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Commemorating the Eastern European Jewish Past through Landscapes: Zuzanna Ginczanka and the Ukrainian Context of “Little City”

Abstract

The author examines the relationships between a poet, geography and local memory in the case of the iconic Polish poet of Jewish descent, Zuzanna Ginczanka (1917–1944), and her native region, today’s Rivne Oblast in Ukraine. The geography of Zuzanna’s life encompasses the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv where she was born, Rivne¹ and surroundings where she grew up, and Lviv where she hid from the Nazis, as well as the Polish cities of Warsaw where she studied and Kraków where she died at the hands of the Gestapo in 1944. Poised between the

¹ In the article, all the names of cities and some areas located in Ukraine are indicated according to Ukrainian linguistic rules in modern English translation or transliteration. It is worth mentioning that many cities had different names in the languages of the ethnic groups that formerly lived there. During the times of Zuzanna’s life in Rivne, it was known by its Polish name Równe, as the region was incorporated into the Second Polish Republic in 1921, according to the Riga Peace Treaty between Poland and Soviet Russia. Likewise, the Yiddish name of ראָוונע was actively circulated, as a large share of the city’s population was Jewish. The same is true for the cities of Ostroh (Ostróg in Polish, אָסטֶרע in Yiddish), Velykyi Oleksyn (Oleksin Wielki in Polish) and the Ukrainian historical region of Volyn (Wołyń in Polish, Volhynia in English).

real and the imagined as well as the private and the cultural, the article proposes to focus on the locality of Rivne and its understudied importance for Ginczanka's work. Through the lens of her poetic concept of the "Little City," the article looks at the connection between the real cityscapes and their imaginary portrayal offered by Ginczanka's poetry, in order to analyze the correlation between her image of the "Little City" and the modern idea of Rivne. By introducing a term "memory agent," the author explores how poetry and the poet's personality may inform and affect local memory of Jewish heritage and the Holocaust and, at the same time, the present city's self-perception. The paper argues that the rediscovery of the histories of non-Ukrainian personalities who were once connected to places in Ukraine will enrich these communities' historical and cultural understanding, strengthening their sustainability and resilience amid the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and the struggle against post-Soviet colonial and totalitarian trauma.

Keywords: Zuzanna Ginczanka, cultural memory, Rivne, little city, Holocaust, Ukrainian Jewish studies, agent of memory, Ostroh, Jewish heritage.

Introduction: Connecting Place, Poetry, and Memory

Poetry is instrumental in shaping imaginative topographies and the formation of memory of a place. In this regard, a poet acts as a mediator who connects geography, society, and history through their writing as well as translating personal experience into the universal language of cultural meanings. What drives my interest in the theme is that today Ukraine tends to approach its history and memory from the perspective of inclusivity, resulting in the retrieval of forgotten and banished memories. As Maureen P. Boyd and Emma Janicki-Gechoff argue, when speaking of the local, the personal and the everyday, the poet joins in the creation of the "dialogic local space". This space, they continue, "values multiple local realities as it invites us to listen to, take up, and have confidence in our own local everyday and personal realities, and to listen to, consider, and respond to other local realities. This openness can deepen and widen how we know and see our own realities" (Boyd & Janicki-Gechoff, 2019, p. 1). The emphasis on the local angle of the relationships between poets, places and memory helps to access the ways literature takes the elucidative path and contributes to the social mission of furthering historical awareness and a sense of belonging, as well as strengthening democracy in communities. A state that experienced totalitarianisms, wars and genocides quite recently, Ukraine seeks to build inclusive memory, debunking the occupation regimes' propaganda and returning its forgotten, banned and distorted memories amid fighting against the Russian war of ex-

termination. Jewish heritage has long been an exemplary case of the erasure and removal of memory from cityscapes. For a long time, Jews were invisible even in the memory of cities that once had a largely Jewish population and mushroomed across the former Pale of Settlement,² another creation of Russian imperialism, for a while. Upon being culturally wiped out by the Soviet occupation regime, Ukrainian cities all too often remained unaware of their past for decades. Many people physically vanished from the cities. Affected by totalitarian repressions and colonial trauma, those who remembered were not vocal about the past, while many were deprived of their genuine identity and memory, frequently unaware of this.

