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HISTORY AND PERSONAL FATE IN THE GERMAN-LANGUAGE LYRICS OF BUKOVINA

Literary historians from the socialist countries have been engaged for decades in exploring the thesis that literature is the brightest expression of the many external factors—historical, social, national, etc.—influencing human life. The modern writer especially is endowed with an intensive historical consciousness. Nevertheless, for one author, history can be an abstract and blurred category, as in the example of Marcel Proust’s “subjective” novel *In Search of Lost Time*, and for another author, it can be definite and painful, as in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s document-based epic chronicles of the Stalinist period. Of concern here is not so much an aesthetical moment as a philosophical-historical dimension. The American novelist William Faulkner invented the fictional region Yoknapatawpha, where the events of most of his novels and stories take place; he finds this “miniature stamp of the native land”¹ enough to show the many decades of the American history.

The depth of historical conscience and historical thinking of an author cannot be measured by either the geographical scale or the chronological scope of their works; instead, what matters is the author’s ability to embrace the essence of historical events and to artis-

¹ Cited after Gribanov Boris, *Faulkner* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1976), 91.

tically transform them through imagination, recreating the history for the reader in an original, aesthetically complete form. Hence, in order to unveil the complex interrelations of historical events and personalities in a poem, a drama or a novel, it is not necessary to make deep historical outlines into the past of a certain literature. For this task, a small geographic region and limited time-span may be sufficient; for example, Bukovina in the period between the two World Wars.

Home until World War II to Ukrainians, Romanians, Jews, Germans, Poles, Magyars, Armenians, Roma, and other nationalities, Bukovina seemed to endure more turmoil in the twentieth century than over the whole of its previous history, including during the ancient Slavonic state, Moldavian principalities, and Ottoman rule. Nearly 150 years of peace under the Austrian Crown were interrupted by World War I, and in 1918 the province was transferred to Romanian rule under the Treaty of Versailles. Two decades later its northern part was “liberated” by the Soviet army—under the 1940 Hitler-Stalin Pact, Bukovina was divided into two parts, with the north incorporated into Soviet Ukraine and the south remaining under Romanian rule. One year later, Northern Bukovina was occupied by the Germans, who gave the land to their Romanian allies to rule. In 1944 the Red Army “liberated” Northern Bukovina for the second time and it was again incorporated into the USSR. After the fall of the Soviet Union it remained part of now-independent Ukraine. So, this is a land which seems to be a toy of history rather than its full-fledged subject.

In her poem “Czernowitz,” Rose Ausländer tries to sketch the main stages of this chaotic, tangled modern history of Bukovina as “a history in a nutshell”:

Gestufte Stadt im grünen Reifrock
Der Amsel unverfälschtes Vokabular

Der Spiegelkarpfen
in Pfeffer versulzt
schwieg in fünf Sprachen

Die Zigeunerin
las unser Schicksal
in den Karten
Schwarz-gelb
die Kinder der Monarchie
träumten deutsche Kultur

Legenden um den Baal-Schem
Aus Sadagura: die Wunder

Nach dem roten Schachspiel
wechseln die Farben

Der Walache erwacht –
schläft wieder ein
Ein Siebenmeilenstiefel
steht vor seinem Bett – flieht

Im Ghetto:
Gott hat abgedankt

Erneutes Fahnenspiel:
der Hammer schlägt die Flucht entzwei
die Sichel mäht die Zeit zu Heu²

German-language Bukovinian poetry, which paradoxically reached the apogee of its development during the Romanian period (although it of course had been prepared by the lasting Austrian period), supplies us with numerous and astonishing facts relevant for exploring the topic of “history and personal fate,” illustrating not only the inevitable weight of history borne by all poets, but also the resistance of artists attempting to elude this yoke. My analysis is based on the personal and artistic tragedies of

² Rose Ausländer, *Die Sichel mäht die Zeit zu Heu: Gedichte 1957-1965* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1985), 16.

