

A
CLASSY
INTROVERT'S
READING GUIDE

1850

1900

1950

2000

2020

The classics catalogue brings together the gems of Latvian literature from the past two centuries – beloved novels, cult classics and simply great reads that have shaped our culture.

When the first novel written in Latvian – Reinis and Matīss Kaudzīte's *Mērnīeku laiki* (The Time of the Surveyors) – was published in Latvia in 1880, *The Brothers Karamazov* had just been published in Russia and *Nana* in France, and more than 250 years had passed since the publication of *Don Quixote* in Spain. Little wonder, then, that many reviewers in Latvia have complained – both then and now – that Latvian literature lags behind, with global trends sometimes appearing in the works of Latvian authors only several decades later.

However, it is this isolation and unique course of development which makes the history of Latvian literature so interesting to modern readers, from the attempts in the nineteenth century to establish foundations of a national literature (keeping one eye on literary trends in Western Europe and the other on Latvian oral tradition and folklore), to the early twentieth-century social commentary echoing the 1905 Revolution, to later literary efforts by the Latvian refugee community to keep its culture alive in the United States, Germany and Sweden, and finally to the Soviet-era manoeuvring between Communist Party literary dogma and the authors' own deep desire to tell the truth.

As we move further into the twenty-first century, the fascinating journey of Latvian literature is at last beginning to gain recognition outside of Latvia. Works by many of the authors described in this booklet have already been published in England, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere, while others await discovery in other countries. Some of these works are serious; others are witty. Some are grounded in reality; others in fantasy. Some works describe a world that has rarely appeared in the news or in stories written by non-Latvians. They describe a world standing at the crossroads between the West and the East – a world which has been under the control of different foreign powers, but through it all has never stopped seeking to understand itself.

But above all this is excellent literature, which retains the capacity to thrill and captivate even twenty-first-century readers with relatable plots and engrossing descriptions of the world – which is why people have shared and enjoyed, written and read stories across the world for millennia.

1850

1900

1950

2000

2020



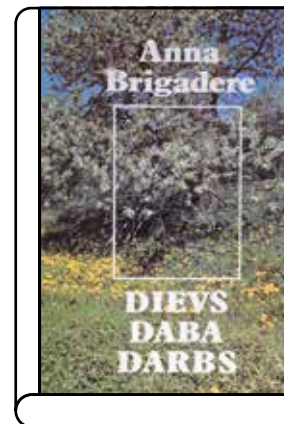
ANNA BRIGADERE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1861–1933

Writer, playwright, and poet **ANNA BRIGADERE** grew up in one of Latvia's most beautiful regions, Tērvete, which she brilliantly weaves into her works. Due to family circumstances, Brigadere attended school for only a few years. She started work in her teens, as a seamstress, an assistant in her brother's store, and a governess. She went on to train and qualify as a teacher, which allowed her to work as a home tutor for a German family in Rīga. In 1915, during the First World War, Brigadere fled Latvia for Moscow, where she remained until 1917. On returning to Rīga she worked as the editor of a literary almanac.

Brigadere wrote her first story in about 1893. As a playwright she is known for emphasising the role of women in her works, portraying them as defenders of the moral virtue of the Latvian nation. Brigadere wrote several much-loved plays based on fairy tales, including *Sprīdītis* and *Maija un Paija*, which remain ever-present in children's theatre repertoires and on lists of required reading in schools. Brigadere's longest and most beautiful work was published at the end of her life: a trilogy about her youth, composed of the novels *Dievs, daba, darbs* (God, Nature, Work; 1926), *Skarbos vējos* (Harsh Winds; 1930), *Akmens sprostā* (In a Stone Cage; 1933). The plot centres on Brigadere's experiences in her childhood and early youth, and so we follow the main character, little Annele, from the ages of four to sixteen as we progress through the trilogy. This work is commonly known as the Bible of Latvian life and values.



Originally published by
Valters un Rapa, 1927
376 pages
Free rights



The first part of Anna Brigadere's autobiographical trilogy, ***Dievs. Daba. Darbs*** (God. Nature. Work; 1926), is a psychologically nuanced portrayal of a servant girl named Annele and the way her character develops as she comes to understand the world around her. This story reflects the author's own childhood memories, of when she first learned about the word of God, the natural world around her, and everyday work. Annele comes from a servant family. Each year on Jūrģi (St. George's Day) they move to a new home and therefore also into a new world. The people she encounters leave a considerable impression on Annele. As she comes to understand life's truths and encounters injustice, so she begins to grow up. She learns about holiday traditions and the patterns – as well as, in her opinion, the oddities – of adult life.

Brigadere's memories reveal a small child's innocent view of life, which can, at times, bring both tears of joy and sadness to the eyes of the reader. For example, Annele is out on a visit and is given a slice of bread and honey – a food seen as a great treat. However, Annele doesn't like the taste of it and leaves the bread by a fence. When she returns, she tells the lady of the house that a dog snatched the bread out of her hands. The lady comforts the little girl and, as a consolation, gives her a new slice of bread and honey.

Along with its realistic and gripping portrayals of country life at the turn of the twentieth century, modern-day readers enjoy Brigadere's expressive language in *Dievs. Daba. Darbs*, in which Annele describes everything she sees and hears simply, without pretension, and in a heartfelt way.

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1862–1922



AUGUSTS DEGLAVS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

AUGUSTS DEGLAVS (1862–1922) is considered one of the foundational figures of novel-writing in Latvian literature. He was born in a homestead in Vīganti, in Šķilbe parish (Jelgava County). His parents owned a farm, where the author worked in his youth. On graduating from Auri Parish School, he moved to Rīga and started work at the Augusts Dombrovskis sawmill in the Vecmīlgrāvis district. He also worked at several newspapers, was a civil servant, and was involved in the Rīga Latvian Society and the *Auseklis* temperance society. He gained notoriety in 1891 when the newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis* published his story *Vecais pilskungs* (The Old Manor Lord), which was about life during the period of corvée labour in Latvia. From this point on, Deglavs was primarily a writer and journalist. After the First World War, he became the editor of the St. Petersburg newspaper *Jaunā Dienas Lapa* and later was actively involved in the foundation of the Latvian Democratic Party in 1917. He died of tuberculosis in Rīga.

Deglavs's major achievement was his novel *Rīga*, a heavyweight in the world of literary realism. The author began writing it in 1909 and continued work on it for the rest of his life, ultimately leaving it unfinished. In the present day, *Rīga* is considered to be a window into Deglavs's time, full of his keen observations on the *New Latvian* intellectual movement: ambitious men and youths from the countryside arriving in German Rīga to begin their struggle to climb the social ladder.



Originally published by
D. Seltiņa apgāde, 1909
222 pages
Free rights

His novel ***Zeltenīte*** (Golden Girl) is harsh and direct, in contrast with the rest of his work. The main character, Anna Zeltēnīte, is a seamstress living on the outskirts of the city. The novel describes the tragic events in the final year of her life, as she falls hopelessly in love with an undeserving lad working at a factory. Anna is not dissimilar to Don Quixote in her role as a “good character” struggling against the evil world. The novel is filled with images of everyday material poverty, as well as the intellectual emptiness of the lives of the workers and other common folk with their cynicism and broken dreams – all of it commonplace in the world in which the author lived.

Is the novel's sweet-sounding name meant to serve as a contrast to the harsh realities depicted within its pages? Or does it instead suggest the destiny of the less powerful? This novel is the story of Zeltēnīte and people who lived lives like those of Deglavs's contemporaries: individuals who were not powerful, but struggled to be on the same level as those “up top”.

As an observant publicist and emerging writer, Deglavs was troubled by what he saw when he moved from the countryside to Rīga. He depicts with unvarnished detail the vices he encounters – drinking, violence, general moral decay. His contemporaries acknowledged the author's skill in writing honestly about his time without holding back and considered this to be Deglavs's best work and one of the most lasting works of Latvian literature (A. Upīts, *Ritums*, 1922), while also highlighting the focused and dynamic language he employs in his prose (H. Lejiņš, *Jaunā Gaita*, 1969).

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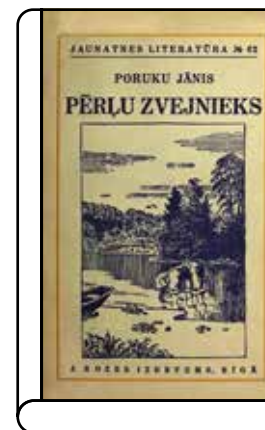
JĀNIS PORUKS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1871–1911

JĀNIS PORUKS (1871–1911) was born in Prēdeļi in Druviena parish (located in present-day Gulbene municipality). His father was the head of the parish and his family owned a farm. He studied at Druviena Parish School, Liezēre Church School, Cēsis City School, all the while immersing himself in world literature. Poruks was a talented and pleasant young person, and as a result he secured the support of Rīga Polytechnic School docent Hermanis Vestermanis, who helped Poruks financially as well as giving him advice during his search for a private school and, later, while he was studying music in Dresden. While abroad, Poruks enjoyed not only art but the company of interesting people. He went on to study chemistry in Rīga but was discharged during a period of student unrest, and so instead found work as a civil servant and in business. At the end of the century, he began to work intensively on his writing; however, 1904 was the year that marked the start of Poruks's decline. His daily routine was disrupted and he was suffering from a mental illness which led him to seek treatment at several psychiatric clinics until he died suddenly at Wladimir Tschisch's psychiatric clinic in Tartu.

Poruks was one of the first to write in Latvian about Nietzsche's ideas. His book *Nākotnes reliģija* (Religion of the Future) focused on these ideas and was also published in German in Berlin. His novella *Perpetuum mobile* (1894) came about as a result of his studies on contemporary philosophical thought, and he is seen as having had an especially broad creative range compared with other Latvian writers. Poruks includes in his work concepts from Christianity to Nietzscheanism, from rich fantasy to the stark realities of everyday life. He wrote novels, short stories, novellas, poetry, and other works, and is considered to be one of the foundational figures of Latvian romantic prose. He also developed several Latvian literary archetypes: pure-hearted folk, "pearl divers", pale lads, and others.



Originally published by
Ernst Plātes, 1895
85 pages
Free rights



Pērļu zvejnieks (The Pearl Diver), which the author described as fantasy, is one of the earliest long prose works by Poruks. Its main character, Ansis, is from the countryside and comes to Rīga to study. He is passionate; a dreamer and an idealist. For Ansis, "pearl diving" means fulfilling your life's goals: he wants to make his dreams come true, not just view them from a distance. But his life takes some difficult turns: his mother dies, he is unlucky in love, and he struggles with loneliness and, of course, the possibility that the world will never understand him. Ansis has no shortage of benefactors, including his mentor Talheims, his beloved Anna, and others. As the story progresses, Rīga comes to discover Ansis's unique nature and he begins to meet new people. The moral of the story is that every reader has to find the "pearls" in their own life (there is also a theory that Poruks used "pearls" to refer to the hearts of good people). The story is partially autobiographical and in it Poruks appears to foresee his own fate. This story also contains a motif that was completely new to Latvian long-form prose: Ansis discovers not only the physical path he must take on his journey, but also the path to find himself.

This and other works by Poruks are characterised by the words he wrote in a letter to his fiancée: "I was the first to include the concept of modern art in the Latvian national element." Literary specialist Viesturs Vecgrāvis compared *Pērļu zvejnieks* with Novalis's novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) and Ludwig Tieck's novel *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1796). Along with romantic elements, Poruks also weaves in reflections on the modern culture and philosophy of his time. This work is included in the Latvian Cultural Canon.

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JĀNIS JAUNSUDRABIŅŠ

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1877–1962

JĀNIS JAUNSUDRABIŅŠ (1877–1962), one of the most well-known Latvian authors of psychological prose, left a lasting mark on every literary genre imaginable, though in the present day he is mostly remembered for his skilful portrayals of country life. Past and present critics have also remarked on Jaunsudrabiņš' realistic approach to describing people and his use of vibrant and picturesque "popular language", which, as Latvian writer Jānis Veselis notes, "makes even small events interesting".

Jaunsudrabiņš, who was born into a servant family, lost his father at the age of three and spent his childhood tending livestock and attending the Nereta Parish School in southern Latvia. He lived most of his life in Latvia, finally fleeing the country during the Second World War. He ended up in Germany, where he died in Körbecke in 1962.

As well as writing, Jaunsudrabiņš also worked as a professional painter and book illustrator. During his lifetime there were several exhibitions of his work, and he is considered one of the foundational figures in the art of book illustration in Latvia. He made his literary debut with his translation of Knut Hamsun's novel *Pan* and would go on to translate other novels by Hamsun into Latvian, as well as works by Guy de Maupassant, Charles De Coster, and others. In his youth he wrote poetry. In 1906 he signed the Decadent declaration *Mūsu mākslas motīvi* (The Purpose of our Art). The first significant work of prose by Jaunsudrabiņš was his short story *Vēja ziedi* (Wind Blossoms), which was published in 1907 and gained the attention of critics for its interesting portrayals of people and nature and the composition of its central metaphor.

① At the beginning of the novel *Jaunsaimnieks un velns* (The New Farmer and the Devil; 1933), the retired Latvian army officer Krasts is building his new farm. Together with his wife Aina and her father Andrāns, he works tirelessly to complete it, turning the surrounding spruce forest into pastures and putting up new farm buildings. However, a devil, a figure in Latvian tradition who is more of a trickster than a diabolical villain, has lived in this part of the forest for centuries and is angered by the destruction of his home, so he directs a series of misfortunes at the farmer – a beautiful woman named Manga, lack of money, etc. – to try and make him leave. At first the farmer is somewhat susceptible to the devil's temptations, but in the end he pulls himself together and defeats them, so that good triumphs after all at the end of the novel.

