

Semantics of Religious Festivals in Latvian Childhood Memories in the 20th Century

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Abstract The paper focuses on the semantics of religious festivals in the Latvian childhood memoirs of the 20th century. It is based on the autobiographical portrayals of childhood in Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš' *Baltā grāmata* (White Book), Annas Brigadere's *Dievs. Daba. Darbs* (God. Nature. Work), Jānis Klīdzējs' *Cilvēka bērns* (A Person's Child) and Vizma Belševica's *Bille*. The choice of looking at these memoirs specifically was determined by the factor that they originated in different historical periods of the 20th century, i.e. they provide an insight into the transformations of the semiotics of childhood memories, which have been dictated by the historical period. The semantic fields in the works of the reviewed authors differ, especially if we compare the childhood memoirs which took place prior to World War II (Jaunsudrabiņš and Brigadere), with the memoirs that took place later (Klīdzējs and Belševica). Up until the mid-20th century, childhood semantics were founded on the literary tradition of the late 19th century in the memoirs written up by the Latvian authors,—home and the rural environment as indicators of a happy childhood. Authors, whose memoirs are sourced in the second half of the 20th century, came to experience World War II. The childhood semiotics in 20th century literature encompass typological similarities and differences which have been determined by the authors' experience, and which have been gained in different times and spaces. A child's existence in real time and space is their own individual experience, and in the same way, each author's artistic world's time and space category reproduction forms are individual. However, all the analyzed works have a more or less religious context typical of them, which are revealed by stories about celebrating religious festivals.

Keywords autobiographical memories; reminiscences of childhood; memoir literature; religious festivals; childhood semiotics

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Festivals, which are a religious community's instrument for creating consolidation and solidarity, are an important component of religious practice. The rituals, which are conducted during the festivals, perform not only a religious function, i.e. bringing the sacred epistle to life, but also a social function: consolidating the group and creating special connections between the group's core (the leader or leadership) and the group members. At the same time, these festivals also have a direct influence on a person, as individual religious experience is gained through them, enriching a person's range of experience and leaving a more or less long-term impact. Consciously or unconsciously, individual religious experience also finds its expression in literature. In other words, writers include their personal experience, ascribing this to literary characters, in their works. A writer's personal experience is supplemented freely through fictional characters, whereas, it is much closer to experience that has really been lived through in autobiographical works. In this article, we will focus on childhood memoirs, in which the author's individual religious experience, gained at religious festivals, is reflected. This is an attempt to respond to the question what are the fields of semantics of religious festivals in the Latvian childhood memoirs of the 20th century? The article is based on the works of four authors, which most strikingly characterize the previous century's childhood memoirs.

In the late 19th century, and especially in the early 20th century, the theme of childhood gained a stable position in world literature. Several European writers graphically declared the intimate introspection (Romanovska 20-21): Walter Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* and Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Adult, i.e., the author's view on what they have lived through or experienced in their childhood, reconstructing a child's point of view, reflecting what has happened from the *inside*, from the positions of the child, who, being self-aware, does not divide oneself from the world, but sees oneself within the world, is at the centre of attention in these works.

There is a widespread view that the popularity of the theme of childhood in the early 20th century was determined by Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) psychoanaly-

sis, i.e. by his idea that childhood is the determining stage in a person's life, which significantly influences both the psyche, as well as consciousness (Freud, 1923). Freud emphasized that a child is a full-fledged person, and under his influence, research on the child as a social being came to the fore in the early 20th century. The interest of academic psychologists in the child also facilitated a look back at one's childhood in literature. The reminiscences of childhood also became a powerful source of inspiration for writers around the world, also including Latvia, where descriptions of autobiographical memories and stories about childhood experiences with a focus on adventures, were created. One of the important semantic components of these texts was religion, particularly the religious festivals, respectively, a child's contact with sacred time and space and individual religious experiences.

Childhood Memoirs in Latvian Literature

Literary texts with autobiographical elements, which Jēkabs Zvaigznīte (1833-1867), Doku Atis (1861-1903) and Jānis Poruks (1871-1911) have included in their works, can be considered to be the beginnings of the portrayal of childhood memoirs in Latvian literature. They are compositions of varying artistic quality, in which some event experienced, or thing that has been lived through, by the authors themselves during childhood has been interwoven into the plot. Even though the works by the authors mentioned cannot be considered to be autobiographical compositions, they have provided the stimulus for the development of the portrayal of childhood in Latvian literature.

