



Piotr MAJCHER

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2680-6734>

Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie (Kraków, Poland)

***The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* by Peter Handke – behaviour analysis of the protagonist**

Abstract: *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1970) by Peter Handke is not, as it might seem, a story about sport. The Austrian Nobel Prize winner presents the story of Joseph Bloch, a former footballer and currently an assembly worker. Analysing his behaviour allows one to recognise the symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder. The purpose of this article is to describe Joseph Bloch's mental condition and answer the question as to what the possibilities of presenting anxiety in literature are, as well as its impact on the recipient of the text.

Keywords: Peter Handke, contemporary Austrian literature, anxiety in literature, generalised anxiety disorder

Introduction

Peter Handke (b. 1942) is a controversial Austrian writer, translator and scriptwriter. In 2019, he was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature. However, the decision of the Swedish Academy was not accepted by many circles, and Handke himself was considered persona non grata in Sarajevo and Kosovo as a result of the stance he took towards the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The Austrian writer did not share the explanations widespread in the Western world that put the blame for the crimes in the Balkan Peninsula solely on the Serbs. According to Handke, all nations

that took part in the war were guilty. To the wider public, the Nobel laureate is known only from this perspective. It undoubtedly obscures Handke's rich literary output, which touches on various aspects of human existence and often contains autobiographical motifs.

The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick (1970) is Peter Handke's third prose text.¹ However, compared to *Die Hornissen* ([The Hornets], 1966) and *Der Hausierer* ([The Peddler], 1967), this short story was a huge commercial success. With an initial circulation of 25,000 copies, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* reached number nine on the bestseller list of the German weekly "Der Spiegel" in May 1970. For this reason, the Suhrkamp Publishing House printed a further 6,000 copies in August 1970 and a total of another 24,000 by January, 1971. Handke's text is not, as it might seem, a story about sport. The Austrian Nobel laureate tells the story of Joseph Bloch, a former football player and later fitter, who quits his job at a construction site while feeling as if he had been fired. He then hooks up with a cinema cashier called Gerda, whom he strangles after their first night together, and then leaves for a village on Austria's southern border. However, it is not possible to tell whether he is on the run. Bloch is self-centred and focused on abstract thoughts. The analysis of his behaviour allows one to recognise the symptoms of generalised anxiety.

After committing the crime, Joseph Bloch leaves Vienna, as the text clearly indicates, since one of the places mentioned in the text is Vienna's Naschmarkt. It is somewhat more difficult to identify where the protagonist went. It seems that the area around Jennersdorf in the Austrian state of Burgenland could have been used as a prototype. Handke's summer stay at Feri Zotter's artists' house in the artists' village of Neumarkt an der Raab (Austria) contributed to the creation of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. At that time, the author took many photographs of the places he refers to in the story. This makes it possible to assume that the first notes for *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* were written during this stay.²

The purpose of this article is to analyse and present the psychological condition of the main character, and also answer the question as to how anxiety is presented in literature and what impact it has on the recipient of the text. A further section is devoted to a clinical characterisation of the generalised anxiety disorder that can be observed in Joseph Bloch.

¹ Peter Handke, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972).

² Cf. (ck), „Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter. Entstehungskontext.“

1. Anxiety in literature

Anxiety has accompanied man since the beginning of time. It is a phenomenon that all of us can experience. For this reason, the phenomenon of anxiety is also present in literature. Its presence can be signalled in various ways. It is undeniable that from a psychological point of view, the circumstance of perceiving the surrounding world as a threatening place for the individual in question is responsible for the atmosphere of anxiety. This distinguishes anxiety from the emotion of fear caused by a specific object: "Strach jest zawsze strachem przed czymś, kimś lub jakimś zdarzeniem" [Fear is always a fear of something, someone or some event].³ This means that fear is a necessary emotion because it protects and warns the individual against something. Anxiety, on the other hand, is an imaginary phenomenon and is not triggered by any specific threat. It arises as a result of a person's negative attitude resulting from his or her experiences and experiences, so it is often very difficult to determine its basis. As it is a state without an object,⁴ it is impossible to free oneself from anxiety by removing a specific thing or transcending a given state.⁵