According to his contemporaries, Jaunsudrabiņš' inspiration for this novel came from watching sap drip from a birch tree. This prompted him to imagine the devil as a symbol of primordial nature, which – as the author would later say himself – manifests in physical desire and material temptation, all of which are defeated by the



1
Originally published
by Valters un Rapa,
1933
460 pages



2
Originally published
by Prometejs, 1937
(Part I published
by Jāņa Brigādera
apgāds, 1911)
570 pages

farmer's virtuous hard-working character. The character of the metaphorical devil in a novel which is otherwise entirely realistic prompted considerable discussion at one point. Ultimately, Jaunsudrabiņš became involved in these discussions himself and reminded readers in the newspaper "Jaunā daiņa" in 1934 that gods in early literature would also often be described realistically. In his opinion this same artistic technique could be used in the 20th century; even though humans had acquired godlike powers, this very same power had made them increasingly anxious and, since readers were seeking "the kind of peace that's found only in fairy tales", the author wanted to give this to them.

② Jaunsudrabiņš' trilogy *Aija* (1911–1924) follows the life of a man named Jānis. In the first novel, he is a fifteen-year-old servant boy working as a cowherd at a wealthy farm, who falls in love with the slightly older Aija, a maid at the main house. Aija flirts with Jānis but is more interested in an advantageous marriage than in this cowherd's love and marries a wealthy, middle-aged cobbler. Jānis is crushed and sets out for Rīga, where he works in various factories so that – in the second part of the trilogy – he is able return to his childhood home by the time he is thirty, to help out on the farm. Jānis falls in love with Ieva, who was just a little girl in the first book but has grown into a beautiful young woman and is also working as a maid. Jānis tries to use this new love to get over his earlier infatuation with Aija, whose husband has since died. He is not successful, and is thrown into an existential crisis, though this crisis is ultimately resolved when Jānis marries Aija.

The final volume of the trilogy focuses on their life together and reveals that Aija isn't even close to being the woman he had envisioned. She is a pragmatic egotist who is also disloyal and lazy, but Jānis is unable to leave her. This makes his life even more miserable than it was before his marriage, when Aija was constantly on his mind. And so, because of this, he commits suicide at the end of the novel.

When describing this work – which has also been added to the Latvian Culture Canon – Latvian literature specialist Viesturs Vecgrāvis says: "with respect to the qualities of its psychological portrayals, it can be counted among the best European realist novels of the first half of the 20th century." Along with other critics, he also highlights Jaunsudrabiņš' vivid language and ability to reveal his characters' inner experiences and feelings.

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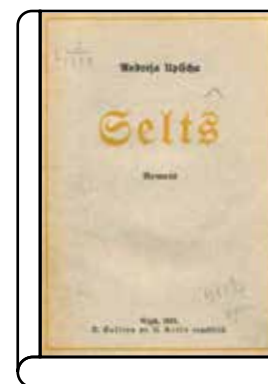
ANDREJS UPĪTS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

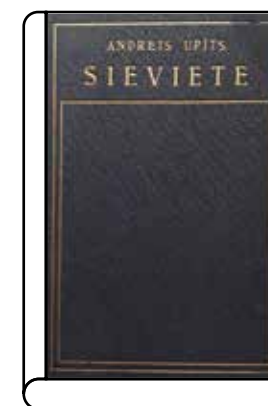
1877–1970

ANDREJS UPĪTS (1877–1970) was an author, literary scholar, and literary critic. He lived through the contradictions of several different eras, which left a clear mark on all of his writing. Upīts wrote in a wide range of genres: his body of work includes 20 novels, 12 collections of short stories, and a great many plays – dramas, comedies, and historical tragedies. Throughout his career, the author was both a literary scholar and a literary critic. Upīts was also a poet, journalist, and translator. He translated the works of Gustave Flaubert, Heinrich Mann, Anatole France, Heinrich Heine, and other foreign authors into Latvian. After World War II, Upīts became the head of the Department of Latvian Literature at the University of Latvia (1944–1948). Later he became the founder and director of the Language and Literature Institute at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences (1946–1951) and the president of the Latvian Writers' Union (1944–1954).

- ① His work *Zelts* (Gold) was serialised in periodicals in 1914 and published as a novel in 1921. This book, like most of Upīts' writing, contains a notable analysis of contemporary social issues. Several artistic techniques, symbols and motifs characteristic of Upīts – also present in his later works – appear throughout this novel. For example, the title embodies a symbol which becomes a leitmotif of the book. In this case, gold (or money) is a convenient literary device, used in a manner similar to its appearance in the works of Émile Zola, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and other nineteenth-century authors, demonstrating that wealth can fundamentally test a person's fundamental humanity. Augusts Sveilis Jr., the oldest son of a poor small-town tailor, is at the centre of the story in *Gold*. He and his family are tested suddenly and unexpectedly when Augusts, working as a servant, receives an inheritance from his mistress. The inheritance leads him (and his family) into a completely unfamiliar environment, one they had previously only seen from a distance. In this world, commercialism, intrigue, and the excesses of Rīga's Latvian bourgeois inhabitants are everywhere. Here the slogan "Gold is life, gold is freedom, gold is everything" rules. Symbols of the era – shops



1
Originally published
by Augusta Golta
apgāds, 1921
446 pages
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except English



2
Originally published
by Augusta Golta
apgāds, 1910
299 pages

for many types of goods, a car, and the bourgeois social circles of big-city Latvia – reveal the magical power of money, against which their country/ small-town morals turn out to be powerless.

- ② *Sieviete* (Woman; 1910) was Andrejs Upīts' first significant novel and has been republished numerous times and widely discussed. It was the work with which he first gained notoriety in Latvian literature. When it was published, he had only recently left his teaching position, and the book's popularity allowed him to turn his full attention to writing. Critics consider the change of setting – from the countryside to the city (i.e., from an environment which tends towards complete order to an environment where absolute chaos is a constant) – as the greatest influence *Sieviete* and other works by Upīts around the same time had on Latvian literature. These works brought radical changes to the principles of Latvian novel writing.

In Latvian literature of that time, *Sieviete* – an explicitly realistic work, which balances on the border of naturalism – was also noteworthy for its focus on relationships between men and women as well as its nuanced description of the main female character's mindset. The plot centres on Elza, a young woman from a small town, and her move to Rīga following her father's death, which critics have interpreted as a metaphor for the decline of patriarchal society. She arrives in the city and joins her brother and his friends at a boarding house. They take advantage of her naïveté, get Elza drunk, and begin to force themselves on her. Her brother doesn't defend her. Thus "defiled", Elza then tries to have her revenge on her brother and his friends in various ways. A young poet tries to stop her, but Elza doesn't listen to his warnings. The next time the poet arrives, it's already too late. The players of this game are all dead, including Elza herself who commits suicide upon discovering that she has syphilis.

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EDVARDS VIRZA

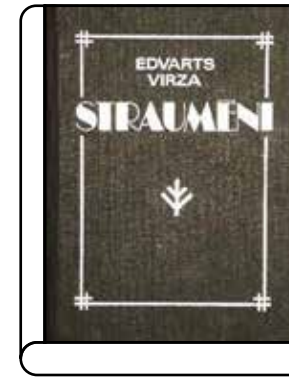
Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1883–1940

EDVARDS VIRZA (originally: Jēkabs Eduards Liekna, 1883–1940) was born in Rāceņi in Emburga (present-day Salgale) parish. He was one of nine children of a farming couple, Anna and Juris. He attended the Salgale and Bauska Schools, then studied law and economics in Moscow. During the 1905 Revolution, he taught himself French so that he and his wife, poet Elza Stērste, could later popularise French poetry in Latvia. He befriended other Latvian poets and worked to find his own poetic voice, and in 1906 published his first cycle of poems in the journal *Dzelme*. He was mobilised during the First World War, serving as a rifleman in Jukums Vācietis's regiment, and wrote poetry about his fellow soldiers. Prior to independence he promoted the idea of an independent Latvia. He worked in the press, was the director of the Daile Theatre, and worked at the Ministry of Education. Between 1940 and 1985, his works were effectively illegal.

Edvards Virza's poetry collection *Biķeris* (Cup; 1907) is especially noteworthy among Latvian works of that time, as it is the first book of erotic poetry in the history of Latvian literature. The collection received a harsh response from Virza's contemporaries, primarily due to its themes. It describes lust and sensuality in language so explicit that it shocked the society of the time. The author received many awards for his service to Latvia and Latvian culture, including ones given to him by Kārlis Ulmanis, the head of the authoritarian regime which controlled Latvia between 1934 and 1940.

Though *Straumēni* is written in prose, Virza called this work a long poem. Using a Neo-Classical approach, the author tells a story set in the 19th century, on a country homestead in the southern region of Zemgale. At the heart of this work are the author's childhood memories and the stories



Originally published by
Valters un Rapa, 1933
356 pages
Free rights

he heard from his grandparents about the idyllic life of Latvian peasants. The world depicted in this book is imbued with a mythical sensibility, the yearly cycles described in it involving people as well as other living creatures. Along with work and responsibilities, the rhythms of nature and the mind change with the passage of time. For example, the entire household participates in growing and harvesting flax, and the linen fabric – which is a product of this work – serves as a symbol of unity for the people of *Straumēni*. Therefore, this process and its result must come from the entire family's shared labour.

The central figure in *Straumēni* is not any one person, but instead the entire *Straumēni* household. The reader is introduced to the traditional Latvian way of life as a welcomed guest, to whom the family shows the material and spiritual meaning of all things, seemingly outside of the context of time or history. The expressive story-telling style brings scents, tastes, and colours to life and makes this work thrilling as well as meditative. The language is euphonious and makes it easy to surrender to the flow of the story. In 1934, the well-known Latvian prose writer Jānis Veselis wrote the following about Virza and *Straumēni*: "He is a typical indoor poet filled with the constant alarm of a foreign time, which never stops and in the end changes everything." At the end of his description, Veselis refers to Virza's work as one of the brightest and happiest Latvian books, adding: "And this is why *Straumēni* is a bright and joy-filled book, it's because a person isn't left all alone with the sorrows and emptiness of the world."

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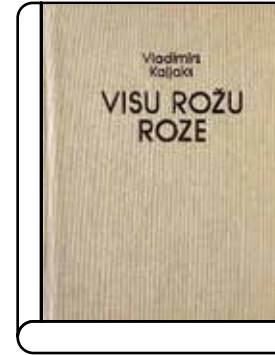
VLADIMIRS KAIJAKS

Foto: Jānis Deinats

1930-2013

VLADIMIRS KAIJAKS (1930-2013) was a multifaceted writer who began his literary work as a poet but later devoted himself completely to prose – stories, novellas, novels – and wrote on a variety of topics. His body of work includes crime novels – *Vistu elks* (Hen Idol; 1967) and *Brigītas brīnums* (Brigita's Miracle; 1970) – as well as an expansive tale about a family, which weaves its way through Latvian history (this four-part novel series *Likteņa līdumnieki* (Shapers of Destiny) was the basis for an extremely popular television series in Latvia). However, in terms of literary merit, the most interesting part of his oeuvre is the stories and novellas which touched on the horror and fantasy genres and are the reason that Kaijaks could be called the “Latvian Stephen King” – though at times his work also shows more similarities with the metaphorical and frightening world of Franz Kafka. Kaijaks is one of only very few Latvian authors who has written literature of this type and his achievements in the field are yet to be outdone.

- ① The author's most expressive works are his short story collections ***Visu rožu roze*** (The Rose of All Roses) and ***Vecis*** (Old Man). Literary critic Guntis Berelis observes that Kaijaks's talent was in his ability to write in a meticulous manner about the unbelievable, the fantastic and the horrible so that it seemed completely normal and integrated organically with reality. *Visu rožu roze* is considered one of the best works of Latvian short prose from the 1980s. It contains six stories. Of these, *Šnorhs*, *Zirneklis* (Spider), *Vecis* (Old Man), and the title story *Visu rožu roze* (The Rose of All Roses) are especially worthy of attention. *Šnorhs* tells the story of a mysterious creature which wreaks havoc in the life of an office worker. *Zirneklis*, which has been adapted into a film, is a horror story about the attempts of a



1
Originally published by
Liesma, 1987
187 pages



2
Originally published by
Liesma, 1992
203 pages

blood-sucking spider to attack a young woman. *Vecis* is about an older man who suddenly appears in a small country village and quietly observes the residents' illegal and immoral behaviour. *Visu rožu roze* is one of Kaijaks's best stories and focuses on a fanatical gardener who succeeds in growing an indestructible rose which threatens to take over the world.

- ② The story collection ***Vecis*** is no less impressive and also contains six stories. *Atpalikusi kāja* (The Backward Foot) is an absurd tale about an engineer whose foot defect changes the fate of the entire nation when he becomes president. *Mašīna* (Machine) is a fantasy story about a car controlled by artificial intelligence, which falls in love with its inventor. In the story *Kaste* (Box), a writer isolates himself from the outside world to the extent that he suddenly begins to shrink and spends his last days in a box. The stories *Laiva* (Boat) and *Liktenīgā sievietē* (Woman of Destiny) play with elements from psychological thrillers and revenge dramas, while the story *Cilda* is an expansive and emotionally gripping depiction of the 1949 deportations of the Latvian civilian population by Communists and is told from the point of view of Cilda, an abandoned dog.

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JĀNIS VESELIS

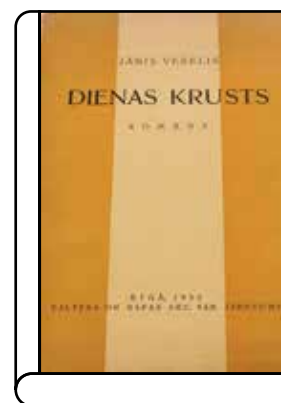
Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1896–1962

JĀNIS VESELIS (1896–1962) learned most of what he knew about literature through self-study: before the First World War he studied German and French on his own, and when he was nineteen he experienced “a moment of clarity, oneness with the Universe” and began to take a deep interest in the ancient writings of various different cultures. As a result, he developed his own unique approach to literature, which he used in his own written works – prose, plays, poetry – as well as in his reviews. During Latvia’s first period of independence, Veselis was one of the most prominent prose critics and wrote about nearly all of the most prominent authors of the day.