We can mention the works of Anna Brigadere (1861-1933), Antons Austrīņš (1884-1934), Jānis Grīziņš (1900-1941), Aspazija (1865-1943), Ernests Birznieks-Upītis (1871-1960), Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877-1962), Lidija Pērļupe (1904-1962), Jānis Širmanis (1904-1992), Jānis Klīdzējs (1914-2000) and Vizma Belševica (1931-2005) as important contributions by Latvian authors to the reflection of childhood memories. They are autobiographical portrayals of childhood, of which several are considered to be the highest achievement of the writer's creative artistic work: Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš' *Baltā grāmata* (White Book), Annas Brigadere's *Dievs. Daba. Darbs* (God. Nature. Work), Jānis Klīdzējs' *Cilvēka bērns* (A Person's Child) and Vizma Belševica's *Bille*. In this article, we will focus specifically on the works of these 20th century authors, as they contain the most vivid memories of childhood in Latvian literature. The study of these is included in school programmes and their value has also been recognized in the 21st century. The choice of looking at these memoirs specifically was decided by the factor that they originated in different historical periods of the 20th century. Therefore, they provide an insight into the

transformations of the semiotics of childhood memories, which have been dictated by the epoch.

Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš' *Baltā grāmata* about the adventures of a boy called Jancis was published in 1914, even though most of it was written in the summer of 1910, when the author was relaxing in the countryside—at Nereta, where he had spent his childhood (Jaunsudrabiņš 343). Individual portrayals were published in the press from 1911. The author wrote the book's final pages at the beginning of World War I, which was not, however, a disruptive factor in his creative plans, as the author intended to write a hundred brief portrayals of his childhood, which he also achieved at that time. It should be noted that Jaunsudrabiņš' memories of childhood were also supplemented by the author's own illustrations, created in a specific style. His work differs markedly from previously created memoirs: there is an absence of heightened sentimentalism, glorification of childhood or an imagined romanticism in *Baltā grāmata*. Literary critics, with a Marxist bent, liked Jaunsudrabiņš, who was considered to be a realist as his work reflected working people's childhood world. Andrejs Upīts (1877-1970), for example, wrote: “[...] his short stories take us into the world of the servant's child, the more lyrically or dramatically inclined portrayals show scenes of the joys and troubles from the lives of working people, where there is a role not just for the little adventurer himself, but all of the surrounding, realistically viewed world” (Egle and Upīts 761-762) (the translation is by the author here and onwards). On the other hand, others expressed negative criticism, for example, Kārlis Dziļleja (1891-1963) maintained that children are not really very fond of the portrayals in *Baltā grāmata* (Dziļleja 104), but he had specific objections to the illustrations. Another critic called them caricatures, as they were not natural and tended to lean towards a decadent futuristic direction (Jaunsudrabiņš 1920: 18). Jaunsudrabiņš responded to this criticism: “[...] I learned how to draw like that from children myself, and, if one or another drawing in this book is not sufficiently childish, then my rather brief preparation for this work is to blame” (Jaunsudrabiņš, “Par bērnu zīmējumiem” 18). Jaunsudrabiņš' target audience for this book was children, to whom he wished to reveal what he had experienced and gone through himself, with the goal of educating the younger generation. Each individual story uncovered the development of a boy's understanding of what is good and what is evil. The book has, however, gone beyond the narrow boundaries of didactic literature, as it is a message incorporated in poetic language, exceeding the author's own plans. Jaunsudrabiņš' poetic narrative has been cinematized in the film *Puika* (director Aivars Freimanis).

The first part of Anna Brigadere's trilogy of childhood memories *Dievs. Daba.*

Darbs reached readers in 1926, the second part was published in 1930, and the last part of the book in 1933. The texts of Jaunsudrabiņš and Brigadere have “the liberating recollection of a rural childhood [which] is in sharp contrast to the constrictions of urban life” (Skultans 541) in common. The main character, around which Brigadere concentrates the activity in her plot, is the servant girl Annele. The book reflects her life at a farmstead in a servant family from the ages of about 4 to 15 years. Like the work of Jaunsudrabiņš, Brigadere’s childhood memories also are composed from separate of narratives. They are quite short stories placed in a chronological order. In other words, childhood memories are characterized by separate *flashes* of memory, which the author has recorded without trying to create a unified plot line. Soviet literary critics tended to emphasize Brigadere’s social origins: there wasn’t any real basis for banning her works as she had come from working class. Furthermore—during the 1970s, the literary character of Annele, as a drawing, had found a way onto a chocolate bar, becoming widely recognized in this way, especially among those who loved sweets... Even though Brigadere’s childhood memoirs *Dievs. Daba. Darbs* were not banned and fragments were included in school textbooks, the title of the book was changed to *Trilōģija* (Trilogy). The change of title was the needed to avoid the name *Dievs* (God) on the cover of the book, as the Soviet authorities promulgated atheism and religion was considered to be the opiate of the masses. Even though the book was used for didactic purposes, Brigadere’s childhood memories are not didactic by their nature, as *Dievs. Daba. Darbs* is an adult author’s message to an adult audience about her childhood. The fact that it is not children’s literature, is graphically confirmed by its sentimentally philosophical pathos, which would be unable to captivate a young reader. It is significant that Brigadere has given her work a subtitle *A Book for Young and Old*, inconspicuously indicating in this way that this text can be understood by reading the book together. The author made no claims about returning to childhood and speaking the language of a child. In other words, her intention was not to create children’s literature. The childhood memories of both Jaunsudrabiņš and Brigadere had an important social role. As recognized by Skultans, “although both writers had long since moved to Riga, their preoccupation with, and idealization of, their rural roots and the dissemination of their writing through school textbooks helped to shape a national identity, proud of its peasant heritage” (Skultans 541).

