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purse containing the sum for his return journey to Pultuzk. When the *hasidim* got wind of this outrage they forced the issue and elected Rabbi Eliezer as their spiritual leader. However, Plock had a terrible reputation as “a devourer of the clergy”, and Rabbi Eliezer’s term of office was relatively brief.

Mr Ashkenazi pointed out the house on the *rynek* which had been the residence of another famous hasidic figure, Rabbi Hayyim Shapira. While praying on his balcony during the Russo-Polish war in 1922, the saintly man had been arrested and accused of signalling to the enemy. After a summary trial he was executed by a firing squad. His murder, perceived by some as a prefiguration of the *Shoah*, caused an uproar throughout Poland and several attempts to have him rehabilitated were made until 1939, when the cause then seemed futile. For the first time I at last understood how such an absurd accusation could have been perpetrated – the *rebbe*’s balcony gave directly onto the Vistula and beyond, the open fields.

I had hoped to find the tombs of my ancestors in the cemetery, to kneel and pray for those of our family who had perished violently among the first victims of Nazi barbarity. Instead my hopes were met with the spectacle of the football field, which now occupies the spot of the age-old cemetery. As we walked along the side of the field I discovered the debris of a tombstone with some Hebrew lettering. What desecration! Even the memorial monument which had been erected in a corner of the sports field by the handful of survivors of the *Shoah* had been severely vandalized. As we stood there, plunged in tearful thought, a book of Psalms in our palms, a group of youngsters jeered while passing *Zhid, Zhidka* (Jew-boy, Jew-girl). Though I had never ever heard that cry before, the blood froze in my veins as if I had perceived some horrific echo resounding from the depths of time through the collective memories of generations of cowering ancestors. That word, which continued to echo in my inside as we left Plock, as we left Poland, summed up in one pathetic syllable, the harassing experience of the visit we had just ended. Though a world had vanished, human folly abides.

From Cernovcy to Czernowitz*

Verena Dohrn†

Cernovcy was the last station of a journey through the West Ukraine. They say that the old Czernowitz was the crown, the ultimate standard of all that Galicia, the Bukovina, had been at its best. Legends of the Bukovina had fed questing journeys: poems by Rose Auslaender and Paul Celan, stories of the German Jewish symbiosis, of Enlightenment, tolerance and the manifold cultural liveliness in that landscape. Rose Auslaender had painted a picture in my mind of the “Green mother/Bukovina”, of the “Carpathian tops/fatherly”, of “four-language-songs” and of “humans/who understand one another”. But: something else overshadowed this idyllic picture. The black milk of the “Death Fugue” had poured across it, had coloured it darkly so that it was no longer recognizable.

The “Death Fugue” of Paul Celan – composed out of his own and strangers’ words and suffering of Czernowitz – sings the end of the song of four language speaking family songs . . .

Once, the author Karl Emil Franzos travelled on the railway to his hometown Czernowitz: with the Karl-Ludwig Train towards the East; from Cracow over Tarnow, Przemyśl to Lemberg. There, he changed trains and travelled South: to Czernowitz-Jassy. “Half Asiatic” he called Galicia, the landscape through which he travelled; Czernowitz, the city, however, he called “an oasis in the midst of the half-Asiatic cultural desert”. There was a time when the railway united Czernowitz with the world: with Lemberg and Odessa, Warsaw and Bucharest, Vienna and Berlin. In 1918 and in 1945 the borders of the countries were drawn anew, Czernowitz was cut off from the world of the West, was pushed to the outer edges of the Eastern world. Since then, an “Iron Curtain” had come to hang between the world, cutting streets and railway lines in half. Until today, travellers

*Editor’s Note: Translated and abridged from a radio broadcast.

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from the West had to organize the journey to Galicia and into the Bukovina through Moscow . . .

The time came when Czernowitz, the town-of-many-people – Jews, Ukrainians, Romanians, Poles – was destroyed. Many of the 120,000 who lived there: most of the 50,000 Jews (almost a third of the inhabitants) were killed; the rest – gone with the wind. The old Czernowitz, 51 years on after World War II started, is almost forgotten. The present Cernovcy is a Soviet provincial town with about 260,000 inhabitants living in a kind of no-man's land, on the Southwest border of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, 37 miles distant from the Romanian border.

