

Interpretation of the Theme of Night: A Case Study of Rainis's Creative Laboratory

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The writings of Latvian poet and playwright Rainis (real name Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) are characterized by deep roots in world culture, extensive creative ideas, a continuous artistic quest, and an effort to cultivate individual artistic expression. Rainis was not only a writer and translator, but also an active supporter of socialism and national statehood. In 1897, due to his political beliefs, he was arrested and exiled to Pskov and later to Slobodsk in Vyatka Governorate (1898–1903). After the tragic events of 1905, Rainis, along with his spouse, the poet Aspazija (real name Elza Rozenberga, 1865–1943), abandoned Latvia, going into exile to Castagnola in Switzerland and returning to Latvia only in 1920.

A wide range of sources has been used in research about Rainis. These include his finished and published works in various editions, their translations into foreign languages, and translations of other authors' works by Rainis himself. His literary heritage also includes his unfinished works and variants of manuscript texts, his correspondence and diaries, and various documents of the era. There are also his so-called creative thoughts¹ or notes, in which the poet has identified both purposefully developed and sometimes spontaneous ideas arising from contemplation on a particular work to be created, as well as focusing on the development of themes and artistic images that, due to their idealistic ambition and expansion, exceed materials to be included in individual works. This rich set of texts reflects Rainis's creative laboratory: the birth of ideas, the evolution of ideas, themes, and artistic images, the search for the form of a literary work, the contradictions faced by the poet in the creative process, resolved and unresolved artistic issues, and the creative impulses that have guided the poet on this complicated course. Research of Rainis's creative laboratory is important not only as a separate case in the history of literature and drama, but also as a significant contribution to the research of artistic creative processes, especially in the changing cultural paradigm that Latvia experienced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There are particularly important images of morning, day, and light, particularly the sun, which symbolize life, freedom, and courage of spirit. They represent the highest ethical ideals in Rainis's writing. The steady use of light imagery is typical of all of Rainis's writing at various stages of its development, which is certainly diverse, broad and has to be treated symbolically. But do we have a stable definition of night imagery in Rainis's

1 In Latvian, *radāmās domas*.

fiction? The purpose of this article is to find out whether changes in the theme of night are manifested in Rainis's plays, and if so, which. The article also seeks to highlight the dynamics of the theme of night in the evolution of Rainis's creative intentions. The article will mainly analyze Rainis's creative thoughts regarding plays, in particular two of his plays — *Fire and Night* (*Uguns un nakts*, published in 1905) and *I Played, I Danced* (*Spēlēju, dancoju*, 1915). However, contextual trends will be researched in relation to the most important nocturnal theme developments in the works of the Latvian poet and playwright Aspazija as well as of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), focusing on some aspects of Rainis's translation of J. W. von Goethe's tragedy *Faust* (1808, 1832).

Rainis has turned to the theme of night and darkness several times in his plays. In his play *Fire and Night*, whose subtitle is *An Old Song in a New Sounding*, the Black Knight talks about 'final darkness': 'Where the unmentionable almighty night reigns/ The eternal, uninitiated night'² (Rainis 1980: 184); he also mentions 'Unmentionable night' (Rainis 1980: 184) and 'a sluggish night/ Which is weighing down everything/ Without moving'³ (Rainis 1980: 186). Similar trends in forming the image of night are also observed in the materials of his unfinished play *Īliņš* (or *Kurbads*)⁴. The unfinished play is a rich store of creative ideas, in which Rainis has identified ideas and themes that have also been used in other works, including the play *Fire and Night*. According to researchers of Rainis's writing Viktors Hausmanis and Gundega Grīnuma, it is unfortunately not possible to determine precisely when Rainis started his work on the play, but the dated pages show that he worked particularly intensively on the ideas of *Īliņš* in 1900–1902, during his exile to Slobodsk, returning to the play purposefully during the Castagnola exile, and in 1926 had still not abandoned the idea (Hausmanis, Grīnuma 1981). *Īliņš*, the protagonist of the unfinished play, is the son of a bear and a captive woman. The young man has spent years lacking strength and lying on top of the furnace. When he regains his physical strength, he aims to reshape the world and struggles with narrowness and numbness, both in the space of life and in the minds of the people. In the dialogues between *Īliņš* and his bride Ziedīte in Act 1, the protagonist is described as the spring wind⁵ whose task is to free the earth from the winter freeze (Rainis 1981c: 168), while in Act 3, *Īliņš* calls on people to come closer to the sun and go out to learn a new, wider room of life⁶. Thus, confronting the protagonist and his aspirations with images of night and darkness is inevitable.

2 *Kur valda neminamā, pārvarīgā, / Mūžīgā, nesāktā nakts.*

3 *[..] kūtrā nakts, / Kas spiezdama guļ pār visu pāri / Un nekustas.*

4 Rainis changed the title of the play several times. In the oldest outlines, Rainis called his work in progress *Sonnenkind* (or 'the Sun Child'), later the play was called *Īliņš* or *Īls* (parallel forms), but in October 1917 the name *Kurbads* appeared in several notes (Hausmanis, Grīnuma 1981). As *Īliņš* is the protagonist's name most often used in Rainis's notes, the play will be further on called *Īliņš*, not *Kurbads*, although the compilers of the academic edition of Rainis's Collected Works chose the latter, which is chronologically the last title.