Up until the mid-20th century, “the imagery of childhood in rural nature” (Silo-va 222) dominated in Latvian children’s memoir literature, as only very few writers or poets had not spent their childhood in the countryside. The “merging of self, nature and farm” (Schwartz 46) are also typical of those childhood memories reflected

in the works of authors in exile after World War II.

Jānis Klīdzējs' book *Cilvēka bērns* (1956) stands out particularly among the childhood memoirs of authors in exile. Salceviča's view is that "in the rich Latvian exile literature, he stood, as if aloof, beyond the schools and small schools, remaining faithful to himself, his style, his range of themes, his Latgalian and Catholic soul" (Salceviča 2012: 198-199). Klīdzējs belongs to that generation of writers who rapidly entered Latvian literature in the 1930s but was among those exiled in the 1940s. However, a confident positive pathos still dominates in his works. *Cilvēka bērns* is an epistle about life at a rural farmstead in eastern Latvia (Latgale) in the 1920s, where a 7-year-old boy, Bonifācijs, is at the centre of the plot. It is noteworthy that *Cilvēka bērns* was created in 1950s, when Klīdzējs lived in California and studied clinical sociology. A religious tone is present in Klīdzējs' childhood memories as Catholicism dominates in Latvia's eastern region and has a powerful influence. From the author's memories, it can be sensed that he has received critical reproaches about them: "Very liberal and sceptical groups start talking about the need for religious renewal. It was only just 10 years ago when this kind of thinking was almost taboo. If, at a reception for younger or middle-aged intellectuals, someone were to mention the importance of religion in the rainbow of human existence, the whole group would feel shocked, almost to despair: how could such an idiot turn up among our group of enlightened people?" (Klīdzējs, "Kādēļ es rakstu")

It is possible that the world portrayed in his book is markedly sunny and sweet out of nostalgia for his homeland, or perhaps influenced by the Californian climate. There are only weddings in *Cilvēka bērns*, but no funerals, no alcoholics in the family or among relatives, nobody is slaughtering any animals, children are not overworked, and it is quite normal that a young boy talks to a Catholic priest one on one, on an equal basis. The relationship of the book's main hero Bonifācijs with God is distinctly mercantile. By taking flowers to crucifix, there is hope that He will be more lenient about the knife which was *inadvertently* taken. In Bonifācijs' adventures, much is dependent on how he is able to organize things with the saints. In the child's understanding, each saint is responsible for some specific sphere. For example, Saint Anthony regulates the volume of rainfall. In the world created by the author, those who have friends *up top* have more success. A particular feature of these memoirs is the warm-hearted humour which is present in the language of almost every character. As Klīdzējs lived in the USA, his childhood memoirs were not available to readers in Soviet Latvia until 1981. After the release of the book in Latvia, his childhood memoirs received such acclaim, that a film called *Cilvēka bērns* was made (director Jānis Streičs).

Even though Vizma Belševica's *Bille* continues the childhood memoirs' tradition in Latvian literature, its tone is different, as the traditional notion about childhood as being an idealized happy period of life, has been changed. As opposed to the previously reviewed works, the activities in these memoirs take place in an urban environment—they are the memories of a girl in the city, in which tragic sociopolitical and psychological conflicts of the period are reflected. These memoirs lead the reader through intense turning points in history: the fall of democracy and the establishment of an authoritarian regime in Latvia (1934), the Soviet occupation (1940), World War II on Latvian territory (1941-1945) and the first post-war Soviet decade.

