

BOOKS TO FALL FOR

LATVIA. ADULT FICTION, 2018

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BOOKS TO FALL FOR. ADULT FICTION 2018

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is providing grants for translation and publishing of Latvian literature,
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E-mail: lga@gramatizdeveji.lv



Ministry of Culture
Republic of Latvia



Latvia
100

LATVIAN
LITERATURE

(IN)SCRIBE YOUR CODE

Why literature? This question – which contains both the answer and the attitude that gave rise to the question in the first place – pops up from time to time in a small nation with a small language. Smouldering doubts: does the novel really teach us to know ourselves and the world better? But even doubts can be rewarding – Latvian literature at the beginning of the 21st century surprises us with its diversity.

These are the works of those who understand and try to predict life, documentarians of the latest fads and shapers of their nation's beginnings, storytellers of their family origins and the adventures of folk heroes, ponderers of "the big questions" and survivors of these answers who follow in the same craft. Synthesizers, creators, encoders of the essential code that shapes each and every one of us.

No, this isn't just because in another, say, two thousand years someone might consider us feverish twitches in the birth of yet another "real" or "authentic" world, but for the sake of today. Because of what's happening here and now – because of what's happening to you, reader.

A book can't heal a nation's problems. Writing speaks to each of us differently, echoing and searching for all that's most worthwhile inside us, all that is good. For the humanity that was written into our source code as a law essential to survival.

We hope you seek and find the echoes of this code in the diversity of the works of Latvian writers and poets!

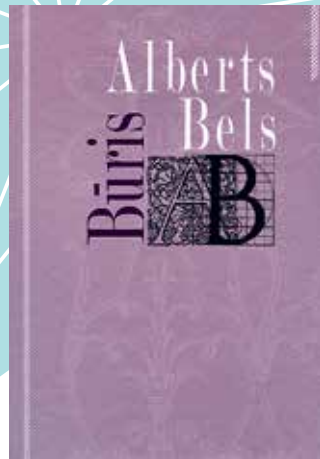
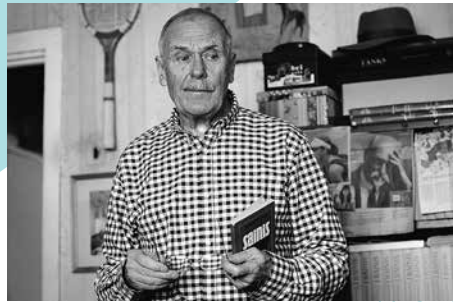


Photo: Kristaps Kalns



ALBERTS BELS
(né 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 College of

Scriptwriting. His first work of fiction 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 modernist and postmodernist literary devices in his work, often juxtaposing parallel stories that take place in different historical periods.

The Cage is about an architect, Edmunds Bērzs, who is locked up in a cage in the forest by a criminal, Kārlis Dindāns. Criminal investigator Strūga is searching for the architect, who seems to have disappeared without a trace, and in the process, he gradually gets to know Bērzs – a typical representative of the middle class. He stumbles by chance onto the tracks of Dindāns, who out of some inexplicable jealousy is keeping Bērzs captive 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. Bērzs 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 would be worth thinking about more seriously? It presents the possibilities of thinking without being controlled by the ruling power. To think, without preconceptions and fear of ideological watchdogs, about concepts such as human self-assurance and self-respect, about the possibilities as well as the limits of each separate individual.”

Literary researcher Viesturs Vecgrāvis

“Bēls 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 Bēls is trying to show, with cool irony, that a cage is no means for the development of a better person.”

Literary theorist Jautrīte Salīņa

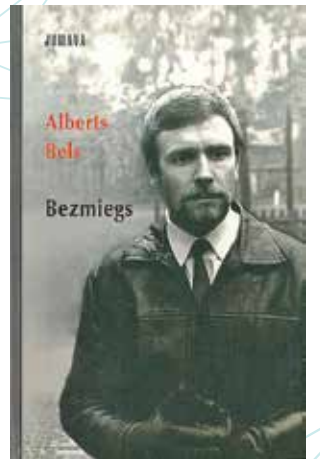
Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2015 (originally published by Liesma, 1972)
176 pages

Contact: Bārbala Simsons, barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv
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The novel *Insomnia* takes place in a block of flats in 1960s Soviet Latvia, and revolves around the main character Eduards Dārziņš and a woman named Dina, whom he spots running outside near his building one night. She is visibly shaken, and so he invites her into his flat, where she promptly falls asleep, and remains as such for some time. After waking 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, during a time that the Teutonic Knights are 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 make a decision on their future fate: either – 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, and 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 understand that, as her entire behavior bore witness to this, besides insomnia had sharpened my senses”
(from *Insomnia*, translated by Jayde Will)

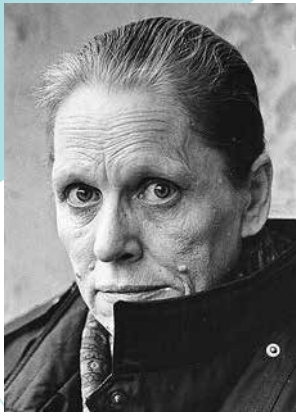


Published by Jumava, 2003 (originally published by Liesma, 1987)
142 pages

Contact: izdevnieciba@jumava.lv
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Photo: Gunārs Janaitis



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 Riga and lived there all her life, and thus the city plays a prominent role in her writing, especially in her semi-autobiographical trilogy *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* in 1969, her publications were banned for several years for what was perceived as an anti-Soviet sentiment in her work. Her short story collection *Misfortune at Home* (Nelaime mājās, 1979) was also immensely popular – simultaneously funny and sad, and 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. Belševica is best known, however, for *Bille*, an honest retelling 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.

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

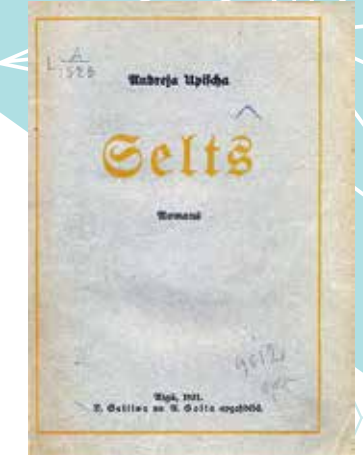
Bille has been published in Swedish and Russian translation, while selections of her poetry have been published in translation in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

Published by Mansards, 2016 (originally published by Mežābele, 1992)
296 pages

Contact: info@akka-laa.lv
Foreign rights sold in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland



Photo: Mārtiņš Lapins



ANDREJS UPĪTS (1877–1970) was an author, literary scholar, and literary critic. He lived through several different eras and their contradictions, 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 succession of 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).

The novel *Gold* (Zelts) was serialized in periodicals in 1914 and published as a novel in 1921. This book, like most of Upīts' writing, contains a marked analysis of social issues. Several artistic techniques, symbols and motifs characteristic of Upīts – also used in his later works – appear in 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 inherent humanity.

Augusts Sveilis Jr., the oldest son of a poor small-town tailor, is at the center 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 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.

Published by Atēna, 1998 (Originally published by Augusta Golta apgāds in 1914)
326 pages

Contact: info@akka-laa.lv
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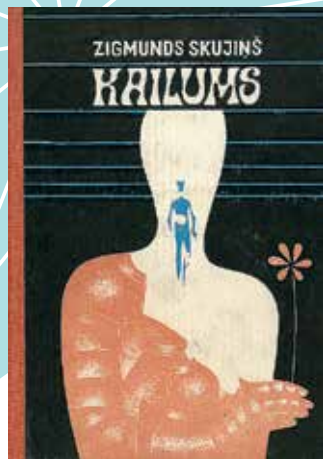


Photo: Inga Skujiņa

ZIGMUNDS SKUJIŅŠ (1926) is the author of many remarkable novels, film scripts, plays, and essays, and is one of Latvia's most translated writers. He debuted with a short 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 short story collections *Attack on the Windmill* (*Uzbrukums vēdzirnavām*, 1976), *Storyteller's Sunday* (*Stāstītāja svētdiena*, 1995), and *Magic and Ink* (*Buršana un tinte*, 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 a 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 have been made based on the book, and it's still the Skujiņš novel that most people first come into contact with. The novel's protagonist, Aleksandrs Draiska, comes to 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, 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 his army friend who came to the factory town after falling in love with the girl from the letters, deciding to masquerade as his friend in order to find her.