5 The word *īliņš* means 'sharp wind, breeze'. Linguist Konstantīns Karulis gives two versions of this word, explaining it (1) as a borrowing, (2) the legacy of the Proto-Indo-European language. (Karulis 1992: 341–342)

6 For instance, 'in Act 3 is also culmination of Īl.'s hope and plans, full power, unrestricted possibilities, fullness of strength: [...] the plan to go to the warm lands, to get the sun.' (Rainis 1981b: 221)

For example, in a page of creative thoughts dated 15 August 1907, the poet outlined a sketch for a dialogue that he intended to include in Act V of the play, in which one of Īliņš' opponents is either his own antagonistic internal voice or sands which devour the protagonist⁷ and, according to one of Rainis's final variants, symbolically represent the protagonist's struggle with the multitude of people who are cowardly and mentally inert. According to Rainis's intention, the following thought would be varied in the text of his opponent: 'Only what does not move, lives forever, what doesn't spend, it is the night that wins everything: the past, god, fate, death' (Rainis 1981b: 287). This interpretation of the image of night is also found in a stylistically unfinished poetic piece, which Rainis seems to have planned to incorporate into Īliņš' monologue marked as *Klage der Sehnsucht* or a 'cry of despair':

'Out of the night we come, and we go on
Towards the great infinite final night
We look back into the night to see our lifetime
And we see the same night ahead of us.
A tiny ray of light flashes up like lighting,
A single moment in the ever-long darkness,
And you are the ray and the moment'⁸ (Rainis 1981a: 207–208).

As we see, both the lines of the Black Knight in *Fire and Night* and the quoted snippets from Īliņš' text feature the night not only treated as inscrutable, inert and depressing, but also associated with the eternal. In contrast to this, the idea of human life appears in the materials of Īliņš' as a short-yet-bright moment, with the task of at least breaking the inert mass of an all-encompassing darkness for a moment.

In general, we can find interesting pieces of material written for Īliņš' and developed in the form of poetry and fragmentary outlines of ideas, which present variations of the image of the night, in particular in Act V of the play, providing remarkable evidence not only of the options discussed by Rainis but also of the contradictions the poet came across.

Although the materials of Act V of Īliņš' also contain fragments of text in which the night is associated with aggressive activity (e.g., 'comes a fierce black night' (Rainis 1981a: 200)), in Rainis's treatment, the night is mostly frightful not because of its chaotic whirlwind of

- 7 See, for instance, the idea written down in the Slobodsk period, Īliņš' 'is victorious over antagonists of mass: the coarse force, a giant, then a spiritual force — God, then wants to raise the mass itself, the time, the small things — but the mass outweighs him, against the sand, the 10000, he is powerless.' (Rainis 1981b: 251)
- 8 *Iz nakts mēs atnākam un ejam atkal
Uz lielo, nebeidzamo gala nakti.
Uz mūžu nakti atskatāmieš atpakaļ
Un priekšā redzam vis to pašu nakti.
Kā zibens pazibsnī sīks gaismas stars,
Viens vienīgs mirklis garā, garā tumsā,
Un tu tas stars, tas mirklis.*

elements, but, on the contrary, because of its emptiness and lack of form. For instance, in a voluminous poetic passage of the tragedy that was written for Act V, the poet writes the following on the cosmic proportions of the battle of day and night:

‘Night eels itself between the earth and heaven
 Its body gross and without form
 It stretches out dark shadows as its arms.
 Sun does defend with whips of rays
 But night brings forth the rolling clouds
 As big as mountains, heaps them up
 And pushes them in all the room,
 The green earth now loses breath
 And the fair joy grows pale in heavens.
 Now sun bleeds out from thousand wounds
 And red from her blood they trod
 The cloud giants stand —

The sun has fought for thousand years
 But night falls back, but only to return
 And cover all beyond the realm of sun.
 Night rules unchallenged since older days
 And night has nothing to fear in this battle
 It only wins and never loses
 Because it has nothing, only the void.

Her body does not grow old from birthing
 Her child does not suck life from her breast.
 She holds on to her power, spending nothing,
 She creates not, she only does destroy,
 She has no passion of creator,
 She does not burn when warming others
 She sows no seed form all that she has gathered
 She does not bleed for her brothers⁹ (Rainis 1981a: 199) [emphasis by Z. Š.].

9 *Starp debesi un zemi spraucas nakts
 Ar rupjo bezveidīgo ķermenī,
 Kā rokas izstiepdama tumsās ēnas.
 Gan saule gainās staru pātaģām,
 Bet nakts tai pretīm atveļ mākoņus
 Kā milzu kalnus, kaudzēm kraudama
 Un visu telpu pilnu piebāzdama,
 Kā zaļai zemei dvaša aizraujas
 Un gaišais jautrums nobālst debesīs.
 Jau saule asiņo iz tūkstots vātīm
 Un, asnīs nobridušies sarkani,
 Stāv mākoņmilži —*

In his creative thoughts from the exile in Slobodsk, Rainis also notes that ‘the night and the emptiness are without love, they do not create and bear fruit’ (Rainis 1981b: 249), while ‘light wants to overcome the night, the world, the content — the void’ (Rainis 1981b: 249). However, the poet, looking at night in another context, also comes to a different theme of the night: ‘Day and night or void. A man and a woman. The woman is empty, the man must create, then she gives him back. (Substance. V The night is empty, but it is forced to give birth, the beam of light is the creator, thus the day overcomes the night.) Power and substance, or everything is merely energy, emptiness’ (Rainis 1981b: 248). Rainis continues this idea in another note of the Slobodsk period, developing an ideal outline of the main character of the play *Īlīnš*, in the context of cosmic developments:

‘In Īl. [*Īlīnš*] denotes strength and forgiveness coming from the earth that turns, hurrying forward, not knowing where.