Czernowitz/Cernauti/Cernovcy – merchants' roads from Constantinople to Nuernberg, from Siebenbuergeren to Cracow and to the Baltic – they flowed into one another here, at a ford of the Pruth. Czernowitz, as the name suggests, of Slavic origin. It is first mentioned in a document, as a customs point, in 1408. In the course of history, the city had different masters: Moldavian counts, Turkish governors, Habsburg emperors who finally granted it its own sovereignty lasting a good half century until the beginning of the War in 1914. When Austria-Hungary and its double monarchy came to an end, Czernowitz was ceded to the Romanians. After a Soviet ultimatum in 1940, the Red Army entered it, and the Germans came a year later and occupied Czernowitz. In 1945 it became part of the Soviet Union.

Whatever befell it, Czernowitz was different, unique among cities and the *Shtetl* – it was “a world all its own”.

It was a Jewish place. Most of its inhabitants were German-Sephardic-Galician-Russian-Jews who found their home in the Bukovina. 1408 was also the date when the first Jews were mentioned in documents. The Muslim Turks, rulers of the city since the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, showed the Jews far more tolerance than the Spanish Inquisition or the Cossacks who had made the Jews their scapegoat in their battle against the *Schlachta* (the Polish nobility). The Habsburgs, during their rule, came to profit from the sophistication and wealth of the Jewish merchants in Czernowitz, and received the full loyalty of their Jewish citizens. In addition, many of the Czernowitz Jews spoke the language of the Habsburgs, High German, while the Germans in

Czernowitz spoke in a Swabian dialect in their suburb Rosch. And others mixed their languages, spoke Judaeo-German or Yiddish – their ancestors from the late Middle Ages, from Germany, had brought the old *Judenteutsch* with them.

The real flowering time for Czernowitz Jewry began when it was separated from Galicia in 1849. It became the “Crown-land Duchy of Bukovina” in 1867, part of the Austro-Hungarian double-monarchy. This brought the Jews the yearned-for equal civil rights with the Christian citizens of Czernowitz . . . A rich and varied Jewish culture now developed in Czernowitz: the assimilated Jewish landowner, the factory owner, scholar, or simple shoemaker; the tattered Kaftan-Jews or the *Wunderrabbis*, enlightened or Hassidic-influenced Socialists all the way to the dogmatic Zionists – all was part of that culture. It was filled with social-economic, cultural and political contradictions and varying experiences which became a cultural dynamite or, by contrast, artistic intuition in the minds of the intellectuals of Czernowitz.

A major difference existed between Czernowitz and the impoverished, heterogeneous Galicia behind the Carpathian mountains. The Bukovina with its capital city Czernowitz in the Eastern-most section of the weakened, fairly enlightened Habsburg monarchy was a closed, but certainly not homogenous society with its own enclaves of smaller, closed societies. And there was a place in Czernowitz for that third of its population which was Jewish . . .

Comparing the old and the new city plans of Czernowitz (the old one so much better, so much more detailed than the Soviet plan of today's Cernovcy) while seated on a stone bench in the Ringplatz, one begins to understand this place. The old Czernowitz is there, before our eyes: the Ringplatz, the Rathaus, the Hotel “Schwarzer Adler”; the main road from North to South, the old Tempelgasse in the West, the Russischestrasse in the East. Diagonally across from us is the Herrengasse, Southeast – then as now the “Korso” in the “Klein-Wien” of the Orient. One difference: Where in the Habsburg time one saw the Maria Statue, in Romanian times the “Liberation Monument” with the Bukovina aurochs triumphant over the vanquished double eagle of Austria-Hungary, there now stands the Lenin Monument in the

middle of the Ringplatz, surrounded by flowerbeds. Across from it towers a 20-metre-tall photo wall, covered with pictures of honoured comrades from the Cernovcy district.

Searching for the Jewish Czernowitz, we wandered through the former Tempel-Gasse. The Jewish temple from 1877 still stands there. Once, it housed one thousand people. When the Germans occupied Czernowitz in 1941, they burned it – but the walls withstood the flames, and even survived attempts to blow it up after the war. Only the Byzantine dome, the slim turrets and oriel bays are lacking today. Instead of the Star of David, a hammer and sickle is seen above the portal. The temple of Czernowitz is now the movie-house “Oktober”.