The core of the plot in Belševica's childhood memoirs is formed by a story about the adventures of Sibilla Gūtmane or Bille, a girl from the Rīga working class suburb of Grīziņkalns. The author brings together colourful events in the girl's life: in her family, in the courtyard and in the countryside with her girlfriends, as well as with her teachers and schoolmates, neighbours and people met by chance. At the same time, it is a message about the end of childhood: the experienced horrors of war, what was seen and heard about those killed, people exhausted by hunger and heavy work (prisoners of war and those displaced to the Jewish ghetto) leaves an indelible impression in Bille, raising many issues about the absurd world order and lost values, about human nature and the choices that are made. The memoirs include the post-war Soviet period: joy about the end of the war is overshadowed by the dual morality of Soviet ideology, the subjection of the creative process to the dictates of ideologically *correct* themes, and the suppression of one's individual voice and subjective experiences. Bille is an inquisitive and lonely child who has acquired early self-dependence and been toughened by life. Even though these childhood memoirs are formed by individual stories unconnected within the plot, as is usual in Latvian literature, it is an artistically unified work, as each event described in the particular separate story concludes with Bille's new experiences, an evaluation of the situation and a wrap-up of what she has learned. Belševica had ended up being monitored by the KGB, with her books not being published in Soviet Latvia. *Bille* was first published in the USA (1992) and in Latvia three years later after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Belševica's *Bille* is a striking and unpolished portrayal of childhood memories, which has become one of the most popular works of this genre, gaining the recognition of both readers and critics. The film *Bille* (director Ināra Kolmane) was made based on the motifs in the book.

Reflections of Religious Festivals in Childhood Memoirs

Latvian authors' memories about the recent past, i.e. childhood, are alive, but are

simultaneously also partial and selective, which is why childhood memories are similar to a leadlight window compositionally, with each separate element having its own colour. A unified leadlight drawing, or the story created within its images can only be seen using external light. In Latvian literature, this external light is mainly the reflection from a childhood spent happily in the countryside, which is overlaid with an adult perspective: the first hurts and difficulties which one has during childhood have wounded, but at the same time, enriched one's experience.

Religious festivals have a special place among these selective memories. The childhood memoirs selected for analysis include memories about the first festivals that were experienced, usually connected with some event on the religious calendar. Authors' intention has not been to provide a precise description of a festival or to explain its semantic significance. However, the reader can gain an insight into the festival process, as well as to understand the significance of the festival, obviously through the prism of the writers' childhood memories.

A story from Jaunsudrabiņš' *Baltā grāmata* called *Sestdienas vakars* (Saturday Night) includes the author's memories of contact with the sacred, characterized by several of the young boy's feelings: cleanliness (on Saturday evenings people head for the *pirts*-sauna) and peace (everybody is resting after a hard working week). The young boy's religious experience is portrayed rather poetically: "My mother and I sat up in bed and prayed together. Then I clearly felt that God placed his hand over my eyes and slowly stroked my forehead. I opened my eyes to see him. Nothing. Darkness. Only the windows shined like sheets of white paper" (Jaunsudrabiņš, "Baltā grāmata" 34).

Whereas, in the story *Liieldienas* (Easter), the author has described the traditional Latvian swinging on swings at Easter and the egg battles, highlighting this festival as the awakening of nature. References to the Christian Easter experience are not included among the the main hero's feelings. In this way, the author has recalled the emotions of this festival, which are characteristic specifically to children.

Memories of the Sunday celebrations are included in the *Baznīca* (Church) story, with the central Sunday event being attendance at the church service. The young boy Jancis had been longing to go to the church for a long time: "When learned to say the Lord's prayer, I was allowed to go to church with mother. Up until that time I had to be satisfied with climbing up the hill and seeing the white tower with the red roof, and I could hear the ringing coming from afar on peaceful Saturday evenings" (Jaunsudrabiņš, "Baltā grāmata" 119). Memories of the first visit to the church include a description of the colourfulness of the space in a dynamic form: the author has chosen to portray his experience of the contact with the sacred space

in the form of an intensive dialogue. The dialogue between Jancis and his mother is made up of short questions, and answers that are equally short, about some colourful item visible within the church. In turn, the sound of the organ at the Sunday church service is described as the greatest of all the experiences: the simultaneously experienced fear and fascination have been fixed in the author's memory. In other words, the sacred in Jaunsudrabiņš' interpretation is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as it was described by Rudolf Otto (Otto 1917).

In the story *Jāņi* (John's Festival) the portrayal of the celebration of the summer solstice begins as follows: "It was a peculiar evening and an even more peculiar night" (Jaunsudrabiņš, "Baltā grāmata" 159). It should be added that the celebration of this festival has been inherited from the traditional Latvian religion and continues to be celebrated in Latvia nowadays too. The author remembers the emotions from his childhood very well, even though he mainly describes the *Jāņi* traditions, with the key word being *peculiar*. The author provides quite an accurate ethnographic description about how the summer solstice was celebrated earlier in Latvia, but the young boy's experience of the festival is at the centre of the story—the effort in waiting for the sunrise and trying not to fall asleep (in Latvia, the celebration of *Jāņi* concludes along with the sunrise).

