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DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0049.08

From Claiming Authority to Sensuous Excursions: Mapping the Female Body in Latvian Women's Travel Writing (1878–1920)

**No autoritātes pieprasīšanas līdz jutekliskām ekskursijām:
Sievietes ķermeņa kartēšana latviešu rakstnieču
ceļojumu aprakstos (1878–1920)**

Keywords:

history of women's
writing,
gender,
embodiment,
mobility,
travelogue

Atslēgvārdi:

sieviešu rakstniecības
vēsture,
dzimte,
mobilitāte,
ķermenis,
ceļojumu literatūra

Summary

Although Latvian women started to publish their travel writings during the 1870s, until recently they have not attracted much scholarly attention. Thus the aim of this article is twofold: first, by focusing on Latvian women's travel writing published in the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries, to expand the knowledge of women's contributions to the genre and to the history of literature in general; and second, by concentrating on the female body, to analyze how women construct narratives about themselves as embodied travelling subjects. Based on the ideas of feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) and the insight that travel writing is one of the most physical of literary genres because it thematically involves the body moving through space, the travelogues of Minna Freimane (*Par piemiņu*, 1884) and Angelika Gailīte (*Vērojumi un sapņojumi*, 1920) are read in order to trace the changes in the representation of the female traveller's body.

Kopsavilkums

Latviešu sievietes ceļojumu aprakstus sāka publicēt 19. gadsimta 70. gados, taču līdz šim tie nav izpelnījušies lielu pētnieku interesi. Raksta mērķis ir divējāds: pirmkārt, sniegt īsu ieskatu latviešu sieviešu ceļojumu aprakstos, kas publicēti 19. gadsimta pēdējās desmitgadēs un 20. gadsimta sākumā, paplašinot zināšanas par sieviešu ieguldījumu ceļojumu aprakstu žanrā un rakstniecības vēsturē kopumā. Un, otrkārt, koncentrējoties uz ķermenisko aspektu klātbūtni ceļojumu aprakstos, analizēt, kā sievietes konstruē naratīvus par sevi kā iemiesotiem, ceļojošiem subjektiem. Balstoties atziņā, ka ceļojumu apraksts ir viens no fiziskākajiem žanriem, jo tematiski ietver ķermeņa pārvietošanos telpā un laikā, un sievišķās rakstības idejās (*écriture féminine*), aplūkotas izmaiņas ceļotājas ķermeņa atainojumā 19. gadsimta beigās un 20. gadsimta sākumā: Minnas Freimanes ceļojumu aprakstu grāmatas "Par piemiņu" (1884) un Angelikas Gailītes ceļojumu aprakstu grāmatas "Vērojumi un sapņojumi" (1920) tuvlasījumos.

The need to highlight Latvian women's contribution to literature and to expand the traditional literary canon with texts previously considered marginal and omitted from literary histories, while at the same time asking questions about the strategies and agency of women's writing, makes it useful to draw attention to the hitherto little-studied Latvian women's travel writing. Based on the idea that travel writing is the most physical of literary genres because it involves the body moving through different configurations of time and space, and on the ideas of women's writing (*écriture féminine*) that highlight the importance of the corporeal in the text, the article focuses on the representations of a female traveller's body in women's travelogues published in the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Foregrounding women as subjects and speakers, Latvian women's travel writing already from the last decades of the 19th century onwards placed value on subjective experiences: travellers whose writings' primary purpose was to inform their compatriots at home interpreted the unfamiliar through themselves, often grounding the narrative in their judgment and the authenticity of lived experience. I argue that the presence of subjective, embodied experience, drawing attention to the sensory aspects of the journey, became increasingly important in women's travel writing in the early 20th century, when, in addition to being informative accounts, travel writing became more literary.

Although feminist interest in autobiographical texts (letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, etc.) has led to serious reconsiderations of vast and various sources of women's travel writing, showing that travelling, traditionally seen as a socially privileged activity, has also involved less privileged social groups who have their own stories to tell, the objective of this article is to look at travel writing that was published and circulated. Thus my analysis is limited to travel writing by middle-class female travellers, read as examples in order to trace the changes that took place with regard to the position of women in the social order and in women's writing. The close readings of travelogues by Minna Freimane (*Par piemiņu*, 1884) and Angelika Gailīte (*Vērojumi un sapņojumi*, 1920), which originated from their travel experiences, were published as books at the essential stages in the development of Latvian women's writing: Minna Freimane's travelogue was published during the emergence of women in Latvian literature, while Angelika Gailīte's travelogue was published in the same time period that saw phenomena such as the New Woman and increased attention being directed to the issue of women's emancipation. Being aware that the

field of Latvian women's travel writing is still at an early stage of research, where women's travelogues need to be identified and itineraries mapped, and acknowledging that a few case studies could never encompass the whole range of women's travel writing, what this analysis can do is to trace the contours of the tradition of Latvian women's travel writing in relation to self-presentation and literary culture, and highlight connections and changes.

Looking for Tradition

Whereas travel writing has long been considered male territory and the tradition of women travellers was obscured, starting from the 1970s, Western academic feminist critics rewriting the male-authored history to include women's contributions revealed that women have always not only travelled but have also written about their journeys. From the mid-19th century onwards, the number of travelogues published by women increased rapidly, and from then until today, women writers have made a significant contribution to the genre in all its various forms.

