

# WE Latvia The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

13 NOVELS BY 13 AUTHORS TELLING THE STORY  
OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



# 13 AUTHORS TELLING A UNIFIED STORY OF THE XX CENTURY IN 13 NOVELS

## THE NOVEL SERIES

# We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The historic novel series *We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century* focuses on the XX century experience of a nation that forged its independence at the beginning of the century, lived through the horror of two world wars, survived the Soviet era, and dramatically regained its independence — just some of the themes covered in this series.

13 Latvian authors were invited by writer Gundega Repše to participate in the creation of this literary series, each of them selecting a specific époque of Latvia's XX century history to address. The unifying principle for the development of the entire cycle has been the meticulous authorial work of historic research that forms the basis for each writer's personal literary vision without the dangers of curbing it.

By 2018, all thirteen novels in the series have been published — a notable event in contemporary Latvian literature.

Each of the series' novels has been shortlisted for the Latvian Literature Award, and many of the series' novels have received noteworthy awards.

The series is published by Dienas Grāmata Publishers.

# THE ENTIRE XX CENTURY IN 13 NOVELS BY 13 NATIONAL AUTHORS

The series comprises thirteen published novels, each of them proving to be a notable event in national modern literature:

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

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

▲ *18* by Pauls Bankovskis (2014)

▲ *Glass Shards* by Inga Gaile (2016)

▲ *Bogene* by Gundega Repše (2016)

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

▲ *Duna (The Rumble)* by Inga Ābele (2017)

▲ *Teachers* by Andris Akmentiņš (2017)

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

▲ *Officers' Wives* by Andra Manfelde (2017)

▲ *There* by Kristīne Ulberga (2017)

▲ *Room* by Laima Kota (2016)

▲ *Red Mercury* by Arno Jundze (2017)

“Perhaps, our history can be seen as a mirror — as we take in our face reflected in it, it becomes believable. This face isn't always pleasant, but we know that it's real. The novels presented in our series *We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century* open a surprising gallery of fascinating faces to our view, created by the best contemporary authors working in Latvia. Both, individually and as a group, these writers have completely redefined our national historical novel.”

Dace Sparāne-Freimane,  
Director and Editor-in-Chief of Dienas Grāmata Publishers.

**Osvalds Zebris / *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* (*Gaiļu kalna ēnā*)**

176 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2014

It is 1905 in Riga, a city rocked by workers’ riots, violence and pogroms during the waning days of the Russian Empire, when the Tsar is gradually losing his grip over his vast empire. Revolution is in the air — brother pitted against brother, social unrest and turmoil forces people to choose sides. Amidst this upheaval, a former schoolteacher becomes involved in the revolution but soon realizes that the impending war is bound to require more of him than he is willing to give. A year later, the dramatic kidnapping of three children has Riga’s police force on edge. Who are the culprits? And what is their motivation? The answers to this investigation mystery, where only victims and no perpetrators are revealed, will shatter the lives of two families as they struggle to identify who they should blame for the revolution.

Award-winning Latvian author Osvalds Zebris weaves a powerful tale of a country’s desire for freedom set against the backdrop of the 1905 Revolution in Tsarist Russia, a process that gave birth to some of the most dramatic events in the XX century.

In the *Shadow of Rooster Hill* is a novel about the birth of the national consciousness of Latvian nation, one of the national teachers’ generations, the courage to oppose the insanity of violence, and the consequences of failure to prevail over personal fear.

