

CATALOGUE ASCENDUM



“Ascendum” has been active in Latvian publishing field since 2013 and over time has become a well-recognized, independent publishing house offering bold and challenging voices that reflect on the contemporary, the complex, and the undiscovered.

Titles published by Ascendum are regularly nominated for the Latvian Literature Award, and have also been nominated for the European Union Prize for Literature. Ascendum publications have likewise been consistently shortlisted for – and have won – the Latvian Book Design Award "Zelta ābele".

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MĀJOKLIS

Poet Anna Auziņa's prose debut (2021) explores a young woman's coming of age, her sexuality, and relationship with God.

Nominations

The Annual Latvian Literature Award (LALIGABA)

Translated to Lithuanian

Buveinė. Terezės dienoraštis



The Dwelling. Teresa's Diary

by Anna Auziņa

Translated by Ieva Lešinska-Geibere

"Mājoklis. Terēzes dienasgrāmata" (The Dwelling. Teresa's Diary, published by Ascendum, 2021) is the prose debut of the Latvian poet and literary critic Anna Auziņa. The novel is written in the form of a private online diary which reveals the inner world of the main character Teresa, the formation of her personality and her experience as a woman.

The story unfolds as if in two parallel lines that converge in each diary entry. The book begins with entries from 2008 when Teresa is married and working for an advertising agency. She is a mother of two, recalling her own childhood during the Soviet era, her humble teenage years, her first encounters with sexuality, and her first sexual experiences. It is the story of Teresa's coming of age, self-exploration and discovery in which awareness of herself as a sexual being plays an important role. In the storyline of the adult Teresa, which covers the time of writing the diary from 2008 to 2020, her body turns from a source of pleasure and sometimes of shame into a cause of pain and suffering as she faces the aging, illness and death of her parents, occurring at the same time as she decides to give birth to her third child.

Outside forces don't seem to affect Teresa's life too much; the great external events in the world, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or the financial crisis, remain somewhere in the background, while socio-political and economic realities are certainly present. For instance, anyone born behind the Iron Curtain will be able to empathize with Teresa's surprise in an episode where she describes witnessing the opening of the first post-Soviet chain of hygiene product stores in the country. However, it is the personal, private, and intimate details that are the key that makes Teresa's experience universal and relatable to everyone, regardless of biography. There is nothing unusual about Teresa's experience, her sexuality is not overcome by trauma, she even feels overprotected during adolescence; she does not suffer from violence, she has a healthy sexual relationship with her husband, and the monogamous marital life does not prevent her from falling in love platonically or condemning the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on contraception.

Fish

05.08

I was eight or nine years old, and my friend Nastya and I were playing in the park at the recreation center. The recreation center was situated by the Black Sea, and Dad had made arrangements to take me out of school because we were going to a resort. The guests lived in small cottages. Each had two separate apartments, and Nastya and her grandparents stayed in the neighboring cottage. In the middle of the park there was a square with a fountain. We were floating plastic toys in the pool of the fountain, guiding them with twigs, when a man appeared behind us and started scolding us for hitting the fish. There were several women with children around, but none of them defended us. The man grabbed both of us by the hand and made us come with him to the director. For beating the fish.

I was afraid that my parents, when they found out, would not believe us and would scold us for fooling around. It seemed, however, that the man was not taking us to the administration building on the beach, but in the opposite direction, deeper into the park. And he had a very firm grip on our hands.

I still believed that we were being led to the director, and I thought it would obviously be in another house, when I saw from another path on the lawn my mother running towards us. Livid with anger, she threw herself at the man until he let go of our hands and retreated, murmuring something. Later, when my parents and I were sitting with Nastya and her grandparents, all the adults were happy as if they had recovered a great treasure, but excited and angry at the same time.

Nastya and I didn't really understand what they were angry about, and we made excuses that we hadn't hit any fish. But the adults didn't scold us and said nothing at all about the fish, just told us never to follow any strangers.

In the end, Dad wrote some sort of a statement to the management of the resort, and Nastya's grandparents signed.

I still don't know what the strange man wanted to do with us for beating the fish.

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05.09

I've lived alone for so long that I'm afraid I wouldn't know how to make love to anyone else. I would be all shy, uncomfortable, etc. That my own body would embarrass me. I don't have any bad features, my body is still quite slim, but I'm not so young anymore: I've given birth, the skin on my abdomen is not firm and there are folds on my back and sides. I hardly exercise, and I don't wax. I have cellulite and a lot of body hair, which I mostly shave off, but when you shave, it grows back quickly. Theoretically, I know that the only way is to behave naturally, so I'd probably try just that.

He and I got on really well as soon as we started making love, but it was so long ago. And with others before him I couldn't really let go. Sex was more of a symbolic act. I don't know what it would be like with someone else now — if something has changed in me or if

he really is the only one I can make love to, with whom I don't start thinking — fuck me, what am I doing here? Who doesn't make me feel like running away.

Store

05.10

One early winter evening when I was in the twelfth grade, I walked home as usual, along Dzirnāvu Street. It was already dark, and Riga looked rather grey, but on the corner of Baznīcas Street I noticed bright shop windows. At that time, I didn't normally go into

Stores. I never had any money. However, the huge windows were so tempting that I got curious and pushed the door open.

