

## The dance of robots vs. the fascist shuffle

Irina Wolf

Two huge metallic arms assist Liliom in remembering his aggressive deeds. The two robots are the visual highlights of **Kornél Mundruczó's** staging of *Liliom*. At the 99<sup>th</sup> edition of the Salzburg Festival, Ferenc Molnár's play is unrolled from the end. Liliom is in purgatory where he must explain why he was unable to break the spiral of violence. But while in Molnár's piece there are ridiculous clerks, in Mundruczó's adaptation the last judgement is called "Safe Space" and it is populated by people who call themselves feminist, queer or non-conformist – officials of political correctness. Although Mundruczó builds a humorous 'MeToo' identity discourse, the director's attitude towards the characters taking on Liliom's moral test remains unclear. Then, the end of the play is changed: Liliom gets another chance, he is allowed to return to Earth for one day to make his daughter happy. But the poetic staging does not work out. This is due to its stylistic incongruity as well as to its visual quality at the expense of language. The brilliant actors get lost in the pile of gimmick used by Mundruczó who loves technology. The two robots build up the whole set – a forest with dozens of acacia bushes, for example. They also hang a moon over it. As time goes by, the machines seem more and more human. Thus, in the end they get enthusiastic applause and bow like two real actors. But there are also two treadmills, a video wall on which live-filmed scenes are shown, a swimming pool in which two men perform synchronous swimming and a ballet dance act on Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake music. Sometimes less is more.

The last (world) premiere of the Salzburg Festival was Theresia Walser's "dark" comedy *The Outraged*. Walser, one of Germany's most successful contemporary authors, tries to capture the debate about right-wing populism with humoristic means. The main character is a mayor of a nameless alpine town. The apparently moderate conservative politician struggles to assert herself with common sense, but using also a good deal of opportunism against her right-wing populist rival. The whole discussion takes place in a setting reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock. The mayor, who fears her position shortly before her election, has kidnapped the corpse of her half-brother from the morgue. Together with another brother, a bohemian type youngster, they have hidden the body in the town hall chest, in which many things have been disposed of during the course of history – it's said that even Luther was once forced to use the chest when hiding from his pursuers. The dead brother had committed suicide by driving into a group of people and killing among others a Muslim. There are various running gags designed to lend structure to the staging of director **Burkhard C. Kosminski**, general manager of Schauspiel Stuttgart since 2018. There is an

automatic door in the glass wall behind the oak-paneled mayor's office which can be opened by all except by Pilgrim, the mayor's factotum. He is a diligent yes-sayer, proven as servile spirit and speechwriter. Cunningly, he provides the mayor and her adversary with the same funeral oration. Then there is a cross that Pilgrim should remove at the behest of the mayor, because Muslims might be affected. But the wife of the victim has nothing against this. The dead merely serve as objects of projection for the panic, ideological obsessions and political survival of the living. Between screwball comedy and populism satire Theresia Walser's piece becomes a farce. This is no doubt boulevard theatre, but it is thwarted by serious thoughts on the current political situation.

**LILIOM, by Ferenc Molnár, with texts by Kata Wéber. Director: Kornél Mundruczó. Sets: Monika Pormale. Costumes: Sophie Klenk-Wulff. Lighting: Felice Ross. Live camera: Martin Prinoth. Choreography: Yohan Stegli. Music: Xenia Wiener. Dramaturgy: Christina Bellingen, Soma Boronkay, Kata Wéber. With: Jörg Pohl, Maja Schöne, Oda Thormeyer and others. Prod. Salzburg Festival, Coproduction with Thalia Theater, Hamburg, PERNER-INSEL HALLEIN.**

**THE OUTRAGED. A DARK COMEDY, by Theresa Walser. Director: Burkhard C. Kosminski. Sets: Florian Etti. Costumes: Ute Lindenberg. Music: Hans Platzgumer. Lighting: Felix Dreyer. Video: Sebastian Pircher. Dramaturgy: Ingoh Brux. With: Caroline Peters, Sven Prietz, André Jung, Silke Bodenbender, Anke Schubert. Prod. Salzburg Festival, Coproduction with Schauspiel Stuttgart, SALZBURG.**