotte and Carl Hirsch on Zentraina Square, the former Ringplatz, 1998 (Photograph by Leo Spitzer)

German. It was the first time in my memory that the simple question “Where are you from?” evoked such a brief, clear-cut response from her. Three words: “From *here*, Czernowitzer.” Usually it has required a complicated narrative about emigration and diaspora, if not a history and geography lesson. Stunned, I watched my mother reclaim in an instant an identity that I had always connected to a name few people knew—a mythic past place that, I knew, had ceased to exist before I was born.

On that bright, sunny, clear, and crisp early September morning in 1998, Lotte and Carl Hirsch and the two of us, their daughter and son-in-law, were standing in a large tree-lined square, the nexus of seven streets on which, at that hour, relatively little traffic, either human or vehicular, was evident. Two of the square’s defining parallel streets were lined with a series of imposing, ornately stuccoed late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century buildings in the neo-baroque and Jugendstil styles that had reflected the trends of urban modernism in Vienna, the Habsburg imperial capital on which this city had been modeled. A block-long, windowless Soviet-era wall of reinforced concrete demarcated the square’s third side, incongruously fronted by a large, gilded bas-relief crest and an open-air café with red-and-white Coca-Cola sun umbrellas.



Figure 3. Cernăuți Primăria in a 1920 postcard, recording the Romanianization of the city (bottom), and the Chernivtsi city hall in 1998 (Photograph by Leo Spitzer)



Map 2. Czernowitz city map, early twentieth century

Opposite the wall, on a slightly elevated knoll accessible by some dozen steps, stood a large, impressive, gracefully proportioned neo-baroque building. It was blue-gray, trimmed in white, and highlighted by a large white clock on its top floor and a second clock, black-faced, high on its elegant central tower. Its entrance was guarded by a Ukrainian soldier. Clearly, this was an official structure.

“We are here on the Ringplatz,” Carl said to us, “and that is the Rathaus [city hall]. In our time, under the Romanians, it was called the Primăria. But everything looks different. There were no trees planted here. Down there [he pointed toward the café with the Coca-Cola umbrellas] was a large bookstore, Leon König. Here is the Rathausgasse. . . . That is the Herrengasse . . . that, the Liliengasse . . .”

“And that, the Postgasse,” Lotte interjected. “And, Carl, what was the street parallel to the Postgasse called?”

“The Hauptstrasse . . . and over here the Russische Gasse.”

Lotte nodded, but seemed disappointed. “The Ringplatz is no longer the Ringplatz. It looked much different. It was much larger. They must have built something here. There, the tramway used to run on its tracks. It is all very, very, very changed.”

Neither Lotte nor Carl expressed any consciousness that the city tour on which they had begun to lead us, narrated in German, identified the streets and sites by their old German names, as they had been called nearly a century earlier, under the Habsburgs—before Lotte was born. Or that many of these streets and sites—the Ringplatz, Herrengasse, and Liliengasse, for example—were themselves originally intended to mirror the elegance and urbanity of places bearing the same name in Vienna’s imperial Ringstrasse complex. Nor did it seem to strike any of us as particularly bizarre that as we explored the city, we were using a photocopy we had brought with us of an early-twentieth-century German-language map of Czernowitz.

#### THE RETURN

“My feelings about returning to Czernowitz are ambivalent,” Carl said to us on September 3, 1998, in the Hotel Maingau in Frankfurt, on the eve of our departure for Ukraine. Although we had not yet envisioned writing about this trip, Leo and I had decided to videotape this conversation with my parents about the expectations they held of their first return to the city they had left more than a half-century earlier. As I listened to the mixture of apprehension and curiosity in their voices, I thought back on the ambiva-

lences that had preceded the decision to undertake the trip in the first place. Whose desires were driving it: my parents' or mine and Leo's? We had left that unresolved, each of us thinking that we were merely going along, not one of us willing to claim responsibility for what might easily turn out to be a truly difficult, if not disastrous, trip.