There is substantial scholarly literature on women's travel writing that both seeks to identify women's travelogues and looks for similarities in themes, voice, style, and perspectives, however, without arriving at a single answer to the question of whether women's travel accounts are fundamentally different from men's (Mills 1991, Siegel 2004, Saunders 2014). While gender as a reference point has generated much historical and theoretical research in travel writing studies, by developing a more nuanced approach to travel accounts researchers have concluded that an individual's travel experiences and representations are shaped by the interaction of different factors, and gender identity is intertwined with ethnic and national identity, race, age, class, wealth and status, education, political and religious beliefs, ideals and convictions, the narrative conventions of the genre at a particular time period, as well as the circumstances of publication (Bassnett 2002, Thompson 2011, Bird 2016). Despite the differences, the flexibility of the genre offered women a public space in which they could take a subject position, gain a voice, and claim agency. As Carl Thompson argues, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "travel and travel writing constituted an important route to self-empowerment and cultural authority for women" (Thompson 2011: 189). By travelling and writing about their journeys, women were able to obtain education outside the official institutions which were closed to them, and acquire a degree of independence, social power, and authority. In addition, they were able to subvert expectations of women's roles and dominant norms by explicitly positioning themselves as travellers and writers.

In the late nineteenth century, when women's travel and travel writing had reached a previously unprecedented scale and women travel writers began to be singled out as examples of the new women's liberation, Latvian women also began to publish their travel accounts. In the 1870s, as women started to make inroads into Latvian literature in poetry, prose, drama, and journalism, the first known Latvian female travel writer Minna Freimane (1847–?) published her travel writing *Iz Kaukāzijas* (From the Caucasus, 1878) in the newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis*. Later she published impressions about her travels in Germany, France, and Italy: *No Baltijas tālā svešumā* (From the Baltic to Distant Foreign Lands) (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 1880), and Egypt: *Par Ēģipti* (About Egypt) (*Latviešu Avīzes*, 1880). As can be concluded from the scant biographical information, she travelled as a governess and later as a servant to a baroness (Kārkla 2020). In 1884 Freimane's travel writings were compiled as a book *Par piemiņu* (For Remembrance) (Liepāja, Klāva Ukstiņa apgāds). Returning to the Caucasus, she continued to travel and write, publishing *Pa Volgas upi uz Kaukāziju* (On the Volga River to the Caucasus, 1884) and *Dagestānē* (In Dagestan, 1886) (*Baltijas Vēstnesis*). Although the time span of her public activity was short and little is known of her life after 1886, Freimane's travelogues allowed women authors who came after her to comfortably place themselves within the tradition of Latvian women's travel writing.

Writer Marija Medinska-Valdemāre (1830–1887) in her *Vēstule "Rotai", ko cien. tautiete M. M. no Krievzemes laidusi* (Letter to Rota sent by the honorable compatriot M. M. from Russianland), published in the family magazine *Rota* in 1884, stated: "Although there are already a few female compatriots in my homeland who have travelled and told a lot about their adventures, I know that there are even more who, having lived in their homeland all their lives, long to know and hear something from the lives of other people (..)" (Medinska 1884). After managing her brother's estate in Novgorod Province for almost 20 years, Medinska-Valdemāre, looking for better living conditions, moved together with her husband to Aksay in southern Russia. The purpose of her writing was both to educate and to entertain her readers, and the target audience of her travel letters were Latvian women who, as the author points out, had less time and fewer opportunities than men to gain either formal or informal education.

Examining narratives of the 19th-century travellers from Courland, Māra Grudule notes the different positions of Latvian male and female travellers: while men travelled independently, on their own initiative, women were mostly able to see foreign lands as travel companions (Grudule 2005: 123). Undeniably, the opportunities for men to gain education, travel independently and have a professional career, which often took them abroad, were much more plentiful. The dominant ideology of middle-class

culture that predicated the separation of public and private spheres, mapped as masculine and feminine, was not publicly questioned until the mid-1880s (Zelče 2002, Hanovs 2003, Eglāja-Kristsons 2017). On the one hand, women writers and journalists in their own discussion of women's role in society accepted the idea of natural differences between men and women, the notion of women as the weaker members of society, and the association of women with domesticity (Kronvalde 1870, Freimane 1882, Medinska 1884, Birzniece 1886). The discussion included questions on women's education and professional careers, from which they voluntarily withdrew for the benefit of men. According to Hanovs, the liberation of women from male dominance was illusory and "middle-class women actually did not create an opposition to the male discourse but legitimized men's views, as they shared with them the same social and cultural values". Women's identity was dominated by class, not by gender, and the double male dominance of the time (the competition of native and foreign male cultures) "left women the role of man's companion". A professionally active woman would only make the difficult struggle of Latvian men for social status in a multinational Baltic society more complex and challenging (Hanovs 2002: 30–31). On the other hand, female-authored travel writing was an opportunity to subversively address the particular social order and the related notions of masculinity and femininity. As women travellers moved across different geographies, their positions as subjects changed, and their travel writing revealed an alternative set of models, destabilizing the assumptions about separate, differentiated spheres of activity, as well as the idea of women as passive and inert.

