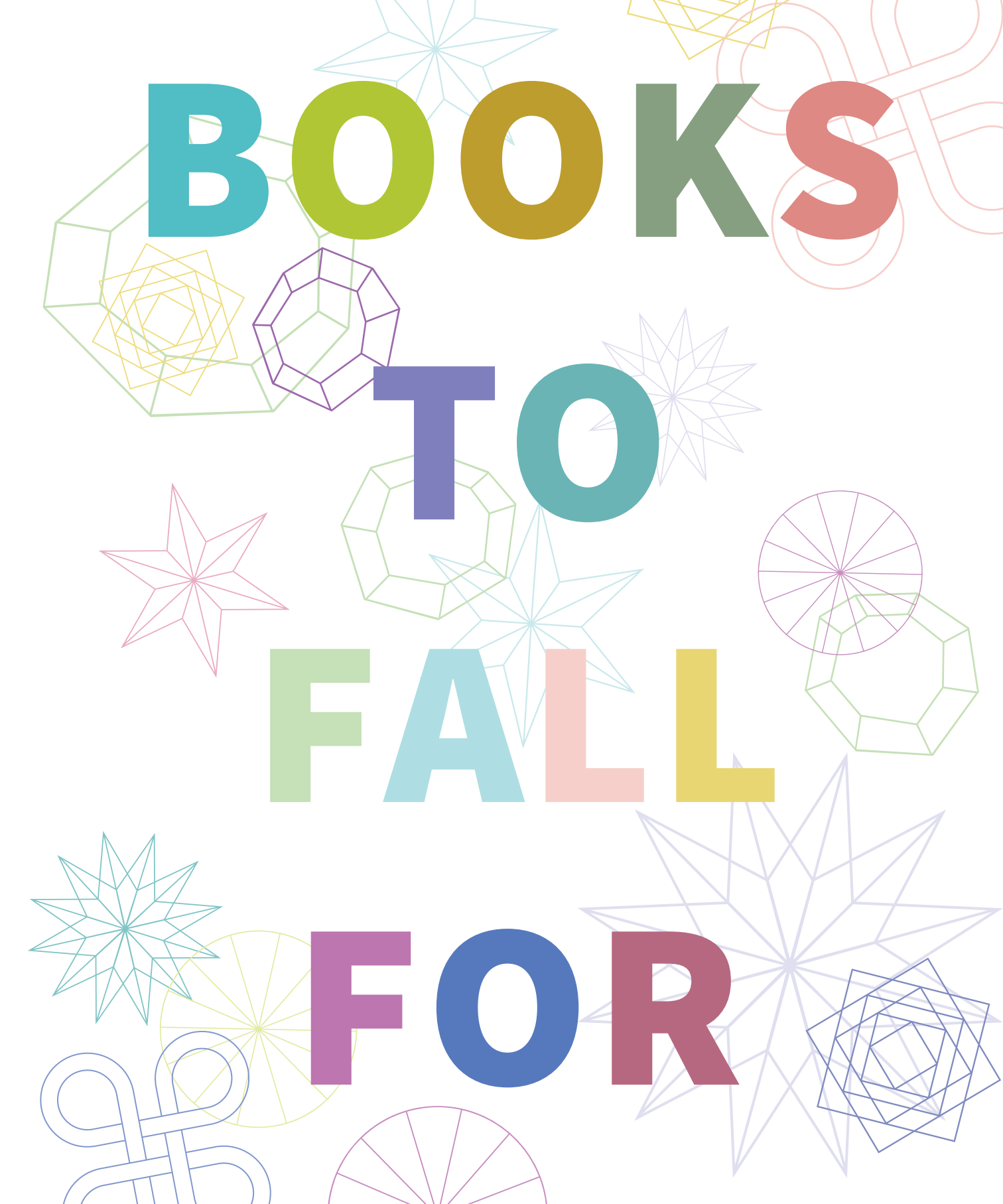


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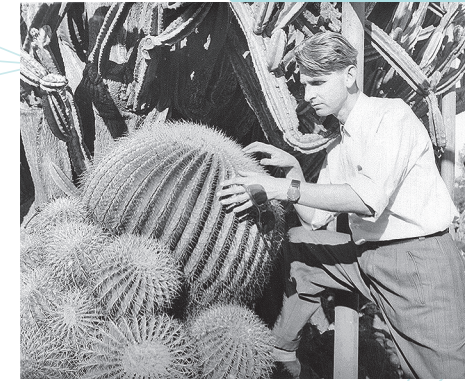
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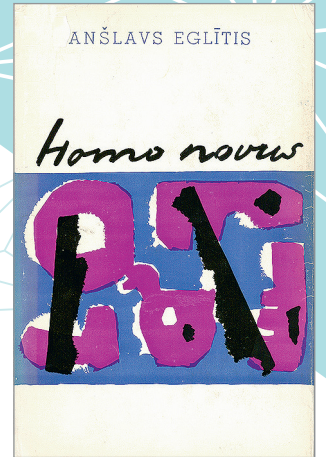
# ANŠLAVS EGLĪTIS

(1906–1993) was born in Riga to the family of prominent Latvian writer Viktors Eglītis. He was interested in literature and arts and graduated from the Art Academy of Latvia in 1935, later becoming an art teacher and journalist. In 1944 he escaped to Germany and later to Switzerland. In

1950 he settled in California, where he continued his literary work, and also wrote theatre and film reviews. Some of his most notable works include *Bride Hunters* (Līgavu mednieki, 1939), *Homo Novus* (1944), and the story collection *Maestro* (1936). In his early works Eglītis portrays the artists and bourgeoisie in pre-war Riga, but later wrote about Latvian emigres in the US, and revisited his experience of the Second World War, and also depicted life in Soviet Latvia from an émigré's point of view, even using a spy novel plot for one of his works.



From Literature and Music museum's archive



*Homo Novus* is Eglītis's second major novel. It is a tale of youth, offering an incredibly detailed account of life in Riga during the 1930s in its portrayal of the capital and its society, in particular the

bohemian circle that Eglītis, being a painter himself, knew so intimately. The novel recounts the lives of the young people of those times, people not so different from their modern counterparts; their joys, bohemian lifestyle and endeavours.

The novel's protagonist is a painter named Juris Upenājs. The story begins as he arrives by train to Riga from the small town of Cesvaine, with his arrival coinciding with that of Eižens Žibeika, a *bon viveur* coming from Paris where he has blown all his money. These three cities become an important part of the novel, representing three distinct entities. Paris – the centre of art and fashion, culture and a place both far away and inspirational. Cesvaine – the earth, a sense of belonging and pastoral roots to which many creative personalities of those times reached back and which was the birthplace of Eglītis himself, with Riga situated somewhere between his earthy roots and that exciting, distant place. Juris perceives Riga as a miracle and comes to love the city deeply. He describes its streets, corners, cafes and bars with amazing mastery.

But all this forms just a backdrop to the novel's main focus – the world of painters. Although the characters are merely the fruit of the writer's imagination, they are very real. Eglītis rendered the very vibrant soul and flavour of the 1930s art world not as a dispassionate observer, but as the active participant that he was, describing in detail the drinking in bars, quarrelling and lengthy discussions about the essence of life and art, taking pleasure in small things and the search for inspiration so necessary for the creative spirit.

Excerpt in English is available  
Contacts: [info@akka-laa.lv](mailto:info@akka-laa.lv)

In 2006 *Homo Novus* was published in Germany by WeidleVerlag.



## MODERN CLASSICS FICTION



Photo: Gunārs Janāitis



**REGĪNA EZERA** (real name Regīna Kindzule, 1930–2002) was born in Riga. Ezera graduated from the Department of Journalism of the University of Latvia and started publishing her writing in 1955. From the 1960s onwards her main occupation was

writing. Her most well-known works are the novels *The Well* (Aka, 1972), which was adapted into the highly popular film *The Lake Sonata* (Ezera sonāte, 1976), *Smouldering Fire* (Zemdegas, 1977), *Violence* (Varmācība, 1982), *Betrayal* (Nodevība, 1984), and the short story collections *The Trap* (Slazds, 1979); *The Princess Phenomenon* (Princeses fenomēns, 1985), and *Dragon's Egg* (Pūkaola, 1995). Considered a master of what could be called “silent drama” as well as nuanced psychological portraits, she pays great attention to details in human relationships, often uses parallels with the animal world, exploring the interaction between man and animal. She blurred the line between psycho-realism and postmodernism fiction in the novels *Smouldering Fire*, *Violence* and *Betrayal* by deconstructing the plot and incorporating her persona and reflections about writing. Her works have been translated in German, Swedish, Estonian and other languages.

The novel *The Well* begins on the shores of a lake in the heat of summer. Rudolf, a doctor from Riga, is looking forward to enjoying some time off work, spending it on his own fishing while lodging with an elderly couple on the lakeside. He comes into contact with the next door neighbours, the Tomariņi family, as 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 meeting 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 miss a father figure.

Attraction surges between the quiet, slightly standoffish Laura and the confident, successful Rudolf, yet from the very beginning there is a sense that the relationship is doomed. A crucial part of the story is the presence, or rather absence, of Laura's husband Rihard, who is in prison for murdering his friend while on a hunting trip while he was drunk. The fact that Rihard is soon to be released throws a shadow over any attraction between Laura and Rudolf. Rihard, from a distance and through circumstance, has forced Laura into playing the roles of perfect mother, perfect wife and strong woman. Regīna Ezera skilfully blends together the lives of all these people, showing the sins and life events of previous generations and how the echoes of these reverberate in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

**Contacts: [info@akka-laa.lv](mailto:info@akka-laa.lv)**

In 1986 *Der Brunnen* (The Well) was published in Germany by Ullstein. In 1987 a selection of short stories entitled *Die Schaukel und andere Erzählungen* was published by Verlag Harro v. Hirschheydt.

