

Lucija Stepančič: Adolf and Eva

Three Operettas: Dolfi the Loser, Dolfi the Layabout, Dolfi the Bluffer

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

Dolfi the Loser

1

A neat block of flats, balconies full of flowers. Mown lawns, flowering shrubs, sated and content pensioners strolling amidst the benches.

The men are wearing *lederhosen* with knee-high socks.

The women are in *dirndls*. Everything is as it should be. Apart from the troubles of old age.

From behind an open window, behind the curtains, a lamentation escapes towards the sky, floating above the happy land like a cloud. It is Adolf who is once again suffering so cruelly, partly with good reason, partly out of habit.

‘...oooh dear, my joints, once again. Lousy old age! These damn pains of decrepitude... and not having achieved anything in life... just can’t forget about that... it’s Eva’s fault – she was the one who led me astray... I could have been Chancellor by now... not only Chancellor, I could have conquered Europe... the entire World... I would be someone to reckon with, be afraid of... that’s how it should have been... I would have put things in order... even if it meant going to war... even if the war had to be on a world scale, what do I care... destroy all of Europe – we know how to do that, we’ve done it before... yes, war is what’s needed... I would have restored the Fatherland’s former glory... and if that didn’t work, I could still be a famous painter... kids would learn about me at school, art hysterics would study my work, everyone would want to attend my exhibitions at the Kunsthalle... instead I am watering flowers... feeding the cat... sticking pictures into the photo album... oh, that damned woman, such a philistine!’

These kind of thoughts go through his mind, over his head in woes. Getting on in years but still alert and vigilant. Dolfi would much rather be thinking about the fate

of Germanity but merciless old age that spares no one is humiliating him with banal physiological problems.

Ever more often he is confined to his bed (in his garishly-furnished bedroom, but let's leave that for now, although this, instead of masking, somehow highlights the fact that this is actually social housing.) Dolfi struggles getting out of his quarters. No amount of airing can dispel the stuffy discomfort and the stale discontent that lingers in his room... He stares for days on end at the patterned wallpaper, deciphering dark prophecies and especially airing his grievances over his unfulfilled higher mission.

'...it must be punishment for wasting my life... my Fatherland was waiting and I lived only for my own self... and the dumb woman... even though I had known all along that I was born for greater things... great ideas... great acts... a painter, but not as I am now, a true artist... or a commander-in-chief... it doesn't matter... a genius is a genius...'

Let's not forget the wedding photograph, hanging on the wall above the double bed. Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun, blessed lovers, newlyweds from long ago. Before he had to start combing his hair over his bald head. From the years when Eva was still a natural blonde, not, like now, all pale, without any measure or taste. When neither of them had double chins.

'...so all I get is a measly pension instead of eternal glory! Instead of Teutonic Knight Paradise!'

Eva, heavily aged and wearing a lot of makeup, enters the room.

His loving partner.

In what is obviously a new dress (a short black cocktail piece, intended for women a great deal younger than she), revealing a lot of leg, clad in black fishnet stockings and high heels, much higher than appropriate from either an aesthetical or health point of view.

'Dolfi, *meine Liebe!* Take a look at this. Don't you think it suits me!' *Truth be told, Eva has once again gone slightly over the top. But she does so for her hero, not for herself.*

'A German woman should wear a dirndl! With or without an apron, that's as much choice as she has!' *Dolfi is about to become really angry.*

'Oh, Shatzi, how can you? This is the very dress we saw in the shop window the other day! On Friedrichstraße!'

On most matters Eva is convinced that her husband knows what he is doing, she completely trusts him. For example, Dolfi knows precisely which nations should be exterminated. But when it comes to fashion... On this point Eva will not waver. It is perfectly clear to Eva that her husband, clever as he is, has not the faintest clue about fashion.

'Yes, at Landauer! The Jew! I told you where to buy things from and where not!' *Eva's husband suddenly jumps up, throwing off the blankets. Now it is even more obvious just how much the Führer has aged.*

'And I've told you a hundred times that the Jew is the only place where you can get anything decent to wear. Aryan fashion is just rubbish, surely you could have noticed that yourself. After all, you are an aesthete, an artistic soul.'

Eva's banal comments are the last thing he needs in his suffering. And as if that's not enough, Eva is also about to get cross, her brow furrowed with extra wrinkles. Of which, one might say, she has her fair share.

'And you're all powdered like some whore! As if you've stepped out of a painting by one of those degenerate painters!'