In many cases, loosely quoting Zoë Skoulding's discussion of Lisa Samuels' poetry, it meant "...to live together in city spaces when no common assumptions can be made about a shared perception of the past, but when the need for a shared future, in both political and ecological terms, is urgent" (Skoulding, 2013, p. 94). In response to a shared ambition of Ukrainian society, the current decade has seen an upsurge in local interest in Ukraine's past, resulting in increasing family research, oral history projects and local initiatives, intensive scholarship in the field of memory studies as well as education, journalism and literature. The local trend has been stepped up by state memory policy measures such as the establishment of the national Day of Remembrance of Ukrainians who saved Jews during the Second World War. It is celebrated on May 14 and is part of the relevant resolution adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament in early 2021. Shifting the focus to local communities would likely have incentivized them to explore their own history and social ethics because of the formal necessity to celebrate the day and explain its broader context. However, Russia's full-scale escalation of the war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022 accelerated some developments in the fields of local memory and culture of remembrance as well as hindered many processes such as access to archives, including the fact that some archives have been destroyed.

Within the ambit of imagined geography (imaginative geographies), literature plays a critical role in connecting people and places. Literary texts occupy a special place in our imagining of history, others and self. "In storing and accumulating cultural data," Renate Lachmann points out, "the literary text in its

² The Pale of Settlement was an exclusive area of the Russian Empire in which Jews were allowed to reside, as defined by Russian discriminatory legislation, which aimed to restrict Jewish housing in rural areas and important cities, including Kyiv, and thus to protect local entrepreneurs from Jewish trading competition. It mainly covered the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, now Ukraine and Belarus and partially Poland and Lithuania.

intertextual dimension functions as part of cultural memory. A fantastic text points to a silenced repressed memory, confronting culture with its oblivion” (Lachmann, 2004, p. 165). The exploration of marginalized pasts amid seeking one’s own place in history and identity explains the emergence of paradigmatic Ukrainian novels like Oksana Zabuzhko’s *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2009), Tania Maliarchuk’s *Forgottenness* (2016), Victoria Amelina’s³ *Dom’s Dream Kingdom* (2017) and Sofia Andrukhovych’s *Amadoka* (2020). Aimed at symbolic attaching of reinvented memories to the Ukrainian land, they take a look at private experiences of “big” history intimately linked to places and landscapes, which might have been silenced or distorted in the cultural imagination. Importantly, the legacy of semi-forgotten non-Ukrainian writers and artists from Ukraine, given that there were many, is emerging from the shadows and turning into a focus of current memory discussions. Considering their literary texts, either rooted in Ukrainian landscapes or experienced and written in relation to them, brings a wealth of insights into the shared and divergent past, providing ideas and connections for the present. Along with rediscovered literature and arts formerly repressed by the Soviets, it creates the potential to extend and enrich the Ukrainian perception of the past in a more granular and pluralistic way. Basically, the core of cultural memory is both a real and a symbolic attachment to place. It thus mainly tends to be localized; by extension, literature fuels the construction of place histories and local memories. Its beneficial impact on local development can be effected by engaging, through “localized” writing, small cities and distant communities in discussions on the emasculated totalitarian perceptions of self and others.

The present paper examines the relationships between the poet, geography and local memory in relation to the iconic Polish poet of Jewish descent, Zuzanna Ginczanka (1917–1944), and her native region of Rivne Oblast, Ukraine. It is being developed in two intertwining perspectives: firstly, in terms of “localization,” i.e. the portrayal-and-construction of a particular place in poetry that is aesthetically attractive to the current readership and influences both their perceptions of the past, self and others, and local memory; secondly, it speaks about the impact of the poet’s personality on their life’s geography that affects imaginative geographies (Rogers et al., 2013). A few words of explanation: Zuzanna Polina Gincburg was born in Kyiv, Ukraine and grew up in the Ukrainian city of Rivne. It was then called Równe, as the region was annexed by the Second Polish Republic in 1921 under the Riga Treaty (see footnote

³ Ukrainian writer and human rights defender Victoria Amelina (1986–2023) was fatally injured in the Russian missile strike on the Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk on June 27, 2023.

on the first page). In 1944, two Rivne natives and friends, Zuzanna Gincburg and Blumka Fradis, were murdered by the Gestapo in Kraków. In her short life, Zuzanna managed to publish a single poetry collection, *About Centaurs* (1937), which eventually drew wide critical acclaim. The city of Rivne is situated in the north-west of Ukraine, in the historical and ethnographic region of Volyn. Homeland to several cultures prior to 1939, it was part of the Second Polish Republic in 1921–1939, the years Zuzanna lived there. Since the restoration of Ukraine's independence, Rivne has been the center of Rivne Oblast representing the region's rich Jewish heritage and many sites of the Holocaust that deeply affected its landscapes during the Second World War.