**VIZMA BELŠEVICA** (1931–2005) was one of Latvia's most acclaimed poets and was nominated for the Nobel Prize. She also wrote prose and was a prominent translator from Russian and English. She was born in Riga and lived there all her life, and thus the city has a prominent role in her writing, especially in the semi-autobiographical trilogy *Bille*. It is an honest retelling of her childhood in the 1930s and 1940s during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis as well as the Soviet occupation, all seen from the perspective of a young girl named Bille. Her more notable poetry collections include *Rings of Years* (Gadu gredzeni, 1969), *In My Lady's Bedstraw* (Madarās, 1976), and *Autumn Time* (Dzeltu laiks, 1987). After the publication of *Rings of Years* her publications were banned for several years for what was perceived as anti-Soviet sentiment in her work. Her short story collection *Misfortune at Home* (Nelaime mājās, 1979) was also immensely popular – simultaneously funny and sad, rich in black humor, 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. *Bille* has been published in Swedish and Russian translation, while selections of her poetry have been published in translation in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

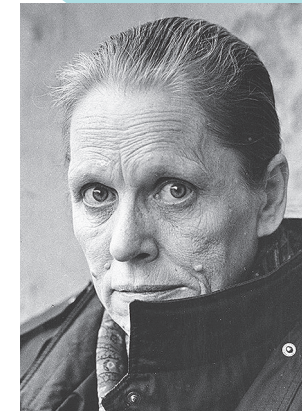
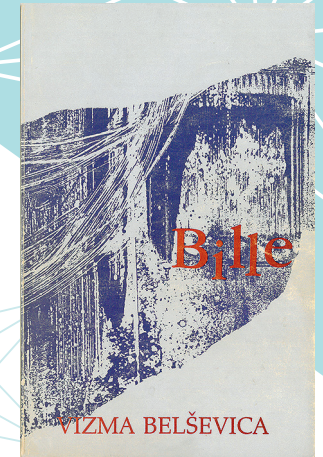


Photo: Gunārs Janāitis



The first volume of *Bille* was published in 1992, with *Bille Lives On* (Bille dzīvo tālāk) and *Bille's Wonderful Youth* (Billes skaistā jaunība) published in 1996 and 1999 respectively. The entire trilogy came out in one volume in 2004. Bille is the shortened name of the main character, Sibilla Gūtmane, who observes an era that is filled with tragic events and difficult to understand even for adults. Bille, as opposed to 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 the life in the workers' district of Grīziņkalns and life of the Gūtmanis family there during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The result is 75 separate stories told in chronological order. Bille goes to school and visits her country relatives; as the regimes change, Bille grows up and, along with the adults, she has to endure stretches of starving, helps people imprisoned in the ghetto, and goes to the countryside to exchange things they have for food. Each episode represents a moment that stuck in her mind forever.

**Contacts: [info@akka-laa.lv](mailto:info@akka-laa.lv)**

In 1997 *Bille* was published in Sweden by Natur och Kultur.



## MODERN CLASSICS FICTION

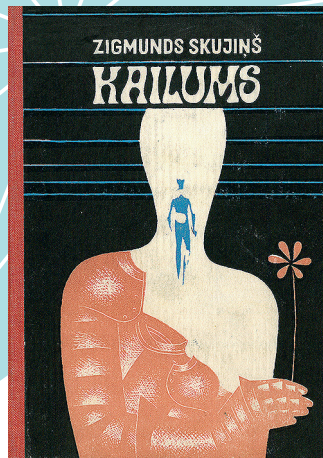
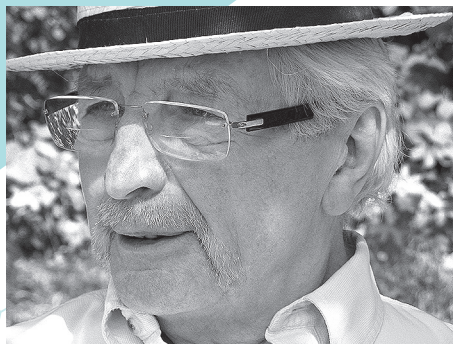


Photo: Inga Skujņa



### ZIGMUNDS SKUJĪŅŠ

(1926) is the author of many remarkable novels, film scripts, plays, and essays, and is one of Latvia's most translated writers. More than seven million copies of Skujiņš's works have been published in German, English,

Russian, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovakian, and Hungarian. He debuted with a story collection in 1954. His more notable works include the novels *Nakedness* (Kailums, 1970), *The Bed With the Golden Leg* (Gulta ar zelta kāju, 1984), *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* (Miesaskrāsas domino, 1999), *Entry of the Thief of Hearts* (Siržu zagļa uznāciens, 2001), and the story collections *Attack on the Windmill* (Uzbrukums vējdzirnavām, 1976) *Storyteller's Sunday* (Stāstītāja svētdiena, 1995), and *Magic and Ink* (Buršana un tinte, 2003). A storyteller with a penchant for exotic details, his short stories mix a wide array of settings (from Soviet Latvia to Ancient Rome), genres (historical, 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 initially 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.

The novel *Nakedness* (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 films based on the book have been made, and it's still the Skujiņš novel that people first come into contact with.

The protagonist of the novel, Aleksandrs Draiska, comes to a small textile factory town looking for a girl he's been exchanging letters with. Finding somebody else at the address, he sets off on a search across the town, where he discovers that almost everybody 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 the end, however, when we discover that instead of Draiska it was his army friend who came to the factory town after falling in love with the girl from the letters, and decided to masquerade as his friend in order to find her.

Excerpt in English is available

Published by Liesma, 1970

Contacts: Jānis Oga, [janis@apgadsmansards.lv](mailto:janis@apgadsmansards.lv)

[www.apgadsmansards.lv](http://www.apgadsmansards.lv)



The narrative of the novel *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* is split into two parallel stories. On the one hand, there is the 18th century Baltic German gentry in 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 effort it is finally established that her husband had been torn into two during a battle, and that his lower part had been stitched to the upper part of a local captain named Ulste, who is of humble origins. After having found the lower part of her husband, she conceives a child from it and is contemplating at great length whom to consider as the father of her child, but then her husband returns – in one piece. The other plotline is the life story of the author himself, who travels through the turmoil of Latvia in the 20th century. The story is a rich tapestry of detail, with nationalities intertwined in an inseparable mix – Latvians, Germans, Jews, and the Japanese, among many others. The connection between the two narratives becomes gradually clear: they click together through details that are mentioned as if in passing. It is also a moving story of an experience of one person's life in turbulent times.

Published by Preses nams, 1999

Contacts: Jānis Oga, [janis@apgadsmansards.lv](mailto:janis@apgadsmansards.lv)

[www.apgadsmansards.lv](http://www.apgadsmansards.lv)

Selected titles in translation: *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* (Miesas krāsas domino) in English (Arcadia, UK) and Swedish (Tranan); *The Bed with the Golden Leg* (Gulta ar zelta kāju) in Estonian, Russian, and Bulgarian; *Memoirs of a Young Man* (Jauna cilvēka memuāri) in Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish, Czech, Ukrainian, and Hungarian; *Man in His Prime* (Vīretis labākajos gados) in English, Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Ukrainian; *Nakedness* (Kailums) in Estonian and Russian; *The Grandsons of Columbus* (Kolumba mazdēli) in Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Georgian.



## MODERN CLASSICS FICTION

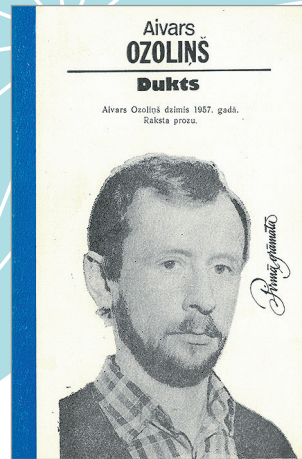


Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer and journalist **AIVARS OZOLIŅŠ** (1957) studied at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Latvia. Renowned as one of the first Latvian postmodern writers, he made his debut in the late 1980s with a novella entitled *Almost a Hundred* (Gandrīz simts,

1989). His seminal work is the book *Dukts* (1991), a cult classic of Latvian postmodernism fiction, which had clear intentions to cast doubt on the entire purpose of fiction and writing. *Dukts* consists of several unconnected stories, varying in style and length, but all of an experimental nature, full of wordplay, puns, parody and references to other texts in the same vein as the work of Daniil Kharmis and Donald Barthelme. The most popular is the titular story – a humorous and absurd parody about what is described as an eponymous mythical “game of gods that everyone can play.” Ozoliņš quit writing soon after the publication of *Dukts* and became a well-known political commentator. His works have been translated in Russian, English and Swedish.

*Dukts* is his only book-length publication. It is an exemplary work of postmodernism, in which influences as wide ranging as Kharmis, Kafka, Barthelme and Latvian nonsense poet Nurbulis intermingle to create a unique blend of literature about nothing. Perhaps fittingly, after *Dukts* came out, which was soon followed by the short story *Fairy Tale No. 13* (Pasaka Nr. 13), He has not published any other work since, and has abstained from talking publicly about his writing.

However *Dukts* is one of the very few books with staying power from that heady era in Latvian literature when authors immersed themselves in all that had been previously forbidden or unwelcome. In 2014 the book was republished, and the book is being enthusiastically discussed yet again at universities and dorm rooms all over Latvia. The book offers a kaleidoscopic mixture of characters, ideas and wordplay, mostly centred on the concept of “Dukts” – a word with no real meaning in Latvian. As the narrator says in the book: “The essence of Dukts (although as of yet we’re not sure what it actually is) can be best portrayed by a single infinitely long, over-exposed film, which has to be seen instantaneously to be understood.” The book then details all the futile historical attempts to define or comprehend Dukts before showing the concept in practice with a brilliant series of surreal short stories.

Excerpt in English is available  
Published by Jumava, 2014  
Contacts: [izdevnieciba@jumava.lv](mailto:izdevnieciba@jumava.lv)  
[www.jumava.lv](http://www.jumava.lv)

## MODERN CLASSICS FICTION

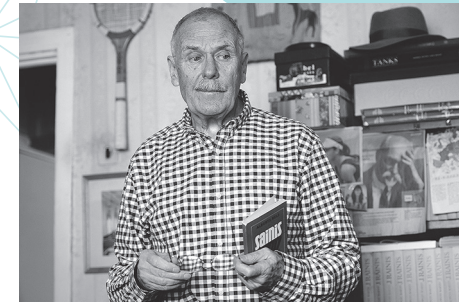
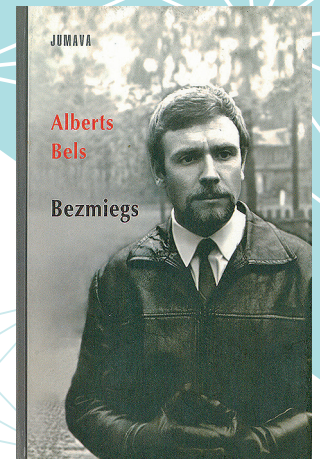


Photo: Kristaps Kalns



**ALBERTS BELS** (real name Jānis Cīrulis, 1938) was born near Riga and later studied at the Electrotechnical Faculty of the Riga Technical Institute, the State Arts School in Moscow and the Moscow School of Scriptwriting. He debuted in 1963. His most well-known novels include *The Investigator* (Izmeklētājs, 1967), *Insomnia* (Bezmiegs, 1967, but published only in 1987); *The Cage* (Būris, 1972), *The Voice of a Herald* (Saucēja balss, 1973), *Men in Boats* (Cilvēki laivās, 1987), and *The Black Mark* (Melnā zīme, 1996). He was one of the first Latvian writers to employ modernism and postmodernism literary devices in his work, often juxtapositioning parallel stories taking place in different historical periods. The novel *Insomnia* is considered one of Bels’s best and most intriguing works. His criticism of the Soviet establishment in the novel resulted in a lawsuit and a ban on its publication. A censored version of the novel only appeared in 1987, with a full uncensored version finally published in 2003. His works have been translated into English, German, Russian, and several other languages.

