

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

Published by Charles University,
Karolinum Press

Ovocný trh 5/560, Prague 1, Czech Republic

Cover and graphic design by Zdeněk Ziegler

Typesetting by Karolinum Press

First Czech-English edition

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*. Vol. 3, *Divadlo Jaroslava Kvapila* (Prague: Dr Václav Tomsa).

© Karolinum Press, 2021

Text © Jaroslav Kvapil, 1948

Translation © Patrick John Corness, 2020

Afterword © Geoffrey Chew, 2020

Illustrations and cover image © Jiří Grus, 2020

ISBN 978-80-246-4705-0 (epub)

ISBN 978-80-246-4704-3 (mobi)

ISBN 978-80-246-4700-5 (pdf)

ISBN 978-80-246-4381-6 (pb)



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

CHARACTERS

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 kameni ke dnu splývá,
hastrmánek hlavou kývá,
hou, hou, hou,
starou hlavou zelenou.

Hou, hou, hou,
kdo to chodí nocí tou?
Hastrmánku, 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, tatrmaněk,
hou, hou, hou,
bublínky 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,





dědka česat, lože změnit,
hou, hou, hou,
s babkou hastrmanovou?

VODNÍK:

I, pěkně vítám z lesa k jezeru!
Jakž, je tam smutno bujným slečinkám?
Mám dole na dně samu nádheru
a zlatých rybek na pytle tam mám;
rákosím se kmitnu,
ruku svou jen napnu,
po slečince chňapnu,
za nožky ji chytanu,
stáhnu si ji k nám!

Lapá po lesních žínkách.

LESNÍ ŽÍNKY:

Hastrmánku, heja hej,
tedy si nás nachytej!
Kterou chytíš, mužičku,
dá ti pěknou hubičku!
Ale žena, hahaha,
hastrmánku, hahaha,
za uši ti vytahá!

Rozutekou se.

VODNÍK:

Uličnická havěť! Kterak zbrkle pádí!
Horem dolem polem - inu, mládí, mládí!

RUSALKA - *vynoří se z jezera:*

Hastrmánku tatíčku!

brush the hair on the old man's head -
hey, hey, ho -
usurp the Old Green Woman's bed?

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

You're welcome on our shore, wood sprites!
If you lively girls feel bored out there,
down here, you know, I've nothing but delights.
I've golden fish galore, there's bags to spare;
through rushes I'll flit,
just reach out a bit,
snatch a damsel's toe.
catch her leg like so,
draw her down below.

He tries to catch the wood nymphs.

WOOD NYMPHS:

Water Spirit, ha, ha, ha!
come on, catch us if you can!
The one you catch, my dear man,
she will kiss you, ha, ha, ha!
But then your wife, ooh la la!
old Water Spirit, ha, ha, ha!
she'll box your ears, ha, ha, ha!

They scatter.

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

Oh, what a cheeky lot! They always rush headlong
up hill, down dale - ah well, they're young, so young!

RUSALKA - *surfacing in the lake:*

Water Spirit, father dear!

VODNÍK:

Kýho šlaka, dítě,
snad mi tady v měsíčku
nesušíš mé sítě?

RUSALKA:

Hastrmánku tatíčku,
než se vody zpění,
sečkej se mnou chvíličku,
ať mi smutno není!

VODNÍK:

I vida, smutno!

RUSALKA:

Všechno řeknu ti!

VODNÍK:

A dole taky?

RUSALKA:

Smutno k zalknutí!

VODNÍK:

Dole, kde je samý rej?
Není možná - povídej!

RUSALKA:

Chtěla bych od vás, hlubin těch se zbýti,
člověkem být a v zlatém slunci žíti!

VODNÍK:

Mohu-liž věřit vlastním uším svým?
Člověkem býti? Tvorem smrtelným?

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

Oh goodness me, my child,
are you, in this moonlight clear,
seeing my nets get dried?

RUSALKA:

Water Spirit, father dear,
until the water starts to foam,
bide with me a while, stay near,
console me in my gloom.

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

You're sad, I see!

RUSALKA:

I'll tell you what ails me.

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

At home you aren't happy?

RUSALKA:

So sad it stifles me!

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

Below we're such a joyful throng.
This can't be true. Tell me what's wrong.

RUSALKA:

Your depths down here I want to shun
to be a human, living in the sun.

SPIRIT OF THE LAKE:

My ears just can't believe it - why
become a human, destined to die?

RUSALKA:

Sám vyprávěls ty zvěsti neznámé,
že mají duši, jíž my nemáme,
a duše lidí že jde nebi vstříc,
když člověk zhyne a když znikne v nic!

VODNÍK:

Dokud rodná kolébá tě vlna,
nechtěj duši, ta je hříchu plna!

RUSALKA:

A plna lásky!

VODNÍK:

Vodo pravěká –
snad nemiluješ, dítě, člověka?

RUSALKA:

Sem často přichází
a v objetí mé stoupá,
šat shodí na hrázi
a v loktech mých se koupá.
Však pouhou vlnou jsem,
mou bytost nesmí zřítí –
ó vím, že člověkem
dřív musila bych býti,
jak já jej objímám
a jak jej vinu v ruce,
by on mne objal sám
a zulíbal mne prudce!