

Adrees by Māris Bērziņš, Winner of the Baltic Assembly Prize 2015 for Literature
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Dressing up on the inside

Ladies and gentlemen,

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said: “The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation”. Sounds rather grim, which is why we – the writers – do what we can to avoid any declines. We do as much as we can afford and endure to strengthen one of the nation’s cornerstones – Latvian literature. However, I must say, sometimes it’s a bumpy road, for quite often our efforts are questioned even by people who are rather close to us.

Recently I ran into an old friend, my former classmate.

“What are you doing these days?” he asked me. I gave him an honest answer – “I’m sitting at home and writing”.

“Oh, I see... So you don’t really have a job?” he inquired.

“Why, well I have a job, I’m writing.”

“Oh, I see... But... Aren’t you even looking for a normal job?”

At that moment I was boiling inside, yet I pulled myself together and replied with poorly disguised irritation:

“I’m writing novels. Isn’t it a normal job?”

My old friend graced me with a pitiful look.

“I don’t know, maybe it is. But we already have so many books... why write new ones, if no one has the time to read what’s already written?”

Awkward silence. But then I came up with an analogy.

“That’s a nice shirt you’re wearing,” I said.

“Sure it is... It’s from the latest *Hugo Boss* collection.”

“I see. But did you really need a new one?”, I knew where I was going with this one, “If people wore all the unsold clothes that were manufactured in the previous century, I think there would be no need for anything new to be designed and manufactured. Shops are bursting with clothes, why would anyone need something new? But look at you – sporting another designer shirt although you have plenty to wear! I just don’t get it!”

My classmate looked perplexed. “What do you mean!? One always wants something new. Don’t you?”

“Well, sure I want. I want to read the most recent collection of novels by author X. Can you imagine that for some people books serve the same purpose as your shirt does to you? The only difference is...” I was struggling to complete my statement with a decent metaphor, “...to dress up on the inside! They also want to have something new. Do you understand?”

“Dressing up on the inside? Ha, ha, ha! You’re weird,” my childhood friend shook his head and bade adieu hastily.

That’s my story.

Fortunately, unlike my old classmate, the Baltic Assembly understands and supports literature. And I am truly happy to have my work appreciated. I cordially thank you for the prize. Especially because the prize will allow me to dress up both on the inside and outside.

Thank you very much!

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