"Is Czernowitz our *Heimat*?" my father continued, as though reading some of my thoughts:

The events that took place there—that we lived through—call that into question. The first time we made a visit to Bucharest—in 1968 after our emigration—Paul Roth, a cousin who still lived in Czernowitz came to see us there. And I must admit that I felt so happy that I had not stayed in Czernowitz. The truth of the matter is, we would not have decided to go back there now if it were not for Marianne—because Marianne doesn't have a *Heimat* [home], and we want to show her ours because ours is also in some ways hers.

We didn't have money there, but we had a very happy childhood. . . . The friendships we made were powerful. They stayed strong through life. We shared experiences and culture. We were like brothers, my Czernowitz friends and I. . . . There are probably not many places in the world that have produced such close fellow feelings among its émigrés. I am curious to see what has become of all of this.

As these comments indicate, Carl and Lotte, like other survivors of deportation or displacement from Czernowitz, continued to be afflicted by affectionate longings for earlier stages and scenes in their own lives, as well as for pleasurable experiences in familiar places and settings in this city of their birth. The strong friendships and close fellow feelings that Carl evoked attest to these positive images and the delight he and Lotte took in their recollection. But I also always knew that their nostalgia for Czernowitz—or Cernăuți, as it later came to be called—was layered. These positive associations with the past were only one aspect of their recall. Like others who had been displaced from their homes and native lands and become refugees or exiles, my parents also carried with them negative and bitter memories of the past—traumatic memories of bad times when they had suffered virulent discrimination and oppression. For them, as well as for the other refugees and exiles among whom I grew up, such negative and traumatic memories were certainly nostalgia's complicating flip side. Geographical and temporal distance and the trauma of exile or expulsion make it difficult to develop an integrated memory of a lost home. Conflicting recollections therefore coexist

without being reconciled: the place called “Heimat” contains both “what we lived through, especially in the war years” and the “experiences and culture” that Carl so fondly recalled on the eve of our journey.

In a profound sense, this nostalgic yearning combined with negative and traumatic memories—pleasure and affection layered with bitterness, anger, and aversion—is internalized by the children of the exiles and refugees. We of that “second generation” have peculiar relationships with the places where our families originated and from which they were forcibly removed or displaced. For me and my contemporaries, children of exiled Czernowitzers, Czernowitz has always been a primordial site of origin. Although none of us had ever been there or seen it (or even thought we might ever be able to see it), it was the source of our “native” German linguistic and cultural background, with which we closely identified and, indeed, still identify, although we grew up in Romania, the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel, France, Germany, or Austria. Strangely, the streets, buildings, and natural surroundings of Czernowitz—its theaters, restaurants, parks, rivers, and domestic settings, none of which I had ever myself seen, heard, or smelled—figure more strongly in my own childhood memories and imagination than do the sites and scenes of Timișoara, Romania, where I was born, or Bucharest, where I spent my childhood.

Some of these same places, however, were also the sites of my childhood nightmares of persecution, deportation, and terror. When I began to write about my own early memories and about the phenomenon of personal and cultural memory in general, I needed a special term to refer to the secondary, belated quality of my relationship with times and places that I had never experienced or seen, but which are vivid enough that I feel as though I remember them. My “memory” of Czernowitz, I concluded, is a “postmemory.” Mediated by the stories, images, and behaviors among which I grew up, it never added up to a complete picture or linear tale. Its power to overshadow my own memories derives precisely from the layers—both positive and negative—that have been passed down to me unintegrated, conflicting, fragmented, dispersed. As Eva Hoffman writes in her book *After Such Knowledge*: “The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our lives.”<sup>1</sup>

I grew up in 1950s Bucharest, Romania, within a community of fellow German-speaking exiles from Czernowitz whose tastes, attitudes, behaviors, and stories about a world that had long ceased to exist shaped me profoundly. My desire to visit Czernowitz originated with these encounters and grew in intensity over many years. Although, during my childhood in Romania,

Soviet Chernovtsy was a mere thirty kilometers from the Romanian border, there were severe travel restrictions within the Soviet bloc. To me, at the time, Chernovtsy seemed as remote as if it had been on another continent. After my parents and I emigrated to Austria in 1961 and to the United States in 1962, my parents' city of origin acquired an ever more distant, mythic aura.