Inside took my breath away. The shop was deep, with several long, roomy aisles with shelves – you could walk through them and freely inspect the goods. And what goods they were! There were pink and yellow sponges in different shapes; colored cotton balls in large, transparent packages; shelves of shampoos and shelves of creams. There were also shelves of special facial cleansers. I had read in magazines that it was not good to wash your face with ordinary soap.

So here there were lotions and liquid cleansers of various kinds. And entire shelves reserved for make-up – while in the small haberdashery shops, you had to ask the saleslady if you wanted to see something! Once, back in primary school, Ilva and I had bought red lipstick on Tērbatas Street and tried it on, but, unfortunately, we immediately ran into my mom, who didn't find my dark artlessly painted red lips as nice as I did. Here, at the new store, there were mirrors everywhere and you could put anything on in good light.

Then there were shelves of pads and tampons, which you could just pick up without asking anyone. There were several different varieties of pads with two, three, four or five drops drawn on the packaging, and special pads for the night. But the best were the

tampons, Tampax tampons with applicators so you wouldn't have to touch the tampon with your hands. You could browse it all for as long as you liked. I bought a package with several days lunch money – just in case the wonderful shop suddenly disappeared. It wasn't cheap, but still, I could afford it. So what that the lunch money was gone – I lived not far from the school.

I came home, breathless, and told Lilija about the new shop.

"You can't imagine," I said, "it's like... like they have everything!"

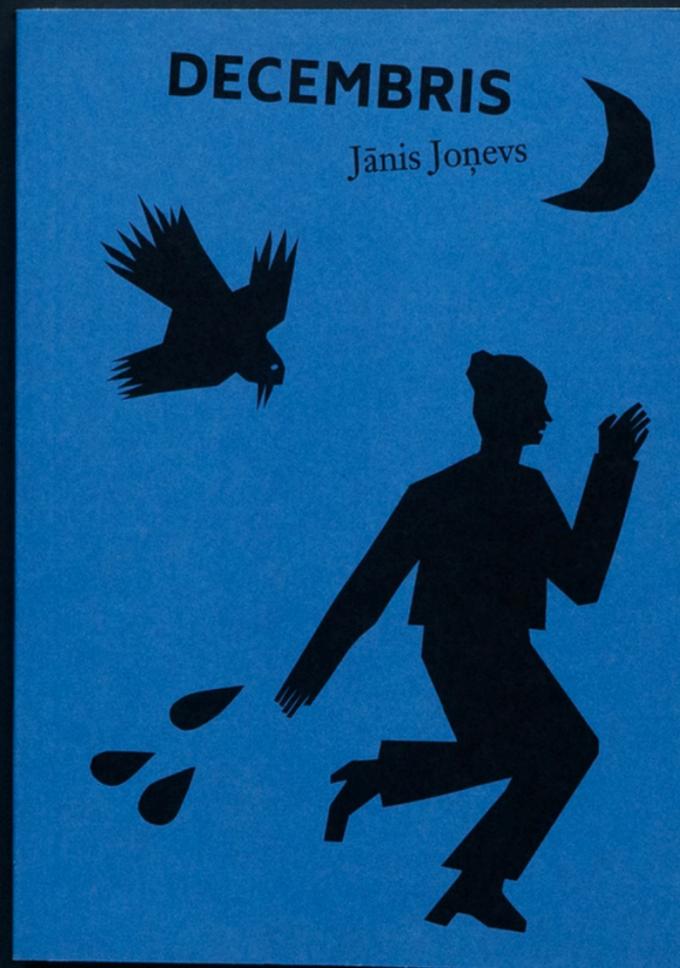
It was the first Drogas store in Riga.

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05.15

Never wash your bottom sitting on the edge of the bath if you've had a lot to drink.

Even today I'm still sore all over. The craziest thing was that I had locked the door, so there was no point in calling for help. I kicked around in the bath for a good while.



DECEMBRIS

Jānis Joņevs' true crime novel (2022), in which the author, through an exploration of 1990s press coverage, seeks to understand what lays behind the disturbing series of murders reported by the media in 1997.

Nominations:

The Annual Latvian Literature Award (LALIGABA)

Latvian book design award "Zelta ābele"

Translated to German

Dezember

December

by Jānis Jonevs

Translated by Kaija Straumanis

WINTER

Nowhere is May more May-like than in Bordeaux. An old man pushed along his oyster cart, the sunlight playing on his bald head the same way it did on the bronze window frames of the church and on the bare shoulders of the French woman who passed by me on Rue de la Prévôté. Though she didn't see me where I was, leaning out the window a few stories up and having a smoke while watching the street. Why didn't I go down? Why not haggle with the old man over his oysters? It was, of course, because of Mārcis Lācis. We were working together on a show called Rīga. Urban Myths. I had put together an impeccable collection of city legends—the Devil of Iļģuciems, the waters of Vecmīlgrāvis that tasted like old men, midnight gatherings at the Great Cemetery, and more—I'd finished the post-processing and had sent everything to Mārcis. I was done! But now I got a message from him:

—The axe-wielding rabbit and the underground passageway don't work. We need at least one more gruesome legend.