Eva does not know enough about art to tell the difference between artists who are degenerate and those who aren't, but she still starts to cry.

'Then you tell Magda that as well! Just look at her! Go on! I dare you! We're going over there now anyway!'

It was now the Führer's turn to cry out in agony. 'The Goebbelses! Not again!'

Despite knowing very well that he hasn't a chance of getting out of it, he continues to whinge for a while.

Out of principle, his friend Joseph, the very one inviting them over, would say.

'It's their wedding anniversary, their hundred-and-thirty-seventh, or something like that. Or their two-hundred-and-eighty-third.'

Eva knows that she has more or less won, her tears drying up.

'I told you to think of an excuse so we wouldn't have to go!' Her Führer husband pleads with her though he knows very well that here every word is superfluous.

'Come on, it's only once a year. You'll put up with it. And I've already wrapped up their present.'

'One of my paintings, again, I suppose?'

'You should be glad that they at least appreciate you! That they have taste! Where do you find people with taste these days? And you get some cake!'

'Yes, cake made by Magda. With her, one always feels she wants to poison you. She would be capable of killing anyone, even her own children.'

'Oh, come one, once a year you can put up with her killing you a little.'

Adolf follows Eva. What else can he do. It isn't his fault. It's Adam's. He was the one who set an indecent precedent in Paradise about how men should listen to women, especially if they are called Eva. Jewish propaganda, what can we do. Dolfi always maintained that the good old Germanic pantheon should be reinstated with all its robust heroes and Valkyries, ancient deities who know about being tough, instead of these swindling Semites who trick you before you know it.

2

The living room at the Goebbelses' flat.

Furnished in the same (hostile propaganda would say stale and stuffy) way as Hitler's flat a floor below.

Magda and Joseph are hanging up paintings, he is standing on a ladder, she is handing them to him.

'We could just celebrate every tenth anniversary. We'd have ten times fewer of these damn watercolours by Hitler.'

Was not Joseph always known for the sharpness of his dangerous mind? Didn't he always find the right thing to do and the right thing to say? Even if it caused resentment left, right and centre?

'Don't worry, we'll take them down again. As always,' says Magda, today in really good mood and conciliatory. Surprisingly.

'I will, as usual. Despite my lumbago,' Joseph sighs, defeated on all fronts, Magda knowing with a single glance how to blow away his dangerous mind, as if it were a plain piece of trash.

'Or leave them hanging so we die of repulsion.'

'The lengths you'd go just for some silly sociability. You used to be the coolest, hottest babe in all Berlin, now you're just playing at some kind of conventionality.'

'Hitler's visits with that bimbo of his amuse me no end. I wonder what she will drape herself in this time just to try and be prettier than me.' She hands him another picture. 'Have you got this one? And hurry up!'

The doorbell rings.

'That'll be them! Can't you do this faster?'

‘One more to go. Go, open the door, and delay them a little before you bring them in here!’

Magda’s feigned voice can be heard from the hallway, elevated by ten despicable pitches, from which only a bitterly hardened husband can discern shades of veiled mockery.

‘Eva, Darling! Renewed again, I see! Nice, nice, lucky you, with Dolfi spoiling you like this. My Joseph just moans all the time if I ask him for money, his pension is so meagre.

‘Why do you even ask him? Do you think Eva asks me?’ *Hitler sighs.*
‘Next time, do as she does, take the money and go out and buy what you want. As long as it’s not from the Jew!’

At that moment Joseph appears, smiling sociably. He doesn’t seem to mind that they had been talking about him only a minute ago. He opens his arms towards the visitors and notices the gift Eva is holding. It is clearly another framed painting and, according to all the rules of etiquette, he begins unwrapping it, without daring, despite his famed boldness, to express his true opinion.

‘How nice, but you really shouldn’t have.’

‘Nothing is too good for old comrades,’ *Hitler sighs.*

‘My Dolfi is so gifted, so talented,’ *Eva cries out in her own usual frivolous way.* ‘When he wasn’t accepted at the Academy, it broke his heart. It left him with a life-long feeling of being misunderstood. He could have ended up in a bad way because of all that, have become a criminal. But he has a soul of gold, instead of killing people, he prefers to create true art and feed the birds.’

‘And the cat,’ *her husband adds.*

‘Degenerative artists flaunt themselves in academies and galleries everywhere. And this is what they call the Avant-garde. It’s shameful. We need a leader to come along and sweep away all this rabble,’ *Joseph concludes.*

‘I absolutely agree. We’re all waiting for the final solution. But the two of us are too old, I’m afraid. As are our comrades.’