Literature has various ways of expressing anxiety. Tilmann Köppe emphasises that the first way is to directly indicate that a person is experiencing anxiety.⁶ A literary text directly expresses that someone is experiencing a state of anxiety. Sometimes this state can be signalled indirectly, which requires the reader to decipher it. It is also possible to combine both ways of signalling a state of anxiety.⁷

If we assume that literature is expressive, i.e. that it expresses reality in the colouring that underlies a particular associated feeling, emotion or state, then it seems legitimate to examine the world depicted through the lens of the actions and thoughts of a particular protagonist.⁸ Referring to the reader, it should be stated that a text can become a source of anxiety in him or her when he or she feels – provided he or she possesses adequate empathetic resources – the anxious perception of reality by the literary protagonist. An analysis of the events unfolding around him will also bring out the feelings experienced by the protagonist. A look at the world depicted as seen through

³ „Lęk,” Instytut Psychologii Zdrowia Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego, last modified September 26, 2010, <https://psychologia.edu.pl/slownik/id.lek/i.html>.

⁴ Cf. „Lęk.”

⁵ Cf. Tilmann Köppe, „Über Angst in der Literatur,” *Hermeneutische Blätter. Angst* 26, no. 1 (2020): 8.

⁶ Cf. Köppe „Über Angst in der Literatur,” 8–9.

⁷ Cf. Köppe „Über Angst in der Literatur,” 9–10.

⁸ Cf. Köppe „Über Angst in der Literatur,” 11–12.

his or her eyes familiarises the reader with a specific state of anxiety, rather than just a description of it. It should also be borne in mind that a literary work as such can stimulate the reader to feel a state of anxiety, especially when there is a cross-referencing of the negative image of literary reality with his or her own life.⁹

2. Generalised anxiety disorders

In everyday language, the term neurosis is commonly used. This term, however, is not a precise medical term because it is too broad and presupposes anxiety as the root cause.¹⁰ Current diagnostic classifications make use of a category of anxiety disorders that include anxiety as their underlying cause, although the individual does not always feel it. The most common anxiety disorders include phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and generalised anxiety disorder, from which the protagonist of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* probably suffers.¹¹

It is very important to point out that an anxiety disorder can be diagnosed when anxiety or fear interferes with a person's normal existence, which manifests itself primarily in the fact that he or she is unable to pursue goals that are important to him or her.¹² The absence of such a circumstance prevents the diagnosis of this type of disorder. In all anxiety disorders, we are dealing with a greatly exaggerated version of the normal adaptation difficulties that each of us feels in various situations. In contrast to anxiety disorders, normal fear and anxiety correspond to the reality of the threat.¹³

The diagnosis of generalised anxiety disorder according to the DSM-5, the American Psychiatric Association's classification of mental disorders, requires the following criteria:

- excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least six months about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance),
- the individual finds it difficult to control the worry,
- the anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with least some symptoms having been present for more days than not for the past six months):

⁹ Cf. Köppe „Über Angst in der Literatur,“ 13–14.

¹⁰ Cf. Martin E. P. Seligman, Elaine F. Walker, and David L. Rosenhan, *Psychopatologia*, trans. Joanna Gilewicz, and Aleksander Wojciechowski (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2003), 182.

¹¹ Cf. Seligman, Walker, and Rosenhan, *Psychopatologia*, 180–181.

¹² Cf. Seligman, Walker, and Rosenhan, *Psychopatologia*, 181.

¹³ Cf. Seligman, Walker, and Rosenhan, *Psychopatologia*, 182.

- Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbances (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep)
- the anxiety, worry or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment of social, occupational or other important areas of functioning,
- the disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effect of a substance (e.g. drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g. hyperthyroidism),
- the disturbance is not better explained by another mental disorder, e.g.
 - anxiety or fear or worry about having:
 - panic attacks in a panic disorder,
 - negative evaluation in social anxiety disorder (social phobia),
 - contamination in the case of obsessive-compulsive disorder,
 - separation from attachment figures in separation anxiety disorder,
 - reminders of traumatic events in posttraumatic stress disorder,
 - gaining weight in anorexia nervosa,
 - physical complaints in somatic symptom disorder,
 - perceived appearance flaws in body dysmorphic disorder,
 - having a serious illness in illness anxiety disorder,
 - delusions in schizophrenia or delusional disorder.¹⁴

