

Biography: Māris Bērziņš (1962) is a writer and playwright. Māris Bērziņš has worked in the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia, he established and for a while managed the State Culture Capital Foundation. After this colourful career Māris Bērziņš decided to turn to literature and currently works as a full time writer. Māris Bērziņš is an active member of the Latvian Writers' Union.

Synopsis: Māris Bērziņš's short stories about Gutenmorgen have an absurd aesthetic, along with humor, irony, and sometimes a note of existentialism. These stories took shape over a period of twelve years (2005-2017, with new ones still being written), The stories are independent of one another, but all have one thing in common: the titular character, a man named Gutenmorgen. He appears to be a completely ordinary citizen, with a wife and children, with his TV, friends, and bottle of beer. He's sometimes indecisive and passive. As such things often go, however, appearance and behavior can be deceiving. Gutenmorgen is a hero at heart. Almost everything he thinks about or does is meant to make the world a better place, and to improve his own life. He doesn't forget about others, either. Gutenmorgen raises a monument to his friend the writer. He reconciles a couple who divorced twenty years ago. He even handles developments in geopolitical events, along with the unity of the Baltic States. Gutenmorgen is also never afraid to get his hands dirty. He shoots at opposing hockey players who beat his team, kills the entire Cabinet of Ministers at least three times a week, and scares other bad people, including his neighbor. Gutenmorgen will never lay a hand on his neighbor's dog, though; he loves animals.

Excerpt

Gutenmorgen and Berlin

One time Gutenmorgen flew to Berlin. In the evening, he checked into a hotel, had a good night's sleep and in the morning decided to take an early walk while the streets were still not crowded. He didn't feel like waiting for breakfast, so, having descended the stairs to the hotel lobby, he strode to the door. The hotel manager was coming toward him. He was smiling and said to Gutenmorgen: "Guten Morgen." This utterance came as a surprise for

Gutenmorgen and he got very excited. But then he quickly recovered and having yet to become tongue-tied in Berlin, asked the kindly hotelier: "Do you know me?" To which he received an enthusiastic: "Ja, ja." After walking out of the hotel in a somewhat confused state, Gutenmorgen suddenly realized: "Oh, no wonder the hotelier knew me, he must know his guests after all. Still, it's very nice." Having come to that conclusion, he energetically walked toward the city centre.

"Guten Morgen, guten Morgen," Gutenmorgen heard behind his back and was once again startled. Turning around, he saw two German ladies who also looked at him. For a while they all looked at one another. A moment later, Gutenmorgen started feeling uneasy because of the women's stares; he turned away and continued on his walk. Yet the surprises didn't cease. Every now and then he heard his name from the mouths of a variety of people. Could they really know me? Gutenmorgen wondered. It seemed slightly strange that most people wouldn't even look at him and used his name like spies would a password. "Guten Morgen," said one person, and the other echoed: "Guten Morgen."

Gutenmorgen decided that the majority of Berlin's population must not know him personally after all, yet everyone knows that he has arrived in Berlin, is now taking a walk in the city and has decided to spend the day here. That is event number one here, and that's why all honest citizens begin their day by mentioning Gutenmorgen's name. He was a little miffed that many seemed to swallow the first syllables making it sound like "...Morgen", but Gutenmorgen was generously inclined, he understood that Germans may find it difficult to pronounce his name. Like Finns find it impossible to say *šaursliežu dzelzceļš*.

Gutenmorgen spent the morning in a state of a kind of euphoria and missed the moment when lunch time set in. Yet gradually he began to notice that no one was mentioning his name anymore, increasingly often pronouncing a similar name, Gutentag, instead. Who was this Gutentag? Enough for someone else to show up and I am already forgotten, Gutenmorgen frowned. His good mood was ruined for the rest of the day and he tried to ignore the conversations around him. Come evening and Gutenmorgen became quite deaf and failed to notice people hailing some Gutenabend.

Rather disappointed in his trip, Gutenmorgen returned home.

Gutenmorgen and Amnesia

One time Gutenmorgen took the trolleybus to work. Two women standing next to him were having a chat. Gutenmorgen wanted to be polite and not listen to their conversation, but one of the women said what she had to say so loudly that he simply could not avoid hearing it.

- My God! I don't remember it at all! I must have amnesia, - she said.

"Sick," Gutenmorgen thought and tried to step away from this woman, but the course of events took a different turn, for at that very moment, the driver stepped on the brakes and Gutenmorgen bumped into her. His sense of balance made him grab the woman's body as if in a vice.

- What are you doing? – the woman in his clutches asked in a startled voice.
- I am sorry! I am not at all like you think I am! It was an accident, the trolleybus is breaking like crazy... forgive me please, - Gutenmorgen mumbled red in the face and pressed into the throng, so as to get away from this sick person as soon as possible.