With the men taking rather a long time talking politics and theory, Magda shouts from the living room where all the paintings are now carefully in place.

‘Oh, do come in, come in! The cake is on the table!’

They enter the living room where the cake waiting for them sports a swastika.

‘Oooh! A cake! What a surprise! I’d have some of that, even if it’s poisoned!’

Adolf burbled, only the *Oooh!* being genuine.

‘But you don’t even know if it’s good,’ *Magda* rebukes him just so nobody forgets how ‘*scharf*’ she can be.

‘With a *Hakenkreuz* it can’t be bad! Sweet like the final solution!’

‘And I’m not afraid to indulge with you around, author of such a brilliant weight-loss book,’ says *Magda*, the slithering snake, in a wheedling voice. ‘What was it called again?’

‘*My Struggle. Mein Kampf*’

‘Such a great title for losing weight. I loved it. I’d be sure to lose weight if I’d read it.’

‘The next one will be a workout DVD called the *Triumph of the Will*.’

‘But before you go on another weight-losing session, you can have some of this cake. I won’t tell anyone.’

With a smile out of women’s good home-keeping magazines, *Magda* begins cutting the cake, placing the pieces onto dessert plates.

‘I always put the nation first! Even when nobody is watching me!’

Hitler stands up and stares with a rapt and absent gaze at an invisible audience. He then makes the Nazi salute and starts giving a speech. The other three, their mouths already stuffed with cake, stare at him, baffled.

We are at this moment no longer in the respectable bourgeois lounge where the attentive hand of a woman is very much apparent. Instead, we are looking at a rundown attic above the local bar known as Lili Marleen, into an improvised bedroom used by the owner, Leni Riefenstahl, a happy-go-lucky, arrogant girl who cares little for the widely-prevailing 3K sentiment (*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*). Extensively and indecently tattooed, the only discernible word among the lavish drawings is *Leni*. *Leni* across her back, *Leni* down her arm and *Leni* in her cleavage. But Joseph Goebbels who is on a visit right now is not (at the moment) bothered about her character flaws, for he is busy investigating whether Leni has any other hidden places where her name is tattooed. This he could, in fact, have known already, as he has explored the possibilities countless times, but forgetfulness, as we can see, is not always tragic.

Yes, that's right, none other than Goebbels is on a visit, even though he is here without Magda's permission. In fact, to be precise, he never asks for her permission.

He was always like that.

But there is something different today. Somehow he cannot make his mind up whether to first have his way with Leni or whether to first tell her the latest joke about his neighbour whom he cannot take seriously. So he decides on a compromise and talks away with Leni under the blanket. Despite everything, Leni hears every word. Just like Joseph, she too is almost as equally nosy as she is lustful.

These two really do deserve each other.

'And then, Leni, Eva noticed the ladder in the corner of the living room. I always mess something up, so she guessed that we hang up the watercolours at the last minute before she and that Hitler of hers come for a visit. Once the pictures were in the wrong order, another time they were a little crooked. Yesterday I made a great effort to make sure everything would be in order – but I forgot to take the ladder away.'

Leni grins rudely, cynical as she is. 'And Hitler? Did he notice anything?'

‘Are you crazy? He wouldn’t see three centimetres beyond the tip of his nose! At the table he began his speech on the final solution and fell into a trance with excitement over his own cleverness. He preaches away as if being listened to by millions.’

Leni is all ears. As the owner of the bar and waitress, she knows all the freaks in the wider area, but in terms of being nutty, Dolfi has no competition.

‘And then, a piece of cake got stuck in Eva’s throat,’ *Joseph continues*. ‘Probably because of the ladder, just at the point she noticed it. She began choking, and do you think Hitler even noticed? Magda and I went about saving her, and the idiot just ranted away. As far as he was concerned, the poor woman could just go ahead and choke to death.’

‘Well, that could be the final solution he so wishes for. All this rant about exterminating half of Europe is just for the sake of talking, he likes listening to his own voice; I think for him exterminating Eva would probably be enough.’

‘Do you think so? Eva is as thick as two short planks, but Hitler is even more stupid. What on earth would he do without her? He’d be entirely lost.’

‘If only he didn’t paint,’ *Leni grins*. ‘Then at least we’d never have known that he is also completely untalented.’

Joseph remembers the exhibition at the local fire station, unable to hide his gleeful smile; at the thought that total disasters don’t only happen to him, he feels a pleasant buzz bringing a good feeling to his old bones. He thrusts away happily.