The novel *Insomnia* takes place in a block of flat in 1960s Soviet Latvia, and revolves around the main character Eduards Dārziņš and a woman named Dina, who he spots one night outside running near his building. Visibly

shaken, he invites her into his flat, where she promptly falls asleep. She is like this for some time. After waking up, they begin to talk, and finds out more about her, which leads him on a journey through her often difficult life, which only raises more questions for Dārziņš. The story then switches to the 13<sup>th</sup> century during a time that the Teutonic Knights are vying for control of the Baltic. Soldiers and ordinary people that can be understood to be the beginnings of the Latvian nation are forced to make a decision on their future fate – to fight for their freedom against the knights, or assimilate with their aggressors. The novel then oscillates between these two parallel plots, weaving a tale of humanity in the face of almost impossible odds, and the desire to control one’s destiny amidst the most oppressive of regimes.

Excerpt in English is available  
Published by Jumava, 2003  
Contacts: [izdevnieciba@jumava.lv](mailto:izdevnieciba@jumava.lv)  
[www.jumava.lv](http://www.jumava.lv)



## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

### THE NOVEL SERIES

We Latvia The  
20th  
Century

2011 marked the publication of the short story collection *We. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, the making of which was brought about by Latvian writer Gundega Repše. The book, which contains stories from 12 Latvian women authors, is a literary summary of Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This collection became the impetus behind a much bigger project – the historical novel series *We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. A total of 13 Latvian authors were invited by Gundega Repše to take part in the creation of the series, with each choosing to take up a specific period of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian history. The primary thread running through the series has been the exhaustive research of documents and other available material, which serve as a basis for the individual literary vision of each writer without having to curb it. The series is published by Dienas Grāmata Publishers.

There have been a total of 6 novels published in the series so far, with each of them having been a seminal event in Latvian literature:

*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*  
by Osvalds Zebriš (2014)

18  
by Pauls Bankovskis (2014)

*The Taste of Lead*  
by Māris Bērziņš (2015)

*Words Were of No Use*  
by Guntis Berelis (2015)

*Mother's Milk*  
by Nora Ikstena (2015)

*Bogene*  
by Gundega Repše (2016)

Latvian writer **INGA ĀBELE** (1972) was born in Riga. She graduated from the Department of Theatre, Television and Drama at the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2001. Becoming successfully involved in several genres of literature, she has published short story collections, including *The Well House* (Akas māja, 1999), *Observations in the Time of Snow* (Sniega laika piezīmes, 2004), *Ants and Bumblebees* (Kamenes un skudras, 2010), the novels *Fire Will Not Wake You* (Uguns nemodina, 2001), *High Tide* (Paisums, 2008), and *Wicker Monk* (Klūgu mūks, 2014), the poetry collection *Night Pragmatist* (Nakts pragmatīke, 2000), as well as a book of plays entitled *Plays* (Lugas, 2003)).



Photo: Zane Emštreite

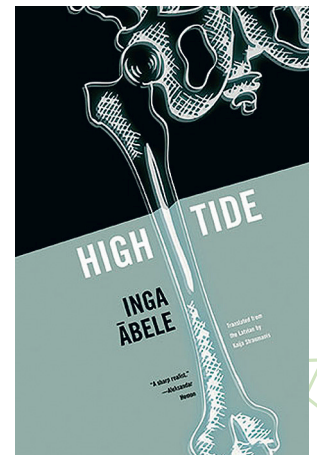
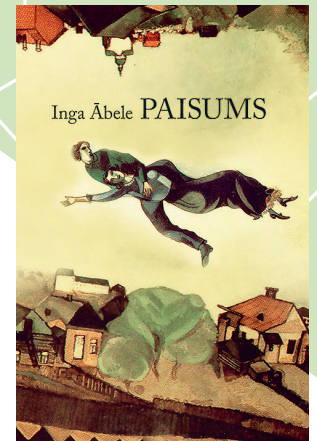
*High Tide* was the winner of the 2008 Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature and the 2008 Annual Latvian Literature Award. The novel *High Tide* addresses the question of why we are so dependent on the past, even when it has turned us into someone else.

In the beginning they were two. They have no values, no horizontals and verticals, and have to create values by themselves. They crack jokes like if something bad happens, they'll help each other die. And then something bad does happen. The boy gets sick, and the girl has to kill him. This "killing" turns out to be completely different from what you see in movies or on stage. Everything turns out to be false, awkward, and horrible. Time goes on. One day the middle-aged woman realizes she no longer knows if what happened so long ago really happened. What were those two people who once lived together? Who was that girl who killed her friend? Did he even exist if she only remembers him a couple times a year? She has nobody to talk to about it. That's why she writes, searching for an answer to the question: How many lives do we live in a single lifetime? By writing, she searches for the path to her former self. There is a high tide and a low tide: when you are in one, then you can understand the other. The plot of the novel is both real and imagined. The crime is also a symbol of the suicide we commit after each stage of our lives, in search of an answer to the question: What is it that continues to live?

The full English translation is available  
**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2008**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane, [dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)**  
**[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)**

Selected works in translation: the novel *High Tide* in English (Open Letter Press, US), in Swedish (Ariel) *Ants and Bumblebees* in English in the prose anthology *Best European Fiction 2010* (Dalkey Archive Press, US), the novel *Fire Will Not Wake You* in Swedish (Ariel), in Danish (Husets), and Lithuanian (Versus aureus), and short story collection *Still Life with Pomegranate* in French (L'Archange Minotaure), in Czech (Kniha Zlin), and Slovenian (Modrijan).

## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE





## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

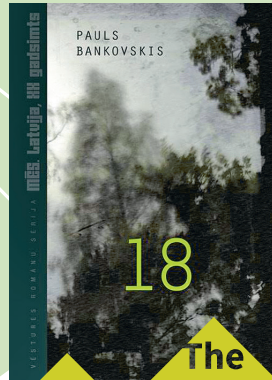


Photo: Girts Ragelis



Writer and journalist **PAULS BANKOVSKIS** (1973) was born in Līgatne, Latvia. He studied glasswork at the Riga School for Applied Arts as well as philosophy at the University of Latvia (1992–1996). His prose has been published since 1993. A prolific author, within a span of a decade he published

*18* was shortlisted for the 2014 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

It is autumn 1918. The war is supposed to be over (the truce between Germany and the Entente was signed on 11 November), but it is not. On 18 November 1918, Riga and Courland are under the Germans. Amongst all this chaos, destruction, hopelessness and mortal danger, a small group of Latvians got together in the middle of an occupied city and founded their own national state, something which would have seemed impossible even a year earlier.

“Every year, on the 18th of November, we fly the Latvian flag, solemn official events take place and people celebrate with their families and friends – perhaps less solemnly but certainly with more true feeling. It’s not surprising that nowadays the date 18 November, 1918 seems to have been a great celebration of the birth of the Latvian nation. And it hardly occurs to anyone

that at that time there were hardly very many celebrants. (...) The diary form became a natural medium in the novel: one writer is an eyewitness of the events of 1917–1918, whereas the other is our contemporary. One of them can only guess not just at what the next day will bring but even at the events taking place around him, whereas the other encounters not knowing as he tries to understand the past and its relation to today’s reality.” (From the afterword by the author)

Excerpts in English are available

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2014**

**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane, [dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)**

Selected titles in translation: *Reds, Rats and Rock’n’Roll* in Finnish (Like) and Czech (Argo) and the short story collection *School* in German (Akademie Schloss Solitude)

10 novels and two collections of short stories, as well as a children’s book and a book of non-fiction. His focus tends to shift from Latvian history, its myths, and legends to the realities of the recent Soviet past to the possibilities of the future. In late 2007, Pauls Bankovskis published his first children’s book, *The Tiny-Noggins’ Play House* (Mazgalvīši spēlē mājās), which was awarded the International Baltic Sea Region Jānis Baltvilks Prize in Children’s Literature and Book Art in 2008. His latest novel *18* (2014) talks about 1918, the year the Republic of Latvia was declared, and was published within a series of historical novels entitled *We. Latvia. The 20th Century*.

## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

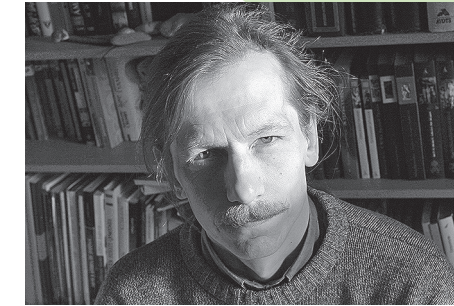


Photo: Kristaps Kalns



Writer and literary critic **GUNTIS BERELIS** (1961) was born in Cēsis. He studied physics and library science. He is one of leading literary critics in Latvia, and he is known for his prose-like essays. He is the author of *A History of Latvian Literature* (1999), a collection of essays about twentieth-century Latvian literature. Guntis Berelis has a blog entitled “Guntis Berelis Appraises: Writings on Literature” ([berelis.wordpress.com](http://berelis.wordpress.com)), where he publishes interviews with writers, articles on literature and literary criticism. Guntis Berelis has published two collections of short stories – *Mythomania* (Mitomānija, 1989) and *The Minotaur Hunt* (Mīnotaura medī bas, 1999) and two novels – *Fiery Bulls With Golden Horns* (Ugunīgi vēši ar zelta ragiem, 2007) and *Words Were of No Use* (Vārdiem nebija vietas, 2015).

*Words Were of No Use* was shortlisted for the 2015 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

It is 1913 in the coastal city Ventspils, where the first motion picture made in Latvia, called *Kur patiesība?* (Where Is Justice?) is being shot. A man with “golden hands” named Rudolf Tush and who is unafraid of any type of labour, finds himself joining the film crew by accident and begins building set decorations and doing other menial tasks. Nobody has the slightest idea that this man has a few well-hidden sinister passions. For example, he loves fire, gaining extraordinary amounts of joy from watching buildings burn to the ground, a fact confirmed by his reputation during the 1905 Revolution when he actively participated in burning down manors and castles. Tush has another peculiarity – he is mute. To be more precise, he has the ability to speak, but after a rather foolish encounter with a Kazakh military patrol in 1905, he made a decision to stop speaking entirely. One night, after hearty carousing in a local drinking establishment and watching his first-ever pornographic movie, he accidentally kills someone, and is forced to flee. The story then is transported to 1915. The First World War is raging. Tush is by no means a patriot or fond of the Russian empire, but he is happy about the war, seeing numerous opportunities to profit from it. He experiences combat in 1916, and at one point finds himself on a battlefield where everyone has died following a German gas attack. He runs into the same film crew he had worked with. The film crew had been thinking about making a film about the end of the world and believe authentic corpses would be great for the film. Tush begins planning his bright and happy future, but luck is once again not on his side. Tush is a character with a hidden darkness inside him; he is the kind of small-minded individual that, though he is entirely apolitical by nature, makes war possible at all.