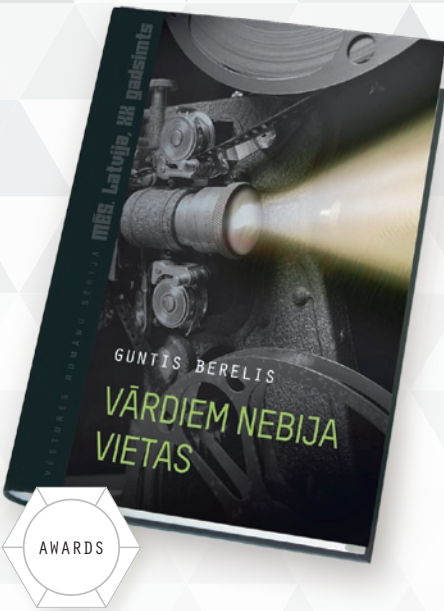


- ▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2014
- ▲ WINNER of The European Union Prize for Literature 2017

**Guntis Berelis / *Words Were of No Use* (*Vārdiem nebija vietas*)**

256 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2015

It is 1913 in the coastal town of Ventspils, the location used for the filming of the first locally-produced motion picture *Kur patiesība?* (*Where Is the Truth?*). Rudolf Tush – a man known for his ‘hands of gold’ and readiness to take on any job – by chance finds himself as part of the film crew. Nurturing a range of well-concealed sinister passions, such as his panache for arson (a reputation earned during the 1905 Revolution, when he reduced manor houses and castles to rubble), he is an obscure addition to the film team. He is also mute, or rather has rejected speech following a rather foolish encounter with a Russian Cossack patrol in 1905. One night, after an evening of hearty carousing in a local drinking hole and his first encounter with a porn movie, he accidentally kills a man and is forced to flee. The story then jumps ahead to 1915. With World War I raging, Tush, certainly no patriot or devotee of the Russian Empire, embraces the flames of war as an opportunity for profiteering. Entering active combat in 1916, he finds himself on a battlefield strewn with the corpses of fallen soldiers following a German gas attack. There, he encounters the film crew he had once worked with, scheduled to make a film about armageddon and finding the surrounding killing fields an ideal location for their needs. Tush embarks on a new phase of planning for a lucrative future, but luck turns its back on him once again. A character with a distinctively dark streak, Tush is the epitome of the sort of small-minded, outwardly apolitical individual who eventually paves the way to the war.



- ▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2015
- ▲ WINNER of The Newspaper Diena Annual Award in Culture 2015
- ▲ WINNER of The Egons Līvs Award “Krasta ļaudis” 2014-2015

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**OSVALDS ZEBRIS** (1975) is a Latvian prose writer and publicist. *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill* (*Gaiļu kalna ēnā*, 2014) is his third book. His first publication, a short story collection entitled *Freedom in Nets* (*Brīvība tīklos*, 2011), received The 2011 Annual Latvian Literature Award in the Best Debut category. His novel, *The Wooden House People* (*Koka nama ļaudis*), was shortlisted for the Latvian Literature Award 2013. Osvalds Zebris is also script writer for the youth TV series *The Hidden Ones* (Latvia State Broadcasting Company, 2017) and creator of the cultural history lectures *Vestalian* (for Latvia’s largest news outlet Delfi.lv; 2017).

***In the Shadow of Rooster Hill***

Translation rights have been sold in Albanian, Bulgarian, Croatian, English, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian and Serbian.

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Latvian prose writer and literary critic **GUNTIS BERELIS** (1961) was born in Cēsis. He studied Physics and graduated in Librarian Science from the University of Latvia. One of Latvia’s leading literary critics, he is known for his prose-like essay writing style. He has published *A History of Latvian Literature* (1999), a collection of essays about XX century national literature. Guntis Berelis authors a blog of literary reviews, studies, and criticism, called “Guntis Berelis Appraises: Writings on Literature” (berelis.wordpress.com). Guntis Berelis has published two short story collections – *Mythomania* (*Mitomānija*, 1989) and *The Hunt for Minotaur* (*Mīnotaura medības*, 1999; winner of The Latvian Literature Award 2007) – and two novels, *Fiery Bulls With Golden Horns* (*Ugunīgi vēršī ar zelta ragiem*, 2007) and *Words Were of No Use* (*Vārdiem nebija vietas*, 2015).