Published by Mansards, 2005 (originally by Liesma, 1970)
213 pages

Contact: Jānis Oga, janis@apgadsmansards.lv
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The narrative of the novel *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* is split into two parallel stories. On the one hand we have a story of 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 pains she discovers that her husband had been torn in two during a battle, and that his lower half had been stitched to 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 contemplating at great length 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.

Published by Mansards, 2009 (Originally published by Preses nams, 1999)

Contact: Jānis Oga, janis@apgadsmansards.lv
Foreign rights sold to Italy, United Kingdom, Macedonia, Sweden

Selected titles in translation: *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* in English (Arcadia, UK), Macedonian (Prozart Media) and Swedish (Tranan); *The Bed with the Golden Leg* in Estonian, Russian, and Bulgarian; *Memoirs of a Young Man* in Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish, Czech, Ukrainian, and Hungarian; *Man in His Prime* in English, Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Ukrainian; *Nakedness* in English (Vagabond Voices, UK), Estonian and Russian; *The Grandsons of Columbus* in Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Georgian.





Photo: Gunārs Janaitis



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.

Epiphanies (1978) is full of moments of insight, flashes that combine essay-like meditations, journalism, irony, and philosophical conclusions. The author himself has said of *Epiphanies*: “They're impulses, little flashes whose light illuminates a few moments in life especially brightly. Sometimes these impulses can seem contradictory; sometimes, as impulses tend to be, that's exactly what they are. Yet as all the book's impulses come together, they show us what life is, from birth until our journey into the afterlife.”

The motif of the road, the idea of an individual's and nation's independence, the creation of self-confidence, a tendency to seek intellectual freedom, and endless growth all appear in *Epiphanies* as they do throughout all of Ziedonis' writing. In his initial works, we can sense discontent with alleged truths; this is why he challenges the world of dogma and its limitations. Over time, the author's efforts to break apart and reshape the world develop into a longing to understand it thoroughly and to try to live in accordance with cosmic rhythms. Ziedonis was also deeply influenced by Latvian folklore and the Upanishads.

“In *Epiphanies*, Ziedonis persistently preaches logic in the absurd, truth in the false, heaviness in the buoyant, many sides to the one, usefulness in the useless, and so on. Ziedonis always strives to break the stereotypes of perception and the inertia of thought processes, looking at very familiar themes and symbols from an unexpected and often paradoxical point of view.”

Literary critic Guntis Berelis

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2011 (Originally published by Liesma, 1971)
304 pages

Contact: info@akka-laa.lv

Selected titles in translation: *Colourful Fairytales for Children* in Italian (Damocle edizioni), *Each Day Catches Fire* in English (Red Dragonfly Press, USA).

THE NOVEL SERIES



The Novel Series *We.*

Latvia. The 20th Century.

The historical novel series *We. Latvia. The 20th Century* is about the experience of one nation during the past century that forged its own independence, lived through the horror of two world wars, the Soviet era, and the regaining of its independence, which are just a few of themes covered in the series.

2011 marked the publication of the short story collection *We. The 20th Century*, the making of which was brought about by Latvian writer Gundega Repše. The book, which contains stories from 12 female Latvian authors, is a literary summary of Latvia in the 20th century. This collection became the impetus behind a much larger project – the historical novel series *We. Latvia. The 20th Century*.

A total of 13 Latvian authors were invited by Repše to take part in the creation of the series, each choosing to take a specific period of 20th-century Latvian history. The primary thread running through the series has been the exhaustive research of documents and other available materials that have served 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 12 novels published in the series so far, 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)

“A 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)

“The Glass Shards” by Inga Gaile (2016)

“A Room” by Laima Kota (2016)

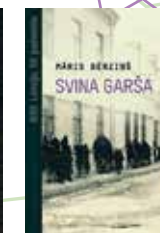
“The Rumble” by Inga Ābele (2017)

“Officers' Wives” by Andra Manfelde (2017)

“There” by Kristīne Ulberga (2017)

“Red Mercury” by Arno Jundze (2017)

“Teachers” by Andris Akmentiņš (TBP, 2018)



THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: Zane Emštreite



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. She has become successfully involved in several genres of literature, publishing 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), a collection of poetry *Night Pragmatist* (Nakts pragmatīķe, 2000), as well as a book of plays entitled *Plays* (Lugas, 2003). *High Tide* was the winner of the 2008 Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature.

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 joke that 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 might 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 whether what happened a long time ago really happened. Who 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. So 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?

Published by Dienas Grāmata in 2008

320 pages

Contact: Dace Sparāne-Freimane, dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv

Foreign rights sold in the USA, Sweden and Albania

Selected works in translation: *High Tide* in English (Open Letter Press, US), Swedish (Ariel) and Albanian (Antolog Books), *Fire Will Not Wake You* in Swedish (Ariel), Danish (Husets), and Lithuanian (Versus aureus), short story collection *Still Life With Pomegranate* in French (L'Archange Minotaure), Czech (Kniha Zlin), and Slovenian (Modrijan), *Wicker Monk* in Lithianian (Elges ledykla).

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: Girts Rāgelis



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). He has been publishing works of prose since 1993. A prolific author, within a span of a decade Bankovskis had published 10 novels and two collections of short stories, as well as a children's book and a book of nonfiction. 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* (Mazgalviši 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) focuses on 1918, the year the Republic of Latvia was declared. *18* was shortlisted for the 2014 Annual Latvian Literature Award.

Reds, Rats and Rock'n'Roll examines in retrospect the era of socialism in Latvia. The action takes place between the years 1978-89, the most severely tarnished phase of Soviet splendor. Various colorful characters live their lives in the pages of this book: the thoroughly drunk poet Harry Mikelson, who, for the consolidation of his career, becomes a spokesperson for the Cheka; the old Cheka official who commits suicide for unknown reasons; the swimmer and potential champion Eva Kallas and her romance with the somber Israeli spy Joren, who doesn't quite know whom he works for and what he gains from his spying; the ruffian Zmejs and his comrades; Jozef, who has decided to join the army; as well as an endless number of other individuals. Each character has a separate storyline, and at first glance it seems they do not have and could not have anything in common.

Published by Valters un Rapa, 2002

301 pages

Contacts: Pauls Bankovskis, telomera@gmail.com

Foreign rights sold in the United Kingdom, Finland and Czech Republic

Selected titles in translation: *18* in English (Vagabond Voices) *Reds, Rats and Rock'n'Roll* in Finnish (Like) and Czech (Argo) and the short story collection *School* in German (Akademie Schloss Solitude)

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

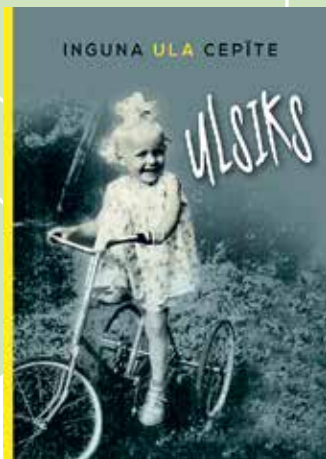


Photo: Zane Ernštreite



INGUNA ULA CEPĪTE (1960) grew up in the family of noted Latvian choir conductors Ausma Derkēvica and Imants Cepītis. Since 1991 she has been the director of the publishing house *Pētergailis*, which she has developed into one of the leading publishers of textbooks and original Latvian literature in Latvia. *Ulsiks* is her first book-length work of prose for adults.

This apparently simple yet subtly painful tale of childhood memories shows life in Soviet-occupied Latvia during the 1960s and 1970s. At times the bitter secrets of the Soviet dictatorship invade the childhood of this small, inquisitive, mischievous girl named Ulsiks.

Through an environment of culture – her father’s vast cultural knowledge; the immense combined Song Festival choir conducted by Ulsiks’ mother’s knowledgeable hand; and the many individuals from the art world (though anonymous figures in this child’s world, known to her only by their nicknames) – the characters who surround Ulsiks work to keep the cultural DNA of the nation safe, and keep little Ulsiks and her childhood safe, too.

