

IN HOC SIGNO [PRO]VINCES

Out-Sourcing the Hearts of Empires, the Case of Chernivtsi (Czernowitz, Cernăuți)

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first publication

*In regard to literature and art nation is always province.*¹

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1 Reemtsma, Jan Philipp: Das unaufhebbare Nichtbescheidwissen der Mehrheit. Sechs Reden über Literatur und Kunst. München: C.H. Beck 2005, p.149: »In bezug auf Kunst und Literatur ist Nation immer Provinz.«

2 Cf. Uderzo, Albert/Gosciny, René: Der Seher. Trans. by Gudrun Penndorf. Stuttgart: Delta 1975 (Großer Asterix-Band 19), p. 28.

3 Cf. Deleuze, Gilles: Kleine Schriften. Trans. by K.D. Schacht. Berlin: Merve 1980 (Intern. Merve Diskurs 95), p. 27f.

Dealing with the concept of *province* means dealing with an enigmatic question. A *province* is what an empire gains. But what is not gained? Any space that is claimed to be a possession and part of a *cosmos* has its status because of matters of power. The whole empire is therefore a possession and a kind of a province. But on the other hand a province is something that has not been integrated – it is not part of the empire claiming to have rights upon that space, it is rather a resource of the empire. This is perfectly evident in architecture. Castles and towers do not accept the other within their walls, but rather there is a sense that beyond their confines the other is probably still at large. This can be outside of the province, but we may be wrong to be too confident about this fact.

In one of the adventures of Asterix, whose village in Gaul has resisted Roman conquest, the Romans appear to have succeeded in conquering the famous village of this cartoon-hero. A soldier is sent to Caesar to tell him the news that the Gallic territory has been occupied in its entirety. The emperor asks whether it has been occupied as a whole and the soldier's reply is: *all of it*.² This is not the announcement of an overwhelming victory, but simply that the Romans have succeeded in driving the last resisting villagers beyond the borders using a trick, according to this particular story-line.

Province means both integration, and as a *conditio sine qua non* of the claim over the province, that the integration is an ongoing process, and will never come to an end. Thus a province not failed vaporises, it becomes part of its new context, and it is constituted by being *almost* the enemy's country as well. A province seems to be simply impossible whether it be the attitude of its new possessors (who lose the *otherness* of their identities) or the post-colonial inhabitants. A coquettish way of becoming provincial.

Thus, *let there be irritation and province* means *let there be tension*, the tension of *littérature mineure*. A minor literature is also the literary mining (Deleuze) of language by showing that the majority is constant, while also becoming a modality of the minority,³ of this indecision in the heart of a province – not to know whether something has been said correctly or revolutionarily; or most likely in this field it is both. Writing can be both and has to be both, it is still the *graphein*, scratching, carving ... drawing – the end point is a draw.

1

Thus a province seems to be both indestructible and fragile; it is the same with colonies. And its tension with the empire is what saves us from universal provincialism – we all know the phrase *global village*. One province does not equal another, and this helps the major culture to stay dynamic, a melting pot with the blaze of possibility.⁴ Europe as an idea is exactly this, Europe is unavoidable and endangered – it is the duty of culture as such, for culture implies cultures. It is deconstruction and affirmation; it is the affirmation in (and of) the state of being deconstructed.⁵ It is a duty which can be fulfilled in different ways and means – this could be the meaning of province which is no longer satisfied with being provincial, but is aware of and aspires to its dignity. A province could be described as *province + knowing and reflecting on its provenience*.

To choose and check one's perspectives, to select one's position. This is simultaneously both duty and freedom, as we notice when we see those who are not supposed to, and even are forbidden to do so, by certain governments. They are writers in fact, who are experts at ending with a draw and *Erörtern*, a word that means discussion and choosing a place, probably taking place where the *you* is not replaceable. Or is it, »(w)here the *mis* takes place«⁶...? Writers have often been the victims of governments, as Derrida has shown.⁷

This is so because writers claim to show the rhetorical and incoherent nature of absolute truth which suffocates human thinking and humanity itself – and it does not just claim to

4 Cf. Barthes, Roland: Fragmente einer Sprache der Liebe. Trans. by Hans-Horst Henschen. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1988, p. 59.