***Words Were of No Use***

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Pauls Bankovskis / 18

176 p. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2014

Autumn, 1918. The war is supposed to be over (the Triple Entente had signed an armistice agreement with Germany on November 11), but peace fails to be re-established. On November 18, 1918, Riga and the region of Courland are under German control. Against the historic backdrop of chaos, destruction, dampened social moral and mortal danger, a small group of Latvians gathered in the heart of their occupied capital and declared the foundation of Latvia as an independent nation state, something which would have seemed impossible even a year earlier.

“Every year, on November 18, we fly the Latvian flag, solemn official events take place and people celebrate with their families and friends – perhaps less solemnly but certainly with increasingly genuine feeling. Today, it does not seem surprising that November 18, 1918 appears to have been the great celebration of the birth of the Latvian nation. And it hardly occurs to anyone nowadays that, back then, there may not have been many people out there to celebrate the event. [...] The diary form is adopted as a natural medium in the novel: one of the writers provides eyewitness accounts of the events occurring in 1917–1918 while the other is a modern contemporary. The first of these men has no certainty, neither with regards to what the next day might bring nor the very nature of events unfolding around him. The other, likewise, experiences a state of uncertainty as he tries to understand the past and its relation to contemporary reality.” (Quoted from the author’s afterword)



▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2014

Inga Gaile / The Glass Shards (Stikli)

176 p. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2016

The novel’s events evolve during the late 1930s at the time of president Kārlis Ulmanis’ authoritarian regime. This period in Latvia is often associated with images of a burgeoning economy, social stability and the swelling of national pride; at the same time, these are the years when concepts such as “reduced value individuals” — individuals who are perceived to be a threat to the future happiness of the nation — were also disseminated.

Popular in Europe, the concept of eugenics has infiltrated established, negative attitudes towards mental health patients. Magdalene, the novel’s protagonist, has been raped and is subsequently sectioned as mentally insane in a psychiatric clinic. There she meets Kārlis, a young, progressive psychiatrist whose views on the treatment of mental illness have been influenced by Freud’s psychoanalytical teachings. The patient and her psychiatrist find themselves drawn to each other emotionally when the head of the state-endorsed eugenics program visits the clinic promoting the sterilization of mentally enfeebled patients “for their own good as well as for the benefit of our future.” The novel’s heroes find themselves in borderline situations, their decisions seemingly controlled by the shadow of Magdalene.



▲ Special prize from the Egons Līvs Award “Krasta ļaudis” 2016-2017

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Latvian prose writer and journalist **PAULS BANKOVSKIS** (1973) was born in Līgatne, Latvia. He studied glassworking at the Riga School for Applied Arts as well as philosophy at the University of Latvia (1992–1996). He has been publishing prose since 1993. A prolific author, within the span of a decade, he published ten novels and two collections of short stories as well as a children’s book and a work of non-fiction. His focus tends to shift from Latvian history and its myths and legends to the realities of the more 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. Currently in production is the English translation of Pauls Bankovskis’ novel *Reds, Rats & Rock’n’roll*.

18

Translation rights have been sold in English.

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**INGA GAILE** (1976) is a Latvian poet, prose writer, playwright, performance artist and theatre director. She is the author of four collections of poetry and a collection of children’s poetry. With her unique brand of humor, she explores inner states of being, her own experiences, the everyday lives of women and stigmatized groups of society while promoting equal rights. She has won several awards, including The 2015 Annual Latvian Literary Award in the children’s literature category. Her first historical novel, *The Glass Shards (Stikli)*, was published by Dienas Grāmata in 2016.

The Glass Shards

Translation rights have been sold in Estonian.

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Gundega Repše / *Bogene*

200 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2016

In her latest novel, *Bogene*, Gundega Repše sheds light on events that, until now, have been granted no more than a pointed silence. Therein lies the symbolic gesture of *Bogene*: namely to address the subject in a direct, immediate, first-hand manner. Only then does the author let her readers regain their footing and gather up the threads of information. In this way, we are able to understand the inner workings of silence. There’s no single answer – just like speech, silence can be both a strength and a weakness. The opposing sides 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 truly were: visceral, corporeal, immediate and in shocking contrast to the clear vision and soaring, constantly forward-looking spirit.