The natural forces originate from the earth, from their opposite that is the dormant, primeval night, and yet from it: from the rest, from nothing, from the night, all the present, every movement, the light. Īl. is the existing struggle in itself, against itself, it is its own development. Where does it go? Who knows but still: forward! Revolution’ (Rainis 1981b: 252).

Thus, although Rainis remains faithful to the inherent symbolic system where light is unambiguously positive and victorious; night is no longer formidable, inert, because of its void and passivity, a hostile force to eternal development. Night is a mysterious ambivalence, as it also conceals an unrealized creative potential, which only requires a strong external impulse. It is possible, therefore, that Act V of the play also contains extraordinarily poetic lines devoted to the wonderful beauty of the night and which do not have even a hint at the destructive functions of the night:

‘Night’s deep dark ornament of holy darkness,
You silver veil that weaves above

*Jau tūkstots, tūkstots gadu saule cīnās,
Bet nakts tik atkāpjas, lai atkal nāktu
Aiz pasauls telpām visā plašumā.
Jau sen bez pretestības valda nakts —
Un naktij nau no cīņas jābaidās,
Tā var tik uzvarēt, bet nevar zaudēt,
Jo viņai nau nekā — tik tukšums vien.*

*Tās miesas nevecu no dzemdēšanas, —
Tai bērns iz krūtīm nesūc dzīvību.
Tā savu spēku cīņai neizlaiž,
Tai radīt nevajga, bet tikai postīt,
Tā nekvēl radītāja kaislībā,
Tā, būtes sildot, pate nesadeg,
Tā sēklu nekaisa iz sava pūra,
Priekš brāļiem nelej savas asinis*

And stretches subtle strings of rays
On meadows pale, on scintillating brooks'¹⁰ (Rainis 1981a: 200).

It is no secret that Rainis's creation of the world of artistic efforts and ideas has been strongly influenced by the creative personalities of two poets. They are his spouse, Aspazija, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, especially his tragedy *Faust*, the translation of which Rainis worked on in 1896–1897.

In Aspazija's writings, the image of the night was interpreted in a diverse manner, both in the play *The Witch (Ragana, 1894)* and in other dramatic pieces and in her poetry at various stages of life. Saulcerīte Viese writes: 'There is the 'bewitched,' nightmare night in her *The Twilight of the Soul (Dvēsdes krēsla)* from which the lyric hero cannot get out. There is the blossoming night in *The Sunny Corner (Saulainais stūrītis)* when 'trees yield their juice' and a young heart is fairly embarrassed. There is *An Armful of Flowers (Ziedu klēpis)* containing the inspired *Moonlight (Mēnessnakts)*, a true anthem to the beauty of the Moon and the translucent delicacy of the soul. There is a deep nocturnal loneliness in *Wings Widespread (Izplesti spārni)* when 'no one hears you, no one is holding you.' And this is the perfect cosmic dynamic night of life and transformation.' (Viese 1985: 18) Aspazija has been drawn to focus on nocturnal themes so often, not only by the possibilities of symbolic treatment of night, but also by its obscurity and the rich spectrum of feelings. Frequently, in Aspazija's writings, it is at night that the deepest parts of a person's soul open up, it is honored as a great moment of creation. In 1910, Aspazija conveys this feeling of excitement in her fantasy *How Roses Blossom (Kā rozes plaukst)*:

'We think of the night as a heavy, shapeless giant who lies on the whole life and stops all the movements. But the night is not like that.
The night is infinitely subtle and invisible; she walks so gently that she does not touch upon the ground.
In her hand, she carries a gold dish tied with a black blanket that keeps the secret of the great creation.
All the fine threads of the tissues of life, which pass and cross in the workshop of Nature, are woven into the night.
All that is great becomes the night.
[...]

The greatest thoughts are thoughts at night. That is why everyone bows in respect for the night. We often despise the grey mundanity, but no one has complained about the black nocturnity'¹¹ (Aspazija 1988: 171).

10 *Nakts dziļi tumšās segas svētā rota,
Tu pāri austais sudrabetais plūvurs,
Kas smalkās staru stīgas izstiepis
Pār blāvām pļavām, dzirkstelainiem strautiem.*

11 *Mēs iedomājamies nakti kā smagu, bezveidīgu milzeni, kurš uzguļas virsū visai dzīvībai un visas kustības*

This complete fantasy of poetic passion, which also contains a subtle discussion with Rainis, reveals the influence of German Romanticist literature on Aspazija. We can see similarities to *Hymns to the Night* (*Hymnen an die Nacht*, 1800) by Novalis (real name Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg, 1772–1801), where the unusual, passionate vision is characterized by an ecstasy of love and death, which is typical of the author:

‘Aside I turn to the holy, unspeakable, mysterious Night. Afar lies the world, sunk in a deep grave; waste and lonely is its place. In the chords of the bosom blows a deep sadness. I am ready to sink away in drops of dew, and mingle with the ashes. [...]