I wrote back:

—But Mārcis, I'm in France!

He replied:

—We need at least one more.

And so I was back at my computer, listening to the creak of the oyster cart and the sound of the woman's heels fade into the distance and trying to find Mārcis one more urban myth. It could even be a legend or a rumor. The only thing it couldn't be was something made up by someone with talent, a name. The story had to be authorless, origin unknown—not a one-off incident retold, but a combination of all of our smallest fears, accumulated to form a single, terrifying story to give audiences instead of the boredom of reality. As Werner Herzog once said, "There's something not gone right with our civilization. Somehow we need the very dark monsters." While beautiful women sunned themselves on their terraces, I was inside searching the internet for a monster created by civilization. Drug addicts and rats, gypsies and policemen. Pretty soon I found an appropriate clip. In 2010, Latvian Television reported on a series of incidents in the neighborhood of Jugla wherein its residents were "overcome with panic and fear due to a violent maniac." Perfect! Journalists had gone around the neighborhood interviewing people. I read through some of the responses.

Svetlana:

—He'll kill me too if you show my face on TV. He's killed two men, and I've heard he's killed a woman and her kid, too.

Marija:

—I've heard there's a serial killer on the loose [. . .] he's killed two men, and raped a young woman and then killed her and cut off her head.

Iļģvars:

—[Q: How many people have been killed?] Six, I heard. Though some say it's eight.

Pāvels:

—Eight people have been killed already. My dad said it's more like twenty-five.

Frightened by the increase in victims, the journalists stopped their interviews and instead went to the police, who assured them: "The rumors about a serial killer are just that—rumors," and "there's no serial killer in Riga." Yes, there had been a double homicide in the Jugla forest involving two drunk, homeless men, and they'd interviewed a lot of people in the course of that investigation, which is where the rumors probably started. That all made sense, but I felt the story would be a great example of the modern-day myth behind irrational, unstoppable violence. I was already thinking of how I'd do the minimal amount of post-processing, throw in a joke as the subject-heading, hit "send" on the email and then relax on a terrace with a glass of white wine. But then I heard the closing statement for the news segment:

—This isn't the first time a rumor has caused such an uproar. Several years ago residents of our capital feared a nonexistent serial killer who supposedly cut out the hearts of his victims. Laura Vonda, Ainis Kupčs, Latvian Television.

It was technically what I needed—an archetype that was repeating itself. But something in my plan shifted and I began to think about that other nonexistent incident, the earlier one. Just think, without rhyme or reason. Because I knew immediately that the earlier story wouldn't work for the show. A maniac who cuts out people's hearts—it made me uncomfortable to even think about offering that to Mārcis. It sounded too made-up, simultaneously unbelievable and banal.

Too banal to be a legend. Too unbelievable for an original series.

And despite that—or perhaps because of it—I was curious about that earlier incident.

I thought I could remember some of the rumors from back then. But what haven't we heard over these past several years? Former PM Šķēle is on his deathbed, cultural administrator Siliņš is gay, politician Štokenbergs will be the next prime minister.

I think I can remember it clearly. There was something. Yes, like the LTV clip had said, "several years ago." In the clamor of heavy metal music and romance, hadn't there also been rumors in the background of a heart-cutter? A heart-cutter who was also an amazing jumper? He'd escaped the authorities numerous times by jumping out a window, galloping across rooftops. I think someone even said he'd left Riga and was biking in the direction of Jelgava. I remember thinking, Jesus, but then realizing that it couldn't be true because why wouldn't the police just pick him up if they knew where he was headed? Those thoughts and feelings seemed to belong only to the unique moment of the world in which we existed.

I emailed Mārcis about a pair of red shoes, though I cheated a bit. It was a classic theme, but I came up with the story. I kept the serial killer to myself, and went out to enjoy the terraces.

Some time passed before I went back to the “nonexistent maniac,” to the “made-up” incident. And of my own volition.

Procrastination online is always productive, and soon enough I tracked it down: the incident “didn't take place” in 1997. That explained why there was so little about it on the internet, and it was a good reason to give it a rest.

At the time I was still self-conscious asking others about it. The whole thing seemed low-brow, stupid. But there were other ways to find out more. I moved from the clever conversations on the terraces to the library, where I began to look through print media from that time.

Print media is, naturally, a particular kind of source. I barely read print media in the nineties (unless you count *Tales of Beverna* and *Черный понедельник*, two underground, extreme-metal magazines); it was time to find out what I'd missed.

I wasn't striving for originality: I looked at the mainstream newspapers— “Diena”, the “Independent Morning Newspaper”, “Rural Newspaper”, “Voice of Riga”, and the “Evening News”. I also looked through some smaller newspapers devoted solely to crime reporting—*Fact*—and, of course, the teen-centric newspaper “LaBa”. Other sources came in handy now and then, too, and at times I had to stray from the path of the nineties and dive deeper into the past.