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 effectively articulating her long-suffering silence by giving it greater meaning.

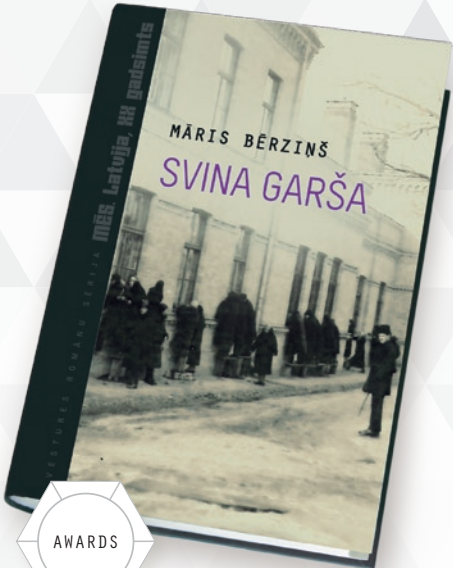


- ▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2016
- ▲ Special prize from the Egons Līvs Award “Krusta Jaudis” 2015-2016

Māris Bērziņš / *Taste of Lead (Svina garša)*

344 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2015

*Taste of Lead* is a narrative account focusing on a young Latvian man, Matīss, who seeks and eventually fails to avoid siding with either power at war in Europe in 1940. Facing the challenges and conflicts experienced by every young man – the discovery of the existence of love, betrayal, evil and mercy and, on a personal level, the taste of lead in his mouth. A vehicle for dealing with weighty issues, this novel is characterised nonetheless by the signature irony, wit and a taste for paradox noted in Māris Bērziņš’ other works. This piece of prose writing explores lines of division; those simple, qualifying lines which set a regular man apart from a hero, the tragically thin line delimiting peace from war, the demarcation line seen between words and actions and the contrast line between relinquishing and taking action. *Taste of Lead* satisfies the reader with its depth of humanist voice. Set between the late 1930s and early 1940s, *The Taste of Lead* was published in 2015 to become one of Latvia’s most widely debated and in demand books. In 2016, director Valters Silis produced a stage version of the same title, *Svina garša*, for the National Theatre of Latvia now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive season. The Latvia Museum of Writing organizes tours of the places mentioned in the novel, and many schools have included it in their mandatory reading curriculum. An excerpt from this novel has been included in the Dalkey Archive Press anthology *Best European Fiction 2017* (translation into English by Margita Gailītis).



- ▲ WINNER of The Annual Latvian Literature Award 2015
- ▲ WINNER of The Baltic Assembly Prize 2015
- ▲ WINNER of The Dzintars Sodums Award 2015
- ▲ Special prize from the Egons Līvs Award “Krusta Jaudis” 2014-2015
- ▲ Latvia’s Copyright agency AKKA/LAA Eternity Award 2016

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Latvian prose 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*. She has been publishing works of prose since 1979. Gundega Repše has published 10 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.

*Bogene*

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**MĀRIS BĒRZIŅŠ** (1962) is a Latvian prose writer and playwright. He started writing relatively late in life, debuting as a novelist with *Ēriks Traums’ Dream* (Ērika Trauma sapnis) in 2003. His most popular work to date is *Gutenmorgen* (Gūtenmorgens, 2003; Gūtenmorgens. Otrreiz, 2017), a tale recounting the life and exploits of an outlandish individual named Gutenmorgen. Three short films – Elīna Eihmane, *Mistrus Media* – and a TV film In the *One Village* – Linda Olte – have been made so far based on *Gutenmorgen* stories. This piece was followed by novels *Titanium Screws* (Titāna skrūves, 2011) and *Hi, Dzintar Mihail!* (Sveiks, Dzintar Mihail!, 2013). A feature film is currently in production based on the novel *Titanium Screws* (d. Ivo Briedis, Mistrus Media). *Taste of Lead* (Svina garša, 2015) is Māris Bērziņš’ fourth novel.