The memories of the celebration of the winter solstice are reflected in the story *Ziemas svētki* (Winter Festival or Christmas). Jaunsudrabiņš begins his story by highlighting the long waiting: "Is the winter festival still a long way away? How many weeks? How many days? Three more weeks. Only a week and a half now. Five more days. Three days. Tomorrow already! They are here" (Jaunsudrabiņš, "Baltā grāmata" 315). In the writer's memories, the festival is highly awaited. Prayers on the evening of the festival and fortune telling are included in the description of the Winter Festival, but the winter solstice's traditional mask parade (*ķekatas*) is described as the main event on the ensuing day. The author remembers this as a succession of colourful and funny activities which are an inseparable component of this festival.

The story *Jaungads* (New Year) follows as a surprise, which in contrast to the Winter Festival or Christmas, has remained in the memory of the author firstly for its atmosphere as a Christian festival: "[...] on New Year's morning and we sang and prayed to God, as Christian people should. But on the previous evening, entering the new year, we were pure pagans. Then we had a completely different God, a different religion" (Jaunsudrabiņš, "Baltā grāmata" 333). The author has wanted to emphasize that traditional Latvian religious customs were still practiced during his childhood, which were not in opposition to Christianity, but existed very well alongside

the world of the Latvian peasant. The pouring of fortunes (fortune telling by pouring melted tin into water) was portrayed as the main celebratory element of New Year. However, the juxtaposition of Christianity and Latvian traditional religion is already the author's view as an adult, and is not included in the description of the young boy's attitudes.

A story called *Maija svētdiena* (Sunday in May), included in Brigadere's childhood memoirs *Dievs. Daba. Darbs*, reflects a child's first contact with sacred time and space. Sunday is a special day for Annele: she is not required to do any herding work and can go visiting with her parents. Her enthusiasm is so great that it seems that "she is just bursting with energy" (Brigadere 50). Having picked some wildflowers, Annele is about to snap some birch branches, but she is admonished by her father: "Think about the fact that this is also a child of God, just like you. A living creation that feels pain just like you. [...] Don't snap them. Never waste little trees for no reason. Let them grow, so they can gain joy in God's sun" (Brigadere 50). In Brigadere's interpretation, the child is introduced to the sacral space in relation to nature, in which a tree is a child of God, as it transpires, and God's sun shines over everything. In the child's interpretation of the world, the unity of the microcosm (human) and the macrocosm (nature) is marked: everything is unified. Having understood this, Annele notices that "father has eyes like the sky" (Brigadere 51). Respectively, her attitude to those close to her changes through contact with the mysterious unity of the world and she notices that everything is different: "Why is today like something that has never been before? Annele thinks. And comes up with the explanation. This is because today is Sunday. The forest, flowers, the blue sky are Sunday, father and mother are Sunday. Their hands are Sunday. There is no work in their hands. There is no haste in their legs" (Brigadere 51). In this way, the author leads the reader from the sacral space into sacral time—into Sunday. In the Christian tradition, Sunday is a holiday, it is a day that should be devoted to God. This is why Brigadere remembers that her mother, having sat by the side of the road, converses, to the wonderment of the girl. Not with her or with her father, but with someone else. Anna Brigadere indicates clearly, that in the child's understanding, prayer is a conversation with God. In addition, the girl is surprised how her mother describes God, when reciting a psalm, *The Lord is my Shepherd*. In a masterful way, the author reflects the rural girl's lack of understanding of the comparison of God with a shepherd. Having only just come into contact with the mysterious power unifying the world, Annele wonders how God has turned out to be a shepherd. Having grasped the mysterious, the girl cannot accept that God could be a common shepherd, and she sees him in her imagination in poetic images: "His coat is like

flakes of foam with hems of blue sky. He is gigantic, gigantic, gigantic. His gilded wing tips slide above the forest. When he flies over, the meadow bursts into endless flowers and a sunny field. But he's looking and searching. What is he searching for there? Well, if he is a shepherd, then what else than his flock" (Brigadere 51).

It is notable that in Brigadere's childhood memoirs the contact with the sacred occurs in nature. Annele's religious experience does not come about from visiting a church, but by listening to her mother's Sunday prayer by the side of the road. The secrets of nature revealed by her father lead her into the sacred space, which she then begins to see in all its splendor. Whereas, sacral time is described as a balance: "Then there is peace. And then there is Sunday. The blue sky is Sunday, the forest, meadows, flowers, birds, father, mother—everything is then Sunday" (Brigadere 53). Brigadere portrays Annele's return to the secular space masterfully, as the girl's poetic fantasies are suddenly interrupted: "Mother has stood up, shaken and tied her scarf. "Well, have you rested your legs?" asked her father. "You don't want a drink?"" (Brigadere 54). In this way, the author draws a fine boundary between the sacral and the profane, as well as illustrating her inkling about this boundary in her childhood. In reading this story, we notice that Brigadere has revealed a deeply personal experience, which we can define as intimate introspection.

