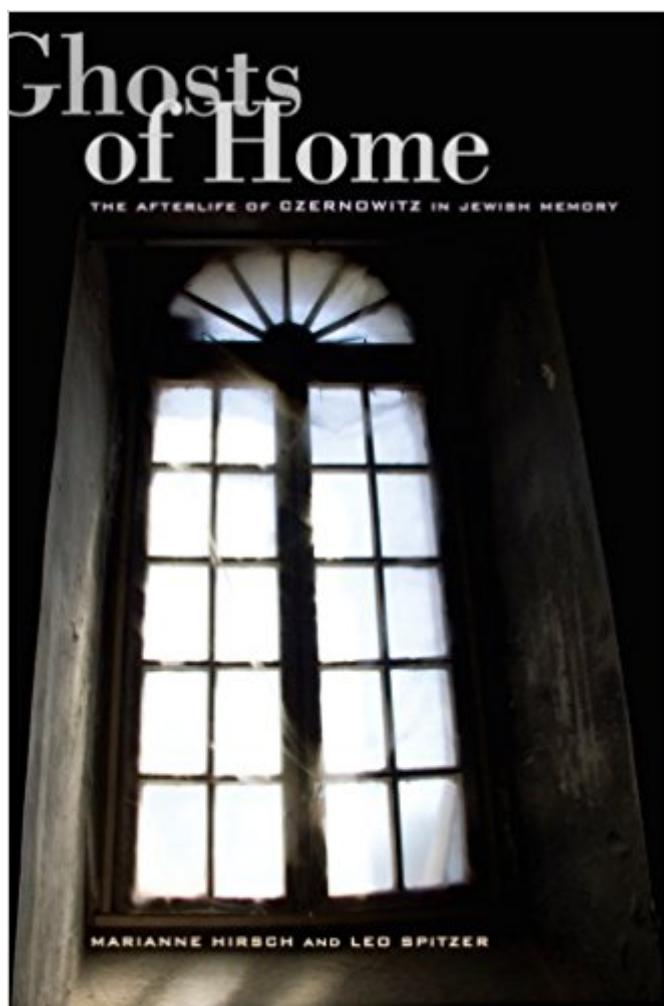


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# Ghosts Of Home: The Afterlife Of Czernowitz In Jewish Memory



## Synopsis

In modern-day Ukraine, east of the Carpathian Mountains, there is an invisible city. Known as Czernowitz, the "Vienna of the East" under the Habsburg empire, this vibrant Jewish-German Eastern European culture vanished after World War II; yet an idealized version lives on, suspended in the memories of its dispersed people and passed down to their children like a precious and haunted heirloom. In this original blend of history and communal memoir, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer chronicle the city's survival in personal, familial, and cultural memory. They find evidence of a cosmopolitan culture of nostalgic lore; but also of oppression, shattered promises, and shadows of the Holocaust in Romania. Hirsch and Spitzer present the first historical account of Jewish Czernowitz in the English language and offer a profound analysis of memory's echo across generations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[This] monumental book . . . is a stunning marriage of intellectual curiosity and personal search. [It] reads with the poignancy of memoir, yet in a collective voice. . . . The overarching authorial voice is nuanced and reflective but also informed. . . . (Priests of The World 2010-04-07)" Hirsch and Spitzer expose the complex layers that inform our understanding of the past. (Jewish Book World 2010-07-06)" Unique . . . Ghosts of Home collects the fragments of one place and provides us with an artifact that is as close as we will ever come to "perfect rest." (Tikkun Magazine 2010-11-10)" An interesting volume. (German Studies Review 2011-06-03)" Eminently readable. . . .

Hirsch's depiction of prewar Jewish life is masterful. (Norman Ravvin Canadian Jewish News 2012-04-26) "The ability to observe, evaluate, and contextualize habits and specific objects is one of the greatest strengths of this book." (Austrian History Yearbook 2011-05-11)