‘What springs up all at once so sweetly boding in my heart, and stills the soft air of sadness? Dost thou also take a pleasure in us, dusky Night? What holdest thou under thy mantle, that with hidden power affects my soul? Precious balm drips from thy hand out of its bundle of poppies. [...] How poor and childish a thing seems to me now the light! How joyous and welcome the departure of the day! [...]

‘More heavenly than those glittering stars we hold the eternal eyes that the Night hath opened within us. Farther they see than the palest of those countless hosts. Needing no aid from the light, they penetrate the depths of a loving soul that fills a loftier region with bliss ineffable¹² (Novalis 2005).

Although the fantasy of Aspazija does not include the complex religious symbolism of Novalis’ writings, nor its complicated poetic texture, the two poets are united in the excitement of the mysterious and creative potential of the night.

In Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s tragedy *Faust*, there are many scenes that take place at night. One of the most magnificent examples is the Walpurgis Night on Harz Mountain, another scene features a night in his study where Faust calls the Spirit of the Earth, and in

apstādina. Bet tāda viņa nebūt nav.

Nakts ir netverami smalka un nesaredzami daiļa; viņa iet tik maigi pāri pār zemi, ka to nemaz neaižskar.

Rokā tā nes zelta trauku, pārsietu ar melnu segu, kurā glabā lielo radīšanas noslēpumu.

Visi dzīvības audu smalkie pavedieni, kuri rit un krustojas dabas darbnīcā, tiek ievērti nakši.

Viss, kas liels, top pa nakši.

[..]

Arī vislielākās domas tiek domātas pa nakši. Tādēļ ikviens jūt it kā bijību un cienību pret nakši. Bieži dzird gan ar nīcināšanu mīnām pelēko ikdienību, bet neviens vēl nav sūdzējies par melno iknaktību. (Aspazija 1988: 171)

- 12 *Abwärts wend ich mich zu der heiligen, unaussprechlichen, geheimnisvollen Nacht. Fernab liegt die Welt – in eine tiefe Gruft versenkt – wüst und einsam ist ihre Stelle. In den Saiten der Brust weht tiefe Wehmut. In Taupfropfen will ich hinuntersinken und mit der Asche mich vermischen. [...] Was quillt auf einmal so abendungsvoll unterm Herzen, und verschluckt der Wehmut weiche Luft? Hast auch du ein Gefallen an uns, dunkle Nacht? Was hältst du unter deinem Mantel, das mir unsichtbar kräftig an die Seele gebt? Köstlicher Balsam träuft aus deiner Hand, aus dem Bündel Mohn. [...] Wie arm und kindisch dünkt mir das Licht nun – wie erfreulich und gesegnet des Tages Abschied. [...] Himmlischer, als jene blitzenden Sterne, dünken uns die unendlichen Augen, die die Nacht in uns geöffnet. Weiter sehn sie als die blässesten jener zahllosen Heere – unbedürftig des Lichts durchschaun sie die Tiefen eines liebenden Gemüts – was einen höhern Raum mit unsäglicher Wollust füllt. (Novalis 1998)*

another night scene, when Faust takes a walk, his poodle turns into Mephistopheles. At night, Faust also comes to a forest cave. When beholding it, he expresses his passionate desire to immerse into the depths of his soul:

‘[...] Then to the cave secure thou [Mephistopheles] leadest me,
Then show’st me mine own self, and in my breast
The deep, mysterious miracles unfold’ (Goethe 2005).

On the other hand, Part II of the tragedy includes the classic Walpurgis Night, in which the eternal transformation and creation force manifest chimeric, semi-finished, monochrome-shaped creatures — griffins, sphinxes, Arimaspi, sirens, the centaur Chiron, pigmies, doddles, Nereids, Lamia, Empousa, Mirmidons, tritons, eternal shape-shifter Proteus, hippocampi, etc. The activities also involve Grays, the earth-changer volcanic Seismus, and Anaxagoras and Tales discuss the origins of life.

In his essay *The World as Black Magic: On the Philosophy of Goethe’s Creativity*, Estonian writer and literary critic Jaan Undusk explains the understanding of light, darkness, and twilight in Goethe’s writings. He writes that the author of *Faust* is ‘a hunter in the kingdom of creative twilight’ (Undusk 2002: 21) and admits that Goethe ‘is never going to hunt the obvious, the reality of the daylight, he is more likely to be attracted by the dark potential and what may result from it’ (Undusk 2002: 21). Jaan Undusk concludes that Goethe’s ‘night is never empty, it just keeps aloof, something budding in the dark. [...] A young mother’s lap (thus, the night for Goethe is also a young mother) can also bring forth horrible things in the world, but it is a miracle in itself. There’s always something being born in the night, it’s not the end of this world’ (Undusk 2002: 23).