In the 1890s, the extensive travel narrative *Celojumu vēstules* (Letters from Journeys) (*Dienas lapas fejetons*, 1891–1892) by governess Piliņa Katrīna (?–?), whose biography is almost completely unknown, was published. While staying with her employer in Berlin, she was able to travel to Austria, Switzerland, and France together with a female companion, as the improved modes of transport and accommodation had made travel in Europe more accessible, affordable, and safer for people from different social classes, especially for women. Her travel letters belonged to the travel writing of the time and, like the travelogues of her predecessors Freimane and Medinska-Valdemāre, contained both entertainment and useful information. According to the editor's note accompanying the letters: "Although these letters are from 1885 and therefore seem to be out of date, we are nevertheless presenting them to our readers because, firstly, they will not be displeasing for them as written by a woman of our country, and secondly, we hope that they will in no way bore them because they are written in a concise and rather attractive manner. Some of them will serve as historical reminders, others as introductions to foreign lands" (Piliņa 1891). In 1891, Piliņa Katrīna continued her journeys as a governess, travelling by

steamship from Odessa to Vladivostok and visiting South Asian port cities on the way. Two slightly different versions of her Asian travel impressions were published: *Brauciens ap Āzijas pasaules daļu* (A Journey Around the Asian Part of the World) (Balss, 1891) and *Ceļojuma vēstules* (Letters from Journeys) (*Dienas lapas feļetons*, 1892). When she embarked on this journey, she already had some experience in travel writing, thus her Asian travel letters contained more detailed information and historical facts about the places visited than her previous travelogues.

Almost a decade later, Marija Jēgere-Šmite's (1872–1950) Asian travel narrative *Pa tālajiem Austrumiem* (In the Far East, 1900–1901) was published in the magazine *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*. At the time of her travels she had lived in Beijing, China for more than two years (from 1896 to 1899), accompanying her husband Pēteris Šmits, who did his internship there to qualify for a professorship. Together with her husband Jēgere-Šmite visited Korea and Japan. In her travel writing, she claimed the status of a female intellectual and established her authority from the outset by criticizing male travellers' superficial and misleading accounts about East Asia, which she aimed to correct by providing her readers with reliable information based on her own experience, her observations, and knowledge gained from books and journeys with professors. Her carefully crafted, informational, and thoughtful descriptions show that while the practice of science was almost exclusively a male domain at the time, the genre of travel writing as semi-scientific encouraged women to conduct empirical investigations into many topics and gave them the opportunity "to do science while not necessarily appearing to do science" (Thompson 2017: 136). Šmite's political and ethnographic essays, travelogues, and translations that were published in the Latvian press during her stay in Beijing and Vladivostok show a woman trying to establish herself in a very specific branch of science alongside her famous husband (Dunajevs 2023). Using her independent powers of observation and judgment, learning about foreign cultures, languages, histories, social organizations, and natural environments, as a traveller she became an active agent and cultural commentator with her travelogue participating in a broader range of cultural debates and the study of East Asia.

At about at the same time, travel accounts by another female traveller, Hermīne Zālīte (1858–1932), were published in the magazine *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*. Like Jēgere-Šmite she travelled together with male family members – her brother, professor Kārlis Balodis and her husband, editor Pēteris Zālīte. In her travelogues *Uz dienvidiem* (To the South, 1896) about travels in Germany and Italy and *Uz Parīzi, uz pasaules izstādi* (To Paris, to the World Exposition, 1900), she voices the emancipated middle-class woman's view of travel in Europe as an important part of self-education and cultural enrichment. She aims to foster the knowledge and appreciation of Western art as she describes the tour of foreign art galleries and museums while

also providing practical details of her journey, including information about accommodation, food, transport, entrance tickets to the museums, and recommendations of cultural sites. At the beginning of her Paris account, she also pays attention to women's travel apparel, advocating dress for increased mobility and showing that the turn of the century marked the beginning of a change in women's clothing: luxurious, impractical and uncomfortable garments that hindered freedom of movement were replaced by simpler and more comfortable clothing, which was also more suitable for travelling.

Changes in women's access to travel in the early 20th century coincided with the impact of first-wave feminism, the *fin-de-siècle* challenges to the gender order, and the emergence of the image of the New Woman in culture. The cultural influences of modernity gave rise to a new kind of female traveller, characterized by Sidonie Smith as "the woman of some independent means and some independence of mind who was just as eager as certain men of the time to expand her horizon of knowledge and her arena of agency through travel" (Smith 2001: 16). In the early 20th century, travel became a symbol of the modern woman as well as a feminist practice that involved the deconstruction of social privilege and power, and travelling women, in particular, were seen as pointing to broader social and cultural themes of power, resistance, and emancipation (Marsh 2004). Latvian women increasingly travelled not only as companions but also independently, seeking educational opportunities, enjoying Western European culture, for leisure as well. Teacher and publicist Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa (1877–1950) was one such woman who had an income that allowed her to travel abroad. In her unpublished autobiography she writes: "In 1901 I felt so tired that I decided to go abroad for a few months. The management of the school was left to Mr Ķeniņš, the two small children in the care of my parents, while I, with a small bag in my hand and a little money in my pocket, wandered through Vienna, Switzerland, [and] Northern Italy, to spend a few weeks in Ospedaletti, where I wrote my series of literary works *Iz Dienvidiem* (From the South) [...]" (Rūmane 1938). The lyrical cycle *From the South*, in which the specific geographical place is discovered through sensual perceptions, was later published in the literary supplement of *Pēterburgas Avīzes* (1902), marking the beginning of her literary activity. Thus travelling to Italy provided the author not only with new, stimulating experiences, but also undisturbed time for writing and self-reflection (Kārkla 2019). In 1911 Rūmane-Ķeniņa travelled to Paris and afterwards published her impressions *Vēstules iz Parīzes* (Letters from Paris, 1912) in the monthly journal of literature and art *Druva*. She deliberately avoided describing monuments, churches, famous buildings, and museums but instead concentrated on the rapidly changing everyday life of Paris that took place on the boulevards, in magazines, and in café-restaurants. She paid special attention to the impressions left by

