

**PHANTASMAGORIA AND IRREALITY IN THE POETICS OF
ROLAND SCHIMMELPFENNIG'S DRAMAS
«ETERNAL MARIA» AND «ARABIAN NIGHT»**

The renowned German postmodernist playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig, a recipient of numerous international awards, occupies a distinctive position in contemporary drama. Although he is not typically categorized among representatives of postdramatic theatre, he nonetheless advances the traditions of literary drama: for R Schimmelpfennig, the dramatic text remains the starting point and central axis of theatrical production. Simultaneously, he assimilates and transforms elements characteristic of postdramatic aesthetics, notably through his collage-like dramaturgy, the destabilization of character identity, and the incorporation of surreal and fantastical motifs.

R. Schimmelpfennig has elaborated a unique form of narrative theatre, wherein characters frequently interrupt the dramatic action to directly address the audience, narrate, or comment upon their own roles. This technique creates an aesthetic distancing effect while paradoxically intensifying emotional engagement by foregrounding the act of storytelling itself.

R Schimmelpfennig's oeuvre has attracted considerable scholarly attention. G. Brandstetter provides a general analysis of his poetics [2, p. 97 – 112]; E. Fischer-Lichte characterizes his method as «kaleidoscopism» [3, p. 81 – 89]; N. Frey examines the particularities of speech structures within his plays [4, pp. 114 – 117]; N. Yuhon addresses genre transformations [8 – 9]; and F. M. Mennemeier situates Schimmelpfennig's early work within a broader literary context [5, p. 83 – 98].

The stylistic and linguistic features of the play «Under Pressure 1 – 3»

have been examined within broader studies of German postmodernism [1, p. 16 – 19]. N. Yuhan's analyses of «Arabian Night», «Under Pressure 1 – 3», «The Golden Dragon», and «The Woman from the Past» focus on intertextuality, intermediality, and the strategies of theatrical experimentation [10 – 11]. J. Ryan, meanwhile, explores the comedic dimension of «The Woman from the Past» [6, p. 23 – 31].

In «Eternal Maria», the motif of repetitive fate is already encoded in the title. Maria symbolizes the eternal feminine principle: a readiness to wait, to sacrifice, and to submit to forces beyond her control. Her future trajectory is anticipated by the parallel story of Eva and Hans. Much like Maria's attachment to Karl, Eva once awaited a beloved who never returned and ultimately married Hans, the man who had remained faithfully at her side. Maria thus stands at a similar crossroads, torn between her longing for Karl and the limitations of her present life [7, p. 112 – 113]. The external conflict between father and son functions as a trigger for Maria's internal struggle, reflecting Schimmelpfennig's consistent pattern of mirroring inner and outer conflicts.

Chance events, rather than conscious decisions, typically disrupt the monotonous lives of Schimmelpfennig's characters. However, chance in his dramaturgy does not merely intrude temporarily into an otherwise ordered world; rather, it reveals the underlying multiplicity and chaos of existence. Unlike in classical drama, where chance ultimately reaffirms a cosmic or moral order, in Schimmelpfennig's plays, it often appears as a purely destructive force, emphasizing the helplessness of human beings in the face of an unpredictable reality. A striking example of this motif is provided by the drama «Arabian Night».

The play's action unfolds through multiple parallel plotlines, united by a common setting – an apartment building – and a shared temporal frame – a single night – which endows the events with a heightened metaphysical resonance. Franziska Decke's storyline echoes the «Sleeping Beauty» fairy tale, where a princess is to be awakened by a kiss. Franziska's life is monotonous:

she works, returns home exhausted, showers, and falls asleep, only to awaken the next morning without memories of the previous day. Her roommate, Fatima Manzur, clandestinely invites her boyfriend, Kalil, during Franziska's nightly oblivion.

Every evening, Kalil waits for Fatima's call and rides to her apartment on his motorcycle. Fatima speculates what might happen if someone were to awaken Franziska with a kiss. The habitual pattern of events collapses when an unforeseen deviation occurs [7, p. 313].

Peter Karpathy, observing Franziska from his window, is seized by an irrational desire to kiss her. He sets off in search of her apartment. At the same time, Kalil becomes trapped in a malfunctioning elevator, while the building manager, Hans Lomayer, fails to post a warning. Fatima, anxious over Kalil's delay, accidentally leaves the apartment door open. Peter, entering the apartment, kisses the sleeping Franziska, who dreams that she is kissed by a sheikh.

Within her dream, the sheikh's jealous first wife curses Franziska to bring misfortune upon all men and to forget her true self until her destined love awakens her. Schimmelpfennig's blending of dream and reality serves to dismantle the clear boundaries between these domains, emphasizing the porousness of identity and experience.

Lomayer, too, experiences a dream-like vision, imagining himself in a desert where he encounters his former wife, now identified with the vengeful first wife of the sheikh. After impulsively kissing Franziska, Lomayer flees, leaving Franziska to awaken confused, believing herself transported to a palace.

Fatima, meanwhile, struggles to reenter the apartment while Kalil escapes the elevator. He encounters the bewildered Franziska; their meeting leads to a misunderstanding when Fatima returns and, seeing them together, succumbs to jealousy. Fatima's subsequent act of violence – the murder of Kalil – tragically culminates the chaotic chain of events.

The characters of «Arabian Night» are portrayed as powerless before

entropic forces. They remain incapable of fully understanding either the events that overwhelm them or the motivations underlying their own actions. They neither seek nor find metaphysical explanations for their fate [7, p. 325 – 328].

Their behavior is governed by unconscious impulses, and the autonomy of the body over conscious will is emphasized. Peter Karpathy's compulsion to find and kiss Franziska, or Karl's inexplicable act of violence in «Eternal Maria», exemplify this loss of rational agency. Ultimately, the dramatic conflicts arise from confrontations not merely between individuals, but between the self and the ungraspable forces of the Other and the Unknown.

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