It wasn't until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989 that a trip to western Ukraine began to seem possible. I had heard tapes of a few travel accounts and radio documentaries from Germany, indicating that traces of what Czernowitz once was could still be found in the present-day city of Chernivtsi. On several occasions during the 1990s, Leo and I had suggested a joint visit to Czernowitz to my parents, but even though they went as far as researching travel arrangements and considering potential dates, the trip never materialized. In fact, every time I pursued the subject with them, they seemed either surprised by my interest or noncommittal and even evasive. It wasn't clear to me whether they were afraid of what they might, or might not, find there or were dissuaded by what they perceived to be the practical difficulties of the trip. Austrian Czernowitz, and even Romanian Cernăuți, had been a provincial capital with excellent rail connections to all of East Central Europe, but Ukrainian Chernivtsi had become a provincial outpost, with inadequate train services and virtually no air connections at all. And yet, I knew that since my parents were in their eighties, and our cousin Rosa Roth Zuckermann, who still lived in Chernivtsi, was close to ninety, the "return" trip I had fantasized we would make *together* would have to happen sooner rather than later.

Throughout the 1990s, moreover, many of my Jewish friends and university colleagues had begun to undertake such "return" journeys to places where their parents and grandparents had lived and from which they had escaped or been deported. Many of these journeys resulted in essays or books, memoirs of their search for ancestral lives that had preceded their own. Since most of these journeys were undertaken belatedly, without parents or grandparents as guides or companions, they were searches driven by archival research and local guidance and by a great deal of desire, curiosity, speculation, and fantasy. I spent many hours talking with fellow travelers to the past and reading their accounts, but I was aware that, unlike them, I still had the opportunity to take such a trip *with* my parents. Moreover, in the early 1990s, I had accompanied Leo on two research trips to Bolivia, the country of his native-Austrian parents' refuge from Nazi persecution. Leo himself had been born in Bolivia, leaving there for the United States at the age of ten: he had his own childhood memories of La Paz and the Austro-German Jewish

community there. But the book he wrote about that Andean refuge was not begun until after his mother had died and did not appear until after the death of the uncle who had served as an invaluable witness and informant.<sup>2</sup> His Bolivian quest and the journeys to Eastern Europe of my associates and friends served both as backdrop and as added incentives for my own.

My fantasy of “return” to Czernowitz was not exactly a nostalgic longing for a lost or abandoned Heimat (as my father termed it): how could a place I had never touched, and which my parents left under extreme duress, really be “home”? Nor was it a yearning to recall some better past time in that city, for I had experienced no actual time there at all. Why, then, actually go there? Why make a “return” journey to a place that had been, in Eva Hoffman’s words, “home in a way, but . . . also hostile territory?”<sup>3</sup> The more I knew that I wanted to do it, the less I could actually articulate, to my parents or to Leo or to myself, what I hoped to find or do there—beyond, of course, the acts of connecting memory to place, of bringing the memories back to the place. But what exactly would that return accomplish—for me or for the memory I had inherited and, indeed, adopted as my own postmemory? How could I know until I had actually made the trip?

Was it the paragraph I included in my book *Family Frames*, in which I gave up on making the trip, that ultimately changed my parents’ minds, or was it Leo’s book on his return to Bolivia?<sup>4</sup> At any rate, by spring 1998 a change took place in my parents’ wavering attitude, and our trip finally began to take concrete shape. An acquaintance suggested we travel to Lviv, Ukraine, by air via Frankfurt, and from there by car to our destination. A travel agency in New Jersey specializing in Ukrainian journeys procured our visas, arranged for a vehicle and driver to take us to Chernivtsi, and made reservations for us in the one Chernivtsi hotel they could recommend. We paid our fees and sealed our commitment to go.