modern dance, focusing in detail on Isadora Duncan's performances. Rūmane-Ķeniņa conveyed to the Latvian readers innovations in Duncan's choreographic language, as well as characteristic changes in a woman's role in the artistic process, since modern dance not only completely transformed the types of movements seen on the stage but especially sought to liberate the female body, and "for women especially, Duncan's dance bodied forth the vitality and agency they were continually denied in their daily lives" (Coates 2013: 185). Ideas about the new freedom of movement of the body and the emancipation of the dancing female body can also be linked to the freedom of movement that many 20th-century women experienced when travelling.

The well-known Latvian oculist, Antonija Lūkina, wife of Fēlikss Lūkins, later known as the writer and feminist activist Ivande Kaija (1876–1942) in her travel narrative *Vagonā no Cīrihes uz Lugano* (In a Railway Carriage from Zurich to Lugano) (*Dzimtenes Vēstnesis*, 1910), signed with her maiden name Tonija Meldere, described a train ride, revealing how technological advances made middle and upper-class women's independent journeys in Europe possible, as travelling by train became an increasingly comfortable and safe mode of transportation. The text follows the linear trajectory of a train journey from the "cold north" of Switzerland to the "sunny south" of Italy. To entertain readers, the travelling companions encountered are painted in contrasting and vivid colours, with impressions based on the narrator's subjective feelings towards the cheerful, carefree Italian workers returning home after seasonal work, and the old Swiss ladies with their cackling voices who move about in their daily routine and among whom the traveller feels as if "among the witches of Walpurgis Night" (Kaija 1910). Sidonie Smith, examining how women's travel and travel writing in the twentieth century was shaped by particular modes of vehicles, writes that in train carriages "women were in enclosed spaces designed to protect them from the elements and from their own vulnerability as travelling women" (Smith 2001: 127). Kaija's travel narrative captures the subjective impressions of a female traveller in the protected space of a train carriage, placing the journey itself at the centre of attention. Observations, brief encounters with other passengers, and contemplation caused by watching the landscape outside the window become the content of the narrative, and the narrator, a woman who can travel alone, is the sign of female emancipation.

In the context of Latvian women's changing social roles and cultural experiences at the beginning of the 20th century, organized teachers' excursions also played a role. In 1909, artist and teacher Lilija Sērmūkša (1882–?) went on one of the five travel itineraries offered by the commission of the educational department of the Russian Society for the Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in Moscow. Her travelogue *Ceļojums pa Turciju, Grieķiju, Ēģipti, Palestīnu, Sīriju un Bulgāriju* (A Trip through Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Bulgaria) was published in the newspaper

Dzimtenes Vēstnesis in 1911. Travelling through many countries over two months, the trip was not only an educational journey – the group was accompanied by guides – but also intensive and physically exhausting. In the summer before World War I, teacher and writer Angelika Gailīte (1884–1975) travelled with a group of teachers from Moscow to Italy. Her travelogue *Vērojumi un sapņojumi* (Observations and Dreams), centred on the experience of the travelling female subject, is a narrative about her escape from a failed marriage and the depressing, provincial Russian city where she resided, and the discovery of the riches of Western culture, vivid impressions from seeing original works of art which surpassed any written art history. However, most of all it speaks of personal freedom, mapping the topographies of the identity of a New Woman – independent, relatively educated, sexually liberated and oriented towards life in the public sphere. While all travel narratives discussed above are informed by the writers' subjective positions as women, to perceive this corpus of texts as homogenous would be fallacious, taking into account the significant social and literary changes during the time period in question. In the next two sections of the article, I will look closer at the travelogues of Minna Freimane and Angelika Gailīte to examine how the woman traveller represents her body in the narrative in different time periods. The examples I have chosen mark the beginning and the end of the period in question, thus allowing us to map both the continuities and differences of women's travel writing.

Minna Freimane: The experiential, sentimental observer and body in motion

Travelling, at least historically, has usually been understood as a deeply bodily experience, and travelogue, mainly because its subject matter involves the movement of the body through different configurations of time and space, can be considered the most physical literary genre (Helmets, Mazzeo 2005, Forsdick 2016). The presence of the traveller's body ensures the authenticity of the travelogue, assuring that the source of the narrative is based on eyewitness experience. Simultaneously the presence of the body in travel writing "is always a matter of selectivity and performativity, and must therefore be read in the wider context of cultural and travel history" (Forsdick 2016: 68–69). Although travel was seen as a sign of women's emancipation, given the long-dominant link between travel and knowledge as rational and the view that women's corporeality affected their rational capacity and thus weakened their agency, female travellers had to make a special effort to gain authority as storytellers and create space for their narratives within the dominant notions of travel. Traditionally

the protagonist of a travel narrative was coded as “male crossing borders”, but the woman in a man’s itinerary was mostly mapped as an “object of desire” or “destination” (Bassnett 2002: 225). This the positioning of women in men’s travel accounts was closely linked to the perception of women as bodies, embedded in conventional binary thinking, drawing parallels between the intellectual and the rational as masculine, and the corporeal, intuitive and emotional as feminine. While women travel writers, telling their own stories, destabilized certain assumptions, all the same they wrote in a masculine tradition in which the travelling woman, at least to some extent, had to subordinate her material self in order for her text to compete with male accounts (Bassnett 2002; Helmers, Mazzeo 2005; Bird 2016).