‘Only that Englishman, what’s his name, had paintings as bad as his.’

‘Churchill.’

‘Churchill, yes, that’s it. Old ladies at amateur art classes paint better than these two.’

‘But unlike Hitler, at least Churchill is a hulk. A man should look well-built, not showing off his rickety legs in knee-high socks,’ *Leni rudely makes fun.*

‘Leni, Leni! Are you trying to make me jealous, or what? You naughty girl, I’ll show you!’

Joseph wags his index finger, pretending nastiness, someone capable of condemning entire nations to death, as he pulls theatrical faces, right at the level of Leni’s non-existent virtue.

‘Oh, you know that you’re the only one for me. Unlike everyone else, you at least have the occasional good piece of gossip. You’d be a great propaganda minister, my goodness, you would be,’ Leni flatters him. It’s hard to tell whether she really means it, crafty as she is.

4

‘You’ve been to see that slut again, haven’t you? That Riefenstahl woman?! Don’t lie to me, I can smell it!’

This is how Magda awaits her husband when he returns from his conquest. Even a persona like Goebbels needs a moment or two to set his propaganda machine in motion. Just a little longer, and he will once again be grinding away at all that he is faced with, though it’s true that today he needs a few extra moments to get going and, facing an enemy such as Magda, even that is not much. Once again he tells her everything from the start, although, Magda should have already known all this, she could have remembered, damn it!

...how things were a hundred years ago in the Aryan Commission... how various tarts flung themselves at him... among them also Leni... women who thought that in this way he might help them renounce some Jewish grandmother sixty-seven times removed... some distant cousin who was a rabbi... some other circumcised relative here or there... some great-aunt from Galicia... now these damned

certificates are no longer needed, though, if you asked him, they would be bloody useful... but the tarts are still around, especially Leni... because you never know what else might come along, where you might need your connections... Levantine cunning... oriental opportunism... and in the end he's the one who was made to look like a whoremonger.

'I didn't say you went to bed with her!' Magda shouts at him, flushed and bloated, sweeping, cleaning, slogging her guts out day in day out while her Joseph fornicates left, right and centre. 'What I mean was that you went to that pub of hers! You stink of schnapps, du Schwein!'

'Shut up, woman, you don't even realise that one can also work for the Fatherland while sitting in a bar! You don't have a clue what an honest drunkard might do for ulterior motives while ordering a beer!' Joseph's gift of the gab is already running on full form.

'I spend all day sweeping, cleaning, working, and you, you filthy pig, go out boozing!' But this we already know.

'Well, and I instruct. I coach today's youth. A young guy came to the bar. Unemployed. Do you think he will wait for us? If we don't train him, someone else will!'

'Right, what can he learn from you apart from drinking and whoring, eh? Motherfucker!'

The swearing hits Joseph like a bolt of lightning, a revelation. He stands there in a trance, staring at his wife, as if overcome by déjà vu, a memory of her beauty from years long past.

'Magda, my darling Magda, I haven't heard you speak like this for ninety-seven years. I started to believe you didn't love me any more...'

Magda strikes him hard across the face.

The slap turns Goebbels into a romantic moron. 'Do you remember our first slap?'

This enrages Magda even further and she smashes a chair on his head. Joseph falls to the ground but doesn't shut up. '...and when you first hit me with the broomstick... right on my head... and when you first kicked me... in the balls... when you first knocked me out... oh, those were the times... ooooooh...'

5

Leni Riefenstahl is now at work, which means she is waitressing at the Lili Marleen bar. A thirty-year-old skinhead is pushing along the bar as if there was a whole regiment in the joint, but he is the only punter sitting there. The young man, head shaved and boasting a low forehead, sings (or to be precise croaks) at the top of his voice.

'...jawohl, jawohl, ich liebe Alkohol!'

Riefenstahl observes him with a kind of zoological interest, like a drunken coelacanth or a stoned baboon. Göring and Goebbels (the latter with a large bruise under his eye, caused by Magda when he returned home), are sitting at one of the tables, carefully considering the young man's possible usefulness and use.

'Finally, a young man who gives me a hint of hope. A fighting spirit, that's the right thing!' As usual Göring pretends that he is being optimistic and constructive.

Goebbels, who's been around and knows the game, is sceptical as usual. 'Doesn't he seem a little wimpy to you? Send him to the Russian Front? It would be the end of him. The Russians wouldn't have to use a single bullet, he'd die simply from not seeing his mum.'