Bukovinian poets, fatally drained by criminal ideology, totalitarian authorities, and World War II.

Rose Ausländer, whose poem is cited above, was almost a peer to the twentieth century; she was born in Chernivtsi on May 11, 1901 under the name Rosalie Beatrice Ruth Scherzer, and died in Germany in 1988. In her youth she was an ardent student of Plato, Spinoza, and the Berlin philosopher Constantine Brunner, and a member of Dr. Kettner's so-called "Ethical Seminar" in Chernivtsi. In her poem "Spinoza II," she wrote:

Mein Heiliger heißt Benedikt
Er hat das Weltall klargeschliffen³.

As a twenty-year-old girl, the young poet followed her friend—later husband—Ignaz Ausländer into emigration in the United States, where she worked as a bank clerk and an editor of German-language immigrant newspapers, in which she published her first poems. In 1931, after ten years in America, she returned to Chernivtsi, and shortly before the beginning of WWII published her first book of poems, *Rainbow* (1939). The book is opened by a short poem called "Into Life":

Nur aus der Trauer Mutterinnigkeit
strömt mir das Vollmaß des Erlebens ein.
Sie speist mich eine lange trübe Zeit
mit schwarzer Milch und schwerem Wermutwein.⁴

Here for the first time appears the outlandish oxymoron "black milk," repeated later in the first line and fatal leitmotiv of Paul Celan's *Death Fugue*.

³ Rose Ausländer, *Ich höre das Herz des Oleanders: Gedichte 1977-1979* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1984), S. 263.

⁴ Rose Ausländer, *Die Erde war ein atlasweißes Feld: Gedichte 1927-1956* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1985), S. 66.

But soon the war broke out, and the cannons spoke while the muses were silenced. Most of the German-language press dared not publish reviews on this book of poetry written by a Jewish author, though certain papers published balanced reviews of Rose's first volume; among reviews appeared in the Bukovinian press in "Czernowitzer Morgenblatt" (March 20, 1940) and "Allgemeine Zeitung" (April 20, 1940), and in Switzerland in "Der Bund" (March 17, 1940) and "National-Zeitung" (April 14, 1940).

In 1941 Chernivtsi was occupied by the Germans including Brigadenführer Otto Ohlendorf's SS units. Rosa Ausländer was imprisoned in a Jewish ghetto, where she lived with her mother and younger brother in a dark basement, hungry, scared and in the lethal danger of deportation to Transnistria. She later expressed this state of moral despair and existential dismay in a poem of from her first post-war collection, *Blind Summer*:

Sie kamen
mit scharfen Fahnen und Pistolen
schossen alle Sterne und den Mond ab
damit kein Licht uns bliebe
damit kein Licht uns liebe

Da begruben wir die Sonne
Es war eine unendliche Sonnenfinsternis⁵ –

This period is also described in her spacious essay "Everything Can Be a Motive":

„Getto, Elend, Horror, Todestransporte. In jenen Jahren trafen wir Freunde uns zuweilen heimlich, oft unter Lebensgefahr, um Gedichte zu lesen. Der unerträglichen Realität gegenüber gab es zwei Verhaltensweisen: entweder man gab sich der Verzweiflung preis, oder man übersiedelte in eine andere Wirklichkeit, die geistige. Wir zum Tode verurteilten Juden waren unsagbar trostbedürftig. Und während wir den Tod erwarteten, wohnten manche von uns

⁵ Rose Ausländer, *Die Sichel mäht die Zeit...*, 332.

in Traumworten – unser traumatisches Heim in der Heimatlosigkeit. Schreiben war Leben. Überleben“⁶.

One of the best poems depicting the Jewish fate during the time of persecutions is “Without Wine or Bread” (alluding, undoubtedly, to the works of Hölderlin and Trakl, and to biblical tradition in general):

In unserm Herzen ist die Nacht zu Haus
und will dem Lichte eines Tags nicht weichen.
An unsre Schläfe schlägt die Fledermaus
ein unentwirrbar blutiges Hakenzeichen.

