

Signe Raudive

Mg. philol., Mg. sc., literary scholar

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

E-mail: signe.raudive@lulfmi.lv

DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0049.10

Women in the Book Publishing Industry of Latvia During the Interwar Period

Sievietes grāmatu izdevējdarbībā Latvijā starpkaru periodā

Keywords:

women's history,
publishing industry,
the 1920s–1930s,
popular literature,
translations,
children's literature

Atslēgvārdi:

sieviešu vēsture,
izdevējdarbība,
20. gs. 20.–30. gadi,
populārā literatūra,
tulkojumi,
bērnu literatūra

Summary

This article explores the materials available that reflect women's achievements in the publishing industry of Latvia during the period from 1918 until 1940. The publications produced by Ilga Zvanītāja, Anna Grobiņa and Emīlija Benjamiņa are analysed in detail, including the way they were critiqued and received by the public, and also the specialisation in publishing particular literary genres. Each of the female publishers pursued a different publishing strategy and offered a differing range of published works. The empirical foundation for the article encompasses evidence of women's activity in the publishing industry as found in documents from the *Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs* (Latvian State Historical Archive), overviews published in periodicals, reviews and bookseller advertisements, and bibliographic data. The aim of the publication of this article is to provide a more comprehensive background to the collective discourse about the history of Latvian book publishing, enhancing knowledge about the women working in the industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā pētīti pieejamie materiāli, kas atspoguļo sieviešu darbību izdevējdarbībā Latvijā no 1918. līdz 1940. gadam, un sīkāk analizēti izdevēju Ilgas Zvanītājas, Annas Grobiņas, Emīlijas Benjamiņas apgādātie izdevumi, to kritika un vērtējums sabiedrībā, specializācija atsevišķu literatūras žanru izdošanā. Katra no izdevējām piekopj atšķirīgu izdevējdarbības stratēģiju un piedāvā atšķirīgu izdevumu produkciju. Raksta empīriskā bāze ietver liecības par sieviešu darbību grāmatniecībā – Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīva dokumentus, periodiskajos izdevumos publicētos pārskatus, recenzijas un grāmatu tirgotāju sludinājumus, bibliogrāfiskos rādītājus. Publikācijas mērķis ir veidot pilnīgāku priekšstatu par latviešu grāmatniecības vēstures kolektīvo diskursu, paplašinot zināšanas par 20. gadsimta 20.–30. gados nozarē strādājošajām sievietēm.

Introduction

Unlike other fields of research in the humanities, in the study of the history of books women's practical involvement as book publishers, retailers and distributors has been little researched, and studies have been for the most part limited to the period leading up to the proclamation of the independent state of Latvia in 1918.¹ The history of women's readership up until the end of the 19th century has been investigated to a slightly greater extent.²

It has to be acknowledged that there is a perfectly rational reason why the study of the history of women in the book industry has ended up on the periphery of researchers' field of vision. That is, the small number of women working as publishers at the end of the 19th century and in first decades of the 20th century, and the books they published: of inconsistent quality and rarely making a contribution of enduring cultural value. A feminist approach in the research of the publishing industry is essential, given that as late as the 20th century book publishing in Latvia was, in the main, to be regarded as a patriarchal sector of industry. In Latvia, as opposed to other larger Western countries where individual women working in publishing and journalism³ opened up the way for remarkable progress and broke the stereotypical

1 Essential sources for the biographies of the people involved in the sector are the database *Latviešu grāmatniecības darbinieki līdz 1918. gadam* (<http://lgdb.lnb.lv>) created by Latvian National Library staff members (Ināra Klekere, Lilija Limane, Viesturs Zanders) and also the article by Klekere and Limane: *Latviešu grāmatniecības profesiju attīstības tendences līdz 1918. gadam: datubāzes "Latviešu grāmatniecības darbinieki līdz 1918. gadam" analīze* (Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas zinātniskie raksti, Volume 3, 2017). The work of women as book distributors and publishers up until the beginning of the 20th century has been researched by Limane in the article *Latviešu grāmatniecības vēsture un sievietes* (Latvijas Luterānis, 01.05.2007, 22.–23. lpp.).

2 See, for example, the articles: Daija, Pauls, Eglāja-Kristsons, Eva (2016). The Discourse on Dangerous Reading in Nineteenth-Century Latvia. *Literature and Medicine*, No. 34(2), pp. 468–483; Limane, Lilija (2017). Latviešu sieviešu grāmatas līdz 19. gadsimta vidum Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Reto grāmatu un rokrakstu krājumā. Vilks, Andris (chief ed.). *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas zinātniskie raksti*, 3. (XXIII) sējums. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, 62.–78. lpp.

3 Eleanor 'Cissy' Patterson (1881–1948), who in 1930 became the editor and publisher of one of Washington's largest morning newspapers *Washington Herald*; Elizabeth Garver Jordan, editor of *Harper's Bazaar* from 1900 to 1913; the publishing house *Hogarth Press*, jointly owned and run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf; Louise Seaman Bechtel (1894–1985), the first person to head a juvenile book department established by the American publishing house *Macmillan Publishers*; May Massee (1881–1966), an American children's book editor, the founding head of the juvenile departments at *Doubleday* from 1922 and at *Viking Press* from 1932; Bertha Mahony (1882–1969) and Elinor

views entrenched in society about the capabilities of women, these kinds of exemplars are very few. A more fully inclusive women's involvement in the development of the book publishing industry in the territory of present-day Latvia was also hampered by a lack of education, society's attitude with regard to a woman's place and role within it, and existing laws and regulations.

The limited rights women had to pursue entrepreneurial activities, these including the right to undertake any kind of publishing under their own name, was to a great extent determined by the existing laws of the Baltic governorates of the Russian Empire. As in the jurisdictions of other countries, so, too, in the legislation of the Baltic provinces in the 19th century men's rule prevailed and a woman's legal rights were largely defined within the context of family rights. With the exception of certain cases, any property (both goods and real estate) belonging to the wife that she brought to the marriage, or had acquired during the marriage, were considered the property of the husband, likewise it was the man's right to take action with and receive all income deriving from his wife's property, both goods and real estate (Zelče 2002: 21–23). In this respect women's rights in the Baltic governorates were not far removed from those on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, where "women were not recognized as or legally allowed to become publishing professionals until the late nineteenth century", and of those few pioneers "women who were leaders in these family businesses printed and published under a male relative's name". (Claro 2020) In the Baltic, women were able to inherit property on the death of their husband, in addition they were permitted to take over management of their husband's property in the case of illness, or if the husband was unable to carry out his duties for some other reason. (Kreicbergs 1909: 26) Several Latvian women – for instance, Anna Misiņa (1865–1928), wife of the eminent Latvian bibliographer and librarian Jānis Misiņš, also Emma Kukure (1879–?), spouse of the book publisher Jānis Alfrēds Kukurs, and others, would manage their husband's publishing enterprise whenever their husband was absent, however, more detailed information about how active a part these women may have taken in making executive decisions related to the enterprise more often than not cannot be found, or has not been preserved. One can begin to speak of a more significant women's participation in the industry in Latvia as women became owners of publishing houses, starting from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. All the same, during this period also the number of these women was negligible, and mostly they continued to be employed in low-paid jobs, carrying out various technical duties.

Whitney Field (1889–1980), founders of the *Horn Book Magazine*; Emma Ihrer (1857–1911), editor of the German newspapers *Die Arbeiterin* un *Die Gleichheit* and defender of women's rights; Hedwig Dransfeld (1871–1925), from 1905 onwards editor of *Die christliche Frau*, and many others.

At the turn of the century, as the socio-political importance of books and the press, in particular, steadily increased, the publishing industry became the chief shaper and influencer of public opinion. It also became a viable and profitable economic sector. After the foundation of an independent Republic of Latvia in 1918 and *de iure* recognition of the state in 1921, there was a gradual increase in economic growth and public spending power, and the Latvian book publishing industry thrived as well. Both in Latvia and in the whole of Europe, the interwar period “marked the beginning of women’s access to professions, which was dependent on the civil and political rights they enjoyed.” (Gardey et. al. 2017) Publishing houses and individual publishers who had either completely or partially halted work during World War I resumed operations, these including publishers of note in Latvian book publishing history such as *Valters un Rapa*, Jānis Roze, Ansis Gulbis and others. Women were often employed as technical staff, typesetters, layout designers, and editors at printing works, in the editorial offices of publishers and newspapers; occasionally they opened their own bookshops, and in the rare case started up independent publishing activities, quite frequently out of necessity, having to provide for their family on the death of their spouse, though only very few of them became more widely known and appreciated by the public. A similar situation with respect to women’s employment in journalism and publishing existed also elsewhere in Europe and in North America, starting with the colonial era, when “women were involved in the publishing and printing business, nearly all of them doing so in the context of helping out family members.” (Chambers et. al. 2004: 44)

A precise figure for the number of women employed in the publishing industry in the 1920s and 1930s is difficult to establish. In the *Latviešu grāmattirgotāju un izdevēju biedrība* (Latvian Bookseller and Publisher Association) and *Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība* (Latvian Publisher and Retailer Association) archive documents held by *Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs* (Latvian State Historical Archive) that have been researched up until now, the composition of the membership of the organisations is not shown according to gender. In membership lists most often members were named by surname, or otherwise were listed under the name of the enterprise they owned, which more often than not had been named after the founder rather than their current – male or female – owner⁴. According to the data so far assembled, up until 1940 only 20% of all members of the Latvian Bookseller and

4 For example, in 1926 the *Latvijas Grāmatizdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība* list of members named a K. Paučītis of Limbaži. In fact, at the time the enterprise formerly owned by publisher Kārlis Paučītis (1866–1919) was being managed by his wife, the widow Līze Paučītis (1870–1975).

