



Mini Review

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From Katowice to The World: In Honor of the 120th Anniversary of Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb And Ruth Storm's Birth – A Report on A Scientific Conference Held in Katowice, Poland

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Abstract

This report is dedicated to the two-day scientific conference/symposium on literary and cultural studies, which was held at the Faculty of Humanities of the Silesian University in Katowice on 12–13 June 2025. In 1905, two women were born in Katowice who went on to enjoy successful artistic careers beyond their birthplace. The painter Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb (1905–1992) and the writer Ruth Storm (1905–1992) left the industrial city in their teens and never returned to Upper Silesia, which was divided between Germany and Poland in the 1920s. They both continued their careers in various German centres (Breslau, Berlin, Wangen im Allgäu and Wiesbaden).

Keywords: Painter Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb, writer Ruth Storm, 120th anniversary of the birth of both artists, scientific conference, picture exhibition, Upper Silesia, Poland, Germany

Introduction

In 1905, two women were born in Katowice whose artistic careers took place outside their birthplace. The painter Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb (1905–1992) and the writer Ruth Storm (1905–1992) both left Katowice in their early teens and never returned to Upper Silesia. Political events of the time, such as the Silesian Uprisings of 1919, 1920, and 1921, contributed to this. These events resulted in the division of one of the most important industrial areas and the Polish-German borderland. Forgotten in their hometown, they gained recognition as independent artists in German Silesian circles. Both women continued their careers in various German

centres for artists, painters and writers (Breslau, Berlin, Wangen im Allgäu and Wiesbaden) before and immediately after World War II.

From the very beginning, Gerda Stryi chose pictures depicting subjects from Mediterranean regions as exposita. Thanks to the activities of the “Künstlerbund Schlesien”, her works were always included in relevant exhibitions, including the “Berliner Secession” and the “Große Berliner Kunstausstellung”. The artist was also represented at the renowned Alfred Flechtheim Gallery in Berlin.¹

In the case of the second woman in her St. Hedwig's novel “Tausend Jahre – ein Tag” [A Thousand Years – One Day] and the

“Odersaga” [Saga of the Oder], Ruth Storm turned to the history of her homeland. In these works, the history of her country becomes a source of strength for those who suffer this fate. This is also evident in the novel “Ein Stückchen Erde” [A Piece of Earth], which is set in the Silesian mountains. Here, the happiness of life in the beloved homeland makes the pain of separation all the more palpable, but also renders the wise serenity of those who overcome adversity all the more credible.²

One of the event’s organisers answered the question about the circle and the reason for interest in the works and biographies of the two women:

“Although today’s view of the past has become more open, restoring the memory of Silesian women artists and the region’s rich history is still very much needed. We want German history, culture, and figures associated with the early years of Katowice to be recognized by the public – says dr Krzysztof Kłosowicz.”³

To mark the 120th anniversary of their births, the University of Silesia in Katowice and the Foundation for Silesian Culture [Stiftung Kulturwerk Schlesien] in Würzburg, Germany, organized a scientific conference aimed at rekindling public interest in the multifaceted work of these two artists. The conference received funding from the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation [Fundacja Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej / Stiftung für Deutsch-Polnische Zusammenarbeit] in Warsaw, Poland.

The symposium took place on June 12–13, 2025, at the Faculty of Humanities headquarters of the University of Silesia in Katowice. Researchers from Polish academic centers in Krakow, Opole and Katowice attended, as well as representatives of the Association of Freunde und Förderer der Stiftung Kulturwerk Schlesien e.V. from Würzburg. The conference’s hybrid nature manifested itself through online broadcasts with over 300 participants over two days. The section dedicated to writer Ruth Storm took place on the first day and featured German-only speeches. The second day was

dedicated to artist Gerda Stryi and featured Polish presentations.