“This book is a perfect product of our time both as a memoir and as a literary event. It pokes at the eternal question from a counterpoint position – what happened and what will happen when Ulsiks transforms into a completely different being, meets her destiny, while remaining a symbol of eternal childhood in this life.”
Gundega Repše, author

“It’s easy to walk along a bright path even in a dark time. Inguna Cepīte’s book is just such a path through the 1960s and 1970s – a journey back to childhood and through childhood with Ulsiks – a magnet for trouble – through her mischief and observations about the world, which are not judgemental, but instead share in the joy of each day’s novelty.”

Anita Rožkalne, literary critic

Published by Dienas Grāmata, 2018
256 pages

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THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: Andra Cerīna



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), along with collections of short stories and fairy-tales, and books of biographical fiction, nonfiction, 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 in Lithuanian, Estonian, Swedish, Danish, and Georgian.

Nora Ikstena’s trilogy *Three* contains three novels: *Celebrating Life* (1998), *The Virgin’s Lesson* (2001), and *Mother’s Milk* (2015). The thread connecting these works is the attempt by mothers and daughters to discover, during different eras, a way to live without losing their voice, without becoming “a bell without its chime”. *Celebrating Life* resounds as a prelude to this trilogy, like a poetic conjuring attempting to disentangle the unbreakable ties that bind the feminine trinity of mother, daughter, and grandmother, with the most significant and traumatic of these being death and its acceptance. The first novel brings with it an immense, uncontrollable wave of emotion, though it provides no answer to the question – *why does it hurt?* The second novel, *The Virgin’s Lesson*, is more sentimental, though at the same time much more grounded, and serves as a bridge connecting the first and third novels of the trilogy, allowing the author’s alter ego in *Mother’s Milk* to finally find the courage and voice to call pain by its true name.

“Works interwoven by three very different threads (self, destiny, time) flow together into a trilogy, are reborn on a new level, in a completely different type of text. Practically an epic. Also – the very essence of this author’s creative work.” Author Arvis Kolmanis

“If it were a wine, I’d say: it’s full-bodied, blood red in colour, like an invitation to return to where it all began, with the unsettled bouquet of smouldering wood and the mineral notes of its native terroir and tannins of sensitive imagination on the palate, but with an aftertaste that has the complex and long lingering notes of smoke.” Author Inga Ābele

Published by Dienas grāmata, 2017
352 pages

Contact: Dace Sparāne-Freimane, dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv
Rights to individual novels have been sold to United Kingdom (Peirene Press), Sweden (Rosinante), Italy (Voland), Hungary (Vince Kiado), Macedonia (Antolog Books and Makedonika Litera), Albania (Skupi)

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



JĀNIS JONEVS (1980) 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. The novel garnered

acclaim from critics and readers alike, and received numerous awards: it received the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut; it received the 2014 Kilograms Kultūras Prize awarded by Latvian public television; it was named among the 100 favourite Latvian books of all time on the television show *Great Reading*; and 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 the Winner of the 2014 European Union Prize for Literature and the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award for Best Debut. Jonevs' novel proved to be a real hit and bestseller 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 view into 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 a Latvia that had just regained its independence.

The story seems even more captivating to the generation that shares the same perception and experience of the world – Jonevs is the first among this generation who has managed to stir their memories by transforming these images and that period into a full-fledged work of literature.

Published by Mansards, 2013
312 pages

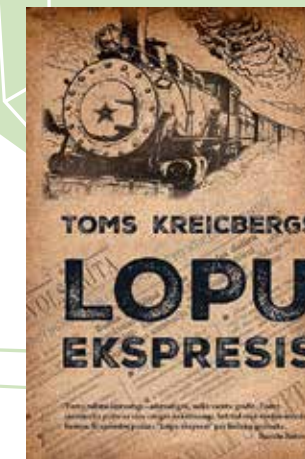
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Rights sold to United Kingdom (Wrecking Ball Press), France (Gaïa), Norway (Bokbyen), Bulgaria (Izida), Turkey (Bencekitap), Poland (Kolegium Europy Wschodniej), and Slovenia (Miš).

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



TOM CROSSHILL'S (1985) fiction has been nominated for the Nebula Award (three times), the WSFA Small Press Award and the Latvian Annual Literature Award. He is the author of *The Cat King of Havana* (2016, Katherine Tegen Books), a YA novel about Cuba, salsa and lolcats. Crosshill lived in the USA for several years; he now resides in Latvia.

The Cattle Express is a contemporary Latvian author's effort to pinpoint both his personal identity and a universal human one; he seeks to combine both into a coherent whole. Two plotlines parallel each other in this text: the first takes place in Latvia in the first half of the 20th century; the second, in 21st-century New York City. Crosshill's story of occupation, deportations, war and the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis – the first Latvian Prime Minister – runs side by side along a tale of the modern world of Wall Street finance – which comes with a promising life, full of possibility.

Two characters also act in parallel, with half a century separating them. Readers meet Laura – a girl from Ulmanis-era Latvia who endured deportation to Krasnoyarsk – and her grandson Peter – a young man who's landed in the tangled scheming of the Wall Street financial world with a lot of post-Soviet baggage. Many things make Tom Crosshill's novel *The Cattle Express* not only a deeply meaningful read, but also an exciting one. Among these are intriguing parallels between the two plotlines, masterfully depicted little scenes of New York City, the complicated love lives and journeys into adulthood for both young protagonists, as well as thriller-worthy plot twists. The author proves he can write skilfully in a style that not only combines the hallmarks of historical fiction and contemporary prose, but is also completely different from his previous work. Black-and-white comics by young Latvian artist Mikus Duncis illustrate the novel. They also reflect one of protagonist Peter's hobbies; in his spare time, he draws comics, trying to illustrate his grandmother's life story.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2016
336 pages

Contact: Tom Crosshill, tom@tomcrosshill.com
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THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



JĀNIS LEJIŅŠ (1954) is one of Latvia's pre-eminent authors of historical novels. His trilogy *A Seal in Red Wax* (*Zimogs sarkanā vaskā*) earned popularity among readers as one of the most widely read works of this genre in Latvian literature as well as a number of prizes, including the Kilograms Kultūras Award as the year's major event in literature. His screenplays for TV dramas are also highly regarded.

A Man's Heart meets the criteria of "historical novel", however, like other novels by Lejiņš, it has multiple layers, making it more than just a formal portrayal of the period. In the novel, author Jānis Lejiņš turns to the history of 20th-century Latvia. At the centre of the tale is a modest and to some extent comic Švejk-like character Ludis Šteinbergs, who shows up at a Latvian small town secondary school in spring 1939 to teach boys how to become real men and is naively overconfident in his own infallibility. Soon enough the unexpected occurs: into the perfect man's carefully cultivated bachelor world, a *femme fatale* enters. Yet along the way the ominous mill of fate of the mid-20th century has already begun to turn, ready to annihilate anyone who may get caught between the millstones.

Since the novel begins in 1949 with authorities erecting a monument to Šteinbergs as a hero who fell in "the struggle against Fascism", the reader must guess the answer to the question: who is this person really – an insignificant pawn in the great games of the 20th century, or someone whose essential nature is easy to overlook? The novel follows the life of Šteinbergs for several decades: he is the leading figure against a background of two major wars and the interwar period, which features other characters as well, starting with the General Secretary of the Soviet Union and ending with a meticulously crafted network of spies in several countries.

A Man's Heart offers the reader a psychologically realistic story rich in documentary fact in which there is witty humour as well, and the author, with a smile, often pokes fun at the stronger or weaker aspects of human nature.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2017

432 pages

Contact: Bārbala Simsone, barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv

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THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



GUNDEGA REPŠE (1960) was born in Riga, where she studied art history and theory. She was a lecturer for the Artists Union (1985–1992), contributing to the magazine *Liesma*, the newspapers *Labrīt* and *Izglītība un Kultūra*, and literary journal *Karogs*. She has been publishing prose 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 published in 2012), *Nice People* (*Jauki ļaudis*, 2014), six collections of short stories and many books of nonfiction, including biographies, literary diaries, conversations with writers, and essays.