Publisher Association⁵ were women, although the number of women working in the sector was greater.⁶ Not one of the female publishers featured in this article was a member of the Latvian Publisher and Retailer Association.

The publishing work carried out by women in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s was very varied, both in terms of genre of the published works (popular literature was widely represented, especially translations of works by foreign authors and literature intended for children; works by classic writers of Latvian literature as well as the first attempts of fledgling writers received their first publications or repeat editions; health and beauty handbooks; works with contents of a religious nature; calendars), and also in terms of the extent of operations as manifested by print runs and methods of promotion (marketing). The manner in which the women started working in the publishing business differed: there were instances when they continued to run a family enterprise after the spouse had died, or they took over from another family member; occasionally they registered and started up an independent enterprise which, however, required abundant financial means or potential sponsors, something that not all women had available to them.

When processing the existing data about the publishing activities of those women who had inherited the enterprise on the death of their husband, it can be seen that, on the whole, the widows continued pursuing the same direction of business as had been established by their late husband. Relatively often these publishers issued reprints of works previously published by the founder of the enterprise. A woman most often would continue to run the publishing enterprise under the founder's name, in this way affirming the intent to continue to pursue the same course as had been set in place by the previous owner. The aim of these publishing houses was to preserve the legacy left by their founders, to maintain the established

5 On investigation of the minutes of meetings and the submissions for membership of the *Latviešu grāmatlīgumtāju un izdevēju biedrība* and its successor *Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība* (held by LVVA, files 2309 and 2402), and also the lists of members published annually in *Latvju Grāmata*, it can be seen that at various periods there were 73 female members in both associations. From 1924 until the association was dissolved in 1936, the *Latviešu grāmatlīgumtāju un izdevēju biedrība* (LGIB) had 46 female members. In the newly established *Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība*, 29 women (only two of them former members of the LGIB) were admitted in 1938–1939, most of them book retailers. For comparison – on 26 November, 1939, the *Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība* had 139 members. (*Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība* 1939b)

6 So far in research when comparing data from the publication *Latvijas tirgotāju saraksts* (1936) issued by the Ministry of Finance, the minutes of meetings and lists of members of the professional associations already mentioned, and the catalogues *Iespiedu darbu izplatītāji Rīgā* compiled by the private historian Voldemārs Eihenbaums (1951), the author of this article has found 236 women who were working in publishing and book retailing between 1918 and 1939.

standards and reputation; the publishing of works that were not characteristic of the established profile of the imprint or of a different literary form or genre was not a typical occurrence. This kind of approach was characteristic of, for example, Elizabete Alunāne and Līze Paucīte, who will not be described in more detail within the parameters of this article. Although Elizabete Alunāne continued to manage the enterprise founded by her husband Heinrihs Alunāns (1904–1944) for 40 years after his death, during these years she avoided implementing any major innovations. The greater proportion of books produced by Alunāne was made up by reissues of works that had already been published by her husband's publishing house in the 1870s–1890s, with the most attention being devoted to the repeated publication of plays by the Latvian thespian, actor, director and playwright Ādolfs Alunāns (1848–1912), who was the nephew of Heinrihs Alunāns. Alunāne also published individual works by turn of the 19th and 20th century authors that were already well-known in Latvia, among them novels by the German writers Eugenie Marlitt, birth name Eugenie John (1825–1887) and Wilhelmine Heimbürg, real name Berta Behrens, (1848/1850–1912), short stories and the novel *Erdsegen* (published in Latvian with the title *Zemes svētība*, 1926) by Peter Rosegger, and works by the Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940).

Līze Paucīte ran the family business for a considerably shorter period of time: from 1919, when her husband died, until she handed over management to her son in the 1930s. Paucīte published a variety of calendars, brochures of an instructive or religious nature, and hymn sheets. She also offered printing services on order and printed the newspaper *Limbažu Vēstnesis*. During Līze Paucīte's time in charge, the range of goods on sale at the K. Paucītis book and writing goods store was expanded with haberdashery, wallpaper, typewriters, suitcases, money purses and wallets, briefcases and other wares, in addition to photographic equipment for photographers and amateurs – plates and film. (Ozola 2010: 7) The departure from the original core business of the store and the diversification of goods on offer indicate, possibly, efforts to attract a broader client base and find new sources of income.

It was a different picture in the situations where the publishing enterprise had been started up by the women themselves. This scenario can be roughly divided into two courses of action. In the first, the themes or subject matter of the published works may have been closely linked with the publisher's personal political or religious convictions, or a deeper interest in a particular field, thus rendering these publications of interest to a narrow niche of readers, but unknown by the wider public or being given a mixed reception. The majority of these female publishers produced few books and soon closed down the enterprise.

The other course of action was the production of books on a commercial basis, catering for a broad consumer base. In this case the books were selected according to the potential interests and needs of the readership, and taking as their guide the latest currents of popular literature in Western Europe (Ilga Zvanītāja, Anna Grobiņa, Emīlija Benjamiņa), which could potentially be reflected in healthy sales figures in Latvia as well. These publishers strived to ensure good sales of their products, acquiring advertising spaces and regularly publishing advertisements and blurbs of the most recent books in major press publications (*Jaunākās Ziņas, Atpūta, Hallo, Latvija*), as well as by distributing sales brochures. "Through the repeated placement of advertisements week after week in specific periodicals, publishers were seeking to create a shared readership with magazines whose pricing, thematic emphases, and explicit demographics matched their own." (Battershill, 21) The potential readership was addressed with catchy slogans and when valuable editions or series of books were being planned, the publishers invited future readers to sign up for the books in advance or as subscribers.

This article will examine more closely the activities of three publishers whose operations in Latvia took place in the latter half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, with a particular emphasis on the printed works they published and the reception these received from the public. Although the publishers specialised in different literary forms and genres, they are united by both the scale of production (the large number of books produced) as well as their visibility among others working in the sector. The conclusions were grounded in detailed and widely scattered and diverse sources of information: publications of the period (advertisements, announcements about the start of activities of the publishing house or the closing down of the enterprise, reviews), memoirs, archive files, in the attempt to reconstruct the strategies employed by the publishing house, as indicated by the choice to publish works of a concrete genre or by certain authors. The chief obstacle that hindered drawing generalised and credible conclusions was the shortage of materials – documents regarding the activities of the smaller publisher, contracts signed and performance indicators were either not accessible, or have not been preserved. In many cases it was difficult or even impossible to judge the role and influence of the woman in the work of the publishing house. As new discoveries come to light, the assumptions and findings written about in this article may need to be changed.

Ilga Zvanītāja and the publishing house *Orients*

Ilga Zvanītāja (also known as Zvanova, after marriage in 1937 her surname changed to Melnalksne) was born on 16 June, 1909, in Moscow. Her mother was Anna (née Bēniņa, 1887–1966), after marriage Zvanītāja, later Grobiņa, her father was the town elder of Līvāni, Jānis Zvanītājs (1879–1941). After Ilga's mother married for a second time, her stepfather became the entrepreneur Oto Pēteris Grobiņš (1890–?), the owner of several distilleries of spirits and one of the founders of the Latvian private moneylender savings and loan society, the so-called Lombardbanka (1924–1928)⁷ and for the first years also the owner of the publishing house *Orient*, later to be known as *Orients*.

In the cultural history of Latvia, the name of Ilga Zvanītāja is more widely known in association with her professional work in the theatre. Initially she studied acting in private studios in France, then later attended the theatre courses of Ernests Feldmanis and also at the *Krievu teātra studija* (Russian Theatre Studio); she was one of the leading actresses in the *Rīgas Drāmas teātris* (Drama Theatre of Riga) and also *Liepājas Jaunais teātris* (New Theatre of Liepāja), performing in more than 100 roles. She also gained acclaim as a public declaimer – a soloist with the *Filharmonija*. Zvanītāja acted in plays and operettas of various genres; she also appeared in several feature films, for which she was awarded the title of Meritorious Stage Artist of the Latvian SSR in 1950 (Tjuņina [bez dat.]). Her work in publishing up until now has received less attention in cultural history, notwithstanding that from 1931 until 1937 she worked as the manager of one of the largest publishers of popular literature in Latvia – the publishing house *Orients*.

The publishing house *Orients*⁸ was started up some time around 1925, when its first books appeared. Its first owner was Oto Grobiņš, however, at the beginning of the 1930s the enterprise was transferred to the name I. Zvanītāja, who was at the time 22 years of age. Possibly the change of ownership had been necessary to avoid potential confiscation of the establishment, which could have happened as the result of a court case against Grobiņš. With a power of attorney issued on 6 May, 1931, authority to run the enterprise was assigned to the mother of Ilga Zvanītāja, Anna Grobiņa, who had worked there previously.