An allen Enden fletschen ihre Zähne
die Wölfe, ihre Augen funkeln rot.
Es rüsten sich des greisen Volkes Söhne
zum Abendmahle ohne Wein und Brot.

Die Silberbecher rollen aus der Hand.
Die Blumen sind vergast. Die Lüfte stechen.
Was wir besitzen: eine Klagewand,
an der die Fluten unsrer Tränen brechen⁷.

When the Soviet troops liberated Bukovina in spring 1944, Rose Ausländer immigrated to America again, leaving the terrors of the war behind. She worked as a secretary in a New York trading company and wrote poetry in English. Was this a protest, a psychologically-motivated rejection of the German language? Nevertheless, she could and would not lose her native language despite forever losing her homeland. On a 1957 trip to Europe, the poet visited in Paris her fellow Bukovinian Paul Celan, whom she has known from Chernivtsi times; her fate is buoyed after several lengthy discussions with him, then already a famous author: she returns anew to her native German language as her most valuable treasure and spiritual core:

⁶ Rose Ausländer, *Hügel aus Äther unwiderrufflich: Gedichte und Prosa 1966-1975* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1984), 286.

⁷ Rose Ausländer, *Die Erde war...*, 155.

Mein Vaterland ist tot
sie haben es begraben
im Feuer

Ich lebe
in meinem Mutterland
Wort⁸.

In 1965, a quarter century after the previous edition, *Blind Summer* finally appeared in Vienna. In the same year she left the United States and moves first to Austria, then to the BRD to experience the language in a native environment. In Düsseldorf, in the Jewish pension Nelly-Sachs-Haus, the aged Ausländer, still without fame in literature, began a new life of incredibly intensive literary work resulting in over twenty new poetry collections, including *36 Gerechte* (1967), *Inventar* (1972), *Ohne Visum* (1974), *Andere Zeichen* (1975), *Noch ist Raum* (1976), *Doppelspiel* (1977), *Aschensommer* (1978), *Mutterland* (1978), *Es bleibt noch viel zu sagen* (1978), and many others—often two or three books a year! These collections ultimately established her place as one of the most prominent figures of postwar German literature.

No less tragic were the life and works—likewise determined by the times and history—of another Bukovinian poet, Moses Rosenkranz. Born in 1904 in Berhomet on the Pruth to a poor Jewish family, he perceived this event already as some sort of misunderstanding, as he revealed later in his autobiographical poem “Descend”:

Ich kam zur Welt in einem Stamme
der mich in seine Hut nicht nahm
daß ich sehr unwillkommen kam
es sagte mirs der Blick der Amme

⁸ Rose Ausländer, *Ich höre das Herz...*, 98.

Ich kam zur Welt in einer Kiste
 in der kein Platz für mich bestand
 ich kam zur Welt in einem Land
 darin ich nichts zu suchen hatte
 In eine Welt verschlossener Türen
 kam ich und mußte draußen stehn:
 ich fühlte wie die Winde gehn
 und wurde ohne mich zu rühren.⁹

Growing up in a polyglot environment (Ukrainian, Romanian, German, and Yiddish were spoken in his native village, and his mother, originally from Galicia, taught him Polish), he chose German as his poetic language, and as early as 1930 published in Chernivtsi his first German-language collection, *Leben in Versen*. This was followed by two more books of poetry, *Gemalte Fensterscheiben (Stained-Glass Windows, 1936)* and *Die Tafeln (The Tablets, 1940)*, which made him one of the most famous Bukovinian poets of interwar period (Swiss literature scholar Kaspar Niklaus Wildberger calls him “the father of Bukovinian poetry”).¹⁰