Written in the style of a diary, *The Tin Scream* centres on the world of a 1970s teenager, a world that reflects the ongoing social and psychological processes of society. At the beginning of the book, Rugetta, the main protagonist, is attending school in the 6th grade and, on a friend's recommendation, she starts keeping a diary. This reveals the everyday life at an elite Soviet school, friendships and betrayals, a protest over the presence of Russians and an admiration for Tarkovsky and world culture, including Bach and Shakespeare. There is also a realignment of ideals – hence the title of the novel, tin being a metal that is ductile and easily wrought, and the noise it makes when broken is called "the tin scream".

With this novel the writer offers readers a rich, evocatively drawn gallery of characters who have been delightfully and wittily rendered, despite the tragic circumstances of that era. The world-renowned Latvian theatre director Alvis Hermanis and his theatre company, the New Riga Theatre, staged a production based on motifs from the novel, and this too has enjoyed public acclaim.

"The integral foundation for the poetic whole of this work is the writer's panoramic view. Repše's world is constructed from a series of counterpoints, contradictions and contrasts. She is radical."

Literary critic Ilva Skulte

Published by Pētergailis, 2002

140 pages

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Gundega Repše's novels have been published in Sweden (Ariel Förlag) and Germany (DuMont)

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE

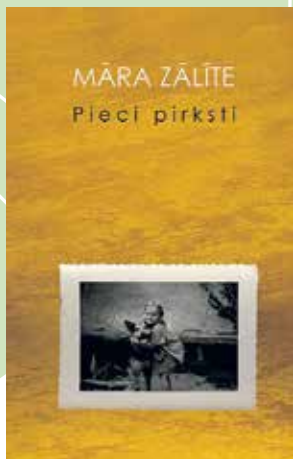


Photo: from the author's personal archive



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 Writers Union of Latvia, served as editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Karogs*, and headed the copyright agency of Latvia. Māra Zālīte is the author of five 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.

Five Fingers is the winner of the 2013 Annual Latvian Literature Award. It is a fictionalised childhood memoir in which the author describes her family's return from Siberia to Latvia in the 1950s, and her life in Latvia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The quality of 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'. This means that she has taken on the task of remembering.

The 'five fingers' are a metaphor for the apple tree, in the branches of which Laura sets up her perch, and a metaphor for God's hand. They are also the fingers of Jewish opera singer Asia broken during an interrogation by the Cheka [...]. The repressive instrument, the ubiquitous Cheka, has been generalised as an absolute evil in the character of the Ogre, at the same time not paying much heed to political correctness – that other enemy of freedom." Journalist Egīls Zirnis

Published by Dienas Grāmata, 2018 (Originally published by Mansards, 2013)
304 pages

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Foreign rights sold to USA, Estonia, Lithuania, Georgia

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Birds of Paradise is the sequel to the novel *Five Fingers*. Its tightly woven drama and precise poetic details clearly and uncompromisingly describe the 1960s – the only time and place in which ten-year-old Laura can grow, mature, and find the truth.

The plot unfolds in the beginning of the 1960s when the main character, Laura, is ten years old and is forced to face all the realities of Soviet life – joining the pioneers, Communist political education, work on collective farm brigades. Laura's thoughts are occupied not only by her readiness to fight for the Communist party's ideals, but also by the beautiful vision of Pavlik Morozov and the secrets in the school's attic. Her luck turns sour when she takes chewing gum to school for the first time, and also when she is forced to be on duty with Grigorijs, called the "Goliath Gorilla" in secret, the son of Communist Party organiser Smirnovs. As Laura begins to grow up, she comes into contact with good and bad, with the baggage she inherited from her parents and grandparents echoing their bitter experiences in Siberia nearly always somewhere in the background.

"Māra Zālīte magnificently follows up on *Five Fingers* by perfectly conjuring up Kurzeme from the days when honest words had to be kept to yourself. Enchanting and gentle contact with the world is set in a dreamlike context as it blends with a growing perception of those whose futures had been trampled into the ground." Author Inga Ābele

"It's doubtful whether Ionesco, Beckett, or Orwell could have done a better job showing the absurd drama in which we lived during that time." Film director Virdžīnija Lejiņa

Published by Dienas Grāmata, 2017
320 pages

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Selected titles in translation: The plays *Tiesa* in German (Berlin & Riga), *Margarēta* in Lithuanian (Vaga); the novel *Five Fingers* in English (Dalkey Archive Press), Georgian (Bakur Salakauri), Estonian (Randvelt Kirjastus) and Lithuanian (Lithuanian Writers Union Publishers).

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN PROSE



Photo: Girts Ragelis



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 and Vija Kostoff) was 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.

Warm Earth is a courageous story about the nature of incest. Instead of fixating on detail, it digs deep. The author has attempted to pierce the seemingly flirtatious veil of taboo and present a story cleverly resisting bringing a naive "for and against" argument over physical love to the forefront (while marginalised, descriptions of these acts are as colourful and lively as the text of the whole novel); instead, she uncovers the deeper and much more painful reason behind loneliness and the monsters it creates: the lack of soulful warmth and a yearning towards the warmth of the earth.

Published in Dienas Grāmata, 2008
168 pages

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"The protagonists of *Santa Biblia* are Tūrs, Levs, and Nīma (who is also the book's 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 factory that produces microchips for controlling people and installing a certain kind of personality programme in their minds. Over the course of the novel, the protagonists visit twelve stations, possibly representing the Catholic Stations of the Cross (although there are fourteen of those, each dedicated to a meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ).

With the help of an inexhaustible talking rucksack, the young people fulfill their mission, encountering various illustrations of 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. Biblical and Christian references dominate the novel and are intertwined with history."
Literary critic Kristīne Kārklīņa

Published by Dienas Grāmata in 2013
177 pages

Contact: Dace Sparāne-Freimane, dace.sparane-freimane@dgramata.lv
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SHORT STORIES

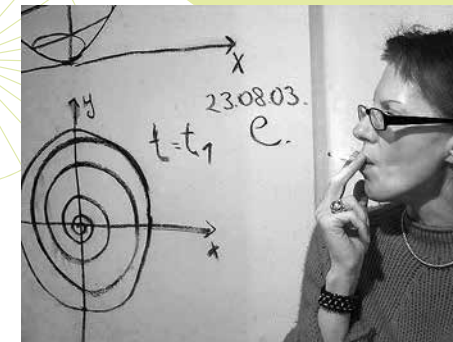


Photo: from the author's personal archive



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 *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 Latvia declared independence, her acclaim was aided by a wildly popular movie based on her children's book *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* (Stun, stun, 2004) was called the cultural event of the year by the influential daily newspaper *Diena*.

Push, Push was received with great curiosity as Andra Neiburga returned to adult fiction after a 16-year absence following her much-praised debut short story collection *Stuffed Birds, and Birds in Cages*. Not only was *Push, Push* one of the most talked-about books of the year, but it has since become a popular staple in secondary school curriculums, and hasn't lost its ability to surprise and even shock a new generation of readers.

"All of her stories are constructed from the inside out, building from the characters' individual experiences, memories, thoughts and reflections [...]. Her great variety of characters also considerably widens 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 of the possibilities offered by Neiburga."
Literary critic Ieva Kolmane

"The stories are full of drama and subtleties, which encapsulate the narratives that would normally require a generational novel. Neiburga's 'family' is her generation – the wounded souls, the unhappily happy people, those pushed and shoved by their lives and history, those 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, the most notable book in 21st century Latvian literature."
Author Pauls Bankovskis

Published by Jānis Roze in 2017
248 pages

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

SHORT STORIES

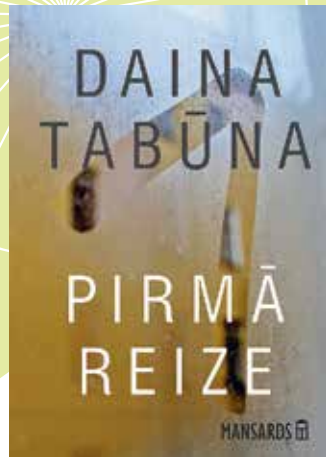


Photo: from the author's personal archive



DAINA TABŪNA (1985) is a Latvian writer, a graduate of the Latvian Academy of Culture. Her short stories have been published in numerous Latvian publications, including *Luna*, *Karogs*, *Sans*, *Kultūras diena*, *Latvju teksti* and the online magazine *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.