Overall, print media in 1997 reported on the same things it reports on today: “Kazakhstan has a new capital,” “Mikhail Baryshnikov's ‘private visit’ to his birth city comes to an end,” “Vietnam citizen turns fugitive,” “Renaldo scores.”

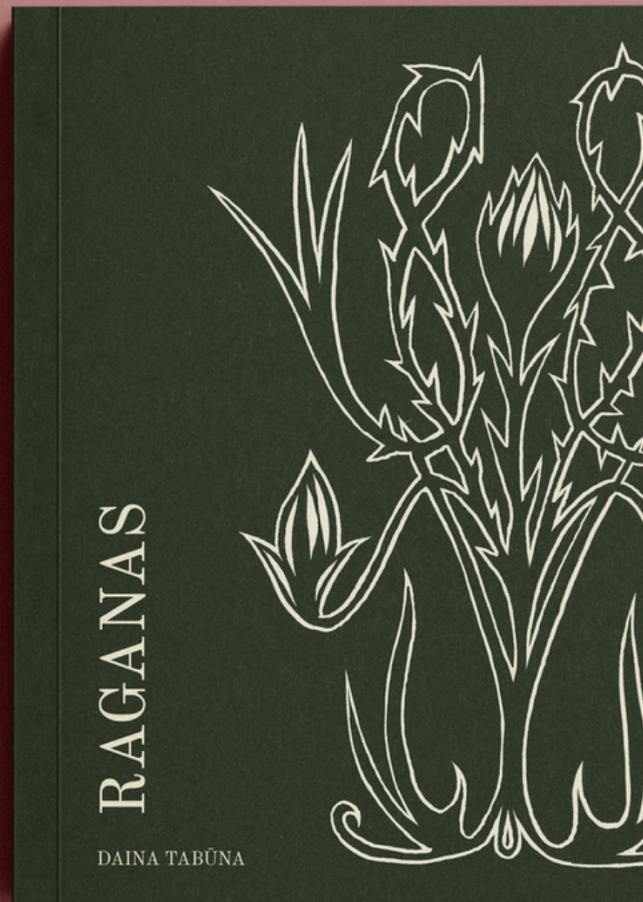
Society was concerned about the ruination of our youth. On November 14th the Evening News published a story with the headline, “Television causes cruelty and callousness.” The article was about the city of Bauska. Raimonds, a grade-schooler there, had threatened the principal with a knife. Although he was seventeen years old, Raimonds was still in the ninth grade. He came to school dirty, tormented the younger kids, and didn't really have any friends. But his “classmates were fascinated by his stories. Raimonds told them he had fought with the well-known actors Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger.” As proof of Raimonds's storytelling nature and the negative influence of television, the newspaper had also published a fragment from one of his school essays:

“October 22, 1997

It's my time.

I wake up. It's morning. Saturday or Sunday. 9:20 a.m. I work out for an hour. Then I rest for ten minutes. Then I turn on the TV, though I don't watch anything until noon. Then I get my bike and ride somewhere. I come back twelve hours later. I turn the TV on again and watch until all the shows have ended, and then I turn off the TV and go to bed. I fall asleep. I start to dream. This is what I dreamt: ‘I'm walking in a forest when suddenly there's a bright light all around me. When the light disappears I see skeletons with large swords in their hands.’

The fragment ends there. I find it an extremely interesting piece. I don't know Raimonds and there's no way we would have been friends, but I can very well understand his longing for a different world.



RAGANAS

Daina Tabūna's novel "Raganas" (2023) is a story imbued with deep warmth that, in light of contemporary feminist thought, sensitively portrays a search for self — voiced with raw honesty, genuine emotional power, and a quietly consoling humanity.

Nominations:

Annual Latvian Literature award

The European Union Prize for Literature

Translated to:

Estonian

Nõiad

Serbian

Veštice

Witches

by Daina Tabūna

Translated by Kaija Straumanis

The bells of a nearby church are tolling. It's an advent Sunday, the second, probably, Alma thinks to herself as she looks through her servewear. She decides on a glass bowl usually used for salads. This morning she's going to crouch over it naked.

The kitchen fills with the strong aroma of dried mugwort coming to a slow boil in the pot on the stove. The Priestess had called the wormwood many other things, which Alma can only vaguely remember: the Goddess Herb, a guide through rites of passage, the feminine energy plant. Alma is no botanist, but her body remembers the aroma immediately—it's the mildly bitter scent of a field, the smell of the scorching sun. While the wormwood steeps, she takes her black notebook and writes what she saw last night. Dream journaling is something recommended by the Priestess, as well as every lucid dream expert Alma's read up on. Last night's dream was a tangled story-line complete with witch hunts and horrifying scenes of crying children locked in a trunk. In the last week she's come to the realization that her dreams are often like movies; one minute she's seeing the character's point of view, but the next she's watching from the sidelines.

"How am I supposed to control it if I'm not even part of it?" she writes in her notebook. It's a question she remembers asking herself at one point in the dream. Now, awake, the question seems ridiculous: of course she can't not be in her own dream, because the dream is in her. But the issue of how to get out of the role of observer—and whether she even needs to—is an unresolved one. She turns off the stove. The wormwood water needs to cool.