The event included the opening of an exhibition of prints, photographs, and paintings brought to Katowice by the Kulturwerk Schlesien Foundation. Students majoring in Germanic philology at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Humanities, presented excerpts from Ruth Storm’s prose works. The second day of the conference featured the premiere of a subtitled Polish film entitled “Gerda Stryi zum 120. Geburtstag — Hommage an eine Schlesische Malerin. Ein virtueller Ausstellungsrundgang mit Viola Plump”. The footage is available online.⁴

Dr hab. Gabriela Jelitto-Piechulik (University of Opole) presented a paper titled “Zwei literarische Perspektiven auf die heilige Hedwig von Schlesien: Joseph von Eichendorff und Ruth Storm” [Two literary perspectives on St. Hedwig of Silesia: Joseph von Eichendorff and Ruth Storm] and Prof. dr hab. Renata Dampc-Jarosz (University of Silesia in Katowice) invited the audience to follow in the footsteps of “Die erinnerte Stadt. Bilder aus Kattowitz/Katowice im Prosawerk von Ruth Storm” [The remembered city. Images of Kattowitz/Katowice in Ruth Storm’s prose work]. Another speaker, dr hab. prof. UKEN Angela Bajorek (University of the National Education Commission in Krakow), offered a different perspective on the work of the Katowice-based writer in her presentation “Eine ungewöhnliche Initiationsreise im Kinderbuch »Glück muss man haben« von Ruth Storm” [A unique initiation journey is depicted in the children’s book »Glück muss man haben« by Ruth Storm]. In his presentation “Aus dem oberschlesischen Industriegebiet ins Riesengebirge. Ruth Storms und Alfred Heins literarische Bergwanderungen” [From the industrial area of Upper Silesia to the Giant Mountains. Ruth Storms and Alfred Hein’s literary mountain hikes] dr Paweł Meus (University of Silesia in Katowice) sought convergences and intersections between the works of Ruth Storm and Alfred Hein (1894–1945), another Upper Silesian author from Bytom.

¹ Cf. Alexander Hildebrandt (1983) Am Grund tiefer Himmel. In: Eberhard Günter Schulz (Editor), Gerda Stryi. Bilder und Texte. Delp’sche Buchhandlung, München und Bad Windsheim, Germany, 7–20.

² Cf. Eberhard Günter Schulz (2013) Tapfer in Leben und Werk. Die Schriftstellerin Ruth Storm wird 85. In: Eberhard Günter Schulz (Editor Viola Plump, Ulrich Schmilewski), Leuchtendes Schlesien. Betrachtungen zu Ereignissen und Persönlichkeiten. Bergstadtverlag Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, Görlitz, Germany, 199–200.

³ Milena Skóra (2025) Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb. Artystyczny głos w cieniu śląskiej historii. URL: <https://fwpn.org.pl/mloda-redakcja/mloda-redakcja-2025/gerda-stryi-leitgeb-artystyczny-glos-w-cieniu-slaskiej-historii-4XFpvr> (10.07.2025).

⁴ Viola Plump (2025) Virtueller Ausstellungsrundgang Gerda Stryi. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erfnNDvDaLc> (10.07.2025).

On the second day of the session, Aleksandra Giełdoń-Paszek, dr hab. prof. UŚ at the University of Silesia in Katowice, presented the work of Gerda Stryi-Leitgeb within the context of her artistic milieu. Dr Krzysztof Kłosowicz (University of Silesia in Katowice), focused on presenting the Silesian artist Gerda Stryi in literary memoirs. Dr hab. prof. UŚ Michał Skop (University of Silesia in Katowice) mentioned Eberhard Günter Schulz's (1929–2010) contributions to popularizing the works of Gerda Stryi and Ruth Storm. Schulz was a historian and the long-time editor of the German cultural magazine "Schlesien. Kunst — Wissenschaft — Volkskunde". The

symposium concluded with a historical and literary walking tour of the city in the footsteps of Ruth Storm and Gerda Stryi, led by dr Kłosowicz and prof. Skop.

Acknowledgment

None

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.