

Madara GRUNTMANE

Writing and...

An author's creative side is inseparable from his or her life and work.

I am 38 years old and I am a poet. I have to admit that this isn't always easy to say out loud when someone asks me what I do for a living. I'd rather say that I work somewhere else: *I'm a producer of cultural events*, I say just so that I can look "normal." Many perceive that being a poet isn't an actual job, if you consider a job to be something you do in order to earn money so that you can provide for your family and yourself. By that definition, then being a poet in Latvia isn't something you can rely on. If you only work as a poet or a writer, you can't really predict your income, nor are there regular paychecks. These types of jobs don't really allow you to plan a monthly budget: utilities, apartment. And don't even think about credit debt.

In Latvia, the average poet publishes a book every two years and even that is not a guarantee. It is possible to apply for stipends through the State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF), and if a committee accepts and approves your application, then you may be awarded somewhere between 1000 and 2000 EUR. Theoretically, one can get by with that amount for an entire creative period, a year or two, while a book is being written, but of course, this isn't realistic. This is why the majority of authors, parallel to their writing, have a steady job as a teacher and/or translator, or work in an advertising agency or somewhere else. I can't speak to how they deal with combining their work life with their writing, I can only attest to my own experience.

I also have a job: I own an event planning agency. A team and I organize public cultural events, mainly in the capital of Riga, Latvia. Our task is to create high-quality events for significant state and city celebrations such as Independence Day, city festivals, Contemporary Culture Forum, et cetera. My thought process in my work life, which can also be seen in my writing, is part of every moment of my daily life. Every cultural event that we create is a microcosm, just like a poem, and my greatest goal is that a person who partakes in these moments gains something for themselves and becomes richer from it. Similarly, every person I meet and every moment at work serves as inspiration and an experience that I can use in my writing. It is impossible to open my office's door and immediately forget that I'm an author because I am the boss. Thoughts of a literary life don't fade, they are with me throughout my workday without being a hindrance.

To be honest, while I'm at literary retreats thoughts of work don't go away, and that, unfortunately, interferes with writing. Taking into account the delicate process of creating something, it is cumbersome if someone continually bothers you about work, or if work situations arise which only you can solve. I have had instances where I am reading in front of a large audience and my phone rings for the 5th time in a row because the client believes that I am the only one that can solve their issue—you begin to feel that you are being pulled in half and can't be both a writer and a company manager. Luckily, this

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doesn't happen too often. And even to come here, I needed to ensure that when I return home my life hasn't crumbled while I'm away in Iowa.

To elaborate on the thesis that I stated in the beginning, *An author's creative side is inseparable from his or her life and work*: writing is a way of life, and work is often a disparate way of life, yet everything that you do is accomplished with a much richer perspective because you are a worker with an advantage. The advantage: a literary worldview that helps you with your job. However, it would be ideal if one could separate work from writing because while work events can serve as inspiration, they can become a hindrance to what an author is trying to create.

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