Even after the war had begun, the Jews of Czernowitz considered themselves to be safe. Jews escaping from Germany sought shelter there. In 1940, the Russian occupation began, and the Russians began to persecute the bourgeois, well-to-do Jews, accusing them even of collaboration with the German fascists, dispossessed them, deported them. Most of the young revolutionaries, including poor and non-religious Jews, did not fear the Soviets. They saw

hope in their arrival, assumed that they would provide protection against the Germans and an easier life for themselves. In those days, the young Paul Celan came to know the poems of Ossip Mandelstam, and learned from him the magic of words as tools for fashioning the vision of suffering in the future.

The Jews were declared fair game when the Germans arrived. The *Einsatzgruppe* SS had no delicate qualms about the way to deal with them. “Liquidate them!” was the order. Immediately, in the first days, thousands were taken, tortured, and killed. A ghetto was established in the old Jewish quarter at the edge of the Cecina of the Pruth.

Our walk down to the old Jewish quarter brought us through the Karl-Liebknecht Strasse (formerly the Uhrmacher Gasse), across the Scholem Aleichem Strasse, the old Juden Gasse. No rope-makers, carpenters, furriers, watchmaker, shoemaker, plumber, barbers, coppersmiths, locksmith, pot repairer, glass blower, tailor, gold- and silver-smiths – no advertisements of workshops or shopwindows; nothing like that to be seen in the Jewish quarter. No sweet aroma arose out of cellar bakeries, no



Czernowitz: the Old Temple, now a cinema.

From Cernovcy to Czernowitz

sharp smell from whiskey bars, butchers or fish shops. Yet it is said that about twenty thousand Jews still live in Cernovcy.

And so we walked across the Volgogradskaya, alias Springbrunnen Gasse, and entered the Henry Barbusse Strasse, the old Synagogen Gasse. The metamorphosis of the street names reports the paradigmatic changes within the history of the city, in Cernovcy as in other Soviet towns. Next to the Lenin-Mainstreet there is a Karl Marx Strasse (once the Armenian Street), and there is a Friedrich-Engels Strasse. At least the Juden Gasse is still permitted to carry a Jewish name, that of the Jewish writer Scholem Aleichem. And, on the old Synagogen Strasse . . . among rows of old houses which survived the fire of 1867 . . . stands the old synagogue . . . but the old Czernowitz was gone. We walked around and looked for children, up the Henry Barbusse Street, towards the centre . . . tried to reconstruct the boundaries of the ghetto, and walked up the old Tuerkenbrunner Gasse, up the Tuerkengasse.

Deportations to Transnistrien, the area between Dniestr and the Southern Bug, travelled several hundred kilometres to the east of the city,

came to that Ukrainian concentration camp . . . the twenty-one year old Paul Celan and his friend Moses Rosenkranz were lucky: they were taken to do repair work on the roads. Paul Celan had to endure that parents and friends disappeared, that they were murdered.

We are back at the synagogue. Nearby monuments have disappeared: no Turkish Fountain, a witness from Turkish times; no traces of the ghetto, no memorial. Only a synagogue in the old Tuerkengasse. A high building, in Moorish style with decorated facades, a clearly preserved Star of David, tightly surrounded by other houses. Once, in Czernowitz before the war, there were over seventy synagogues here. An old couple passes. The man stops to tell us that the synagogue now belongs to a technical firm, used as a cultural centre. It could not be used for anything else after the war, since there were so few Jews in Cernovcy. Of 50,000 Jews in Czernowitz, barely 6000 survived the Holocaust . . .

The time rushes by. *Shabbes* is almost gone. We come to the synagogue in the Lukian-Kobelickij Strasse, the only one which is still a synagogue in Cernovcy. Eighteen old men, most



Czernowitz: Old Synagogue, now a theatre workshop.



Czernowitz: Family Synagogue.

of them wearing straw hats and white linen jackets, are assembled for *Havdalah* in the former family synagogue. Freshly painted, with a gleaming silver Star of David on its dome, it was easy to find. The men spoke Yiddish and a little bit of German. They were afraid, avoided giving their names, did not permit us to write down anything of the conversation, of course refused to be recorded on tape . . . who can tell . . . the fear of Fascism, of Stalinism, of antisemitism resides deeply within them. One of them, probably the youngest one, conducts the service, assigns individual tasks on *Shabbat*: who will carry the Torah, who will read the *Parasha*; and he criticizes those who talk during the services . . .