*Taste of Lead*

Full translation in English by Margita Gailītis is available.

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Inga Ābele / *Duna*

432 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2017

The events of Inga Ābele’s novel, *Duna (The Rumble)*, unfold in 1949 in three different geographical locations – the capital Riga, and the regions of Sēlija and Latgale. If his horse is not spared from a single drop of life’s overflowing cup of suffering then why should someone like him, Andrievs Radvils, be spared? The protagonist’s resigned stream of consciousness drives the trajectory of this novel and will remain with the reader long after the book has been closed.

“Inga Ābele sets herself a task worthy of an archaeologist – to restore the colours lining the canvas of Latvia’s cultural history, which gleamed brightly until the second half of the XX century. Torn apart in its unfair sweepstakes, connecting the biographical lines of people who find themselves on the losing side of history, thread by thread, the writer weaves them together around her novel’s central metaphors: horses and the River Daugava. A drive shared by the river and the nation alike, the quest for freedom connects the currents of desire into a single, powerful word – *Duna*.” (Vents Zvaigzne)

Inga Ābele’s previous novel *Withe Monk*, stylistically similar to the narrative evoked in her novel *Duna*, received countless awards, and was adapted for a National Theatre production (d. Indra Roga, 2017). In 2017, Ābele received The Latvia’s Copyright agency AKKA/LAA Eternity Award for success of the *Withe Monk*.



▲ Special prize from the Egons Līvs Award “Krusta Jaudis” 2016-2017

Andris Akmentiņš / *Teachers (Skolotāji)*

240 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2018

Poet and prose writer Andris Akmentiņš’ novel highlights the significance of teachers and education in 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvia. The author strives to single out the heroic endeavours of rural teachers – the nurturing of a new generation of intelligentsia to replace those previously deported and exiled. The author builds his novel as a hyper-lively reality in the modernist spirit which also echoes the atmosphere of Khrushchev’s political thaw. His heroes might misplace their cause and lose their lives, yet they refuse to play the part of the victim getting by instead on their wits and cunning, a characteristic of peasants in Latvian folklore. The new post-war generation and the contradictions of Khrushchev’s era are diverse and interesting themes, demanding a vivid dualism – hunger and the desire to live, modern science and fashion, the theory underpinning the Party versus its true face. Competitive in everything, two sisters intend to uphold the professional tradition of their pedagogical family. The elder of the two, Velta, returns to teach in her native rural school after her studies. Having taught at school since the end of the 19th century, their father is now engaged in writing his autobiography, portraying himself as a prominent figure in the revolution. Their school is assigned a new gifted teacher, Jānis, who throws himself into every task assigned to him. But being idealistic, he soon succumbs under the weight of his duties, burns out and loses his life in a foolish protest against the Party. The long-suffering collective memory – a characteristic of the novel in its own right – is varyingly rewritten within the novel’s narrative frame. The work is written as an epistolary novel; the author’s research included reading several hundred letters written in the 1950s by teachers from his own family and conducting interviews with teachers working in those years.



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Latvian prose writer, playwright and poet **INGA ĀBELE** (1972) was born in Riga and is one of our most celebrated writers, having recieved many literary accolades, both Latvian and international. She graduated from the Department of Theatre, Television and Drama at the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2001. Equally successful across several literary genres, 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), novels *Fire Will Not Wake You* (Uguns nemodina, 2001), *High Tide* (Paisums, 2008), and *Wicker Monk* (Klūgu mūks, 2014), a poetry collection *Night Pragmatist* (Nakts pragmatiķe, 2000), in addition to a collection of her works as a dramatist, entitled *Plays* (2003). Most of Inga Ābele works are translated into Swedish, Italian, English and other languages.