Generalised anxiety disorder, unlike panic attacks, is a chronic condition and can last for many months. It is characterised by more or less constant elements. A person suffering from generalised anxiety is unable to control his or her restlessness and fear. The symptoms of this disorder are often responsible for very bad moods and problems at work and in relationships. The disorder has effects in four areas: emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural. Regarding the first area, the individual may feel helplessness, tension, nervousness, alertness and constant irritability. In the area of cognition, the person expects something terrible to happen, but is unable to tell what it will be. In the physical aspect, the sufferer of generalised anxiety disorder has constantly tense muscles. The EEG shows increased beta activity

¹⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. Fifth edition. DSM-5tm* (Washington DC, London: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 222.

in the frontal lobes (especially the left hemisphere), indicating severe anxiety. In addition, generalised anxiety can cause fatigue and difficulty concentrating. On the other hand, on a behavioural level, patients with this disorder cannot find a place to be and try to focus on something that will relieve their anxiety.¹⁵

3. Joseph Bloch – mental health analysis

Joseph Bloch's state of mind was inspired by reading Klaus Conrad's monograph *Die beginnende Schizophrenie. Versuch einer Gestaltanalyse des Wahns* (1958), as mentioned by Handke in a December 1968 interview with the "Kölner Stadtanzeiger".¹⁶ He also referred to it in the journal "Text+Kritik"¹⁷ in 1969 in an issue containing a reprint of the story.¹⁸ It should be emphasised, however, that – according to its description as a medical condition – the protagonist does not suffer from schizophrenia, but is affected by another mental disorder. Handke's aim was not to depict the condition itself, but a human being struggling with it, who functions in a specific reality.

In the case of the protagonist of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, it can be concluded that he suffers from some kind of mental disorder. A holistic analysis of his behaviour leads to the conclusion that it is an anxiety disorder. Such a general diagnosis can be made on the basis of the observations of Bloch's behaviour: he is unable to lead an undisturbed existence and cannot pursue goals that are important to him. An example of this is his dismissal from work based on the assumption that he had been fired. This was caused by an irrelevant reaction of his work colleagues. This is presented in the story as follows:

When Joseph Bloch, a construction worker who had once been a well-known soccer goalie, reported for work that morning, he was told that he was fired. At least that was how he interpreted the fact that no one except the foreman looked up from his coffee break when he appeared at the door of the construction shack, where the workers happened to be at that moment.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. Seligman, Walker, and Rosenhan, *Psychopatologia*, 219–220.

¹⁶ Peter Handke, „John Lennon sagte: Revolutionäre sollen sich selbst ändern.“ *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, no. 299, 24.12.1968.

¹⁷ *Text + Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur: Peter Handke*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, vol. 24 (1969).

¹⁸ Cf. (ck), „Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter. Entstehungskontext.“

¹⁹ Peter Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, trans. Michael Roloff (London: Penguin Classics, 2020), 5.

Dem Monteur Josef Bloch, der früher ein bekannter Tormann gewesen war, wurde, als er sich am Vormittag zur Arbeit meldete, mitgeteilt, daß er entlassen sei. Jedenfalls legte Bloch die Tatsache, daß bei seinem Erscheinen in der Tür der Bauhütte, wo sich die Arbeiter gerade aufhielten, nur der Polier von der Jause aufschaute, als eine solche Mitteilung aus und verließ das Baugelände.²⁰

There is also an evident lack of logical thinking in Bloch's described behaviour. Looking at the protagonist's existence, one can see that he is a very irritable person, who finds it difficult to accept elements of his surrounding reality and is often irritated by everything, as exemplified by the following scenes:

It was a beautiful October day. Bloch ate a hot dog at a stand and then walked past the stalls to a movie theater. Everything he saw bothered him. He tried to notice as little as possible. [...] He was so irritated that he looked at the grimy cord that the waitress was just pulling to turn off the wall lights – it had grown brighter outside again – as if the entire lighting arrangement was designed especially to tax his strength.²¹

