

Rusalka

Jaroslav Kvapil

Translated by Patrick John Corness



Rusalka: A Lyrical Fairy Tale in Three Acts

Bilingual Czech-English edition

English translation by Patrick John Corness

Jaroslav Kvapil

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Jaroslav Kvapil's *Rusalka: Lyrická pohádka o třech dějstvích*

formed the libretto for Antonín Dvořák's opera,

which premiered 31 March 1901 in Prague's National Theatre.

The libretto was first published in 1901 by F. Topič.

The Czech text that appears in this edition comes

from 1948's *Souborné dílo Jaroslava Kvapila o čtyřech svazcích*.

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Charles University
Karolinum Press

www.karolinum.cz
ebooks@karolinum.cz



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jaroslav Kvapil (1868–1950) was a Czech poet, playwright, translator, and theatre director.

Born in the Bohemian town of Chudenice, when it was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was sent to secondary school in Plzeň and moved to Prague to study at Charles University. He studied medicine for a year before switching to philology and then law. When he left university, he went to work as a journalist. As a young man, he came to the attention of Prague's literary circles primarily for his poetry, which incorporated symbolist and Parnassian influences.

Inspired by his relationship with the actress Hana Kubešová, Kvapil began to focus more on theatrical work, writing scripts, translating plays, and directing. In 1900, he joined the Czech National Theatre as a dramaturg; he became the chief director in 1906 and served as the head of dramaturgy between 1911–1918. In his eighteen years with the National Theatre, he brought Czech drama into the mainstream of European theatre—staging plays by leading European playwrights, such as Ibsen and Chekhov. Kvapil's work is remarkable in its reflections of emerging artistic movements, shifting from symbolism to realism and naturalism.

During the First World War, Kvapil became a leading voice calling for Czechoslovak independence. When the war ended, Kvapil served three years as the minister of education and culture, before becoming the artistic director of Prague's Vinohrady Theatre.

A strong proponent of democracy, Kvapil was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 and imprisoned until the end of World War II. When the Communists took power in 1948, Kvapil resisted pressure to support the new regime.

Today, Jaroslav Kvapil is best known for writing the libretto for Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka*. A truly European work, it draws inspiration from Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid," as well as the Czech fairy tales of Karel Jaromír Erben.



Translator's dedication:

For Jitka, my fairy tale

O S O B Y

Lesní žínka

Druhá žínka

Třetí žínka

Vodník (Hastrman, Hastrmánek)

Rusalka

Rusalky

Ježibaba

Lovec

Princ

Hajný

Kuchtík

Cizí kněžna

C H A R A C T E R S

Wood Nymph
Second Wood Nymph
Third Wood Nymph
Spirit of the Lake (Water Spirit)
Rusalka (Water Nymph)
Water Nymphs

Ježibaba (Forest Witch)

Huntsman
Prince
Gamekeeper
Kitchen Hand

Foreign Princess

PRVNÍ DĚJSTVÍ

Palouk na pokraji jezera. Kolkoem lesy, v nich na břehu jezera chalupa čarodějnice Ježibaby.



ACT ONE

A glade on the shore of a lake, surrounded by forest. Among the trees at the lakeside stands the cottage of the witch Ježibaba.



TŘI LESNÍ ŽÍNKY – *tančí na palouku:*

Hou, hou, hou,
stojí měsíc nad vodou!
Zvědavě se v hloubku dívá,
po kamení ke dnu splývá,
hastrmánek hlavou kývá,
hou, hou, hou,
starou hlavou zelenou.

Hou, hou, hou,
kdo to chodí nocí tou?
Hastrmáнку, měsíc stoupá,
už se tobě v okně houpá,
za chvíli se k tobě vloupá,
hou, hou, hou,
ve tvou síňku stříbrnou!

Hou, hou, hou,
měsíc bloudí nad vodou!¹
Po jezeře tančí vánek,
probudil se hastrmánek,
hastrmánek, tatrmánek,
hou, hou, hou,
bublinky už ze dna jdou.

Vodník se vynoří z jezera a mne si oči.

LESNÍ ŽÍNKY:

Hou, hou, hou,
hastrmánek nad vodou!
Hastrmánek chce se ženit,
která z vás chce vodu pěníť,

1) In an earlier edition: *bloudí lučinou*

THREE WOOD NYMPHS – *dancing in the glade:*

Hey, hey, ho –
the moon lights up the lake below.
She peers right down into the deep,
and glides across the stony bed.
The Water Spirit is asleep –
hey, hey, ho –
nodding away, Old Green Head.

Hey, hey, ho –
who goes there at dead of night?
Water Spirit, the moon shines bright,
she's bobbing at your window, so
quite soon inside your home she'll steal –
hey, hey, ho –
upon your silver den she'll call –

Hey, hey, ho –
the roaming moon lights up the lake.
A gentle breeze is dancing there.
The Water Spirit is awake,
Water Spirit – it's Old Green Hair –
hey, hey, ho –
blowing bubbles from below!

*Spirit of the Lake emerges above the surface
of the lake, rubbing his eyes.*

WOOD NYMPHS:

Hey, hey, ho –
Here's Water Spirit from below!
Water Spirit wants a wife;
which one of you will cause some strife,