But soon, Rosenkranz mercilessly was pulled into the orbit of history. The whirlwind of war brought him through a Jewish ghetto and several Romanian “labor” camps, in one of which he stayed with Paul Celan. In May 1944 the poet managed to flee to Bucharest and stay underground until the Soviets come. Liberation by the Red Army brought him only new trouble and suffering. After a short period of work for the International Red Cross in Bucharest he was suddenly arrested under an alleged pretext. The poet recalls this as a horrible incomprehensible nightmare:

Laut den damaligen Bestimmungen durften die Hilfeleistungen des Internationalen Roten Kreuzes den Deutschen in Rumänien nicht zugute kommen. Ich setzte mich eigenmächtig über diese Verfügung hinweg und ließ Teile einer irländischen Schenkung (insgesamt 40

⁹ Moses Rosenkranz, *Im Untergang: Ein Jahrhundertsbuch* (München: Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1986), 10.

¹⁰ Kaspar Niklaus Wildberger, *Moses Rosenkranz – der Vater der Bukowina-Dichtung*. In: *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, 38. Jg., 1989, Folge 3, 177–185.

Waggons Lebensmittel und Kleidung) sächsischen Kinder- und Altersheimen zukommen. Ich wurde angezeigt. Der damalige rumänische Justizminister Lucretiu Patraskanu weigerte sich, mich zu verhaften. Auch die sowjetische Kommandatur, die meinen Fall übernahm, sprach mich zunächst frei. Das war Anfang 1947. Im April desselben Jahres wurde ich von der Straße entführt und über die rumänische Grenze – zur Täuschung der rumänischen Behörden hatte man mich in die Uniform eines russischen Majors gesteckt – nach Moskau geschafft, wo ich zunächst verhört und danach in den berüchtigten GULAG abgeschoben wurde. Dort mußte ich rund zehn Jahre unter den durch die Literatur hinlänglich bekannt gewordenen Bedingungen verbringen...¹¹

This criminal and bloody time, when the weak and disenfranchised human, stuck between two powerful totalitarian regimes, experienced life as a total hell, where death and suffering lurked at every step, engraved an additional quality in his poems. The heavy blow of history, ruthlessly shattering human fate, evokes horrific pictures in poet's mind, surpassing the visions of Hieronymus Bosch or Pieter Brueghel the Younger:

Es irrt ein Särglein in der Luft
das fällt auf mich herab
so lieg ich bald in einer Gruft
und niemand kennt das Grab

Mein Schatz kriegt einen Fotogruß
aus Genf ich lach im Schnee
und steh derweil am Lethefluß
das ist der Jenissej¹².

When the poet was already in a Soviet camp, his friends in Bucharest managed to publish his fourth collection, *Verses*, which saw light in 1947 under the pseudonym Martin Brand. The poet continued to create poetry in the camp, overcoming inhumane conditions; however, most of these poems

¹¹ Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter. No. 42. Jg. (1993), Folge 4, 283.

¹² Moses Rosenkranz, *Im Untergang*, 89.

were lost. Upon release from GULAG he was incarcerated in Romanian prisons Jilava and Gherla (eighteen years altogether), and it was not until 1958 that the poet was finally freed. In 1961 Rosenkranz emigrated to BRD, where he dwelt in Lenzkirch, a Schwarzwald village, until his death in 2003. His subsequent publications were two books of poetry under the common title *Decline: The Book of the Century* (vols. 1 (1986) and 2 (1988)), which initiated his lifetime legacy series. In a consideration of the milestones of his work one should also mention a book of poems, *Bukovina: Poems 1920–1997* (1998), and a prose book, *Childhood: Fragment of an Autobiography* (2003). Moses Rosenkranz looked on his human and literary fate not as a single event caused by an unlucky constellation of his life dates or biographic moments, but rather as evidence of the brutal character of twentieth-century political history, in which criminal rulers sentenced the Jewish people to total extermination:

So leichenweiß
ist kein Schnee wie die Not
kein Herd ist so heiß
mein Volk wie dein Tod

Liegst wie ein Schnee
und fliegst wie ein Brand
o Wolke von Weh
mein Volk in dem Land

Es sprießt kein Reis
wo mein Israel ruht
der Glanz ist zu weiß
zu rot ist die Glut¹³.