Excerpt in English is available

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2015**

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## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

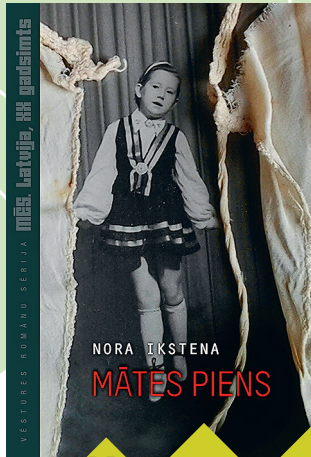


Photo: Andra Ceriņa



We Latvia The 20th Century

*Mother's Milk* was shortlisted for the 2015 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

The novel deals with the post-war period and follows the destinies of three generations of women, with the narrative focused mostly on the 1970s and 1980s. The mother, whose own mother has raised her without her real father, is a talented gynecologist who cannot accept the narrow space allotted to the individual by communist ideology. During her residency in Leningrad, she successfully – and in secret – performs an artificial insemination procedure on a young Russian woman, but the woman loses the child in a confrontation with the woman's brutal husband, who is a war veteran. The path to science is now blocked for the talented doctor and she is reassigned to work in a small country village. She takes along her daughter, who is now deprived of the loving care of her grandparents. The doctor suffers from clinical depression, placing the burden of everyday life on her young daughter's shoulders. The daughter too has to live with the inborn hostility of the system and, through the prism of her emotions, the turbulent events of the 1980s: the dismissal of a free-thinking teacher, the Chernobyl disaster, the death of several Soviet leaders, and the ensuing reform movements. The doctor's daughter grows up, going through unexpected twists and turns of betrayal. The novel is about abandonment – of a husband and father, of dreams and hopes, of work and point of views, of friends and loved ones. This path of suffering is made lighter by a motif of forgiveness: the daughter, who helps her mother survive, was not given milk from her mother's breast as a child, as the mother fears that by drinking her milk, her daughter might inherit her suffering and despair. The novel ends with the fall of the Berlin Wall – a breath of fresh air and freedom that the mother never wanted to see.

Excerpts in English are available

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2015**

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[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)**

Writer **NORA IKSTENA** (1969) was born in Riga. In 1998, she was guest editor of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* for an issue dedicated to Latvian fiction. She is the author of five novels *Celebrating Life* (Dzīves svinēšana, 1998), *The Virgin's Lesson* (Jaunavas mācība, 2001), *Amour Fou* (2009), *Besa* (2012), and *Mother's Milk* (Mātes piens, 2015), collections of short stories and fairy-tales, many books of biographical fiction, non-fiction, and essays. Her short story

*Elza Kuga's Old Age Dementia* was included in the prose anthology *Best European Fiction 2011* (Dalkey Archive Press). In addition to English, Czech, and German translations, her work has also been translated into Lithuanian, Estonian, Swedish, Danish, and Georgian.

Also famous for:

*Celebration of Life* is a novel about a peculiar woman named Eleonora has invited seven colourful people to her own funeral. Eleonora is peacefully laid to rest, but during the night following the funeral, these seven people, seven ghosts from the past, share their memories of Eleonora, with the stories serving as the book's "celebration of life." In sharing their memories about Eleonora, the storytellers wander about in space and time, embarking upon expeditions to distant metaphysical places.

Reading Nora Ikstena's novel is, first and foremost, an aesthetic experience. Its tone is serious, nostalgic, strangely unreal, and beautifully wise. One can sense a slight trace of decadently refined and capricious yearning towards making her works aesthetic, an element that also features strongly in her stories.

Excerpt in English is available

**Published by Atēna, 1998**

**Contacts: Nora Ikstena, [ikstena@apollo.lv](mailto:ikstena@apollo.lv)**

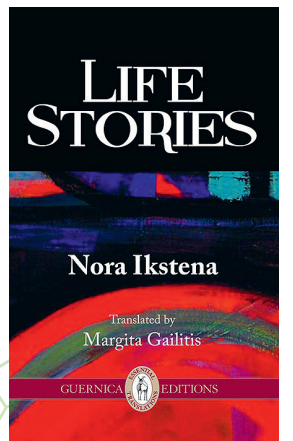
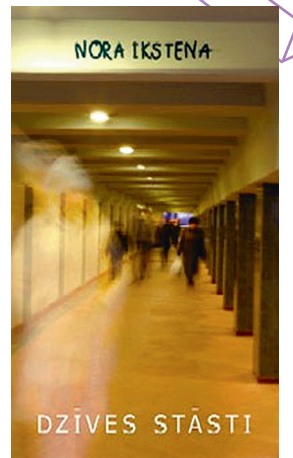
In talking about the inspiration behind her short story collection *Life Stories*, which won the 2004 The Annual Latvian Literature Award, she said that "I have written *Life Stories* virtually in the space of one breath – these stories have been imagined in such concentration, that I had to free myself from them. They came so naturally, that I am very happy to have returned to the short-story format. It seems to me that in these eight stories each individual and different life is so strikingly intense that it was not possible to place all into one novel ... Also in terms of style, I searched and found a different approach to each of the stories. I wanted to express myself more clearly and more simply."

Excerpt in English is available

**Published by Atēna, 2004**

**Contacts: Nora Ikstena, [ikstena@apollo.lv](mailto:ikstena@apollo.lv)**

Selected titles in translation: the short story collection *Life Stories* (Dzīves stāsti) in English (Guernica Editions) and Hindi (Vani Prakashan), the novel *Celebrating Life* (Dzīves svinēšana) in Swedish (Atlantis), Estonian (Huma), Danish (Rosinante), and Georgian (MVP), the novel *The Virgin's Lesson* (Jaunavas mācība) in Estonian (Loomingu Raamatukogu) and Lithuanian (Mintis), and the novel *Amour Fou* in Russian (Dienas Grāmata, Latvia)





## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

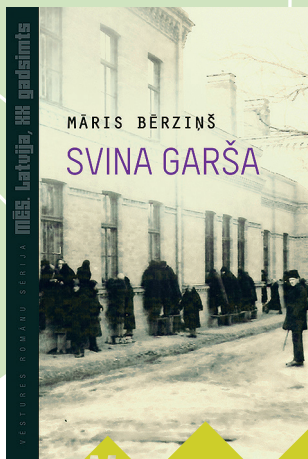


Photo: Kristaps Kalns



Born in 1962, **MĀRIS BĒRZIŅŠ** is a Latvian prose writer and playwright. He started writing relatively late in life, previously working in the Ministry of Economy, and was also in charge of setting up and managing several state

and municipal institutions. His first novel *A Dream of Eriks Traums* (*Ērika Trauma sapnis*) was published in 2003. His most popular book to date, *Gutenmorgen* (*Gūtenmorgens*, 2003), belongs to the absurdist tradition in short prose and is vaguely reminiscent of the works of Russian writer Daniil Kharmis. The book tells the story of an outlandish person named Gutenmorgen and his various exploits. *The Taste of Lead* (*Svina garša*, 2015) is Māris Bērziņš' fourth novel.

*The Taste of Lead* was the winner of the 2015 Baltic Assembly Prize and shortlisted for the 2015 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

Latvian writer and literary critic Ilze Jansone had this to say about the book: "Matīss, the main character created by Māris Bērziņš for his new novel, is not a war hero of any kind. He is an everyman who only gradually comes to realize what it means for him to belong to a certain nation, a young lad with the same desires as any other boy of his age has had throughout human history. Quite in line with many classical literary works having a historical focus, Matīss's ordinariness is precisely where the power of this novel can be said to reside. He is devoid of jingoism; the only engine driving him is his natural human need to enjoy his youth undisturbed and gradually find his ground, which is why his actions are not premeditated and derive from a simple love for all humankind.

Māris Bērziņš' novel could be seen as quite an extraordinary landmark in the literary landscape of Latvia, as its author has underlined themes that have not garnered particular attention thus far. The kinds of detail that has been predominant in Latvian works on the Second World War have been descriptions of battles, memories concerning legionnaires, the Siege of Kurzeme, the deportations, and the second period of Soviet occupation or, largely, the war activity and descriptions of the Communist regime, possibly due to the fact that it impacted Latvia for a longer period of time and with farther-reaching consequences than the German occupation. The horror and absurdity of the communist regime are described by Māris Bērziņš in precise detail pertaining to that initial period of occupation, in a spare and refined writing style, concluding the story with a narrative account of the occupation by the National Socialists."

Excerpts in English are available

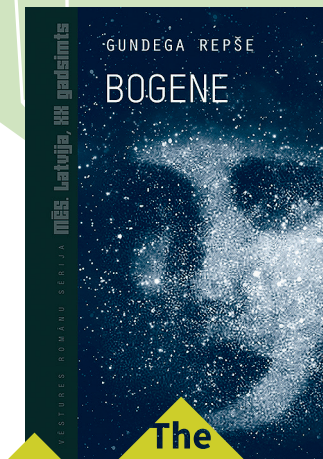
**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2015**

**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane, [dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
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## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer and art scholar **GUNDEGA REPŠE** (1960) was born in Riga. She studied art history and theory. She worked for the Latvian Artists' Union (1985–1992), and contributed to the literary journal *Liesma*, the newspapers *Labrīt* and *Izglītība un Kultūra*, and literary journal *Karogs*. Her prose has been published since 1979. Gundega Repše has published ten novels, including *Thumbelina* (*Īkstīte*, 2000), *The Orphanage* (*Bāreņu nams*, 2008), the trilogy *Heavy Metal* (*Smagais metāls*, Omnibus edition in 2012), *Nice People* (*Jauki ļaudis*, 2014), six collections of short stories and many books of non-fiction, including biographies, literary diaries, conversations with writers, and essays.

In her latest novel, *Bogene*, Gundega Repše sheds light on events that until now had received only pointed silence. Therein lies the symbolic gesture of

*Bogene*: to address the subject instantly, directly, and first-hand. Only then does the author let her readers regain their footing and gather up the threads of information. This is how we can come to understand the inner workings of silence. There's no single answer – just like with speech, silence is both a strength and a weakness. The opposing side consist of the victim and salvation. One of the main purposes is to articulate and express feelings that have been repressed for so long – and to reveal the violence and suffering for what they were: visceral, corporeal, immediate and in shocking contrast to the clear vision and soaring spirit always looking to the future.

