

Writings from the Margins  
German-Jewish Women Poets from the Bukovina

Amy Colin  
*University of Pittsburgh*

German-Jewish women's writing from the Bukovina constitutes the furthestmost margin within a literature which was first marginalized, then deterritorialized, and finally pushed to the border of its existence. Emerging in a multicultural biotope at the easternmost border of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German-Jewish literature of the Bukovina developed during the Habsburg era, but reached its culmination in the 1920s and 1930s, when the region was part of the Romanian Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> So strong was the attachment of Bukovinian Jewish poets to the Austro-German culture that they continued to write in German despite their growing isolation in a Romanian-speaking environment. With the rise of fascism, racism, and anti-Semitism in the Bukovina, their situation became increasingly difficult. In the mid-1930s, the Jewish poet Alfred Margul-Sperber, who was Paul Celan's mentor, attempted to publish the first anthology of German-Jewish poetry from his homeland, but his efforts were in vain, for all German publishers refused to print this book, claiming that German-Jewish poetry was worthless since it was not rooted in the "German soil" and "Volksseele" (*VD* 15). The publisher Philipp Witkop for instance, in a letter of 10 October 1935 to Alfred Margul-Sperber, explains why he refuses to publish such an anthology:

Ihr Anthologie-Manuskript geht gleichzeitig eingeschrieben an Sie zurück. Entschuldigen Sie, dass ich Sie so lange warten liess . . . Die Gedichte zeigen einen hohen Grad von sprachlicher Kultur, aber wenig von jenem Lebens-und Seelengehalt, der aus den letzten Tiefen einer in sich gegründeten Persönlichkeit

spricht; sie geben mehr feinsinnige Literatur als schöpferische Dichtung. Schöne Verse, ergreifende Strophen, aber nicht *ein* vollendetes Gedicht. Den besten Eindruck gibt mir Rose Ausländer. Viel Anmutiges, Schönes sagt etwa ihr Gedicht auf ein Blatt. Aber wie kann ein einzelnes Blatt so überbewertet, so überreich mit Worten bedacht werden. Das zeigt, dass der Autor den Blick auf das Ganze des Lebens verloren hat. Und von solchem schicksalhaften Aussenseitertum spricht das ganze Heft. Wie viel mehr Zusammenhang mit Boden und Geschichte zeigt dagegen die Anthologie der Siebenbürger, die sprachlich oft ungewandter, seelisch undifferenzierter ist.

Your anthology is being returned to you under separate cover, by registered mail. Forgive me for letting you wait such a long time . . . The poems display a high degree of linguistic sophistication, but little of that existential and emotional content that emanates from the depths of a personality founded on itself; they produce sensitive literature rather than creative poetry. Beautiful verses, moving stanzas, but not a single perfect poem. Rose Ausländer in particular makes the best impression on me. Plenty of grace and beauty is in her poem to a leaf. But how can a leaf be so overestimated and so richly endowed with words? This shows that the author lost perspective on the whole of life. And such fateful marginality is expressed in the entire notebook. By contrast, the anthology of poets from Transylvania is so much more connected with the soil and history, although these poems are often linguistically more awkward and emotionally simplistic.<sup>2</sup> (VD 15)

As this passage shows, no aesthetic criteria but rather “blood-and-soil-ideology” determined the publisher’s decision to reject the anthology. Pathos and meaningless phrases such as “aus den letzten Tiefen einer in sich gegründeten Persönlichkeit [sprechen]” mask the writer’s hypocrisy. Although the anthology contains mostly poems by male Jewish authors, Witkop singles out Rose Ausländer’s poem about a leaf as a means of illustrating the alleged weakness of the entire anthology. It is characteristic of his time that Witkop masculinizes Rose Ausländer by calling her “der Autor” rather than “die Autorin.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these rejections, Alfred Margul-Sperber did not give up and sent the anthology to Schocken Verlag, a Jewish publishing

house. But soon afterwards Schocken, which offered to bring out the anthology, was forced to close down. In subsequent years, the persecution of the Jewish population increased considerably, culminating in deportations and mass murders. But even in the ghettos and death camps, Bukovinian Jewish poets continued to write in German. Although their German mother tongue had become the murderers' tongue, they believed—as did Paul Celan—that language would go through the “thousand darknesses” of death bringing speech, would go through the darkness and death, but would eventually resurface, “‘enriched’ by it all” (GW 3:185-86).

For a long time, even after World War II, the German-Jewish literature of the Bukovina remained largely unknown. It was only in the sixties and seventies that Paul Celan (1920-70) and Rose Ausländer (1901-88) succeeded in making their voices heard, gradually awakening interest in their cultural background. In the late eighties, other Bukovinian authors, including Alfred Kittner (1906-91), Alfred Gong (1920-81), and Immanuel Weißglas (1920-79) became better known in Germany and the United States. Nevertheless, younger scholars such as Barbara Wiedemann-Wolf, in her book *Antschel Paul-Paul Celan* (1985), treats German-Jewish poets from the Bukovina in a condescending way, passing harsh judgments about their work, providing no proof to justify such denigration, and never questioning her own criteria of evaluation.<sup>4</sup> It is the irony of history that a fascist such as Witkop recognizes the aesthetic beauty and linguistic sophistication of German-Jewish poetry from the Bukovina, while Barbara Wiedemann-Wolf, who enjoys the “Gnade der späten Geburt” (the privilege of having been born after the War), rejects their poetry precisely because it does not meet her “aesthetic standards.” The times have changed, and so did the critics, but the marginalization of German-Jewish literature persisted.

Finally, in the nineties, the public recognized the significance of this literature written at the margins and from the margins. In 1991, *Fäden ins Nichts gespannt* (*Threads Stretched Across Nothingness*, 1991), a collection of poems by 22 Jewish authors from the Bukovina, appeared. In 1994, *Versunkene Dichtung der Bukowina: Eine Anthologie deutschsprachiger Lyrik* (*Sunken Literature of the Bukovina: An Anthology of Poetry in German*, 1994) was published; this anthology, edited by the author and Alfred Kittner, contains texts by 86 Bukovinian poets writing in German and stresses the seminal contribution of Jewish poets to the development of German literature. In addition, it includes Jewish women

authors such as Rose Ausländer, Elisabeth Axmann (b. 1926), Lotte Berg (1907-81), Clara Blum\* (1904-71), Johanna Brucker (b. 1917), Dusza Czara-Rosenkranz\* (1899-1971), Ninon Hesse\* (1895-66), Josefine Kanel\* (1889-1980), Else Keren\* (b. 1924), Lola Laufersweiler-Wotta (1878-1948), Ariadne Löwendal\* (1899-1954), Partenie Masichievici (1887-1952), Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger\* (1924-42), Salomea Michel-Grünspan\* (b. 1901), Lucy Preminger-Hecht\* (b. 1906), Adrienne Prunkul-Samurcas (1907-73), Gerty Rath\* (1902-77), and Marianne Vincent (1900-88). Many of these women poets were Jewish.<sup>5</sup>