It is thus that we found ourselves in Frankfurt on September 3, armed with still and video cameras, a guidebook, maps, and lots of single dollar bills stashed in strategic places on our bodies. (Neither charge cards nor travelers’ checks could be used in 1998 Chernivtsi; it would be nearly a decade before bank machines would be introduced.) I also brought along a few, to me essential, reading and reference materials: a volume of Paul Celan’s poetry and John Felstiner’s fascinating book, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, about translating Celan into English; some published and unpublished memoirs I had read but wanted to consult further in the place itself (my father’s memoir “A Life in the Twentieth Century,” Pearl Fichman’s manuscript “Before Memories Fade,” and Dorothea Sella’s volume *Der Ring des Prometheus*);

and an envelope of old photographs we had chosen from Carl and Lotte's albums—pictures of city streets and sites, in particular, but also photos of the two of them, most from the mid- and late-1930s.

In retrospect, I am struck with how unpredictable this journey seemed in comparison to the numerous trips that both my parents and Leo and I had taken on other occasions. We were not crossing the Iron Curtain—that had long been dismantled—but we knew little more about conditions in Ukraine now than we had during its existence. A small exhibition of photos by Roman Vishniac on Jewish life in Ukraine in the mid-1930s, which I had seen in a New York gallery, led me to expect muddy roads in small villages, drab clothing, old people hunched over, made only worse by an additional half century of neglect and destruction. In my imagination, the dominant colors of the place were black, white, gray. In addition, rumors of muggings and petty theft in the Ukraine, as well as U.S. State Department warnings about that country's limited and inadequate medical facilities, increased our anxiety about the trip so visibly that our teen-aged son Gabriel tried hard to dissuade us from making it. And since I still had difficulty explaining why this journey was something I "needed" to do, I was not the most effective advocate for it. Nor could I assuage Gabriel's fears: I had little insight to offer into what traveling in Ukraine might entail. Lacking success with me, he tried to keep Leo home at least but Leo joined me in asserting our "need" to go, without properly explaining or justifying it to a child who would be left at home with family friends and our dog. "What is my need about?" I wrote in my journal. "Recovering a lost world? Experiencing the loss? Or the process of remembering?"

Our fears and lack of familiarity with contemporary Ukraine somehow increased the legendary aura of our destination. At the same time, however, Czernowitz shrank to utter ordinariness after we bought a Lonely Planet guidebook to Russia and consulted its short section on Western Ukraine. Here we found three pages devoted to Chernivtsi, in which the city was written up like any other tourist site in the guidebook—in this case as a site worth visiting for its old Habsburg buildings, its Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox churches, its Armenian cathedral, and the palatial buildings, formerly the residence of the Orthodox Metropolitans of Bukowina, which now housed the Jurii Fed'kovych University. The insert map of the city in the guidebook showed street and place names in Ukrainian—its tiny size making it difficult to find correspondences to the Herrengasse or Ringplatz always invoked by my parents. Additionally, the guidebook only mentioned Jews as one among a number of current-day population groups. How disori-

enting! Somehow it seemed harder for me to see Czernowitz as simply a place like any of the others I had visited in my many travels than to think of it as a place of potential danger, where I might be mugged or hassled and made uncomfortable.

But when we finally did set off on our trip, the flight on Ukraine International Airlines could not have been more ordinary and our arrival in Lviv less eventful. We did have to show and declare all the cash we had brought along for the customs agents, a complicated operation considering how carefully we had hidden it on our bodies and in our clothes. My parents are always nervous around officials, especially if they speak Russian or, as in this case, Ukrainian. I felt a rush to protect them, but I could not speak Ukrainian and had to look to *them* for translations and explanations.

Still, the entry and customs formalities were relatively quick, and when we exited the airport we were happy to be met by Alexei, a tall young man sent by the travel agency to pick us up and drive us to Chernivtsi. He led us to a rickety old VW bus, placed our luggage in its back, and within minutes drove us through the outskirts of Lviv, lined with Soviet-style block apartment buildings, in a southwesterly direction toward our destination. A visit to Lviv's inner city—to what had been the famous Austrian Lemberg and Polish Lvov—was not scheduled until our return from Chernivtsi.