It should be emphasized that Brigadere has not described a visit to church on a Sunday, because the sacral space in her memoirs is not associated with the church. The description of an experience gained at church is quite brief in the story *Dieva galds* (The Table of God of Lords Supper): "[...] in the church, on that sacred place behind those white railings, where gold vessels stand on a purple blanket, covered by gold-fringed cloths. Candles flicker on both sides, while in the middle, the Saviour is staring and waiting for the people with open arms" (Brigadere 110). It is easy to notice that objects define the sacred space in the author's memories.

In the story *Jāņi* (John's Festival), Brigadere reveals her childhood memories about celebrating the summer solstice in the countryside. The author has included the weaving of garlands as an important element in the celebration of this festival: the girls look for oaks and try to reach the branches so they can weave them into a garland. The next element—the sounds of the *Jāņi* songs across the fields. This is because special folk songs are sung in Latvia during the celebrations for this festival with a refrain typical only to this festival (*līgo, līgo...*). In this story too, Anna Brigadere reveals what she has seen herself, as the information, in a way, is suddenly cut short—there is no account about the lighting of the bonfire, about dancing and singing until the sunrise, about eating the *Jāņi* cheese and drinking beer. The most important thing in these memories is unstated—little Annele was obviously so tired

that she fell asleep, and she did not experience the celebration of *Jāņi*, which usually takes place until sunrise. Obviously, this nuance of childhood memories can only be understood by those readers who have a good knowledge of Latvian culture.

In the story *Ķekatas nāk!* (The *Ķekatas* [the Mask Parade] are Coming!) Brigadere remembers celebrating the Winter Festival, which is firstly described as the “endlessly awaited” (Brigadere 87) festival. This commences with finishing off any jobs and decorating the house, which is the main sign that the festival has arrived. The festival meal began after the family returned from the *pirts-sauna*. The quiet nature of Christmas Eve is highlighted among Annele’ feelings: “The first festival feeling embraces everyone like a mildly trembling wave. Nobody speaks loudly. There is just quiet talk and smiles” (Brigadere 87). In contrast, the next day has remained in the author’s memoirs for its loudness, as the mask parade arrives (*ķekatas*). Brigadere describes the Latvian cultural tradition in quite some detail, and the story concludes with the girl’s regret that the festival is over: “The great wave has flowed away, Christmas is over, and it seems that it has torn a chunk out of her heart, so sorry for her, so sorry” (Brigadere 91). There is a portentous nuance in this message—the author does not remember Christmas as a celebration of the birth of Christ, but as a Latvian traditional cultural festival. There are not the usual Christmas semantics and attributes of today in her childhood memoirs.

The story *Kad pūpoli zied* (When the Pussy Willows Flower) includes a small reference to *Pūpolu svētdiena* (Pussy Willow Sunday), but the author has not described the celebration of the festival. In the memories, she has spent some time on the Bible story about how Peter denied Jesus. The tradition of reading the story about Christ’s suffering, which prepares one for Easter and explains its meaning has been highlighted, but the celebration of Easter is not included in Brigadere’s childhood memoirs.

Memories about the celebration of religious festivals are not included in *Cilvēka bērnis*, Klīdzējs’ childhood memoirs, in contrast to the previously examined works from Jaunsudrabiņš and Brigadere. The author’s selective memory has ignored the themes favoured in the previously examined childhood memoirs: the celebration of Christmas, Easter and *Jāņi*. Festivals are merely reference points in time, for Klīdzējs, eg., in discussing an event, he adds that it took place shortly before Easter. It is also pointless looking for descriptions about Sundays. The author explains the boy’s attitude to Sundays as follows: “Boņš liked Mondays better than any other days, right from the beginning, because Mondays were also the beginning of something. When grandfather started some jobs, such as tree planting, fixing the fence around the house or clearing stones from the fields, which he could not do

without the assistance of Boņs, he always [discussed] these jobs in advance, and always added: ‘We will start on Monday’” (Klīdzējs 214). The impact of the cultural environment needs to be considered in understanding why the boy had such an attitude towards Sundays. Klīdzējs spent his childhood in eastern Latvia, or Latgale, where Catholicism dominates. The Church’s request to avoid working on Sundays and to dedicate this day to God, i.e, to take part in a church service, was strongly observed in his childhood. Some people went to church, but others remained at home and rested. In other words, in the understanding of a child—they did nothing. Sundays were not described in Klīdzējs’ memoirs, as they seemed boring to the boy. Monday, however, always came with some new work, events, misunderstandings or incidents. In other words, Monday meant a return to life. Quite paradoxically, in not describing Sunday, the author has actually described it: it is such a sacred day that life stops on that day.