Lote is on a train headed east in the sweltering summer of 1941. She remembers the past, but forbids herself to think about it, much less talk about it. Lote spirals into silence, shifting the trajectory of her life from a future where she experiences new love, hopes and dreams, to the present, the now, inwardly – to life, existence, expressing herself only in the simple and basic phrases she needs to survive. The minimalism of living, keeping your mouth shut and helping others – this is the world according to Lote, a mute and broken existence, an unlikely victim. Repše has portrayed her protagonist with subdued compassion, refraining from exaggeration and drama, yet still articulating the long-silenced suffering by giving it greater meaning.

Excerpts in English are available

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2016**

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Selected titles in translation: *The Tin Scream* (Alvas kļiedziens) in Swedish (Ariel) *Unsichtbare Schatten* (*Ēnu apokrifs*) in German (DuMont) and the short story *How Important Is It to be Ernest?* (*Cik svarīgi būt Ernestam?*) in English in the prose anthology *Best European Fiction 2013* (Dalkey Archive Press)

## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer and journalist **ARNO JUNDZE** (1965) was born in the town of Jaunpiebalga. He graduated from the Faculty of Education and has a Ph.D. in philology. He has worked in Latvian television for more than 10 years directing various programs

dedicated to culture and literature. He is also the editor-in-chief of *LZA Vēstis* magazine and the cultural news editor for the *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* newspaper. He has received numerous prizes for both his literary work and work in television. He has also published several books for children, including his latest book entitled *Christopher and the Order of Shadows* (Kristofers un Ēnu ordenis, 2015).

*Dust in the Hourglass* was shortlisted for the 2014 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

A naive young man dreams of a romantic future with a door open to endless possibilities, but ends up in Afghanistan in the hell of war where he is forced to do almost anything to salvage any semblance of a future. However in this future, it will be easier to kill than to love. A Lutheran minister, who is a Gulag survivor, serves only God, because the villagers often avoid even saying hello to him. A talented researcher at the turn of the millennium is dreaming about a career in science, but in order to support his family, he ends up selling tractors. A once famous journalist, who is now an addict, is excited about having gotten the scoop of his career without realizing that he is being played by the secret service. There are echoes from witch trials, death and love in Paris, a walk into the realm of silence and fragments of overheard phone conversations, secretly copied letters and text messages that the reader has to put together like pieces of a puzzle.

Excerpts in English are available

**Published by Zvaigzne, 2014**

**Contacts: Mrs. Bārbala Simsone, [barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv](mailto:barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv)  
[www.zvaigzne.lv](http://www.zvaigzne.lv)**

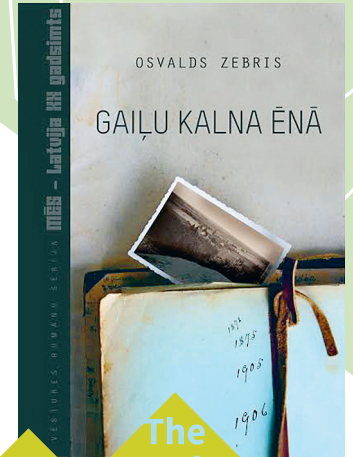
## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Born in 1975, **OSVALDS ZEBRIS** is a writer, publicist, and editor of several periodicals. *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* (*Gaiļu kalna ēnā*, 2014) is his third book. The first one, a collection of stories entitled *Freedom in Nets* (*Brīvība tīklos*, 2011), received the 2011 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut. His novel *People of the Wooden House* (*Koka nama ļaudis*) was shortlisted for the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award.



Photo: Kristaps Kalns



**We Latvia  
The 20th Century**

*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* was shortlisted for the 2014 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

It is 1905 in Riga – the Russian Tsar is slowly losing power over his vast empire, and the city is being rocked by worker riots, violence and pogroms. Revolution is in the air. Pitting brother against brother, the chaos forces people to choose a side. Among this upheaval, a former schoolteacher becomes involved in the revolution, but soon realizes that war will take much more than he is willing to give. The following year, a dramatic kidnapping of three children has Riga's police on edge. Who did it? What was their motive? The answer will shatter the lives of two families, as they struggle to understand who is guilty in a revolution where all sides are victims.

Award-winning Latvian author Osvalds Zebris weaves a powerful tale of a country's desire to become free against the backdrop of the 1905 Revolution in Tsarist Russia, an event that gave birth to some of the most dramatic events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Full translation in English is available

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2014**

**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane, [dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)**



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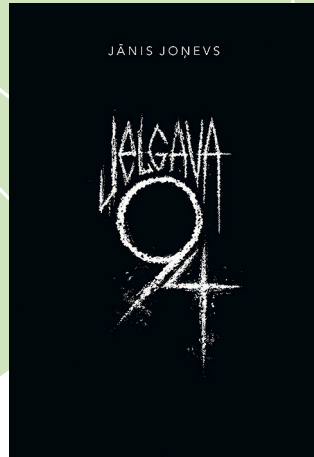


Photo: from the author's personal archive



Latvian writer **JĀNIS JONEVS** was born in 1980. He graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture. Since 2002 he has been working as a copywriter, reviewer and translator from French. His first novel *Jelgava '94* was published in 2013. It

has garnered acclaim from critics and readers alike, and received numerous awards: it received the 213 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut; in 2014 it received the 1 Kg of Culture Prize awarded by the LTV 1 television show 100 Grams of Culture; it was named among the hundred the most favourite Latvian books of all time on the television show Great Reading; the Children's Jury (a project involving young readers from all over Latvia) chose the book as their favourite book in the over 15 age group.

*Jelgava '94* was a winner of the 2014 European Union Prize for Literature and the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut.

Jonevs's debut proved to be a real hit in Latvia. The story takes place in a town called Jelgava and centres around the rather short-lived craze for heavy metal music in the 1990s. The reader is given a look at this world from the inside – the text is both an intimate diary of a youngster trying to find himself by joining a subculture as well as a skilful, detailed and almost documentary depiction of recent history, i.e. the beginnings of Latvia that had just regained independence.

The story seems even more captivating for that generation sharing the same perception of the world – Jonevs is the first among them who has managed to stir their memories by transforming the images of the period into full-fledged literature.

Full translation in English is available

**Published by Mansards, 2013**

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[www.apgadsmansards.lv](http://www.apgadsmansards.lv)**

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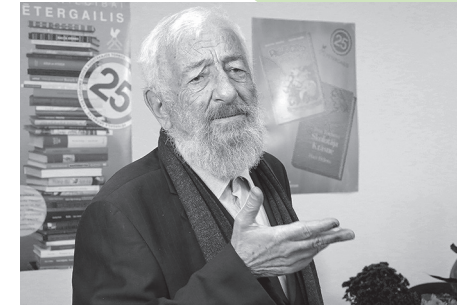


Photo: from the author's personal archive

Writer **JURIS ZVIRGZDIŅŠ** (1941) was born in Riga. He studied history and philology at the University of Latvia. He worked as an editor for numerous publishing houses and today is a freelance author. He published his first short story in 1982. Since that time, he has written novels, short stories, plays, essays and miniatures. It was in the 1980s that he ventured into children's literature. He is a three-time laureate of the Jānis Baltvilks Children's Book and Book Art Award for both his books as well as for his contribution to development of Latvian children's literature. He is also the author of the novel *Memoirs of Mr. Von Merkatz* (2003). His prose has been translated into several languages, including Russian, English, Italian and Lithuanian.

Zvirgzdiņš shows how, with the change of regimes, people also change. Their lives become a true dance on a tightrope or finding oneself on the edge of a knife blade. Haralds, the ever helpful Mrs. Olga, Miss Stege the dentist, the efficient Amēlia or Amītis, the artist and free-thinker Kalnavārņa, Eidis, who is able to adjust to any time-period, including wartime, the Jewish girl Ida, whom the author has provided with the opportunity in the novel's epilogue to unite with Eidis and to return to a once-more-independent Latvia in the 1990s from their home of many years, New York.

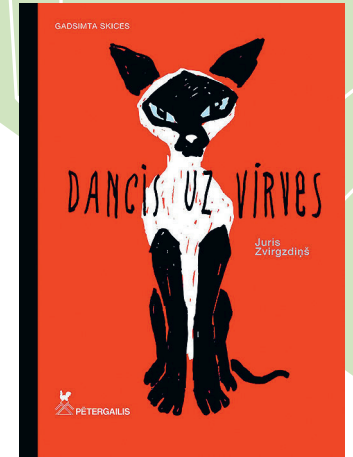
The author develops the plot of the novel unusually swiftly for Latvian literature. One scene quickly follows another; the many dialogues virtually allow the reader to take part in conversations. And, as is characteristic for Zvirgzdiņš – throughout so much that is tragic, from the many years of Soviet occupation, the arrival of the Nazis in Riga, the fleeing to exile from one's homeland – the author's characteristic humour permeates this work.

In describing the novel, one can call it grotesque, farcical, or sentimental, but it doesn't speak of what is most significant, which is that the unique style of Zvirgzdiņš is unlike any other in European literature.

Excerpt in English is available

**Published by Pētergailis, 2015**

**Contacts: Mrs. Inguna Cepīte, [petergailis@apollo.lv](mailto:petergailis@apollo.lv)  
[www.petergailis.lv](http://www.petergailis.lv)**



## THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION CRIME

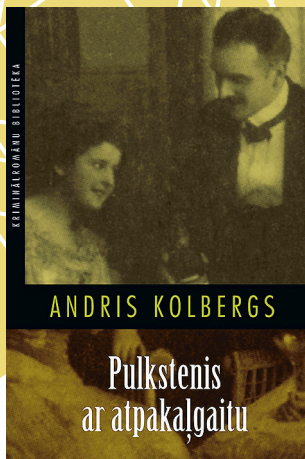
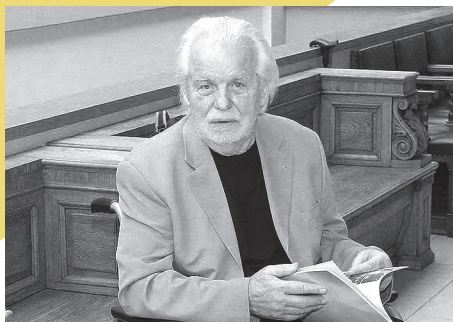


Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer **ANDRIS KOLBERGS** (1938) was born in Riga and studied at the Moscow Typography Institute from 1966 to 1968. He later worked at the Riga Train-Car Factory and at other factories. In the 1970s and 1980s, Kolbergs was one

of the most popular Latvian detective novelists. His works were published across the U.S.S.R. as well as in several European countries. During the late 1980s as the movement for democratic change came to a head, Kolbergs became the first chairman of the renewed Riga Latvian Society, and the president of the Latvian Detective Novel Association. More recently he has written various guidebooks to Riga. Several films have been produced based on Kolbergs's scripts and detective novels, including *Being Unnecessary* (Liekam būt, 1976), *Reflection in the Water* (Atspulgs ūdenī, 1977), *Gifts Over the Telephone* (Dāvanas pa telefonu, 1977), *Rally* (Rallijs, 1978), *Three Days for Contemplation* (Trīs dienas pārdomām, 1980), *The Double* (Dubultnieks, 1986), *Photograph of a Woman and a Boar* (Fotogrāfija ar sievieti un mežakuili, 1987), *Let's Not Talk About Love Right Now* (Par mīlestību pašreiz nerunāsim, 1988), and *Depression* (Depresija, 1991).

