

Roland Schimmelpfennig

PLAYS ONE

Translated by David Tushingham



OBERON BOOKS
LONDON

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THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

The Animal Kingdom (Das Reich der Tiere) was given its world premiere at the Deutsches Theater Berlin on 1st September 2007 with the following cast:

Chris	Niklas Kohrt
Sandra/Antelope	Dörte Lyssewski
Dirk/Marabou	Wolfgang Michael
Frankie/Zebra	Falk Rockstroh
Peter/Lion	Ernst Stötzner
Isabel/Genet	Kathrin Wehlisch
Director: Jürgen Gosch	

This translation of *Das Reich der Tiere* by Roland Schimmelpfennig was commissioned by The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre.

Characters

PETER, actor, mid- to late thirties
In the animal kingdom THE LION

Later A FRIED EGG

DIRK, actor, over forty,

In the animal kingdom THE MARABOU

Later A SQUEEZY KETCHUP BOTTLE

ISABEL, actress, mid-thirties, younger than Peter

In the animal kingdom THE GENET

Later A PEPPERMILL

SANDRA, actress, mid- to late thirties,

In the animal kingdom THE ANTELOPE,

Later A PIECE OF TOAST

FRANKIE, actor, a little older than Peter,

In the animal kingdom THE ZEBRA

CHRIS, writer and director, early to mid-thirties.

A crocodile.

Maybe other animals: scorpions, giraffes, rhinoceroses, elephants and others.

The animal costumes are original creations based on proper ethnological research. Inspiration can be found in the works of the indigenous peoples of North and South America, and of Africa. Nothing cuddly or jokey. No-one walks or acts on four legs. Fluid transformations from human to mythical or animal form similar to many Egyptian or Aztec gods.

The footnotes are taken from the 1929 Leipzig Jubilee Edition of *Brehm's Animal Life* edited by Carl W. Neumann and published by Philipp Reclam jun.

Act One

1.

Two actors in their dressing room, PETER and FRANKIE. Both mid- to late thirties. FRANKIE is the older of the two. They have just come in and are still wearing their own clothes. FRANKIE has a large sports bag with him, which will be of significance later. They undress. Now they gradually transform themselves into animals: they put on make-up, paint their bodies, stick on hair or feathers or pieces of fur. By the end of the scene PETER will have turned into a LION, FRANKIE a ZEBRA. Both carry out a long and practised sequence of considered and skilful operations. Their movements are routine and in their assurance communicate something like pride or self-confidence. The quality and originality of both these (and the subsequent) animal costumes, combined with their simplicity, is very attractive. Towards the end of the scene they may also place expressive masks of wood, straw or paper on their heads, albeit without obscuring their faces.

PETER: *(Dismayed and irritated at the same time, disgusted.)*

A fried egg, – a fried egg?

FRANKIE:

Fried egg, yeah – a fried egg.

Pause.

PETER: *(Questioning, disgusted.)*

Or a bottle of ketchup?

Pause.

FRANKIE:

A fried egg and a bottle of ketchup –

PETER:

Ketchup. What is that – a fried egg and a ketchup bottle –

Brief pause. He's off again:

A piece of toast –

Brief pause.

A pepper pot –

Brief pause.

What's that supposed to be –

FRANKIE: (*Now equally irritated.*)

What's it supposed to be?

Brief pause.

What is it?

PETER:

What's it supposed to be –

Brief pause.

FRANKIE:

A fried egg.

Brief pause.

A bottle of ketchup. A piece of toast. Pepper.

Silence. Loud and abrupt.

PETER:

Oh yes!

Brief pause.

PETER:

Oh yes!

FRANKIE:

Yes!

Pause. Suddenly:

PETER:

A singing fried egg?

A talking fried egg?

Or a torturing pepper –

FRANKIE:

I dunno.

PETER:

Or a piece of dancing toast?

FRANKIE:

Maybe, yeah – I dunno.

PETER:

A bald egg. The fried egg's supposed to be bald.

They all are.

Brief pause.

There are limits.

FRANKIE:

Limits, yeah – .

PETER:

It's bollocks.

Suddenly:

FRANKIE:

You think about nothing else. Don't kid yourself, you think about nothing else.

Both continue transforming themselves the whole time. Sometimes their quarrel is broken for longer periods because certain manoeuvres require too much concentration to continue arguing with the required force.

Whatever happens, the scene should last as long as it takes them both to change into a zebra or a lion without any help from anyone else.

PETER:

I'm not going to do it, I am not going to be a fried egg. I'm not –

FRANKIE:

You think about nothing else.

