Aspazija’s play **“The Witch”** (*„Ragana”*) (1895)

The play “The Witch” was written in 1894. Aspazija got the idea for the story after visiting the region of Nītaure in summer 1894. The nature there, the tales about the Witch hill, the swamp forest — all of it made the poetess imagination come to life. In a dark cave live the evildoer witches hiding from the sunlight. The heroine Liesma (Flame) also comes from there, yet she thirsts for the light and another way of living. Similar to “The Vestal” (*„Vaidelote”*), the protagonist of “The Witch” is also a new type of personality with her own creational discrepancy. “Awoke also the soul of the Witch, with all its flaming essence breaking away from the old life and still not being able to find her place in the light, it held on to the old with thousand tentacles and was forever being thrown between contradictions,” told Aspazija. The critics judged Liesma as a female version of Faust, who searched the meaning of life and individual satisfaction. The play’s action happens in a fantasy world, a fairytale kingdom. The longing for light and love clashes with lust for power in the character of Liesma. The play is staged at the Riga Latvian Theater in 1895. The main roles are played by Dace Akmentiņa (Liesma), Jūlija Skaidrīte (Līgita), and Berta Rūmniece (Giltina). However Aspazija wasn’t happy with the ending and she didn’t feel like the drama’s main conflict was solved. After the first publication in the magazine “Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts” in 1896, the play was henceforth being printed without the last act and called a fragment of drama. In later years the poetess returned to this work multiple times, yet still didn’t finish it. In the ending of the play, Liesma best describes her inner conflict:

*„Starp debesi un zemi griezta viesulī,*

*Es slāpdama pēc gaismas stariem tvēru*

*Un pekles karstās liesmas vienmēr dzēru.”*

“Between heaven and earth in a whirlwind I’m thrown,

Thirsting for light I grasped for its rays

But always I drank the burning hell blaze.”

“The Witch” set out the path for Aspazija’s next large drama “The Silver Veil” (*„Sidraba šķidrauts”*). Even today, the genre of fantasy allures and lets one freely express their ideas and passions. The character of Liesma is just as alive now, as it was at the time it was created. The controversy of a person’s character, doubts and longing are all the same. The drama makes us look into the depths of our soul and try to see the fight between our inner light and darkness. While it has been performed multiple times in amateur theaters, it was probably the scale of the work that kept professional theaters from touching it. A very important event was the play’s staging at the Jurmala City Theater (*Jūrmalas pilsētas teātris*) (1989). Later in 2015 it was staged by the Liepaja Folk Art and Culture Centre’s Youth Theater studio (*Liepājas Tautas mākslas un kultūras centra jauniešu teātra studija*).