Klīdzējs’ childhood memoirs are a succession of dynamic stories, at the centre of which is 7 year old Bonifācijs, or Boņs, who is getting to know the world, through his involvement in the life of a rural farm and gaining his first life experience. Firstly, this is experience concerning relationships, which come about through contact with family members, neighbours and strangers. Secondly, it is the experience of relationships with the metaphysical world, where the author’s selective memory has special significance. Boņs has a discussion with Saint George, his protector, has hopes of seeing the Virgin Mary and talks to the Saviour, when he has done something bad or if he needs advice. Klīdzējs has successfully balanced the horizontal and vertical dimension in his memories, allowing them to overlap as well. In other words, the sacral is present together with the profane. This creates a special enthusiastic presence and the sense of an uninterrupted festival, which the author has not wanted to intensify any further in telling us about the celebration of some other festival. In other words, in Klīdzējs’ memoirs, each day and every new event is like a festival, which encourages the experience of something special: “Then you finally start speaking with God—or at least you think that you have to discuss everything, which you cannot know or understand yourself, with God himself...” (Klīdzējs, *Cilvēka bērns* 249).

As in Klīdzējs’ work, no descriptions of religious festivals can be found in *Bille*, Vizma Belševica’s childhood memoirs. However, the author has not shied away from memories about celebrating festivals, as secular festivals have remained in her selective memory, eg., the celebration of the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia prior to World War II, has been preserved in her selective memory, in her story *Valsts svētki* (National Celebration) and *Dzimšanas diena* (Birthday). Belševica’s

experience of religious festivals in her childhood has not been as special events, as in her family, a critical attitude towards religion dominated. The author has revealed this in her story *Dieva meklēšana* (Searching for God), in which there is a description about how the little girl, Bille, wants to go for a walk with her grandmother, who tends to wander into churches. Even though the author has not mentioned that the walks take place on Sundays, this can be understood by what happens in the story's plot. In addition, the the author's experience over several Sundays is reflected in this story and can be understood from the story's plot. There is already criticism of religion, expressed by Bille's mother in the first sentence of the story, where she remarks to the grandmother: "It would have been better to take the child to paddle in the pool at Grīziņkalns" (Belševica 45). *Searching for God*—is how Bille's mother describes the walks and their venturing into churches on Sundays. In this way, Bille has developed an idea about various Christian denominations: "[...] if the Salvation Army is banging drums and singing somewhere, grandmother and Bille stop by the group, listen and even join in the singing a little. If the doors to some church, be it Catholic, Lutheran or Baptist, are open, they go inside to look and listen. They sing with the Lutherans as well, but not with the Catholics: the latter have choirs singing upstairs in the church, singing beautifully, and generally everything with the Catholics is beautiful and mysterious" (Belševica 45). It is surprising, that the only things in the author's memory that have remained from the Orthodox Church, which she has not entered herself, only having had a look from the outside, are religious items: "The gates are directly opposite and in place of the gates there is this long narrow building with a glass window. Through the window, there is Jesus with his hand raised in blessing. The long face and the long palm with thin fingers are painted, but the surroundings are all gilded, star-like, with strands of small pearls. Wonder why it's like that?" (Belševica 47). The author has written how Bille's gaze lingered on the church with the "blue and green towers. They are roundish, like a black radish with the root in the air, only the root terminates in a branched cross. The crosses shine in the sun in a way that dazzles the eyes" (Belševica 47). Belševica has maintained the enchantment of an unattainable at that time, sacral space in her memories, which has been reinforced by the singing of a deep male voice, which could even be heard outside the church (Belševica 48), even though the words could not be understood by the girl (in this way the author makes it understood that the singing in the church is in Russian). The reason why Bille is not allowed to enter the Orthodox church, is explained by her grandmother's sharp retort to the girl's invitation to enter and to listen to the singing: "My legs won't carry me there! But they are Orthodox! That's how they trick people to go inside with their angelic singing! And in the