7 During the latter half of the 1920s, the name of Oto Grobiņš featured in the press a great deal; as the director of a bank, he had appropriated very large sums of money from the bank without a guarantee, had issued these kinds of loans to other people, and had also forged bills of exchange. In 1928 the Lombardbank was declared insolvent and in 1932 Grobiņš was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for financial misdemeanours. (Latgales dati [bez dat.])

8 At first located in Riga, at Brīvības iela 36.



Fig. 1. The actress Ilga Zvanītāja in the late 1920s. Photo by Rūdolfs Egle. The Museum of Literature and Music, RTMM 414140, I. Zvan. F2/6

During Oto Grobiņš's time, the spectrum of publications produced by the publishing house was geared towards a Russian-speaking readership, primarily works by Russian writers, as well as translations into the Russian language of adventure stories and crime novels by French and English authors. The release of a Russian translation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (in Russian: *Na zapadnom fronte bez peremen*) in 1929 caused a stir, especially when it became one of the first precedents in the Latvian book publishing industry where the publishers were sued for publishing a work by a foreign author without their permission. On 6 February, 1931, the *Tiesu palāta* – the Latvian judicial panel sentenced representatives of the publishing house *Orients* Oto Grobiņš, Anna Grobiņa and the writer S. Karachevtsev to one month in prison for publishing the book by Remarque. The plaintiff was the *Ullstein Verlag* publishing house in Berlin. In addition, the Court awarded damages to *Ullstein* of 2400 lats. ([Anon.] 1932: 6) The verdict was appealed, because already by April, 1933, newspapers were writing about the case reaching the Senate ([Anon.] 1933: 6), however, the author has not been able to obtain any further information about the outcome of the matter. As Konstantīns Karulis has pointed out, although Latvia had not yet joined the Berne Convention for the protection of authors' rights, there were already in place agreements that had been signed with France, United Kingdom and Germany and which provided for the protection of authors' rights in the other contracting party country, though usually translators and publishers ignored these regulations (Karulis 1997: 223). Publishing houses that printed works in translation did not pay authors' fees, took liberties with the texts, frequently they even did not indicate that the work was a translation, all of which served to make the publishing of translations very profitable (Veisbergs 2022: 119). The case of *Orients v. Ullstein Verlag* publishing house did bring to the fore an issue which up till then had been all too little discussed: that of the exploitation of intellectual property rights of authors from countries that had signed the convention and their insufficient protection in Latvia.

At some point around 1931–1932, which coincides with the change of ownership and when Ilga Zvanītāja became the new manager, the profile of the books published by the imprint partly changed. While retaining the publishing of translated literature as its core activity, the spy and crime novels that *Orients* previously published were gradually replaced by so-called women's fiction. The chief protagonists of these novels were mostly young women or girls, most often children born out of wedlock, who "come from a poor background, but after a variety of trials land in another world, where money, power, splendour and sometimes also destruction prevail" (Daukste-Silasproģe 2005: 666). The publishing house *Orients* gradually inherited its defined specialisation and readership, and became one of the largest publishers of popular fiction in Latvia, alongside other publishers such as *Latgrāmata*, *Dzintarzeme* and *Sfinkss*, largely publishing women's novels translated from German into Latvian. Until *Orients* ceased to exist, it "produced approximately 200 books, comprising almost solely light literature in translation" (Veisbergs 2019: 180).

The choice to publish literature such as this was a fairly typical feature of the era. In order to satisfy people's need for literature, and readers with differing intellectual or aesthetic requirements, in the early 1920s "translated pulp fiction was extensively published, by the end of the 1920s an increasingly larger market share was taken up by translations of modern works" (Veisbergs 2019: 176). In the 1920s–1930s, the selection of works to be translated was largely in the hands of publishers and the translators themselves. The decision whether to cater to the demands of professionals and aficionados of high culture or to pander to the desires of the average reader, whether to publish highbrow classical literature or junk fiction was to a large extent determined by the level of education of the publisher, their professional occupation, convictions, opinions about the role of literature in society, and their strategic vision about the most viable business activity to ensure the continued existence of the enterprise. Since the major proportion of the novels published by *Orients* had already achieved popularity and a certain notoriety in their country of origin, the publisher Zvanītāja could be confident that readers (mostly female) in Latvia would also be interested in topics that were current in Western Europe at the time. With her offering, Ilga Zvanītāja was able to satisfy the interest of that stratum of society who in low-priced books and booklets sought a pleasant, undemanding way to pass the time and an opportunity to escape the everyday cares and worries that affected the poorest and most vulnerable of the population particularly severely, in circumstances where the financial crash of the 1920s–1930s had reduced purchasing power and opportunities for employment.

Some of the female authors of the women's fiction novels published by *Orients* these days have been practically forgotten, however, they were popular in the late

19th century and early 20th century. Among the writers published by Ilga Zvanītāja the following were represented by one or several translated novels: the British novelist Olive Wadsley (1859–1959); the Italian journalist and writer Flavia Steno (1877–1946); German writer Eugenie Marlitt, birth name Eugenie John (1825–1887), the German writer and women's rights activist Magda Trott (1880–1945); the Austrian writer and author of over 120 novels, Annie Hruschka, pseudonym Erich Ebenstein (1867–1929), and others. In 1936 *Orients* published the novel *Am Glück vorbei* (in Latvian: *Laime bija tik tuvu*) (1st edition of the German 1920) by Clara Sudermann (1861–1924), German writer and second wife of the playwright Herman Sudermann; it is the only novel by this author to be translated into Latvian. The most widely known author in translation published by *Orients* became the German writer Hedwig Courths-Mahler (1867–1950). From 1931 till 1937, the publishing house released 60 of her novels: of these, 18 came out in 1934, 15 in 1935, and 19 in 1936; in this way *Orients* became the leading publisher of the German author's works in Latvia.

The books by novelist Courths-Mahler were popular and much-favoured women's reading matter. Her works were attractive to the less well-off and also middle-class women, and "appealed chiefly to housewives and chambermaids but managed to touch on some social issues to raise her apolitical readers' consciousness". (Harlan 2016: 31) The storylines were rife with unexpected incidents and twists and turns in the lives of the protagonists: the wife of a wealthy wholesaler falls in love with an impoverished artist and runs away from her husband, leaving behind her daughter;



Fig. 2. Hedwig Courths-Mahler (1935).
Lyselotte's Wedding. Transl. V. Spandegs.
Rīga: Orients.

a husband starts to doubt the paternity of his wife's child; a wicked plan is devised for the inheritance of wealth; a rich relative dies, but there are complications preventing the rightful legatee from receiving their money, and similar. There was no shortage of flirtation, intrigue, family secrets, imprisonment, unexpectedly inherited wealth and fame, hopes for love, fulfilment or disappointment in love. The novels of Courths-Mahler often also became the first examples of adult literature that young girls and women encountered, when "after the fairy tale and special children's literature phase girls usually turned to Courths-Mahler, but boys – to a variety of adventure and gangster pieces." (Kroders 2011: 130) When urging readers to buy novels, the advertisements that appeared in the press about the latest books published by *Orients* highlighted the "heart-wrenching" account of the suffering and miserable experiences the chief heroines had undergone, and promised that "the novel, rich with complications and events" would be read "with unflagging interest" ([Anon.] 1936: 29)

Gradually, little by little, gaining experience in book publishing and diversifying her potential reading audience, alongside the pulp fiction Zvanītāja also published several period novels featuring historic personages as well as informative literature aimed at those bringing up children and young mothers, and a series of children's books *Jaunatnes literatūra* (Young People's Literature). A few original works of Latvian literature were also published, for example, the novel *Pūļa elks* (Idol of the Multitude, 1935) by Vilis Lācis and a collection of short prose, *Amora bultas* (The Arrows of Cupid, 1934) by Jēkabs Birgers.

The people employed by *Orients* for the translation of books were on the whole little known, for example, Ādolfs Andersons (also A. Rudzudruva, ?–?), the pedagogue Kārlis Pētersons (also working under the pseudonym Medards Olis, 1891–1952). The poet Valdis Grēviņš (1895–1968) was involved in the translation of a number of books, but his translations were most often under the pseudonym V. Gaitnieks. Working under various pseudonyms (T. Atauga, R. Selga and others), the journalist Oto Brikšķis (1904–1980) translated several pulp novels. Among women translators, the best known were the actress and translator Olga Ezerlauka (1858–?) and singer and theatre critic Anna Grēviņa, who was also the wife of Valdis Grēviņš. The most prolific translators for the publishing house *Orients* were Olga Ence (1904–?) and Velta Ozole (?–?): each had translated more than 15 novels, chiefly women's fiction from German and Russian. The field of translated literature also offered vast work opportunities for "a string of rather poor translators, [who were] in fact regurgitators of the contents." (Daukste-Silasproģe 2005: 630) As regards visibility of the translator, the tendency for a translator to intentionally hide their identity behind a pseudonym or an abbreviation can occasionally be observed in the case where the source text might be regarded as a weak composition of trivial literature, or could in

some degree discredit previous work by the translator, or where the translation was of poor quality. And, conversely – the translator’s visibility was increased if the work to be published was of a high quality. This feature is particularly noticeable during the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, when practitioners of the trade actively discussed the prohibition of wide-ranging access to junk literature. Frequently on the title page the choice had been made to put ‘adapted by’ instead of ‘translated by’, thus an admission of a free retelling and veering away from the original text. According to the observations of translator Andrejs Veisbergs, in the 1920s–1930s a translator’s approach to their work was to a large extent determined by the contents of the book. Unlike texts of good quality, pulp fiction was translated very freely, with frequent omissions [and] abridged passages, indicating on the first page that it was a free adaptation, a retelling, a transposition. (Veisbergs 2019: 184) As prior to 1938 Latvia was not yet a signatory to the Berne Convention, the publishing of translations was financially more profitable for the publisher as well, bringing in clear profit more so than original literature in Latvian, where the authors would have to be paid an author’s fee.