Es war ein schöner Oktobertag. Bloch aß an einem Stand eine heiße Wurst und ging dann zwischen den Ständen durch zu einem Kino. Alles, was er sah, störte ihn; er versuchte, möglichst wenig wahrzunehmen. [...] Er war so gereizt, daß er die schmutzige Schnur, an der jetzt die Kellnerin zog, um die Wandbeleuchtung auszuschalten – es war draußen wieder hell geworden –, ansah, als ob diese ganze Wandbeleuchtung eine Zumutung, eigens für ihn, sei.²²

The protagonist's irritation in *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* is also recognised by others. For example: "Why was he always sitting down, getting up, going out, standing around, coming back in? asked the landlady. Was he doing it to tease her?"²³ („Warum er sich immerzu setze, aufstehe, weggehe, herumstehe, zurückkomme? fragte die Pächterin. Ob er sie damit verspotten wolle?“²⁴). Although Joseph exists in certain realities, he seems to be only suspended in them. He does not seem to take an active part in the events unfolding around him. He believes that everything is beyond his reach.²⁵ His impaired functioning in social, professional or other areas of the surrounding world is also recorded in the next scene:

²⁰ Peter Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 7.

²¹ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 5, 52.

²² Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 7, 76.

²³ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 31.

²⁴ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 46.

²⁵ Cf. Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 46; Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 69.

Late in the afternoon he took a streetcar to the stadium. He bought standing room but sat down on the newspapers, which he still hadn't thrown away; the fact that the spectators in front of him blocked his view did not bother him. [...] Bloch asked the waitress to turn on the set and then watched as if none of this had anything to do with him.²⁶

Am späten Nachmittag fuhr er mit der Straßenbahn hinaus ins Stadion. Er nahm einen Stehplatz, setzte sich dann aber auf die Zeitungen, die er noch immer nicht weggeworfen hatte; daß ihm die Zuschauer vorne die Sicht verstellten, störte ihn nicht. [...] Bloch bat die Kellnerin, den Fernsehapparat einzuschalten, schaute aber dann zu, als ob ihn das alles nichts angehe.²⁷

Bloch is unable to take action in line with his wellbeing, he behaves without rational justification, which is most likely due to his anxiety. He also very often experiences anxiety that causes him to run away when confronted with various factors: "Somebody turned toward him, and he walked away"²⁸ („Jemand drehte sich nach ihm um, und er ging weiter"²⁹). Instead, he interprets objectively unrelated events as directed against him:

The little girl had come back and was leaning against the back of the landlady's chair. She was sent to get wood for the kitchen, but when she opened the door with only one hand, she dropped the logs. The waitress picked up the wood and carried it into the kitchen while the child went back to leaning against the back of the landlady's chair. It seemed to Bloch as if these proceedings could be used against him.³⁰

Das Kind war hereingekommen und lehnte hinter der Pächterin am Stuhl. Es wurde um Holz für die Küche geschickt, ließ aber die Scheite, als es mit der einen Hand die Tür aufmachte, fallen. Die Kellnerin sammelte das Holz auf und trug es in die Küche, während sich das Kind wieder im Rücken der Pächterin an den Stuhl lehnte. Bloch kam es vor, als könnten diese Vorgänge gegen ihn verwendet werden.³¹

The perceived fear and anxiety also cause Joseph to tire very quickly and he continues to feel alienated, as well as threatened and entrapped. This is made apparent by the following descriptions:

Bloch grew nervous. If the pressure of everything around him when his eyes were open was bad, the pressure of the words for everything out there when his eyes were closed was even worse. [...] The constriction was so tight that all at once he was exhausted. He lay down on the floor, unable to fall asleep but incapable of raising his head. [...] It seemed as though a crowbar had pried him away from what he saw – or, rather, as though the things around him had all been pulled away from him.³²

²⁶ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 7, 11.

²⁷ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 10, 16.

²⁸ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 10.

²⁹ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 16.

³⁰ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 23–24.

³¹ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 35.

³² Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 12, 14, 34.