In 1944, Veselis emigrated to Germany, where he had worked as an editor for the publishing house *Latvju grāmata* (Latvian Book) during the Nazi occupation. He left his wife Mirdza and their four children behind in Latvia, though they had been living apart even before then. In 1950, Veselis moved to the United States, where he worked as a door-to-door salesman for Latvian books.

His contemporaries characterised Veselis as a unique individual with a strong personality. At one point, his most popular work was a book of short prose inspired by Latvian myths: *Latvju teiksmas* (Latvian Tales; 1942), which is also one of the first works of distinctly fantasy-style prose in Latvian literature. More recently, readers have preferred his novels, especially *Dienas krusts* (The Day’s Burden; 1942). These novels are written in a fairly realistic style, but nonetheless the reader can sense the author’s interest in the mythical and primordial world and its influence on the life of individuals.



Originally published by
Valters un Rapa, 1931
183 pages



Jānis Veselis’s novel ***Dienas krusts*** (The Day’s Burden; 1931) is one of the earliest and most important modernist works of Latvian prose, and was seen by the author’s contemporaries as having been inspired by James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Veselis had also published a partial translation of *Ulysses*, as well as a discursive essay about it. The author Dzintars Sodums, who also translated *Ulysses*, has praised *Dienas krusts* highly, while Jānis Rudzītis named it in the Latvian refugee newspaper “*Latvija*” as one of Latvia’s best works of prose, with the greatest likelihood of receiving recognition outside of Latvia because “everything local in it is imperceptibly woven together with overarching themes and overlaid with a nuanced plot.”

The plot centres on a tragic love story, though fundamentally *Dienas krusts* is a deep examination of Rīga’s working classes. The book focuses on the intertwining lives of the residents of a tenement house over the course of 24 hours, during which several romantic dramas and personal crises arise and are resolved, occasionally overlapping with the comical events that occur each hour. These connections were very important to Veselis, and to emphasise them he created horoscopes for all of the characters before writing the book.

The book’s publishers, “Valters un Rapa”, wrote: “Veselis has created a new vision of the city in Latvian literature, which, like a living organism with its chaotic motion down labyrinths of monotonous streets and alienation within buildings walls, can defeat and destroy a person’s individuality.”

Contact: info@akka-laa.lv



VILIS LĀCIS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1904–1966

1900

1950

2000

2020

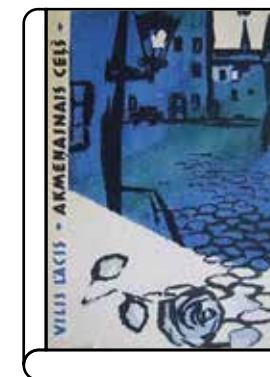
VILIS LĀCIS (1904–1966) was born in Mangaļi parish in the fishing village of Rīnūži (present-day Vecmīlgrāvis near Rīga). During the First World War, his family was evacuated to the Altai region in Russia, where Lācis finished his studies as a teacher and began work as the secretary of the village council. On returning to the newly-independent Latvia, Lācis tried his hand at several different jobs: fisherman, harbour labourer, stoking a ship's furnace, and working at a library. At the same time, he was focused on his writing and making contacts among Communists. During the 1930s, his writing career was helped by the publisher Emīlija Benjamiņa, who published a serialised version of Lācis's novel *Zvejnieka dēls* (The Fisherman's Son) in the newspaper "Jaunākās Ziņas". As a result, Lācis became one of the most popular Latvian writers. In 1940–1941, Lācis was amongst those who helped to establish the new Soviet government in Latvia. During the Second World War, he fled to Moscow along with other Soviet activists; on the return of the Soviet occupation he once again came to power, serving as the chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet (1950–1958) and the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR (1946–1959).

Due to his political activities (he signed the arrest and deportation orders for many major figures in Latvian society and politics), Lācis's role in Latvian history is mixed; even tragic. However, due to his captivating Soviet-era novels, he continues to be one of the most popular Latvian writers in Latvia. In the 1930s, as much as today, readers enjoyed the exciting adventures, the noble qualities of the characters, and the fast-paced and well-designed plots, all of which characterise Lācis's prose. Following the start of the Soviet occupation, Lācis became declarative. The works of Lācis have been adapted for film and television more than those of any other Latvian author.

- 1 ***Zvejnieka dēls*** (The Fisherman's Son) depicts life in a Vidzeme fishing village on the north-eastern coast of Latvia during the 1920s and 1930s. For Lācis, the inhabitants live a difficult, impoverished, unjust existence, caused by greedy buyers and other Capitalists. The novel offers a detailed examination of the unhealthy relationships between the villagers, as well as the alcoholism, poverty, and other problems caused by overwork, which all makes them passive and easily manipulated. Lācis encapsulates all of these themes in



1
Originally published
by Jaunāko ziņu
spiestuve,
1933-1934
244 pages



2
Originally published
by Grāmatu Draugs,
1939
359 pages

the microcosm of the Kļava family. Its patriarch is an uncouth braggart, while the youngest son, Roberts, is an educated but immoral city-dweller. Only the oldest son, Oskars, who is "more than six feet tall, broad-shouldered, well-grounded, seasoned by the sea winds" feels distressed by the poverty of the fishermen. Oskars marries a rich shopkeeper's daughter but realises that this was not the right choice and returns to fishing, so he can change the engrained routines of life and the local economy, and to fight those who try to harm the village residents. *Zvejnieka dēls* is one of the most popular Latvian novels of all time. It has been adapted for the screen two different times (by director Vilis Lapenieks in 1939 and director Varis Krūmiņš in 1957). In the first two months after the first release in 1939, the film was seen by 250,000 people. During the Soviet years, the regime considered the 1939 film ideologically problematic and created its own version.

- 2 As with many of the other novels by Vilis Lācis, ***Akmeņainais ceļš*** (Rocky Road) was written as a work of literary realism and contains autobiographical elements: the self-made man, and fishing and labour motifs from the first half of the 20th century. The novel's plot focuses on the lives of young people in 1930s Rīga. Roberts Līviņš, the ambitious and driven son of a labourer, gets his education and goes on to become an architect working at a wealthy construction company. Soon after his attainment of higher education, respectable employment and a "better" social echelon, he falls in love with the director's daughter Līvija and is forced to forsake his earlier life, his roots, and his family. Roberts's wealthy bride does not wish to become the wife of someone from a lower class and demands that her husband break off contact with his family; however, in the end Roberts understands that high society will never understand his origins or his best friend Ēriks, a gifted boxer who is travelling along his own "rocky road" with Roberts. Ēriks is another one of the physically strong characters created by Lācis.

Like other works by Lācis, *Akmeņainais ceļš* was first published in a serialised form. When advertising this "new, interesting novel" prior to its publication, the magazine "Atpūta" wrote that in the novel "the author uses his cleverness and descriptive talents to portray the lives of the city's youth, their mistakes and ambitions."

Contact: info@akka-laa.lv



ANŠLAVS EGLĪTIS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1906–1993

1900

1950

2000

2020

ANŠLAVS EGLĪTIS (1906–1993) was a Latvian writer, journalist, and painter, the son of writer Viktors Eglītis and teacher and translator Marija Stalbova-Eglīte. The artistic environment of his family and home life, in addition to his sustained interest in the world of literature and art while growing up, were immensely important to his growth and development as a writer. Eglītis and his contemporaries appeared on the Latvian literary scene in the 1930s, at a transitional time between literary generations. It is interesting to note that the author's books often contained his own illustrations, drawings, and other graphic design elements. He emigrated to Germany in 1944 and to the United States in 1950, where he became a film critic. Eglītis is rightly referred to as the most prolific Latvian refugee author, with more than 50 books to his name. These are typified by their linguistic expressiveness, urban landscapes, poignant characterisations, sharp irony, and captivating storylines. His novel *Līgavu mednieki* (Bride Hunters; 1940) holds a special and lasting place in Latvian literature and has been recognised by critics as one of the most significant and unique works of its time. His so-called "artist's novel" *Homo novus* (1946) was also a success. These works are especially meaningful in the history of Latvian literature because of their depictions of cultural life in Rīga and their vibrant range of younger characters, as well as their colourful descriptions of artists and their milieu during this time. The author continued his tradition of precise, fine-grained, detailed character descriptions in the works he wrote later in exile.

- 1 Anšlavs Eglītis wrote his novel *Homo novus* in the early 1940s, and the author hoped it would encourage the movement of Latvian painting onto a new path. In the novel, Eglītis shows the Rīga art world in the 1930s as seen through the eyes of a "homo novus": the new arrival Juris Upenājs. The plot is moved along by coincidences, engaging events, the bohemian



1
Originally published
by Grāmatu Draugs,
1946
355 pages



2
Originally published
by Grāmatu Zieds,
1940
331 pages

lifestyle, and the artistic creation process. The novel portrays the entire arc of the artist's career, from a humble debut to the later accolades. The work also depicts the emergence and development of a new generation, encountering everyday difficulties. Eglītis does an excellent job in characterising the "gallery" of painters/artists in the story, skilfully detailing their outward appearance, their clothing, and their behaviour.

Latvian literature specialist Viktors Hausmanis has written that "in this novel you can read a perfect description of the bohemian life of Rīga artists, with all of their drinking, arguments, conversations, while also being taken on a walk through all of Rīga's pubs and restaurants, wiling away several days planted next to a glass. Eglītis has been able to depict all of this with his characteristically attractive style, which is filled with life, vitality, and wit."

- 2 *Līgavu mednieki* (Bride Hunters) was the novel which first brought Anšlavs Eglītis, the giant of Latvian literature, his considerable popularity. Its key qualities include exceptionally witty writing and excellent descriptions of its characters and settings. At the centre of the novel are the different paths taken by three friends – Eplats, Ķurzēns, and Dušeļs – as they struggle to achieve happiness. Eglītis refers to these three fortune-seekers as "bride hunters" because they believe the quickest way to become rich is to marry well. The author gives a wry description of the Latvian elite of the 1930s – shop owners, consuls, bank employees, student fraternity members – and takes the reader through the restaurants and cafés that abounded in Rīga at that time. *Līgavu mednieki* is a living testament of Rīga, its people, their lives, mores, relationships, ways of thinking, language, approach to life, desires, and longings.

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1910–1993

MARGERIS ZARIŅŠ

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

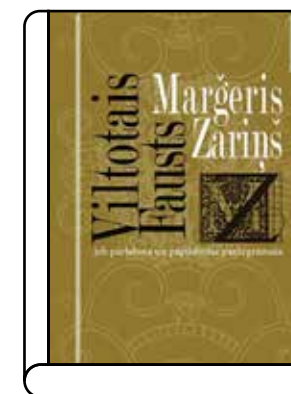
Writer **MARGERIS ZARIŅŠ** (1910–1993) was a bright personality in the Latvian cultural world. Before he gained fame as a writer, he was already a respected composer, working as the musical director for one of Latvia's largest theatres – the Daile Theatre – as well as composing the score for 16 films, including several screen adaptations of some of the most recognised works of Latvian literature: *Nāves ēnā* (In the Shadow of Death), *Purva bridējs* (Marsh Crosser), *Ceplis* (Kiln), and others. Zariņš's literary debut came in 1969 with a magazine publication, while his first story collection *Saulrietu violetās ērģeles* (The Violet Strings of the Sunset) was published in 1970. These stories were primarily about musicians and music. He gained more recognition for his later works, which are characterised by wry wit and light-heartedness, playing with themes found in other literary texts and genres. Zariņš often employed a compilation method and combined texts with different styles and functions within a single book. For example, his novel *Kapelmeistara Kociņa kalendārs* (Conductor Kociņš's Calendar; 1982) is structured like the titular calendar, consisting of various seemingly-unrelated literary, historical, and journalistic text fragments. This work is extremely reminiscent of Milorad Pavić's famous work *Dictionary of the Khazars*. A similar principle is used

- 1 in the short adventure novel *Didriķa Taizeļa brīnišķīgie piedzīvojumi* (The Marvellous Adventures of Didriķis Taizelis; 1978).

- 2 Zariņš's 1973 novel *Viltotais Fausts jeb Pārlabota un papildināta pavārgrāmata* (The Counterfeit Faust or a Corrected and Expanded Cookbook) gained great popularity and almost cult status among Latvian intellectuals and artists at the time. In it, the author plays with literary traditions and possibilities to an extent not seen before in Latvian literature.



1
Originally
published by
Liesma, 1978
109 pages



2
Originally
published by
Liesma, 1973
356 pages

As in most of Zariņš's other literary works, this novel contains elements of Postmodernism, which was also extremely important in Western literature at that time. These elements include breaking down the divide between "high" and "low" culture, playing with cultural heritage, and undisguised quoting/rephrasing/parody.

The novel takes place in the 1930s and during the Second World War in Rīga, mostly among a mix of artists and intellectuals. The central character is a young writer and composer named Kristofers Mārlovs who goes to meet Trampedahs, a chef who is past his prime, to secure publication rights for his new cookbook in exchange for the elixir of youth. As in Goethe's story, the beautiful Margarēta also appears in the novel, though later the author switches the roles of the characters around, turning Trampedahs-Faust into the villain while Mārlovs-Mephistopheles becomes a fragile victim. The novel contains a great deal of parody and self-parody, as well as actual historical figures and places which are merged with fiction. Real recipes are given an important position in the text. These and other features make it possible to call *Viltotais Fausts* a genuine example of Postmodern literature, though it is not known whether the author knew about this artistic movement when he was writing his novel. It may be that Zariņš just wrote what he wanted to see in Latvian literature and, despite the existence of censorship (and likely due to his influential position in society), he was able to publish the majority of his works though they were in clear conflict with the type of literature which was favoured in the Soviet Union. A notable exception is his novel *Trauksmainie trīsdesmit trīs* (The Turbulent Thirty-Three), which he had to publish ten years after its completion because it quite openly criticised the absurdities of the Soviet regime.