In the VW, my mother, who suffers from occasional car sickness, sat in front, and in just a few minutes, we heard her striking up a conversation with Alexei, the driver, in halting but competent Russian. He seemed delighted that she could communicate with him, and they continued to talk during the entire trip. Occasionally she turned around to check on a vocabulary term with my father or to translate relevant facts about Lviv, the countryside, or Alexei's family for us. Although the trip to Chernivtsi took several long hours, she was animated, engaged, happy.

It was late afternoon when we started out, a clear beautiful, bright early autumn day. The bumpy two-lane road was lined with green fields, small villages with colorful onion domes or pointed church steeples, expansive wheat fields, grazing goats and cows. A few times we had to stop as flocks of brilliantly white geese crossed before our vehicle. The villages certainly did not seem affluent, but they looked neat, with fenced yards and painted houses, nothing like the photographs in the New York exhibit. To me the landscape recalled the countryside from my childhood excursions in Romania, and I took delight in the geese and ducks and the stork nests on top of telephone poles. Carl and Lotte had never been in this area before: it had been part of Galicia, the Bukowina's neighboring province under the Habsburgs that later

belonged to Poland rather than Romania. When we reached what had been the former border between Galicia and Bukowina, we took note. Only some thirty kilometers from Cernăuți, during the Second World War this was the boundary between collaborationist Romania and German-occupied Poland: for Jews in my parents' situation at the time, it was the divide between the chance of survival under Romanian rule and almost certain death under the Nazis.

We had now been on the road for over four hours, with one stop at a dilapidated outhouse near a gas station. The only drinks we could buy there were sweet orange sodas. We were parched, hungry, tired, but also excited and full of anticipation. It was dark when we finally drove into Chernivtsi and discovered that the main access road into the city was closed and we would have to make a detour. We circled through newer and older parts of a dark city in which my parents tried hard, but were unable, to recognize any familiar landmarks, although at one point they thought we were passing the central railroad station. They called out street names in German, asking each other whether this, by any chance, was the *Siebenbürgerstrasse* or the *Hauptstrasse*. Alexei, a Lviv native, was equally lost and stopped for directions four times, which was not easy since the streets were almost deserted. At one point, we were forced to back up through an entire street. I kept telling myself that a trip to the past was bound to be full of obstacles and wrong turns. Then, after circling for what seemed like hours but was probably not more than thirty minutes, we pulled up in front of an enormous concrete-block building, said good-bye to Alexei, and walked up a large staircase to enter an almost totally dark space. It took minutes for our eyes to adjust, to discern a small lamp at the other end of an expansive empty lobby, and to make our way to the front desk. We had arrived at the Cheremosh Hotel, which we would later jokingly call the *Cher et Moche* (in French, expensive and ugly).<sup>5</sup>

#### ROSA'S BOOKSHELF

Even though it was already quite late, Carl phoned Rosa Roth Zuckermann from the hotel and arranged for us to visit her the next morning. Rosa, Carl's first cousin, daughter of his mother's sister Lotti and her husband, Leon, was nearly ninety years old and the only member of the family who had remained in Chernovtsy after the Soviets took control of the northern Bukowina at the end of the Second World War. She had survived deportation and nearly three years of displacement and misery in Transnistria, where her first husband, young son, and parents all perished from typhus during the bitter-cold

winter of 1941. She was married a second time after her return to Chernovtsy, to Martin Zuckermann, a teacher; their son, Felix, was born in 1949. She too became a teacher of languages—first of French, in a school, and then, privately, of German and English. Her husband died in the early 1980s.

I had met Rosa only once before, in 1958, during my childhood in Bucharest, when she and Felix briefly visited our family there. Even though my parents stayed in touch with her by mail in the years following our emigration to the United States, we had not seen each other since that time.