*Duna*

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**ANDRIS AKMENTIŅŠ** (1969) holds a university degree in journalism. He lectures in creative writing and translates animation films from English for dubbing. A celebrated bard and angling enthusiast, his debut in the literary world was as a poet and organizer of poetry events. Laureate of the Klāvs Elsbergs Award (1992), he has published 4 poetry collections, a short story collection entitled *Warmer Than Tear* (Preses Nams award for Best Prose Work, 2001), and a book for children, *Three Brothers*, which explores the history of Old Riga. An outstanding professional in the field of advertising, he received The Summit International Award 2006 for the PR campaign, “Day of Song.”

*Teachers*

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## Nora Ikstena / *Mother's Milk* (*Mātes piens*)

176 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2015

Nora Ikstena's latest novel deals with the post-war period and follows the fates of three generations of women, its narrative centering mostly on the 1970s and 1980s. Raised by a single mother herself, the central mother figure is a professionally brilliant gynecologist who finds herself at odds with the dehumanizing effects of Communist ideology. While living in Leningrad, she has successfully performed a secret artificial insemination procedure on a young Russian woman who later loses her child as a result of the brutality of her war-veteran husband. With no prospects for advancing her scientific career, the talented doctor is sent off to practice in a rural area – her daughter sharing the experience of being uprooted. The doctor suffers from clinical depression and the entire burden of everyday life is placed on her young daughter's shoulders.

The daughter inherits her mother's hostility towards the system and suffers existentially from the turbulence of the 1980s; responding emotionally to the dismissal of a free-thinking teacher, the Chernobyl disaster or the string of deaths of "great Soviet leaders" seeking to bring reform. It is a novel about rejection and loss – rejection by husband and father; the loss of hopes and dreams, work and convictions, friends and loved ones. The sea of suffering is alleviated by drops of forgiveness: deprived of her mother's milk as a child lest she absorb the sense of loss and despair through her nourishment, it is nonetheless the daughter who helps her mother survive.



- ▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2015
- ▲ WINNER of The Dzintars Sodums Award 2016
- ▲ WINNER of The Annual State Broadcasting Company LTVR Award "Kilogram of Culture 2015"

## Andra Manfelde / *Officers' Wives* (*Virsnieku sievas*)

256 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2017

The minor military port Karosta is a closed army settlement situated in the northern part of Liepāja, a port town in Latvia. During the 1970s, some of its inhabitants would do Cossack dancing in the local Sailors' Club, a venue created from the local church building, while others tried to save their uniforms from the damage of excrement in the military jail. Reminiscent of the famous Russian nesting doll, Karosta was a model in miniature of the larger empire; closed off as it was from the rest of the world by the Iron Curtain, an off-limits area that only a selected, pass-holding few could access. Here, the officers drank cognac and their wives wore French perfume. But beyond the fence, in Latvian Liepāja, life was completely different. Andra Manfelde's novel takes an insider's look into those territories closed off to civilians, where military classification meant physical danger for outsiders, as a retrospective parallel look at the stagnating USSR and the secrets of adultery.

"This is an intense and poignant work. Here, we have prose which blessedly reminds us how different it is from the frills of historical retellings. Visual effectiveness and the author's intelligent balance of characters and symbols open up vistas into the bleakest pools of human existence, the way we peer into the depths of wells. Entrusting themselves to Andra Manfelde's authorial sincerity, readers can even reach as far as the souls of officers' wives, without being shackled into any ideological harness." (Gundega Repše)



- ▲ WINNER of The Egons Līvs Award "Krasta ļaudis" 2016-2017

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Latvian prose writer **NORA IKSTENA** (1969) was born in Riga. In 1998, she was guest editor of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* for its 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), several collections of short stories and fairy-tales and numerous 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* by Dalkey Archive Press. With various publishers taking an interest in the production of translations into English, Czech and German, Nora Ikstena's bibliography has been extended to include numerous titles of her books translated into Lithuanian, Estonian, Swedish, Danish, and Georgian.

### *Mother's Milk*

Translation rights have been sold in English, Hungarian, Italian and Macedonian. Full translation in Russian by Ludmila Nukneviča is available.