The article's basic premise is that local memory and identity are dependent on and framed by prominent natives: writers, artists, renowned scientists, and cultural agents who operate as memory agents. Their personal impact may be described in terms of the present time, to signify its reciprocating and bilateral nature: While their legacy continues influencing the place, the place continues conceptualizing and accepting them and their legacy. Speculations explicated herein barely refer to a real person but rather to a set of cultural meanings a poet is associated with in local discourses as well as to their symbolic presence in memoryscapes. Relatively recently returned to the spotlight in Ukrainian literature, yet still unfamiliar to many, poet Zuzanna Ginczanka is involved in shaping the local memory of contemporary Rivne and beyond. Her poetic concept of "*malutkie miasto*" (Ginczanka, 2023), i.e. "Little City," is the focus of this analysis. The paper aims to examine the local memory of the Jewish past through the lens of Ginczanka's biography and poetic imagination. It explores the ways she may influence and expand local practices of remembering, by focusing on the real topographies of the cities of Rivne and nearby Ostroh, major Jewish centers of Volhynia before the Second World War. The paper therefore exists at the intersection of cityscapes and poetry, past and present, as well as the private and the cultural.

Zuzanna Ginczanka's "Little City" in Terms of Memory Culture

In her early poem *Zamiast różowego listu* [Instead of a Pink Letter], Ginczanka introduces the concept of the "Little City," imagined as the site of eternal youth and everlasting life. Melancholy and idyllic, it is framed by a love story which never happened, thus being filled with a light sadness. In the manuscript, the poem is entitled *Moje malutkie miasto* [My Little City] (December 23, 1932) (Ginczanka, 2023, pp. 79–80). Ginczanka developed a poetics of the town, a recurring object of her poetry, as small and riddled with

too many alleys and, paradoxically, too few alleys at the same time. Houses are expressively likened to large colorful piano keys and pumpkins permeated with seeds. There is also a web of long sidewalks surrounded by shapely tall buildings; there might be just two small houses, it reads, depending on the reader's imagination. The city's overview is smooth, shrinking and broadening constantly. Ginczanka practices the idea, to apply Hanna Meretoja's conception, that "each cultural and historical world functions as the *space of possibilities...*" (Meretoja, 2017, p. 2). Poetry creates a broad "space of possibilities." Contrasting music with silence, the big with the small and many with few, the author zooms in on the city while reproducing its changing sounds and shaping its imaginative topography.

It is safe to assume that Ginczanka drew inspiration from the contours and scenery of her native city, where she spent her childhood and apparently started writing. Moving to Warsaw to study after graduating from secondary school, she visited Równe every vacation. Her overall impression resonates with the portrayal of Równe immortalized by other Jewish writers whose life traversed the city, both in reality and in memory, such as Amos Oz.⁴ In the interwar period, it was the type of Jewish-dominated provincial town where Jews, Ukrainians, Czechs, Poles and others, 25 nationalities in total, lived together. Its cultural and linguistic diversity was conditioned historically and politically. Upon the region's incorporation into the Second Polish Republic amid the Ukrainian fight for national liberation, Poles made up the second-largest ethnic group in the city. In 1927, the well-known Volyn Fair took place in Rivne for the first time, intensifying goods exchange and the movement of people (Semeryn, 2023). Ginczanka's poetry encapsulates city streets and alleys as devious and quaint, with fine central buildings verging on poor ramshackle homes. Today the Little City is turning into memorabilia. Along with the universal messages conveyed, its sharp and vivid portrayal triggers local memory.

Moje malutkie miasto ma zbyt wiele uliczek —	My little city has too many streets —
(nie mogę Cię zobaczyć)	(I cannot meet you here)
chyba wszystkich nie zliczę;	I doubt I can count them all;
Moje malutkie miasto ma uliczek za mało —	My little city has streets too few —
nie ma w niej takiej jednej, by się dwoje	There's not one where two might meet. ⁵
spotkało	
(Ginczanka, 2023, p. 79).	

⁴ Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (Oz, 2004).

⁵ Working translation from Polish into English – Khrystyna Semeryn and Joanna Dutkiewicz.

Portraying her Little City, Ginczanka apparently has a fondness for spring and the surrounding riot of blossoms. Testing aesthetic boundaries in her early “local” poetry, she employs rich colors and hues with which to depict the landscapes. In a ravishing account in *Ostatni śnieg* [The Last Snow] (April 23, 1933), the speaker daydreams about the warm season’s colorfulness while walking among “white masses of snow”:

W maju nocą bruki bocznych ulic mrok
wyścieli, jak czarny aksamit,

i kontury domów spłyną w sady
wyiskrzanej suto skier gwiazdami.

Noce – noce wejdą w moje życie
cichuteńko zza przyszości węgła

i zostaną zbyt samotne sobą – rysowane
głębią czerni węgla –

W maju będą ranki jasnobarwne
malowane wschodów miękkim pędzlem.

Niebo – błękit, lekki błękit pruski
i promieni wółchromowe frędzle,
połyskliwie cynobrowe dachy i liliowość,
która w bzach się ściele –
w maju będą jasnobarwne ranki –
jasnobarwne ranki-akwarele
(Ginczanka, 2023, p. 104).