Early the next day, eager for our reunion, we met Felix Zuckermann on the central Ringplatz, where a taxi had dropped us off, and with him we set off to Ulitza Klara Zetkina, the former Pardinigasse, where Rosa had lived for the last fifty years. This residential street, the site of a few villas, small middle-class apartment houses, and humbler residences, all constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century, was now in major disrepair. Its sidewalks were eroded, its pavement torn and potholed, and wild grasses and small bushes grew virtually unhindered within its domain. Rosa, smiling broadly, waved to us from the top-floor window of a small apartment house close to the beginning of the street, welcoming us and beckoning for us to come up to see her.

At the apartment door, she greeted us each joyfully with an embrace and kiss, commenting animatedly on how well we looked and how glad she was that we had come to visit her. A short, full-bodied woman with sparkling, vivid, deep-set dark eyes, wavy gray hair, and a warmly engaging face, Rosa emanated an energy and liveliness that belied her age. Speaking to us in a clear, precisely enunciated German with a slight Bukowina lilt, she invited us into her parlor but then, as we were about to sit down, offered to show us around her apartment. This was the first private residence we would visit in Chernivtsi, and I had been taken aback by the lamentable appearance of the building in which it was located. Like the street it fronted on, her building's entrance yard was rutted and overgrown with bushes, its small public entrance lobby was cluttered and unswept, the hallway and stairwell were dank and dimly lit, with dark green paint peeling from the plaster walls.

Beyond the door of Rosa's apartment, however, a different world began to unfold before our eyes. On a first glance throughout her place, it was as though we had stepped back into another era—as if we were back in the time when Czernowitz was indeed that Austrian provincial capital where “people and books used to live.” Certainly the place where she now lived had never been the abode of the very rich: its living spaces were modest in size, graceful but not elegant, with high ceilings, good wooden floors, floor-to-

ceiling tiled woodstoves. Yet its less appealing amenities were also apparent: the tiny cold-water bathroom, drippy plumbing, inadequate kitchen stove and refrigeration. The apartment's eclectic furnishings and décor, however, emphatically rose above its structural features and regrettable facilities. Long white lace curtains hung suspended from the ceilings by the windows, enclosing the hominess of this interior. Fresh flowers, in ornate glass vases, decorated various surfaces and shelves. In the bedrooms and parlor, floor and table lamps with ornamental cloth shades supplemented dim ceiling fixtures. Upholstered chairs, of indeterminate vintages, as well as old lacquered-wood tables, large and small but all layered with doilies and knickknacks, covered much of the floor space. The tables' surfaces were barely visible under the piles of books, magazines, and newspapers that threatened to displace the knickknacks. Chests and packed bookshelves lined the walls. And on the walls, shelves, and mantelpieces in all the rooms were pictures of buildings and sights in old Czernowitz and photos in ornate frames—of a much younger Rosa and Felix, of Rosa and Martin Zuckermann, and of Rosa's brothers Arthur, Paul, and Muniu as young men, as well as of various other relatives and acquaintances.

"Come, make yourselves comfortable," Rosa said to us, as we returned to the parlor and she busily cleared books and other reading materials from the surface of a table to make room for cups and saucers. "I can offer you tea with lemon or Nescafé, with a slice of the torte that the mother of one of my pupils baked." Her language pupils, especially the children, were fond of her and affectionate, she explained, and often brought her cakes, flowers, and sweets—"little gifts," as she called them—when they came for their lessons.

The conversation quickly turned from Rosa's queries about our first impressions of the city and the changes it had undergone since Lotte and Carl left to the health and present situation of various close relatives dispersed throughout the world. Leo and I, however, eventually wandered over to one of Rosa's stacked glass-enclosed bookshelves, to which both of us were attracted by the covers of several displayed books and especially by four small souvenir tin and plaster-of-Paris busts of Emperor Franz Joseph and two framed color postcards of Empress Sissy, his wife. Rosa, perhaps noticing my expression of surprise and then amusement as we examined her little imperial pantheon, nodded with a smile: "Yes, I am still a monarchist. I long for those good times. Friends send me these keepsakes from Vienna. And," she added, pointing to a small Israeli flag wedged into a corner of the same shelf, "I remain a Zionist. I have always been a Zionist, never a communist."