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Latvian prose writer and poet **ANDRA MANFELDE** (1973) was born in Kuldīga, Latvia. Her poems have been published in periodicals since 2002. In 2005, Manfelde's debut collection of poetry entitled *Gods Dig Ditches* was published and received the Ojārs Vācietis Prize. Manfelde's first novel *The Needle* was published the same year, upon which the popular Latvian musical was later based. Her second collection of poetry, *Concrete Shrines*, was published in 2008, followed by a third, *Northern Market*, in 2013.

In 2009, Manfelde offered readers her collection of fairytales, *Tale of the Heart*, followed a year later by her family memoir, *The Children of Sod House*. Manfelde's story, *The Sundial Record*, was included in *We the People. Latvia. XX Century*, a short story collection forming part of the prose series dedicated to the Latvian experience throughout the XX century, published in 2011. The same year, she also produced her collection of poetry and documentary prose *A Trip to the Moon: Visby – Ventspils – Visby*. Her novel *Homeland* was published in 2012, and in 2013 Manfelde authored the libretto for Latvian composer Zigmārs Liepiņš' work, *The Transcendental Oratorio*.

### *Officers' Wives*

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Kristīne Ulberga / *There (Tur)*

248 p. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2017

The events of the novel take place in Latvia in the 1980s, a time when changes can be felt in the air, but the Soviet regime continues to work against people and the opportunities open to them. The novel’s narrative is based on actual events. One of the novel’s main characters, an adolescent boy named Pavel, gets lost in a forest. His aim is to find an escape from his own life and from a secret; however, deep in the woods, he stumbles upon a house inhabited by peculiar people. The boy has nowhere else to go and, therefore, decides to stay with the strange, long-haired, radical-thinking people. In order to prove that these individuals truly exist once he finds his way out of the forest, Pavel starts keeping a journal. The text combines several parallel plot lines, with the notion of time weaving itself insistently into a single intimation with a unified thread. Pavel actually spends the entire decade in the forest, while another thread of the story, set in contemporary times, sees his housemates from the days in the wilderness discovering the journal and returning to their old abode, still in a good state of repair and well-looking after by its current inhabitant. While the present owner of the property is absent, the three friends make themselves comfortable in front of the fire and sift through the events of the past as they read Pavel’s notes. In his scribblings the boy not only noted down what he saw going on around him and the way his uncouth, rustic housemates and their esoteric practices appeared to him as an observer, but he also describes the tragic turns of his own destiny. Many years have passed since his days in the forest yet it is only now that his companions learn the reasons behind Pavel’s flight from his home and the pain he endured while living among them. In the end Pavel’s secret is revealed.



Laima Kota / *Room (Istaba)*

320 p. Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2016

Laima Kota’s novel *Room* offers a glimpse into the everyday lives of Latvians thirty years ago, when Soviet power was in the process of abetting the country’s rapid economic collapse. However, the political climate suddenly shifted in favour of the basic human desire to live in prosperity, and the Soviets declared Perestroika.

In her new work, Kota employs those styles characterising various genres which, as a writer, she adores, such as burlesque and the absurd thriller, farce and heightened realism. In doing so, she succeeds in extracting the very essence of the era from the memories of those who lived through those times, concluding that in view of all we experienced during Soviet rule, we are extremely well-equipped to cope with the trials and tribulations the 21<sup>st</sup> century might throw at us.



- ▲ Nominee for the Annual Latvian Literature Award 2016
- ▲ Special prize from the Egons Līvs Award “Krasta Jaudis” 2016-2017

We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century



The novel *There (Tur)* is the second work for adults by Latvian prose writer **KRISTĪNE ULBERGA** (1979). Her debut novel for teenage readers *I Don’t Read Books* received the Jānis Baltvilks Prize. Her first novel for adults *The Green Crow* (Zaļā vārna), published in 2012, won The Annual Latvian Literature Award. Her novel *The Green Crow* is soon to be published in England.