In 2010, his diary was published, which combines both an objective realism and subjective narrative. The book is a testimony of an era, a testimony of an eyewitness and person closely familiar with it.

*Time in Reverse* (2011), – it's 1919 in Latvia, a period of history brought to life by the master of the Latvian detective genre, Andris Kolbergs, with the expressive colours, flavour, and scents of that time. A reckless yet cunning burglary targetting a jeweler, a freshly independent Latvia and the people defending it, the charm of Riga and its outlying areas, riflemen, the Bermondts Affair, first love, corrupt cops, and the passions of the bordello, with a thrilling crime making the novel one that will completely capture your attention.

Excerpt in English is available  
**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2011**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane,**  
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**www.dgramata.lv**

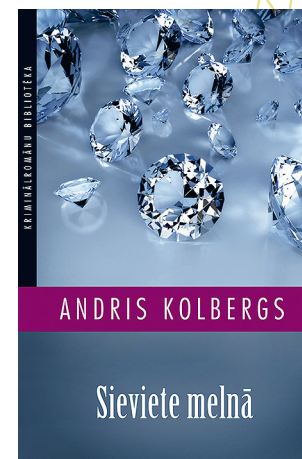
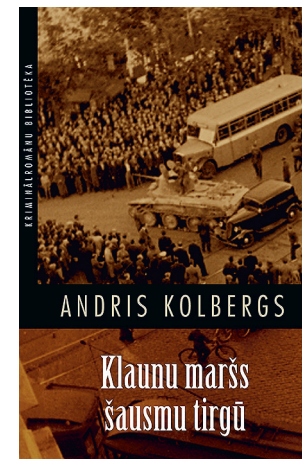
*March of the Clowns in the Market of Horrors* (2011) – which can be also read as a standalone work, this book is the sequel to the wonderful yet gripping historical detective novel *Time in Reverse*. Twenty years have passed, the Second World War is raging, and Latvia's independence has been extinguished. The same heroes – grey-haired jeweler Mendels Davidsons and his children, rifleman Ēriks Vāls and his beloved Hanna languishing in distant Germany, the refugee Alma and the skillful merchant Izraels Šermanis appear along with many others once more on a stage set by historical events. The Nazis rule Latvia, the Jews have been driven into the ghetto, and everyone is desperate to stay alive. The heavy burden of the last years has pushed Latvia's people to a breaking point, exposing and bringing their true qualities into clearer focus – qualities which in more peaceful times would have stayed hidden. A time of chaos and destruction when jealousy, hatred, lust, and a thirst for glory go hand in hand with true sacrifice and love.

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2011**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane,**  
**dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv**  
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*The Woman in Black* (2011) is the final volume of the trilogy devoted to Latvia's history in the 20th century. *Time in Reverse* and *March of the Clowns in the Market of Horrors* told the story of the birth of Latvia and the Second World War, while this book introduces the reader to the day-to-day realities of Soviet life. Former guerrilla fighters, Soviet veterans with memories of the front, rigged elections, and a young policeman who knows nothing of the culture or life during Latvia's interwar independence, but still wants more than anything to find love and have recognition at work...however it is then that a mysterious woman in black appears, who brings with herself not just bad luck but also a giant diamond. The apple-green diamond has been moving for years from owner to owner, and as diamonds do, leaving in its wake dead bodies and ruined lives. Who will become the owner of this priceless stone? And what use is it in a country where the only real wealth exists in good relations with the party elite?

Irony, extensive historical knowledge, and the ability to join events together into a thrilling and attention-grabbing tale are the reasons why Andris Kolbergs is deservedly called the master of the Latvian crime genre.

**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2011**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane, dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv**  
**www.dgramata.lv**





## THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION CRIME



Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer **ALDIS BUKŠS** (1985) has worked in different financial institutions in Latvia for nearly ten years. He debuted in 2015 with his first novel, a psychological thriller called *The Debt Collectors*.

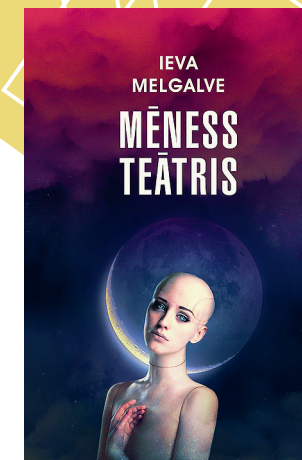
Worried about the increasingly tense relationship of their parents, little sister Krista calls her brother Ritvars in Birmingham, where he has been working for several years and asks him to come home. When Ritvars arrives to his native Riga, he finds out the painful truth: their father has been unable to cover their bank loan, and the Leidums family is on the brink of losing their mortgaged flat. Ritvars understands that he needs to do something to help ... This novel abounds in everything to capture readers' attention – an engaging plot, exciting chases, the criminal underworld, bankers and entrepreneurs, friendship and love, lies and betrayal, greed and honour. The action takes the reader to Spain, the UK and Latvia in a fast-paced thriller that is sure to keep up the suspense until the very end.

Excerpt in English is available  
Published by Dienas Gramata, 2015  
Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane  
dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv  
www.dgramata.lv

## THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION SCIENCE FICTION



Photo: Spigana Spektore



**IEVA MELGALVE** (1981) is a science fiction and fantasy writer, with influences of literary and experimental genres. She has also written books for children and young adults. Her first book was a collection that included her first short story and a play entitled *The Point of No Losses* (Bezzaudējumu punkts), which was published in 1999. In 2013, her play *Inhumanity* (Necilvēki) was self-published. Her fantasy novel *The Dead Don't Forgive* (Mirusie nepiedod) was published and subsequently shortlisted for the 2013 The Annual Latvian Literary Award for Best Prose Work. Her next novel *Arrow, Star and Laee* (Bulta, Zvaigzne un Laī) was published in 2014. Her novel *Moon Theatre* (*Mēness teātris*) combines dystopian fantasy with the storytelling techniques of literary fiction, creating a book that is both accessible and attractive to genre readers as well as to a wider audience that values intellectual challenges.

In an enormous theatre on many stages there are theatre performances all happening at the same time. The actors don't have their own identity outside of their stage lives, and no other objective than just to get the chance for a better part and try to not get on the playwrights' blacklists. Who are these playwrights, who is the audience, and do they really exist? No one knows (although a few of them – the inquisitive young Lapsa, for example – tries to find out). One of the book's central roles – an Actor who doesn't have his own name – desperately tries to

take part in the scenarios presented to him, but each time he tries to play his role honestly, it becomes more and more bizarre, tearing down the border between performance and truth. Similarly, the Mime – one of the androids equipped with artificial intelligence who maintains order in the theatre world – tries to play the role of guardian for the actors. However, as the Mime gradually awakens to a consciousness that becomes his own, he can no longer react to what is happening in the theatre without emotion.

Perhaps they could continue to play their parts if the planned performances weren't shaken by a resistance movement trying to realise the Actor's identity behind the scenes and possibly even do away with the theatre's power altogether. Yet their road isn't easy – the idealistic Malda, who's expecting a child, can no longer separate true love from performed love, and the tricky Gurdy, sensing imminent danger to the movement, tries to make a scapegoat out of the egotistical Vladi, who in turn has landed himself a good part, no longer wanting to resist the existing order...

Excerpt in English is available  
Published by Zvaigzne, 2015  
Contacts: Mrs. Bārbala Simsone, barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv  
www.zvaigzne.lv



## THE BEST SHORT STORY AUTHORS

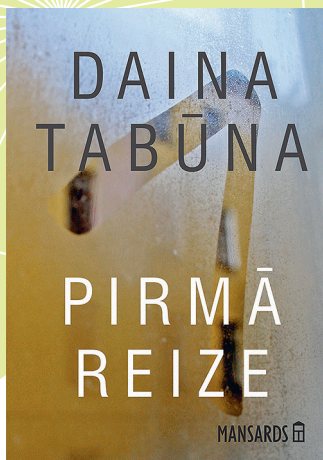


Photo: from the author's personal archive



**DAINA TABŪNA** (1985) is a Latvian writer. In 2010 she graduated from the Latvian Academy of Culture. Her short stories have been published in numerous Latvian publications, including *Luna*, *Karogs*, *Sans*, *Kulturas diena*, *Latvju teksti* and the online journal *Satori*. Her first short story collection entitled *The First Time* (Pirmā reize) was published in 2014, and was shortlisted for the 2015 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut. She lives and works in Riga.

*The First Time* was shortlisted for the 2014 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut.

How can you get ready for life as an adult if you always have to experience new and undiscovered things? The protagonists of her short stories deserve praise for their struggles, however life always has some sort of surprise in store for you, and suddenly nothing is ever the same again.

Excerpts in English are available  
**Published by Mansards, 2014**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Aija Rozenšteine, [aija@apgadsmansards.lv](mailto:aija@apgadsmansards.lv)**  
**[www.apgadsmansards.lv](http://www.apgadsmansards.lv)**

Although **ANDRA NEIBURGA** (1957) has only published two short story collections and a book for children, they have all become modern classics and an indelible part of contemporary Latvian literature.

Her literary debut with *Stuffed Birds, and Birds in Cages* (Izbāzti putni un putni būros, 1988) was warmly received at the time due to its sharp, uncompromising prose and the depth of her characters. After re-independence, her acclaim was aided by an extremely popular movie based on her children's book entitled *The Story of Tille and the Dog-Man* (Stāsts par Tilli un suņu vīru, 1992). The publication of her second and most recent collection of short stories *Push, Push* (Stum,stum, 2004) was named as the culture event of the year by the influential daily newspaper *Diena*.

Andra Neiburga's work has been published in anthologies and magazines in Francē, Germany, the UK, the US, Russia and elsewhere. A Swedish translation of *Push, Push* came out in 2007.

become a popular staple in secondary school curriculums, which hasn't lost its ability to surprise and even shock a new generation of readers.

Latvian literary critic Ieva Kolmane said the following of Neiburga's work: "All of her stories are constructed from the inside out, building from the characters' individual experiences, memories, thoughts and reflections (...). The great variety of her characters also considerably widen their appeal – even if there's a reader who hasn't spent a lot of time worrying about existential problems, they will have had to waste a considerable effort dealing with their lives and relationships in a manner similar to at least one the possibilities offered by Neiburga."