A discussion of marginalized literatures pushed to the borders of silence and neglected for a long time such as the poetry of German-Jewish women authors from the Bukovina prompts readers to rethink their critical approach, methods of interpretation, and strategies for assessing the value and significance of such literary works. Time and again literary critics and scholars have tended to either ignore or denigrate the importance of marginalized writings because they used traditional aesthetic criteria as a means of comparing a major with a minor literature, rejecting the latter as weak and inadequate since in their view it did not produce writers of Goethe's and Schiller's stature. By contrast, Franz Kafka explored the phenomenon itself, without passing judgment on its alleged value. In his diary note of 25 December 1911, he described some of the distinctive features of minor literatures, referring in particular to the Czech and Yiddish literature of his time (*T* 151-52). Kafka pointed to their impact upon the development of national consciousness, political awareness, and receptivity to foreign cultures. In addition, he uncovered recurrent themes that in his opinion mirrored a link between the particular and the general. In *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (*Kafka: For A Minor Literature*, 1975), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari interpreted the comments of the Jewish writer as an analysis of three fundamental conditions marking the development of all minor literatures: the inextricable bond between the individual and the collective, the pervasiveness of politics, and the "deterritorialization" of language. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka, a representative of a minority, further developed the characteristics of the German-Jewish literature of Prague by turning the poverty of a marginalized language into the semantic richness of his texts and allowing words to set free their poetic intensity. Following Kafka's as well as Deleuze's and Guattari's lead, the present essay sets the poetry of Jewish women authors

from the Bukovina against the background of their multilingual native contextuality and explores their untiring struggle for acceptance within the Jewish and non-Jewish community. It analyzes their attempts to cope with social barriers, prejudices, and with the dilemma of writing in the German mother tongue and that of the murderers.<sup>6</sup>

Although the majority of German-Jewish women authors made their appearance on the literary scene in the twenties, there is a very important precursor whose name and work have been entirely forgotten: Regina Goldschläger. Although she was a novelist, her courageous feminist stance, as inscribed in her novel *Die Königin von Saba* (*Queen of Saba*), published in 1901, must have inspired the later generations of women authors, both prosaists and poets, from the Bukovina. Her novel is a critique of society that drives women into despair by denying them the right to realize themselves. In an attempt to break out of such an existential prison, the protagonist—a young, innocent woman who can no longer endure the restraints imposed upon her—kills her husband, whom she perceives as a source of embarrassment and pain. In jail, while waiting for her trial, she discovers her own artistic creativity, which enables her to find a new meaning in life; but it is too late, for the judges sentence her to death. Unlike the Ukrainian feminist Ol'ha Kobylanska, who became a leading figure in Ukrainian literature, Regina Goldschläger's voice has faded into silence. Although Margul-Sperber mentioned it in his "Unsichtbarer Chor" ("Invisible Choir"), he did not succeed in drawing the attention of a broad public to it. An unreceptive audience was the major obstacle German-Jewish women from the Bukovina had to overcome in order to make their voices heard. Some of the women poets from the Bukovina who were familiar with Margul-Sperber's "Unsichtbarer Chor" must have read *Die Königin von Saba*, for their poetry further develops one of Regine Goldschläger's main ideas: realizing one's own artistic creativity is a means of escaping the constraints society has imposed upon women—a means of intellectual survival.

Rose Ausländer's personal experiences at the beginning of her literary career also shed light upon the social and political barriers which female Jewish authors had to overcome. When Rose Scherzer was born, Czernowitz was still an Austro-Hungarian city where Romanians, Ruthenians, Germans, Jews, Poles, Armenians, Lipovanes, and Hutzuls peacefully coexisted. Their interaction brought about

a cultural flowering which vanished in the turmoil of World War I. During that period of time, Rose Scherzer and her parents moved to Vienna, but later returned to her home city where she studied philosophy and became an active participant in the *Ethisches Seminar* (*Ethical Seminar*), a philosophical group concerned with the study of Plato, Spinoza, and Constantin Brunner. In 1921 she emigrated with her husband Ignaz Ausländer to the United States, lived in Minneapolis, and later settled in New York where she founded the Constantin Brunner society. Since she had little self-confidence, she sent Karl Kraus her poems under a pseudonym. He made positive remarks about them, but did not offer to publish them in his *Fackel* (*Torch*) as she had hoped.

In New York she fell madly in love with Helios Hecht, a Bukovinian Jewish graphologist, divorced her husband, and started a new life with her lover. Shortly thereafter, they moved back to Czernowitz, where Rose Ausländer devoted most of her energies to caring for her old and sick mother, but also wrote poetry. In 1939, the leading publishing house Literaria, which published the works of many Jewish writers and poets from the Bukovina, including Margul-Sperber's texts, brought out Ausländer's first volume of poetry. Literaria's editor-in-chief took advantage of Ausländer and had the press print 400 rather than the negotiated 500 copies of her volume, charging her, however, the price for the latter number.<sup>7</sup> Ausländer could do nothing to protect herself. Moreover, this editor, in a letter to Margul-Sperber, emphasized that he considered Rose Ausländer—who later became a leading post-War German poet—totally incompetent and even incapable of proofreading her own texts. He asked Margul-Sperber to do the job for her.<sup>8</sup>

It was thanks to Margul-Sperber, who had encouraged Ausländer, that the editor of Literaria actually agreed to publish her work. But in his letters to Ausländer, Margul-Sperber often assumed a rather condescending and patriarchal attitude towards her, teaching her "lessons" on how to write "good poetry" and accusing her of having no understanding of poetic rhythm, style, and the compatibility of metaphors. Moreover, although Margul-Sperber did admire her early love poetry, he entirely misunderstood it. Hence he compared her poems to orgasms, implying that her verses were unmediated expressions of women's sexuality, rather than the result of a conscious, creative process involving reflection, stylistic work, and deeper knowledge about poetic language. After swallowing his criticism for a while, Ausländer, in her letter of 28 May



1939 to Margul-Sperber, finally complained about his uncreative misreadings of her work, emphasizing that she had never thought of sexual intercourse while writing her poetry.<sup>9</sup> She argued that it was impossible to call a poem the orgasm of another poem, as Margul-Sperber did, when the first text had been written years before the second. Although Ausländer complained about Margul-Sperber's "bitter pills" of criticism, she remained grateful to him for his help.

Margul-Sperber's interpretation of Rose Ausländer's texts was indeed inappropriate, for her poems display strong similarities with the literary tenets of her male contemporaries, drawing on German Expressionism, mysticism, and Constantin Brunner's philosophy, rather than sexual experience. Time and again Rose Ausländer's *Unveröffentlichte Gedichte 1927-56* (*Unpublished Poems 1927-56*) (AGW I: 208) evoke a holy linguistic universe, in which the purest words ripen, creating configurations of love motifs imbued with images of the female body and with allusions to a mystical union between an "I" and a "Thou." In her Shoah poems, which she wrote while hiding in the ghetto, Rose Ausländer used neo-romantic images as well as expressionist metaphors to evoke Jewish suffering: "Fäden ins Nichts gespannt: wir liegen wund / verwoben in das Material der Qual, / ein Muster lückenlos auf grauem Grund / wie es ein schwarzer Wille anbefahl." 'Threads stretched across nothingness: we lie wounded / woven into a fabric of pain / a pattern without gap on gray background / the way a black will had ordered it' (AGW I: 152).

After the war, Rose Ausländer fled to Bucharest and later managed to leave Romania. Although she moved back to the United States, she continued to write in German but turned away from the neo-romantic idiom of her early poetry, choosing e. e. cummings as her new literary model. Yet the most radical change in her style occurred at a late stage in her life, when she was in her sixties, which is in and of itself an astonishing phenomenon. At that time, the poet had moved back to Europe, settling first in Vienna and later in Düsseldorf. Under the impact of Paul Celan, Rose Ausländer started to employ elliptic images, dense metaphors, and neologisms. In her volumes of poems *36 Gerechte* (*36 Righteous*, 1967), *Mutterland* (*Motherland*, 1976), *Doppelspiel* (*Double Play*, 1977), and *Einverständnis* (*Consent*, 1980), for which she was awarded several literary prizes, Ausländer touches on modern linguistic theories as well as on current social and political problems. Like Celan,

Ausländer believed that all words had lost their purity and power, since the “man without qualities, the depersonalized human being” had misused them (*AGW* 3: 286). But unlike Celan, Ausländer did not destroy familiar semantic and syntactic structures as a means of decentralizing language and renewing its linguistic power. Since she identified the notion of mother tongue with images of her beloved mother, she bestowed upon words a softness and elegance often associated with portraits of women.