The second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was a time when Latvian national identity was gradually emerging, and travel accounts, predominantly male-authored, played an essential role as political and cultural polemics. Rather than focusing on direct experiences of travel, foreign travel impressions were used to address social, political, and cultural issues, as well as “to legitimize claims to cultural development and, to some extent, cultural uniqueness” (Goloubeva, 2003: 13). Pointing to the fact that travel writing plays a significant role in allowing women to participate in a wide scope of debates and discourses, Carl Thompson writes that consequently a travelogue could become a “journey to authority” (Thompson 2017: 133). For female travellers during this time period, the genre was an important route to wider recognition as intellectuals and writers. This statement can be applied to the first known Latvian female travel writer, Minna Freimane (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Portrait of Minna Freimane.
Photo by Oswald Lange, ca. 1890.
The University of Latvia Academic Library,
The Museum of Literature and Music,
LABR R6902-11, Alksnis Mīkelis 6-11.

Freimane was born in Jūrgumiža, where her father was a manorial taskmaster. Belonging to a family of the Latvian upper social class shaped her future possibilities – she was hired as a governess in the family of a Russian colonel and later as a maid for the baroness, and both professions enabled her extensive travels. Overall, little is known about her personal life story, her public portrait consists of involvement in the national movement (collecting folklore, participating in the work of the Liepāja Latvian Society), literary activities, public speeches, and travel writing (Kārkla 2021). Before being compiled as a book, her travel writing was published serially, mostly in the political, social, and literary newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, one of the most important Latvian civic publications of the time, thanks to which also Latvian journalism began to emerge (Hanovs 2002), and Freimane was later mentioned also as one of the first Latvian journalists–war reporters as a result of her witnessing and describing the beginning of the Russo–Turkish war (1877–1878) (Akmentiņš 1943).

Her book of travel accounts *Par piemiņu* (For Remembrance, 1884) (fig. 2), divided into four sections, begins with an eyewitness account of the outbreak of the Russo–Turkish war, and the first part of the travelogue documents her travels in the Caucasus. The second section, entitled *Vācu kolonijas grūtumi un kara briesmas* (The Hardships of the German Colony and the Perils of War), is a historical description of the German colonies in the Russian Empire that suffered during the Russo–Persian War (1826–1828). While this story had little to do with Freimane’s direct travels, it gave her the opportunity to express her views about the colonial movement, pointing out the dangers to which colonists exposed themselves by moving to foreign

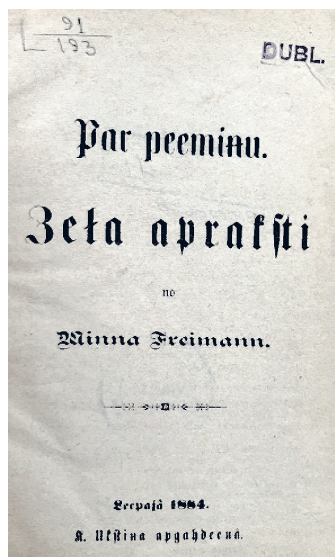


Fig. 2. Book cover:
Minna Freimane. *Par piemiņu*
(For Remembrance).

territories. In the narrative, Freimane also focuses on the fate of women who were taken captive and later returned. By recording their stories, she emphasizes women's journeys that were very different from her own. The historical account is followed by her actual travel through Germany, France, and Italy, focusing in detail on Pompeii. The fourth part of the book chronicles her journey to Egypt, where she stays in Cairo for three months and goes on a desert tour.

Her travel writing is descriptive in nature, understanding travel as a means of gaining and passing on new knowledge, and she repeatedly expresses a great responsibility to her readers, at the same time filtering the observations through herself. According to Mary Louise Pratt, who counterposes scientific, objective travel accounts and experiential texts, Freimane's narrative is sentimental travel writing, as the authority of the narrator is based on "the authenticity of felt experience" and she clearly supports her message in sensory experience, judgment, and agency. Instead of a "disembodied eye" or panoptic observer who erases the body in order to claim complete, objective knowledge, the sentimental, experiential protagonist is "composed of the whole body" (Pratt 1992: 76–78). In November 1879, starting a new journey, Freimane wrote: "My mind was joyful like a bird that forgets everything else and soars into the sky singing. I thought about how I wanted to remember everything I saw and tell my compatriots at home" (Freimane 2021: 143). The pronouns 'my' and 'I' clearly emphasize the presence and significance of the traveller's personality – the traveller is a central figure of her account.