Latvian writer Pauls Bankovskis had this to say about her work: "The stories are full of drama and subtleties, which encapsule the narratives that would normally require a generational novel. Neiburga's "family" is her generation – the wounded souls, the unhappily happy people, the ones pushed and shoved by their lives and history, the ones left standing in the doorway between the 20th and 21st centuries. Her prose is colloquially grotesque yet at the same time harshly ironic, poetic and emotionally precise. (...) *Push, Push* is, without a shadow of doubt, most noteworthy book in 21st century Latvian literature."

Full translation in English is available  
**Published by Valters un Rapa in 2004**  
**Contacts: Ms. Andra Neiburga, [andra.neiburga@gmail.com](mailto:andra.neiburga@gmail.com)**

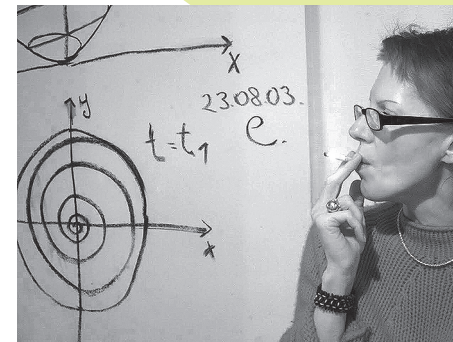


Photo: from the author's personal archive



## THE BEST SHORT STORY AUTHORS



## THE BEST SHORT STORY AUTHORS



Photo: Ģirts Raģelis



**INGA ŽOLUDE** (1984) is a prose writer, essayist and literary critic. She is the author of three novels and two collections of stories. She teaches creative writing at the University of Latvia and in workshops. Her story “*Dirty Laundry*” (translated by

Margita Gailītis un Vija Kostoff) is included in the anthology *Best European Fiction 2014* published by Dalkey Archive Press. Her prose has been translated into English, German, French, Swedish, Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian, Croatian, Lithuanian, and Armenian. She is a member of Latvian Writers Union and ambassador of the CISAC community of artists.

*A Solace for Adam's Tree* was a winner of the 2012 European Union Prize for Literature.

It brings together 13 short stories that are all united by an idea that is profound and compelling: to have a conversation about life and death.

Full translation in English is available  
**Published in Dienas Gramata, 2010**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane**  
[dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)

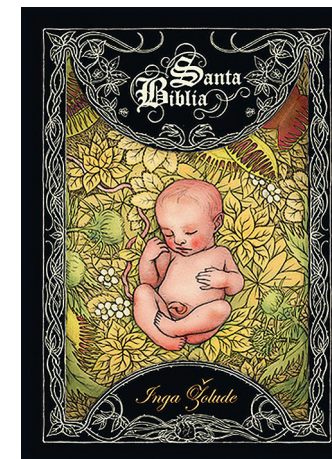
Her short story collection *Stories* was shortlisted for the 2015 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

This collection of seven short stories is writer Inga Žolude's fifth book. The stories in this collection have developed from observation, most often while observing herself, nature, and other people, as well as from listening closely, most often to silence, to herself, and to words. In talking about her book, Žolude stated that “I wanted to write stories that we carry inside us and which quite possibly none of us actually knows is there.”

Excerpt in English is available  
**Published in Dienas Gramata, 2015**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane**  
[dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)



“The protagonists of *Santa Biblia* are Tūrs, Levs and Nīma, who is also the narrator. The prototype for Nīma is clearly Mary, and the prototype for Levs is Joseph. They are on a mission to save the world: to find and destroy a microchip plant which produces microcircuits for controlling people and installing a certain kind of personality programme in them. In the course of the novel, the protagonists visit twelve stations, which may represent an analogy with the Catholic Stations of the Cross (albeit there are fourteen of those, each dedicated to a meditation on the passion of Jesus Christ). With the help of a talking, inexhaustible rucksack, the young people fulfil their mission encountering various illustrations to the decadence, animal nature and sins of mankind at a certain time and place. The location where the novel unfolds is abstract and unspecified, it resembles time tunnels and encompasses various regions. References to the Bible and Christianity dominate in the novel and they are intertwined with history: there is a Casper Hauser prototype from the 19th century, the hedonism of the ancient Romans, skyscrapers, and neutralization of the brain among other things.” (Literary critic Kristine Karklina)



Excerpt in English is available  
**Published by Dienas Gramata, 2013**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Dace Sparāne-Freimane**  
[dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv](mailto:dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv)  
[www.dgramata.lv](http://www.dgramata.lv)



## THE BEST SHORT STORY AUTHORS



Photo: from the author's personal archive



Writer, poet, playwright, and translator **DACE RUKŠĀNE** (1969) studied at the University of Latvia's Department of Biology and at the Latvian Academy of Medicine. In 2003, she attended the Sources 2 scriptwriting workshop in Vienna. Rukšāne is the author of three plays: *Florinda Will Arrive Tomorrow* (Rīt atbrauks Florinda), produced at the Daile Theater in 2001, *An Angel. Not Yet Fallen* (Kāds eņģelis. Vēl nekritis, 2001), and *I Didn't Tell You Everything* (Es tev nepateicu visu), performed at the Limbaži Theater in 2005. She translated Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina*

*Monologues*, which was performed at the Daile Theater in 2003, and Henry Miller's play *Just Wild About Harry*, which was staged at the Daile Theater in 2008. In 2007, her novel *Why Where You Crying?* (Kāpēc tu raudāji?) was published in German, as well as a Danish translation of her novel *A Little Affair* (Romāniņš). She has written several film scripts, magazine articles, and is the author of a weekly column in the magazine *Sestdiena*, a Saturday supplement to the newspaper *Diena*. She has been editor-in-chief of the magazine *Lilit* since 2004.

*Love Stories*, as the title suggests, are stories elucidating upon the subject of love. But readers may search in vain for classic, sentimental "pieces" as well as the literary provocations so characteristic of the author some years ago. These loves stories might be defined as a consciously toned down, profound book, rich in a quest for hidden issues of the human essence, revealing them delicately yet avoiding their brutal elimination. That is love – love imagined, unanswered, denied, accepted with and without conditions (which are often very peculiar conditions). Here, love is portrayed through the use of different images – animals, things, imagined landscapes. Love that is, often without even being aware of it, transformed into its opposite. The author's protagonists are both younger and older women that play out the only lives given to them in their own unique ways – the author leaves them to it, at times sliding into the surreal as well as fantasy and horror. Every story is almost a stand-alone, polished life episode, but the book forms a uniform whole – a sensitive, sharp insight into a woman's world (including her everyday life and chores) within the reality of the modern world.

Excerpts in English are available

**Published by Zvaigzne, 2015**

**Contacts: Mrs. Bārbala Simsone, [barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv](mailto:barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv)  
[www.zvaigzne.lv](http://www.zvaigzne.lv)**

## **ROALDS DOBROVENSKIS** (1936)

was born in Yelets, Russia and graduated from the State Choir School of Moscow in 1954. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory and at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute (1975). He worked as a journalist and writer in Habarovsk and Sakhalin from 1958 until 1973. During this time he wrote several books for children. In 1975 he married Latvian poet Velta Kalčiņa and moved to Riga, where he continued to work as a journalist. Dobrovenskis was deeply interested in Russian classical music and studied composers' biographies. His first novel *The Alchemist, or the Life of Composer Alexander Borodin* was published in Russian in 1984. It was followed by the recounting of another prominent composer's life in the novel *The Poor Knight. A Book About Mussorgsky*, which was published in 1986 in Russian. He came to prominence with his epic novel *Rainis and His Brothers. The Seven Lives of A Poet* (Rainis un viņabrāļi. Viena dzejnieka septiņas dzīves, 1999) about Latvian poet Rainis, arguably the country's most famous literary figure. The novel is constructed like a collage which includes many historical details, quotations from documents, diaries, literary works, reflections and speculation about the true motivation behind real historical events. He used a similar style for the historical novel *Magnus the Danish Prince* (Magnus, Dāņu princis, 2004) by deconstructing historical events in the territory of Latvia during the 16th century and drawing parallels to events in the 20th century.

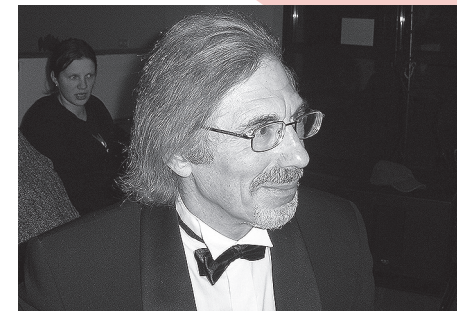
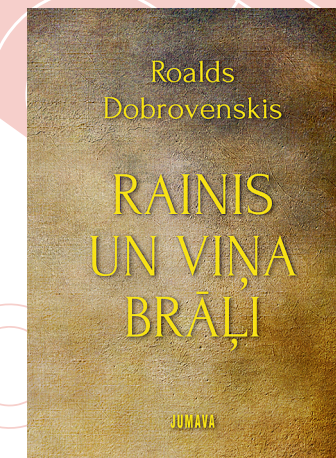


Photo: from the author's personal archive



The title of the biographical novel *Rainis and His Brothers. The Seven Lives of A Poet* is more than just a melodramatic literary device. The life of Rainis, Latvia's preeminent poet, dramatist, statesman and thinker evolved in such a way that on numerous occasions his literary and political work brought him to the brink of almost total collapse, after which he was forced time and time again to start his life over. There was no need for him to wait for or invent complexities in his life – it was as if the plot for a story of epic proportions was laid out right before him. It was a case where fact was indeed stranger than fiction.

The focus of the novel rests on the lives of people who had a profound influence on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the reader is taken up in a whirlwind of dramatic events that changed the course of history.