Mein Vaterland ist tot  
 sie haben es begraben  
 im Feuer

Ich lebe  
 in meinem Mutterland  
 Wort

My fatherland is dead  
 they buried it  
 in the fire

I live  
 in my motherland  
 word (*AGW* V: 98)

Frederike Maria Zweig once pointed out that language is a region from which one cannot be expelled (HZ 10). Her remark could well be the motto of Rose Ausländer’s poem “Mutterland,” which illustrates her attachment to her mother tongue, the only realm in which existence is still possible. As these verses suggest, such a strong bond to the German mother tongue is a direct consequence of the War that destroyed her “Vaterland.” At first sight, the “I” of Rose Ausländer’s poems does not seem to be gendered. Yet the poem’s concluding lines underscore that the speaker becomes part of the “motherland,” which is at once the word as well as a “dwelling place.” Hence it is through the writing of the poem that the speaker constitutes herself/himself, enabling in turn the “motherland” to come into being within language. Since the author of the text is a woman, the poem suggests an interesting reversal of Freud’s Oedipus theory. In the absence of the “father’s land” and perhaps the father himself, the daughter feels attracted to the “mother” and her “land” without displaying the ambivalences which, according to Freud, are characteristic of most mother-daughter relationships. On



the contrary, Rose Ausländer gives birth to her own “mother-land,” the poetic text, her “dwelling place” in a metaphorical as well as literal sense, because—for the years to come—she was so ill that, like Heinrich Heine, she lived in a “mattress crypt,” devoting all her time to writing and re-writing poems. Poetry was her only means of fighting against illness and looming death.

Time and again Rose Ausländer’s memory returns to the “Vaterland,” the Bukovinian scenery, Jewish life in that region, and the fate of the Jews during the War. In her late texts, such as her poem “Czernowitz vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg” (“Czernowitz Before World War II”), she embeds romantic images of her early work in innovative linguistic configurations as a means of evoking the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups in the Bukovina:

Friedliche Hügelsstadt  
von Buchenwäldern umschlossen

Weident entlang der Pruth  
Flöße und Schwimmer

Maifliederfülle  
um die Laternen  
tanzten Maikäfer  
ihren Tod

Vier Sprachen  
verständigten sich

Viele Dichter blühten dort auf  
deutsche jiddische Verse  
verwöhnten die Luft

Bis Bomben fielen  
atmete glücklich die Stadt

Peaceful hillside town  
enclosed by beechwoods

Willows along the Pruth  
Rafts and swimmers

A profusion of May lilac  
Around the lanterns

May beetles dance  
 their death

Four languages  
 came to an understanding

Many poets flourished there  
 German Yiddish verses  
 caressed the air

Until the bombs fell  
 the city breathed happily (*AGW* VI:348)

The poem, written in a straightforward, narrative style, captures the atmosphere of a city. The image of the hilly scenery surrounded by woods and blossoming lilac trees is so idyllic that it appears removed from time and history. It is in such a harmonious setting that Rose Ausländer embeds her references to the flourishing Bukovinian literature and the coexistence of German and Yiddish poetry—a symbol of the German-Jewish symbiosis that was once a reality in the Bukovina. By invoking the image of four languages which come to an understanding or rather communicate with one another independent of their speakers, the poem stresses the allusion to the harmonious coexistence of all cultures in the Bukovina, which Rose Ausländer depicts here as a haven of mutual understanding and a source of poetic inspiration. Although there were ethnic tensions in the Bukovina too, Rose Ausländer's verses do not allude to such problems. As the poem's concluding lines evoke the destruction of the town during an aerial attack, they suggest that—in Ausländer's view—it was only World War II which put an abrupt end to the multicultural life in her homeland.

In the late poem "Transnistria 1941" (*AGW* IV: 94), Rose Ausländer uses the fusion of poetic images and facts to evoke the unspeakable:

Eislaken auf Transnistriens Feldern  
 wo der weiße Mäher  
 Menschen mähte

Kein Rauch kein Hauch  
 atmete  
 kein Feuer  
 wärmte die Leichen

Im Schneefeld schlief das Getreide  
schlief die Zeit  
auf Schläfen

Die Zunge der Himmelswaage  
ein funkelnder Eiszapfen  
bei 30 Grad Celsius unter Null

Ice sheets on Transnistria's meadows  
where the white mower  
mowed down people

No smoke no breeze  
breathed  
no fire  
warmed the corpses

In the snowfield the corn was sleeping  
time was sleeping  
on its temples

The pointer of heaven's scale  
a glittering icicle  
at minus 30 degrees centigrade

Although the four-stanza poem employs some traditional stylistic devices (alliterations and parallelisms), it does not follow familiar poetic traditions. Resembling rhythmic prose rather than melodious verses characteristic of traditional poetry, Rose Ausländer's text undoes familiar notions of rhythm and musicality—two crucial poetic elements which are considered to mark the difference between poetry and prose. On the figurative level, the poem further develops such interplay of stylistic devices, juxtaposing three different clusters of metaphors: "der weiße Mäher" recalls a symbolist style of writing; the allusions to the ice blankets that cover Transnistria's fields, to the corpses that no fire warms, and to the temperature of 30 degrees below zero bring to mind the straightforward style of an account; metaphors such as the frozen balance of heaven invoke existential problems—the total absence of justice and the death of time, which fell "asleep" in the snow. It is in this third and last cluster of images that the traditional and the factual modes of writing converge, creating powerful images of death and destruction: "Die Zunge der Himmelswaage / ein funkelnder Eiszapfen / bei 30 Grad Celsius unter Null." "Such fusion of brutal

Eiszapfen / bei 30 Grad Celsius unter Null.” “Such fusion of brutal facts and poetic images realizes Celan’s demand for a ‘grayer’ language, a language which wants to locate even its ‘musicality’ in such a way that it has nothing in common with the ‘euphony’ which more or less blithely continued to sound alongside the greatest horrors” (CGW III: 167).

Rose Ausländer had the chance to survive the war and later make her voice heard. She became the best known woman poet from the Bukovina. By contrast, Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, Celan’s talented cousin, was deported to a death camp in Transnistria, where she died of typhus at the age of 17. During the war, in Czernowitz, Selma wrote German love poems that can be considered a counterpart to Anne Frank’s diary. Selma’s “Poem” (ME 50) is a testimony of her will and her desire to live and to create. It also testifies to the irrationality of a time overshadowed by war and mass killings.

Ich möchte leben.  
Ich möchte lachen und Lasten heben  
und möchte kämpfen und lieben und hassen  
und möchte den Himmel mit Händen fassen  
und möchte frei sein und atmen und schrein.  
Ich will nicht sterben. Nein!  
Nein!

I’d like to live.  
I’d like to laugh and lift loads  
and like to fight and love and hate  
and like to grasp the heaven with my hands  
and like to be free and breathe and call out.  
I do not want to die. No!  
No.

In another stanza of this poem, the lyrical *I* confronts the murderer, who is coming to kill her, with a question: it is a question that millions of Jews have asked themselves—a question without answer—a question which mirrors the madness of time: “Du willst mich töten. / Weshalb? . . . Sie kommen dann / und würgen mich.” ‘You want to kill me. What for? . . . Then they come / and strangle me.’