5 Crépon, Marc: Europa, vielleicht (Notizen zu einer »Geopolitik« der Ohn-Macht). Trans. by Richard Steuerer. In: Zeilinger, Peter/Portune, Dominik (Eds.): nach Derrida. Dekonstruktion in zeitgenössischen Diskursen. Wien: Turia + Kant 2006, pp. 34-50, p. 42: »Und doch, Europa muss sein. Vielleicht besagt die Dekonstruktion der Begriffe der Identität und der Kultur, wie sehr es sein muss. Denn sie sagt nicht nur, was man nicht mehr von Europa erhoffen kann und darf. Sie zeigt auch auf dieses »man kann« und dieses »man muss« [...], gerade

dort, wo die Aporie sich präzisiert.«

6 Derrida, Jacques: *Limited Inc a b c...*
 Trans. by Samuel Weber. In: Derrida,
 J.: *Limited Inc.* Trans. by Samuel
 Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evan-
 ston: Northwestern UP 1988, pp. 29-
 110, p. 40; cf. Derrida, J.: *H.C. für das
 Leben, das heißt ...* Trans. by Markus
 Sedlacek. Wien: Passagen 2007
 (*Passagen Philosophie*), p. 39.

7 Derrida, J.: *Deplazierte Literaturen.*
 Für einen internationalen Widerstand
 der Schriftsteller jenseits des alten
 Weltbürgertums. Trans. by Jörg
 Lau. In: *die tageszeitung*, Nr. 4461,
 05.11.1994, p. 20f., here p. 20: »Ihren
 Ort zu wählen, sich frei zu bewegen:
 das ist ein Recht, das unsere Welt
 den Schriftstellern mehr und mehr
 verweigert. Noch einmal wollen
 wir, gegen das Verbot, den Ort der
 Literatur sagen, ihren Ort in eben
 diesem Moment. [...] Was bedeutet
 heute für so viele Autoren, bekannte
 ebenso wie unbekannt, diese
 Verschiebung, die oft genug darin
 besteht, keinen Ort mehr zu haben?
 Sie bedeutet, in den Tod geschickt
 [...] oder des Landes verwiesen zu
 werden, bedroht mit Einsperrung,
 Folter, Hinrichtung oder Ermordung.«

8 Cf. *ibid.*

9 Derrida, J.: *Das andere Kap. Die
 vertagte Demokratie. Zwei Essays zu
 Europa.* Trans. by Alexander García
 Düttmann. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp
 1992, p. 12: »Es ist einer Kultur eigen,
 daß sie nicht mit sich selber identisch
 ist.«

10 Cf. Lihaciu, Ion: *Aufblühendes
 kulturelles Leben im alten Czernowitz.*
 Zum kreativen Milieu einer Provinz-
 metropole. In: *Spiegelungen* 1/1
 (2006), pp. 67-73, p. 67.

11 Vogl, Joseph: *Mittler und Lenker.*
 Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften.
 In: Vogl, J. (Ed.): *Poetologien des
 Wissens um 1800.* München: Fink
 1999, pp.145-161, p. 160.

12 Celan, Paul: *Ges. Werke in fünf
 Bänden.* Ed. by Beda Allemann,
 Stefan Reichert and Rolf Bücher.
 Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1986, vol. 3,
 p.185; cf. Musner, Lutz: *Czernowitz
 als Paradigma. Kultureller Pluralismus
 und Nationalitätenfrage.* In: *IFK-news*
 1 (2000), p. 6f., here p. 7.