In May at night, darkness will line the
cobblestones of side streets like black
velvet,

And the contours of houses will flow into
orchards lavishly sparkling with stars.

Nights – the nights will enter my life qui-
etly from round the corner of the future

And they will stay too lonely themselves –
drawn with the depth of coal blackness –

In May, there will be brightly colored
mornings painted with the soft brush of
sunrises.

The sky – blue, light Prussian blue and the
semi-chromatic fringes of rays,
Shimmering vermillion roofs and purple-
ness that floats in lilacs –

In May, there will be brightly colored
mornings – brightly colored watercolor
mornings.⁶

The richness of natural colors and tints is manifested amid the snow’s pure whiteness. A number of Zuzanna’s childhood poems, often available in manuscripts only, e.g. *Czekam wiosny* [I Am Waiting for Spring], *Styczniowe porównania* [January Comparisons] and *Narciarski szlak* [The Ski Trail], all part of the *Echa Szkolne* [School Echoes] “series” are built upon snow imagery. In these texts it is directly linked to a sense of home and the domestic environment. According to historical data and memoirs, there were indeed extremely snowy winters in Rivne during the first half of the 1930s. Multiple

⁶ Working translation from Polish into English – K.S. & J.D.



archival photographs show people skiing in the city center, e.g. in the main May 3 Street that had been thus renamed in honor of the adoption of Poland's first Constitution (Danyl'chuk, 2017). This was the street where the house of Zuzanna's grandparents, the Sandbergs, with a first-floor shop, was situated. In his memoirs, Polish poet Władysław Milczarek, a native of Velykyi Oleksyn near Rivne, describes its urban atmosphere:

Ulica 3-go Maja szeroka, prosta, daleka —
śródmieście tętniące gwarem i marszem
codziennych kroków,
Tu domy są te same i życie płynie
dawne —
wałęsa się w zaułkach i w boczne ulice
ucieka.
Strzeliste wieże kościoła patrzą na nurt
cichej rzeki,
ruiny zamku są smutne i sterczą
niepotrzebne...
(Milczarek, 2015, p. 207).

May 3 Street is wide, straight, faraway –
the downtown vibrant with noise and the
march of daily footsteps,
the houses are the same and life flows by
as before –
wandering the alleyways and escaping
into side streets.
The soaring church towers look over the
current of the silent river,
the castle ruins are sad and protrude
unwanted.⁷

In *Czekam wiosny* (March 1, 1932), the speaker shares her admiration for the picturesque snowy landscapes “on the way to school.” It is impressive how she navigates the language to maintain the connection between the straightforwardness of real views and the eloquent simplicity of the poetic imagination: “sanek srebrzyste dzwonięcie” [the sled’s silvery ringing], “brzęk stalowych mych łyżew i w słońcu ich lśnienie” [the clink of my steel skates and their glistening in the sun], “białe dachy i pola, drzemiące pod śniegiem” [white roofs and fields, slumbering under the snow], “błękitnawe odcienie na białych równinach, oszronione anteny radiowe w wyżynach” [bluish hues on the white plains, frosted radio antennas in the highlands], “narciarzy, jadących na teren szeregim” [skiers, riding the terrain in a row], “zgięte pod śniegiem bukszpany i sosny” [boxwoods and pines bent under the snow], “w zawiei i wietrze” [in the blizzard and wind], “lodów zwierciadła, przetrzynięte liniami” [ice mirrors, slashed through with lines] (Ginczanka, 2023, p. 38), etc. By all accounts, there are many references here to real landscapes familiar to the poet. I would therefore call them “memory signposts.” In *Styczniowe porównania* (early 1932), the speaker observes the snowy scenery outside the window while sitting in a cozy armchair and letting her thoughts flow free-

⁷ Working translation from Polish into English – as above.

ly (Ginczanka, 2023, p. 45). Another poem, *Narciarski szlak* (December 11, 1932), also portrays the loved childhood activity of skiing (Ginczanka, 2023, p. 76). It expresses a longing for spring amid contemplation of the snow-covered world's beauty. Ginczanka's descriptions of the Little City and the comforting environment of her own room are often coupled and interwoven. The poetic imagery of home is *self*-centered, with the speaker identifying and synchronizing her body and senses with the house, e.g. in *Klechda o moim domu* [A Tale About My House] (December 15, 1932).