Bloch wurde nervös. Einerseits diese Aufdringlichkeit der Umgebung, wenn er die Augen offen hatte, andererseits diese noch schlimmere Aufdringlichkeit der Wörter für die Sachen in der Umgebung, wenn er die Augen geschlossen hatte. [...] Die Beklemmung war so stark, daß er sofort müde wurde. Er legte sich auf den Boden, unfähig, einzuschlafen und unfähig, den Kopf zu heben. [...] Es kam ihm vor, als hätte ihn ein Stemmeisen von dem, was er sah, abgestemmt, oder als seien vielmehr die Gegenstände ringsherum von ihm abgehoben worden.³³

Thus Bloch reacts negatively not only to the objects he can see, but also to the words associated with them that torment him. As Marcin Polak points out:

Bloch przejawia eskalację manii wątpienia tudzież rakowaty przerost samoświadomości językowej [...], kiedy to podaje w wątpliwość poszczególne wypowiedziane lub pomyślane wyrażenia, słowa, elementy składni. Jednocześnie, na trajektorii wyobcowania z języka, wszystko, co zostaje wypowiedziane i zasłyszane w obecności Blocha lub pomyślane przez niego samego, wydaje mu się niepoważne, komiczne.³⁴

[Bloch manifests an escalating mania for doubt or a cancerous overgrowth of linguistic self-consciousness [...] when he casts doubt on particular spoken or conceived phrases, words, elements of syntax. At the same time, on a trajectory of alienation from language, everything that is uttered and heard in Bloch's presence or thought by him seems to him frivolous, comical.]

In this context, it is important to note Handke's sceptical attitude towards the phenomenon of language. He was concerned with its functioning particularly in the first phase of his work under the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word becomes apparent in its use, which presupposes an extra-linguistic intervention in the process of assigning content to the individual words and phrases of a language. Their content is thus attributed and even in some way imposed upon them. This takes place as an act of the own will of individuals or groups.³⁵ Handke saw the danger of a restriction of human freedom in this phenomenon and identified language with an instrument of manipulation and enslavement of the individual. He was therefore highly critical of the phenomenon of language, as reflected in many of his works, such as *Prophecy* (1976, *Weissagung*, 1964)³⁶, *Self-Accusation* (1969, *Selbstbeziehung*, 1965)³⁷ and

³³ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 19, 21, 52.

³⁴ Marcin Polak, „Post phobiam,” in Peter Handke, *Strach bramkarza przed jedenastką*, trans. Kamil Idzikowski (Łódź: Oficyna, 2022), 118.

³⁵ Cf. Jörg Zeller, „Handkes Stellung zur Sprache,” in *Über Peter Handke*, ed. Michael Scharang (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1972), 228–229.

³⁶ Peter Handke, “Prophecy,” in Peter Handke, *The Ride across Lake Constance and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976).

³⁷ Peter Handke, „Self-Accusation,” in Peter Handke, *Kaspar and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969).

Kaspar (1972, original 1967),³⁸ and not only in *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. Language contributes to the fact that human relationships are by no means characterised by a relationship of equality. They are dominated by a linguistic relationship of superiority and subordination, which opens the way to manipulation. As a result of such a situation, language loses its original function, which means that it is no longer merely used for uninterrupted interpersonal communication. Although it is still used for this purpose, it primarily expresses the content of certain groups who are interested in imposing their beliefs and thought patterns on other people. In this way, individuals can be deprived of their intellectual autonomy, but in doing so they can become members of a certain system. Therefore, each person must be aware that language can also be used as a means of indoctrination.³⁹ On such a view, it becomes an additional (or perhaps the main?) contribution to the anxiety disorder for the protagonist of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. As a result of the imperfection of language, he is unable to find his way in society and properly understand the reality around him.

Besides the anxiety combined with a sense of entrapment, Bloch also feels anxiety towards nature, as it seems to him it wants to annihilate him: "The landscape, even though it was flat, curved toward him so firmly that it seemed to dislodge him"⁴⁰ („Die Landschaft, obwohl sie eben war, wölbte sich so nah an ihn heran, daß sie ihn zu verdrängen schien"⁴¹). Joseph also suffers as a result of thoughts and imaginings from the past overlapping with unfolding events: "When the boiling water from the kettle hit the bottom of the pot, he didn't see tea leaves but ants, on which he had once poured scalding water"⁴² („Als das kochende Wasser aus dem Kessel die Teeblätter auf dem Boden der Kanne traf, sah er statt der Teeblätter Ameisen, auf die er einmal siedendes Wasser geschüttet hatte"⁴³). As the anxiety experienced by Bloch is very strong, he tries to focus his attention on something that could distract him from this state and develops various habits (obsessions) in himself, e.g. "an odd compulsion to find out the price of everything"⁴⁴ („Er bemerkte an sich eine merkwürdige Sucht, von allem den Preis zu erfahren"⁴⁵) or maniacal counting:

³⁸ Peter Handke, "Kaspar," in Peter Handke, *Kaspar and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1969). Published separately: Peter Handke, *Kaspar*, trans. Michael Roloff (London: Methuen, 1972).