On the cusp of womanhood, Daina Tabūna's heroines are constantly confronting the unexpected. Adult life seems just around the corner, but so are the kinds of surprise encounters which might change everything. Two siblings realise they're too old to be playing with paper dolls and begin to re-examine their close relationship. A girl who dreads visiting her religious grandmother develops her own fixation with Jesus, and a disaffected young woman, listlessly wandering the streets, stumbles into an awkward relationship with an office worker. The narrators of these stories each try, in their own way, to make sense of how to behave in a world that doesn't offer any clear answers. Life, however, always has some sort of surprise in store, and suddenly nothing is as it was before.

"It's strange how poorly I remember my dad. If I hadn't dug up those couple of photographs from my mom's secret box buried deep down in the drawer, I might not even remember his face. I was my mother's daughter, and Edgars was his father's son; that's what everyone said. It's as if we weren't even brother and sister."
(from *The Secret Box*, translated by Jayde Will)

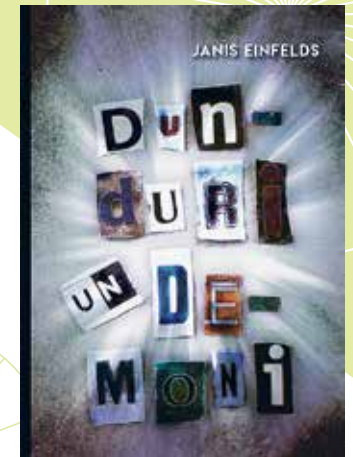
Published by Mansards, 2014
152 pages

Contact: Jānis Oga, janis@apgadsmansards.lv
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SHORT STORIES



Photo: from the author's personal archive



JĀNIS EINFELDS (1967) is the author of five books of short prose and four novels. In 2005 he received the Annual Latvian Literature Prize for his story collection *Unpeople* (Neļaudis). Einfelds' works have been published in the Latvian prose anthologies *Der idiotische Mond* (Germany, 1997) and *New Latvian Fiction* (USA, 1998). He is one of the most prominent Latvian postmodernists.

The story collection *Gadflies and Demons* is Einfelds' ninth book. The gadflies and demons in this book are not only metaphorical, but also quite palpable and present. The author and his alter ego Fabulu Jūlis take the reader through the absurd realities of capitalism in the 1990s, while also still managing to entertain. The author asks the reader to confront the question: are those of us living right here, right now, really all that different from the characters in the book, and if we aren't, what can we expect in our own future? The collection's eponymous first part brings this question to the forefront, but in its second part, the miniature cycle *Winter*, which is focused on one of the characters from *Gadflies and Demons*, the reader journeys along with the author as he unpacks this question on an unstoppable ride into the void. Einfelds' prose weaves together a surreal worldview with the grotesque, realistic, even rough and naturalistic details of everyday life existing alongside a sense of the romantic and the pain that comes from the fragile nature of ideals in our world today.

"Einfelds' characters continue to be amazing – colourful, creative, and original as if taken from a dream or like colourful shadows conjured up by some type of literary intoxication. With this book, Jānis Einfelds establishes himself not only as a postmodernist classic, but also as an author who is incisive in his social commentary with a perspective grounded in both conscience and history."
Literary critic Jūlija Dibovska

Published by Dienas Grāmata, 2017
208 pages

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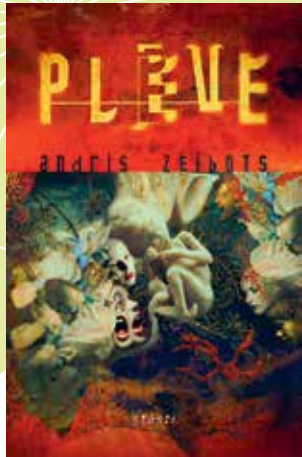


Photo: from the author's personal archive



ANDRIS ZEIBOTS (1950) is a writer, poet, playwright, radio broadcast presenter and producer. He has published a novella *The Corpses' Ball* (Liķu dejas) and a poetry collection *Water Lizard* (Ūdens ķirzaka, 2010), as well as plays and humorous stories. His novel *Oceanic Me* (Okeāniskais es, 2013), a work of psychological science fiction, won the Dzintars Sodums Award for Innovation in Literature.

The Film is a collection of short stories written during various periods. The author himself describes them as ghost stories or horror stories. The stories are linked by an element which may be called "the fear factor": the inexplicable, the irrational which turns up in the lives of the protagonists and adds tension to the plot. However, these stories go beyond the narrow specifics of genre, because the author adeptly manipulates them using a variety of means of expression in order to elicit in the reader an effect of unease, simultaneously inspiring thoughts on the metaphysical. In the events portrayed in these stories, the everyday mingles with the surreal, and the poetic with the terrifying, resulting in texts that can be interpreted on several levels, posing a challenge to the reader's erudition. In most of the tales, the terrifying element is not the "external" factor; – using stream of consciousness, the disjointedness of time and space, unreliable narrators, and other techniques, the writer masterfully conjures an atmosphere in which the reader begins to discern the "internal" fear inherent in the narrative, and the instability of reality and its unpredictability. Zeibots constructs the characters' dialogues and internal monologues which are so typical of every person's running internal "conversations with the self" with the professionalism of a playwright. He tangles threads of various truths and compels the reader to become completely absorbed by the story's setting – , providing the main ingredient in a cocktail of tension, interest and fear.

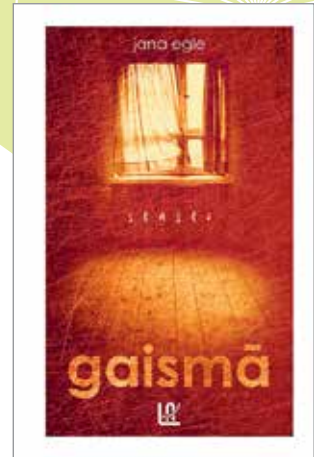
Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2017
288 pages

Contacts: Bārbala Simsone, barbala.simsone@zvaigzne.lv
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SHORT STORIES



Photo: from the author's personal archive



JANA EGLE (1963) is a poet and prose writer. Her poetry collection *To Hear the Unsaid* (Dzirdēt noklusēto) was published in 2002. She received the main prize at the Prose Readings Festival for her stories "Such an Autumn" (Tāds rudens) and "Off to the Sea" (Aiziet jūrīnā), and her story collection *Into the Light* (Gaismā) received the Latvian Literature Award for Best Prose. Jana Egle is a lecturer in Literary Studies at the University of Liepāja.

Into the Light is Jana Egle's prose debut. It includes eight stories whose themes connect with the not-so-sunny moments and aspects of life. Jana Egle brings to light subjects that have been kept hidden or considered unsuitable for discussion – violence against women, paedophilia, transsexuality. The themes running through this collection are guilt, domestic abuse, helplessness – how these form, how they affect a person's later behaviour, what effects they have on the direction of one's life. All eight stories are about family relationships – about brothers, about mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Each story brings to light secrets or occurrences that are typically hidden and not spoken of in our society.

"This book brings a new, but mature, voice to the world of Latvian storytelling. The individuals in these stories seem both 'written off by life as well as 'written out' of it. Exposing everyday violence, the author has gazed into the deep, dark current of human nature."
Literary critic Rudīte Kalpiņa

"Jana Egle's stories distinguish themselves in that as they show real life and reflect nearly unbelievable situations; in them life's dramatic and sometimes tragic aspects blend together with the comical. Jana talks about that which we typically keep hidden and generates so much empathy in the reader that at times the reader even forgets that this is literature."
Writer Inga Žolude

"Egle's stories are focused; there is nothing unnecessary in them. All of their power is contained in their action, not a step to the right, not a step to the left, and there is also quite a lot of dialogue."
Literary critic Arturs Skutelis

Published by Latvijas Mediji, 2016
128 pages

Contact: Renāte Neimane, renate.neimane@latvijasmediji.lv
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THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION THRILLER



Photo: from the author's personal archive



BAIBA ZĪLE is a writer and a translator; she has translated into Latvian the works of Boris Vian, Albert Camus, Simone Weil among others. Prior to *The Master of Lies*, Baiba Zīle published a novel *Simulating Life* (Dzīves simulācija) under the pseudonym Anna Kravicka. Under the pen name Barbara Sea she has also written several books in English, the latest of which is *Beautiful Strangers Don't Care about Owls* (2015).