The publishing house *Orients* was closed down on 29 May, 1937, by a ruling of the Minister of Social Affairs, Alfrēds Bērziņš, based on the regulations of martial law ([Anon.] 1937: 2). The regulations provided that a minister had the right “for internal security of the state and for maintenance of the public peace to issue regulations and orders on the procedure for the publishing and distribution of periodical and non-periodical publications.” ([Anon.] 1934: 6) A number of the publisher’s books ended up on the so-called list of banned books, among them a novel in 20 parts, *Kaīslību viļņos* (In the Waves of Passion) by the Russian emigrant Olga Bebutova (*Olga Mihájlovna Bébutova*, 1879–1952) and its accompanying advertising brochure. More than 70 thousand unsold copies were removed from circulation (Paeglis 1996: 73), causing a huge financial loss. As far as can be perceived, at some time around 1935–1937 Ilga Zvanītāja gradually withdrew from the business, entrusting its management to her mother Anna Grobiņa, as indicated by the several petitions addressed to the Head of the Press and Association Department of the Ministry for Social Affairs and signed by Grobiņa,⁹ requesting a review of the ministry’s decision to ban several of the books published by *Orients*.

Although the publishing house *Orients* managed by Ilga Zvanītāja cannot be regarded as being notable for the publication of significant works of lasting value in the history of Latvian book publishing, and its editions these days may be destined to be

9 Sabiedrisko lietu ministrijas Preses un biedrību departaments (1937). LVVA 3724. f., 1. apr., 932. l., 3. lp., LVVA 3724. f., 1. apr., 932. l., 4. lp.

forgotten, it deserves acknowledgement as a successful and high-profile publisher catering for the consumers of popular culture in its time. By publishing mainly works by the German novelist Courths-Mahler, much loved by the average reader in 1920s–1930s Western Europe, as well as other authors, *Orients* became a recognised brand among those women who sought lightweight, easy-reading novels for relaxation and for whiling away their spare time. The books published by *Orients* were widely available, moreover, they were made even more attractive by their low price: as the so-called *puslata romāni* (half-lat novels), they enabled readers to enjoy works by Courths-Mahler and also the compositions of other female German novelists.

Anna Grobiņa and the publishing house *Kaija*

The publishing house *Kaija* was registered in late 1935. Although the lifespan of the enterprise – up until its nationalisation in 1940 – was not a long one, its activities are worthy of notice for the production of major editions of the works of several prominent and popular authors, as well as for launching an ambitiously envisaged book series *Latviešu literatūras pieminekļi* (Monuments of Latvian Literature, associate creator of the series Kārlis Egle). The owner of the new enterprise was the already previously mentioned Anna Grobiņa, wife of the general manager of *Lombardbanka*, Oto Grobiņš, and mother of Ilga Zvanītāja. From 1931 until 1936 Grobiņa held power of attorney for the publishing house *Orients*. While it was in existence, the publishing house *Kaija* produced a total of some 80 books, these including authors of adventure novels and science fiction that were popular abroad, also Jack London, Mark Twain, the children's author Hugh Lofting, and original works of literature in Latvian as well as research in Latvian literary studies as part of the series Monuments of Latvian Literature. After *Orients* was closed down, *Kaija* continued with the series *Jaunātnes literatūra* that *Orients* had initiated.

Very little is known about the life of Anna Grobiņa, but the few scraps of information available form the impression of a tenacious, combative and resourceful feminist. In 1930 she, together with her husband Oto Grobiņš, sued the editors of the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas*, Pēteris Bākulis and Ernests Runcis-Arnis, for defamation; Arnis received the sentence of a 1500 lat fine and two weeks imprisonment. (M.S. 1931: 3) The court proceedings of the trial of Oto Grobiņš for the misuse of investors' funds, lasting several years, were widely reported in local newspapers, who also showed interest in the lifestyle of the two women – Anna Grobiņa and Ilga Zvanītāja, when the trial against the directors of *Lombardbanka* began. In several



Fig. 3. Passport photo of Anna Grobiņa.
Early 1920s.
Latvian National Archive,
Latvian State Historical Archive,
LNA LVVA 2996-7-34677.

interviews Grobiņa strenuously defended her husband, pleading his innocence, and also emphasising the importance of *Orients* as the source of additional income:

"Recently my husband has no longer received a wage. We had a small publishing house, but no money. I concluded that I should sell my things and start up some small shop from which we could all eke out a living. My daughter [Ilga Zvanitāja – S. R.] is 19 years old, she studied languages in Paris. When hard times began, she had to return to Latvia and we installed her at the publishing house on a wage of 1500 roubles per month. To work in the office [...] On the day that [my] husband was arrested and taken to the central prison, we were auctioned off. We remained in an empty apartment. Just us women, Grobiņš sitting in prison. But I did not lose heart. Whatever may happen. If other directors were to undertake to pay their share, we would do so too. Let everyone pay the same. But [my] husband will be saved."
([Anon.] 1928: 3)

As reported by the press, in 1932 and 1934 the Grobiņš's property was sold at auction; with the family's financial means now reduced, Anna Grobiņa began to take an active involvement in the establishment and maintenance of the publishing house *Orients*: "Both of the Grobiņš's are energetic people and after their great misfortunes a couple of years ago have now started their life afresh. To experience better times [...] [Anna Grobiņa] stands at the cash desk, carries around the recently published copies of novels, collects money from kiosks and keeps the household going." (Ls. 1932: 3)

On 15 July, 1936, the newly founded publishing house *Kaija* began printing the collected works of Jack London as luxury editions and launched a major subscription campaign. It should be remarked that in the 1930s the American writer Jack London (1876–1916) was plentifully represented in the lists of several Latvian publishing houses – the last (14th) volume of Jack London's works (1922–1932) was published by Atis Freinats; in 1933, the publishing house *Grāmatu Draugs* released the novel *Piedzīvojums* (Adventure); and the short stories of London in a selection titled *Sievietes spēks* (The Power of a Woman, 1934) was produced by Jānis Miķelsons (1891–1967)

in Rūjiena. Noting the writer's popularity and positioning herself as the most complete publisher of the collected works of writers, Grobiņa's publishing house started on printing the works by Jack London. In its offer, the publishing house *Kaija* envisaged publishing all of London's works in 30 volumes, divided into 5 series comprising 6 books each. The cost of one series or six books was 6 lats for subscribers, while the price per book if bought individually was Ls 2.50. The works of Jack London was one of the rare projects that *Kaija* completed in full, and it did not, one may presume, leave its readers disappointed. The author of the introduction to the collected works was the writer Vilis Lācis, then at the zenith of fame, and responsibility for the quality of the translation was borne by a large and talented collective of translators: Anna Grēviņa, Roberts Kroders, Zelma Krodere, Sigurds Melnalksnis, Elizabete Kauliņa and others, but the translations of poetry were produced by the Latvian poet Eriks Ādamsons (1907–1946). In comparison with the Atis Freinats editions, the *Kaija* production was more comprehensive, and some works in the series, for example London's first novel *A Daughter of the Snow* (Latvian title: *Sniega meita*) appeared in Latvian for the first time (Gailītis 1976: 156).

During its period of existence *Kaija* began the publishing of several ambitious, large-scale series of authors' works, but this was not completely finished, halted by World War II. Thus from the intended eight volumes of collected works by the Austrian writer Peter Rosegger, (1843–1918), only six (1938–1940) were released. The publishing of works by Vilis Lācis (1904–1966) was begun in 1939, the first four volumes came out under the *Kaija* imprint, but thereafter, starting from 1940, several of the Lācis volumes prepared by *Kaija*¹⁰ were released without indicating the name of the publisher. Of the selected works by the Russian writer Maxim Gorky (*Maksim Gorkij*, 1868–1936) that had been prepared for publication at *Kaija* in the spring of 1940,¹¹ the first two volumes *Bērnība* (Childhood) and *Ļaudīs* (In the World) were released at the close of 1940 and in 1941, though by now no longer by the nationalised publishing house *Kaija*, but by the *Daiļliteratūras apgādniecība* of the *Valsts apgādniecību un poligrāfisko uzņēmumu pārvalde* (VAPP) set up by the occupying Soviet regime.