In this rigorous and beautifully written account, Hirsch and Spitzer chronicle a search for a vanished world and, through the terrible lacuna of the Holocaust, discover the life before and after. Simultaneously a history of a fascinating Central European town, an excavation of a thriving culture, and a journal of several returns, *Ghosts of Home* adds both scholarly and human dimensions to our knowledge of the Holocaust, the vicissitudes of memory, the predicament of the second generation, the poignant impossibility of recapturing the past; and the need to understand and honor it in its full complexity. Eva Hoffman, author of *Time*; This exemplary masterpiece of cultural memory interweaves the thoughtful reflections of the post-memorial family memoir with astute historical recontextualisation of one family's experiences of the complex Jewish negotiations of cultural modernity and shifting political dominions in Central Europe. Built around the figure of the journey that takes the reader back and forth across the layered histories of the city of former Czernowitz the text explores the fabric of memory in places, images and things which have the affective power to undo amnesia. This book re-engages us not only with an important fragment of 'the past' but asks us to think about what it means to carry lost histories, intergenerationally, and to transform 'the past' by tenderly and thoughtfully reinserting such memories, often transmitted by images and objects, into the still fragile picture of the experience of European Jews across the long twentieth century. Griselda Pollock, author of *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* "Ghosts of Home is a compelling cross-generational memoir of Czernowitz, once a vital center of a fragile German-Jewish cultural symbiosis in the outer reaches of the Habsburg Empire. Hirsch and Spitzer have created a remarkable narrative of live voices, documents, photographs, travelogues, and memorabilia out of which emerges the 'idea of Czernowitz,' ghostlike and filled with gaps, but like a promise of another history which was not to be. This is embodied cultural history at its best." Andreas Huyssen, author of *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* "In *Ghosts of Home*, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer have written a remarkable inter-generational memoir of Czernowitz and its remarkable German-Jewish cultural world, vanished in the Holocaust. With grace and precision, they use both history and memory to shape a profound set of reflections on loss and survival. Anyone interested in reading a verse of Celan or a short story of Appelfeld should start here. What a gift to join these two

scholars on their moving, penetrating journey back to what was once home, somewhere in the now-vanished Jewish world of Czernowitz."; Jay Winter, author of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*"In a very fine intertwining between the private and the public, this book evokes landscapes of memory animated by ghosts emerging from the past. Hirsch and Spitzer provide us with a multifaceted image of the complex universe of memory. This volume is an important contribution to our way of conceiving the practice of history, its meaning and methodology, its struggle against the unknowns of memory and its choice to give up the claim to omniscience. It is also a delicate and moving story of how individuals connect to each other in the effort to give us back the richness and frailty of the past. For us readers, like for the children of survivors, a passage of memories takes place that allows us to say 'it's our story now.'"; Luisa Passerini, author of *Memory and Utopia: The Primacy of Intersubjectivity*"This is an engaging and exciting multilayered, guided tour through the city of many names; Czernowitz/Chernivtsi/Cernauti; that perhaps never existed except in memories, dreams, and nightmares. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's work is an experiment in story-telling, part history and part dialogical memoir that incorporates voices of parents, survivors, and witnesses and is full of precise and poignant details."; Svetlana Boym, author of *The Future of Nostalgia*

First a confession. My mother was born in Bukowina and spent most of her youth in Czernowitz. She used -and still uses- to tell me various stories from that dark period of the years 1940-1945. From time to time I let her know about some new items, articles or things that appear about Czernowitz. There are many things she has in common with most people mentioned in this new book, but the most significant fact for her which she always emphasized to me and others was that of the German culture which was to be the dominant factor in her life then. To tell the truth, Czernowitz has remained in her heart and soul and I am sure she will always be a Czernowitzer. The pride of her being able to recite from memory many poems and whole parts of plays which were written by such eminent literary figures such as Heine, Goethe or Schiller as well as the Romanian genius Eminescu causes the past to become even more prevalent in her daily life. Having asked her why she would not ever visit there, she replied that it would be a pity to see the city as it looks today and would definitely spoil her good memories from those times. Indeed, there were also happy years and not everything was black. By profession I am a teacher of English and a historian as well. My area of expertise is the Cold War and the role that intelligence services played during those times. Still, I got curious to know more about the city and its culture, and after having read some reports, books and articles which can easily be deemed as not serious and superficial, I made up my