Selma’s verses were early expressions of a very talented woman whom nobody took seriously. Even Hersh Segal, her Czernowitz

mitted that he had never believed his student to be so talented. Segal had Selma's poetry printed by a private press in Israel. Jacob Silbermann's attempt to publish her work in Germany in the seventies failed. Aesthetic criteria were used as an argument against publication. It was not until 1980 and 1984 that her poetry was published in the Federal Republic.

Ariadne Löwendal (1899-1945) is one of the few Bukovinian Jewish women who managed to realize her ideals only by leaving the Jewish community. Ariadne was the daughter of an erudite, orthodox Jewish watchmaker and jeweler who was close friends with the leading Romanian politician Konstantin Stere and with the poets Alfred Margul-Sperber, Georg Drozdowski, and Robert Flinker. Despite her orthodox Jewish upbringing, Ariadne married the nobleman Georg von Löwendal, an influential theater director. It was thanks to her husband that she became known in literary circles, but her male contemporaries labeled her "a flamboyant, self-assured woman," signaling an unwillingness to accept her. Like her husband, Ariadne played a crucial role in Bukovinian cultural life; she was a singer and an actress as well as a poet whose texts were published by leading Czernowitz journals. After the outbreak of the War, she and her husband left for Bucharest, where they both continued their artistic endeavors.

Although Ariadne Löwendal's native language was Russian, she wrote German poems which combined familiar poetic devices such as the stanza tradition of the German "Lied" with innovative themes and images. Her poem "Bessarabische Teppiche" (Bessarabian *VD* 160) evokes the sufferings of abused Ruthenian women:

Es hängen Teppiche an einer kalten Wand,  
Sie sind mit Leid gewebt von einer heißen Hand  
In einem armen, sehnsuchtsvollen Land.

Geschlagen war sie von dem Schicksal wie vom Mann.  
Es drohte zähneknirschend ihr der Wahn,  
Als Gott zum Trost den Teppich ihr ersann.

Hell webte sie die Blumen in das Lied von Gott,  
Still webte sie die Zweige ihrer stummen Not,  
Schwarz webte sie die Angst vor ihrem nahen Tod.

Sie webte Ornamente wie das Feld am Rand—  
Dort ließ das Herz gewebt ihr liebes Sonnenland.  
Die Not verkaufte es in eine fremde Hand.

Es wurde welk am Boden von dem fremden Schritt,  
Und sterbend lag das Herz des Landes dort und litt . . .  
Die Blumen sangen noch ein stilles Lied.

On a cold wall carpets hang,  
Woven in sorrow by an ardent hand  
In an impoverished, yearning land.

Both fate and husband had beaten her.  
With gnashing teeth madness threatened her,  
When God invented the carpet to comfort her.

Brightly she wove into God's song the flowers,  
Silently she wove branches of her mute sorrow,  
Black she wove the fear of her imminent, last hour.

On the margins the ornaments as a field she designed—  
There the woven heart left her beloved sun-land,  
Poverty sold it to a foreign hand.

Under alien footsteps the land's heart lay on the ground,  
There it withered away, suffered and died,  
As the flowers sang one more silent song.

Weaving a tapestry is these women's refuge from a reality of suffering and humiliation. As they weave their pain and dreams into the tapestry, associating their feelings with colors and ornaments, they create patterns that become maps of the human psyche. Suffering and fear, poverty and humiliation, but also love of God and nature are the recurrent motifs of their tapestries, which mirror the tragedy of generations of Bessarabian women deprived of any chance to fulfill themselves and live in dignity. For these women, their suffering is their fate. They have no means of breaking out of the community that oppresses them. It is the weaving of tapestries that brightens the somberness of their existence. But in order to make a living, they have to sell their artistic work and thus their only source of comfort. As the poem's concluding lines suggest, society steps on these women's lives the way people step on the tapestries, degrading them to carpets placed on the ground.



In the three-stanza poem “Bekanntschaft mit dem eigenen Kind” (“Acquaintance With One’s Own Child” *VD* 161) Löwendal evokes a pregnant mother’s feelings:

Ich hab dich neun Monate im Körper getragen,  
doch warst du mir gänzlich fremd.  
Ich hatte dir eigentlich gar nichts zu sagen —  
und näher war mir mein Hemd.

Dein erster Blick fiel in die Welt voll Entsetzen,  
Du fordertest zürnend: “Zurück!” —  
Ich band dich mit Ketten gebügelter Fetzen  
und sang Wiegenlieder vom “Glück.”

Dann fühlte ich zitternd: “Du bist mein Kern!”  
und küßte ein kleines Tier,  
leuchtend gesegnet vom führenden Stern:  
der ewigen Wärme zu dir.

Nine months long, in my body I carried you,  
Though you were a total stranger.  
Nothing did I find to say to you,  
and to me, even my shirt was closer.

Your first gaze upon the world was full of fear:  
“Get me back!” — angrily you demanded this,  
I tied you with chains of ironed rags, my dear,  
And for you, I sang lullabies of “bliss.”

But trembling I later felt: “You are my core!”  
And I kissed a small animal,  
Radiantly blessed by a guiding star:  
The eternal warmth for what you are.

The opening stanza conveys the pregnant mother’s perspective: even her shirt seems closer to her than the embryo in her womb. Despite nine months of pregnancy, there is neither an emotional bond nor any form of communication between the mother and the fetus. Neither gestures nor words bridge this gap, for the pregnant woman has nothing to say to her fetus, whose gender is not mentioned. The poem’s focal point is the mother herself. The second stanza marks a thematic turn, for it speaks of the newborn’s anxieties as the mother perceives them. It is the child’s fearful gaze that acquires the

communicative function of language, for it conveys a message the mother can read and translate into words. The gaze, a non-verbal sign, suggests the child's wish to return to the womb and triggers a verbal response, the mother's lullaby, a song of happiness. Such a song signals the mother's gradual identification with her child, yet it also leads to a moment of self-understanding, for the mother realizes that the foreign body that lived within herself is the kernel defining her femininity.

The poem "Das Jägerzimmer" ("Hunter's Chamber" *VD* 161), published in 1931, is particularly remarkable, for it unmasks the cruelty of hunters who kill animals in order to decorate their lodge.

Ich bin in einem Zimmerwald,  
 wo ausgestopfte Tiere stehn —  
 verstummte Herzen starr und kalt,  
 Korallenaugen, die nicht sehen.

Auf diesem Friedhof welkt kein Gras.  
 Der Tod ist schöner als das Leben.  
 Kein Auge wird von Trauer naß —  
 und nur die kleinen Motten schweben.

Sich selbst ein Denkmal, jedes Tier  
 steht in der Ewigkeit der Stille —  
 und unbegreiflich ist in mir  
 erwacht ein sonderbarer Wille:

Des Jägers Leichnam an der Wand  
 auch ausgestopft still stehn zu lassen,  
 mit einem Zettel in der Hand:  
 "Einst gab es solche Jägerrassen."

I am in the forest of a hunter's chamber  
 where stuffed animals are standing,  
 silenced hearts, cold, stiff and somber,  
 coral eyes which do not see.

In this graveyard, no grass is withering,  
 Death seems more beautiful than life,  
 No eyes grow moist from mourning  
 and nothing but small moths are floating.

As a monument to itself in the silence of eternity,  
 each animal is standing,  
 and in me, incomprehensibly,  
 a strange resolve is awakening:

To leave on a wall the stuffed and  
 silent corpses of hunters  
 With paper slips in their hand:  
 "Once there were such hunter races."

