

Editorial

The de Medici touch

In an article not so long ago, Clare Azzopardi outlined the neglected state of literature in Malta. She complained that not only is there no budget for literature but, unlike other EU countries, there is no infrastructure within the Cultural Ministry to protect, guide and nurture it.

Being a bilingual nation one must differentiate between works written in Maltese and those written in English. There appears to be no problem about works of scholarly research being published in English. One can perhaps even dare say they do sell well too. Here, however, lies the crunch.

If a publishing house like Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti issued Treasures of Malta in Maltese, the fear of not selling would be a determining factor. Apart from the fact that writing Treasures of Malta in Maltese could pose a linguistic problem for those regular contributors who for years have been writing in English, would it be worth the bother and risk to do so simply to say the publication is in the national language? And would this result in an expansion in the target audience, unless Treasures is published in both languages?

It is an undeniable fact that many prefer reading and writing in English and this for different reasons. The Akkademja tal-Malti acknowledges that the Maltese language is threatened by the use of English here and in fact has a sub-committee whose task it is to guarantee the inclusion of Maltese in as many spheres of life as possible.

National Book Council chairman Gorg Mallia mentioned another reason when he was speaking at the opening of the 22nd edition of the annual book fair last November. He said there were still too many misconceptions about Maltese books, with people not knowing about the existence of such books for certain age groups.

Ms Azzopardi, on her part, felt that "the Maltese have a very laid-back attitude indeed where literature is concerned".

To encourage art financially is a very delicate matter which only great men like Lorenzo de Medici got absolutely right to the last T. The establishment of the famous Studiolo, where the various facets of Art, with a capital A, rubbed shoulders and exchanged ideas produced a genius like Michelangelo, who was not only a sculptor but an architect and a poet to boot.

Pouring money into art is not enough. Good taste and sensitivity in the appreciation of the arts in whatever form is an essential requirement and this is the quality the literature officer, as proposed by Ms Azzopardi, should have. However, one needs to be careful not to fall into the trap of simply assigning a title to a person or group of persons who then become "experts" in whatever their duty demands of them, whether or not they are fully qualified to do so in today's highly competitive world. One can mention quite a few examples of this happening, even if in other spheres!

Art and its creation is a direct reflection of the level of education and culture in a country. A work of art may be inspired at germination stage and may be helped out in its realisation but the right intellectual climate must be nurtured for such phenomena to happen.

To be truly representational of literary circles, we must as a nation come to terms with our bilingualism and accept both languages spoken concurrently without embarrassment or inhibition. Only in this way will literature, as an art, thrive and develop onto something worth shouting about.

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