Next, she does her daily tarot. Today she draws Temperance. The picture is of a woman holding a small box, overflowing with the spirits of animals: herbivores in a column flowing upward, and a cloud of carnivores spilling down below. Alma isn't particularly interested in the idea of Temperance right now, but the billow of animals seems in harmony with the herbal steam filling the space around her. The association makes her happy, and if the Priestess asks her today about any synchronicities in her life, Alma will have something to share (whereas she's slacked off on inner peace exercises, having done them only a couple of times and without results). Then she pours the steaming liquid into the glass bowl and sets it in the middle of her bedroom.

This is where she hesitates. According to the instructions she should now squat over the steaming bowl. But in addition to the praise sung about the medicinal nature of this ritual, she's also read physicians' warnings online about potential harm it could cause, like steam burns and bacterial infections.

Okay, so no, I'm not going to do it while it's still boiling, Alma decides after circling the bowl a few times. But ten minutes later she dips a finger into the wormwood soup and it still seems freakishly hot. It would be awful to accidentally sit in it or spill it all over her legs; but she can't wait any longer and decides to risk it. She squats over the bowl and loosely wraps a blanket around herself to keep the steam from escaping.

Now she should focus on her breathing—take a deep breath in and imagine the energy of the herbs entering her body through her pelvis, then breathe it out, directing everything old and superfluous down through the floor where it will turn into compost for Mother Earth. The steam coupled with her heavy breathing remind Alma of having a head cold—sitting with a stuffy nose and sweaty face over a mug of hot tea. Only this time it's the opposite end doing the work.

The muscles in her legs are quick to remind her they exist, which frustrates her because she's been to so many yoga classes lately. Though the Priestess did have a warning in her blog post that squatting isn't ideal. It's fine for the purposes of this cleanse, but it doesn't allow you to fully relax. The best way to do the cleanse is to find a chair made of natural materials—wood is best—that also has a hole in the seat—if possible, cut by a strong and caring hand. Alma sputters, imagining Roberts's face if she had asked him to do something like that when they still lived together. Or if he were to see her now.

"Vaginal steaming is an ancient ritual that helps balance hormones, cleanse the uterus and body of old or toxic energies, and helps women reconnect with their sacral chakra," she giggles, pretending to preach.

No, Roberts wouldn't just be speechless, she thinks as she shifts onto all fours, careful not to snag the blanket on the still-steaming bowl. He'd be pissed, even if he didn't admit it. And he'd be embarrassed—how did he spend seven years of his life with this woman, having long and intellectual conversations with her, thinking she was worthy of his intellect? He'd feel duped.

Eventually Alma manages to position her pelvis over the bowl by assuming Child's Pose. Tendrils of steam lick her, and her crotch grows damp and dewy. I'm going to smoke you out of my vagina, she thinks. Lately she's been remembering all the bad times.

It didn't come naturally. Her hand still reached for her phone to text Roberts how much she missed him, or to scroll through their old chats, or creep on him and see what he was up to. Each time she had to force herself to remember that he'd betrayed her.

Yes, betrayed.

He'd drawn out the process of dumping her, avoided giving her direct answers, and then, right around the time she'd barely started to get over him, he was back again. Kept her on a short leash, leaving crumbs of hope along the way, all while keeping his distance and not telling their mutual friends they were back together—only to leave her broken hearted a second time after months and months of torture.

Then, at some point, the flow of anger turned into streams. She began to remember tens of episodes: how Roberts would shut down, purse his lips, and give Alma the silent treatment whenever they argued. Like that time at their friends' wedding, when, in a moment of jealousy toward the bride, Alma had questioned Roberts's love for her, and instead of setting her mind at ease, Roberts had gotten up from the table and walked away—leaving Alma to run after him and beg for his forgiveness. How he never defended her if someone said something hurtful about her.

She kept remembering more. How she had betrayed herself in her attempt to become what he wanted. How she bought clothes and accessories that he'd like, but weren't her style; how she tried to avoid talking about her past experiences because it seemed that it hurt his feelings; how, once they moved in together, she tried so hard to be a good homemaker, buying cookbooks and coming close to tears if the meals she spent hours making didn't look exactly like the pictures (every time). Each of these little betrayals weren't technically Roberts's fault—he'd never asked for any of it, at least not specifically, but Alma's newfound spite was directed at him anyway. She remembers the black and white photo he put up in the kitchen, a portrait of an unknown woman; he said she reminded him of Alma, but all Alma saw was something she could never be.