In answer to this the skinhead's biceps (together with the hair in his armpits) stick out from his T-shirt. He has a tattoo of a heart with the word '*Mutti*' across it.

Göring won't allow himself to be put in a bad mood, my God he won't. 'Hey, a beer or two less and a summer camp. A little training and he'll get there.'

Goebbels, smiling sourly and not saying anything, mocks his unsinkable, forever positive friend. He finds optimism at any cost vulgar. To him, glorious despair is more appropriate for such cases, especially as far as the idea of superior humans is concerned.

'You just need to look at his haircut to see that he could be trained for the SS.'

'You can't even know if he's blond or not. And besides, to me this one doesn't even seem fit for the SA.'

But on the other hand Göring is well aware that they basically don't have a choice.... That if Joseph saw other youths, he would also understand... Long hair, black music, alternative civilian service, faggots, intellectuals, cosmopolitans... all degenerates, if you ask him... How will this lot fight when they are being taken over by disciplined nations from the east!

Adolf steps into the pub. Göring and Goebbels greet him enthusiastically. 'Heil Hitler!'

The downcast Führer gives them a modest wave, it looks more like he's dispersing cigarette smoke and instead of feeling honoured, he lowers his head further. The Führer does not know how to relax at the bar, even less so at home, unlike most people, he can only relax when he is standing on a podium, addressing what is at least the illusion of a crowd of several thousand. A crowd he cannot now not find even in his fantasy; the only people here are his old comrades and Leni, if he can even count her.

'Dolfi what's up? We haven't seen you in ages!' *Göring attacks with his cheerfulness, oafish as he is not even noticing that anything is wrong. But something is wrong.*

'Eva has...,' *Hitler squeaks, goes even paler, if that is at all possible.*

'Eva has...'

'Has become pregnant? At last! Well done Dolfi, you've finally done it! That's all you needed – a little family happiness! Otherwise you are an ideal couple!' *Göring is enthusiastic.*

Now Joseph also becomes chatty, even him. A family? That's a washout, he should know! And he starts off with his story that everyone has heard a hundred and a thousand times, that they have known since time immemorial! How he has six children, and what good does it do him?... When Magda decides she would have just girls... Even though she was able to give her first husband a son!... and that only five months after their marriage... and to him, Joseph, only girls!... Out of principle!... How stubborn she is!... How wicked she is!... Like some intellectual! And Joseph can try and try!... to finally produce an heir!... Six times in bed with the same woman! Does anyone even know how much of a sacrifice that is for him? At least it should reflect in his pension, how much he has to put up with for the Fatherland, but it isn't.

All that's true, but Dolfi is still unable to tell them what is bothering him and why he is even more uptight than usual, more uptight than anyone else in the world. He is still uttering the same words.

'Eva has... Eva has... well, she hasn't become pregnant.'

Göring gives him a chummy pat on the shoulders. 'See, you got off lightly! If a wife can't give birth to five soldiers, then its better she doesn't give birth at all! Rather than turning your home into a hell-pit of women! Ha, ha, ha...'

'Eva has...'

Finally, Goebbels leans towards the Führer in a confidential sort of way. 'And now that my daughters have all reached menopause! It's like having six additional mother-in-laws at home! As well as my Valkyrie!'

Everyone knows anyway that Magda is the only man in the Goebbels house! But that is not important now. The Führer plucks up courage and finishes his sentence:

'Eva has seen an immigrant! A non-Aryan! A sub human! On the stairs! In our racially pure block of flats!'

Now they all heard it. They all fell silent. Even the skinhead at the bar. Apart from Leni, who was silent before anyway (well, nobody is looking at her right now to notice her guileful smile).

'Well I never!' *Göring eventually manages to utter.*

'It was what we were afraid of! I knew we would not be spared!' *squeaks Goebbels who no longer sees anything amusing about the man's desperation. He'd much rather be desperate about something else.*

'In Hindenburg's empty flat. That's where he has moved into!' *Hitler is shaking with rage but he even manages to act that out as something righteous.*

'Right opposite your place!' *Göring realises, now also appearing traumatised – they have finally succeeded in killing his good mood as well.* 'And what will you and Eva do now, how will you tolerate something like that right under your nose?'

'And then I saw him as well,' *the Führer cries out instead of a reply.*

'And? Is he a Jew? A southerner?'

Hitler can barely stand this questioning. 'He looks like a Slav. Those cheekbones, you know. And arched brows.'

Leni brings the beers to the table. 'His name is Broz. A Yugoslav.'