Indeed, Faust’s infinite craving for perfection begins to materialize in collaboration with Mephistopheles, who says:

‘Part of the Part am I, once All, in primal Night,—
Part of the Darkness which brought forth the Light,
The haughty Light, which now disputes the space,
And claims of Mother Night her ancient place’¹³ (Goethe 2005).

Rainis translates this as follows:

*Tās daļas daļa es, kas pirmāk visa bija,
Tās tumsas daļa, kas sev gaismu dzemdēja,
To lepno gaismu, kura, nakti mākdama,
Gandrīz vai valsti viņai nolauņija* (Gēte 1982: 51).

13 *Tās daļas daļa es, kas pirmāk visa bija,
Tās tumsas daļa, kas sev gaismu dzemdēja,
To lepno gaismu, kura, nakti mākdama,
Gandrīz vai valsti viņai nolauņija.* (Gēte 1982: 51)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe used a delicate phrase ‘Mother Night’ in this passage of text, which specifically accentuates night as capable of creation:

*Ich bin ein Teil des Teils, der anfangs alles war,
Ein Teil der Finsternis, die sich das Licht gebar,
Das stolze Licht, das nun der Mutter Nacht
Den alten Rang, den Raum ihr streitig macht [...].*
[emphasis by Z. Š.] (Goethe 19--: 172)

Although Rainis did not retain this essential nuance¹⁴ in his translation of *Faust*, we should not believe that he did so for any particular purpose. Another — in a way similar — inaccuracy can also be observed in another fragment of *Faust* translated by Rainis: namely, in his translation, Faust speaks to Mephistopheles, saying ‘*tu ērmots gars, kas dzimis peklē [...]*’ (Gēte 1982: 52) (‘an odd spirit born in hell [...]’), although in the original Goethe calls Mephistopheles the son of Chaos: ‘*[...] Des Chaos wunderlicher Sohn!*’ (Goethe 19--: 173). Rainis used the word ‘hell’ in his translation, but it clearly has a negative connotation, suggesting something frightening and destructive. On the other hand, the word ‘chaos’ used by Goethe — although it refers to a structure that differs sharply from the cosmic order of the Lord and his angels in the *Prologue in Heaven*, rather represents an unpredictable and ambivalent environment, which includes not only destructive but also creative forces. It was noticeable that Rainis had corrected this imprecision in his comments on *Faust*. In explaining the word ‘chaos’ used in the classic Walpurgis Night, he added, ‘Mephistopheles, as we have seen before, is also called chaos’s son.’ (Rainis 1982: 461) Although Rainis seems to have forgotten some of his own notes in Part 1 of the tragedy, it is important that he considers it necessary to remind us of Mephistopheles’s connection with chaos.

The purpose of this article is, of course, not a critical analysis of the translation of *Faust* by Rainis. The inaccuracies found in the translation have been considered in order to highlight the context of the creative laboratory of his writings and to emphasize that the poet not only made an invaluable contribution to the wealth of the Latvian cultural space by translating *Faust*, but also gained a creative impulse for his own writing. It is possible that without the scenes of Walpurgis Night, as shown in Part I of *Faust*, or the scenes in the The Mountain King’s cave in *Peer Gynt* (1866) by Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Rainis would not have been able to write, for instance, Act III in his play *I Played, I Danced*.

From insights into Rainis’s writing, let us turn to the theme of the night occurring in his works. I would like to mention conclusions made by Janīna Kursīte in her study *Rainis’s Poetry*. She points out that, around 1910, in terms of time and space, Rainis’s poetry

14 Valdis Bisenieks translates it thus:
*Es daļa daļas, kura sākamā bij viss,
Es daļa tumsas, kurai bērns bij piedzimis,
Par gaismu aug tas, lepmi klūst kam prāti.
Kas padzīt grib nu nakti, savu māti [...].* (Gēte 1999: 48)

underwent significant changes¹⁵: ‘In his collection *The End and The Beginning* (*Gals un sākums*)¹⁶, Rainis has already waived binary oppositions in his early poetry, where, for instance, the night (also darkness) is unequivocally associated with death and the negative, while the day (also light) is associated with life and the positive. During the second stage, the night is deeper than the day because:

‘In the day you hide yourself,
And you hide your pain much deeper.’¹⁷

In *Dagda Sketchbooks* (*Dagdas skiču burtnīcas*) the night is often the time when the most concealed thoughts are not afraid to reveal themselves; it is also the time when the spirit and soul are able to recover. The link between night, darkness and death does not disappear in *Dagda Sketchbooks*, but it is rich in comparison to the previous stage. The night is also death, but only as part of cycle, followed by a renewal’ (Kursīte 1996: 175).

The borderline of 1910 referred to by Janīna Kursīte also chronologically separates two highly vivid plays by Rainis: *Fire and Night*, written in 1904 and 1905 (the prologue in prose 1907), and *I Played, I Danced*, whose text was created through intense work in 1915.