PETER:
Me?

FRANKIE:
You –

PETER:
Me? Not me.
You, however:

He shouts:
You need that egg. Or the ketchup bottle.

Brief pause.

Nobody knows who you are.

FRANKIE:
I've been here longer than you. Everyone knows me.

PETER:
Exactly –

FRANKIE:
I've been here from the start –

PETER:
Exactly. You've been here from the start.

Brief pause.

You've been here six years.

Brief pause.

Six years.

Brief pause.

Six years!

Brief pause.

Six fucking years –

Brief pause.

Six years six days a week. Six days a week or more: every Christmas, every Easter.

Pause.

For six years. You are the zebra.

You've been the zebra for six fucking years.

FRANKIE carries on calmly with his make-up.

Nobody knows what you look like any more. You, rather than the zebra. Everyone knows the zebra. But none of them can remember you even exist.

2.

An antelope enters, a female. An oryx antelope¹, tall, slim, with horns that curve sharply upwards. The way she moves is wonderful, how she places one foot in front of another in high shoes, and how she stands there: proud, powerful, just standing there silently for a long time.

SANDRA:
I was the antelope for four years.

Pause.

¹ Oryx antelopes have been known since ancient times and at least one species is depicted regularly on Egyptian and Nubian monuments. Here the oryx can be seen in a range of positions, usually with a cord around its neck as a sign that it has been hunted and captured. The same animal can be seen in the chambers of the pyramids of Cheops, often pictured with a single horn, which gave rise to the claim that the oryx had inspired the legend of the unicorn. According to Hartmann, the ancients depicted oryx antelopes with both straight and curved horns. This type were often kept tamed in ancient times and used in sacrifices. The oryx are among the largest and heaviest antelopes, however, they make a majestic impression despite their somewhat sturdy frames. The head is elongated without being misshapen, the facial lines almost straight or only a little curved, the neck mid-length, the body, which rests on relatively high strong limbs, is very strong, the tail is quite long with a heavy tuft at the tip. The eyes are large and expressive, the ears relatively short, wide and rounded. The horns, which are carried by both sexes, are very long and thin, ringed from the roots and are either straight or bent in a sweeping curve back and to the side.

(*Brehn's Animal Life, Vol. 1, Mammals*)

Then I got pregnant and had to drop out but now, after 10 months off, I'm back. I've only been out for 10 months.

Pause.

The baby's at my mum's most of the time.

She remains standing in the same position for some time. Then she strides off.

3.

ISABEL, mid-thirties, and DIRK, over forty. Both already partly in costume. *She is busy turning herself into a genet², she paints her body, sticks things to it or puts on individual pieces of costume. Next to her, DIRK changes into a marabou³ in the course of the scene.*

Both complete their transformations via a series of well practised and scrupulously executed gestures, just as PETER and FRANKIE did.

ISABEL:

She didn't recognize me.

Brief pause.

Nobody knows what they're going to do. Nobody knows what's going to happen.

² The genet (*vierra genetta*) inhabits Africa as far as Palestine and those areas of Europe bounding the Mediterranean. Its movements are as graceful and delicate as they are nimble and skilful. I know of no other mammal which can combine the flexibility of the snake with the speed of marten as it does. The manner in which it executes its movements cannot fail to inspire wonder. It seems to have a thousand joints. When it attacks, it glides across the ground, its slim body stretched out to form a straight line with its tail, the feet spread as wide apart as possible. Suddenly it leaps with one powerful bound onto its prey and catches it with infallible confidence.

³ The ugliest of the storks is the marabou (*Leptoptilus crumeniferus*) with a crop-like pouch under its neck, a vast, powerful body, bare neck and bare head, covered at most with a few downy feathers, a massive beak, very thick at the root with a pointed, wedge-shaped tip, long legs, powerful wings and a mid-length tail whose lower feathers are strongly developed, sit from the roots and produce splendid ornamental feathers. Its head is flesh-coloured, its skin generally scabby, the plumage on its upper body is a dark metallic green, and that under its body and around its neck white.

DIRK:

They say they're not talking –

ISABEL:

Why's it called a 'Garden'? *The Garden of Things*. A fried egg, a bottle of ketchup. Why don't they call it 'The Abuse'.

Considers briefly.

Or 'The Torture'.

DIRK:

A piece of toast, didn't you say a piece of toast?

Brief pause.

Piece of toast, genet, marabou – it's all the same –

ISABEL:

Things –

She reaches for the mobile phone in front of her for a moment, looks at it:

D'you know how –

She changes the subject.

Or 'The Camp'.