Furthermore, descriptions of the Little City and surrounding landscapes run alongside scenes of love, sensuality and affection, while being cognate and independent of each other. Agata Araszkiewicz, a prominent literary researcher of Ginczanka's poetry, quotes Jan Śpiewak, a writer and schoolfellow of Zuzanna's, who mentioned Rivne as the "sexualized borderland [*kresy*]" in the Polish imagination (Araszkiewicz, 2018, pp. 38–39). Portraying the periphery, especially located in the "East," as being emphatically sexualized and sensual is a commonplace feature of traditional culture. In terms of imagology, a field that explains representations of the *Self* and *Others*, this distant *Other* is created through exoticism and provincialization as part of a stereotyped portrayal, in some cases supplemented with sexualization. Araszkiewicz points out that the "sexualized ambiance of the borderland city [of Równe] is paired with the ambiguity of female sexuality" (Araszkiewicz, 2018, pp. 38–39). Following this interpretation, Zuzanna left Rivne like her mother, but unlike her mother, she regularly returned there. "It can be said that in her writing, she takes female sexuality and issues concerning the periphery – the borderland [*kresy*] – into the very center of culture," Araszkiewicz argues (Araszkiewicz, 2018, pp. 38–39). Such a thought-provoking conversation encourages us to delve into the complicated relationships between the poet and the city, culture and the body, and center and periphery/*Kresy*. In other words, the city affected Polish culture by affecting Ginczanka's life and writing. In her poetry, the relations between center and periphery seem to be handled through the exploration of male-female relations. Although marginalized and exoticized as the hinterland, Rivne/Równe contributed to producing the crucial discussions of modern Polish culture.

What follows from this is, first of all, that echoes of Rivne's landscapes as well as personal experiences that might have taken place in the cityscapes were both reflected in Ginczanka's poetry. Nonetheless, the identification of the poet's life map has yielded more visible results than does a discussion on the assumed connection existing between the poetic imagery of the Little City and the real city of Rivne. By portraying real places, a poet contributes to the



creation of their own version of the urban space. As Neal Alexander and David Cooper put it, “the ‘geographical articulations’ of literature are significant in themselves” and “the geographical *where* of place and location in literary texts affects the *what*, *why* and *how* of their cultural meanings” (Alexander & Cooper, 2013). The link between Ginczanka’s poetry and the city is sophisticated and challenging. Ginczanka’s case, complicated by her Jewish roots, identity choices and the spirit of emancipation, is challenging to figure out. However, it is rewarding to return the memory of Zuzanna Ginczanka both to Ukrainian places meaningful for her biography and beyond them.

Zuzanna Ginczanka as a Local Memory Agent: Place, Role, and Impact

Cultivating local identity through remembrance is a peculiar trend in post-totalitarian societies that are dealing with the burden of the past while rediscovering and animating their persecuted memories. This is truly a process, with its ups and downs, that encounters challenges and limitations. Ginczanka’s return to the regional public likely happened in 2017. Yaroslav Polishchuk, a Poland-based Ukrainian professor and native of the region, translated some of her poetry for a bilingual Polish-Ukrainian poetry collection (Ginczanka, 2017). With multiple publications about Ginczanka along with public presentations in Rivne, nearby Ostroh and beyond, he made a significant contribution to promoting the poet’s legacy among local audiences. The year 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of Ginczanka’s birth, celebrated in both Poland and Ukraine. Since then, a series of publications about her and the Rivne of her time have appeared in the local press and on history websites (Kal’ko, 2018).

A brief digression is needed here, concerning what 1930s Rivne, the city of Ginczanka’s everyday life, childhood and youth, was like. Present-day Rivne apparently does not resemble that former multicultural ambiance. Living there since the mid-16th century, 22,737 Jews were registered in the city in 1931 (Levin, n.d.). From 1919, a couple of Tarbut schools were opened, wherein children acquired Hebrew education. Likewise, a couple of newspapers were published in Yiddish, to mention *Unzer yeg* (וועג אוונזער) and *Dos naye yort* (ווארט נייע דאס). The city’s Jewish community was a relatively thriving one, though affected by historical turbulences. In the 1930s, about 70% of Rivne’s prewar⁸ population was Jewish (Shandro & Hon, 2021). In 1939, Rivne was occupied by the Soviet regime and designated as a district

⁸ Meaning prior to the Second World War.



city of Soviet Ukraine. In 1941, it was occupied by Nazi Germany, with 35 ghettos established shortly after. In Sosonky Tract in Rivne, 17,500 Jews were shot during November 6 and 7, 1941. By December 1941, most of the Jewish population had been exterminated. These were tremendous calamities, but very few historical sites and buildings of Jewish heritage have survived to our time (Shandro & Hon, 2021). Although it survived the Second World War, the city synagogue was closed by the Soviets in 1957.