13 Shmueli, Ilana: *Ein Kind aus guter
 Familie. Czernowitz 1924-1944.*
 Aachen: Rimbaud 2006 (*Texte aus
 der Bukowina* 29), p. 95: »Jeder

do so, it *does so*. The power is based on these absolute truisms, thus it cannot accept it when these truths become (probably true) thesis. Literature that does so is unacceptable – yet, ironically, if it does not do so, it makes one question whether or not it is still literature.

Thus literature is not tolerated – and it seems the occurrence (or *event*) of literature is connected to this taboo, this status of being forbidden; literature has no roots and no rights, it is neither pleased nor placed, it is across and beyond the borders; exodus is its fate and faith.⁸

2

Perhaps one can describe with these thoughts on the nature of the province the essence of Chernivtsi, its myth and truth and the dialectics in between. For Chernivtsi could hardly be called a metropolis, it is a place where the fascination for the metropolis (Vienna, Paris) is at work. The inhabitants define themselves via this sense of belonging. Sometimes this may be idolatrous, but many times it is the emergence of tension. For their definitions vary, it is a kind of cultural feeling, and the knowledge that culture implies *cultures* – and friction.⁹ Otherwise Chernivtsi would be (and be reminded and recognized as) a strange spot in the eastern part of the Habsburg monarchy, not an *urban legend*, but a legend of urbanity.

Chernivtsi is a contest of ideological-cultural approaches and claims. In the (non-existent) beginning there is the Habsburg fiction. Austria would have to be understood as a *poly-ethnic paradise* – and the proof is Chernivtsi. A place where peoples and people become equals, without nationalism, nor the rise of a local establishment, just one colourful entity called *homo habsburgiensis*, and in this particular case *homo bukoviensis*.

Culture was imported. 1784 is the year of first cultural activity in order to entertain the soldiers (present in this region since 1775) and to transform everyone else into a person defined by the Habsburg monarchy. Cultural activity means festivals and balls.¹⁰ So the strange spot could have a tax point ... »wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir besteuern«,¹¹ the rise of the soul and the rise of taxation seem to be connected. And there remained the option of *divide and rule*. And the result? Something like humanity, which is never planned, but as we know, the detour is the shortest way to humanity.

Across the borders of Bukovina, nationalism was at large – so this city became a symbol for the consequences of an ideological intervention, a discourse of the empire itself. Post-colonial topics could not be discussed; the remains were transfigured into the trace of paradise. Today everybody *knows* that Chernivtsi had a modern way of living peacefully together, a place for humanity and books, where »Menschen und Bücher lebten«. ¹² Every former inhabitant carries his own Chernivtsi in their heart, there are – only! – a few private transfigurations of this unknown thing called *Chernivtsi*.¹³

Nowadays, there is a new view which is more realistic and careful. Chernivtsi is discussed as a productive juxtaposition. This city is not an oasis of love and understanding, we know that it was common for Jewish inhabitants to be beaten.¹⁴ It was a city filled with prejudices and superstitions – and the only suspension of this was the strange orientation toward Vienna and Paris. Chernivtsi was surrounded by prejudices and superstition *without* suspension: the belief in devils, witches, evil ghouls and so on, as Mittelmann reported in 1907/08.¹⁵ And thus among the creatures belonging to the species of *homo bukoviensis*, the *homo bukoviensis czernowitziensis* (*Czernowitz* is the german name of *Chernivtsi*) was, in a sense, seriously endangered. The 68,000 citizens were surrounded by the 730,000 inhabitants of this region – inhabitants believing this capital of the region to be not only wealthy, but also to be a valuable prize, a chance to make a big haul (and clearly not by means of trade).¹⁶

3

Chernivtsi is a name for being a flâneur strolling between imported cultures; and it is a name for the ability to be profoundly homeless among and between these cultures, to not have any kind of home in any of them. In all of those unreal, but possible roots, ideologies, cultures, religions, traditions, Chernivtsi is communication, dia- and polylogue. Nothing more. But it is not to be underestimated; at least there is some intellectual benefit and profit resulting from this juxtaposition.¹⁷ Is Chernivtsi a way of life? No, it is rather ways of living. It has