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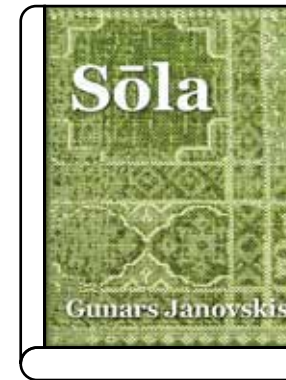
GUNARS JANOVSKIS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

Prose writer **GUNARS JANOVSKIS** (1916–2000) was born in Helsinki to the family of a captain serving in the navy of the Russian Empire. Janovskis and his family returned to Latvia in 1919, and Janovskis spent his childhood near the sea and on fishing trips with his father. He began his studies in classical philology at the University of Latvia before fleeing to Germany in the autumn of 1944. Immediately after the end of the war, he resumed his studies at the University of Bonn in Germany. In 1947, he moved to the United Kingdom and initially became a manual labourer, working as a field hand and at a brick-kiln.

Janovskis is considered one of Latvia's best prose writers. During his life, he wrote more than 30 novels. Most of his work focuses on life as a refugee and relationships between Latvians in the refugee community. In many of his works, the author also includes details from his own life, giving his stories a somewhat autobiographical feel. Janovskis was a true master of the form and his novels contain all that is characteristic of this type of prose: passion, adventure, resignation to one's fate. Some of his novels contain more exotic elements, while others focus on everyday life and the events of his time. The reader may also encounter snatches of heartfelt dry wit in some of his works.

Gunars Janovskis's first novel, *Sōla*, is about Baltic refugees and their lives in post-war England. The novel contains autobiographical elements, as the author includes details from his own life as a refugee. The plot focuses on events unfolding over the course of several months in the lives of the people living on Sola, an island just off the coast of England. Most of the novel is centred on a small segment of the island's 170 inhabitants, and the main character is Arturs Skuja, a Latvian refugee. The



Originally published by
Grāmatu Draugs, 1963
207 pages



most important events on the island and the experiences of its residents are revealed through the lonely, sensitive observations and emotions of this Latvian man still in the thrall of memories of his homeland. Skuja – who has worked as a field hand, raised chickens, and can also pilot a motor boat – observes and analyses the characters of his English and Irish co-workers, along with the English holidaymakers who come to Sola each year. This Latvian refugee contrasts with another strong figure in the novel: the swaggering Juhans Raudseps, a former Estonian officer. He embodies the tragic ex-soldier and, like other such characters struggling to cope with tragedy, he is shown quietly retreating from the outside world, unable to overcome his depression and longing for Estonia.

With a heavy dose of incredulity, Janovskis examines contemporary events in politics and the injustices experienced by refugees living in exile. He also describes the horrific anguish felt by refugees at times, which they must somehow work to overcome. Running throughout the novel are the themes of longing for one's homeland and feeling deep guilt about not being able to help one's country. Janovskis also explores how the relationships among refugees were often were the only thing that could bring them back to reality. There have been a number of theatrical adaptations of *Sōla*, and this novel continues to be popular for new generations of readers. Janovskis has won the hearts of Latvian readers, particularly for his descriptions of the tragedy of the refugee experience and life in exile.

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1923–1992

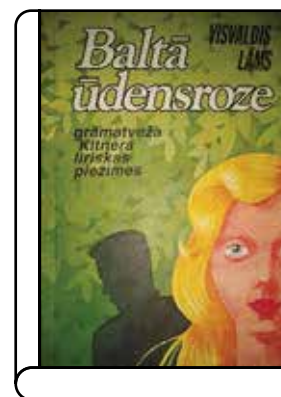


VISVALDIS LĀMS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

VISVALDIS LĀMS (born Visvaldis Eglons, 1923–1992) was a Latvian writer and publicist. At the age of fifteen, following his father's premature death, Lāms got his first job (he was a mechanic's apprentice, locksmith, road worker, and also tried his hand at other trades) and continued to work – with occasional interruptions – for the next thirty years, even after his writing career began. In 1943, Lāms was drafted into the Latvian Legion. In 1946, Lāms was released from the NKVD screening and filtration camp. He devoted several of his works to this topic.

Following the publication of *Baltā ūdensroze* (White Water Lily; 1958) and *Kāvu blāzmā* (In the Aurora's Glow; 1958) in the literary journals "Zvaigzne" and "Karogs", he became the target of ideological criticism. This criticism focused on "ideological errors", the absence of "the role of the citizen", becoming lost in "an obscure corner of life", and the retreat from the mainstays of Socialist realism. As a result, Lāms was barred from publication for seven years. His novel *Kāvu blāzmā* was only published in its entirety in 1989. And yet, as Latvian literary critic Guntis Berelis observes, despite this ideological pressure, "Lāms was one of the few literary figures, possibly the only one, who wrote as if censorship did not exist. He knew, of course, that any heretical statements or free-thinking paragraphs would be struck from his novels – but he wrote them anyway." Central to a number of Lāms's books is the figure of the non-idealised man and his relationship to work, time, history, and life in general. Lāms wrote sixteen novels in total, and several short stories.



Originally published in
Zvaigzne Magazine
101 pages

Baltā ūdensroze. Grāmatveža Kitnera liriskas piezīmes (White Water Lily. The Lyrical Notes of Kitners the Accountant), one of Lāms's significant early works, is a novel which can be used to pinpoint the beginning of modern Latvian prose, after the clichéd uniformity of Socialist realism. It tells the somewhat romantic – while also tragic, and even a bit ironic – story of Kitners, an accountant, during a summer spent at a collective farm near the Gauja River. The novel appears to describe everyday life under the Soviet regime, but it is important to note that it is almost the only novel from the 1950s which can be read as a literary text and not as a product of Socialist realism. Seemingly unremarkable everyday occurrences shed light on dramatic events from the past, and reveal the author's deep respect for the individual's subjective inner world of emotion and thought. The publication of *Baltā ūdensroze* in 1958 was received with a whirlwind of outrage, due primarily to one comical character – Baltbiksis – who is constantly explaining his views and sounds like he is quoting from a book of Socialist realist theory. Furthermore, Lāms clearly shows how Baltbiksis's dogma falls to pieces when it encounters prose containing realistic psychological portrayals. This is where *Baltā ūdensroze* transforms from an outwardly inoffensive novel to a clear attack on the Socialist realist canon. Baltbiksis could be understood as a prototype for the writers in this canon, and so many of these authors felt that they were being ridiculed in Lāms's portrayal of Baltbiksis. A censored version of the book was published as part of the 1973 collection *Raudze*, but an uncensored version, newly edited by the author, was only published in 1992.

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ZIGMUNDS SKUJIŅŠ

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

ZIGMUNDS SKUJIŅŠ (1926) is the author of many remarkable novels, film scripts, plays, and essays, and is one of Latvia's most translated writers. His literary debut was a short story collection in 1954. His more notable works include the novels *Kailums* (Nakedness; 1970), *Gulta ar zelta kāju* (The Bed With the Golden Leg; 1984), *Miesaskrāsas domino* (Flesh-Coloured Dominoes; 1999), *Siržu zagļa uznāciens* (Entry of the Thief of Hearts; 2001), and the short story collections *Uzbrukums vēdzirnavām* (Attack on the Windmill; 1976), *Stāstītāja svētdiena* (Storyteller's Sunday; 1995), and *Buršana un tinte* (Magic and Ink; 2003). A storyteller with a penchant for exotic details, Skujiņš' short stories mix a wide array of settings (from Soviet Latvia to Ancient Rome), genres (historical, domestic, romantic, and science fiction), and tones (from ironic to tragic). He employs his broad knowledge of history and culture to play out various speculative "what-if" scenarios about well-known historical persons and events. Although to begin with his works were somewhat traditional and realist, he quickly shifted towards more ambiguous and entertaining writing styles and topics, ranging from morality and identity problems in Soviet society to extravagant family sagas and historical accounts.

- 1 The novel *Kailums* (when it was finally allowed to be published) turned Zigmunds Skujiņš into a literary celebrity across the Soviet Union and "radically changed the Latvian prose scene," according to Latvian literary critic Guntis Berelis. Since then, two popular film adaptations have been of the book, and it is still the Skujiņš novel that people tend to come across first. The novel's protagonist, Aleksandrs Draiska, arrives in a small textile-factory town looking for a girl he's been exchanging letters with. Finding somebody else at her address, he sets off on a search across the town,



1
Published by
Mansards, 2005
(Originally by
Liesma, 1970)
213 pages
All rights available
except English



2
Published by
Mansards, 2009
(Originally published
by Preses nams,
1999)
404 pages
Foreign rights
sold to Italy,
United Kingdom,
Macedonia, Sweden

where he discovers that almost everyone is pretending to be somebody else. This mask-wearing becomes the cause of death for the girl Draiska has been looking for, driving him deeper into despair. The final twist is saved for last, however, when we discover that it was not Draiska but rather his army friend who came to the factory town, after falling in love with the girl from the letters and deciding to pose as his friend in order to find her.

- 2 The narrative of the novel *Miesaskrāsas domino* is split into two parallel stories. On the one hand we have a story of 18th-century Baltic German gentry, within the framework of Tsarist Russia: Baroness Waltraut von Bruegen, with the help of the famous Count Cagliostro, is searching for her husband who has disappeared during the Turkish wars. With great difficulty she learns that her husband was torn in two during a battle, and that his lower half was stitched onto the upper half of the local captain Ulste, a man of humble origins.

After finding the lower half of her husband, she conceives a child with it and is in the lengthy process of contemplating who should be considered the father of her child when her husband returns – in one piece.

On the other hand, we have the life story of the author himself, travelling through the turmoil of 20th-century Latvia. The story is a rich tapestry of detail, with nationalities intertwined in an inseparable mix – Latvians, Germans, Jews, and Japanese, among many others. The connection between the two narratives gradually becomes clear: they click together through details mentioned as if in passing. The novel is also a moving story of the experience of one person's life during turbulent times.

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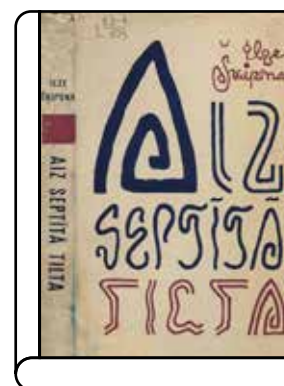
ILZE ŠĶIPSNA

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1928–1981

Following the end of the Second World War, the Latvian refugee author **ILZE ŠĶIPSNA** (married: Rothrock, 1928–1981) ended up in Germany, where her first literary work was published. Šķipsna was educated in Germany and the United States, receiving Masters degrees in library sciences and anthropology. She spent the majority of her life in Texas in the United States. Her friends and contemporaries have written about how she always felt very close to the Latvian people as well as Latvian literature and language. Šķipsna spoke seven languages and published a small amount in English, but the majority of her literary work was in Latvian. She published two essay collections and two novels, and, following the publication of her first book, Šķipsna was already being described as a gifted young storyteller and the author of the first modern Latvian novel. She was drawn to themes relating to philosophy, psychology, and the existential problems inherent to the human condition. Her works can be seen as her attempt to find answers to the large and timeless questions in life, focusing on the problems associated with individuality, national identity, global interconnection, and meaning.

Ilze Šķipsna's first novel, *Aiz septītā tilta* (Beyond the Seventh Bridge; 1965), generated more interest among Latvian refugees than her first collection of essays. Literary critic Jānis Rudzītis described this work as the first modern Latvian novel, and its publication as an important event in Latvian refugee community literature. It signalled the arrival of a new generation of authors, and a movement towards the incorporation of existential and surreal elements into Latvian literary works. At the centre of this novel lies an inner or psychological conflict, with a rich subtext of connections. There are few actual events in the novel and their role is insignificant: it is the author's ruminations which are important, and these appear in the conversations of Edīte, Solvīta, and a few other characters.



Originally published by
Grāmatu Draugs, 1965
223 pages



The chapters where Edīte's opinion is most important begin with the letter E, while those where Solvīta's opinion holds more sway begin with the letter S. Both characters speak in the first person and, ultimately, the reader comes to understand that they are the same. Edīte is introverted and finds it difficult to make real connections in life, whereas Solvīta – outwardly attractive and interested in life's pleasures – has already married a rich American Southerner called Gerald Melvy.

All the discoveries that emerge in this novel turn out to be connected psychologically in some way to the internal collapse of the Melvy family, where the mother is still trying to cling on to traditional Southern aristocratic ways while her sons feel that their world is breaking apart and they are unable to find their footing in it again. When Solvīta and Edīte's problems combine with the decay of the Melvy family, there is no way to resolve it all with a "happy ending". Both main characters meet tragic ends in car accidents while driving on the wrong side of the road. This resolution has to be understood symbolically, as it portrays the parallel existence of two societies and cultures, and the reality that mutual integration of the two is not always possible.

The plot of the novel grows primarily out of a string of various memories, moments of reflection, and emotions. The tension and dynamic of this work is generated by the constant back and forth between Edīte and Solvīta's opposing perceptions of the world. Existentialism echoes throughout Šķipsna's story and can be seen in Solvīta's ruminations. The author uses a series of contrasts to move the story along: familiar/foreign, life/isolation, living in the present/living in memories of the past, and so on. The main problem turns out to be the impossibility of linking together various historical and cultural layers.