Having elbowed his way to the door Gutenmorgen shifted impatiently, waiting for the trolleybus to stop so that he can get outside. Getting off, Gutenmorgen realized that he was unfamiliar with this place. It was not the trolleybus stop from which the well-trodden path led to work. Gutenmorgen vaguely remembered that he had to go to work, but which way he should take, he no longer knew. "I guess I've caught amnesia," Gutenmorgen thought and at that very moment forgot about work as well. In another couple of minutes, he forgot his name. He had also forgotten the way home. So, just as any decent amnesiac, he began to wander aimlessly through the streets and the expression on his face signalled the question: "Who am I and where am I going?" Along the way, he saw a man who looked familiar to Gutenmorgen, so he stopped him and asked: "Do you happen to know who I am?" Yet the person did not answer, just looked at him surprised, put his finger to his temple and strode off. Having failed to receive an answer, Gutenmorgen desperately continued to walk as aimlessly as before. He no longer dared to ask others about his identity.

Getting lost on various streets, alleys, boulevards and mews, Gutenmorgen reached a park whose name he had forgotten. The park was rather empty, his gaze registered only a man who, leaning back idly, was drinking beer. Gutenmorgen did not recognize the man, whereas the man behaved like an old acquaintance. He waved at Gutenmorgen, inviting him

to come over. Relieved that at least someone still remembered him, he walked up to the bench.

- Hello! – having quickly stood up the man said. – Good thing I ran into you. Listen, could you lend me a couple of lats till tomorrow?
- A couple of lats? – Gutenmorgen tried to make sense of what was said. Then he suddenly came to and said: - So you want a couple of lats, huh? Listen, Kalniņš, you haven't returned my fiver for two months, yet you are asking for more money. That's wrong...
- You have a good memory, Gutenmorgen, - Kalniņš said sarcastically and plopped back down on the bench. But Gutenmorgen was happy that now it was clear that he was Gutenmorgen.

Gutenmorgen and Shooting

One time Gutenmorgen shot Bērziņš. It was not the first time. Gutenmorgen liked to shoot, and he did it right and left. A short time ago, he shot everyone in the Swedish national hockey team with the help of television, when the Swedes had treacherously won over our own team. He also managed to hit many of the Swedish fans who were cheering in the stands. In addition, remembering various international conflicts, he released a poisonous gas in the streets of Stockholm. It must be said that he enjoyed not only shooting but trying his hand at other means of murdering as well.

Not a day went by when Gutenmorgen would not put a bullet through someone's rib cage or stab someone in the stomach. If Gutenmorgen was made really angry – sometimes simple dislike sufficed – he knew no mercy. Gutenmorgen had no respect for the status of his victims in society. On the contrary – the higher the rank, the better-known the person, the happier it made Gutenmorgen to take aim at them. He did not want for any arsenal either – he had pistols, revolvers, shotguns and machine guns, howitzers, mortars, cannons, and tanks, even bacterial weapons and hydrogen bombs. One time, in order to help the Americans settle the conflict in Iraq, he got on a plane and bombed half the country.

Gutenmorgen had bumped off, bombed or in some other way killed 248 times, he had shot the colleague who sat across from him 131 times with a light machine gun that now and again appeared on Gutenmorgen's desk and the colleague who sat behind him he showered with grenades over his shoulder, without even turning around. He did it most vigorously if that colleague started humming along with the melodies playing on the radio. Gutenmorgen was a monstrous murderer. He was a serial killer. As he watched some series on TV, he would again and again kill villains who would rise from the dead. But when the news program Panorama came on, real life people got theirs. This week's harvest was approximately this: prime minister – shot dead three times, stabbed to death once, his throat cut once; the mayor of Riga – drowned twice, once in the Daugava and once in the canal by the Opera, and immured live in the western wall of the Blackheads' House. The Cabinet of Ministers was bombed twice – once simply with all the ministers and the second time together with the parliament. The lazy clerks or well-to-do but suspicious citizens were simply hanged on lanterns on Brīvības Boulevard. The President was wounded in the leg because she smiled at some minister that Gutenmorgen did not care for.

Friends, acquaintances, and relatives also did not make it through unscathed. Let's take Bērziņš. How he had suffered! Not to talk about Gutenmorgen's mother-in-law.

Gutenmorgen was really upset with one of his neighbours, particularly because his dog used to start barking loudly, seriously scaring Gutenmorgen as he passed by the fence. Then the neighbour and his entire household really got it. But Gutenmorgen always spared the dog.

He loved animals and always posed an unanswerable question to himself: "Why do I always feel sorry for animals but not so much for people?"