Czernowitzer hat sein privates, persönliches Czernowitz»

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 352, Gong, Alfred: *Gnadenfrist. Gedichte*. Baden bei Wien: Grasl 1980 (Lyrik aus Österreich 15), p. 13, and Corbea-Hoişie, Andrei: *Czernowitz. Bilder einer jüdischen Geschichte*. In: Czernowitz. *Jüdisches Städtebild*. Ed. by Andrei Corbea-Hoişie. Frankfurt/M.: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag 1998, pp. 7-26, here p. 18.

15 Mittelmann, Hermann: *Illustrierter Führer durch die Bukowina (1907/1908)*. Ed. by Helmut Kusdat. Wien: Mandelbaum 2002, p. 29.

16 Cf. Hainz, Martin A.: *Österreichisches Alphabet · Rose Ausländer*. In: *Literatur und Kritik* 373-374 (May 2003), pp. 105-110, here p. 106.

17 Cf. Werner, Klaus: *Waren die Bukowina und Galizien »interkulturell«? Anmerkungen zu einer Debatte*. In: *Literatur und Kritik* 353-354: *Drei Orte in Europa* (May 2001), pp. 39-51, p. 39ff.

18 Cf. Rychlo, Peter: *Czernowitz als geistige Lebensform*. In: *Czernowitz. Die Geschichte einer untergegangenen Kulturmetropole*. Ed. by Helmut Braun. Berlin: Ch. Links 2005, pp. 7-29, here p. 7.

19 Cf. Burger, Rudolf: *Multikulturalismus im säkularen Rechtsstaat*. In: *Famler, Walter/Kraller, Bernhard (Eds.): Lektüre. Ein Wespennest-Reader*. Wien: wespennest 1998 (edition wespennest), pp. 38-43, here p. 38.

20 Marquard, Odo: *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. 1981, p. 23; cf. *ibid.*, p. 23ff.

21 Shmueli 2006, p. 7.

22 Schlegel, Friedrich: *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Ed. by Ernst Behler et al. München, Paderborn, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, Thomas 1958ff., vol. 2, p. 369.

23 Celan 1986, vol. 2, p. 13.

24 Mittelmann 2002, p. 35; cf. *Ausländer, Rose: Ges. Werke in sieben Bänden und einem Nachtragsband mit dem Gesamtregister*. Ed. by Helmut Braun. Vol. 3: *Hügel aus Äther unwiderrufflich. Gedichte und Prosa*

been said that Chernivtsi is a *world*.¹⁸ Harry G. Frankfurt has written an essay on such sentences; there is no such thing as a Chernivtsi-world. The pure traditionalist would not consider himself to be traditional.¹⁹ A member of a tribe might consider his tradition and culture to be *the* culture, culture is beyond this state of mind, it does not trust its truth.

Chernivtsi, not a world, but possible worlds (and thus probably the best of all possible worlds) and their connection defining any of those worlds as impossible as soon as they claim to be universal. Culture is tradition practised ironically, more to the point, it is the ironic process itself. Culture (and therefore Chernivtsi) is what remains if any particular tradition of it has come to an end and has been falsified. It is the competence of compensating incompetence, it is »Inkompetenzkompensationskompetenz«²⁰ ... It is the dignity of the fragment, the particularity, probably over-estimated – »vielleicht auch überbewertet«²¹ – in regard to its parts, but hardly over-estimated when it comes to the style of dealing with those ingredients. It is irony finishing itself in that it becomes the irony even of irony, Schlegel's famous »Ironie der Ironie«.²² The literatures of Chernivtsi tell of this lesson and cause it to become true.

