Rainis’ play **“Semi-Idealist”** (*„Pusideālists”*) (1904)

“Semi-Idealist” is the first play by Rainis. Even though some ideas and outlines for dramas were created already in his school years, this is the poet’s first finished, published and staged play. “The start of the idea reaches back to the year 1897, my prison time in Riga. The time I got to enjoy my confinement at Jaunava Street — was the cruelest of all that had ever been given me. The almost impossible thing could be endured and overcome probably only with the help of humor and by making fun of my countrymen in a good-natured way — there really was nothing else that would be fun to do at the prison —, by laughing I could forget my surroundings,” remembered Rainis.

Initially they were just ideas for a novel. The initiative to write the play was given to Rainis by the play writing contest, announced in 1900, by the anti-alcoholism society “Morning Star” (*„Auseklis”*). “Semi-Idealist” was written in 1901 in Slobodska. Aspazija helped the work a lot by giving suggestions. Rainis called it “a historical humor play in three acts from the end of the last year hundred”. In the course of writing, the title was changed multiple times. One of the titles — “Don Quixote” (*„Dons Kihots”*) characterized the protagonist best. By trying to emphasize other characters as well, Rainis gave the play the title “Semi-Idealists” (*„Pusideālisti”*) that by accident turned into “Semi-Idealist”. In contrast to his later dramas of symbolic ideas, in his first work he was focused on his own contemporary time. This comedy continues the chain of comedy works, started with the “Little Horseflies” (*„Mazie Dunduri”*) and “Mutual Mocking Songs” (*„Apdziedāšanas dziesmas”*). Rainis’ point of focus is the idea of nationalism. If the generation of the Neo-Latvians time was fighting for nationalism, then in the 90’s these ideas had already become meretricious. And then came the next generation, who understood the notion of nationalism deeper and was turning against the pretentious display of it. The main hero Andēls is a tragicomical character with his funny national doings, like restoring the historic labor methods of his ancestors, their attires and eating habits. Despite the play basically being written in a comedy play style, some characteristics of Rainis’ later drama works can already be noticed. If in the first acts the irony and witty humor are predominant, and then in the third act there are already some tragic notes are evident. Andēl’s wish to lead the folk towards happiness is respectable, but he sees it only as a return to the past, not a new path towards the future.

The play didn’t receive any awards in the contest. In 1903 the play was staged by the New Latvian Theater, but later in summer it was also staged in Jelgava by Ādolfs Alunāns. The book was released in 1904. In further years “Semi-Idealist” has been rarely performed, and nowadays it might be mostly interesting as an early work of Rainis and a criticism of its time.