10 Vilis Lācis Novels. Book 3. *Atbrīvotais zvērs* (*The Liberated Beast*, 2nd edition, without imprint); Novels. Book 4. *Piecpātāva pilsēta* (*Five-storey Town*, 2nd edition, without imprint); Novels. Book 5. *Pasaules jūrās* (*On the Seas of the World*, printed at the Universal printing works, jacket printed by *Latvijas Kultūra*); Novels. Book 6. *Putni bez spārniem* (*Birds with no Wings*, without imprint); Novels. Book 7. *Pūļa elks* (*Idol of the Multitude*, without imprint) (all in 1940).

11 *Kaija* had planned to publish a selection of works by Maxim Gorky in six large illustrated volumes, including the works *My Childhood*, *In the World*, *My Universities*, *The Lower Depths*, *The Life of Matvei Kozhemyakin*, *Through Russia*. The first volume was supposed to come out in March, 1940. ([Anon.] 1940: 23)

Anna Grobiņa had also hoped to publish the collected works of the Russian writer Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910) in 20 books and five series with variants and annotations. The journalist, poet and literature critic Jānis Kārklīš (1891–1975) in his assessment of the editions of collected works offered by Latvian publishing houses, rated highly the direction taken by *Kaija*: “Tolstoy has been undertaken on a grand scale – with variants and comments, *War and Peace* alone in eight large volumes. In truth that is the only way that *War and Peace* can be published.” He also rated highly the efforts of the publishing house managed by Anna Grobiņa to provide new translations of classical works into modern Latvian, and praised the work invested by editors in the modernisation of the language of the Jack London works and in maintaining uniformity of style. (Kārklīš 1937: 15)

The Tolstoy series of works that had been started did not have time to come out to its full extent – up till 1940, 16 volumes were released.

Other *Kaija* editions worthy of note are also the four volumes (1939–1940) of works by American author Mark Twain (1835–1910). In 1937–1938 the full complement of seven stories by the classic children’s author Hugh Lofting (1886–1947) was released, featuring the beloved animal physician Doctor Doolittle in a translation edited by the poet Valdis Grēviņš and with a foreword by Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš.

The emergence of the series *Latviešu literatūras pieminekļi* (Monuments of Latvian Literature) was hailed by critics as a much-anticipated and very worthwhile undertaking. After the publishing house *Valters un Rapa* halted the publication of their

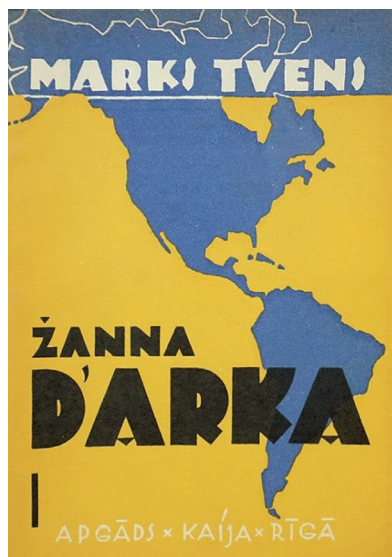


Fig. 4. Mark Twain (1939). *Joan of Arc*.
Rīga: Kaija Publishing House

series of selected works by Latvian authors, *Rakstnieku sejas* (11 books were produced, 1927–1928), no other publishing house had turned to the printing of earlier works of Latvian literature. In 1938, the first in the *Kaija* series was issued: the monograph *Neredzīgais Indriķis. Dzīve un dziesmas* (Indriķis the Unseeing. His Life and Songs) by Kārlis Dziļleja, with an annotated appendix of verse by the first native Latvian poet Neredzīgais Indriķis (1783–1828) and a foreword by Kārlis Egle. A total of 3000 copies of the book were published and it still remains today the most complete compilation of Neredzīgais Indriķis' works. The first book in the series was followed by *Vecā Stendera dzīve un darbi* (1938), the life and works of Baltic German pastor and writer Gotthard Friedrich Stender (1714–1796) – again compiled by Dziļleja and with a foreword by Egle, and the book included Dziļleja's monograph on the writer as well as the songs by Stenders: *Rāms laiks pēc pērkona briesmas* (Calm Weather After the Danger of a Thunderstorm) and *Jauna gada vēlēšanās pēc ikkatra gribēšanas* (New Year's Wishes according to the Desires of Each and Every One).

The turning to the publication of academic writings, historic and biographical surveys and monographs leads one to think that the decision to publish precisely these authors was made not so much at Grobiņa's initiative but rather at the suggestion of the author of the monographs, Kārlis Dziļleja, possibly also Kārlis Egle, to diversify the production offered by the publishing house. Unfortunately, the time remaining for the working life of *Kaija* was too short to carry out all its plans and concurrently with a successful production of the collected writings of foreign authors to develop further the publishing of annotated scholarly editions that had been so promisingly commenced. It should be stated, moreover, that having been preoccupied with the production of popular women's fiction, and adventure and easy-reading literature, Anna Grobiņa quite possibly lacked the knowledge and awareness, as well as informed advisers, with regard to the preparation and design of scholarly publications. This was immediately seized upon by literary critics. One can only agree with reviewers who found fault with the poor visual impact of the books, the flimsiness of the paper used and the ill-considered, user unfriendly and completely impractical location of the references at the centre of the book: "A silvery grey cover, with an advertising verselet on it, a fictionalised account of [the author's] life story, source notes somewhere in the middle of the book so as not to bother the reader for whom they may not be of interest – in that kind of form works are still appearing which are supposed to be serving the science of literature." (Ancītis 1938: 128) Leaving aside the imperfections due to a lack of experience in the publishing of scholarly works, Grobiņa's openness to new ideas and the extensive circle of contacts that she had developed and which permitted the carrying out of time-consuming publishing projects of competitive quality should be acknowledged.

Grobiņa worked hard to attract loyal clients for her publications, inviting readers to sign up for the now-familiar system of subscriptions. *Kaija* books were also available in bookshops and kiosks, but at a higher price. New subscribers were promised thick volumes bound in beautiful and original covers, and an opportunity to make a thorough acquaintance of works by the most popular authors abroad. The owner of the publishing house Grobiņa, in targeted manner, bought up large areas of advertising space in all the major press publications with the largest circulations, including the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas*, and also the radio programme *Hallo, Latvija*, as well as the publication *Skolu Dzīve* intended for school-age youngsters.

Emīlija Benjamiņa as the publisher of children's books

The socialite Emīlija Benjamiņa (1881–1941) in the cultural history of Latvia is more widely known as the publisher of the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas* (1911–1940) and weekly magazine *Atpūta* (1924–1940) together with her husband, the journalist Antons Benjamiņš (1860–1939). The journalistic empire successfully run and overseen by the two was one of the most prominent in 1920s–1930s Latvia. The activities of Emīlija Benjamiņa in publishing children's books is far less well known.

Emīlija Benjamiņa (née Simsons) was born in Riga on 10 September, 1881, in the family of railway employee Andrejs Simsons (?–1899) and his wife Ede (1849–1932). After the death of her husband, Emīlija's mother was left to bring up three daughters on her own. She worked in the editorial offices of the newspapers *Zeitung für Stadt und Land*, *Dienas Lapa* and *Dzimtenes Vēstnesis* as despatcher and newspaper distributor, and additionally, to supplement her income, as a laundress. Emīlija learnt to read from the German-language newspapers that were brought home. She learnt book-keeping at the local school of commerce and from the age of 17 started working in the office of the German-language newspaper *Rigaer Tageblatt*, where she came to acquire a good knowledge of the technical side of running a newspaper, becoming a skilful acquirer of classified advertisements and newspaper display advertising; she also learnt how to handle payments and became involved in the commercial life of the newspaper. In 1906 she married the actor and singer Valdemārs Elks-Elksnītis, but two years later the marriage was dissolved. Already in 1904 Emīlija had made her acquaintance with Antons Benjamiņš, and in 1911 they started living together. They did not formally marry until 1922 – after Benjamiņš had obtained a divorce. At the time they met, Antons Benjamiņš after unsuccessful business ventures in Madliena and Skrīveri had moved to Riga, planning to start a career as a reporter and editor.



Fig. 5. Passport photo of Emīlija Benjamiņa.
Early 1920s.
Latvian National Archive,
Latvian State Historical Archive,
LNA LVVA 2996-2-14100.

He soon began working as correspondent – reporter at the Riga-based German-language newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau*, then from 1907 until 1908 as editor of the newspaper *Mājas Viesis*, and in 1910 he became editor of the newspaper *Rīta Vēstnesis* owned by the publisher Haims Blankenšteins.

Emīlija Benjamiņa persuaded Antons Benjamiņš to carry out “simple economic theft” (Muktupāvela 2008: 74) – to leave Blankenšteins’ newspaper, taking with him lists of the newspaper’s subscribers. At the close of 1911, Emīlija together with Benjamiņš founded the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas*, she signed as the publisher of the newspaper. At around this time she also opened her own printing works in Riga at Parka iela 3, but a year later she acquired zincography equipment. (LU LFMI, n. d.) As described by his contemporaries, Antons Benjamiņš, later to be dubbed *Vecais kungs* – the Old Gentleman – by the employees of his own enterprise, by nature was a mild-mannered man who was averse to taking risks, and it was directly the pragmatic and clear-sighted vision of Emīlija Benjamiņa that played a crucial role in forging the success of the enterprise (Kārkliņš 1990). During the first years of the newspaper’s existence, Emīlija oversaw the entire technical production of the newspaper as well as the accounts; she was also in charge of the distribution – mailing out and delivery. The largest share of the profits was brought in by advertisers, who were enlisted as a result of Emīlija’s wide circle of contacts.