So much has been written recently about Bukovinian poet Paul Celan, and it does not seem necessary to trace his life and literary works

¹³ Idem., 88.

in detail. But Celan is another highly typical example of history's storming into human fate, leaving behind devastating after-effects.

His personal biography is also marked by experiences in the ghetto and concentration camps, the tragic deaths of his parents, revolting anti-semitic persecution, and a great deal of libel by the envious. Along with Moses Rosenkranz, Celan probably had the most direct relations with history, in comparison to other German-language poets of Bukovina.

Celan, a lyric poet par excellence, a "Hölderlin of the twentieth century," valued in history first and foremost the present moment—an immanent feature of lyrics. In contrast to other literary types, the lyrical perceives history mostly as internal, outer events mostly as psychological occurrences, and any plot (if one can apply such a term) as metamorphosis merely of personal feelings. Poetry, like any art, bears for Celan an imprint of the present, its "chronotopos" (using the term of M. Bakhtin) is "here and now."

„Man kann, ich bin mir dessen durchaus bewußt, dieses Wort so oder so lesen, man kann verschiedene Akzente setzen: den Akut des Heutigen, den Gravis des Historischen – auch Literaturhistorischen, – den Zirkumflex – ein Dehnungszeichen – des Ewigen. Ich setze – mir bleibt keine andere Wahl – ich setze den Akut“¹⁴.

Thus the poet defined his artistic motto in his October 22, 1960 Georg Büchner Literary Prize speech in Darmstadt. He never turned away from the uneasy topics of the day, from its ideological controversies. In the famous "Death Fugue" he touched upon the most painful nerve of postwar history—the degradation of modern and allegedly civilized man into a bestial monster—which none dared to touch before, and which the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, in "Negative Dialectics," his thesis on the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz, even called barbarity. But Celan managed to find a new, relevant language for these crimes. In this way he is also a political poet, whose verses open the deepest wounds of our time, whose lines weave the anxieties and fears, delusions

¹⁴ Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden, Dritter Band: Gedichte III. Prosa* (Reden. – Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), 190.

and visions of modern man. The disparity between the world and the individual is too deep to bridge:

Die Welt, Welt
in allen Fürzen gerecht,

ich, ich
bei dir, dir, Kahl-
geschorene¹⁵.

A person is defenseless against history, Celan claims for everybody, but one is especially defenseless when born Jewish. Celan had tried to reject his Jewish fate; he suffered from it since childhood. In an early letter to his aunt Minna in Palestine, the thirteen-year-old boy wrote: “Of course, concerning antisemitism in our school I could have written a 300-page book for you.”¹⁶ These antisemitic trends appeared in Chernivtsi under Romanian rule in the 1930s, culminating in the wartime deportations to Transnistria. One of his contemporary poems, named almost idyllically “A Nocturne,” depicts in its surrealistic images all that defenselessness, all the despair:

Schlaf nicht. Sei auf der Hut.
Die Pappeln mit singendem Schritt
ziehn mit dem Kriegsvolk mit.
Die Teiche sind alle dein Blut.
Drin grüne Gerippe tanzen.
Eins reißt die Wolke fort, dreist:
verwittert, verstümmelt, vereist,
blutet dein Traum von den Lanzen-

Die Welt ist ein kreißendes Tier,
das kahl in die Mondnacht schlich.

¹⁵ Idem, 119.

¹⁶ Israel Chalfen, *Paul Celan. Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 51.

Gott ist sein Heulen. Ich
fürchte mich und frier¹⁷.