The old antisemitism continues in the Soviet Union . . . even though, today, the reformer Mikhail Gorbachev has given Jews and other

national, religious, political and social groups more space to come to terms with their identity. Jewish associations have now sprung up in different areas: in Riga, Vilna, Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Lwow, and also in Cernovcy. Most of the 150,000 Jews in Cernovcy did – as demanded of them by the Soviets – forget the old *mameloschen* Yiddish, as well as Hebrew, the language of their sacred books; it was forgotten and repressed:

Kra-kra-kra screams the crow.
Kra-kra-kra in bird language is also the sacred Hebrew language, meaning: Read! Read! Kro-kro-kro! For the crow is the bird-rabbi, and calls out: Kra-Kra! Read, bird, read . . .!

One of the Yiddish fables of Elieser Steinberg

begins in this fashion. "Dwarf with the giant-head/Steinberg Elieser/Redeemer of Stone and Berg [mountain]" was the name given by Rose Auslaender to the writer of fables from Czernowitz. "Mole and mouse/rose and ring-/no body remained dead/while Elieser lived."

No one is buried any more in the Jewish cemetery of Cernovcy. The leafy roof of the old chestnut trees protected us from a sudden rain squall. We stood on the central path, near a small temple, alongside the graves of famous Chief Rabbis of Czernowitz. And there we found the grave of the fabulist Elieser Steinberg. A light stone, broader than high, stood there as an opened book or a notebook; upon it, a relief of coloured flowers which flew like birds across the stone: *aleph, beth, gimel, dalet . . .*

More than memories, more than the elders in the old age homes represent Jewish culture in Cernovcy. Young people came together not too long ago, in a Jewish Cultural Group; first, to fight against the neglect and the vandalism which is found at the cemeteries of Cernovcy and of Sadagora. They organized Hebrew and Yiddish classes, established a Jewish library, want to turn the Orthodox Synagogue into a Museum for Jewish history, open up relations with Israel, with the Association of Czernowitz Jews in the Emigration. Since summer 1988 a bulletin is published, funds are raised for their group. And they try to work with the Ukrainian Folk Party, and want to see an active Jewish life in Cernovcy.

The old maps of Czernowitz are more reliable for finding one's way in the city than the new ones for Cernovcy. But the old Czernowitz was destroyed by National Socialism and by Stalinism, together with the hope that assimilation might be the solution to antisemitism and to the Jewish Question. Karl Emil Franzos tried the teachings of the Enlightenment in the best Lessing manner, and it died aborning. Self-denial, even self-hate was the result. It rendered the Jews helpless; but then, so did their pious surrender of the self to God. All of it fed hatred of the Jews. Had Karl Emil Franzos experienced the *Shoah*, he would have followed the path of Paul Celan into his Jewish identity, and he would have remembered the *Schibboleth*.

These thoughts came to me in Cernovcy, standing in front of the old buildings of Czernowitz.

The Righteous Gentiles

*Elisabeth Maxwell**

Dean Friedlander, Rabbi Dr Magonet, Ladies and Gentlemen, it's a long eventful road which has taken a carefree little Protestant-Huguenot French girl from the South of France to be invited to address such a distinguished gathering of learned rabbis, professors and their disciples and religious lay people. I am deeply honoured and at the same time full of awe and humility.

I was invited by Rabbi Magonet to talk on any topic of my choice and decided I would like to speak on the subject of *The Righteous Gentiles*, the name given by the Israelis to non-Jewish people who helped to save Jewish lives during these fateful years.

Elie Wiesel has written of the total abandonment of the Jews. It would be preposterous of me as a Christian to come here and lecture you on Righteous Gentiles if it was not to share with you my research as to why there were so few. Why were they more in some countries than in others? What were the factors that made some people take a stand against the tide of their society? Should we not see in the quiet courage of true heroism that the righteous showed lessons for Christians and Jews to share for the future?

For this lecture, I read many testimonies from survivors, scholarly papers and several books written on the subject but I quote extensively from the book by Samuel and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*¹ and from the paper written by Mordecai Paldiel for *Remembering for the Future, The Altruism of the Righteous Gentiles*.² I strongly recommend the book by the Oliners and I acknowledge the vast borrowings I made from Mordecai Paldiel's paper. A book by him on the Righteous Gentiles is soon to be published which will be invaluable for researchers in this field.

The rabbis of old taught that "whoever saves

*Elisabeth Maxwell has written for us on other occasions. Dr Maxwell is particularly concerned with the Interfaith dialogue, and helped to sponsor, direct and organise the historic Oxford Conference on the Holocaust. At present she is working on a future conference which may take place in Berlin.