In three consecutive stanzas Löwendal's ironic poem describes the bodies of stuffed animals decorating a hunter's lodge. In this "cemetery" where death appears to be more beautiful than life no tears are shed, no flowers blossom, and life itself is nothing but a dead ornament. As Löwendal's verses suggest, the display of such animals' corpses, which resemble monuments, is intended to awaken the viewer's admiration for nature's beauty, but it has the opposite effect on the speaker. In her/his view, stuffed hunters rather than stuffed animals should be placed on the walls of the hunter's lodge. Through such a reversal the poet hopes to shock her readers and prompt them to rethink their attitude towards nature. It is a critique of a society that has no remorse in exploiting nature and treating it like a hunter's prey.

Ninon Hesse (1895-1966), née Ausländer, the wife of Hermann Hesse, was as talented as her husband but did not succeed in making a name for herself. Ninon Ausländer, an enthusiastic reader of Hesse's work, was 14 when she began writing letters to her idol. Their correspondence became the basis of their friendship, which later turned into love. Ninon was to become Hesse's muse; she not only inspired and supported his work, but also sacrificed her talent and energy to the beloved man in whose shadow she lived. As a result, Ninon's own work was discovered only in the 1980s, when Gisela Kleine's study *Ninon und Hermann Hesse: Leben als Dialog* (*Ninon and Hermann Hesse: Life as Dialogue*) appeared. This book pays tribute to Ninon's unusual fate.

Ninon was born into a wealthy Jewish family from Czernowitz. Her father, Jakob Ausländer, was a lawyer who was very concerned about his children's education. Ninon went to secondary school in Czernowitz, studied medicine at the University of Vienna (1913-17) and worked as a nurse during World War I. From 1917 to 1925, she studied art history and archeology in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. After

her marriage to the famous caricaturist Benedikt Fred Dolbin broke up, she moved first to Berlin and later to Paris, where she continued her work on her dissertation, but did not complete it. In 1922, she visited Hesse in Berlin and a few years later became his companion; she stood by him in the darkest moments of his life, took care of his household, and spent hours reading to him, since his eyesight was gradually fading. In 1936, they finally married.

Travel was one source of Ninon's inspiration; during her visit to Turkey she wrote her "Ariadne-Diary"; in Vienna, Czernowitz, Italy, and Greece, she worked on her poems and childhood memories. In 1956, she published the anthology *Deutsche Märchen vor und nach Grimm* (*German Fairy Tales Before and After Grimm*), but also wrote "Das Erdkühlein" ("The Little Earth Cow") as well as a study entitled "Hera-Medusa." After Hesse's death in 1961, she published his late poetry and prose as well as the study *Kindheit und Jugend vor Neunzehnhundert: Hermann Hesse in Briefen und Lebenszeugnissen 1877-1966* (*Childhood and Youth Before Nineteenthundred: Hermann Hesse in Letters and Documents About His Life 1877-1966*).

In one of her poems, "Bin ich denn wirklich?" ("Do I really exist?"), Ninon Hesse evokes the insecurities and doubts that mark her life.

Bin ich denn wirklich? Oder ist dies alles Traum?  
Wo finde ich die Grenzen meines Seins?  
Oh sich bescheiden können! Wissen: Dies ist mein  
und dieser Weg führt mich durch Zeit und Raum.

Bisweilen ist es mir, als wüß' ich kaum,  
was Leben ist. Als wäre alles dies nur Schein!  
Denn in mir fühl' ich Kraft zu tausendfachem Sein,  
und einmal nur blüht meines Lebens Baum.

Ich möchte singen können, tanzen, rufen, schrein  
in Farben, Worten, Ton und Marmor Ewigkeiten schaffen,  
Chaos gestalten, tausendfaches Leben leben:

Doch ich bin stumm und kann mich nicht befreien,  
Ohnmächtig kann ich nichts aus Nichts erschaffen,  
und keine Flügel wollen von der Erde mich erheben.

Do I really exist? Or is this all a dream?

Where do I find the limits of my Being?

O, to be able to content oneself! To know: All this is mine,  
and this trail takes me through time and space.

Sometimes I feel as if I hardly know what life is—  
As if all this was only semblance!  
For in myself I feel the strength for a thousand existences,  
and my life's tree blossoms only once.

I'd love to sing, dance, call, scream,  
create eternities in colors, words, clay, and marble,  
give chaos a form, and live thousands of lives:

But I am silent and cannot free myself,  
I, powerless, cannot create out of nothingness,  
and no wings lift me from the earth. (VD 111)

Ninon Hesse's sonnet written in a traditional style evokes the dilemma of a person who has not found a direction and sense in life and knows neither the margins of his/her own existence nor the path to follow. It is such a state of insecurity described in the opening lines that blurs the borders between dream and reality, unsettling the notion of a homogeneous identity. The first two lines of the second stanza further enhance the speaker's uncanny feeling that Being is nothing but appearance. But the subsequent verses set a different tone. They convey the speaker's awareness of his/her powers, which nourish not only his/her desire to be active and creative—perform, dance, and sing—but also the will to give chaos a form. The concluding stanza returns again to the opening lines, stressing the speaker's tiredness and muteness, that is, the inability to create. The poem's conventional form or rather its lack of innovative power seems to enact the speaker's mood. Although the "I" is not gendered, the poem may well refer to the author herself as well as to all poets who cannot manage to fulfill themselves despite an awareness of their own talents. The poem contains no direct critique of society and no direct allusion to the situation of women; it merely suggests an inner psychic condition: a life force which cannot break out of its constraints. By choosing the rigid, well-organized structure of the sonnet to embed in it metaphors evoking the "strength for a thousand existences" and an exuberant creative power which in the end is doomed to remain silent, the poem enacts the existential dilemma it thematizes.

Among Jewish women from the Bukovina who survived the war and emigrated to Israel are Josephine Kanel, Else Keren, Salomea Michel-Grünspan, and Lucy Preminger-Hecht.<sup>10</sup> Except for Josephine Kanel, who died in 1980, the other women poets are still alive and continue to write poems in German. They did not abandon their mother tongue, although some of them, such as Salomea Michel-Grünspan, experienced the death camps.<sup>11</sup> Salomea Michel-Grünspan, daughter of a Bukovinian rabbi, was a physician who practiced in Frankfurt and Kimpulung (Romania) from where she was deported to a death camp in Transnistria. In an unpublished letter of July 11, 1988 to Alfred Kittner she points out that during the four years she spent in the death camp, she and other deportees established an artistic circle and a small orchestra. Salomea Michel-Grünspan survived, returned to Romania, where she continued to work as a physician, and in 1965, she emigrated to Israel. Her poetry does not focus on the Shoah but employs a variety of images and themes ranging from descriptions of nature which testify to her pantheist beliefs to images of disease, in particular fantasies of typhus patients.