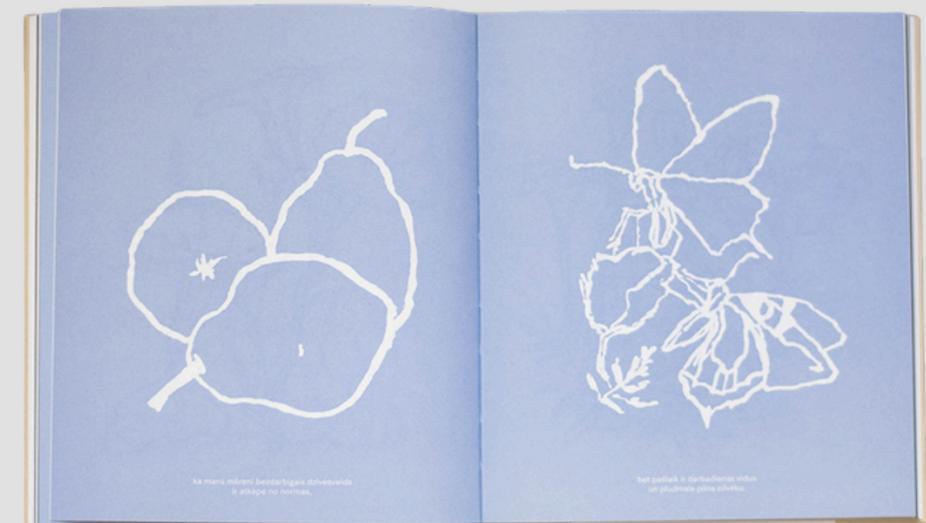
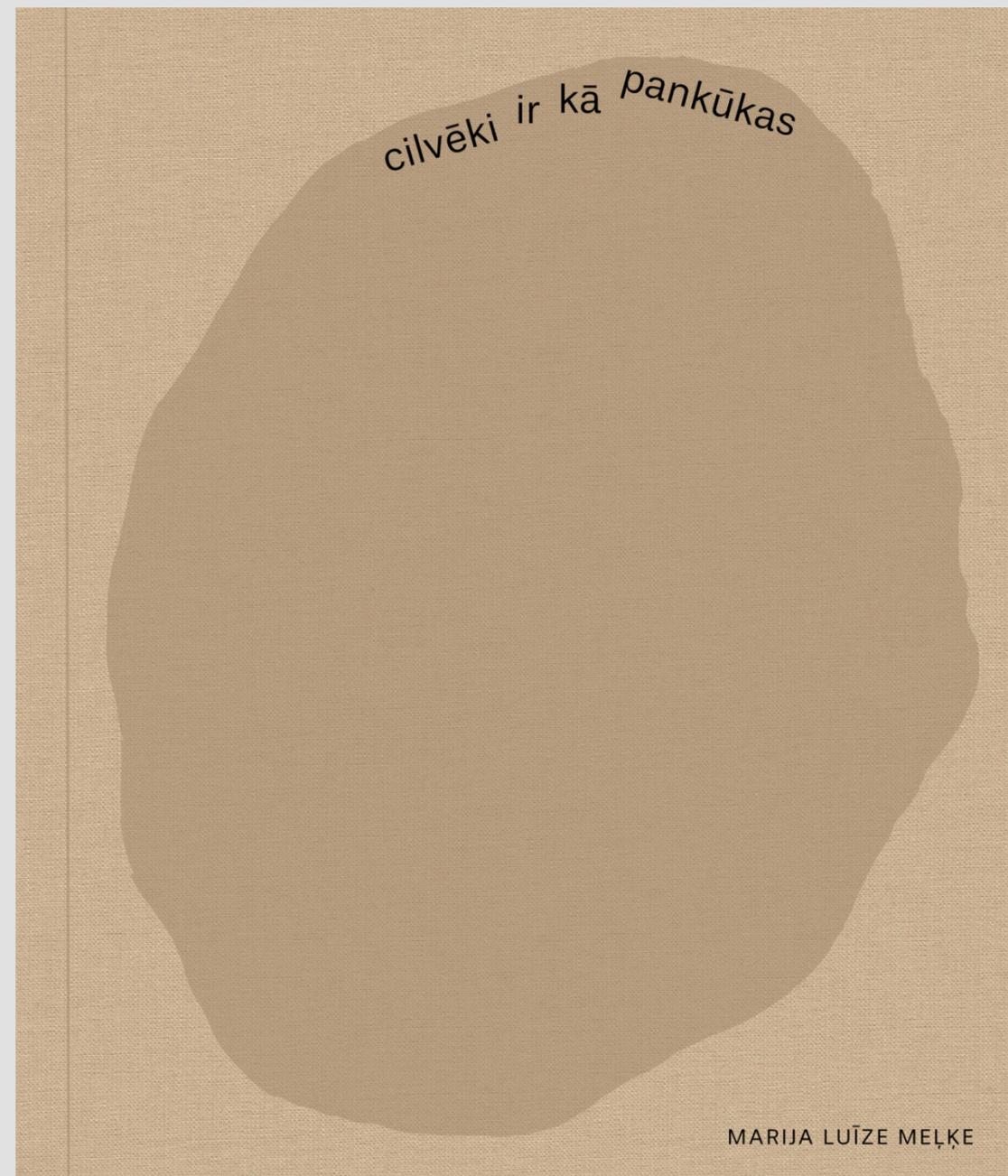
CILVĒKI IR KĀ PANKŪKAS

Marija Luīze Meļķe's graphic flash prose work "Cilvēki ir kā pankūkas" (2024) is a meditation on forgiveness, self-awareness, and life in constant flux, both internally and externally.

The book's design was created by Estere Betija Grāvere with illustrations by Marija Luīze Meļķe.