From 1911 until 1916, Emīlija Benjamiņa, as the co-owner of the *Darbs* printing works, printed some 25 books in the Latvian language. In 1917 she opened her own enterprise: a stationery and office supplies store in the heart of Old Riga at Audēju iela 12, which over the course of time became the largest shop of its type in Riga. (Limane [bez dat.]) The store continued trading throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and in the publishing house that was attached to it all the children’s books published by Emīlija Benjamiņa were produced and later printed in the printing works of *Jaunākās Ziņas*.

Even before World War I the Benjamiņš couple were involved in the founding of two illustrated magazines: from 1911 until 1912 the illustrated magazine *Atpūta*, and the illustrated literary and general interest weekly magazine *Tagadne* in 1913. It must be noted that these early ventures in publishing gave the Benjamiņš couple valuable experience and allowed them to try out in practice themes and columns that would elicit the greatest interest from readers. When in 1924 they started publishing the new magazine *Atpūta*, the Benjamiņi followed and imitated the contents and layout of the magazines published by their competitors, following both the local pioneer of illustrated magazines – the *Ilustrēts Žurnāls*, which had been coming out since 1920, as well as trends abroad. Over time, the magazine developed its own familiar columns and sections: articles of popular science, a review of the week's most striking events in photographs, style, fashion, beauty and handicraft sections, humour, and puzzles for children. In the 1920s–1930s *Atpūta* became the most popular mass circulation magazine in Latvia.

Emīlija Benjamiņa was in charge of both attracting advertising as well as the choice of serialised novels, initially for the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas* only, but later also for the magazine *Atpūta*. A great proportion of the readers enthusiastically embraced the literary fiction section of the magazine, which was a first opportunity to encounter the very latest writings by well-known Latvian authors, works which only later would be coming out as books. A string of the most talented Latvian writers, among them Kārlis Skalbe, Jānis Akurāters, Jānis Ziemeļnieks, Anšlavs Eglītis and Vilis Lācis were engaged to write their works solely for publication by the Benjamiņš couple. In many respects it was precisely Emīlija Benjamiņa's farsightedness and vision honed by many years' experience of what constituted a reader's expectations and needs, and the adaptation to Latvian conditions of themes and ideas taken over from Western Europe that made the magazine she published, *Atpūta*, the best-loved magazine ever, which has retained its status as a cultural historical treasure and can still be read with interest today.

In the history of the Latvian book industry, the place of Emīlija Benjamiņa in the publishing of children's books has been little researched. Although Benjamiņa did not publish many books, the few that she did produce means that she can be added to the most prominent publishers of Latvian children's books in the 1920s–1930s: Andrejs Jesens, Jānis Roze, the publishing houses *Valters un Rapa*, *Grāmatu Draugs*, *Zelta Ābele* and others, and makes Benjamiņa one of the most highly visible female book publishers among those very few women who worked in the industry in 1920s–1930s Latvia. As the linguist and cultural historian Konstantīns Karulis (1915–1997) has noted, Benjamiņa at one time had wished to develop a more wide-ranging book publishing enterprise, but Antons Benjamiņš had not agreed to such a step and wanted

to focus their business activities by publishing a newspaper and a magazine only. (Karulis 1990: 243) Emīlija Benjamiņa nonetheless insisted on publishing books as well, and from 1927 until 1940 under the imprint *Em. Benjamiņa*, *Em. Benjamiņa izdevniecība* or *Em. Benjamiņas rakstāmlietu tirgotavas izdevniecība* issued about 30 editions, mostly books intended for children, as well as original works by Latvian authors, colouring-in books and so-called fold-out books, and also a few calendars and other informative materials.

As the editor of influential press publications, Emīlija Benjamiņa was able to attract to her publishing projects some of the most talented Latvian writers and artists of the time who were already working at the enterprise she jointly owned with her husband. One of these proteges was the poet Jānis Ziemeļnieks (1897–1930), who had been closely collaborating on publications produced by the Benjamiņi since the 1920s. From 1925 until 1930 Ziemeļnieks was a member of the editorial board of the newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas*. Towards the end of the 1920s, several children's books in his translation were released by Benjamiņa's publishing house, for instance, a selection of stories *Skaistāko pasaku izvēle* (A Selection of the Most Beautiful Stories, 1927), which included well-known fairy tales by the Brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm: *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*.

Typically the authors of the translated children's stories in Emīlija Benjamiņa's books were not named. In the books it was stated that the verses and little poems intended for children had been retold and Latvianised by Jānis Ziemeļnieks, that is, that there would have been an original in a foreign language, however, searches for these original sources have not always met with success.¹² The majority of the books were illustrated with reproductions of the illustrations from the foreign editions which was financially more cost-effective rather than having to pay Latvian artists.

The pedagogue Kārlis Videnieks (1880–1965) pointed out, as the chief imperfection of Benjamiņa's early publications intended for children, the inability to produce a book that would be enriching and educational both in terms of form and of contents. Videnieks stated that although the coloured and black and white illustrations chosen seemed rather nice, they were, however, mostly reprinted from foreign publications and therefore alien for a Latvian reader. When making a comparison of all the children's books produced by Emīlija Benjamiņa's publishing house in 1927, the critically inclined Videnieks declared the picture books without text to be more of far

12 For example, the authorship of several children's story books in verse that Benjamiņa published at the end of the 1920s is not known: *Laimis bērns un Pinkšķētāja raibie piedzīvojumi* (The Wild Adventures of Lucky Child and the Crybaby), *Ceļojums uz mēnesi* (A Journey to the Moon) (both published in 1927 and translated by Jānis Ziemeļnieks).

more value, where at least “the owner of the book themselves can colour in a horse or a cow according to their own liking of the moment. If then a suitable verselet were to be found, among folk songs or elsewhere in literature, and added next to it – a cherished book will be had.” (Videnieks 1927: 724)

In critical reviews of later years, in addition to the internal page artistic finish and contents, attention was drawn to other aspects of the choice of book: its binding, durability and suitability for a young reader, also the price of the book. In one assessment by an anonymous reviewer about the children’s books published by Benjamiņa, the rather high price (ranging from two lats to four and a half) was decried, pointing out that less well-off purchasers could do with a “cheaper cost” (K.V. 1928: 198) The little books had, on the whole, good print quality and large letters, but criticism was elicited by the soft, “weak” binding that was not appropriate for the most energetic of readers – children. Critical remarks were also levelled at the lumpiness of the text: the laboured rhythms and absence of harmoniousness in the translation. The colourful illustrations were described as being nice, evocative, nevertheless – foreign, which, along with the high prices, was deemed to be the greatest shortcoming of Benjamiņa’s books:

“A picture, fine, a typical one should help accustom a child’s eye to recognise our own facial expressions, physique and movements. We must help children to become familiar with their surroundings, their own yard and then let us walk among strangers. Cannot the books be published more cheaply, if the pictures have been borrowed from foreign publications and the authors do not need to be paid – that is the publisher’s secret.” (K.V. 1928: 199)

It must be admitted that the works for younger readers published in the second half of the 1920s by Benjamiņa’s publishing house cannot be regarded as significant, worthy of attention and achievements of lasting value in the realm of children’s literature, and in the main took over and modified models from abroad; not much creative thinking was invested in the production of these books.

Momentous changes in the quality of the range of books for small children produced by Emīlija Benjamiņa took place from 1931, when regularly, each year, children’s books of high artistic quality began to come out. Compared with the previous period, these books are of better typographical quality, enhanced with elaborate illustrations by homegrown artists. The publishing of these and also to a large extent the resumption of book publishing in general by Benjamiņa would not have been possible had it not been for the new equipment that was imported, primarily with the future success of the Benjamiņš’s press publications in mind, and the exigency to increase the number of readers of *Jaunākās Ziņas* and *Atpūta*. The copperplate printing press bought in 1931 also allowed the Benjamiņi to fulfil more ambitious and long-term publishing projects, these including the publication of children’s books

of a quality hitherto unseen. This development was also of great significance in promoting the development of the industry in general, because with Emīlija Benjamiņa launching into the children's book market as an experienced, strategically thinking publisher with a vast array of contacts, standards were raised and had to be met by the existing players.

The first book to be printed in the new *Jaunākās Ziņas* copperplate printing press was the children's book in two parts *Mazais ganiņš un viņa brīnišķīgais ceļojums* (The Little Shepherd Boy and His Wonderful Journey). It was also the first story book written and beautifully illustrated by Alberts Kronenbergs (1887–1958), who up until then had worked solely as a book illustrator. Critics immediately commented favourably on the vastly improved quality of the illustrations. The writer Ernests Birznieks-Upītis (1871–1960), for example, lauded the tasteful visual presentation of the book, declaring that "about the execution and prettiness of the book every genuine booklover can only be overjoyed. With full rights and pride we now can place it alongside any more elaborate editions of the big nations abroad." (Birznieks-Upītis 1963: 254–255) The publisher Emīlija Benjamiņa also was accorded congratulations as one "who no longer has utilised illustrations and texts from abroad, as previously, but has given work to our own artist". (Šreinerts 1932: 46) There were, however, admonitions about the high price of the two parts of the set (each book cost three lats), though it was recognised that it was in keeping with the worth of the work.