In the text of the play *Fire and Night*¹⁸, the word ‘night’ (also ‘midnight’) occurs 26 times, and, as noted above, night and darkness are mainly related to the image of the Black Knight; accordingly, night and darkness are treated as inert and immobile, hence as a destructive and all-devouring stiffness. The word ‘night’ occurs 10 times in Act I, which includes the essential dialogue of the Black Knight and Spīdola, ending with the message expressed by the Black Knight: ‘Yet, night will once devour a handful of light!’¹⁹ (Rainis 1980: 186). However, night is also when the action takes place. Each of the five acts of *Fire and Night* takes place in a different location; moreover, thinking both of the symbolic significance of all the elements used in the play and of the visual aspects of the possible stage setting, Rainis changes the background along with the colors and lights that characterize it within a single act. Act I takes place in Aizkraukle

15 In the introduction to the chapter *Time and Space in Rainis’s Poetry*, J. Kursīte writes: ‘In the sense and treatment of the time-space, Rainis poetry is divided into two stages. The first covers the collections *Distant Moods in Blue Twilight* (1903), *Storm Seed* (1905), *Quiet Book* (1909), *Those who don’t Forget* (1911), the poem *Ave, Sol!* (1910); and the second, *The End and The Beginning* (1912), *Dagda Sketchbooks* (1920–1925). The approximate boundary between the first and second stages: 1910.’ (Kursīte 1996: 166)

16 *Gals un sākums*

17 *Dienā slēp tu sevi pats,
Vēl jo dziļāk savas sāpes..*

18 In the play *Fire and Night*, originally written for an opera libretto competition, Rainis creatively developed the plot of Andrejs Pumpurs’ (1841–1902) epic poem *Bearslayer* (*Lāčplēsis*, 1888), deepening its ideological dimension. The protagonist Lāčplēsis embodies the nation’s strength and the struggle for freedom; his bride Laimdota symbolizes Latvia; the Black Knight represents the forces of darkness; the chieftain Kangars betrays his nation. A controversial, but very important image is the beautiful and witchlike Spīdola who symbolizes the freedom of the spirit, the eternal transformation and development.

19 *Nakts tomēr reiz aprīs saujiņu gaismas!*

Castle on the banks of the Daugava River, its opening remark indicating that ‘evening is setting in’ (Rainis 1980: 199); Act II takes place at night in the Burtnieki Castle, which has sunk to the bottom of the lake. The action of the rest of the play takes place in a completely different location; the time of the events is either day (Act III in the newly established city of Rīga and Act V in the Lielvārde Castle on the bank of the Daugava), or a setting whose specific boundaries of time and space are impossible to draw (Act IV on the seashore of the Death Island). It is noteworthy that in Act II the events of the night are not only happening in the Burtnieki Castle at the bottom of a lake — which Rainis, following a tradition set by Andrejs Pumpurs (1841–1902) in his epic *Lāčplēsis* (1888), treated as a lost storage of folk treasure but that the lake also becomes the setting of the three symbolic stages of Lāčplēsis’ fight: driving devils out of the castle, his victory over the dragon, and his encounter with a corpse lying in a coffin, symbolizing the spiritually inert and numb ‘ego’ of Lāčplēsis. Act II contains references to visual effects intended by Rainis, such as the glowing flames of devils’ forks and the fire created by the dragon. The details, which are mentioned in the introductory note to the scene of the meeting of Lāčplēsis and the dead body, symbolize overwhelming stiffness: ‘Then a pale, eerie light sets in: occasional snowflakes, icing in the windows, crackling frost.’ (Rainis 1980: 216)

Unlike the dominating juxtaposition of light and darkness in *Fire and Night*, the interpretation of the theme of night is far from unambiguous in the play *I Played, I Danced*²⁰; moreover, Rainis’s notes at the time of writing the play reflect an evolution of the poet’s insights, which also affects the expansion of the theme of night.

Chronologically, the first creative thoughts for *I Played, I Danced* date back to 1904, when Rainis wrote down ideas for a new play in his notes that would show the night of the devil and the devils’ feat in the devils’ threshing barn. At this stage, it was intended that the main character be a resourceful young man named Ansis. The title of the play is not referenced yet. A comparison of early creative thoughts, which were put down in 1904, with the text of the 1915 play, yields the conclusion that the concept of the place of the action changed in the process of creating the text of the play; moreover, essential changes have affected the depiction of the devils’ threshing barn, the setting of Act III.

In 1904, Rainis planned to describe the devils’ feast as ‘a parody on the threshing of grain’ (Rainis 1984: 293) and ‘the devils’ ballet’ (Rainis 1984: 294), which depicts terrible infernal orgies, which, of course, take place at night:

‘The devils’ feast in a threshing barn or a swamp
They eat worms out of skulls [...]
Drink blood and tears.
Ravens and crows surround them’ (Rainis 1984: 293).

20 The plot of the play is partially based on the Latvian folklore and partially — on the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. The protagonist of the play Tots is a musician, who has to bring back his beloved girl Lelde (the symbol of Latvia) from the Underworld, where she was brought by the dead Master (*Kungs*). To do this, Tots has to face not only the Master, but also the devils whose habitation, the devils’ threshing barn, is interpreted as the world of Chaos.