When describing the practical inconveniences of travel, Freimane writes about her body in functional terms: it must be capable of enduring the difficulties of the journey. Whether it is the headache caused by the unbearable smell of *kizjak* (fuel made from dried cattle dung); the freezing cold of an unheated Paris apartment in November: "The chattering teeth while in my flat was no small matter. But so what! My job was to see the city – and that's what I did"; travelling bad roads with uncomfortable means of transportation: "On the way back I had to endure some difficulties: for 160 versts I travelled well; but when I got higher up the mountains it was no longer possible to drive the cart, I had to climb on the horse unwillingly and continue on horseback"; severe seasickness: "I lay there like a corpse and thought that this hand will no longer hold a pen"; or dizziness when climbing down the steps of the pyramid: "Looking down, [my] head feels dizzy and shaky, seeing the big blocks I have to climb down" – she makes the reader participate in her physical experiences.

The narrative offers Freimane the perfect opportunity to represent herself as an adventurous, fearless traveller who went to and wrote about places that were considered inhospitable for women. Already at the beginning of her travelogue Freimane ventures into the heart of male territory – a soldier's settlement shortly before

the declaration of war. Later, she travels into the African desert, longing for adventure and proudly reporting that she was chosen as the leader of the caravan whilst going along a narrow road in a rocky area: "Everyone wanted me to ride up front on a camel. The others rode on donkeys because the remaining camels were loaded with baggage. Our caravan had a pretty appearance when we rode behind each other in a long line. I, a distant stranger, sitting on a camel, was proud to be the leader of the others" (Freimane 2021: 240). The described experience reveals the freedom of movement – when riding a camel, she is physically rising above the others who are riding on donkeys, and both her gaze and the whole body are empowered with a sense of agency.

Despite the fact that Freimane's narrative is primarily informative, it also makes use of emotions to emphasize her observations and sometimes cause action. While emotions, associated with the physical, irrational, and female, have traditionally been attributed a negative meaning, renewed critical attention to emotions suggests the importance of feelings in historical narratives, including women's travel writings (Harper 2001, Adam 2019). Observations of the landscape cause Freimane joy and excitement, emphasizing the extraordinariness of the sights: "A dark blue sky; darker still, a gently swaying sea, and there, in that darkness, enchanting dancing lights. At such illumination, as we haggled in the boat, we were quite swept away with the joy of the heart" (Freimane 2021: 105). She is flooded with emotion as she watches a Muslim festival in Egypt: "I was so overwhelmed by it all that I couldn't stay any longer and went home". But when she learns of the assassination of the Russian Tsar, she is full of anger and indignation: "Tears brimmed up in my eyes. Feeling that I could not restrain myself, I went away, throwing another glance at the happy revellers". On the way, she is invited by some Arabs into their tent, where she meets a Russian missionary: "Angry as I was [...] I stood up and said to him: 'You'd better go back to your homeland and see to it that you destroy the evil seed in your own land, and [only] then go abroad!'" (Freimane 2021: 198–200) The self-positioning as an emotional and responsive narrator adds significantly to Freimane's observations, and emotions play an undeniable role in motivating her speech and actions. Thus the authority of the traveller is based on the authentic, lived experience of the journey, emphasizing the traveller's personality and including the presence of the physical body by describing the practical discomforts of the journey, the freedom of movement, and her emotional responses to different encounters. Freimane in her travel writing not only transgressed and questioned traditional gender roles by portraying a self-confident woman traveller on the move, but by bringing a physical dimension into the narrative and positioning herself as a corporeal and emotional being, she also explored personal ways of mapping the world.

Angelika Gailīte: A modernist tradition of women travellers

In the early 20th-century, women's travel was no longer exceptional. There were several factors that distinguished these travellers from women who had travelled before: female travellers were freer from expectations and constraints, as women's changing social and geographic mobility had made the conditions of women's identity much more fluid. Alongside the informative 'realist' travelogues, much travel writing in the modern period at the beginning of the 20th century became "less didactic, more subjective, more literary" (Carr 2002: 75). Women writers often used travelogues to redefine themselves through interactions between exploration of self through the experience of travel and self-articulation in writing. Addressing the relationship between geographical space and the female body in the travel accounts of American and British modernist women writers, Joyce E. Kelly points out that by inscribing subjective, lived bodily experiences in travelogues women writers also sought more creative and liberating ways for self-expression. Because women writers of the modernist period focused increasingly on the female body and the right of women to control and articulate their bodies, as well as on the issue that women had been bound to their bodies because of the roles society had assigned them, Kelly finds that the ideas of French feminists who thought and wrote extensively about the intersection of female body, language, and writing practices were particularly suitable for discussing modernist women's writing (Kelly 2018: 23). The ideas of feminine writing – *écriture féminine* – focus on the right of women to articulate their bodies: to 'write the body' and 'write through the body' call for a woman to symbolically reclaim power over her body by linguistically reclaiming this space (her body) as her own (Cixous 1976: 880). The recovery of the female body and sexuality that for centuries had been denied and repressed because of male power was the main source of *écriture féminine* that called for a new representation of women's consciousness, which would include the corporeal and a type of women's language that would be transgressive and challenge patriarchal norms. Reclaiming the female body by writing the body was envisioned as a path to empowerment, self-determination, and liberation from masculinist notions of being. This view can also be at least partially applied to Latvian modernist authors who, at the beginning of the 20th century, began to publish work that differed from the texts written in the previous century.