The ideological incongruity between her monarchism and her Zionism

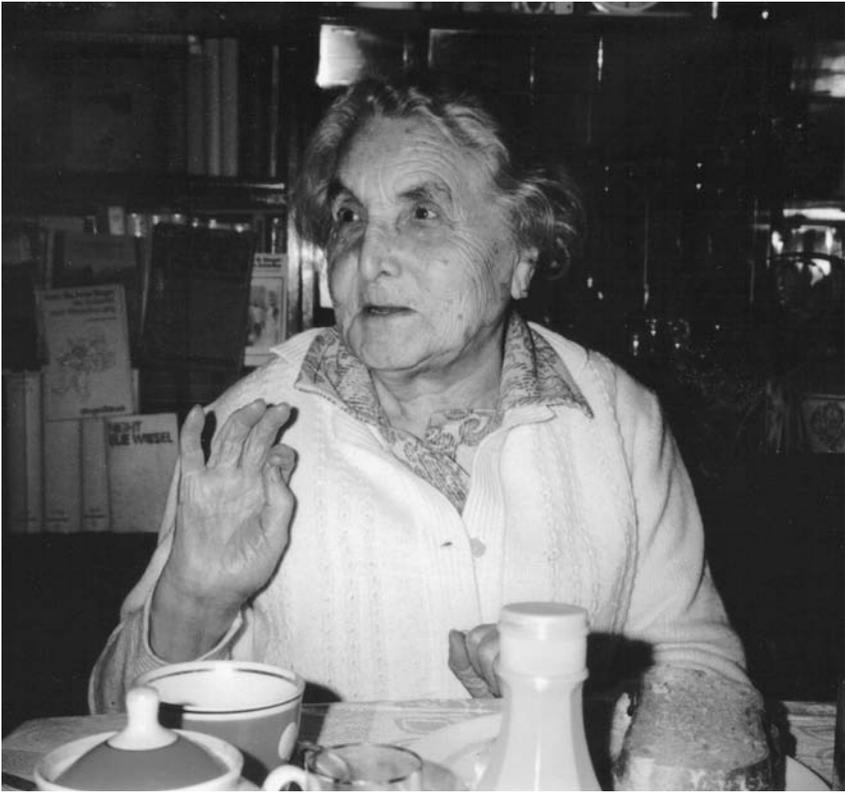


Figure 4. Rosa Zuckermann in her apartment (Photograph courtesy of Helmut Kusdat)

seemed not to bother Rosa at all, and neither Leo nor I probed her for additional clarification. But noting our interest in her books, Rosa joined us by the bookcases while we took a look at the works they contained.

The books themselves included the principal German-Jewish Bukowina prewar and postwar writers, as well as some of the traditional texts that shaped their work.<sup>6</sup> As such, Rosa's haphazard-looking library was a testament not only to the vibrancy and persistence of Bukowina's distinct culture but also to its dispersal and dissolution. Most obvious were the collections by Czernowitz authors published recently and, in some cases posthumously, in German and Austrian paperback and hardback editions, as well as some English, French, Russian, and Ukrainian translations of their works: volumes of poetry by Paul Celan and Rose Ausländer and books about them;