end? Nothing!” (Belševica 48). The author has not immediately revealed the source of this attitude, although the explanation follows at the end of the story, when her grandmother talks about what her family had experienced: “A bearded parish priest has set himself up in the rectory and declared that everyone who crosses over to the emperor’s religion will be given land by the emperor. But my father and mother were servants with many children, and they really wanted land so they could work for themselves and not for others, to live like people and maybe even to educate their children. Mother was immediately fired up to move over to the emperor’s religion. Father had his doubts, however, and said that all the land in the district already belonged to somebody. Will that Russian church be measuring it for them from up in the clouds? But but mother said no and no! [...] Isn’t it all the same, whatever district it is? [...] Well, father didn’t have any say in family matters anyway, everything was always how the wife wanted it, and so they moved over to the Russians. [...] then they went to the parish priest to ask for the land that was promised. The parish priest said that the church was looking for it. As soon as it is found, it will also be provided. [...] the land wasn’t granted, and it turned out that father was right” (Belševica 51-52). This story clearly reveals, why there are no memories about the celebration of religious festivals in Belševica’s childhood memoirs: her forebears had been disillusioned by the politicization of the Orthodox Church, and furthermore had tried to use religion itself for secular goals. When this was unsuccessful, a critical attitude towards the Orthodox Christianity had become rooted in the family, which was strengthened even further by their rejection by the Lutherans, as “the Lutherans would not accept them back. They either didn’t want them, or the Russian government had forbidden it” (Belševica 52). It can be understood that a critical attitude towards one religion had grown into a denial of religion, including the rejection of religious festivals. We can assume that Belševica has no memories of celebrating religious festivals, because they were not celebrated, or were marked in such a poor way, that they have disappeared from the author’s memory.

The Semantic Fields of Religious Festivals

In the previously analyzed childhood memoirs of Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, Anna Brigadere, Jānis Klīdzējs and Vizma Belševica, a conceptual semantic approach was applied which allows for conclusions to be made about the connotative meanings of the semantic components in these literary texts. As explained by Rinkeviča, “childhood semiotics are a system of signs which encompass associative components or signs characterizing childhood themes associated with the concept of childhood. Their establishment and systematization open up opportunities not only to go deeper

into a discursive analysis of childhood themes in the works of Latvian writers, but to also establish typological similarities and differences” (Rinkeviča 10) in stories about childhood.

Several common and different connotative meanings, which form specific semantic fields, have found their place in the selective memory of the reviewed authors in the stories about religious festivals experienced in childhood. First of all, the peace which characterizes the sacral period of Saturday evenings should be mentioned in Jaunsudrabiņš’ memories, and in Brigadere’s story about Sunday and Christmas Eve. Secondly, the noisiness which is typical of traditional Latvian cultural festival elements (swinging, the mask parade and fortune telling) is outlined: Jaunsudrabiņš has highlighted this in his memories in talking about the celebration of Easter, *Jāņi*, the Winter Festival or Christmas and New Year, and Brigadere in portraying *Jāņi* and the Winter Festival or Christmas. The third semantic field relates to the sacral space, i.e. the church, where there is a particular surprise, which in the interpretation of Jaunsudrabiņš is the contact with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. In Brigadere’s story, surprises are illustrated by the strong order of religious objects, copied by the girl as she plays in the meadow and creates her own church, while in Belševica’s memories, surprise is created by the singing of the Catholics and Orthodox. We can divide off the presence of Christianity as the fourth semantic field, which Jaunsudrabiņš has interwoven into the story about participating in a church service on a Sunday and in the story about the celebration of the New Year, Brigadeve—in the story about going off visiting on Sundays and Pussy Willow Sunday, while in Klīdzējs’ childhood memoirs, Christianity is like a background against which the young lad’s experiences take place.

As can be seen, the semantic fields in the works of the reviewed authors differ, especially if we compare the childhood memoirs which took place prior to World War II (Jaunsudrabiņš and Brigadere), with the memoirs that took place later (Klīdzējs and Belševica). Up until the mid-20th century, childhood semantics were founded on the literary tradition of the late 19th century in the memoirs written up by the Latvian authors,—home and the rural environment as indicators of a happy childhood. Authors, whose memoirs are sourced in the second half of the 20th century, came to experience World War II, and Belševica goes into quite some detail on this. Her childhood memories are centred mainly in the war period, which is why festivals, including the celebration of religious festivals, have not remained in the author’s memory. Obviously, these events pale into insignificance against the background of World War II. Whereas, in the case of Klīdzējs, the author’s experience of emigration, which is present in his childhood memoirs, needs to be considered,

as the Latgale rural farm is the centre of the world for him, i.e., the space where it is as safe as being in his mother's lap (this is why there are frequent references to the presence of the Virgin Mary in the book).

We can conclude that childhood semiotics in 20th century literature encompass typological similarities and differences which have been determined by the authors' experience, and which have been gained in different times and spaces. As pointed out by Lotman, a person who exists in a cultural space inescapably creates an organized spatial sphere about him/herself (Лотман 334). A child's existence in real time and space is their own individual experience, and in the same way, each author's artistic world's time and space category reproduction forms are individual. However, all the analyzed works have a more or less religious context typical of them, which are revealed by stories about celebrating religious festivals.

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