Jewish themes and the memory of the past are also inscribed in Else Keren's poetry. Else Keren studied French, English, and painting in Paris from 1947 to 1950; after her studies she emigrated to Israel where she worked as a teacher of French and English, but continued her artistic endeavors and exhibited her artwork. She also translated poetry from Hebrew into German. One of her poems is in memory of Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger:

#### Sie trieben meine Schwester

Es treibt der Wind  
 die welken Blätter  
 Rost und Wein und Ähren  
  
 Rost  
 an der Tür meiner Schwester  
 Wein  
 in den Kelchen der Häsher  
 Gold  
 in den Ähren des Herbstes

Es treibt der Wind  
 die toten Blätter

Es treibt der Wind

den Sand der Wüsten  
Rauch und Schutt und Asche  
  
Es sterben die Ähren  
unter ihren Stiefeln  
es sterben Blumen und Blüten  
  
Sie trieben meine Schwester

They drove my sister out

The wind drives  
withering leaves along  
rust and wine and ears of corn

Rust  
at the door of my sister  
wine  
in the goblet of bloodhounds  
gold  
in autumnal ears of corn

The wind drives  
dead leaves along  
the wind drives  
desert sand along  
smoke and rubble and ashes

Under their boots  
the ears of corn die  
the flowers and buds die

They drove my sister out. (*VD* 336)

Else Keren's poem is a verbal tomb for Selma. Although the poem employs images of Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger's—poetry, the withering leaves, the ears, the flowers and buds—it embeds them into a text that recalls the simple, straightforward style of Rose Ausländer. The verses resemble prose lines split into sections and rearranged to give the illusion of a traditional poem in stanzas. The poem's title plays with the multiple meanings of the word "treiben," which literally means "to drive." "Sie trieben meine Schwester" evokes not only the despair Selma was driven into, but also the way in which the Nazis and Romanian fascists drove Jews like cattle into concentration camps. Yet the verb "treiben" also has an innocent



meaning: “Es treibt der Wind / die welken Blätter” ‘The wind drives/ withering leaves along.’ There is no relationship between the two meanings of “treiben,” between nature and the human tragedy occurring in the midst of nature, between the fall and the extermination of Jews. Time and again unrelated events occur at the same time. The simultaneity evoked in the poem enhances its somber tone, but as the final lines suggest it is not autumn, but the soldiers’ boots that cause the flowers and ears to wither. The wind carries the sand of the desert away, but the smoke, the rubble, and the ashes remain as testimony to the past destruction.

The most fascinating woman author from the Bukovina is Clara Blum (1904-71), the only one who wrote in German, Russian, and Chinese. “Die Judengasse ist mein Ahnenschloß, / Mein Vaterland ein bunter Völkertroß, / Der rastlos wilde Eigensinn mein Erbe.” ‘My ancestors’ castle is the Jewish ghetto, / A colorful train of people is my fatherland, / My heritage is the restless, wild stubbornness,’ (VD 216) this is how Clara Blum describes her background in the poem “Grimmiger Lebensbericht” (“Grim Life Report”). Her life story was an odyssey. She was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Czernowitz, but as a teenager moved to Vienna, where she finished the Gymnasium and later studied psychoanalysis, her teacher being Alfred Adler.<sup>12</sup> Together with Manès Sperber she published the *Individualpsychologische Hefte* (*Journal of Individual Psychology*). She also worked as a journalist, wrote poetry, and became a political activist first for the socialist and later for the communist party. In 1933, Clara Blum won the Prize of the Soviet People for the best antifascist poem and received an invitation to visit the Soviet Union. Initially, she had planned to spend two weeks in the USSR, but she stayed for 11 years. She worked for the Red Army, but also published five volumes of poems written in German—*Die Antwort. Gedichte* (*The Answer. Poems*, 1939), *Erst Recht! Gedichte* (*More Than Ever! Poems*, 1939), *Wir entscheiden alles: Gedichte* (*We Decide Everything. Poems*, 1941), *Donauballaden* (*Danube Ballads*, 1942), and *Schlachtfeld und Erdball. Gedichte* (*Battlefield and Globe: Poems*, 1944)—as well as numerous essays and translations in the journals *Das Wort* (*The Word*) and *Internationale Literatur* (*International Literature*). In Moscow, at the time of Stalin’s purges, Clara Blum, a stateless Jew, fell in love with a Chinese activist and theater director who was forced to go into hiding because he was a Maoist. It was the love story of her life—a love story at the margins of existence. Four months later, history separated them. One day he called her up to say that he wanted to hear her voice one more

time; the phone call was interrupted, and she never heard from him again. For years she thought that he had been sent on a special mission to China, and she made hundreds of attempts to follow him. It is during this period of time that she began writing poems that employ Chinese themes and images—poems that translate the Chinese tradition of poetry into a German style imbued with allusions to European poetry and shaped by the experience of a wandering Jewish woman in Russian exile. Some of these texts such as “National Song” (“Das nationale Lied”) which appeared in the volume *Erst Recht!* (*More Than Ever!*) draw parallels and illuminate differences between the Chinese and the Jewish people; “Mutter Dshao” (“Mother Dshao”) from the same volume speaks up against the Japanese occupation of China, while “Tschu der Frau” (“The Woman’s Tschu”) praises the courage of a national hero’s wife. The poem “Pflaumenblüte” (“Plum Blossom”), also included in *Erst Recht!*, is characteristic of her style.

### Pflaumenblüte

Weshalb liebt mein Volk die Pflaumenblüte?  
Meinem Volke gleicht die Pflaumenblüte.

Stürmt der Winter noch mit Schnee und Eis,  
Sie erblüht am Aste rosig-weiß.

Stürmt der Winter noch auf allen Wegen,  
Unerschrocken blüht sie ihm entgegen.

Ihre zarten Blätter mutberauscht  
Tanzen leis, wenn sie dem Winde lauscht.

Denn es ist ihr Glück, im Sturmeswehen  
Einem Mächtigen zu widerstehen.

Sieben Märchen aus des Volkes Gut  
Preisen ihren stillen Blumenmut.

Und sie lehren weise alle sieben,  
Eisern kämpfen und behutsam lieben.

Und sie lehren nach Chinesenart,  
Daß die Zarten stark, die Starken zart.

Ist die Erde überbraust von Schrecken,  
Daß die Blumen ängstlich sich verstecken,

Dann erblüht ihr machtvoll stilles Licht,  
Gibt der Welt von neuem Zuversicht.

### Plum Blossom

Why does my people love the plum blossom?  
For my people is like a plum blossom.

Though the winter with snow and ice is still storming,  
the plum blossom in pink and white is blooming.

Though the winter on all the trails is raging,  
towards it, the fearless blossom is blooming.

As it listens to the windstorm, courageously,  
its delicate leaves are dancing quietly.

For it is the plum blossom's chance and destiny,  
in a winter storm, to withstand the mighty.

Seven fairy tales from folk tradition  
praise the silent courage of this blossom.

And all seven wisely teach: when fighting,  
be like iron, and be gentle, when loving.

And they teach in Chinese custom that the gentle  
are the strong, and the strong ones gentle.

When the earth is so overwhelmed by fright  
that all other fearful flowers hide,

Then, unfolding, its powerful, yet silent light  
gives the world anew confidence and might. (ER 65-66)

The poem, consisting of ten couplets, merges stylistic and thematic elements of German and Chinese poetry, situating itself at the junction between these two heterogeneous traditions, which—despite all differences—share common denominators. Clara Blum's ten couplets which employ end rhyme, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, the melodious tone of a folk song, and the narrative structure of a ballad, could be seen as standing in both traditions, recalling both a German Lied and a Chinese *Shih*. But there are some distinctive features of Chinese poetry which could not be captured in German, for Chinese poetry is based on a pattern of alternating words of different tones or pitches. By contrast, Clara Blum's

poem works with an iambic meter, which alternates not tones but stressed and unstressed syllables instead. Yet another untranslatable characteristic of Chinese poetry, the omission of the subject, seems to have inspired the way in which Clara Blum's structures her text. As a noun, the plum blossom, which is the poem's subject, is mentioned only in the title and the first couplet; in all other couplets Clara Blum substitutes either the personal pronoun "she" or the possessive pronoun "ihre" for the noun because the gender of "Pflaumenblüte" is feminine in German. In the English translation, such structural particularity could not be adequately rendered.