Nominations:

Latvian book design award "Zelta ābele"



NETĪRO MATU DIENA

Elizabete Lukša-Ražinska's story collection "Netīro matu diena" (2025) follows the misadventures of a young heroine — from bloody periods at school to desperate attempts to have a child. The collection brings together stories about coming of age, navigating the border between documentary and fiction. The narratives wind through bars and childhood paths, lead up mountains, and sometimes simply let the reader gaze at the little lights reflecting on asphalt. Everything that happens in these stories is imagined, and everything that happens is real.

Nominations:

Latvian book design award "Zelta ābele"



A Dirty Hair Day

by Elizabete Lukšo Ražinska

Translated by Uldis Balodis

Is it smart to go to "Bar Chomsky" for a first date? Aurelija yelled "fuck!". But it's not going much better for my friend, that much was clear to her — a bar with rats scurrying around in the yard outside is not a place to meet the future father of your children.

Is it sensible to drag home some guy who is already drunk before you've even met and who spends the rest of the night talking about his recent divorce? I didn't tell Aurelija about that, because I knew what she'd say. Is it rational to fall in love with someone who wakes up and lies next to you reading his ex-girlfriend's blog or her email, because he still knows her password? I didn't tell anybody about that, because I knew it was fucked up.

During the eight months we were theoretically together, I broke up with him 17 times. He didn't know it though, because every break-up happened in my head. It seemed stupid to let him know, since he didn't even know we were together. In my head. Maybe he noticed those times, concluding that I was ignoring his Facebook messages — messages telling me to listen to some song or watch a dumb video, which, by the way, I consider a clear and powerful way of showing someone you're in love.

He asked me out on our first date — no, he asked if we could meet up — on Facebook. He said in his message that dates are for normies. Just like love, but I only learned that later. In the message he, referencing our recent conversation, wittily quoted Wittgenstein and the philosophy professor we both had gushed about.

I joked about those cliched normie dates, writing that I'd bring a box of "Laima" chocolates to "Chomsky". It seemed sweet to me.

Our relationship mostly existed on Facebook. It's the 21st century after all. Spending hours on end in a virtual space makes it possible to have deep and deliberate conversations, avoiding real closeness, which though pleasant still saddles you with responsibility and causes other kinds of problems. At first, we met in bars and drank beer — which was lovely. After that I drank alone and would take the taxi in a stupor to his apartment, but in the end I drank with others and would just send him drunk texts.

I was at his apartment for the first time on just that kind of drunk night. When I woke up the next morning, he'd already left. I had a pretty big hangover and very little idea of where I was. That is, I knew I was at his apartment, but I wasn't really clear where that was. I opened a text on my phone where he'd written his address so I could give it to the taxi driver. Then I turned on his computer and figured out my location on Google Maps. Writing the address into search, I noticed that it brought up frequently searched word combinations. Those included not only my name, but also the names of my past and potential guys. There were women's names there too — his past and potentials, I figured. It was all transforming into a tragedy. I'd gotten into a situation where things were happening on their own, without any active involvement of my brain in the decision-making process. I came around at the moment when I'd already opened up his browser history. The reason for doing that wasn't clear, but I could justify it with a natural curiosity and a pleasant feeling of empowerment, which you get by learning this information secretly. But, even if those can be considered mitigating circumstances, I still got punished. It became clear pretty quickly that coming into possession of this information was the wickedest thing that could happen to me that day, which already had hardly seemed that great.

Along with the sense of alarm accompanying a hangover I was thrown into despair by a line of text that he'd searched for repeatedly in forum-style websites where someone can submit questions that interest them about the most unimaginable aspects of life. "Why won't my girlfriend blow me?" That shocked me, overshadowing the joy that he possibly thought of me as his "girlfriend". I don't know what shocked me more – the fact that this could seem like a problem to him or that he was trying to solve this problem by looking for answers in articles with names like "5 Reasons She Won't Go Down On You" and "Girlfriend won't give blowjobs, deal-breaker or no?", but even so at that moment it seemed like nothing worse could happen to me now. Sure, it was my own fault. But not because I didn't give him a blowjob. And anyway, Aurelija is always saying that you can't go down on someone on the first ten dates, right? I shouldn't have gone snooping in someone else's computer. Reading someone else's browser search history is almost the same as digging around in their subconscious. Interesting, but traumatizing.

New Year's was coming. For freshly-baked couples Christmas is the day that each of them spends with their family, in our case – me with my family, but him with Kārlis at a sex shop, because they'd decided to celebrate Christmas Eve ironically. But I figured we could be together on New Year's. Sure, its importance is overinflated and honestly it's meaningless, but why not spend it together? Until 7pm on December 31st, I felt a sense of pleasant anticipation, as tends to be the case on unimportant dates like this. I went through my closet trying to pick what to wear, even though I didn't know where we were going yet. I wrote him on Facebook to find out what we were doing, but it turned out that he already had other plans.