In recent years, before the full-scale Russian invasion, Rivne seemed to be raising awareness of its heritage and cultural histories. The city installed street signs to improve navigation in the Jewish and Polish pasts for residents and visitors. So far, a few stumbling stones to commemorate victims of the Shoah as well as a set of signs have appeared. A synagogue, the remnants of the Tarbut School and the Polish-language secondary school which Jewish kids once attended, is what is left from among Jewish historical sites, according to Professor Maxim Hon (Shandro & Hon, 2021). Local studies, public history and citizen history projects also surged in recent years. Across the region, heritage tourism took place before the full-scale Russian war, with many Jewish, German, Polish and Czech descendants visiting their motherland. Before February 24, 2022, some memory projects engaging with local memory and the history of the national communities that formerly lived there had been taking place in the city. An exemplary case is the *Paths of Memory* project conducted by an NGO called Mnemonics (with support from the German foundation Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft), to revive the cultural histories and memories of the historical Volhynia. They hosted a series of public talks streamed on Facebook to reach both distant and local audiences. In addition, the team arranged a summer school and offered support to the participants to implement their micro-projects. A collective digital map was the project's final element. Exploring imaginative geographies and local memories helps to connect the present city with its histories and renowned personalities.

A native of Rivne and victim of the Holocaust, Ginczanka may now be seen as an “agent of cultural memory” in the poetic mirror in which the present city can look at itself. “I still remember that in 2014, none of my colleagues at the department had heard of Ginczanka before. Ten years have passed since then. It seems that today most of Rivne’s intelligentsia has at least heard of this poet,” wrote Dr. Petro Dolhanov (2024), a Mnemonics team member, on his Facebook account. Zuzanna’s return to local memory addresses the cultural needs of local communities and, importantly, transcends the confines of a close intellectual circle. The popularization of her legacy among broader audiences, digitally and physically: on social media, in theater etc., is poised



to strengthen local culture and identity. For many, it might be a discovery that will encourage them to delve into their city's history and family research, and to look at themselves differently.

Recent developments in Rivne's memory landscapes and civic activities indicate a growing interest in Ginczanka amid her historical and cultural background. A memory agent in the integrity of the myth and the real, she expounds the city's culturally diverse histories while embodying their enriching intersection. In 2018, a stumbling stone dedicated to Zuzanna Ginczanka was embedded in the sidewalk in front of the Rivne Regional Theater.⁹ Today this is Teatralna (Theater) Square; before the Second World War, Zuzanna's grandmother's house stood there, with a pharmacy on the first/ground floor. Back then, this was the heart of the commercial city center, with a row of first-floor shops and brisk trading taking place. Today, thematic guided tours of Rivne stop in Teatralna Square. The local historical museum and libraries organize regular lectures and memorial events, such as a traveling poster exhibition presenting Ginczanka's life and legacy. Previously, the Rivne Regional Library initiated a project called *Morning Coffee with Zuzanna Ginczanka* that aimed "to popularize the work of the writers of the *Wołyń* poetry group, which operated in Rivne in the early 20th century, through theater."¹⁰ Participants performed poems translated from Polish into Ukrainian for local audiences. In particular, according to the library's social media, Sophia Makaruk and Mykyta Swyncyckyi, two students of the Department of Theater Directing at the Rivne State University of the Humanities, performed *Na zdarzenie z życia prywatnego* [On an Event from Private Life] (1936). Zuzanna as a person and poet is attractive to explore within the ambit of theater. In the neighbor-

⁹ Referring to Gunter Demnig's global project, Zuzanna's stone was funded by German literary scholar and historian Jutta Lindekugel. Another four stones received funding from the Mnemonics NGO and commemorate Ukraine's Righteous Among the Nations Yakiv Sukhenko, who was killed for saving Jews, Ukrainian priest Volodymyr Mysechko, killed for refusing to collaborate with the Nazis, and Jacob and Rachel Krulik, a father and daughter who committed suicide because of the persecution (according to information gathered from the local press and the Mnemonics website). Further information on the Mnemonics website: <https://mnemonika.org.ua/kameni-spotykannya> (*Kameni spotykannia*, n.d.).

¹⁰ *Wołyń*, a regional group of young poets of Volyn, was established in the 1930s on the initiative of Czesław Janczarski, who was determined to find wider and systematic opportunities to publish the poems of the group's members. The group's co-founders included Waław Iwaniuk, Stefan Szajdak and Zygmunt Jan Rumel. They were later joined by Zuzanna Ginczanka, Józef Łobodowski, Jan Śpiewak, Władysław Milczarek, Stefan Bardczak, Bazyli Podmajstrowicz and Zofia Wierzbicka (Szajdak, 2023, p. 22).