the correspondence between Celan and Nelly Sachs; monographs by Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, Viktor Wittner, and Alfred Kittner; Eliezer Shteynbarg and Itzik Manger in German translation from Yiddish; and the recent anthologies *Fäden ins Nichts gespannt* (Threads Spun into the Void) and *Versunkene Dichtung der Bukowina* (Submerged Poetry of the Bukowina). These books were not shelved but faced outward as if in a bookstore window display, and Celan's and Ausländer's portraits stared at us from a number of covers. Behind and below them were German classics—Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Rilke, Mann, Hauptmann, Keller, Storm—as well as a number of other German-Jewish writers, like the Czernowitz-educated Karl Emil Franzos. Stefan Zweig's *Die Welt von gestern* (The World of Yesterday), his memoir of Habsburg era optimism and post-First World War deterioration and disheartenment, was also displayed face-outward in the bookcase, as though to serve as a comment on its entire contents, as were Lion Feuchtwanger's *Exil* and Marcel Reich-Ranicki's *Mein Leben* (in English, *The Author Himself: The Life of Marcel Reich-Ranicki*). And yet, despite what seemed like an overwhelming emphasis on literature embodying or referring back to a no longer existent Austro-German world of yesterday, there were some Romanian works by Mihai Eminescu and Ion Luca Caragiale, many Russian and Ukrainian titles—by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Bakunin, Kobylanska—as well as late-twentieth-century German, English, American, and French novels and recent vintage reference works, particularly in German, such as the dictionary *Der große Duden*. And the bookshelves also contained writings on the wartime concentration camps—Viktor Frankl, Bruno Bettelheim, Primo Levi—as well as Israeli fiction in German translation. Books by Amos Oz were prominently in view.

“Those volumes,” Rosa indicated, pointing to the classics, “were the books of my youth. My mother knew poetry by Heine, Schiller, and Goethe by heart, and she and my father introduced me to their poems as a young girl. They only had four grades of formal schooling, but they were very well read.” As she watched us pick up and leaf through some of the volumes, Rosa continued, “There are only a few specimens like me left here—I mean of old Czernowitzers still speaking German and reading these books. But, you know, I still like Heine better than Celan. Don't you?”

Many, if not most, working- and middle-class Czernowitz Jews of Carl, Lotte, and Rosa's generation grew up with bookshelves such as the one in Rosa's apartment—shelves largely filled with German and German-Jewish classics. In a memoir-essay, Ilana Shmueli, now a resident of Israel, recalls “the beautifully carved mahogany cabinet that stood in the parlor of my

parents' house and that was mostly locked. It contained, naturally, the gold-embossed volumes of the classics, new and untouched. There was also a Judaica section, the *History of the Jews* by Grätz, Herzl's *Alt-Neuland* [Old New Land], etc. There was no bible in the house.<sup>7</sup> But the primary contents of Rosa's cabinet, the works of Celan and *Ausländer* for which Czernowitz is now recognized and remembered (and which, unlike the books in Shmueli's parents' collection, were indeed touched and read), were of more recent vintage. This literature from the period before and after the Second World War—by Czernowitz/Cernăuți writers and by Czernowitz exiles living in a multilingual diaspora—was written in what has been termed “deterritorialized” German. It was created when German was no longer the official language in the former Bukowina and reflected a stubborn adherence to an Austro-German identity in the face of Romanianization, Sovietization, anti-Semitism, and eventual deportation and exile.

These books, many of which represented the Bukowina literature written in a German best described by Rose *Ausländer*'s image of an “uprooted word”—and many of which are also to be found on my parents' shelves in New Hampshire and Florida—both expressed and embodied the contradictions that had led us here.<sup>8</sup> How, I had always wondered, did the rich, cosmopolitan, multicultural environment of Czernowitz survive its many assaults to produce such a powerful afterlife in its descendants? Is there still a place for it now, in the city itself, or will it forever be relegated to the memories and fantasies of its exiles? What would we, what would my parents, find as we began our explorations?

In a complex way, I realized, the contradictions between “home” and “hostile territory” were indeed the driving forces behind my own ambivalent nostalgia for Czernowitz. I knew that I could not resolve the contradictions, nor did I wish to do so. Still, my parents' own ambivalent nostalgia generated in me the need to repair the ruptured fabric of a painfully discontinuous, fragmentary history. “Returning” to the place with them, finding Rosa and Felix there, surrounded by the literary and cultural objects I recognized from the bookshelves of my own childhood and youth, seemed the first step in a process of reconnection and recovery, in both senses of the word. At the same time, I, like other children of exiles and refugees, had inherited my parents' knowledge of the fragility of place, their suspicion of the notion of home. “Where are you from?” The stranger's question and my mother's unequivocal response from that morning would continue to haunt me throughout those first days in the former Czernowitz.