³⁹ Cf. Piotr Majcher, „Die sprachliche Manipulation nach Peter Handke," *Studia Niemcoznawcze* 57 (2016): 552.

⁴⁰ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 28.

⁴¹ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 43.

⁴² Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 13.

⁴³ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 19.

⁴⁴ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 37.

⁴⁵ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 54.

Bloch said that recently he had noticed that he himself was in the habit of starting to count only at the number 2; this morning, for instance, he'd almost been run down by a car when he was crossing the street because he thought he had enough time until the second car; he'd simply not counted the first one.⁴⁶

Bloch sagte, seit kurzem beobachte er an sich die Gewohnheit, mit dem Zählen erst bei zwei anzufangen; heute morgen zum Beispiel sei er beim Überqueren der Straße beinahe unter ein Auto gekommen, weil er gemeint habe, bis zum zweiten Auto noch genug Zeit zu haben; das erste Auto habe er einfach nicht mitgezählt.⁴⁷

The anxiety he feels is also reflected in his relationships with others – he often gets into all sorts of fights and arguments.⁴⁸ The culminating moment demonstrating his difficulties in dealing with others, and above all the very strong tension caused by anxiety and fear, is the murder of the cinema cashier Gerda. As Polak states: “W przypadku Blocha morderstwo na jawie jest konsekwencją błahaego, wydawałoby się, wydarzenia, które przepełniło czarę psychopatologii”⁴⁹ [In Bloch's case, the overt murder is the consequence of a seemingly trivial event that filled the blackness of psychopathology]. The crime is foreshadowed in the story's motto: “The goalie watched as the ball rolled across the line ...”⁵⁰ („Der Tormann sah zu, wie der Ball über die Linie rollte...”⁵¹). It is difficult to give a clear answer as to why Joseph committed this crime. Given his mental state, it is possible to assume that his act was dictated by the need to relieve the tension that tormented him or his aggressive drive, or it may have been the expression of another compulsive act or an act without motivation.⁵² It can also be seen as a kind of unconscious defensive reaction against Gerda's linguistic intrusion into his inner self and Bloch's interpretation of this fact as enslavement.⁵³ Just before the

⁴⁶ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 31.

⁴⁷ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 45–46.

⁴⁸ “Back in town, Bloch sat down in a café and looked on during a card game. He started to argue with the player he was sitting behind. [...] Bloch went into the back room. A slide lecture was going on there. [...] Bloch, who was interrupting loudly, started to argue with people again.” Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 34 („Wieder im Ort, setzte sich Bloch in ein Café und schaute beim Kartenspiel zu. Er fing mit dem Spieler, hinter dem er saß, zu streiten an. [...] Bloch ging ins Hinterzimmer. Dort wurde ein Lichtbildervortrag gehalten. [...] Bloch, der laut dazwischenredete, fing mit den Leuten wieder zu streiten an.” Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 50–51).

⁴⁹ Polak „Post phobiam,” 119.

⁵⁰ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 4.

⁵¹ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 5.

⁵² Cf. Polak „Post phobiam,” 122.

⁵³ Cf. Thorsten Carstensen, „Die Geschichte zwischen Mann und Frau. Peter Handke und die Liebe.” *Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch. A German Studies Yearbook 12* (2013): 48. *Schwerpunkt/Focus: Peter Handke, GegenwartsLiteratur*, eds. Paul Michael Lützeler, Erin McGlothlin, and Jennifer Kapczynski.

murder, he stated: "... that she talked about the things he'd just told her as if they were hers"⁵⁴ („daß sie von Dingen, von denen er ihr gerade erst erzählt hatte, schon wie von ihren eigenen Dingen redete"⁵⁵). Joseph also shows problems with self-integration. At times, it seems to him that the world he perceives annihilates him as an individual or he believes that he has abandoned his own body. He also experiences negative feelings as a result of depreciating himself. This state of affairs is illustrated by the following descriptions:

He was so far away from what happened around him that he himself no longer appeared in what he saw and heard. [...] For a moment it seemed as if he had fallen out of himself. [...] He became aware of himself as if he had suddenly degenerated. [...] The way he lay there, he was something lewd, obscene, inappropriate, thoroughly obnoxious. 'Bury it!' thought Bloch. 'Prohibit it, remove it!'⁵⁶

Er war so entfernt von den Vorgängen, daß er selber in dem, was er sah oder hörte, gar nicht mehr vorkam. [...] Es kam ihm im ersten Moment vor, als sei er aus sich selbst herausgefallen. [...] Er nahm sich selbst wahr, als sei er plötzlich ausgeartet. [...] Er war, wie er da war, etwas Geiles, Obszönes, Unangebrachtes, durch und durch Anstoßerregendes; verscharren! dachte Bloch, verbieten, entfernen!⁵⁷

In the perspective of the above, the fact that the protagonist of *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* suffers from generalised anxiety disorder is also confirmed by his sleep problems and somatic reactions to anxiety in the form of sweating,⁵⁸ nausea or vomiting:

In his room at the inn he woke up just before dawn. All at once, everything around him was unbearable. He wondered whether he had wakened just because at a certain moment, shortly before dawn, everything all at once became unbearable. [...] A fierce nausea gripped him. He immediately vomited into the sink. He vomited for a while, with no relief. [...] The nausea did not so much elate him as depress him even more.⁵⁹

In seinem Zimmer im Gasthof wachte er kurz vor dem Morgengrauen auf. Unvermittelt war ihm alles ringsherum unerträglich. Er überlegte, ob er aufgewacht war, gerade weil zu einem gewissen Zeitpunkt, jetzt kurz vor Morgengrauen, mit einem Schlag alles unerträglich wurde. [...] Ein heftiger Ekel packte ihn. Er erbrach sofort in das Waschbecken. Er erbrach einige Zeit, ohne Erleichterung. [...] Der Brechreiz hob ihn nicht etwa auf, sondern drückte ihn noch zusammen.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 13.

⁵⁵ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns*, 20.

⁵⁶ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 46–48.

⁵⁷ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 69–70.

⁵⁸ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 48; *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 71.

⁵⁹ Handke, *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 34.

⁶⁰ Handke, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 51–52

Conclusion

In *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, Peter Handke describes the disintegration of a protagonist, Joseph Bloch's reality and his split between his inner life and the external world he observes. Undoubtedly, trying to enter the mind of a mentally ill person and presenting the events unfolding around him from his perspective was an ambitious challenge for the author.

An analysis of the behaviour of the protagonist of the short story *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* allows us to hypothesise that he suffers from generalised anxiety disorder. According to the above analysis, he meets all the criteria that the DSM-5 requires for this condition. As there is no mention in the narrative of complaints caused by the effects of specific substances, somatic illness or which result from other psychiatric disorders, it can be concluded that Bloch's adaptation difficulties are essentially due to his anxiety and the anxiety he feels. According to Polak:

[...] objawy Blocha sprawiają, że czytelnik może odnieść wrażenie, jakby Handke napisał *Strach bramkarza przed jedenastką* tuż po lekturze dzieł Freuda. W Klinicznej symptomatologii nerwicy lęku Freud wyróżnił szereg objawów nerwicy lęku, które czytelnik z łatwością wyłowi z narracji [opowiadania].⁶¹

[Bloch's symptoms give the reader the impression that Handke wrote *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* just after reading Freud's works. In *The Clinical Symptomatology of Anxiety Neurosis*, Freud distinguished a number of symptoms of anxiety neurosis, which the reader can easily pick out from the narrative of the story.]

The rationale for creating a protagonist with an awareness of anxiety was undoubtedly Handke's own traumatic anxiety experiences related, among other things, to being under the influence of an alcoholic stepfather. Creating neurotic characters may be a kind of literary self-therapy for Handke. This is why one can find in his works protagonists struggling with their own weaknesses and the surrounding reality, as is the case, for example, in *A Moment of True Feeling* (*Die Stunde der wahren Empfindung*, 1975)⁶² or *Left-Handed Woman* (*Die linkshändige Frau*, 1976)⁶³.