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1930–2002

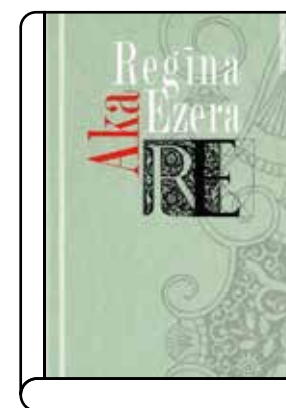


REGĪNA EZERA

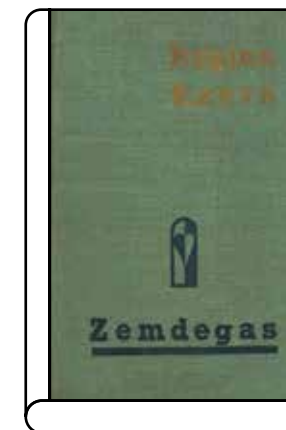
Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

REGĪNA EZERA (née Regīna Kindzule, 1930–2002) was born in Rīga. Ezera graduated from the Department of Journalism at the University of Latvia and published her first literary work in 1955. From the 1960s onwards her primary occupation was writing. Her most well-known works are the novels *Aka* (The Well; 1972) – which was adapted into the highly popular film *Ezera sonāte* (The Lake Sonata; 1976), *Zemdegas* (Smouldering Fire; 1977), *Varmācība* (Violence; 1982), *Nodevība* (Betrayal; 1984), and the short story collections *Slazds* (The Trap; 1979), *Princeses fenomens* (The Princess Phenomenon; 1985) and *Pūkaola* (Dragon's Egg; 1995). Considered a master of what could be called “silent drama” as well as nuanced psychological portraits, she pays great attention to detail in human relationships and often uses parallels with the animal world, exploring the interaction between man and animal. She blurred the line between psycho-realist and postmodernist fiction in the novels *Zemdegas*, *Varmācība* and *Nodevība*, deconstructing the plot and incorporating her own persona and reflections about writing. Her works have been translated into German, Swedish, Estonian, and other languages.

- 1 The novel *The Well* begins on the shores of a lake in the height of summer. Rudolf, a doctor from Rīga, is looking forward to spending some time away from work and plans to spend the time fishing on his own while lodging with an elderly couple on a lake. He comes into contact with the neighbours next door, the Tomariņi family, when he borrows their boat for his fishing trips. He meets Laura and her two children, Zaiga and Māris, her mother-in-law Alvīne and her sister-in-law Vija. For Laura, this encounter is a reminder of her wasted life, one of self-denial and her attempts to honour her responsibilities. For her children, it is a reminder of how much they lack a father figure. Attraction blooms between the quiet, slightly standoffish Laura and the confident, successful Rudolf, yet from the very beginning there is the feeling that the relationship is doomed. A crucial part of the story is the presence, or rather absence, of Laura's husband Rihard,



1
Published by
Zvaigzne ABC,
2015 (Originally
published by
Liesma, 1972)
272 pages



2
Originally published
by Liesma, 1977
414 pages

who is in prison for the murder of a friend he killed on a hunting trip while drunk. The fact that Rihard is soon to be released casts a shadow over any attraction Laura and Rudolf might have for each other. Rihard, from a distance and through his circumstances, has forced Laura to play the roles of perfect mother, perfect wife, and strong woman. Regīna Ezera skillfully blends the lives of all these people together, showing how the sins and life events of previous generations can echo and reverberate through the lives of their children and grandchildren.

- 2 *Zemdegas* (Burning Heaths; 1977), which the author herself referred to as a “phantasmagoria”, was Regīna Ezera's sixth novel. It is composed of six stories, all of which take place in the small town of Mūrgale, and the main characters of each tale die at the end due to various coincidences. The novel culminates in the sixth story, where the reader learns that all of the earlier stories were a vision seen by the author. Ezera then speaks directly about creativity and about the relationship between literature and literary criticism, and the story includes a conversation between the author and a young journalist as well as with a stubborn colleague at the literary museum who ends up causing the author's death.

This novel is unusual in Latvian literature, because Ezera dared to make it less of a description of Mūrgale and its people, and more about her relationship with literature and the development of the novel's fictionalised form. In *Zemdegas* as well as in nearly all of Ezera's works, one encounters the motif of the “tormenting past”: several characters have an event or transgression from their past that torments them, causing them to feel guilt and to suffer as a result. Aside from a postmodern resolution not seen in other Soviet-era literature, this novel's most powerful aspect is found in its nuanced descriptions of the fates of individual characters and the complexities of their relationships.

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1931–2005

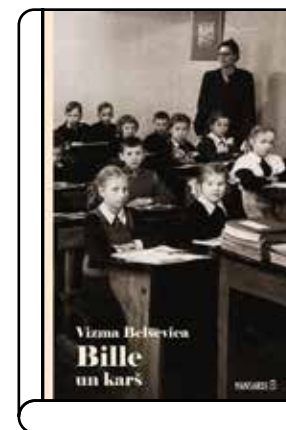


VIZMA BELŠEVICA

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

VIZMA BELŠEVICA (1931–2005) was one of Latvia's most acclaimed poets, once nominated for the Nobel Prize. She also wrote prose and was a very successful translator into Latvian from Russian and English. She was born in Rīga and lived there all her life, which meant that the city played a prominent role in her writing, especially in her semi-autobiographical trilogy *Bille*. Her more notable poetry collections include *Gadu gredzeni* (Rings of Years; 1969), *Madarās* (In My Lady's Bedstraw; 1976), and *Dzeltu laiks* (Autumn Time; 1987).

After the publication of *Gadu gredzeni* in 1969, her publications were banned for several years due to what was perceived as an anti-Soviet sentiment in her work. Her short story collection *Nelaime mājās* (Trouble at Home; 1979) was also immensely popular – at once funny and sad, and rich in black humour, the stories are about various strangers (e.g. a graveyard flower thief, two old sisters with a penchant for dying, and even a ghost) with odd and unexpected occurrences in their lives. Belševica is best known, however, for *Bille*, an honest account of her childhood in the 1930s and 1940s during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, as well as during the Soviet occupation, all told from the perspective of a young girl named Bille.



Published by Mansards, 2016 (Originally published by Mežābele, 1992), 296 pages
Foreign rights sold in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland

The first volume of *Bille* was published in 1992, with *Bille dzīvo tālāk* (Bille Lives On) and *Billes skaistā jaunība* (Bille's Wonderful Youth) published in 1996 and 1999 respectively. The entire trilogy was released in a single volume in 2004. "Bille" is the nickname of the novel's main character, Sibilla Gūtmane, who observes an era filled with tragic events, much of which was hard to understand, even for adults.

Bille, unlike most other children portrayed in Latvian literature, is a city girl. The author avoids any nostalgia about the lost paradise of childhood and, using her actual memories, shows life in the workers' district of Grīziņkalns and the life of the Gūtmanis family during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The result is 75 separate stories told in chronological order.

Bille goes to school and visits her relatives in the countryside; as the regimes change, Bille grows up and, with the adults, endures periods of starvation, helps people imprisoned in the Jewish ghetto, and visits the countryside to exchange what things they do have for food. Each episode represents a moment stuck in her mind forever.

Bille has been published in Swedish and Russian translations, while selections of Belševica's poetry have been published in translation in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

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ALBERTS BELS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

ALBERTS BELS (né Jānis Cīrulis, 1938) was born near Rīga and later studied at the Electrotechnical Faculty of the Rīga Technical Institute, the State Arts School in Moscow, and the Moscow College of Scriptwriting. His first work of fiction was published in 1963. His most well-known novels include *Izmeklētājs* (The Investigator; 1967), *Bezmiegs* (Insomnia; 1967, but published only in 1987), *Būris* (The Cage; 1972), *Saucēja balss* (The Voice of a Herald; 1973), *Cilvēki laivās* (Men in Boats; 1987), and *Melnā zīme* (The Black Mark; 1996). He was one of the first Latvian writers to employ modernist and postmodernist literary devices in his work, often juxtaposing parallel stories that took place in different historical periods.

1 *Būris* is about an architect, Edmunds Bērzs, who is held captive in the forest by a criminal, Kārlis Dindāns. Criminal investigator Strūga searches for the architect, who seems to have disappeared without a trace, and along the way he gradually gets to understand Bērzs, a typical representative of the middle class. He stumbles by chance onto the tracks of Dindāns, who from some inexplicable jealousy is keeping Bērzs locked up in a cage usually used for horses. In this cage, Bērzs is able to survive on nuts, mushrooms, pigeons; he is also cured of his gout and loses unwanted weight. He reconsiders his life and his relationship to society, and also has time to review his life and his relationship to society and focus on existential reflections on his own position in the cage, the cage within himself, and the problem of the cage in society. The novel has retained its value and relevance even in the present day, even under a completely different economic and social system.

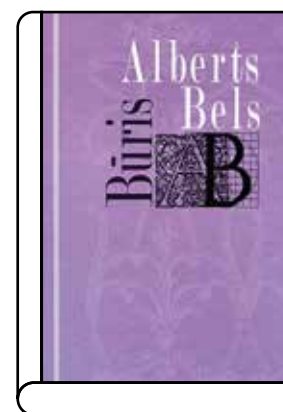
"What can this novel tell today's reader – something that might be worth taking more seriously? It presents the possibility of thinking without being controlled by the ruling power. To think, without preconceptions and fear of ideological watchdogs, about concepts such as human self-belief and self-respect, about the possibilities as well as the limits of each separate individual."

Literary researcher Viesturs Vecgrāvis

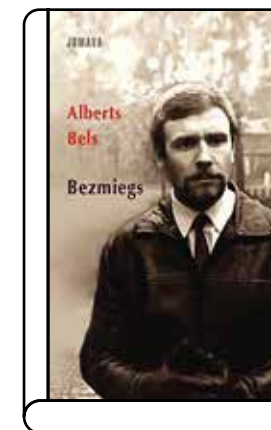
"Bels unequivocally demonstrates [that] each of us carries our own cage with us; the cage can also mean living behind bars in another sense: behind the bars of habit, behind the bars of dogma. It doesn't seem as if Bērzs' experience in the cage has essentially changed him. But perhaps that is precisely what Bels is trying to show, with cool irony: that a cage is no means for the development of a better person."

Literary theorist Jautrīte Saliņa

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1
Published by
Zvaigzne ABC,
2015 (Originally
published by
Liesma, 1972)
176 pages
All rights available
except English



2
Published by
Jumava, 2003
(Originally
published by
Liesma, 1987)
142 pages

2 The novel *Insomnia* takes place in a block of flats in 1960s Soviet Latvia, revolving around the main character Eduards Dārziņš and a woman named Dina whom he spots running outside his building one night. She is visibly shaken so he invites her into his flat, where she promptly falls asleep and remains as such for some time. When she wakes up, they begin to talk and he finds out more about her, leading him on a journey through her often difficult life, which only raises more questions for Dārziņš. The story then switches to the 13th century, at a time when the Teutonic Knights were vying for control of the Baltic. Soldiers and ordinary people who can be understood to be the beginnings of the Latvian nation are forced to decide on their fate: whether to fight for their freedom against the knights, or to assimilate with their aggressors. The novel continues to oscillate between these two parallel plots, weaving a tale of humanity in the face of almost impossible odds, about the desire to control one's destiny amidst the most oppressive of regimes.

"Having gone to the window, I saw a woman running from the direction of the lake. After a few steps she looked back. Turning her head and shoulders, the slender figure in a grey nylon raincoat froze for a moment, then ran on ahead once again. It looked like she wanted to hide herself in a building or courtyard. It wasn't hard to come to that conclusion, as her entire behavior bore witness to it, and besides insomnia had sharpened my senses."

(from *Insomnia*, translated by Jayde Will)

Contact: izdevnieciba@jumava.lv



ANDRIS KOLBERGS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1938

1900

ANDRIS KOLBERGS (1938) is the living classic of Latvian crime fiction.

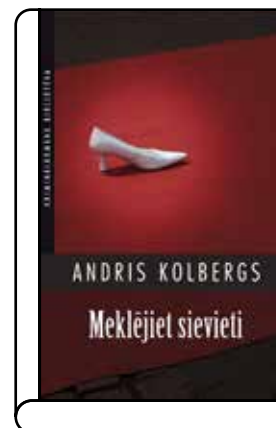
Since his first publication in 1965 he has become one of the very few, and certainly the most popular Latvian crime writers, and his works have been published abroad and adapted for well known films. His books focus less on the process of uncovering the crime (via deduction or a detective's active service) and more on why the crime was committed in the first place. In other words, the interest lies in the analysis of the societal causes of the crime and the psychological description of the criminal's personality. These two tools make skilful use of the only option left to a Soviet author: not getting tangled up in a recklessly thrilling plot or indulging in solving intellectual criminal riddles, but instead searching for and considering the causes at the root of the criminal act – the ultimate disturbance of Soviet order. In 2011, Kolbergs received the Annual Latvian Literature Award for his lifetime contribution to Latvian culture.

① **Meklējiet sievieti** (Don't Call Me, Don't Look for Me; 2012) begins with the murder of Natālija Nolle, the assistant of a member of the Latvian parliament. However, the plot soon branches off into several directions, encompassing a vast array of issues affecting every social class across many decades. This includes parliamentary corruption, links between business, politics, the Mafia and Russian intelligence services, and other criminal matters.

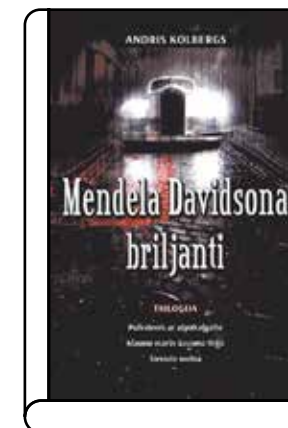
The novel explores the political situation in Rīga and Latvia immediately after the restoration of independence in 1990. It transpires that Natālija Nolle was actually a talented Soviet spy, and a portion of the novel is written from her perspective. When Natālija's beloved son joins the protests to fight for a democratic Latvia, their interests clash as the popular struggle over the formation of the new state rages on. They each come into contact with the nouveau riche and the criminal underworld, learning about the close links between the two in the new Latvia.

