**“Serpent Incantation”** (*„Čūsku vārdi”*) by Rainis (1920)

(“Sketch-books of Dagda”, 2)

The “Five Sketch-books of Dagda” consist of five parts, written in different periods of time — “Addio Bella!”, “Serpent Incantation” (*„Čūsku vārdi”*), “Going Home” (*„Uz mājām”*), “A Silvery Light” (*„Sudrabota gaisma”*) and “Little Girl of the Moon” (*„Mēness meitiņa”*). Rainis himself named these poetry collections *novellas* (in Latvian terminology, it’s a short piece of prose with an unexpected, often tragic ending) by which a novel about the life of the lyrical hero Dagda is created. “This unity was felt from the inside at first, as the fate of Dagda that was taking place in the relationship between his soul and the outside world. From the beginning there was neither any intention to use the form of a novel. The poems emerged by themselves, like how grass grows out the earth, without the artistic choosing of the gardener. The poems were a continuation of days and the emotional experience of the soul, told in a form similar to a diary. […] it turned out that it is a novel about a single life, an organic creature”, the poet admitted.

Rainis had started the second sketch-book “Serpent Incantation” even before the collection “Addio Bella!”. The first ideas came already in 1908. While being in Switzerland, the poet suddenly felt the smell of a wild flower that was the favorite flower of his childhood. “It reminded me of my childhood and my fatherland. “That was so long ago” — resounded in my soul, and on this impulse, on this phrase is based the whole cycle of poems “Serpent Incantation”. The whole collection is a symbol of my childhood memories,” remembered Rainis. It started with creating separate poems, but the collection was assembled from 1916 to the autumn of 1920. Differently form the impressionistic style of the first part, this collection gains a philosophical tone. The symbol of a serpent marks the dialectics of life, death and eternal renewal.

“Is a serpent — death: with agony scares a fang;

Is serpent — undying;

Is serpent — renewal: its bite heals and lifts the pang.”

The recognition of spiritual loneliness of an exile made him to reconsider his life. The reference point made him think about renewal, improvement in a new work and circle of development.

“Who will ask for, how much bane you’ve grieved?

But this much — what kind of life belt you have weaved,”

thought Rainis. “Serpent Incantation” was published by the publishing house “Anša Gulbja izdevniecība” in 1920. The cover was illustrated by Vilhelms Purvītis. The collection of the first three parts is also printed at the same time, under the title “Three Circles” (*„Treji loki”*).