Excerpt in English is available

**Published by Jumava, 1999**

**Contacts: [izdevnieciba@jumava.lv](mailto:izdevnieciba@jumava.lv)  
[www.jumava.lv](http://www.jumava.lv)**



## BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

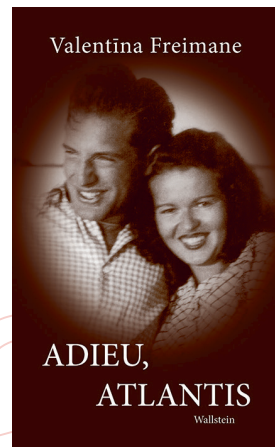


Photo: from the author's personal archive



*Farewell to Atlantis* was the winner of the 2010 Annual Latvian Literature Award. In her memoir, film scholar Valentīna Freimane (together with Gunta Strautmane) talks about pre-war Paris and Berlin, about legendary film stars she has seen close up, and about regular

Economics (1940). Valentīna Freimane lost her parents in the Holocaust but was able to stay alive by hiding with acquaintances. She graduated from the Department of History of the University of Latvia (1949), and did her residency at the Theatre Institute of Moscow (1971). She received her PhD in Art in 1992. Freimane's articles were published in the magazine *Theatre and Life* (Māksla and Teātris un dzīve), and she is the author of the books *50 Years of the Liepāja Theatre* (1958) and *Personalities and Phenomena* (1986). She was awarded the Riga Film Museum's prize for lifelong contribution to film education in Latvia in 1994.

trips as a teenager from Riga to Berlin and back. Going back to her childhood and early youth memories, the author describes the various environments in which she grew up: the high-finance bourgeoisie and artists' milieu of Paris and Berlin, and particularly their film world with personalities well known from the history of cinema; the Riga Jewish, Baltic German and Belarusian circles and their lifestyles, as well as schools in Berlin and Riga. It is then she depicts the collapse, destruction and annihilation of all of this during the years 1940–1945, along with the particular culture that was characteristic of people in this part of the world. She has endeavored to provide her outlook as a child and a teenager without projecting an analysis of events that comes in the latter stages of one's life, and to memorialize those people who, endangering their own lives, helped her and gave her shelter during the Holocaust in German-occupied Latvia. Her memoir encompasses an unusual variety of national, social, geographical and cultural milieus in the 1920s and 1930s up to 1945, which marks the end of the war and the beginning of the long-term Soviet occupation of Latvia.

**Published by Atēna, 2010**  
**Contacts: Stefan Diezmann, [s.diezmann@wallstein-verlag.de](mailto:s.diezmann@wallstein-verlag.de)**  
**[www.wallstein-verlag.de](http://www.wallstein-verlag.de)**

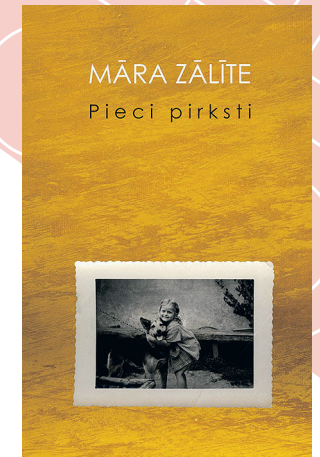
Published in Germany (Wallstein Verlag) and Lithuania (Versme). A Russian translation was published by Atēna in Latvia.

Theatre and film scholar **VALENTĪNA FREIMANE** was born in 1922 in Riga. She grew up in Paris and Berlin, where her father worked as a legal consultant for the German film studio UFA, and later studied at the University of Latvia's Department of

Poet and playwright **MĀRA ZĀLĪTE** was born in 1952 in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, where her family was deported in 1941 by the Soviet regime. When Zālīte was four years old, her family returned to Latvia. In parallel to her writing career, Zālīte has worked at the Latvian Writers' Union, been the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Karogs*, and headed a copyright agency of Latvia. Māra Zālīte is the author of 5 poetry collections and 21 staged plays and musicals, several children's books and collections of essays, as well as the novel *Five Fingers* (Pieci pirksti, 2013). She has won numerous literary awards, including the prestigious J. G. Herder Prize in 1993. She is an emeritus member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Her works have been translated into German, Russian, English, Estonian, Lithuanian, Swedish and many other languages.



Photo: from the author's personal archive



*Five Fingers* was the winner of the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Prose. It is a fictionalised childhood memoir in which the author describes her family's return from Siberia in the 1950s and life in Latvia in the late 1950s and

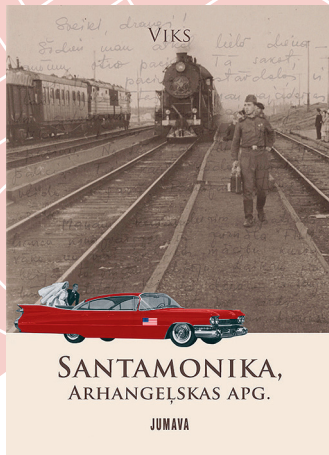
early 1960s. In terms of quality, the book matches the best of Latvian autobiographical literature, including the trilogy *Bille* by Vizma Belševica.

“Up to now, Zālīte has been best known as a poet and playwright. [...] Poetry and drama are present in *Five Fingers* as well; the best of the writing in the book involves a combination of precise poetic details and dramatic purposefulness up to the very end where the protagonist Laura promises to fulfil the wish expressed by her grandfather before his death – to give his wedding ring to his son Reinis who has disappeared without a trace after being deported to Siberia “once he returns.” That means that she takes on the task to remember. The five fingers is a metaphor for the apple tree, in the branches of which Laura sets up a perch, and a metaphor for God's hand; it is also the fingers of Jewish opera singer Asia broken during an interrogation by the Cheka [...]. The repressive instrument, the ubiquitous Cheka, has been generalized as an absolute evil in the character of the Ogre, at the same time not paying much heed to political correctness, which is that other enemy of freedom.” (Egils Zirnis, *Kdiena*)

**Full translation in English is available**  
**Published by Mansards, 2013**  
**Contacts: Mrs. Aija Rozenšteine, [aija@apgadsmansards.lv](mailto:aija@apgadsmansards.lv)**  
**[www.apgadsmansards.lv](http://www.apgadsmansards.lv)**

Selected titles in translation: The play *Das Gericht* (Tiesa) in German (Berlin & Riga) *Margaret* (Margarēta) in Lithuanian (Vaga); the novel *Five Fingers* in Estonian (Randvelt Kirjastus), and an excerpt from *Five Fingers* included in the *Best European Fiction 2015* anthology (Dalkey Archive Press).

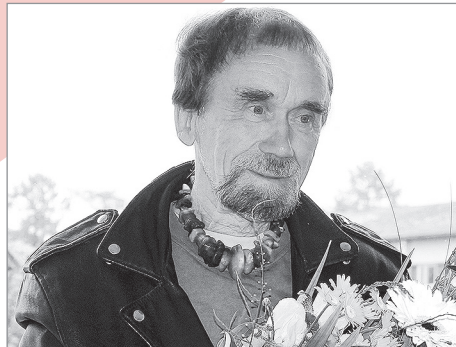




*Santa Monica. The Arkhangelsk Oblast* (Santamonika, Arhangeļskas apg.) is Viks's most recent book, which encapsulates his life between the beginning of 1962 and July 1964, a period when he served in the Soviet army. Despite the story having taken place more than fifty years ago, he paints a vivid picture of the people, events and situations he saw there. He was helped in this not only thanks to the letters he exchanged with his family, but also his memories of those times which made such a lasting, visceral impression on him. Viks has said that he drew inspiration from the fact that the experience was akin to suddenly finding himself in a parallel world, his previous knowledge of which had merely been gleaned from science fiction books. Unlike fiction, however, it was all for real.

Published by Jumava, 2015  
Contacts: [izdevnieciba@jumava.lv](mailto:izdevnieciba@jumava.lv)  
[www.jumava.lv](http://www.jumava.lv)

Photo: Eva Eglīte



Latvian poet and writer **VIKS** (real name Viktors Kalniņš, 1939) studied English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the University of Latvia. From 1974 his main occupation has been writing. He has written lyrics for many musical works composed by his brother, famous Latvian

composer Imants Kalniņš, as well as other notable Latvian composers. He is the author of several poetry collections, short story collections, autobiographical novels and many popular children's books. He also has translated both poetry and prose from English. His most notable works include the poetry collections *Communications* (Komunikācijas, 1978), *An Electronic Rascal* (Elektroniskais pagāns, 1986), the short story collection *A Dangerous Place* (Bīstamvieta, 2009), the children's books *A Complicated Sparrow* (Sarežģītais zvirbulēns, 1982) and *Klaidis in the World Fairy Tales* (Klaidis pasakuzemē, 1983). His poetry has been influenced by American poetry, especially the work of E. E. Cummings. His lyrical poetry is full of experiments with the texts' layout and syntax. His prose is mostly autobiographical, full of memories about real-life events, places and people. His children's books have been adapted and made into two highly popular Latvian animation films: *A Complicated Sparrow* (Sarežģītais zvirbulēns, 1983) and *Ness and Nesija* (Ness un Nesija, 1991).

**ILONA BALODE** (1982) is a writer and musician. Her novel *Riga-Beijing: Don't Try This at Home* (2012) is her debut as a writer.

A former actress at the Latvian National Theatre, today she writes book reviews and articles for the Latvian weekly magazine *IR*. Together with her husband Rolands Ūdris, she is part of the band Ūdris & Balode. She lives and works in Riga. The novel *Riga-Beijing* garnered widespread acclaim by both readers and critics, and was shortlisted for the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut. The novel also won the Delfi Readers' Sympathy Award and Janis Roze bookstores' Bestseller Award.



Photo: from the author's personal archive



*From Riga to Beijing* is the story of a more than 7-month long journey by Latvian actress Ilona Balode and musician Rolands Ūdris that took them from Latvia's capital of Riga all the way to Beijing. The trip was rather unconventional for them – Balode and Ūdris went without any sort of savings, relying on luck, people's goodwill and perseverance. During that time they lived both like vagabonds as well as kings – they saw the life of musicians playing on the street and in clubs, and slept in hotels, parks, train stations and on beaches. They met people from all walks of life, saw the contradictions of the Caucasus, the wonders of the Muslim world, the peculiarities of the Hindus, the hospitality of Pakistan, as well as the pluses and minuses of China's socialism. The book contains the tender, funny and at times unbelievable experiences they had in 16 countries they visited during their journey: Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Tibet, and China.

Full translation in English is available  
Published by Zvaigzne, 2012  
Contacts: Mrs. Bārbala Simsone, [barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv](mailto:barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv)  
[www.zvaigzne.lv](http://www.zvaigzne.lv)





## TRANSLATIONS GRANTS FOR FOREIGN PUBLISHERS PUBLISHING LATVIAN LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

The Latvian Writers' Union administers a number of grant programmes that focus on the promotion of Latvian literature and publishing abroad. The Latvian Writers' Union organises regular open calls for foreign publishers and supporting translators of Latvian literature.

The Latvian Writers' Union has launched a grant programme called "Support for Foreign Publishers Publishing Latvian Literature" and invites applications from publishers around the world.

Information about the grant programme, rules and regulations, application procedures and documents can be found on the Latvian Writers' Union website at [www.rakstnieciba.lv/en/support](http://www.rakstnieciba.lv/en/support)

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E-mail: [rakstnieki@apollo.lv](mailto:rakstnieki@apollo.lv)  
[www.rakstnieciba.lv](http://www.rakstnieciba.lv)  
[www.latvianliterature.lv](http://www.latvianliterature.lv)

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**JAYDE WILL, Project Manager**  
[jayde@latvianliterature.lv](mailto:jayde@latvianliterature.lv)