At the end of the novel, the investigator discovers that Natālija was murdered by the same member of parliament for whom she was working, but it is impossible to prove his guilt due to his high status. A repeat offender nicknamed Psychopath is blamed instead, and the investigator sees the parliament member's name among candidates for the Latvian presidency. "This developing social model is cynical and tragic, but very believable in the present day," writes critic and author Guntis Berelis in his blurb for the novel, in which he also refers to it as not only one of the best crime novels of Kolbergs' career, but of Latvian crime fiction in general.

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1
Originally
published
by NC, 1996
344 pages



2
Published by
Dienas Grāmata,
2018
(Originally
published by A.k.A.,
2002 and 2004)
776 pages

② In his novels, Kolbergs tends to focus on current events, but he showed a completely different side to himself with his **Mendel Davidson's Diamonds trilogy**: **Pulkstenis ar atpakaļgaitu** (Time in Reverse; 2002), **Klaunu maršs šausmu tirgū** (March of the Clowns in the Market of Horrors; 2002), and **Sieviete melnā** (The Woman in Black; 2004). These are historical detective novels, but Kolbergs reshapes the genre according to his own taste and views.

The action takes place in various time periods across the three books, and each one has different main characters, but the works are connected – they're brought together by jeweller Mendel Davidson's diamonds, stolen in 1919, where the first novel's is set. (The story *Pulkstenis ar atpakaļgaitu* is based on an actual criminal case from 1919, about a Jewish merchant who was robbed.) Kolbergs approaches this subject in the way he does best, offering us a look at events not even through the back door, but through a narrow crack; the view we get is extremely limited, while the drabness and frugality of everyday existence immediately becomes bitterly sharp and contrasting. On one hand, the heist itself could be worthy of a classic thriller under any other circumstances, but on the other, the background to the action is also epic: the redivision of the world after World War I and the founding of the Latvian nation in the first book; World War II, ghettos, the execution of Jews and members of the Latvian Legion in March of the Clowns in the Market of Horrors. Yet the trilogy shows all these events "from below," deliberately narrowing the characters' horizons. In *Time in Reverse*, the robbery of the Jewish jeweller is just one of many criminal cases being investigated by a rank-and-file agent of the newly-founded Latvian police force; in *The Woman in Black* we have his mirror image in the 1950's, a junior lieutenant in the militia. The stolen diamonds plotline emerges only periodically – on the whole, the characters don't even know they've been involved with the diamonds (and at the end, the largest diamond disappears into the mists of time again, only to reappear in the 21st century). The plot sparkles and the entire trilogy takes on panoramic contours where the history of "the little people" comes to the foreground, against the background of this "great" history.

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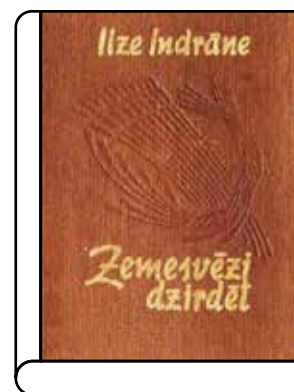


ILZE INDRĀNE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

ILZE INDRĀNE (born Undīna Jātniece, 1927) is a teacher, school director, writer, and playwright. Since the end of the 1950s, when her writing was first published and quickly gained popularity, she has been considered one of the best Latvian writers of romantic prose, though she also received criticism from the Latvian refugee community for writing according to the Stalin-era principles of "immutable regularity". Ultimately, Indrāne would win over her critics and become one of the most important contemporary Latvian prose writers, due to her ability to combine depictions of rural life with a lyrical and emotionally profound exploration of one's inner world. These qualities spoke to readers beyond Latvia and, as a result, her works were translated into the languages of many other nations in the Soviet Union.

Though Indrāne's works were written during two different periods – during the Soviet occupation and following the restoration of Latvia's independence – they did not change in any significant way. Independent of the political system, at the centre of each book is always the story of an individual, their life and experiences. She is the author of seven novels, four plays and nine books for or about children, as well as many stories, essays, and other works of short prose. Her novel *Zemesvēži dzirdēt* (Hearing the Mole-Cricket; 1984) received the most attention and awards for its portrayal of country life during times of change.



Originally published by
Liesma, 1984
397 pages

The novel ***Zemesvēži dzirdēt*** (Hearing the Mole-Cricket; 1984) is a psychosocial portrait of the Dravnieks family across several generations, with a focus on Donāts, an old man with a vibrant and colourful personality. His memories, thoughts and dreams reveal the difficult lot of Latvian farmers as experienced by a single individual over the course of his long life. Through depictions of collective farm work and detailed, precise descriptions of even the most mundane tasks, Indrāne paints a vivid picture of the realities of life in Soviet-occupied Latvia as reflected by Donāts' memories. All of this is expressed in the author's characteristic emotionally-expressive style, combined with a rich layer of metaphor.

At its core, the novel tells the story of the passing of the old generation of farmers (as personified by Donāts) and the arrival of a new generation along with a new set of values. The main character of *Zemesvēži dzirdēt* encounters a strange new world in his old age. Modernity makes itself known from all around him, especially at the hospital and in his children, but his moral compass – as symbolised by the steady, dependable ticking of the titular mole-cricket – allows him to maintain his dignity even when faced with these challenges. Indrāne describes his inner world and the era he represents with respect, love, and sensitivity. Employing tremendous artistic tact, she extols work as a virtue and depicts it as a profound inner human need, as she tries to understand the stable moral foundations of Donāts' generation. Unlike the majority of other Soviet-era literature and Indrāne's own earlier works, the author doesn't try to force anything on the reader that doesn't arise naturally from the structure of the novel; instead, she relies completely on the portrayals in the story.

Contact: info@latvianliterature



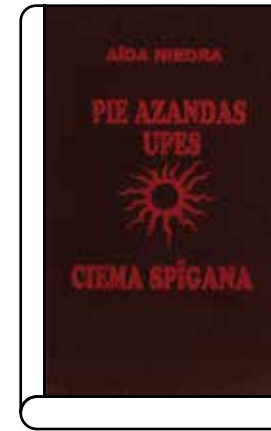
AĪDA NIEDRA

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1899–1972

Latvian author **AĪDA NIEDRA** (1899–1972) was born in Tirza parish, where she received her education before moving to Rīga in 1919. Her literary debut was in 1920, when she became the first Latvian poet to write openly and fearlessly about erotic love. Later she turned her attention mostly to prose, writing stylistically expressionist works, crime novels, and psychologically realistic literature. She fled Latvia in the autumn of 1944, ending up in Esslingen, Germany; she stayed there until 1949, when she moved to the West Coast of the United States and lived in Hollywood and Santa Monica among other places. As part of the Latvian refugee community, she was drawn to write about Latvia and her memories of Rīga. She also wrote about how she had fled from Latvia and described – at times with a hint of dry wit – her life within and experiences of the Latvian refugee community. Over the course of her 50-year literary career, she wrote 30 novels and a number of story collections.

Niedra's prose works centre on strong female characters who occasionally stun their contemporaries with their temperamental natures and open eroticism. This, along with the author's romantic style, has caused Latvian critics to compare her to George Sand. Niedra's novels also feature positivism, impressionism, and expressionism. She found the best source material for her writing in her home region and from speaking with local country people, and she said that she held within her fantastic stories of days gone by as well as a strong passion for life which allowed her to see into the Latvian soul. Niedra's works bring past decades and eras to life, with forgotten people and their experiences made visible once more.



Originally published by
A. Gulbja apgāds, 1933
269 pages



In the novel ***Pie Azandas upes*** (Along the Azanda River; 1933), Aīda Niedra describes the experience of the Latvian National Awakening among peasants in the 1860s and 1870s. "I wanted to show that there is no circumstance, no misfortune, from which a person could not recover," Niedra said in a 1934 interview in the newspaper "Rīts", while she was working on adapting the novel for the stage at the Daile Theatre. To emphasise the harmonious nature of the countryside and contrast it with the negative impact of the city on individual development, the author tells the story of many colourful characters as they go about their daily lives along the Azanda River in Niedra's home region of Tirza.

The central character in *Pie Azandas upes* is Maija, a young, happy-go-lucky woman who falls in love with a young man from a different region, leading to the disintegration of her planned marriage to a local man. However, the true core of this novel is its depiction of country life and the gradual awakening of Latvian peasants to a deeper inner world. The novel provides an incisive view into Latvian peasant life and the difficulties these people experienced through different historical periods, all set against the backdrop of nature. The activists and intellectuals of the Latvian National Awakening are portrayed as noble examples, to be followed when developing one's own national awareness and strengthening one's patriotic feelings. With the publication of this book, Aīda Niedra pioneered a positivist direction in Latvian writing, which was characteristic of a large part of Latvian prose in the 1930s.

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ELĪNA ZĀLĪTE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1898–1955

ELĪNA ZĀLĪTE (1898–1955) was a poet, playwright, writer and translator. She was born into a family of artisans. As she was frequently ill in her childhood, she did not complete secondary school, though she later worked as a teacher in Alūksne. It was her bad health which first motivated her to start writing. Zālīte's literary career began in her twenties, when she was working on translations from Estonian and Finnish, and it culminated with her Latvian translation of the Estonian epic "Kalevipoeg". Later she also translated from Russian, French, German, and Swedish.

Zālīte made her literary debut with poetry, though there was a long gap between her first publications and her debut poetry collection *Sila ziedi* (Pine Forest Blossoms) in 1931. This collection was immensely popular in the 1930s, which allowed her to devote more of her time to writing. In the 1920s and 1930s, Zālīte wrote several plays and worked as a playwright at the Daile Theatre.

Her only novel, *Agrā rūsa* (Early Rust), was written during the Second World War. In 1979, it was adapted for the cinema and became one of the most watched films in the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, Zālīte was forced to align her work with the Socialist realist canon and consequently several of her works – including *Agrā rūsa* – were changed.

Agrā rūsa (Early Rust; 1944) – Elīna Zālīte's only novel – depicts life in 1930s Latvia. Elza Ķikule, a poor country girl, arrives in Rīga in search of work, but has no luck. She receives an unexpected marriage proposal from a rich businessman, the old factory owner Ķikulis. This marriage of convenience runs into difficulties, not least when Elza falls in love with her husband's son Italo, though this never develops beyond an affair.



Originally published by
J. Kadija apgāds, 1944
386 pages



Elza's search for happiness comes to an end when she is accused of her husband's murder.

The novel is written as Elza's life story and as a lesson to her daughter. Zālīte portrays her main character unflinchingly as an empty and shallow woman, which was rather uncharacteristic of novels at that time. All of the events that befall Elza illustrate her philosophy of life, which involves a simple motto: find money, because it makes life easier. Money is the only reason to study, because without study the only way a woman can advance herself is through marriage. Elza also thinks that there is no reason to deny one's body the pleasure it can receive from another body. At the end of the novel, however, the author punishes her main character for living according to these principles.

Zālīte was able to show many essential female characteristics through Elza and other female characters in this story, while also providing an insight into the lives of the wealthy residents of Rīga during this time. The author provides colourful descriptions of cafés, fashion boutiques and the apartments of wealthy people, as well as impressions of travel abroad. Due to the descriptions of Elza's high-class and yet empty life, this novel continues to be popular among readers in Latvia and is one of the few 1940s novels which was republished not only during the Soviet years but also in this century.

Contact: info@latvianliterature.lv



RŪDOLFS BLAUMANIS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1863–1908

The Latvian writer and master of novels, stories, and plays **RŪDOLFS BLAUMANIS** (1863–1908) was born and spent the first four years of his life at the Tranzē servants' house owned by the manor lord of Ērgļi. Blaumanis's father was the manor cook and his mother worked as a housekeeper. From 1887, he lived primarily in Rīga. Blaumanis never had his own apartment, instead renting furnished rooms in apartments owned by strangers as well as friends, including artist Jānis Rozentāls, artist Vilhems Purvītis, and writer and artist Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš. From time to time Blaumanis also stayed at inexpensive hotels or school buildings, which were a source of new ideas and inspiration for him. He worked at various periodicals, writing in Latvian and German, and so readers from both nations came to know him as a clever theatre critic as well as the author of witty satires and lyrical poetry.

Blaumanis worked diligently to become a writer, developing his craft and educating himself in this field. He had an excellent command of German and read many works by German authors, and his first literary attempts were influenced primarily by German literature. In time he would turn his attention to "the core essence of life" and the experience of Latvian peasants, focusing on the "grey everyday lives" of his characters. Here he was profoundly influenced by the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, especially *Faust*.

In 1907, Rūdolfs Blaumanis contracted tuberculosis and passed away on 4th September 1908 at Takaharju Sanatorium in Finland.

Blaumanis wrote his first story *Wiedergefunden* (The Rediscovered) in German and made his debut with its publication in the newspaper "Zeitung für den Stadt und Land". Whereas Blaumanis's novellas are dramatic and focus on a number of ethical questions, his stories are



Published by VAPP
Daiļliteratūras apgādniecība, 1941
Free rights

relatively light-hearted. At times they recall a free-spirited, well-written traditional folklore, rich with humour and captivating plots, focusing on popular country folk character types. These stories are sometimes dominated by the grotesque, for example, in the story *Brīnuma zāle* (Miracle Herb) where the wealthy farmer Jānis goes off in search of a bride and pretends to be deaf to learn about his future wife. Blaumanis often gives good advice in his stories, and is a capable psychologist. In the story *Gultā* (In Bed), a farmer is resting in bed one Sunday. He just wants to read a book and smoke a cigar, but his wife is concerned that he has come down with an illness. She does not leave him alone, tempting him with tasty dishes and treats until the farmer ends up feeling guilty for having leant into the pretence of his illness.

When writer Jānis Veselis was living in exile, he described Blaumanis's work like this: "Alongside the inescapable tragedy of life and various characters, and the unavoidable complications of deep love, Blaumanis also saw the light-hearted, joyful side of life, which is always bursting with laughter. His humour is never mocking; instead he prefers to be more even-handed, showering characters and events with kind-hearted benevolence. The same love, which in his serious novellas and plays leads to harsh fates, reveals a more amusing side in his light-hearted stories and humorous plays. For example, in the story *Paradīze* (Paradise), a young man promises to marry two different women. One woman locks him in an old hope chest and sends it to the other woman – her competition – the next morning. She, in turn, has the chest and its contents cured with smoke from a wood fire."