Angelika Gailīte (fig. 3) broke into literature by exploring the workings of the inner life of her female characters. Like many other women writers of the period, she opened up the soul of women and brought a new image of the intelligent, independent, and sexually liberated woman to Latvian literature. Belonging to the first generation of gymnasium-educated Latvian women writers, Gailīte, after graduating



Fig. 3. Portrait of Angelika Gailīte.
Photo by unknown author, 1912.
National Library of Latvia, Lettonica and
Baltic Reading Room, Aleksejs Apinis
Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room,
LNB RX80, 2, 25, 4. lp.

from Daugavpils Gymnasium in 1903, worked as a teacher. She became engaged to writer Haralds Eldgasts (Jānis Miķelsons, 1882–1926), the author of the novel *Zvaigžņotas nakts* (Starry Nights, 1905), considered to be the first Latvian modernist novel (Vāvere 1998). The novel was dedicated to Gailīte (Angelika Jadvigā G.), who rewrote the manuscript. Gailīte in her memoir writes: “Two to three pages were written by me and it is the first thing I wrote that was published” (Gailīte 1962: 12). Unfortunately, she does not reveal which pages are hers. Subtitled *Vienas dvēseles stāsts* (The Story of a Soul), Eldgasts’s novel was innovative in its revelation of an individual’s psyche. Such intimate revelation of the inner plot of the soul was alien to Latvian literature at the time (Vāvere 1996: 30). An extensive theoretical preface, added to the novel, is considered one of the manifestos of Latvian decadence, beginning with the postulate: “The real immediacy is not outside us, but is inside us” (Vāvere 1998: 265). In the autumn of 1910, the couple moved to Vologda, a Russian provincial city where Eldgasts had a job as a teacher. In the first winter in Vologda Gailīte didn’t have work outside the house, thus she had time to compile her first book of short stories and sketches (most of which were written in 1908) called *Ilgas un maldi* (Longings and Delusions, 1913). The collection was published at the same time when works by other Latvian women authors (*Aina Āre* by Antija, 1912; *Iedzimtais grēks* (Original Sin) by Ivande Kaija, 1913), openly exploring issues of women’s emancipation, calling for the spiritual awakening of women and discussing women’s rights including the demand for the realization of a woman’s personality in all spheres of life, including the sexual,



Fig. 4. Book cover:
Angelika Gailīte *Vērojumi un sapņojumi*
(Observations and Dreams).

were published and discussed in literary criticism. Focusing on the dilemma of the modern woman who, on the one hand, longs for family life and motherhood and on the other hand, feels like it all is a prison to her, they show female characters who want to become heroines themselves and be proud of their independence, but cannot find firm ground under their feet. The choice of themes was largely determined by autobiographical experience, and the open display of women's inner conflicts was a novelty.

When in 1914 Gailīte travelled to Italy with a group of teachers, her marriage had broken up and the trip was the symbolic beginning of a new life. Her Italian impressions, collected in the book *Vērojumi un sapņojumi* (Observations and Dreams) (fig. 4), start with crossing both geographical and deeply personal borders, thus the physical journey is closely linked to the psychological liberation: she crosses the border of the Russian Empire for the first time, leaving behind not only gloomy Vologda, but also an unhappy marriage: "New page. Brand new. Such lightness as if without a past. Among people who see you for the first time, who know nothing of how you have lived, what you have felt before, who take you just as you are, standing in front of them that instant" (Gailīte 1920: 5). Although the travelogue follows the itinerary of the journey, as the chapter headings show – To the Border. Poland. Austria. Vienna. Italy. Florence. Fiesole. Naples. Pompeii. Capri. Rome. From Rome to Venice. Venice – and includes information about the places visited, the focus is on the traveller's experience of the new surroundings that cause enjoyment of mind, body and soul.

Gailīte's travel writing celebrates a state of intense wonder, coming from the strange joy of travelling abroad: "All of us, except Yulia Mikhailovna and the classics teacher, were crossing the border for the first time, so we didn't complain about the inconvenience, but with a strange joy we entered a new, unfamiliar country" (Gailīte 1920: 7). She feels thrilled and elated, looking at the places she encounters with great excitement: "As if carried on wings, we head for the Italian train and take our seats in small Italian carriages with doors on the side facing each seat. We are fascinated by every little thing that reminds us of this country. We are delighted by the first Italian expression: *Vietato fumare* (it's the quite commonplace: No Smoking), that we read on the walls of the carriage" (Gailīte 1920:17).

The book is characterized by sincerity, sensitivity, delight, a personal and sensual experience of the place and the objects seen, as well as an embodied response to the beauty. The impressions of the journey are captured and re-created in the text, involving not only the gaze but through focusing on sensual experiences, the whole body. A series of expressive, sensual reflections in Gailīte's travelogue resonates with the corporeal turn in tourism studies that points to the recognition of sensual awareness in the travel experience. Focusing on the whole sensuous-thinking body and how it perceives and understands the world, several studies have addressed sensory perception in travel accounts, questioning the previously dominant visual perception as primary (Pritchard et al. 2007, Edneron, Falconer 2011, Edneron 2018). For Gailīte the conditioned perception of the outside world dominates, with an emphasis on the search for a personal, bodily connection, the direct, sensory experience of a new place. She imagines Florence, the first Italian city on the itinerary, as a lover who makes "the blood flow faster in my veins" (Gailīte 1920: 26). Deep fusion with the place is evidenced by sensory perception: "I went out alone. Alone in a strange city, without a goal, without a purpose. And there you embraced me in your caressing sunbeams and, pressing a burning kiss on my forehead and lips, took me captive forever. I wandered in enchantment through the silent streets. My feet glided lightly on the broad white stones, as if they were not cobblestones but soft blankets that would carry me" (Gailīte 1920: 27). While the freedom to move around the city and observe without interacting with others was one of the hallmarks of modernity, characterized by masculine privilege and leisure, Gailīte's early morning walk without a goal in Florence and also later in the text, where she describes the pleasure of aimless wanderings in Venice, show that when travelling, women could experience the freedom to move about alone and carefree in the city, becoming a *flâneuses* (Wolff 1985, Elkin 2017).