4

Paul Celan refers to the Jewish tradition in this way, by dealing with the Jewish word and naming it »das Wort, / dem ich entroll-te«,²³ the word he fell out of. It is obvious that the German language and culture could never become a home for Celan, and this even before his cruel experiences during WW II.

The *spoilt* German of the Jews (»ein verdorbenes Deutsch«²⁴) is one significant theme of not only radical anti-Semitic treatise on Chernivtsi, before Celan's mother-tongue turned into a murderer-tongue. Celan's mother – not well-educated, but interested and probably even sophisticated (»gemessen an ihrem begrenzten schulischen Bildungsstand[,] außergewöhnlich belesen«²⁵) tried to introduce Celan into this culture that refused to recognize as being German one of the most excellent poets in its. Even when the Holocaust was reaching Chernivtsi there was still emphasis on German language and literature associated with Schiller, Goethe and enlightenment.²⁶

Celan was perfectly fluent in Romanian and has even written several poems in this language.²⁷ When German was not acceptable to him for writing his poetry as he felt alien in it (»Entfremdet dem Deutschen«²⁸), he chose this language for several poems. But being so close to this language made him recognise that, as in every language, there is responsibility in it segregating it from a na(t)ive home. He was not so secure in using the Romanian words that he could do playful poems.²⁹ More to the point he knew it and thus was insecure with it. He *had* to write playful poems. Being a poet means being universally insecure in more than one sense. When it is said that German poet Celan could have become a Romanian poet (»ums Haar ein rumänischer Autor«³⁰), one has to see it clearly as neither – nor.

The same is true of Russian and Ukrainian. Celan appreciated and even loved the poetry by Ossip Mandelštam – but this because of Mandelštam's relation to his idiom, the same strangeness Celan recognised to be similar to his own. So much for the ambivalence of his *Slavic meridian*, his »slawischen Meridian(s)«.³¹

5

Chernivtsi is a province beyond itself; it is polyvalent referring to many *victories* claiming Chernivtsi to be province. Multiplying provincialism is a state of the transcendence of a province; it is metropolitan. For the idea of the metropolis is not just to be some kind of centre – it is a knot connecting provinces that are not provincial by doing the same.³¹ Thus the provinces and colonies are keeping the legacy of empires – and to refer to them is the *via regia* for an empire not just to legitimise itself, but to be aware of its identity, or even to *have* some kind of pluralectic self/selves. It seems as though a *province* is what an empire gains, but in fact empires are engendered by their provinces.

1966-1975. Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer
1984, p. 290.

25 Emmerich, Wolfgang: Paul Celan.
Reinbek: Rowohlt 1999, p. 28f.

26 Cf. Shmueli, I.: Über mein
Czernowitz erzählen (1924-1944).
In: Gordon, Cécile/Kusdat, Helmug
(Eds.): An der Zeiten Ränder.
Czernowitz und die Bukowina.
Geschichte · Literatur · Verfolgung ·
Exil. Wien: Verlag der Theodor Kramer
Ges. 2002, pp. 161-172, p. 169.

27 Cf. Emmerich 1999, p. 31.

28 Stiehler, Heinrich: Der junge Celan
und die Sprachen der Bukowina und
Rumäniens. In: Gordon/Kusdat 2002,
pp. 115-128, here p. 122.

29 Ibid.: »sicher, daß er es spielerisch
handhabte«.

30 Emmerich 1999, p. 63.

31 Rychlo, Peter: Der slawische Meri-
dian im Werk Paul Celans. In: Gaisbau-
er, Hubert/Hain, Bernhard/Schuster,
Erika (Eds.): Unverloren. Trotz allem.
Paul Celan-Symposion Wien 2000.
Wien: Mandelbaum 2000, pp. 159-
176, p. 159; cf. *ibid.*, *passim*.

32 Serres, Michel et al.: Elemente
einer Geschichte der Wissenschaften,
ed. Michel Serres. Trans. by Horst
Brühmann. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp
1998, p. 607.