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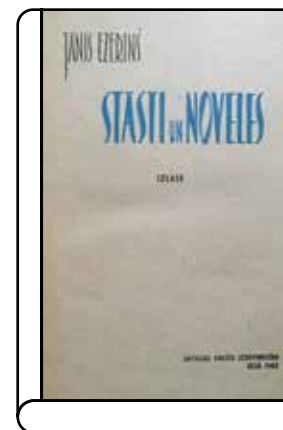
JĀNIS EZERIŅŠ

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

JĀNIS EZERIŅŠ (1891–1924) was born in Bikšēre (now: Cesvaine) parish at Beiri homestead. He attended Cesvaine and Lazdona church parish schools and also the Valka Teachers' Seminar in Valmiera. He worked as a teacher in Lazdona, Barkava, and Salkava. He was mobilised during the First World War but was discharged due to tuberculosis and underwent treatment in Abkhazia. Back in Rīga, he worked for various press publications. He died in Rīga and was buried at the Forest Cemetery.

Ezeriņš wrote his most significant works shortly before his death, and his writing had (and continues to have) a profound impact on later Latvian writers – for example, Regīna Ezerā during the 1960s and 1970s. He translated and was influenced by classics including Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the Old French legend *Aucassin and Nicolette*, the short stories of Giovanni Boccaccio, and Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black*. He also translated the poetry of Alexander Pushkin, Charles Baudelaire, and Alexander Blok.

Ezeriņš is known in Latvian literature as the master of the anecdotal short story. His works are filled with coincidences, tragicomic and incredible events, surprising resolutions, fast-paced plots, and expansive exposition focused on people and their environment. Especially noteworthy is Ezeriņš' ability to draw attention to the mindset of his characters, which makes his short stories particularly effective. At the same time, his stories contain so many different plots and situations that Ezeriņš' literary works can be seen as a kind of encyclopaedia of literature.



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Latvian literature specialist Benita Smilkīņa describes Ezeriņš' novels as being fundamentally "games of happenstance" which draw a person in regardless of their own wishes and then: "like a gambler captures every moment; the only reality is the moment, but reaching for it, one's hands usually still end up empty, one's soul – alone." Ezeriņš often highlights his characters' imperfections, showing them in a completely different, unique light. The most typical subjects of his novels are farmers, the eccentricities of the intelligentsia, and relations between Latvians and German manor lords.

Literary specialist Anna Silgale has noted that the way Ezeriņš approaches his stories reveals something about life itself. He writes with the lightness characteristic of the French, but behind that lies a deep search for meaning typical of Northern Europeans. Through his stories, Ezeriņš shows that life is always full of beauty, but that life also demands truth and understanding, and that those that seek to destroy its harmony cannot just be forgiven. He shows the beauty of the world through the eyes of children, the brightness and vitality of those who are able to transcend mundane everyday life, and the power of those who seek only personal insights. The author plays with language. He doesn't need much to express what he means to say. Behind his playful style one finds eternity, human life and its rules – this is why his characters are often carefree, until one of life's unsettling truths echoes throughout their existence.

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ERIKS ĀDAMSONS

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1907–1946

1900

1950

2000

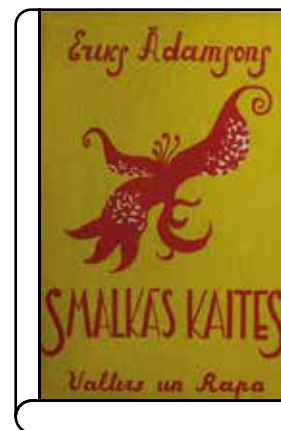
2020

ERIKS ĀDAMSONS (1907–1946) was born in Rīga. He studied at the Rīga City Elementary School and Rīga Secondary School No. 1, where his literature teacher was the well-known Latvian writer Vilis Plūdons. He began his law studies at the University of Latvia and served in the Latvian Army.

While still a young writer, Ādamsons educated himself by immersing himself in Greek and Roman literature as well as in Latvian dainas (folk songs), fairy tales and legends. He read works by English, French, German, and Russian authors in their original languages. The artistic and ethical values of these works as well as Ādamsons' immediate surroundings (Latvia's natural landscape, the Rīga Old Town) were the author's primary sources of inspiration. The beautiful, rare, and humble were transformed by Ādamsons' imagination into poetry which never ceases to captivate.

Ādamsons was a prolific translator from English, Russian, German, and French. He was influenced by Charles Baudelaire and Knut Hamsun. Ādamsons' works, especially his poetry, are characteristic of the rococo style, containing elements of the grotesque, irony, and ornamentalism bordering on Art Nouveau. In literature as well as in everyday life, fine details and pure artistic principles were of the utmost importance to Ādamsons. He was a fine aesthete who blended the comical with the serious. In his works he also did not avoid exotic details.

Smalkās kaites (Subtle Afflictions; 1937) is Eriks Ādamsons' first and most significant collection of short stories. Each of the works in this collection follows the same theme, examining an individual's neurotic psychological characteristics and offering a "window" into their inner world, its depths and hidden corners. For one individual it's their obsessive



Originally published by
Valters un Rapa, 1937
243 pages
Free rights



cleanliness; for another it's the realisation of the grey nature of their existence and their refusal to accept this fact. The idiosyncrasies of each character, which the author refers to as "subtle afflictions", are not as obvious in everyday life and mostly highlight the main character's "anti-hero" nature. The collection can be seen as a witty reinterpretation of the seven deadly sins for the short story genre.

As well-known Latvian poet Veronika Strēlerte noted, "Sometimes these afflictions are easy and curable, for example, jealousy, awkwardness, shame, low self-esteem, and spitefulness, but sometimes they can be fatal and pathological (*The Fall of Habakkuk*).” In Ādamsons' imagination, his characters can live in grand castles surrounded by piles of riches, beautiful interiors, and various delicacies, but in real life they are more likely to have achieved very little and live lives blinded by their complexes. When faced with everyday obstacles, Ādamsons' characters tend to perceive these as otherworldly conspiracies.

Literary specialist Viesturs Vecgrāvis writes that Ādamsons' early prose, as featured in this collection of short stories, is dominated by the idiosyncrasies and complexities of the human psyche, along with deep and precise portrayals of these aberrations while consciously avoiding any moral judgements. In the stories, people and life are viewed as a bright, multi-faceted mosaic, absent of any absolute or indisputable truths or values.

Literary specialist Benita Smilktīņa writes that "Ādamsons' prose [...] is quite realistic; objects and things – everyday or exotic – line up one after another in a rather compact arrangement." This makes Ādamsons very similar to other European modernists.

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KĀRLIS SKALBE

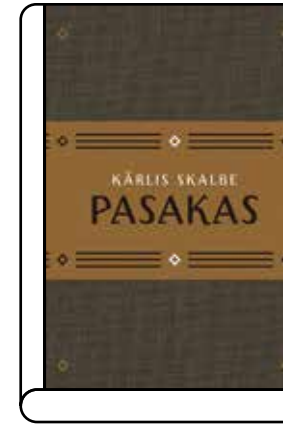
Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1879–1945

KĀRLIS SKALBE (1879–1945) was the son of a blacksmith and the youngest of ten children. He grew up near Vecpiebalga in north-eastern Latvia. After leaving school, he worked variously as a farmhand, ploughman and bookseller. At the age of just nineteen, he published his first collection of poetry, *Pie jūras* (By the Sea). In 1904, he was dismissed from his position as a teacher for “political unreliability”. In 1905, he founded the magazine “Kāvi” (Northern Lights), becoming its chief editor, but it was shut down the following year for publishing articles sympathetic to the 1905 revolution. Skalbe was forced to flee Latvia as a result.

After the establishment of the independent Republic of Latvia, Skalbe achieved considerable fame and success, serving as a member of the Saeima (the Latvian parliament) and building his own summer-house in a beautiful location not far from his birthplace; his family spent summers there throughout the 1920s and 1930s. But the end of his life was troubled, as Latvia suffered invasions from both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In 1944, as Red Army troops once again crossed Latvia’s borders, Skalbe decided to flee the country for Sweden. He died in Stockholm the following year.

Skalbe’s fairy tales hold a similar place in Latvian literature as those of Hans Christian Andersen do in the literature of Denmark. Although



Collection of fairy tales published by Dienas Grāmata, 2019 (*Kaķīša dzirnavas* first published in 1913)
456 pages
Free rights



frequently fantastical, with their kings, princesses, talking animals and enchanted trees, Skalbe’s tales were not really aimed at children and often have dark endings. Despite the sadness and darkness that often prevails in Skalbe’s stories, he promotes a fundamentally humanistic view of existence, showing a deep concern for ethical issues and the proper treatment of others.

He was a deceptively complex writer: although he was known as “the king of fairy tales”, his stories differ from what most Western readers would consider to be “fairy tales”. His most popular and famous tale, ***Kaķīša dzirnavas*** (Kitty’s Windmill) is the story of a windmill-owning cat who is forced to pawn his windmill to pay for his daughters’ dowry, before taking to the road. He encounters various misfortunes on his travels, eventually ending up at a palace where he is able to comfort a king who has fallen into a state of despair after the death of his wife. Skalbe’s works remain popular with Latvians of all ages and backgrounds, as was confirmed in 2014 when *Kaķīša dzirnavas* was selected as the nation’s best-loved book in a national survey.

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1905–1981



ANNA SAKSE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

Along with Vilis Lācis and Andrejs Upīts, **ANNA SAKSE** (1905–1981) is one of the most contradictory figures in Latvian literature. Her stories and prose for children are still much read and beloved, but her political work and prose for adults have, in the opinion of many, irretrievably stained her legacy.

Anna Sakse was born into a poor family of farmers. She studied pedagogy and philology, and worked as a translator and editor. By the time of Latvia's interwar independence years, she had already become involved in the work of the Communist underground, and during the Second World War she moved to the Soviet Union, where she worked at the newspaper "Cīņa" in Kirov. On returning to Latvia, she focused on literary work and worked in the Soviet peace defence committee. The author received many Soviet awards and commendations.

Sakse's three adults' novels – *Darba cilts* (Labour Tribe), *Pret kalnu* (Towards the Mountain), and *Dzirksteles naktī* (Sparks in the Night) – were all mostly devoted to glorifying Soviet power and its ideology, as well as criticising the government and culture of pre-war Latvia. Along with praising her "class precision" and "expressions of social justice", the critics of that time also noted the subtle and nuanced descriptions of the female characters in Sakse's works, as well as the ethically clear, strong heroes in the stories, who follow their ideals and never retreat in the face of opposition. Nowadays this aspect of her prose seems more propaganda-like than her children's literature.

In the 21st century, Anna Sakse has been best known as the author of the story collection ***Pasakas par ziediem*** (Flower Stories; 1966). In it she tells the stories behind the origins of various types of flowers, such as daffodils, snowdrops and hyacinths. Compared to modern-day children's literature, *Pasakas par ziediem* distinguishes itself with its sorrowful and even tragic tone. So, for example, in the story about the water-arum (called



Originally published by Liesma, 1966
283 pages

a "pig's ear" in Latvian), she describes the life of Jānītis, who has lost his mother and is forced to herd pigs all day by his evil stepmother. His stepmother's children begin to call him Pig's Ear. Later in the summer, one of Jānītis's piglets wanders off in search of water, falls into a pool in the marsh, and begins to sink. The step-mother forces Jānītis to go after the piglet, and he manages to catch hold of it by its ears but then sinks into the bog himself. Only his fist remains above the water, and this transforms into a flower.

In the story about the peony, the main character is also a child who has lost her mother. Peony is the oldest daughter in a family of six children and is in love with a boy named Simeons. However, due to all of her chores and the need to take care of her younger brothers and sisters, she can't leave to marry her beloved. Simeons goes off to seek his fortune in faraway lands and sends Peony a marriage proposal every two years, but they are always forced to delay their wedding. In her old age, Peony writes to Simeons that she is ready at last to join him, but Death arrives first and refuses to wait for Peony to marry. Soon afterwards, we see Simeons standing at her grave with a peony, which he brings as a sign of his love.

Latvian literary specialist Anita Rožkalne says that "Sakse's literary tales are significant for their harmonic synthesis of ethical clarity and style, philosophical reflections, and psychologically sensitive descriptions, as well as capturing the mentality characteristic of Latvian fairy tales in an occasionally exotic and colourful form." These stories also contain facts about botany, though these mix with fantasy and an indirect, but powerful, moral conviction that all actions have meaning and that they leave a mark on the world – even if only after death.

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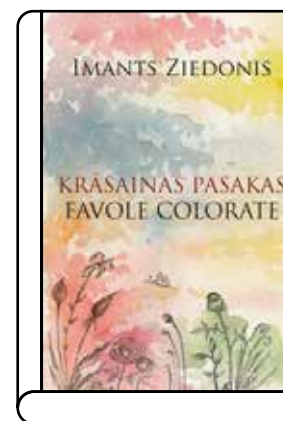
IMANTS ZIEDONIS

Foto: Gunārs Janaitis

1933–2013

IMANTS ZIEDONIS (1933–2013) is one of the most beloved Latvian authors of poetry, short prose (epiphanies, literary fairy tales), and journalism. He was also a translator, scriptwriter, and politician. He was born in Ragaciems to a family of fishermen and farmers. Even though he felt that being a gardener was his calling, he studied philology at the University of Latvia and augmented his knowledge with advanced literature courses in Moscow in 1964. The year 1961 saw the publication of Ziedonis' first book of poetry, *The Sand of Earth and Dreams* (*Zemes un sapņu smiltis*). During the 1970s and 1980s, he formed the Group for the Release of Venerable Trees (a group of volunteers who cleared away brush from around choked old-growth trees across Latvia), which can be viewed as the beginning of the Latvian green movement – and as a symbolic anti-political act which strengthens the nation's historical memory and self-confidence.