On the thematic level, the interplay of Chinese and Western European poetic traditions is carried further. The plum flower, the poem's key metaphor, recurs time and again in Chinese art and poetry, denoting spring, renewal of nature, and a new start in life. The comparison of the plum flower with a people also points to Chinese poetry.

In her poem, Clara Blum explicitly points to a major source that inspired her interpretation of the plum flower: it is the Chinese "fairy tale" tradition, which employs the plum flower as a symbol of resistance, illustrating the idea that the strong ones are gentle and the gentle ones strong. Such folk wisdom echoes Taoism, which perceives balance as a fundamental principle of life. Tao, the law of laws, teaches that the weak will eventually overcome the strong. In 1939, when Clara Blum published her text, another famous German poem imbued with Taoist wisdom appeared in the Soviet Union. It was Bertolt Brecht's "Legende von der Entstehung des Buches Taoteking auf dem Weg des Laotse in die Emigration" ("Legend of the Genesis of the Book Taoteking on Laotse's Emigration Trail") (BB 12:32-34) written in 1938, but published in *Internationale Literatur* a year later. The poem, inspired by Brecht's reading of Laotse, *Taoteking. Das Buch des Alten vom Sinn und Leben* (*Taoteking. The Book of the Old Man about Meaning and Life*), translated by Richard Wilhelm (Jena 1911), tells the story of *Taoteking's* genesis, explicitly underlining the book's main idea: "Daß das weiche Wasser in Bewegung / Mit der Zeit den mächtigen Stein besiegt. / Du verstehst, das Harte unterliegt." 'That the soft water flowing / in time does overcome the mighty stone. / You do understand, the tough one is defeated.' Whether conversations with Brecht, who had read the above-mentioned German translation of *Taoteking* already in 1920, or the friendship with the Chinese theater director or perhaps both prompted Clara Blum to write her poem

will probably never be known. Yet it is clear that both Clara Blum's and Bertholt Brecht's texts refer to the same key passage in Taoteking, a passage which in German translation reads as follows: "Auf der ganzen Welt / gibt es nichts Weicheres und Schwächeres als das Wasser. / Und doch in der Art, wie es dem Harten zusetzt, / kommt ihm nichts gleich. / Es kann durch nichts verändert werden. / Daß Schwaches das Starke besiegt, weiß jedermann auf Erden, / aber niemand vermag danach zu handeln." 'In the entire world, / there is nothing softer and weaker than water. / And yet, nothing else resembles it / and its way of attacking the hard. / Nothing can change it. / That the weak defeats the strong / everybody on earth knows this, / but no one is able to act accordingly.' Both Clara Blum and Brecht point to the dissemination of such philosophical ideas among folk legends. Both interweave two main sources of Chinese poetry into their verses. As Irving Yucheng Lo points out in his introduction to *Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry* (IYL, XV), Chinese poetry draws its inspiration from "two distinct groups, namely the common people, with their colloquial idiom and plain style of speech, and the literati, with their vast erudition and sophisticated sensibilities." Integrating folk legends and Taoist wisdom into their poem's well-thought-out poetic structure, Clara Blum and Brecht merge these two sources of and strains in Chinese poetry as a means of anticipating the outcome of the somber political developments that overshadowed their time. Without explicitly naming it, both poems allude in a hidden way to the Japanese occupation in China. As another of Clara Blum's poems from the same volume suggests, she believed that the Chinese would defeat the Japanese and free their country. History has proven her right.

In order to describe the struggle of the gentle against the strong and evil, Clara Blum, unlike Brecht and Laotse, does not employ the water metaphor but that of the plum flower withstanding the winter storm. The poem's speaker identifies the national identity of "her people" with this flower. Time and again writers, historians, and politicians have described national identity of a people by pointing out its racial, ethnic, and religious characteristics. But Clara Blum does not engage in such reflections. No adjective further explains the general term "mein Volk," thus suggesting that the signified may refer not just to the Chinese, but also to other people. The subsequent couplets further explore the deeper implications of a comparison between "my people" and the "plum blossom," de-

scribed here as the most courageous of all flowers and thus the flower of flowers. The image of a flower brings to mind not only Chinese poetry and painting, but also the German expression “die Blume der Sprache,” the “flower of language,” suggesting that Clara Blum conceives the plum blossom, which is the text’s key metaphor, as the metaphor of metaphors. In light of such reflections, the simile in the poem’s opening stanza acquires new meaning: national identity no longer appears as a fixed entity, but as a figure of speech. In the subsequent couplets, such a figure of speech is associated with fundamental principles in life: to be strong like iron when fighting and gentle when loving; to be like the gentle who will defeat the strong; to have the courage of the gentle ones to withstand mighty winter storms. Yet such existential principles may refer not only to the Chinese, but also to another “people”: the Jews persecuted by the Nazis. By choosing to identify “my people” with “die Pflaumenblüte”, a noun whose gender is feminine in German, rather than with the image of flowing water, “das Wasser,” which is neuter in German, Clara Blum may have wished to point to yet another “people,” that is, to women, in particular the doubly marginalized German-Jewish women.

Although the lyrical *I* is not necessarily identical with the author, “Pflaumenblüte” still bears the signature of a Jewish woman who was forced to live as a multiple outcast at the margins of existence: a Jew and a Communist faced with the looming danger of Hitler’s annexation of Austria and later with the invasion of the Soviet Union, a stateless Jewish woman at the time of the purges in Stalin’s Russia, a woman in love with a Chinese Maoist whose sudden disappearance endangered her own existence. Clara Blum herself resembled a plum blossom withstanding the winter storms: despite the overwhelming power of Nazi Germany, despite the looming danger, she continued to write against fascism and to defend socialist and communist ideas. Despite the prejudices against Jews that she encountered not only in Austria, but also in the Soviet Union, she stood up for the Jewish people and fought for the recognition of their equal rights. Despite the prejudices against women, she struggled to help them and to speak for women’s cause. Never did she abandon the hope that the weak would eventually defeat the mighty. Consciously or unconsciously, she concealed an allusion to herself in the poem’s multiple potential meanings, for blossom (Blüte) brings to mind the image of the flower, and “Blum,” the poet’s name suggests “Blume.”



For Clara Blum, poetry and biography were intertwined, and she followed the path inherent in her poems. After the war, she left the Soviet Union, spent two years traveling through Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Luxembourg, France, and finally emigrated to Shanghai. She had not given up the hope of finding her husband. In China she was once again confronted with the harsh conditions of emigré life but did not give up. Although she went hungry, she traveled to Peking to look for her husband but did not find him. In 1949-50, she returned to Shanghai and wrote down her story as an autobiographical novel *Der Hirte und die Weberin* (*The Shepherd and the Weaver*, 1951) that combines narratives with letters and poems. It is a profoundly lyrical narrative, which testifies to her eternal love for a man as well as to her untiring struggle for the idea of justice and equality among different people, among men and women. The novel, published in the GDR in 1951, was well received by critics and writers such as Feuchtwanger.