mind to finally read something which was well researched. Luckily, I came across this new book written by the two authors, both of them academics. Right from the beginning it was clear to me that book would be entirely different from what I had read so far. This volume embraces the approach of Alltagsgeschichte, or everyday history which has become so popular among many historians who prefer this style over the positivist approach which dominated the field of historical research, but which became marginal during the last three or four decades. It is a well-known fact that the new approach originates mainly in the French tradition called the Annales school. Those familiar with the terms need no elaboration on this. It would only be wise to state that this approach includes not only the exploration of various written sources but also the incorporation of testimonies rendered by people who lived through a certain historical era, or in other words: oral history. This is exactly what happens in this book. This is not a book which one could easily classify according to a certain genre, be it historical, literary or anything else. It is not only a family chronicle, as the authors state in their introduction, but, in their words, it is "as hybrid in genre-as an intergenerational memoir and as an interdisciplinary and self-reflexive work of historical and cultural exploration. It engages many individual voices, including our own, within a web of narratives, recollections and interconnections, together with other historical and cultural source materials". Add the fact that there is a continuous dialogue between the past and the present and you will get a much more complicated yet richer picture of the key questions posed by the writers, among them being: how come that a small provincial city produced such a rich and urbane culture? Why have the Jews in Czernowitz preferred the German culture over other ones? How have the memories of the Czernowitz Jews pass down to the next generations? What was so special about the 600-year old city that was barely to be found in other similar loci? After all, the Holocaust of Czernowitz can easily be labeled as a part of the forgotten Holocaust of the Romanian Jewry. This happened because of the monopolization of the Holocaust by many Polish and Russian historians, authors and their collaborators in Israel and other academic or research institutes. It was only during the last 25 years when the Romanian Jewry Holocaust started to emerge to surface - and this due to some factors that are not relevant in our discussion here. To resolve these main issues, the authors have relied on historical and literary source materials and used official and private contemporary documents, public and archival materials, letters, memoirs, photographs, newspapers, essays, poetry, fiction, Internet postings and other testimonial objects. The result of all this is to be found in three main parts which constitute the core of the book and an epilogue. The result is impressive and the rich narrative and analysis attest to the fact that this is going to be one of the best-ever written books on Czernowitz, a city (and the memories and evoked) which was dissected, deconstructed and re-constructed by both

writers .It was a very good idea to point out to the reader the various contradictions and unsolved issues concerning some personalities who played their part on the stage of history during the dark years of the Holocaust.However,let me mention my reservations about Chapter 11 of this opus where the authors refer the readers to various Internet sites that include materials on Czernowitz.In an academic work like this,it would have been much wiser to tell the reader about those sites in a detailed appendix, where everything regarding the city could be elaborated on.Ditto for the fact that the authors include a list of who met whom and when while visiting the city on various occasions and you get a reunion-style report which is totally unacceptable here.Second, the detailed and engrossing story of Vapniarka(Chapter 9)comes at the expense of other ghettos which are mentioned only casually,such as the Moghilev ghetto.Albeit this,I can heartily recommend this book-which is a multi-layered interdisciplinary microhistory- not only to the CzernowitzJews (who,despite the advanced German culture surrounding them of which they are so proud of, had not been able to produce eminent figures such as an Einstein or another Freud), but to anyone who is interested to find out about a lost culture which will probably be an inseparable part of some people's psyche in the future.

About ten years ago we were able to see a German documentary on post-Shoah Czernowitz. Till then the city had been the site of the 1908 Yiddish Language Conference, but after watching the documentary, Czernowitz became a bastion of German language and culture that had marked as well its relatively large Jewish community.We had to wait several years to visit Czernowitz,till a flight from Kiev made the city easily accessible. We found an Ukrainian city that was trying to preserve its six centuries of history and its Habsburgian days and we were able to retrace its Jewish past, that is slowly fading away. Back from our trip we were lucky to find Marianne Hisch and Leo Spizer's book "Ghosts of Home. The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory". and through its pages we got acquainted with the recent and painful past of its Jewish community. The streets, houses, buildings, memorials that we had just seen, acquired a new life through the book's pages, that mark the days and years of a family and its friends going through the hell of the "special" Romanian Holocaust. The authors' visits to the city helped us to see Czernowitz in a different perspective, as "Ghosts of Home" is a book that brings back the reality of midcentury life in one of the many corners of Europe that perished forever, and more important, it gives us a glimpse of the strength and courage that enabled some people to face a period that nobody could have foreseen.

History is written by the victors, however memory belongs to those who survive. I first became

interested in Czernowitz through the writing of Gregor von Rezzori, however upon investigation, this Eastern outpost of the Hapsburg empire proved to be a fascinating place, and a cosmopolitan haven for educated Jews. Sadly, since the city was caught between the Russians and the Nazis, the result can well be imagined. The authors and their parents return to what is now a city in Ukraine, and their brave, thorough journey is poignant and informative. An important part of the Eastern European story of the 20th century.

This book presents an excellent historical account of Jewish life in Czernowitz and the interplay with The Hapsburg Empire, as well as Romania. In addition, the authors introduce readers to the situation there today as part of Ukraine. A combination of personal, family testimonies and historical facts, is very effective. This book served as a great inspiration for a trip I just completed to the city. The book should be of great interest to any Jew or historian with ties and/or interest to the region. It is a must read if you are planning a trip to Czernowitz.

This book is a very detailed account of life in Czernowitz in the past and present. Any one interested in the history of the region will enjoy this book.

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