However, in the creative thoughts that came approximately in January 1904, there are also ideas that characterize the threshing barn not as a fantastic environment, but as a rigid and realistic location: ‘In the threshing barn. Threshing songs. The overseers with a whip, weary, the Master enters, yells: strong threshing, flogging’ (Rainis 1984: 294). These creative thoughts of 1904 do not show a contradiction in the creative ideas or the author’s difficulty in deciding in favor of one or the other variant of representing the threshing, but rather a more complicated concept: namely, to show Rainis’s intention to present scenes in the barn within the framework of the same act as a change between two different planes: both in the fantastic context (the devils’ feast in the threshing barn, the swamp in the devils’ castle) and in a realistic, historical close-up context of an everyday situation (the threshing of grain under the cruel supervision of an overseer). This is reflected in the wording of the basic idea found in the notes — ‘The threshing barn turns into the devils’ castle and vice versa’ (Rainis 1984: 294), as well as ‘The devils’ castle disappears, and the threshing barn appears again’ (Rainis 1984: 295).

The devils’ feast was unequivocally treated as something scary, inhuman, and destructive. Despite the complexity of Rainis’s intention, recorded in his creative thoughts in 1904, the barn is shown as the place of action and, consequently, night is the time for threshing and the devils’ feast. Moreover, the historically recognized and realistic plan, as it were, dominates in the poet’s early drafts by lending a specific tonality of evil, based in socioeconomic conditions, to the night events plotted in the play.

On the other hand, in the final version of the play written in early 1915, night has received another interpretation. In this short and intense period of the development of the play, it acquired not only the well-known title *I Played, I Danced*, which was first recorded on 28 January 1915 (Rainis 1984: 293), but also its significant subtitle, *The Devils’ Night in Five Acts*, which appeared in Rainis’s notes on 25 February 1915 (Rainis 1984: 293), highlighting the special importance of the theme of night.

However, in the play itself, the word ‘night’ cannot be frequently found. The word ‘night’ (also ‘midnight’) is used in *I Play, I Dance*: 7 times in Act I, 15 times in Act II, 14 times in Act III, 2 times in Act IV and 3 times in Act V, including stage directions. The word is mainly used repeatedly in the text of Tots’s song and when indicating the time of an action or event. Clearly, the word ‘night’ is most-used in Acts II and III. It is only logical, as the action of the play is directed according to the time of the day, starting with the events of the wedding in a decorated peasant room late in the evening in Act I until the rise of the sun in the courtyard of the wedding house at the beginning of a new day in Act V. This chronological direction within an incomplete day has given Rainis an opportunity to make the night both the architectural focus of the play and, most importantly, the basis of ideas for the development of the main character, Tots.

In Act III, Tots goes into the devils’ threshing barn in order to save Lelde, who was murdered by the Master; the stage directions at the beginning of the act portray a wild environment for the action:

‘The front of the threshing barn in a fantastic style.
Only vague signs of the large parts of the building are seen: roofs,
work room, gates. Trees all around.
It is the dead of night’ (Rainis 1981d: 339)²¹.

However, the night is essential not only as the framework for a specific act. In the case of *I Played, I Danced*, the functionality of the theme of night should rather be viewed in the context of the general concept of the play. In Acts II and III of *I Played, I Danced*, Rainis reveals the ambivalence of the night, because, on the one hand, it is related to the dangerous, the destructive (the revival of the vampire Master, the presence of infernal forces), and the dangerous static state of the inert (the depressing loneliness of the devils’ threshing barns, boredom and inertia before Tots’ arrival), while on the other, the action of Act III and the dialogues between Tots and the Three-headed King of the devils emphasize night and the connection of the devils’ threshing barn to the creative and destructive potentials of primeval Chaos (for more, see Šiliņa 2004).

Returning to *Fire and Night*, written in 1903–1904, it is important to dwell on some significant nuances in Act IV of the play, which takes place beyond a specific time and space on the Island of Death. In this act, the word ‘night’ is used only twice, but in one instance it is mentioned in the powerful and poetically saturated lines of Spīdola, in which she tells Lāčplēsis about the road on which the two will be taken by the unity of beauty and strength:

‘There’s more — it’s not the end of the road.
Beyond land’s edge and heaven’s fringe
Spreads a sea with no islands;
No waves, no storm, no day, no night —
Where all ends and danger is standing on guard’²² (Rainis 1986: 62–63).

In this fragment of Spīdola’s text, night is treated as the opposite of light and as a destructive cosmic force while also being one of the elements in the process of eternal creation and transformation, and it is precisely in this respect that the creative potential of the night is implemented. In her essay, published in installments in 1921, Aspazija also referred to Spīdola’s text in the Scene on the Island of Death of Act 4 in *Fire and Night*. She interprets the night

21 In comparison, the opening directions for Act 2, which only indicate that it is dark and the moon appears in the sky during the Act:
‘An ancient cemetery. Old graves and crosses, tall trees; everything is overgrown by bushes and creepers. There are some graves in the foreground, like knolls. It is quite dark.
Later the moon comes out, dark red.’ (Rainis 1981c: 301)

22 *Vēl tas nau viss, tas ceļš vēl īss:
Aiz zemes malas, aiz debess malas
Vēl plešas jūra, kur nau ne salas,
Ne viļņu, ne vētras, ne dienas, ne nakts,
Kur beidzas viss un stāv briesmas uz vakts.* (Rainis 1980: 267)

as one of the basic elements of Rainis's play as follows: 'Night, eternity, it is nature itself, this is an elementary lap of love, it is the great secret from which everything emerges and is born. The world of our light, woven from time and space, would melt into infinity if it were not once again linked and connected by the night where it gets warm to give birth to new worlds' (Aspazija 1987: 604). Of course, it should be borne in mind that, in this case, Aspazija's view is based on the subjective feelings and her own creative ideas; however, it should not be forgotten that Aspazija not only shared Rainis's artistic ideas, but also understood him as an artist and contributed to the development of many an artistic idea or image in his writings.