Much later he was still unable to flee from loneliness—in Bucharest, where many friends of his youth remained; in Vienna, where he failed in establishing a residence; in Paris, where he finally settled to work as a professor of German literature in the elite *École normale supérieure* (Higher Pedagogical School); in Germany, which he visited occasionally to perform public poetry readings or receive literary prizes:

...die Nacht
braucht keine Sterne, nirgends
fragt es nach dir¹⁸ –

Stirrings of neo-Nazism in Europe in the 1960s, the infamous “Claire Goll affair” with its absurd plagiarism accusation, the gloomy depression increasingly experienced by the poet, and the ambiguous status of Celan as a Jew and a German-language poet in the Romance-language world brought about further reticence. “You know... not once have I asked myself if it wouldn’t have been better if I had remained near the beeches of my motherland,”¹⁹ he wrote on July 30, 1960 to his old friend and mentor Alfred Margul-Sperber. In search of his Jewish identity, in 1969, half a year before his suicide, he traveled to Israel. In a short speech for the Union of Hebrew Writers he repeated the same bitter words: “I believe I understand what Jewish loneliness is....”²⁰ In late April his body was found in the Seine. According to Austrian writer Hans Weigel, it is unnecessary to seek reasons for the suicide, as the answer is most obvious: emigration.²¹

¹⁷ Paul Celan, *Das Frühwerk* / Hrsg. von Barbara Wiedemann (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 54.

¹⁸ Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1, 197.

¹⁹ Paul Celan, Briefe an Alfred Margul-Sperber. In: *Neue Literatur*. 26.Jg., 1975, H.7, 56.

²⁰ Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. III, 203.

²¹ Hans Weigel, *Paul Celan*. In: Hans Weigel. In Memoriam. – Graz: Styria 1979, 37.

Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger was Celan's second cousin (they had a common great-grandfather on mother's side). Today she would have been over eighty. But already she has not been with us for over sixty years: on December 16, 1942, barely eighteen years old, she died of typhus and malnutrition in the Mykhailivka labor camp in Transnistria. Witnesses remember her lying with fever in the barracks and singing quietly: "Her voice became thinner and weaker. Then it faded out."²²

During her short lifetime, Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger did not publish a line. She wrote her poems in steady, graceful handwriting in an album with a picture of a bouquet on the cover. This album was preserved for future generations by Selma's friends Else Schächter-Keren and Renee Abramovici-Michaeli, who both immigrated to Israel. The story of its rescue is a true odyssey, full of psychological tension and sacrifice.

The collection of Selma's poems, *Harvest of Blossoms*, first appeared privately in Israel. Its editor was a former Chernivtsi gymnasium professor Hersch Segal, Selma's school tutor. In 1980 German publicist Jürgen Serke published this thin collection with the notable publishing house Hoffmann-und-Campe-Verlag under the title *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt: Gedichte eines jüdischen Mädchens an seinen Freund*. The book became a literary sensation; it elicited a flood of letters and invited associations with the well-known diary of Anne Frank, who perished in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The contrast between the ardent struggle for life and the inevitability of death was especially striking:

I want to live.
 I want to laugh, to bear all of my burdens
 and want to do battle, know love and know hate
 I want to hold heaven in my embrace
 and want to be free and breathe and scream.
 I don't want to die. No!
 No.²³

²² Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt: Gedichte eines jüdischen Mädchens an seinen Freund*. Hrsg. von Jürgen Serke (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 22.

²³ Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, *Harvest of Blossoms: Poems from a Life Cut Short*

Did Selma consider herself a poet? Today this question does not seem so important. The German poet Karl Krolow believes these poems were written by a person already well-versed in literature. Only one thing is clear: she was a girl in love, who wrote poems full of melancholy, inner turmoil, and grieving visions. Almost all of them are devoted to her beloved friend Lejser Fichman, whom she met in a Jewish youth organization in Chernivtsi and who in the summer of 1944 died tragically among Jewish refugees aboard a Turkish steamer torpedoed by a Soviet submarine:

I am the night. My veils are so much
softer than is pallid death.
I gather every burning ache
into my chilly pitch-black boat.