Imants Ziedonis's *Krāsainās pasakas* (Colourful Stories; 1973) examines universal human values and fires up readers' imaginations by prompting them to explore and expand their own view of the world. These are light-hearted stories which speak about life's paradoxes and playfully engage with the reader just as the author himself plays with colours, words, and ideas. They contain great wisdom about life, but never cease being playful, bright, and fun. Ziedonis's writing is free-spirited and accessible, and the stories can be meditative and therapeutic, though always with lively



Originally published by
Liesma, 1973
53 pages



plots and captivating characters. The stories do not contain any depictions of violence or evil; it is as if the author truly wanted to spread only joy and harmony, and to celebrate love. In the "White Story", everything is as white as on the first snowy day of the year. Even the ink turns white, and Ziedonis wonders if the reader will be able to read a thing now that everything has turned white. The "Yellow Story" features the sun, baby chicks, bees, flowers, and a sudden conclusion. One might expect Communist flames in the "Red Story", but in fact it just shows how dangerous ordinary flames can be. In the "Brown Story", little men secretly paint mushroom tops and acorns, and make sure that a person turns brown when they tan. The "Black Story" is about hell, which has seven doors and six antechambers, with a guard who searches those he finds suspicious and takes away any lamps they might be carrying, because of the ongoing battle against light. *Krāsainās pasakas* can be enjoyed by children and adults alike. Since its first publication, it has been reprinted more than ten times in Latvian as well as in several other languages including English, German, Russian, Italian, and French. Nearly every new edition of *Krāsainās pasakas* includes illustrations from a new artist, because the images created by the author in his writing lend themselves so well to visual interpretations.

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REINIS KAUDZĪTE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

1839–1920

The Time of the Surveyors by REINIS and MATĪSS KAUDZĪTES

The novel *Mērnīeku laiki* (The Time of the Surveyors), co-written by the Kaudzīte Brothers, is not just a classic but a legend in the world of Latvian literature. When this novel was published in 1879, Latvian literature was truly still in diapers. There were few authors writing in Latvian, and those who did mostly wrote poetry or stories. No one had dared to attempt writing a novel, which was a popular literary genre in both Western European and Russian literature at the time. This is why the appearance of *Mērnīeku laiki* was such a phenomenon. It was a contemporary work of prose with an epic scope, which seemed to come practically out of nowhere, almost ten years after the first cornerstone of Latvian “national romanticism” had been laid – Andrejs Pumpurs’s mythical epic *Lāčplēsis*, which is related to the epics of other nations.

Reinis (1839–1920) and Matīss (1848–1926) Kaudzīte were teachers and active members of society, who were born and worked in the picturesque town of Vecpiebalga in central Latvia. The brothers opened a school there, organised cultural events, and created their own literary and pedagogical texts. The Kaudzīte Brothers can be considered typical of late 19th century Latvians who worked to educate society and increase national self-awareness, and can be seen as local “Renaissance men”. Though they worked in many different fields, the main goal of the brothers was to generate and engrain in Latvians the belief that they were a nation with their

MATĪSS KAUDZĪTE

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*



1848–1926

own values and able to compete with Russians and Germans who, at that time, effectively controlled life in the territory of present-day Latvia. Modern Latvian culture was practically non-existent at the time, and so many Latvian intellectuals and writers worked to create this culture from almost nothing or, more precisely, by basing it on examples from other nations and giving these a Latvian quality.

One of the means by which the Kaudzīte Brothers wished to achieve their aims was through literature. They wrote school textbooks, poetry, literary critiques, travel narratives, aphorisms, various articles on topics relating to social criticism and history, and so on. This diversity was essential, as they aimed to be as effective as possible in filling and expanding the somewhat negligible range and significance of this layer of Latvian culture.

The most important of their texts was the novel *Mērnīeku laiki*, because it established several literary traditions in Latvian literature as well as “placing” it on the European literary map. The novel is set in two fictional parishes – Slātava and Čangaliēna – in the Vidzeme Governorate in the mid-19th century, following the end of serfdom when a new class of free peasant emerged, establishing their own farms and homesteads. The story centres on the land-surveying work taking place at the time, in order to set the boundaries of the land intended for Latvian peasants. Several plotlines surround this central element: a dramatic love triangle, intergenerational conflict, criminal intrigue, and



Published in 1879
500 pages
Free rights



various episodes from domestic life which depict the nature of family life and society during that time.

The novel's main characters are Kaspars and Liena, members of the younger generation who, in the opinion of the authors, embody desirable Latvian moral ideals. Their love is threatened by outside forces: Liena is the object of desire of the deceitful, wealthy farmer Prātnieks, while Liena's mother cannot stand the poor and honest Kaspars. Liena does not want to give into her mother's pressure and marry Prātnieks, and so she runs away from her parents' home to be with Kaspars and has a daughter with him. However, their love story ends in tragedy: Kaspars is killed when he is mistaken for someone else, while Liena loses her mind.

There is also no shortage of sharp social satire in *Mērnīeku laiki*, directed at some of the qualities the Kaudzīte Brothers disapproved of in the society of the time: greed, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, etc. The novel contains a wide range of characters from different nationalities – Latvians, Germans, and Russians. There are a number of comical figures among these characters, who have since become well-known tropes in Latvian culture.

The Kaudzīte Brothers collected material for their novel over the course of many years, noting down prototypes for characters as well as events in their native Vecpiebalga. This is why the cultural and historical material in the novel is authentic and also offers a valuable record of different social strata and their lives in the Vidzeme Governorate in the mid-19th century. The brothers' literary work continued after the publication of *Mērnīeku laiki* and Matīss Kaudzīte even wrote a sequel to the novel. However, none of these works was as popular or the artistic equal of *Mērnīeku laiki*.

Mērnīeku laiki is a unique book in the history of Latvian literature. On one hand, it functions as a cornerstone for Latvian literature and as a kind of Latvian literary "Bible", but on the other hand, this novel continues to be readable, interesting, and captivating. It has been republished numerous times, translated, adapted for the cinema and theatre. This novel has, in effect, become a part of the Latvian literary genome.

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ASPAZIJA

1865–1943

Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

Poets, playwrights, translators and cultural activists **ASPAZIJA** (born Johanna Emīlija Lizete Rozenberga, 1865–1943) and **RAINIS** (born Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) were a tandem of Latvian cultural excellence. Their literary work is central to Latvian culture.

Aspazija became known to Latvian readers and theatre-goers at the end of the nineteenth century, when her first plays – *Vaidelote* (1894) and *Zaudētas tiesības* (Lost Rights; 1894) – were performed and her debut

① poetry collection *Sarkanās puķes* (Red Flowers; 1897) was published.

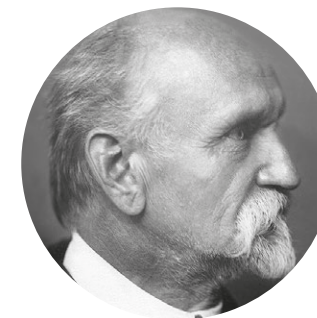
Aspazija's poetry was written in the romantic poetic style and contains many of the ideas prominent at the time, as well as themes focusing on self-knowledge and self-awareness. Aspazija continued to explore these themes in her later work, which reached its highest expression in

② the collections *Dvēseles krēsla* (Twilight of the Soul; 1904), *Ziedu klēpis* (Bounty of Blossoms; 1911), and the play *Sidraba šķidrums* (Silver Veil; 1903).

Rainis first gained wide recognition at the start of his and Aspazija's relationship, when he completed his translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's foundational work *Faust*. The word "congenial" has been used to describe it so often that Latvian poet Valdis Bisenieks declared it as being forever connected with Rainis. At the beginning of the twentieth century,

③ Rainis's first poetry collection, *Tālas noskaņas zilā vakarā* (Distant Echoes on a Blue Evening; 1903), was published. *Gals un sākums* (The End and the Beginning; 1912) is considered Rainis's most significant poetry collection. It forms a conceptual whole and the phrase connecting each section – "I flow, I flow" – reflects notions of continuous motion, renewal, and transformation.

RAINIS



1865–1929

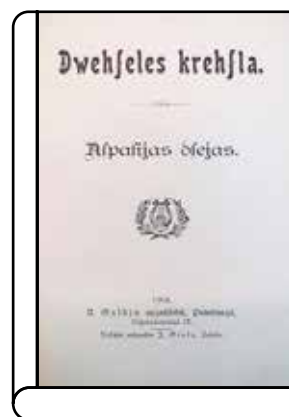
Photo: ILFA Digital Literatura.lv*

Aspazija and Rainis were the founders of the symbolic tradition of idea drama in Latvian literature, which uses deeply symbolic poetic language to describe the search for spiritual values and dilemmas surrounding moral and ethical questions. Especially noteworthy are Rainis's idea dramas *Uguns un nakts* (Fire and Night; 1905) and *Jāzeps un viņa brāļi* (Joseph and his Brothers; 1919), which explore the problems of personal growth and ask how one can maintain one's humanity on the road to attaining a higher goal.

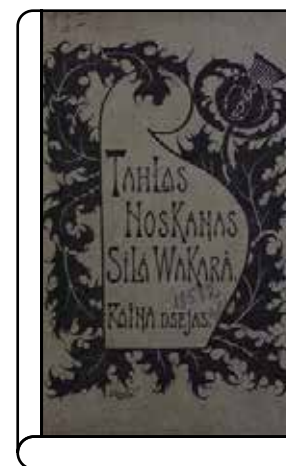
Both poets were active in the wider community. Aspazija was deeply and vocally involved in the campaign for women's rights and in disputes concerning women's emancipation and education. Ideologically, Rainis was a social democrat. His political work was unacceptable to the authorities of the Russian Empire and as a result he was exiled to Slobodskoy in Central Russia. The 1905 Revolution prompted Rainis and Aspazija to go into exile in Switzerland, only returning to Latvia in 1920. Despite their 14-year absence, they were not forgotten and were welcomed back with great enthusiasm, as their plays had been performed and their books published in the intervening years. Rainis and Aspazija's literary works and attitudes were of such importance that they were elected to the Constitutional Convention of the new Republic of Latvia (1920–1922). Rainis was also a member of the first three elected parliaments, served as the Minister of Education, and was the director of the Latvian National Theatre. Rainis's desire to become President of Latvia, however, remained unfulfilled.



1
Originally
published by
Neimans, 1897
62 pages
Free rights



2
Originally
published by
A. Gulbja apgāds,
1904
92 pages
Free rights



3
Originally
published by
J. Brigaders,
1903
133 pages
Free rights



4
Originally
published by
A. Gulbja apgāds,
1912
212 pages
Free rights

Poetry written for children forms an important part of both poets' creative work. Originally published as poetry collections and later appearing as part of various anthologies in Latvia, these works have been reissued many times. They include Rainis's poetic "childhood epic" *Saules gadi* (Years of the Sun; 1925) and Aspazija's descriptions of childhood, which are found in the collections *Zila debess* (Blue Sky; 1924) and *Zelta mākoņi* (Golden Clouds; 1928). Both writers' prose is less well-known – for example, Aspazija's novella on women's issues, *Cīņa par nākamību* (Struggle for the Future; 1894) or her novel *Rudens lakstīgala* (Autumn Nightingale; 1933), which is rich with autobiographical details, or Rainis's retrospective work *Kastaņola* (Castagnola; 1928), which discusses his years in exile in Switzerland.

Also noteworthy are the poets' journalistic works and their collection of political speeches on topics significant to society at that time, including the importance of education and culture to strengthening national identity. Rainis's social democratic beliefs and the repressions he experienced at the hands of the Russian Empire meant that he did not lose his influence during the Soviet years, helping him attain a position similar to Shakespeare and Goethe at the peak of the Latvian literary pantheon.

Their extensive correspondence also forms an impressive record of their historical era. 2 499 pieces of correspondence between Aspazija and Rainis (1894–1929) make up the collection which has been included in the Latvian National Register of the UNESCO programme "Memory of the World".

Several museums have been established to memorialise the poets, including in the Swiss city of Lugano. Their works have been translated and published in many languages – for example, Rainis's poem *Lauztās priedes* (Broken Pines) was translated into 30 different languages and all these translations published together as a book.

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The **Latvian Literature platform** was established in order to promote Latvian literature and its distribution abroad, thus ensuring international cooperation among publishers, literary agents, writers, translators, and organizations working in the fields of literature and publishing. The Latvian Literature platform provides wide-ranging information about Latvian authors, books, translators and translations, the publishing industry and innovations within the industry.

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The aim of the grant program “**Support for Foreign Publishers Publishing Latvian Literature**” is to ensure that the best of Latvian prose, poetry, drama, journalism and children’s literature is accessible and known beyond the borders of Latvia. The program is developed, organized, and administered by the Latvian Literature platform, and is financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia and the State Culture Capital Foundation. The program provides financial support to international publishers who are publishing Latvian literature, thereby encouraging interest from international publishers in Latvian literature, and supporting its translation into different languages. Grant applicants can apply for financial support to cover book production costs. Any independent international publisher who is a legal entity and has experience working with foreign authors is eligible to take part in the grant program.

The deadline for the grant application takes place two times a year. Applications are accepted in accordance with the timeline set by the Latvian Literature platform. Each project must be completed by the end of the calendar year in which the grant was received.

The Latvian Literature platform provides **financial support for translators** who wish to translate Latvian literary works into foreign languages. In order to qualify for funding, the translator must submit a completed application form, a CV, a sample translation, and a letter of intent or an agreement signed with a publisher that confirms plans to publish the respective title. The translator may apply for a grant only if permission has been received from the original copyright holder to produce a complete translation of the entire literary work.

The deadline for the grant application takes place two times a year. Project applications are accepted in accordance with the timeline set by the Latvian Literature platform. Each project must be completed by the end of the calendar year in which the grant was received.