Despite the fact that the dark/light and darkness/daylight generally dominate in *Fire and Night*, Spīdola's text in Act IV forms a deviation from the understanding of night as an unambiguous destructive element, giving it ambivalence and highlighting the idea of interactions of these opposites as eternal creation, change, and development. Thus, it can be concluded that in both Rainis's unfinished and completed plays he fully developed this concept by the year 1910, when the related changes were reflected in his poetry. During his time in Slobodsk, the creative thoughts on the play *Īlīņš* reveal that Rainis recognized the ambivalence of the imagery of night — and as noted, he does not always consistently stick to the unambiguous negative image of the night as a motionless, all-destructive cosmic force. This may be explained in two ways. First, Rainis considers that the collision, struggle, or interaction of opposites is one of the basic principles of drama. Second, early in his dramaturgy, Rainis gets interested in the idea of raising the struggle of opposites from the level of relations of characters to the cosmic level, thus highlighting one of the most important topics in his writing: namely, the eternal movement of spirit within the great harmony of the universe. For example, in his undated creative thoughts, Rainis remarks the following:

'Darkness beats the brilliant sun. But once in space two dark and dead suns will collide and fire will break out again, and suddenly a twice larger dazzling new sun will shine. It will also be extinguished after eternity, when eternity will be fulfilled. If it is after eternity, there is still much time' (Rainis 1981b: 320).

Perhaps, in the creative thoughts for *Īlīņš*, we see the beginnings of ideas which were not only developed within his plays, such as *Fire and Night* and *I Played, I Danced*, but also later around 1910, when they also appear in Rainis's poetry.

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Nakts tēmas traktējums kā Raiņa radošās laboratorijas piemērs

Zane Šiliņa

Atslēgvārdi: luga, radāmās domas, dzeja, nakts ambivalence, gaisma, pretstatu mijiedarbe

Gan Raiņa (Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865–1929) dzejā, gan dramaturģijā īpaši nozīmīgi ir ar rītu, dienu un gaismu saistītie tēli, sevišķi saule, kas viņa daiļradē simbolizē dzīvību, brīvību, gara plašumu un reprezentē visaugstākos ētiskos ideālus. Lai gan niansēs daudzveidīgs, tomēr plašs un savā simboliskajā traktējumā stabils gaismas tēlu izmantojums raksturīgs visai Raiņa daiļradei dažādos tās attīstības posmos. Šī raksta mērķis ir noskaidrot, vai un kādas izmaiņas nakts tēmas risinājumā vērojamas Raiņa dramaturģijā, kā arī iezīmēt nakts tēmas dinamiku Raiņa radošo ieceru evolūcijā, tādējādi raksturojot Raiņa radošo laboratoriju – ieceru dzimšanu, ideju evolūciju, tēmu un māksliniecisko tēlu attīstību, pretrunas, ar kurām dzejnieks radošajā procesā saskāries, atrisinātos un neatrisinātos mākslinieciskos uzdevumus, kā arī radošos impulsus, kas viņu vadījuši sarežģītajā ieceru tapšanas gaitā. Rakstā galvenokārt analizētas Raiņa lugu radāmās domas, kā arī pabeigtās lugas “Uguns un nakts” (publ. 1905) un “Spēlēju, dancoju” (1915), taču kontekstuāli iezīmētas arī būtiskākās nakts tēmas traktējuma tendences Aspazijas (Elza Rozenberga, 1865–1943) un Johana Volfganga fon Gētes (*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, 1749–1832) darbos, pievēršot uzmanību arī dažām Raiņa veiktā J. V. Gētes traģēdijas “Fausts” atdzejojuma niansēm.

Rakstā secināts, ka, neraugoties uz Raiņa dramaturģijā un daiļradē kopumā nozīmīgo tumsas/gaismas un dienas/nakts pretnostatījumu, jau Slobodskas (1898–1903) laikā tapušajās lugas “Īliņš” (“Kurbads”) radāmajās domās Rainis ieskicējis, kā arī vēlāk lugās “Uguns un nakts” un “Spēlēju, dancoju” tālāk attīstījis arī ideju par nakts tēla ambivalenci un ne vienmēr konsekventi pieturējies pie viennozīmīgi negatīva nakts kā nekustīgā, visu iznīcinošā kosmiskā spēka traktējuma. Iespējams, tas izskaidrojams divējādi. Pirmkārt, Rainis uzskata, ka pretstatu sadursme, cīņa vai mijiedarbe ir viens no drāmas pamatprincipiem. Otrkārt, viņu kā dramaturgu visai agri sāk interesēt ideja par pretstatu cīņas pacelšanu no lugas varoņu attiecību līmeņa kosmiskā līmenī, lai tādējādi izgaismotu vienu no viņa daiļrades svarīgākajām tēmām – gara mūžīgo kustību lielajā Visuma harmonijā.