DIRK:

At least now we know what's coming next.

ISABEL:

What's coming next –

DIRK:

What it's about –

ISABEL:

Do we? I don't know what it's about –

DIRK:

Aside from –

Brief pause.

Aside from –

ISABEL:

Aside from what?

DIRK:

Aside from who, aside from the question of who –

Brief pause.

Even if they're not –

Brief pause.

ISABEL:

I am not dressing up as a bottle of ketchup. I am not dressing up as a piece of toast. I'm not mental! I am not mental!

DIRK:

They say they're not talking, but they are talking; not to everyone, but talking is being done, that's the point. What's going to happen to them, to the ones they're not talking to –

ISABEL:

Yes, but –

Brief pause.

She didn't recognize me. What's the point of talking, she didn't even recognize me, what is the point of talking, she doesn't even know I work here.

What have you done in the last few years, she asked me.

How do you mean –

Well, what you've done in the last few years –

But you know me, you know my contract – you know what I've been doing for the last few years, the genet, that's what I've been doing for the last few years.

I would really like to know what's going to happen.
I don't know what's coming next!

4.1

FRANKIE and PETER. Forceful, loud, fast.

FRANKIE:

Without me you'd –

PETER:

Without me you'd –

FRANKIE:

Without me you'd never have made it.

PETER:

Without you I'd be –

FRANKIE:

Without me you'd have been finished years ago –

PETER:

There's a limit.

FRANKIE:

A limit –

PETER:

I've –

FRANKIE:

What limit –

PETER:

I –

FRANKIE:

You wouldn't even 've –

PETER:

I don't –

FRANKIE:

Not even a –

PETER:

I owe you nothing, nothing at all –

FRANKIE:

Nothing, you'd just be one big fat zero.

PETER:

I owe you nothing –

FRANKIE:

Without me, you'd be nothing and you'd be nowhere.

PETER:

You're not getting out of here.

Brief pause.

I've never understood what it is you want from me.

I owe you nothing, nothing at all –

FRANKIE:

You're not going to make it without me. Without me you're nothing.

4.2

Music. The animals enter: THE GENET, THE ANTELOPE, THE MARABOU, THE LION, THE ZEBRA.

THE GENET: From days of yore the zebra had been King of the animals, for the zebra is strong and fast and clever and unyielding.

No-one has ever ridden a zebra, no-one has ever succeeded in harnessing a zebra before a plough or carriage, no-one has ever been able to tame a zebra.

THE ANTELOPE: The zebra is free and not even the mosquitoes bite it because its black and white stripes confuse the nidges, they cannot see the zebra, not even in the light of

day. The zebra has never harmed another animal, for the zebra eats no meat, the zebra eats grass. This is how the zebra lived in the African steppes and ruled justly over the animals.

THE MARABOU: But then the lion, that fearsome hunter, demanded the crown because he was the strongest of the animals and had a claim on the throne from days of yore. This is what the lion shouted and his cry resounded across the steppes: I am the King, not the zebra –

THE LION: I am the King, not the zebra, I am the ruler of the animal kingdom, give me the crown.

THE GENET: For three days, his angry shouts could be heard at sunrise and sunset, the wind carried the lion's cries a long way across the steppes: the animals heard them, the antelope, the gazelle, the giraffe, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the scorpions, the spiders, the large and small birds, the genet, and they also reached the ears of the zebra.

THE MARABOU: The zebra summoned the marabou and told him to fly in circles over the grassy steppes calling all the animals in the kingdom together to a great assembly before sunset at the water hole: come to the great assembly of all the animals in the kingdom, where the animals themselves shall decide who is their ruler from now on: the zebra or the lion.

THE ANTELOPE: And so, as the shadows grew longer, the animals began to arrive at the water hole to hold their council. The antelope, the genet, the marabou, the zebra, the lion, the giraffe, the gazelle, the rhinoceros, the elephant and all the others.

A hot day is coming to an end. The rainy season is past. The grass stands tall on the steppes. Soon the sun will have set.

THE MARABOU: And then the Assembly began. Here sat the lion and there sat the zebra. There stood the great

elephant, the ancient privy councillor of the animal kingdom, and as soon as the last animal had taken its place, he began the proceedings: We have come together today to make a decision who should be our King.

The zebra has ruled us well for many years, now the lion demands the crown, because the lion, he says, is stronger than the zebra.

THE LION: That's right, shouted the lion. I demand the crown by right, I am the King of the animals.

Unrest. Small birds began chattering, everyone spoke in excitement and confusion, the humming birds and the bees and the mice.

THE MARABOU: Quiet, said the elephant, quiet.