After finishing the book, Clara Blum decided to make China her new home, changed her name to Dshu Bailan and became a Chinese citizen. First she had a job as a librarian at the Institute for Russian Language; in 1951, she became a professor of German at the Fudan University, and a year later, moved to Nanking University. In 1957, she became a professor at Sun-Yatsen University in Guangzhou. During all those years, she kept looking for her husband. But all her efforts were in vain. In 1959, she finally found out that he had been deported to Siberia during World War II and killed. Hence her life had been built on a dream, an illusion. But she interpreted it in a very different way. In her second autobiographical novel, *Die Schicksalsüberwinder* (*Those Who Overcome Fate*), which remained unpublished, she carried further the idea inherent in her earlier poem "Pflaumenblüte," arguing that people can determine their own fate and assume the place in life they wish to in spite of all the hardship they experience. The poet who "overcame her fate" ("ihr Schicksal überwand") resembles indeed a plum flower which blossoms on despite the winter storms. It is her own life experience and the Chinese Taoist tradition that convinced Clara Blum that the realization of social and political equality regardless of a person's gender, ethnicity, and religion is possible. Clara Blum dreamed of "utopia"; she dreamed of an ideal world, where not only different ethnic and religious groups, but also men and women peacefully coexisted, tolerating and respecting one another. Since she did not find such world in reality, she created it in her work, hoping that the future will turn her vision into reality.<sup>13</sup>



## Conclusion

As these readings of poems by German-Jewish women authors from the Bukovina show, their multicultural native contextuality is inscribed in their work, manifesting itself in a receptiveness to heterogeneous traditions—a receptiveness that marked the work of both female and male authors from that region. While some women poets such as A. Löwendal embedded allusions to the native Romanian and Jewish cultural heritage in their work, others like Clara Blum integrated elements of such distant literary and philosophical traditions as Chinese poetry into their verses. Not only Bukovina's multiculturalism, but also the marginalization and deterritorialization of the German-Jewish literature from that region is inscribed, however, in the work of these women poets. Although themes and motifs vary considerably from text to text, all of the poems discussed evoke their authors' endeavor to stand up for a marginalized "Other." Such an "Other" assumes different forms: for Ariadne Löwendal it is nature, for Clara Blum the Chinese people, for Rose Ausländer and Else Keren the persecuted Jews during the Nazi period. Some of the above-mentioned poems like Löwendal's "Bessarabian Carpets" specifically address gender issues, criticizing a society that oppresses women, preventing them from realizing themselves. By contrast, Ninon Hesse's "Am I Really?" conceals allusions to the poet's own stance as a woman in those metaphors of the text that evoke writer's frustration with her own inability to realize her creativity.

Like the three dimensions of these authors' identity as women, Jews, and poets, the three main strands of their work—the multicultural, the Jewish, and gender theme—are so intertwined that they cannot be separated. Through their mutual interaction the poetry of German-Jewish women from the Bukovina acquires an innovative character. It is precisely the interweaving of these strands that anticipates poetic developments in contemporary Germany and displays affinities with the work of such an eminent contemporary German-Jewish poet as Hilde Domin. Like Bukovinian women poets, Hilde Domin inscribed her experience of different cultures into the structure of her texts. Drawing on a variety of philosophical and literary traditions, condensed into a straightforward style recalling Rose Ausländer's and Hans Magnus Enzensberger's unmediated artistic expression, Hilde Domin's poetry links the autonomy of the work of art with the necessity to raise public awareness

about crucial political issues of our time. In her view, lyrical subjectivity and societal objectivity need to be combined in order for poetry to have an impact on political developments. Like many other poets marked by the experience of the war and their life as refugees, Hilde Domin believed in the pervasiveness of exile. "Once in exile, always in exile," she wrote. Although she returned to Germany decades after the war, she still felt to be in exile. Her only homeland was and remained her poetic language. Like her, the deterritorialized German-Jewish women authors from the Bukovina also created their "homeland" within the language of their writings, for—as Frederike Maria Zweig put it—language was the only territory from which they could not be expelled.

### Notes

1. The Bukovina is a region located between the Carpathian mountains, the Bessarabian steppe, and Moldavia. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was part of the Ottoman empire, but in 1774, it became part of the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1918, it was integrated into the Romanian Kingdom, during and after World War II it was split between Romania and the Soviet Union. Today the northern part of the country belongs to the Ukrainian republic, the southern part of the country to Romania.

2. Witkop writes a rather awkward, convoluted style; some expressions such as "die letzten Tiefen einer in sich gegründeten Persönlichkeit" cannot be adequately rendered in English. All translations included in this essay are by Amy Colin. I thank Harry Zohn for his suggestions regarding the English adaptations of several ambiguous German expressions.

3. "Der Autor" is the masculine form of author, while "die Autorin" is the feminine form.

4. In the chapter "Der Autor im Kontext" of *Antschel Paul - Paul Celan*, Barbara Wiedemann-Wolf inflicts on readers derogatory and at times nasty comments about the representatives of Bukovinian literature. In the case of Moses Rosenkranz she questions Alfred Margul-Sperber's and Alfred Kittner's opinion that this poet is representative of the Bukovina. Without giving any examples to support her views and without citing a single poem by this author, Wiedemann-Wolf claims that there are grammatical errors in his texts and that his sexual images are embarrassing; poems such as "Die Kuh" ("The Cow"), highly admired by Bukovinian authors, are for Wiedemann-Wolf (who does not even bother to cite the poem) nothing but a collection of clichés (30-31). In Alfred Kittner's case, she insinuates that time and again, in almost all of his poems, he tries to turn Romanticism into a kind of profit to be made out of the inhospitality of the modern city (38). In David Goldfeld's case, she cites a few lines from three

different poems and argues that one cannot tell whether the irregular rhythm is intended or rather is the result of his incapacity to write poems. (45). In Rose Ausländer's case, Wiedemann-Wolf suggests that the poet had no say in the selection of poems included in her early volume *Der Regenbogen* (*The Rainbow*). According to Wiedemann-Wolf, it was Margul-Sperber who decided everything and selected the poems all by himself. As Rose Ausländer's correspondence with Margul-Sperber shows, they worked together in selecting the poems. Wiedemann-Wolf's incorrect statements, which imply that Rose Ausländer was incapable of selecting her own poems, add up to a denigration of this German-Jewish woman author. Such denigration is not limited to Jewish poets. Wiedemann-Wolf's comments about Georg Drozdowski's work are also negative; without giving any example to support her opinion, she argues that his texts are marked by an "embarrassing sultry inwardness and preoccupation with his own self" (36-37). Instead of analyzing the German-Jewish poetry from the Bukovina Wiedemann-Wolf contents herself with pointing out the "influences" upon their work without questioning the concept of poetic influence which she uses. Such an approach to the German-Jewish literature of the Bukovina discloses Wiedemann-Wolf's biases, rather than the value and significance of the German-Jewish literature of the Bukovina.

5. The asterisk (\*) marks which of these women poets are Jewish.
6. Several sections of this essay appeared in the proceedings of a symposium on women and Europe: *Femmes, Nations, Europe*, ed. by Marie-Claire Hooek-Demarle. Paris: Publication de l'Université Denis Diderot, 1995, 143-54.
7. Rose Ausländer: unpublished letter of 19 August 1939 to Margul-Sperber, collection Alfred Kittner and Margul-Sperber.
8. Alfred Margul-Sperber's unpublished correspondence from the years 1936-39, collection Alfred Kittner.
9. Rose Ausländer: unpublished letter of 18 May 1939 to Alfred Margul-Sperber, Alfred Kittner collection and Margul-Sperber Archive, Bucharest.
10. For a discussion of other Jewish women writers from the Bukovina see *Versunkene Dichtung der Bukowina: Eine Anthologie deutschsprachiger Lyrik*, 345-410.
11. She was born in Stanislau, grew up in the Bukovina, moved with her parents to Vienna and later returned to Czernowitz, where she attended secondary school. She studied medicine in Jasi (Romania), went to Germany thereafter, but returned to Romania.
12. In her youth the mother had been forced to marry an old and wealthy Jewish businessman: she left him, however, in order to be independent and rescue her daughter from a similar forced marriage.

13. While this essay was in press, a new study of Klara Blum's work and life appeared: *Klara Blum-Zhu Bailan* by Zhidong Yang.

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