Identifying herself as a Northerner, the traveller repeatedly describes the hot Italian sun, which pleasantly "seeps through all limbs": "All I take from it [Bologna] is the sun's sweltering heat, which seems to reflect off the yellowed walls of the

buildings and the stones of the streets" (Gailīte 1920: 20). Her senses are awakened by the contrast between the scorching sun and the cool stone floors; the scent of lemons and oranges in the garden; the music heard in the convent church; the smell of clean, fresh air after the thunderstorm; or when picking flowers in the mountains and "inhaling their strong but fragrant aroma" or running with the waves on the Naples waterfront: "(...) when the waves rose in the wind and, splashing white foam, crashed against the rocks of the shore, we couldn't resist from running down. Once there, we stood on a wide stone staircase by the boat landing. In between every new gush of water coming in, we each tried to run from one side of the steps to the other, to get over to the side elevation with our feet still dry. When playing like this, we were as if challenging the waves to hurry up. And when a whole shower of spray surprised us halfway across and hit the body, we became even merrier" (Gailīte 1920: 51). The narrator surrenders to the flow of the journey, focusing on personally significant moments which are described as meaningful.

Gailīte does not pretend that her account is objective: this is already evidenced by the word "dreams" in the title, pointing to the presence of imagination, fantasy, and inner geography, merging external and internal journeys and also accessing the unconscious dimensions of herself. The episode of arrival in Naples during the night where she is enchanted by the moonlit waters of the Mediterranean, a sense of dreamlike unreality, is telling: "When I opened the door to our room, I stopped in amazement: a stream of pale blue light was streaming towards me through the open door of the high balcony, then it went straight out to sea in a shining crescent moon. I looked to the side and saw myself in the mirror of the large wardrobe, in the same pale blue illumination that made myself alien, a purely ethereal being" (Gailīte 1920: 51). Using the images of the moonlight and mirror, Gailīte touches the unconscious, also revealing the fluidity and viscosity of the body.

Despite the fact that the account follows the itinerary of the journey and provides information about the places visited, the emphasis is on the traveller's experience which can be described as a state of intense happiness brought about by the journey abroad. Literary critic Andrejs Upīts, critically calling the book "a work characteristic of a woman" noticed the specific: a series of sensual first impressions dominated by a conditioned perception of the outside world. It allows looking at Gailīte's work as the experimental explorations of modern women that have been made possible because of the experience of travel: "This book is full of attractive details, colourful miniatures. But it has no centre, no guiding and unifying thread. [...] We see only a woman travelling for pleasure and relaxation, who looks with alert curiosity at everything that happens on the way, gets excited about everything, and writes about everything in a lightly chattering, poetic journalistic style" (Upīts 1921: 362). Thus Gailīte's

travel account, consisting of personal insights and sensations, creates an Italy of her own. It is as much a book about a trip to Italy as about a female traveller, Gailīte herself. Gailīte's travelogue is a modern woman's self-expression in which her body becomes a vehicle for exploration and imagination, also drawing parallels with the French *écriture féminine* that calls for a new representation of women's consciousness.

Conclusion

Both Minna Freimane and Angelika Gailīte travelled and wrote their travelogues during periods of change, and both of them with their writings were actors and commentators during these transitions. Freimane published her travelogue at a time when the first women authors began to emerge in Latvian literature, and women's presence in the public sphere and their access to education were contested issues. Gailīte travelled abroad to gain new impressions and broaden her horizons in tune with the opportunities that had been opened up for Latvian women by the new age of modernity. In different time periods travel writing had other functions as the predominant ones: while at the end of the 19th century its primary function was informative and the genre worked as a route to intellectual and cultural authority for women, at the beginning of the 20th century, besides being informative travel accounts, the texts became more autobiographical, more subjective and more self-consciously literary, also functioning as a means for creative self-exploration. Both Freimane and Gailīte assign importance to the corporeal, the subjective, and the private in their travel accounts by placing female travellers and their experiences at the centre, also in line with the observation that women writers' biographical and literary maps often overlap (Kārkla, Eglāja-Kristsone 2022). Highlighting the experiences and challenges of the physical body, Freimane bases her authority as a traveller on authentic, lived travel experiences. Gailīte, on the hand, by focusing on sensual experiences and personal impressions and by emphasizing the state of intense happiness elicited by the journey, clearly states that the work is based on both fact and imagination. In the examples discussed, both women's physical mobility, movement through space and time, and writing suggest the importance of travel in the construction of women's identity, agency and authority. They show that female-authored travel accounts are a rich source for the study of women's experiences, self-perception, and self-representation, as well as strategies of women's writing. Moreover, the theoretical framework outlined in the article opens the way to the study of gendered genre modifications – which is certainly worth pursuing further and more in depth, employing access to the deeper mechanisms of textual and cultural form reversal and generation.

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The present research has been carried out as part of the project

Embodied Geographies: History of Latvian Women's Writing (No 1.1.1.2./VIAA/3/19/430).