That made me realize that my night was destined to be a dead-end and that the new year already was looking fairly fucked up. He must've sensed my offense through his Facebook chat window, because, to make me feel better in a way that only made sense to him, he pointed out that we still hadn't "the" talk yet. The talk that would sketch out our plans and goals and help us understand if they even overlapped. He suggested we leave this conversation for next year and have it over a glass of beer at "Chomsky" – the same place where it all began, he added. I filled up on bubbly with my friends, watched the fireworks, got into a fight with my friends, went to some apartment where the people were even more drunk than me, and around seven in the morning went home. The possibility of having "the" talk never came up again.

There were other talks. He suggested we talk about love, because he must have thought that it was great to talk about that while wasted, since sober sensible people wouldn't dare even to say that word out loud. At some point when I was good and tipsy, when I could hold this word in my mouth without reproach, it felt like the time had come to finally blurt out that I was in love with him. I didn't get to. He rushed ahead to tell me that love was just a linguistic construct, which developed in the last or whatever century and is only intended for normies anyway. I didn't understand if these facts were supposed to complement each other, forming his understanding of the meaning of the word, but I was relieved that I didn't manage to say something so stupid and escaped humiliation. Heaven forbid that I would've shared my normie feelings with him.

"I'm in love with you."

"What are you stupid?"

Later, after a few months, he was telling me — dispassionately, it seemed — that he'd liked how Schopenhauer defined love. When I asked him to explain, he answered that it wasn't really possible, because I wasn't familiar with his philosophy and since I hadn't mastered the concepts he'd used, understanding would be impossible. So, then I went and read some Schopenhauer. Not a book of course, but the Wikipedia article. I also looked elsewhere. On the portal "Cālis.lv", I found this comment: "At its core, love is nothing other than a precisely directed, specialized, and — in the strongest sense of the word — individualized mating instinct." I'm not convinced that this aphorism revealed Schopenhauer's understanding of love to me, but it still seemed to explain a lot. Not about love, but about him. All my life I wanted a smart guy. But I got a philosopher, dammit.

On a different night we were discussing masturbation. I never would've imagined that someday I'd meet a guy who I'd have to convince of the superiority of sex relative to masturbation. And that conversation also didn't happen through practice, but through theory. On Facebook, of course.

The first of our, no — my, breakups was at "Chomsky", the same place as our first date. That night after a week of, constant, but not unreasonable alcohol use, I was drinking beer again. He was already out of it, but I was in that altered state of consciousness where everything seems clearer than clear. I remembered the moment when I pretended to go to the toilet but actually put on my coat and left. It was February, night and raining, and it all together seemed so sad. When I woke up, I decided that this was the right moment to watch von Trier's "Antichrist".

During this relationship I've had more sexual partners than in my whole life. The number, of course, isn't impressive, but the fact is interesting. To get over another breakup or to justify being with someone again, I had to prove to myself and Aurelija that I didn't give a shit about him, that I'm independent and also a bitch. That was the way that I could accept and justify my relationship with him. My feelings, which earlier I'd been used to sharing honestly and openly, I tried to view cynically, me — I viewed with irony, but him — with pity. It seemed only fair to do things that earlier would've seemed unprincipled. This was not an occasion where after a breakup I felt so lonely and unsatisfied that I needed to have one-night stands with different guys or, for example, with his former girlfriend. Actually, more the opposite — I tried to be careful in advance so I wouldn't end up in the role of the jilted or disappointed lover.

We drove to his parents' house for Midsummer's, which we spent with his friends. I was overjoyed that he'd invited me on Facebook to celebrate another meaningless holiday together, and I was a little confused when after midnight and a bottle of whiskey he coered me to become his girlfriend. I'd been waiting for that for so long that I'd already come to terms with it never happening and maybe not even being necessary. Since his blood alcohol level didn't allow him to get behind the wheel, his mom came to pick us up, who I met for the first time. To spare himself a horrible hangover, he took some sleeping pills. I only understood that later. Since I wasn't rocked to sleep by little white discs, I was racked with boredom in his dark room. I took his computer, so I could get on Facebook. I noticed that there were three open Word documents at the bottom of the screen.

Curiosity didn't let me ignore them, though I didn't have high hopes, because how could there be anything interesting written in

a Word document. Two of them were some sort of speeches, but the third one — a letter. It looked like he had written it to send to me. I don't know when he'd written it and when he'd planned to send it. Probably he didn't plan to. He was lying next to me knocked out on sleeping pills and I read the letter. I read it many times. About 20. I wanted to copy the letter to somewhere, so I'd have a copy, but I was afraid. Along with writing how pretty my hair was, he also wrote that the concept of having a relationship had dried up or something like that. That we could meet up and that it would be good for me too. Until the moment, of course, when I'd meet my forever guy, he said. That seemed both sad and sweet. I read it over and over and knew that I'd never see this letter again.

If anybody's interested in how it all ended — he drove me to the airport, I took a trip, I went up into the mountains and became enlightened. When I returned I got a message on Facebook that my infidelity in the Caucasus seemed undeniable to him, so he'd had a romantic

episode of his own. What else can you say. I answered that I didn't care. It was July, I was lying in the grass in front of the summer house, and I finally really didn't care.

And anyway, you shouldn't think about or talk about men, Aurelija says. We, women, waste so much time on that, which we could spend on something more valuable. Even on Schopenhauer.

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