The publication of the book was also a milestone in the biography of Alberts Kronenbergs. Up until then his claim to fame was as the first illustrator to work for the Andrejs Jesens' publishing house, and one of the most recognisable and popular Latvian book artists of the 1920s–30s, who had also created the artistic design for children's books by E. Birznieks-Upītis, Rainis and other Latvian writers, as well as children's books in translation. With his picture storybook *Mazais ganiņš*, in the 1930s Kronenbergs joined the ranks of Latvian children's authors. The way that the artist arrived to the field of Latvian children's literature happened by chance, as the result of a completely unexpected and an altogether happy coincidence. As pointed out by Finnish researcher Jukka Rislakki: "prior to Christmas 1931, Emīlija Benjamiņa – partly for the publicity and partly to make money – wished to produce at her printing works the most lavishly presented and interesting children's book that had ever appeared in the Latvian language. It was going to be in four colours (but cheap!) and would be the story of a shepherd boy. The lady wished for it to be easy to understand for children, richly embellished and, most importantly of all, with good rhymes." (Rislaki 2017: 125) Kronenbergs had already been approached to be the illustrator, but difficulties had arisen in finding a suitable text which finally, at the very end, the artist undertook to create. As Jāzeps Osmanis has stated, "the inspiration for creating a

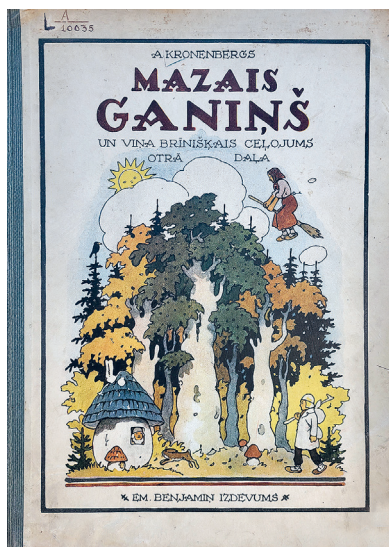


Fig. 6. Alberts Kronenbergs (1931).
The Little Shepherd and His Wonderful Journey.
 Illustrations by Alberts Kronenbergs.
 Rīga: Em. Benjamin Publishers.

humorous children's story in verse came to Kronenbergs from the repeated editions of the poem *Max and Moritz* by W[ilhelm] Busch translated by Aspazija, with the caricature-like pictures by W. Busch." (Osmanis 1977: 282)

Mazais ģanišs un viņa brīnišķīgais ceļojums came out in 1931 in two parts (16 and 33 pages) because Benjamiņa considered that the initial version was too long. In terms of size, the two were the largest of Kronenbergs' books. (Risłaki 2017: 139) Reviews of the book after it came out were overall favourable, remarking on the lightness and comprehensibility of Kronenbergs' language, the beautiful illustrations and the wonderful events taking place in the story which would enthrall young readers, moreover they were all happening in a Latvian environment, hence easier to understand and closer than the motifs and worldview borrowed from foreign sources, as had been the case until now (Puķe 1932: 6) The storybook *Mazais ģanišs*, in which for the first time there was such good harmonisation between the exciting, cheery narrative and vivid illustrations, became instantly recognisable, was quickly sold out and became a bibliographic rarity. After the success of the first book, Kronenbergs received another commission from Emīlija Benjamiņa, and already by the following year a second book for children written and illustrated by Alberts Kronenbergs was produced at the *Jaunākās Ziņas* copperplate printing press. This was a collection of poetry *Zelta laiki* (Golden Times) (1932).

The discovery of Alberts Kronenbergs as a new and talented children's writer can be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of Emīlija Benjamiņa's work as

a publisher. In addition, the popularity of these two first children's books by Kronenbergs allowed Benjamiņa to become convinced that the public would be interested in purchasing for children books of high print quality that were joint efforts by local illustrators and authors, even if the price were to be higher than average market price.¹³

Over the years to come, Benjamiņa's publishing house produced children's books illustrated by Latvian artists, both those who were already well known as well as new artists, with texts written by Latvian authors, for example, a collection of poetry for children *Pasaciņu šūpulītis* (A Little Cradle of Fairy Stories, 1933) by the poet Vilis Plūdons and designed by the magazine *Atpūta* illustrator, the painter Reinholds Kasparsons (1889–1966); the storybook *Mīlulīša daiņu dārzs* (Little Darling's Garden of Dainas, 1936) written by the literary historian, folklorist and poet Ludis Bērziņš (1870–1965) and illustrated by his son, at that time the still young graphic artist Ansis Bērziņš (1913–2001), and also the story *Čigānmeitēns Ringla* (Gypsy Lass Ringla, 1939) by the writer Eriks Ādamsons (1907–1946) illustrated by the artist Margarita Kovaļevska (1910–1999), who also created drawings for the magazine *Atpūta*. In the few reviews that can be found, generally appreciative words have been lavished on the excellent typographical quality of the children's books and the cohesiveness between form and contents.

Undeniably, the first picture books published by Emīlija Benjamiņa can be considered as purely commercial ventures. The little books were decorated with pretty illustrations taken from the original editions and slightly odd for Latvians, with the text often being assigned a secondary role. With the arrival of the new copperplate printing press at the beginning of the 1930s, which permitted for the first time the printing of artists' works at an unprecedented level of quality, the books for children produced by Benjamiņa with their texts by recognised authors became sought after and highly regarded niche publications. Up till 1939, under Benjamiņa's patronage books came out for children by new and already well-known Latvian writers beloved by readers: Vilis Plūdons, Rūta Skujiņa, Elza Stērste, Alberts Kronenbergs, Atis Ķeniņš, Ludis Bērziņš, Pēters Aigars and Eriks Ādamsons with illustrations by talented home-grown artists Margarita Kovaļevska, Alberts Kronenbergs, Ansis Bērziņš, Reinholds Kasparsons, Roberts Tilbergs and others.

On 13 September, 1940, the *Valsts apgādniecību un poligrāfisko uzņēmumu pārvalde* requisitioned the nationalised enterprise *Em. Benjamiņš* and established itself in its place. The *Em. Benjamiņš* office supply and stationery retail concern under

13 The price of books for children with texts by Latvian authors and artists' illustrations published by Benjamiņa fluctuated around Ls 1.80–3.60. The fold-out books for children were cheaper, and could be bought for Ls 0.50–1.25.

whose name the children's books were published in the 1930s, after the shake-up of the regime, became the *VAPP Rīgas centrālo rakstāmlietu tirgotava* ([Anon.] 1940: 8). On 14 June, 1941, Emīlija Benjamiņa, like more than 15 thousand other Latvian citizens, was deported from Latvia. She died on 23 September, 1941, in Solikamsk, Russia, but her final resting place is not known.

When attempting to compare the situation in Latvia with the state of affairs in Western countries during the first decades of the 20th century as reflected by studies conducted abroad, it has to be stated that in the context of Latvia it is not possible to speak of a numerous and unified group of female publishers. Unlike Western countries, where already in the 1920s women were actively involved in professional organisations of the publishing industry and taking part in discussions about the setting of industry standards and remuneration,¹⁴ activities and manifestations of leadership such as these among women in Latvia involved in the publishing and retail of books cannot be observed. Although women did become members of the Latvian Bookseller and Publisher Association and later Latvian Publisher and Retailer Association, this happened sluggishly.

Did women working in the industry in 1920s–1930s Latvia establish alliances and form closer professional and personal relationships? Research undertaken up until now does not reveal this; the most useful for proving whether such links existed would be finding personal correspondence, however, given the modest size of the territory of Latvia, communication could well have taken place in undocumented conversations. There were, however, several preconditions that could have facilitated these kinds of professional friendships: mostly belonging to one particular social stratum, being of the same generation, a similar family status (a majority of book publishers and retailers had become premature widows as a result of the Wars of Independence and World War I), the level of education, similar working conditions, potential encounters with wage differences for doing the same job as men, a commonality dictated by the profession, the inevitable confrontation with the precepts of public opinion and enshrined in legislation about a woman's place in the public sphere and the kinds of occupations that were deemed suitable for her.

The American cultural historian Robert Darnton has stated that the archives of publishers can be considered to be one of the richest sources of information for the history of book publishing (Darnton 1982: 76). Unfortunately, the changes in political regimes as well as the somewhat casual attitude of both publishers and their successors to this kind of documentation, with possibly also a large part being lost during

14 This has been described, for example, by the American researcher Jacalyn Eddy in her work *Bookwomen: Creating an Empire in Children's Book Publishing, 1919–1939* (2006).