The novel *Master of Lies* is a fast-paced tale in which a classic thriller and crime plot are used to create a more profound theme, that of a person's path to self-awareness during a period of historic complexity, and the dilemma of balancing the desire for survival with a clear conscience. The engrossing story of love, crime and a search for the meaning of life unfolds against a vividly depicted background of recent Latvian history.

Alise and Aleksandrs grow up in late Soviet period Riga – in the same period of history, but in different worlds. Alise is a child in the family of a well-to-do party functionary, while Aleksandrs, having arrived in the capital city from the country, ends up in a communal apartment and hanging out with street gangs.

The grown-up Alise spends most of her time in her own world of dreams and feelings – living in a bubble which gently sweeps her through the times of change, while Aleksandrs flees the USSR and becomes part of an international mafia dealing in gemstones. Alise and Aleksandrs don't know each other, however, they are linked by a mysterious person who calls himself the Master of Lies and who holds in his hands the threads of the silent instrument of power so popular in the USSR: a web of secret agents, informers and denouncers.

The paths of Aleksandrs and Alise gradually move closer until they cross, and in now independent Latvia they, of course, fall romantically for each other. However, there is an obstacle to their happiness, a betrayal that took place in the past: one that they would like to believe had been forced upon them by the prevailing situation, yet the question remains of just how far a ruling power can manipulate the conscience of person who on the inside remains free.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2017
400 pages

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THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION CRIME



Photo: from the author's personal archive



FRANCISKA ERMLERE (1968) studied at the Faculty of Robotics and Automatisation at Rīga Technical University, the Division of Television and Theatre Studies at the Latvian Academy of Culture, and the Division of Theatre Sciences in the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia. The author of several plays, scripts for TV movies, animated films as well as stories and novels, she was nominated for the Latvian Literature Award in 2006 for her book *The Jersika Covenant* (Jersikas derība).

The Manuscript (Manuskripts) is a part of the *Riga Detective* (Rīgas detektīvs) series, but can be read as a standalone work. It concentrates on the behind-the-scenes aspects and intrigues of being a writer, exploring Riga in the late 20th century, its society, events, and processes.

The most valuable manuscripts of the Latvian Writers Union, unpublished during the Soviet years, had been kept by Professor Brants, found by investigators drowned in his bathtub. In his drawer, they find a 1987 obituary for Jānis Paiders, but the famous author Nora Paidere's unpublished novel *With the Mark of Cain* (Kaina zīmē) has disappeared from Professor Brants' library. Her novel reveals a secret involving all of the main characters of *The Manuscript* – Alise the librarian; Ilze the professor's daughter; the publisher, and we learn over the course of the novel, the informant Aigars Kalniņš, too; Nora Paidere's son – the unappreciated translator Jēkabs Paiders; editor Aija Rozenberge, who like Professor Brants, has also been drowned. Andrejs Vanags, a lawyer, begins a thrilling investigation and discovers that Jānis Paiders, once a brilliant poet and a rising star during the Soviet years who died under mysterious circumstances, is the son of Nora and Professor Brants. As he starts to make sense of this puzzle, the trail ends up leading to Aigars Kalniņš.

"The characters created by the author truly are typical residents of a typical city: the police investigators are disinterested, passive, lazy, and various secondary characters are crafty and slick, allowing the rare greyish insightful characters stand out. The most interesting aspect of all is Ermlere's unique sketch of the story's setting: her distinctive characterisation of Riga."
Literary critic Diāna Polgina

Published by Latvijas Mediji, 2017
157 pages

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THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION CRIME

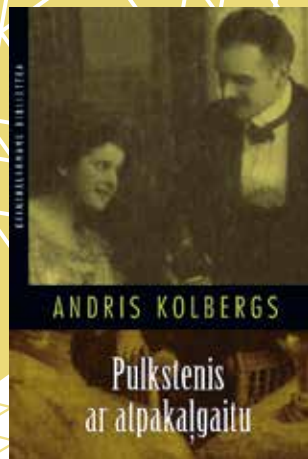
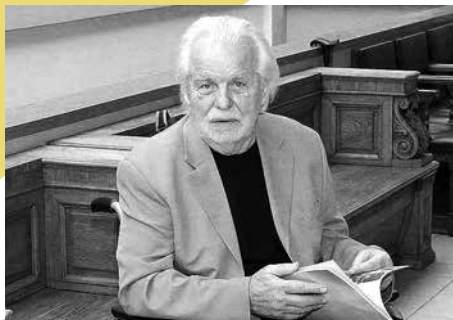


Photo: from the author's personal archive



ANDRIS KOLBERGS is the living classic of Latvian crime fiction. His books centre less on the process of uncovering the crime (deduction or a detective's active service) than on the committing of the crime. In other words, the focus is on the analysis of the crime's societal causes 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 tangling up a recklessly thrilling plot or indulging in solving intellectual criminal riddles, but searching for and considering the causes at the root of the criminal act – the ultimate disturbance of Soviet order.

Kolbergs' novels have a particular style and textual structure that appear in nearly all of his later books. First, in his novels the criminal isn't an "expendable" or the exception to an otherwise entirely positive society, where crime is unavoidable. The social system itself creates crime – the criminal merely uses the opportunities presented to him. Second, Kolbergs' works are increasingly interested in economic problems: what are the economic and legislative factors that permit and encourage these crimes? Third, there's a dialogue with the canon of detective fiction. In *The Man Who Crossed the Street* (Cilvēks, kas skrēja pāri ielai) this is achieved with a covertly ironic flourish by using a corpse that isn't actually important to the novel.

The structure of Kolbergs' novels is quite complex. There are usually two plotlines that remain separate up to the very end. In one, the militia is looking for a criminal; in the other, the omniscient author carefully delves into the life stories of the people described in the book, sometimes wandering into the decades-old past. Each novel is composed of threads that are very distant from one another in time and space, and the biographies of several individuals that at first glance don't and, in fact, can't have anything in common. The author doesn't ignore the investigators' mistaken assumptions either, and explores them just as thoroughly. Thus, he involves additional characters in the text to create secondary plotlines.

As a result, the space of these novels broadens and becomes panoramic. Over the course of the novel, the threads grow closer and closer, until they twist into a tight knot. This journey through the labyrinth of time and life stories is the driving force behind Kolbergs' plots. Always at the root of everything lies the question: what are the mysterious reasons behind the plotlines knotting together? Chance? Order? Maybe "orderly chance"? Order which, at first glance, seems like chance? The plots of Kolbergs' works take shape in the search for the answers to these questions.

The author's plots tend to be quite complicated and sometimes seemingly chaotic: his books are made up of fragments a few pages long, the events they describe are decades and hundreds of kilometres apart, and, what's more, social barriers that seem insurmountable often appear between characters. Only in the final pages do all these fragments, plotlines and secondary plotlines, trips into the past, multiple characters that appear only for a moment, and descriptive passages arrange themselves neatly into an wonderfully precise overview: as it turns out, everything that seemed surplus was necessary to the novel, and chaos transforms into an architecturally elaborate design.