*There*

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**LAIMA KOTA (MUKTUPĀVELA)** (1962) is one of Latvia’s most well-known and popular authors. She gained widespread recognition with her first novel *The Mushrooms Testament* (Šampinjonu derība) in 2002, which won The Annual Latvian Literature Award of that year. Kota has authored five novels since: *A Dozen True Life Stories* (2002), *Loop* (2003), *Emīlija Benjamiņa* (2005), *The Draw of Miera Street* (Mieriēlas vilkme, 2016) and *A Room* (Istaba, 2016), as well as two collections of short form prose: *Totems* (2007) and *My Turkish Coffee* (Mana turku kafija, 2012). Her range of writing extends to include her book for children, *Matilde and Teresa or How to Be Here, There and Elsewhere* (Matilde un Terēze, 2013) and a biography entitled *BrāliBrāli* on brothers Imants and Gido Kokars, conductors and masters of Latvian choral music (2008).

*Room*

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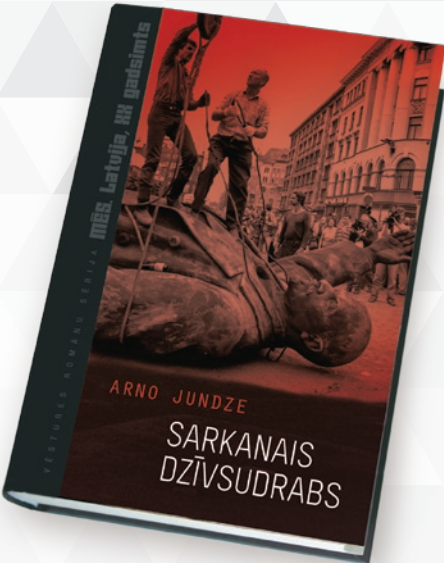
We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century



**Arno Jundze / Red Mercury (*Sarkanais dzīvsudrabs*)**

480 p. Rīga: *Dienas Grāmata*, 2017

This novel focuses on the people of Latvia in the 1990s. Medieval kings longed to get their hands on the Philosopher’s stone, a substance extolled by alchemists for its promise of eternal youth, happiness, and wealth. In the 1990s, history repeated itself much more simply – without any secret teachings or veiled intimations. People started chasing blindly after red mercury; a product of the imagination of Soviet intelligence services, an implausible miracle potion capable of granting world domination to whoever had it in their possession. Yet these people were out-numbered by those who simply wished to get on with their lives, to be happy and to love. As the wheels of the epochs turned, dreams and illusions crumbled – it was no easy task holding onto both oneself and one’s self-esteem in the ensuing turmoil. Latvia suddenly broke free, but not everyone had the strength to find that freedom within, as each and every one of us strove for survival. The novel depicts a wide spectrum of society. There are those from an older generation who received, with independence, an unexpected opportunity to finally meet their relatives who had been driven into exile. There are Soviet secret service agents, and there are the defenders of independence. The last of the forest brothers comes out of his forest after fifty years spent in hiding as a result of his rejection of Soviet power. And there are also the very young who desire to be happy but are oblivious to how heavily their first steps into the free wild world are about to test them.



**We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**We. Latvia. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century**



**ARNO JUNDZE** (1965), is a Latvian prose writer, cultural journalist, literary critic and theorist. He has hosted “100g of Culture” and other TV programmes, and is one of the creators of the programme “Meln uz balta/Black on White”, with interviews and videoprofiles of celebrated Latvian writers for Latvian television (LTV1). Arno Jundze edits the cultural news section for one of Latvia’s largest newspapers, facilitating the shaping of the country’s most important art and literature forums and outlets. Currently, Jundze is head of the Latvian Writers’ Union. Arno Jundze has also written many books for both adults and children, his novel *Dust in an Hourglass* (*Putekļi smilšu pulkstenī*) was nominated for the Annual Latvian Literature Award in 2014.

***Red Mercury***

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