My lover is the lengthy road.
We are betrothed forevermore.
I love him, and I cover him
with my soft black silken hair.

My kiss is sweet as lilac scent—
the wanderer is well aware ...
When he accepts my warm embrace
all other lovers he forgets.

My hands so slender, ivory-white,
will still the fever that he feels
and every face that they caress
must softly smile, unwillingly.

I am the night. My veils are so much
softer than is pallid death.
I gather every burning ache
into my chilly pitch-black boat.²⁴

(Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 36–37.

²⁴ *Idem*, 49.

At times one can notice between her lines the influence of poets she intensively read (Heine, Rilke, Trakl). Nevertheless, her verses are far from feeble imitation; on the contrary, they radiate such far-reaching imagery and seductive melody that sometimes even certain poetic late-Romanticism clichés, hackneyed rhymes, or irregular meter resonate as righteous and persuasive gestures. Considering that most of these poems were written by a very young poet under extreme conditions in a ghetto under constant threat of deportation to Transnistria, the tragic aura of her lyrics becomes more sorrowful:

Oh lay, my beloved
your head in your hands
and listen, I'll sing you a song.
I'll sing about pain, about death and the end,
I'll sing about joy that we lost.

Come, now close your eyes,
I'll cradle you gently,
we both can then dream of delight.
We both can then dream the most golden of lies,
we'll dream ourselves back to the past.

And look, my beloved,
in dreams there return
the days full of light again.
Forgotten the hours, so aching and empty,
of sorrow and pain and denial.

But then—waking up,
my beloved, is horror—
then all is more empty than ever—
if only the dreams could rebuild my delight,
and banish my searing pain!²⁵

²⁵ Idem, 94.

Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger's literary legacy consists of only fifty-seven poems, among them five translations from Yiddish (Itzik Manger), French (Paul Verlaine), and Romanian. One of her last poems, "Tragedy," has only one strophe:

This is the hardest: to give yourself away
and then to see that no one needs you,
to give all of yourself and realize
you'll fade like smoke and leave no trace.²⁶

These lines conclude with a date—"23.12.1941"—and a note scribbled in red pencil: "I had no time to finish...."

After the German poet Hilde Domin read the Chernivtsi girl's poems, she noted: "Undoubtedly, her gift is on a level with the talent of young Hofmannsthal. Despite the 'peculiarity of fate,' this is the art which makes up the heritage of all German poetry, not only the Jewish. These are the kind of lyrics read with tears in the eyes: so pure, so beautiful, so light, and so defenseless."²⁷

Four personalities, four poetic fates from Bukovina; they were so different and yet so similar with respect not only their biographies, which is often explained by common origin, experience of early years and youth, etc. Their similarity bears the imprint of history; it is connected to the Jewish fate in the twentieth century in general, to the Holocaust. Other names could be selected—Alfred Kittner or Robert Flinker, Immanuel Weißglas or Alfred Gong—yet with the same result: a ghetto, a concentration camp, expulsion or death, loneliness or forsakenness. Paul Celan speaks on behalf of all the persecuted, homeless Bukovinian poets disregarded by history in his verse "Psalm" from the book *Die Niemandrose*:

²⁶ Idem, 97.

²⁷ Cited after Jürgen Serke, *Geschichte einer Entdeckung*. In: Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger. *Ich bin in Sehnsucht eingehüllt*, 14.

Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm,
niemand bespricht unsern Staub.
Niemand.

Gelobt seist du, Niemand.
Dir zulieb wollen
wir blühen.
Dir
entgegen.

Ein Nichts
waren wir, sind wir, werden
wir bleiben, blühend:
die Nichts-, die
Niemandrose.

Mit
dem Griffel seelenhell,
dem Staubfaden himmelswüst,
der Krone rot
vom Purpurwort, das wir sangen
über, o über
dem Dorn.²⁸

*Translated from Ukrainian by
Vitalii Bobrov*

²⁸Paul Celan. *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. I, S. 225.