World War II, has meant that any contracts, correspondence and other documentary material have not remained extant until the present day. For this reason, it is complicated to determine the terms and conditions under which a female publisher and author (male or female) agreed to publish a specific work, and the mutual agreements and relationships that a publisher concluded and established with book authors, artists and translators. The answers to questions such as these would significantly enhance knowledge about the attitude of society towards the women who, at the beginning of the 20th century, actively strived to take their place in a sector of industry – publishing, which until then had been monopolised by men.

Literature

- [Anon.] (1928). Ko stāsta Anna Grobiņa kdze *Aizkulises*, 27.04., 3. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1932). Īsās ziņas. Sodīti izdevēji. *Pēdējā Brīdī*, 07.02., 6. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1933). Annas Grobiņas prāva senātā. *Pēdējā Brīdī*, 16.04., 6. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1934). Noteikumi par kara stāvokli. *Latvijas Kareivis*, 16.05., 6. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1936). Atstumtais bērns. H. Kurts-Māleres romāns. [Sludinājums]. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 29.08., 29. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1936). *Latvijas tirgotāju saraksts*. Rīga: Finanšu ministrijas izdevums.
- [Anon.] (1937). Lēmums. [Par izdevniecības "Oriens" slēgšanu]. *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 02.06., 2. lpp.
- [Anon.] (1940). Pamatojoties uz Latvijas PSR Ministru kabineta 1940. g. 9. augusta lēmumu... [Paziņojums par uzņēmuma "Em. Benjamiņš" pārņemšanu]. *Padomju Latvija*, 19.09., 8. lpp.
- Ancītis, Krišjānis (1938). Neredzīgais Indriķis. Dzīve un dziesmas. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 01.07., 128.–130. lpp.
- Battershill, Claire (2018). 'Tricks of Aspect and the Varied Gifts of Daylight': Representations of Books and Reading in Interwar Women's Periodicals. Clay, Catherine, DiCenzo, Maria, Green, Barbara, Hackney, Fiona (eds.). *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918, 1939. The Interwar Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 14–27.
- Birznieks-Upītis, Ernests (1963). Mazais ganiņš. Birznieks-Upītis, Ernests. *Kopoti raksti*, 7. sēj. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 254.–255. lpp.
- Chambers, Deborah, Steiner, Linda, Fleming, Carole (2004). *Women and Journalism*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Claro, Lyndsey (2020). Women in the gentleman's career of publishing. *Princeton University Press*. 06.03. Available: <https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/women-in-the-gentlemans-career-of-publishing> [Accessed 30.08.2022.].
- Daija, Pauls, Eglāja-Kristsons, Eva (2016). The Discourse on Dangerous Reading in Nineteenth-Century Latvia. *Literature and Medicine*, No. 34(2), pp. 468–483.
- Darnton, Robert (1982). What Is the History of Books? *Daedalus*, No. 111(3), pp. 65–83.

- Daukste-Silasproģe, Inguna (2005). Vācu literatūra Latvijā – periodikā un grāmatās (1919–1945). Kalnačs, Benedikts, Daukste-Silasproģe, Inguna, Grudule, Māra, Gūtmane, Zanda, Vērđina, Jana. *Vācu literatūra un Latvija, 1890–1945*. Rīga: LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, Zinātne, 627.–724. lpp.
- Dimants, Ainārs (1990). Retā uzvārda daudzīnājums. *Literatūra un Māksla*, 03.11., 10.–15. lpp.
- Ērmanis, Pēteris (1955). Ievērojams literatūrvēsturisks darbs. *Latvija*, 01.01., 4. lpp.
- Gailītis, Harijs (1976). Džeks Londona latviski. *Karogs*, Nr. 1, 154.–158. lpp.
- Gardey, Delphine, Maruani, Margaret, Meron, Monique (2020). Earning a Living in Europe during the 19th and 20th Centuries: a Question of Gender. *Ehne*. 22.06. Available: <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/gender-and-europe/earning-a-living/earning-a-living-in-europe-during-19th-and-20th-centuries-a-question-gender> [Accessed 21.04.2023.].
- Harlan, Veit (2016). *The Life and Work of a Nazi Filmmaker Frank Noack*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- K.V. [Kārlis Videnieks] (1928). Skaistāko pasaku izvēle. *Mūsu Nākotne*, 01.01., 198.–199. lpp.
- Kalniņš, Jānis (1999). Romāns. Hausmanis, Viktors (red.). *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*, 2. sēj. Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 58.–102. lpp.
- Karulis, Konstantīns (1990). Komentāri. Kārklīšs, Jānis. *Latvijas preses karalis*. Rīga: Karogs, 236.–256. lpp.
- Karulis, Konstantīns (1997). Komentāri. Rudzītis, Helmārs. *Manas dzīves dēkas*. Rīga: Zinātne, 221.–228. lpp.
- Kārklīšs, Jānis (1937). Kopotu rakstu tulkojumi. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 29.05., 15. lpp.
- Kārklīšs, Jānis (1990). *Latvijas preses karalis*. Rīga: Karogs.
- Kreicbergs, Jānis (1909). *Baltijas sievietes tiesības*. Rīga: P. Gailis.
- Kroders, Oļģerts (2011). *Mēģinu būt atklāts*. Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC.
- Latgales dati [bez dat.]. Otto Grobiņš. *Latgales dati*. Pieejams: <https://latgalesdati.du.lv/persona/9744> [sk. 23.11.2021.].
- Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība (1939a). Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrības 1939. gada 16. maija valdes sēdes protokols. LVVA 2402. f., 1. apr., 6. l., 13.–15. lp.
- Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrība (1939b). Latvijas Rakstu izdevēju un tirgotāju biedrības ārkārtējā pilnsapulce 1939. gada 26. novembrī. LVVA, 1694. f., 1. apr., 181. l. 69. lp.
- Limane, Lilija (2018). Stāsts par grāfieni Genovevu kā triviālliteratūras sacerējums. *Letonica*, Nr. 37, 119.–133. lpp.
- Limane, Lilija [bez dat.]. Benjamiņa Emīlija. Klekere, Ināra, Limane, Lilija, Zanders, Viesturs. *Datubāze "Latviešu grāmatniecības darbinieki līdz 1918. gadam"*. Pieejams: <http://lgdb.lnb.lv/index/person/764/> [sk. 21.04.2023.].
- Ls. (1932). Bij. Lombardbankas direktora kundzes mantas pārdod ūtrupē. *Pēdējā Brīdī*, 22.12., 3. lpp.
- LU LFMI [bez dat.]. Emīlija Benjamiņa. *literatura.lv*. Pieejams: <https://www.literatura.lv/lv/person/Emilija-Benjamina/874837> [sk. 02.08.2022.].
- M.S. (1931). "J. Ziņas" ar nolūku aizskārušas Grobiņu ģimenes godu. *Pēdējā Brīdī*, 23.09., 3. lpp.

Muktupāvela, Laima (2008). Emīlija Benjamiņa. Cimdiņa, Ausma (sast.). *100 Latvijas sievietes kultūrā un politikā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, 72.–77. lpp.

Osmanis, Jāzeps (1977). *Saules akmens: latviešu bērnu literatūras gadu gaita*. Rīga: Liesma.

Ozola, Indra (2010). *Limbažu grāmatizdevēji: Paucišu dzimta. Bibliogrāfiskais rādītājs*. Rīga: Latvijas Kultūras koledža.

Paeglis, Jānis (1996). *Kas bija liegts Pirmās Republikas lasītājiem?* Rīga: Zinātne.

Puķe, V. (1932). Kronenberga "Mazais ganiņš un viņa brīnišķīgie piedzīvojumi". *Latvijas Sargs*, 25.01., 6. lpp.

Rislaki, Juka (2017). *Vilki, velni un vīri. Alberta Kronenberga dzīve un daiļrade*. Rīga: Neputns.

Sabiedrisko lietu ministrijas Preses un biedrību departaments (1937). A. Grobiņas vēstules Preses un biedrības nodaļas priekšniekam 1937. gada 12. un 23. februārī. LVVA 3724. f., 1. apr., 932. l. 3., 4. lp.

Šreinerts, K. (1932). Kritika. A. Kronenberga "Mazais ganiņš". *Nākotnes Spēks*, Nr. 1, 45.–46. lpp.

Tjuņina, Ērika [bez dat.]. Ilga Zvanova. *Latvijas krievi*. Pieejams: <https://www.russkije.lv/lv/lib/read/i-zvanova.html> [sk. 24.02.2021.].

Veisbergs, Andrejs (2019). Tulkotās literatūras grāmatas 1918–1944 (tulkotāji, apjomi, avotgrāmatas, kvalitāte un tendences). *Zinātniskie raksti, 4. Grāmata un sabiedrība Latvijā līdz 1945. gadam*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, 176.–199. lpp.

Veisbergs, Andrejs (2022). *Tulkojumi latviešu valodā: 16.–20. gadsimta ainava*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Videnieks, Kārlis (1927). Bilžu grāmatas bērniem. *Mūsu Nākotne*, 01.12., 722.–725. lpp.

Zelče, Vita (2002). *Nezināmā. Latvijas sievietes 19. gadsimta otrajā pusē*. Rīga: Latvijas Arhivistu biedrība.

This article is funded as part of the fundamental research project of the Latvian Council of Science *Female Agency in Latvian Culture and Society (1870–1940)* (No. lzp-2020/1-0215).