Why should you become King, lion, because you are stronger than the zebra? A lot of animals are stronger than the zebra, and a lot of animals are stronger than you.

THE LION: What animal, show me the animal that's stronger than me, roared the lion.

THE MARABOU: The rhinoceros is stronger than you, countered the elephant, and the hippopotamus and I am too – and with that the elephant lowered his long tusks.

THE ANTELOPE: Yes, shouted the rhinoceros, I'm stronger than you, why can't I be our new King?

THE LION: Because I'm cleverer, shouted the lion.

THE MARABOU: You may be cleverer than the zebra, countered the elephant, but several animals are cleverer than the zebra: the hyena and the snake and the spider and the scorpion –

THE GENET: Yes, shouted the scorpion, I want to be King of the animals!

THE LION: You live in the shadow under a rock, called the lion, but I cut through the steppes with long strides.

THE GENET: So do I, shouted the flamingo bird.

THE ZEBRA: The zebra had remained silent up until now.

But now he spoke:

Yes, that's right. You do cut through our kingdom with long strides – but your strides aren't as powerful as the elephant's or as long as the giraffe's, although you do run on powerful, dangerous paws.

But often you hide in the long grass. Often you creep forward crouching, downwind, often you seek the cover of night and then you're hunting, then you're looking for meat and the only animal who's safe from you is the one who can see you quick enough to escape, or else you'll kill it with a single bite to the neck and feast on it. How do you propose to be King of the animals if you're going to go around hunting your own subjects?

THE ANTELOPE: Once again the small animals began to talk in excitement and confusion, the humming birds and the bees and the mice.

THE LION: And then the lion, the fearsome hunter, stood up and said: maybe there are animals who are stronger than I am. Maybe there are animals who are bigger than I am, and some who are cleverer than I am.

But – and now his voice turned into a threatening growl – I still demand the crown and sceptre because there is no animal, whether it's big or strong or small or clever or brightly coloured or black and white striped, that can defeat me.

THE GENET: Suddenly the wind turns. The marabou takes flight. The animals sense the danger immediately: and the lion can sense it too.

Smoke. Fire. The steppes are burning. In the distance the sky is already red with flames. No-one knows where to go.

The animals suddenly flee away from the fire.

5.

PETER and DIRK

PETER:

Is she still here? I thought she wasn't here any more -

DIRK:

Didn't she leave? She left -

PETER:

Or - she did though - or she's come back again -

DIRK:

Come back? Maybe she has come back.

PETER:

But she'd gone. She had gone.

DIRK:

She had, yeah - Though that was her - wasn't it?
It might not have been her.

PETER:

It was her -

DIRK:

Then she's come back.

PETER:

If it was her.

DIRK:

You should know.

PETER:

Me?

DIRK:

You.

Brief pause.

She had a baby.

PETER:

I dunno.

DIRK:

She left to have a baby.

PETER:

I dunno.

DIRK:

And now she's come back. If it was her -

PETER:

Maybe. Maybe not. Hard to say.

DIRK:

Wasn't there something between you two? Weren't you
together for a while?

PETER:

Before that. Didn't last long.

DIRK:

Well -

PETER:

But with those horns -

Brief pause.

Unrecognizable. With her face all - unrecognizable.

Brief pause.

But at the water hole I thought: judging by the arse: yeah,
could well be.

Brief pause.

At the water hole, when she bent down to drink along with
the others, I thought. Yep, that's her arse alright. Hello
arse. That arse hasn't changed.

Contents

'The Theatre Needs Challenges' <i>An interview with Roland Schimmelpfennig</i>	1
<i>The Animal Kingdom</i>	9
<i>Idomeneus</i>	81
<i>Peggy Pickit Sees the Face of God</i>	159
<i>The Four Points of the Compass</i>	229

First published in 2014 by Oberon Books Ltd
521 Caledonian Road, London N7 9RH
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7607 3637 / Fax: +44 (0) 20 7607 3629
e-mail: info@oberonbooks.com
www.oberonbooks.com

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Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Peggy Pickit steht das Gesicht Gottes* © 2011 Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag in der S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main.

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Roland Schimmelpfennig, *Die vier Himmelsrichtungen* © 2011 Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag in der S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main.

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

PB ISBN: 978-1-78319-095-9

E ISBN: 978-1-78319-594-7

Cover image by Bill Knight of *Idomeneus* at the Gate Theatre, 2014.

Cast as pictured: Alex Austin, Jon Foster, Mark Monero, Susie Trayling and Ory Uthara

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Marston Book Services Ltd, Oxfordshire

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