ing city of Lutsk, the local Harmyder Theatre staged *Monodies in Red*, their first post-lockdown performance which later traveled to Rivne. One of the actresses, Yuliia Yatsun, played Ginczanka.¹¹ Readings of Ginczanka's poetry in Rivne organized by political parties are an unlikely attempt to familiarize audiences with the poet, but in fact are more likely to be part of political agendas. Nevertheless, this testifies to some shift in the understanding of her legacy as part of the local context. In Rivne and beyond, various forms of commemoration and popularization of Ginczanka exist today. The impact, however, cannot be measured precisely. Taking up the issue, I looked at reviews and opinions from people who attended the events and interacted with the thematic content. My selection is anonymized and summarized. I came across such responses as "a fabulous woman whose path went through my native city"; "charming and stylish"; "It was so cool to learn that such a charismatic and stylish woman lived in Rivne, that she is a part of our city's history." The prevailing mood of the reviews as well as regular attempts to stage parts of the poet's history and perform her poetry indicate that Ginczanka is seen as being close and interesting to today's society, partly even a role model. Her legacy intrigues contemporary readers and inspires artistic and research projects aimed at delving into the city's histories, including its Jewish history.

It is also worth considering Zuzanna's impact on local memory beyond her native city. Situated 48 km from Rivne, the city of Ostroh is known as a formerly important center of Ukrainian, Jewish and Polish history, also involving Tatar legacy. Its case is remarkable from the standpoint of individual endeavors to preserve and actualize the rich Jewish heritage and local memory of the Holocaust. In the interwar period, between 64% and 70% of its population was Jewish. Jews settled there in the late 14th century, and it was not long before the city became a vibrant regional center of Jewish life. Unlike Rivne, Ostroh has preserved more of its Jewish heritage sites, though many require repair while others have been turned into residential and administrative buildings; in some cases, the signs of the Jewish past are barely recognizable (Semeryn, 2020). Ostroh may be described in terms of Ginczanka's "Little City," with its small streets, provincial peacefulness and rich Jewish history. One genuine agent of local Jewish memory was Hryhorii (Gregory) Arshynov (1960–2020). A builder and businessman, he legally and physically restored the local Jewish cemetery where Tzaddik Shmuel Eidels, known as Maharsha, is buried, and which was once turned into a dance pavilion by the Soviets. He also started rebuilding the 17th-century Great Maharsha Synagogue while collecting artifacts for the future museum. Arshynov worked as an expert on

¹¹ *Monodies in Red*. Poetic performance. 2017 (*Monodii v chervonomu*, n.d.).



the restoration of Jewish heritage sites far beyond the region and headed the tiny local Jewish community. In the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic, I lent him a collection of Ginczanka's poetry. Her name was already known in Ostroh thanks to several presentations by Prof. Polishchuk and other activities at the local university. Interested in Ginczanka's poetry and life, Hryhorii regrettably did not get the time to read it.¹² There is no doubt that if he had lived longer, this man would have invested more effort in familiarizing the local community with Zuzanna's legacy. Today the melancholy fact of lending him the poetry book reminds me of the invisible linkages that connect people and places through time and space, in this particular case through Zuzanna's legacy.

Decoding hidden traces in a city space and poetic references, as well as bringing forward important questions of the past and present, is what I would call the enriching impact of a memory agent (poet, artist, activist etc.) on a community's awareness. It raises interest in diverse histories and provides a sense of historical continuity and genuine attachment to a given place, confronting the ruptures in knowledge and the patchy identity molded by the Soviet totalitarian pressure of the last century.

Conclusions

Given all of the above, brief conclusions may be drawn about the relationships between a poet and their poetry, memory and place as well as the poet's potential impact on enlivening local memory and strengthening local identity. This is valuable for building resilient communities and ecosystems of cultural memory in Ukraine and in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This impact can be described as a recurrent process of reciprocal influence and symbolic exchange within the framework of *poet-(poetry)-place-memory*, with emphasis on the local and on the "localization" of poetry within imaginative geographies. By introducing the idea of "memory agents", as associated with a variety of cultural meanings and a symbolic presence in local discourses on one hand, and a person of integrity whose story keeps intriguing modern society on the other, the article has sought to highlight the role of prominent natives, especially writers and artists, in shaping local memory and identity. Through arts, public history education, and public memorialization, local researchers, artists and activists engage Zuzanna

¹² A broader context of our conversation can be found in my essay:

Чоловік, який тримав склепіння / Der Mann, der ein Gewölbe trug. *Gel:blau*, #26, 2022 (In Ukrainian and German; Semeryn, 2022).