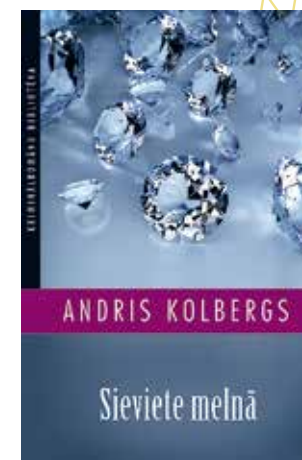
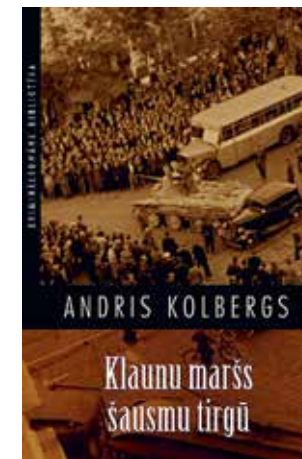
In his novels, Kolbergs tends to focus on current events, but he showed a completely different side to himself with a trilogy about Mendel Davidson's diamonds: *Time in Reverse* (Pulkstenis ar atpakaļgaitu, 2002), *March of the Clowns in the Market of Horrors* (Klaunu maršs šausmu tirgū, 2002) and *The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

The action of the books takes place in various time periods, and each one has different main characters, yet the works are connected – they're brought together by jeweller Mendel Davidson's diamonds, stolen in 1919, when the first novel's action takes place. (The story *Time in Reverse* is based on an actual criminal case from 1919 about a Jewish merchant who was robbed.) Kolbergs once again plays his trump card, 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 become bitterly sharp and contrasting. On one hand, the heist itself could be worthy of a solid thriller given other circumstances, and on the other, the background to the action is 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 in the trilogy all these events are shown "from below," deliberately narrowing the characters' horizons. In *Time in Reverse*, for example, 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; 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 episodically – mostly, the characters don't even suspect what they've come into contact with. (In the end, the largest diamond disappears into the mists of history 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" meets this "great" history – in which the events mentioned above are somewhere in the background.

Published by A.k.A., 2002
287 pages

Contact: info@akka.lv
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THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION SCIENCE FICTION



Photo: Spigana Spektore



IEVA MELGALVE (1981) is a science fiction and fantasy writer with literary influences. 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 Break-Even Point* (Bezzaudējumu punkts,

1999). In 2013, she self-published her play *The Un-humans* (Necilvēki). In the same year, her fantasy novel *The Dead Don't Forgive* (Mirusie nepiedod) was published and subsequently shortlisted for the 2013 Latvian Literature Award. Her book *Arrow, Star and Lai* (Bulta, Zvaigzne un Lai) was published in 2014.

Her novel *Moon Theatre* (Mēness teātris) combines dystopian fantasy with the typical 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 objective other than trying to get the chance for a better part and trying not to get into the playwrights' bad books. 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 – try to find out).

One of the book's central characters – an Actor who doesn't have his own name – tries desperately to take part in the scenarios scripted for 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 he gradually awakens to a consciousness that becomes his own, the mime 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...

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2015
320 pages

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The Dead Don't Forgive is set in a fantasy world where emotions are magic and magicians are both powerful and vulnerable. On the one hand, they can exert near total control over commoners, who do not possess comparable abilities; on the other hand, they can be emotionally unstable and, thus, easily manipulated by other magicians.

The story is told from the perspective of Vega, a gifted young woman who began training as a magician but quit before completing the full course, defying her master. Haunted by memories of that experience and carrying a deep resentment for all magicians, she hides her special skills and lives as a commoner even though this is a crime that carries a severe punishment.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2013
272 pages

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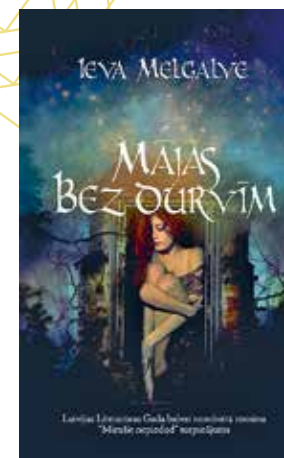
Houses Without Doors is sequel to *The Dead Don't Forgive*, but can be read as a standalone novel. It is enough to know that the story is set in the same world, where emotions are magic, and this magic can either save you or kill you.

In the Bruoni city of Graa, many young commonfolk women and even a young magician have been mysteriously killed. Who is to blame? Rem, the wizard from the capital city, or the stranger Vega who has arrived in Graa in an attempt to keep to herself? The head wizards do not care for justice – it is enough if their suspect survives.

Thus, Vega and Rem will have to fight a silent and cruel mental battle while secluded in prison, at every moment risking the worst fate the mages can be forced to confront – loneliness. Will Vega be able to maintain common sense as the events of her recent past – a friendship that ended in murder, a spell that ended in humiliation, and a love that ended in separation – come rushing back to her?

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2016
320 pages

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THE BEST OF GENRE FICTION SCIENCE FICTION



Photo: from the author's personal archive



LAURA DREIŽE (1990) has written eight YA and adult fantasy novels. Three of them have received the award for Best Original Children's/Young Adult Novel in contests organized by publishing house *Zvaigzne ABC*. Dreīže's first novel *The Song of the Dragon* (Pūķa dziesma) was nominated for the Latvian Literature Award in 2010 as the best debut. For 9 years, Dreīže has organised National Novel Writing Month events in Latvia.

Thus Spoke Mother Goose is a fantasy novel about two apparently ordinary young people, who run into each other in the humdrum little English town of Tingsbury. Both Candy and Corbin, though, have something to hide. Journalist Candy flees from one home to the next, because her dead sister, a poltergeist, invisibly follows her everywhere. Café employee Corbin has a reckless plan in mind, related to his dual heritage – he's half human, half fay. The sleepy small town turns out to be the epicentre of important global events, as another dimension – magical, mysterious and dangerous – exists just beyond our visible one. While conflict grows between mythical beings from different dimensions due to Corbin's rash actions, Candy notices strange things happening: blind mice running around the newspaper's editorial office, children playing on moonlit streets, and more. No one else pays any attention to these events, because no one else can see them. At least, that's the case until one thing becomes clear: the old gods want to break out of their prison in another dimension and regain control over our world. *Old Mother Goose's Rhymes*, a collection of English nursery rhymes, predicts this event. Only Candy can interpret the signs concealed in the book, though she doesn't yet know that.

In the novel's thrilling plot, battles rage between beings whose supernatural powers are counterbalanced by human failings. Most importantly, in the whirlwind of tense events partly caused by their own actions, Candy and Corbin have to walk a hard path – one that leads them out of isolation and closer to each other.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2017

592 pages

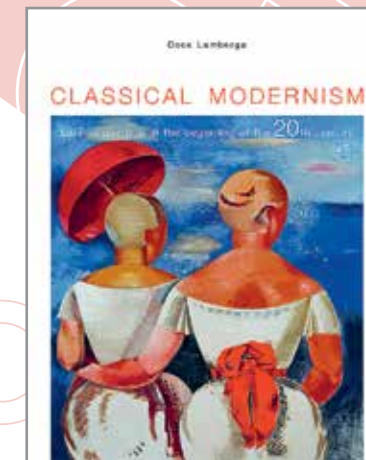
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NON FICTION ART AND CULTURE



Photo: from the author's personal archive



Art historian **DACE LAMBERGA** (1948) has curated more than 50 exhibitions of Latvian art at the Latvian National Museum of Art as well as in Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and Sweden. She has also written more than 300 pieces for the exhibition catalogues for the Latvian National Museum of Art. Lambergā studied Classical Modernism in Sweden, France, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Classical Modernism. Early 20th Century Latvian Painting tells about the most admired generation of Latvian artists. By the beginning of the First World War, when modernism first appeared in Latvia, avant-garde movements had already established themselves as a vivid element of Western consciousness. Although a latecomer in this context, Latvian modernism can be regarded professionally as equal to the output of other countries and constituting an essential strand within the historical processes of European culture. In Latvian painting, the expressions of Classical Modernism were determined by historical circumstances as well as by the character and spirit of the people, and were restricted to particular movements: Cubism, Fauvism, and New Objectivity. With the exception of Jāzeps Grosvalds, who had trained in Paris, the up-and-coming Latvian artists first became acquainted with Cubism and other contemporary approaches to the simplification of form in the galleries of Moscow; only after 1922 were they able to visit Paris and Berlin.

The period of Classical Modernism in Latvian painting lasted in total about a decade and involved experiments in the synthesis of form by members of the Riga Group of Artists: Jēkabs Kazaks, Ģederts Eliass, Romans Suta, Oto Skulme, Uga Skulme, Jānis Liepiņš, Valdemārs Tone, Konrāds Ubāns, and Niklāvs Strunke. In the era of creativity following the First World War, replete with avant-garde approaches to form, these young artists were engaged in a learning process while simultaneously in search of contemporary expression, and through attaining professional maturity, they developed remarkable styles of their own.