Ginczanka in reshaping the city and region's local identity. Outlined concisely, the above assumptions are proved by observations of local trends, including various initiatives and projects (e.g. stumbling stones, the *Paths of Memory* from Mnemonics, and *Morning Coffee with Zuzanna Ginczanka* maintained by the Rivne Regional Library), social media activities, and the evidence of the growing public interest in Ginczanka's personality and poetry amid her cultural and historical background. Through the construction of its eloquent imagery of the "Little City" inspired by local landscapes, Ginczanka's poetry may expand the current (self)perception of Rivne and contribute to shaping its local identity and sense of historical continuity. Returned to local memory quite recently, in 2017, Zuzanna Ginczanka recounts the city's culturally varied histories and embodies their inspiring intersection. Significant aspects include the impact of her legacy on local memoryscapes and on discussions about the past, especially the city's different cultural histories in addition to the Ukrainian, i.e. Polish and Jewish.

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Зберігаючи пам'ять про єврейське минуле Східної Європи крізь ландшафти: Зузанна Гінчанка і контекст українського «містечка»

Ця стаття досліджує зв'язки між поетами, географією і локальною пам'яттю на прикладі культової польської поетки єврейського походження Зузанни Гінчанки (1917–1945) та її рідного регіону, сучасної Рівненської області в Україні. Географія Зузанниного життя охоплює українські міста: Київ, де вона народилася, Рівне та околиці, де виросла, Львів, де переховувалася від нацистів, – а також польські: Варшаву, де навчалася, і Краків із місцем її загибелі в руках гестапо у 1944 році. Балансуючи між реальним та уявним, приватним і культурним, стаття зосереджується на місті Рівному, значення якого для творчості Гінчанки досліджене недостатньо. У ній проаналізовано зв'язок між реальними міськими пейзажами та їхнім зображенням у поезії Гінчанки і те, як її образ «містечка» корелює з сучасними уявленнями про Рівне. Пропонуючи поняття «агентка пам'яті» / «агент пам'яті», авторка досліджує, як особистість і творчість поетки інформують і впливають на місцеву пам'ять про єврейську спадщину і Голокост, а разом на сучасне самосприйняття міста. У статті виснувано, що перевідкривання історій відомих персоналій неукраїнського походження, чиє життя було пов'язане з українськими просторами і локальною пам'яттю, збагачує історичну і культурну обізнаність місцевих громад. Це посилює їхню сталість і стійкість в умовах опору затяжній російсько-українській війні та боротьби з пострадянською колоніальною і тоталітарною травмою.

Ключові слова: Зузанна Гінчанка, культурна пам'ять, Рівне, містечко, Голокост, українодаїка, агентка пам'яті, агент пам'яті, Острог, єврейська спадщина.

Zachowując pamięć o żydowskiej przeszłości Europy Wschodniej poprzez krajobrazy. Zuzanna Ginczanka i kontekst ukraińskiego „miasteczka”

Artykuł przedstawia związki między poezją, geografą a pamięcią lokalną na przykładzie kultowej polskiej poetki żydowskiego pochodzenia Zuzanny Ginczanka (1917–1945) i jej rodzinnego regionu – współczesnego obwodu rówieńskiego w Ukrainie. Geografia życia Ginczanka obejmuje ukraińskie miasta: Kijów, gdzie się urodziła; Równe i jego okolice, gdzie dorastała; Lwów, gdzie ukrywała się przed nazistami, a także polskie miasta: Warszawę, gdzie studiowała, i Kraków – miejsce jej śmierci w murach gестапо w 1944 roku. Artykuł,

balansując między tym, co realne i wyobrażone, prywatne i kulturowe, koncentruje się na mieście Równe i jego znaczeniu (niewystarczająco zbadanym) w twórczości Ginczanki. Odwołując się do poetyckiej koncepcji „miasteczka”, autorka analizuje związek między rzeczywistymi pejzażami miejskimi a ich odwzorowaniem w poezji poetki oraz to, jak jej obraz „miasteczka” koreluje ze współczesnym postrzeganiem Równego.

Wprowadzając pojęcie „agentki pamięci” / „agenta pamięci”, autorka bada, w jaki sposób osobowość i twórczość Ginczanki mogą wpływać i kształtować lokalną pamięć o dziedzictwie żydowskim i Holokauście, a także na współczesne postrzeganie miasta. Artykuł dowodzi, że ponowne odkrywanie historii znanych postaci nieukraińskiego pochodzenia, których życie było związane z ukraińską przestrzenią i pamięcią lokalną, wzbogaca historyczną i obywatelską świadomość lokalnych społeczności. Ma to kluczowe znaczenie dla ich trwałości i odporności w kontekście przedłużającej się wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej oraz walki z postradziecką traumą kolonialną i totalitarną.

Słowa kluczowe: Zuzanna Ginczanka, pamięć kulturowa, Równe, miasteczko, geografie wyobrażone, lokalność, Holokaust, studia żydowskie, judaistyka ukraińska, ukrainistyka, agentka pamięci, agent pamięci, Ostróg, dziedzictwo żydowskie.

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