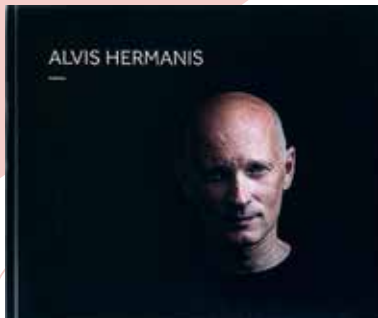
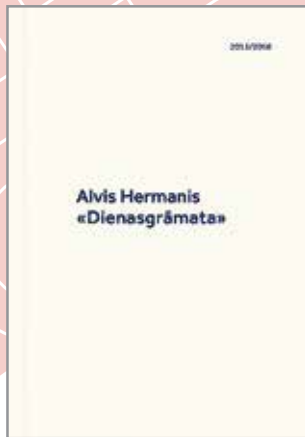
Published by Neputns, 2018

English edition

288 pages

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ALVIS HERMANIS (1965) is an influential figure in Europe's largest theatre and opera stages. Just to mention few – Burgtheater Wien, Jaunais Rīgas teātris, Komische Oper Berlin, Münchner Kammerspiele, Opéra National de Paris, Salzburger Festspiele, Schauspielhaus Zürich, Teatro alla Scala etc.

The album *Alvis Hermanis* collects images from the most visually interesting productions of Alvis Hermanis. These are accompanied by short commentary written by the director himself, as well as fragments from reviews by theatre and film critic Normunds Naumanis. The album also includes an interview with Alvis Hermanis and an introductory essay written by theatre historian and critic Edīte Tišheizere.

“My greatest conviction is that every story is in its own way a model of the world. Every opera, every play, every poem exists as a model of the world in miniature. Latvians have a saying: “the sun in a drop of dew”. This tiny dewdrop with its spherical shape reflects the entire cosmos. I regard each story told in the language of theatre in a similar way. Each individual work is embedded in a certain anthropological context, with all the consequences that follow from that, also at the aesthetic level, as regards style, the visualisation. For me, the visualisation is always the beginning of the beginning. Until I begin to see pictures of how the production could look, the process simply cannot take place.” (Alvis Hermanis)

Published by Neputns, 2016
English edition. 640 pages

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Alvis Hermanis' *Diary* was written during one season – 2015/2016, when such productions as *Die Liebe der Danae* (Salzburger Festspiele), *I due Foscari* (Teatro alla Scala), *La Damnation de Faust* (Opéra National de Paris), *Brodsky/Baryshnikov* (Jaunais Rīgas teātris), *Die schönsten Sterbeszenen in der Geschichte der Oper* (Schauspielhaus Zürich) etc. where staged.

“Of course, this is not a real diary. I knew it right from the beginning that it would be read by people who are strangers to me. Why do I need it? A good question. I wouldn't want anybody else to write about myself and my work. Because I'm not sure whether anybody else, except me, is able to understand what I am really doing and what's behind all that. I'll try writing about it myself.” (Alvis Hermanis)

Published by Neputns, 2016
248 pages

Contact: Dace Krecere-Vule, dace@neputns.lv, www.neputns.lv
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Photo: from the author's personal archive

SANDRA KALNIETE (1952) is an art historian, politician, writer and diplomat, former ambassador of Latvia to the UN and France as well as Latvian foreign minister. Her book *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snow* (Ar balles korpēm Sibīrijas sniegos) is the most translated work of Latvian literature since the restoration of independence, and has been published in English, French, Italian, German and other languages.



The book's title *A Small Mound* derives from a Latvian saying “A small mound fells a giant load”, expressing a sentiment similar to “Great oaks from little acorns grow”, and it leads the reader into the recent past – to the 1990s – when, like a phoenix from the ashes, the Latvian foreign service was reborn. The work abounds with humour, healthy self-criticism and self-irony, recalling a time when Latvia, only having recently regained independence, had to build up a diplomatic service from virtually nothing. The book vividly describes the first awkward steps in learning about international protocol as well as the adoption of historically significant decisions for the country, right up to the present day. Some episodes reveal the difficulties faced by Kalniete and her colleagues, such as the diplomatic tussle in France over the restitution of property belonging to the state of Latvia, and attempts to promote the recognizability of the state. Based on personal experiences, this book discloses new incidents, until now not known to the broader public, and also expands on already known facts from the viewpoint of a politician. It's not quite history yet, but it's the details, the bits and pieces in the background which, when merged together, create the material from which researchers at some later date will distill history.

Published by Jāņa Rozes apgāds, 2017
360 pages

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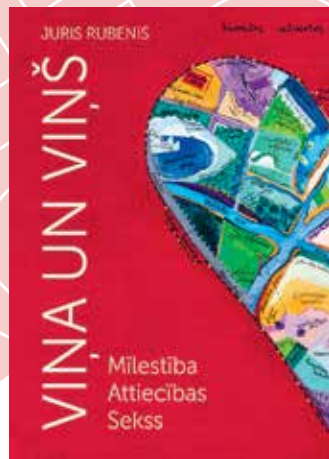


Photo: from the author's personal archive

JURIS RUBENIS, *Dr. theol.*, (1961) is one of Latvia's most respected theologians. A Lutheran minister until recently, he has married thousands of couples. He has also acted as a pastoral relationship counsellor for couples experiencing moments of crisis. Rubenis' books have been translated into Lithuanian, German and English.

She and He is made up of the author's notes on his experiences, and of the conclusions he has come to while trying to understand himself and the depths of intimate relationships. On a broader scale, it's also an investigation into relationships through the centuries, up to the present day. The author draws inspiration and a theoretical understanding of his topic from his teachers – thinkers, psychologists, theologians, mystics, spiritual practitioners, scientists and clergymen from all over the world – while introducing his readers to their ideas. These asides into the musings of other thinkers turn this work into an encyclopaedic reference volume.

At the same time, it's a very practical handbook, presenting information to the reader by taking a modern, clear and easy-to-understand approach. In this book, Rubenis examines sexuality and spirituality, marriage and divorce, men's and women's initiations, the human ego, productive humility and the need for forgiveness, along with many other topics. In doing so, he helps readers believe that good, lasting relationships are possible. He motivates his audience to evaluate current intimate relationships, as a way to discover their inherent potential. *She and He* encourages people whose past relationships have been unsuccessful to try again, but with a different approach this time.

The volume's unique design – the layout of each page, drawings, fragments of paintings, and other images – is also used to convey information. All the visual elements allow readers to solidify the insights they've gained, and urge them to act upon those insights. Linda Daņilevskā's paintings, created especially for this project, complement Rubenis' text, as do drawings and stories by Māris Subačs. Layout and graphic design are by Inta Sarkane.

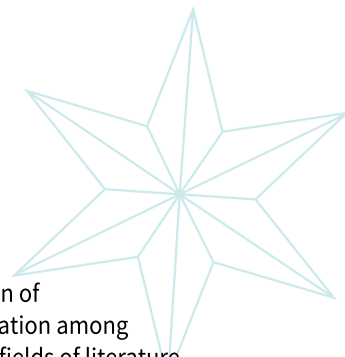
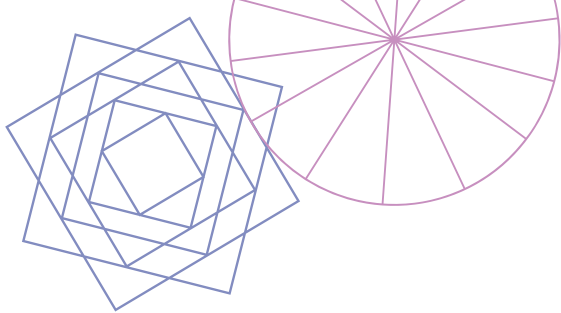
She and He has attracted a great deal of attention in the Latvian market, and continues to do so. It's been at the top of bestseller lists since its publication in September 2016, and is already in its sixth edition.

Published by Zvaigzne ABC, 2016

304 pages

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