It should be pointed out, however, that Joseph Bloch does not only suffer from generalised anxiety disorder. As stated above, problems arising from his use of language can also be noticed in his case, which corresponds perfectly well with Peter Handke's language scepticism. In the case of the pro-

⁶¹ Polak, „Post phobiam,” 114.

⁶² Peter Handke, *A Moment of True Feeling*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977).

⁶³ Peter Handke, *The Left-handed Woman*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978).

tagonist of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, language does not mediate between him and the world around him and the language of others.⁶⁴ He is often unable to match a given linguistic sign with the correct object, which results in him feeling cornered by objects. Bloch rarely manages to communicate with other people because his language problems negatively affect his interactions with them. Moreover, they also interfere with his perception of reality. Thus the protagonist lives within a given society, although he is not integrated into it.

Through this short story, Handke draws the attention of the text's audience to the existing problem of mental disorders in society, with which (consciously or unconsciously) many individuals may struggle. They make the existence of such individuals and all those with whom they come into contact very difficult. By presenting the story of Josef Bloch, the author of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* makes this problem abundantly clear, so that readers can correct their way of observing the world and the behaviour of those around them. Knowing that everyone can be affected by some kind of mental disorder can sensitise them to the problem.

Translated by Anna Wylężątek

References

- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. Fifth edition. DSM-5tm. Washington DC, London: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.
- Blattner, Kurt. *Zu Peter Handkes Sprachverständnis*. Bern: Schweizer Buchagentur, 1982.
- Carstensen, Thorsten. "Die Geschichte zwischen Mann und Frau. Peter Handke und die Liebe." *Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch. A German Studies Yearbook* 12 (2013): 43–65. Schwerpunkt/Focus: *Peter Handke, GegenwartsLiteratur*, edited by Paul Michael Lützeler, Erin McGlothlin, and Jennifer Kapczynski.
- (ck) [Christoph Kepplinger-Prinz]. "Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter. Entstehungskontext," Handke online. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. <https://handkeonline.onb.ac.at/node/1347>.

⁶⁴ Cf. Kurt Blattner, *Zu Peter Handkes Sprachverständnis* (Bern: Schweizer Buchagentur, 1982), 7.

- Handke, Peter. "John Lennon sagte: Revolutionäre sollen sich selbst ändern." *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, no. 299. 24.12.1968.
- Handke, Peter. *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970.
- Handke, Peter. "Kaspar." In Handke, Peter. *Kaspar and Other Plays*. Translated by Michael Roloff. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1969.
- Handke, Peter. "Prophecy." In Peter, Handke. *The Ride across Lake Constance and Other Plays*. Translated by Michael Roloff. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.
- Handke, Peter. "Self-Accusation." In Handke, Peter. *Kaspar and Other Plays*. Translated by Michael Roloff. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969.
- Handke, Peter. *A Moment of True Feeling*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977.
- Handke, Peter. *Kaspar*. Translated by Michael Roloff. London: Methuen, 1972.
- Handke, Peter. *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. Translated by Michael Roloff. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972.
- Handke, Peter. *The Goalkeeper's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. Translated by Michael Roloff. London: Penguin Classics, 2020.
- Handke, Peter. *The Left-handed Woman*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978.
- Instytut Psychologii Zdrowia Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego. "Lęk." Last modified September 26, 2010. <https://psychologia.edu.pl/slownik/id.lek/i.html>.
- Köppe, Tilmann. "Über Angst in der Literatur." *Hermeneutische Blätter. Angst* 26, no. 1 (2020): 7–19.
- Majcher, Piotr. "Die sprachliche Manipulation nach Peter Handke." *Studia Niemcoznawcze* 57 (2016): 543–553.
- Polak, Marcin. "Post phobiam." In Handke, Peter. *Strach bramkarza przed jedenastką*. Translated by Kamil Idzikowski, 113–123. Łódź: Oficyna, 2022.
- Seligman, Martin E. P., Elaine F. Walker, and David L. Rosenhan. *Psychopatologia*. Translated by Joanna Gilewicz, and Aleksander Wojciechowski. Poznań: Zys i S-ka, 2003.
- Text + Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur: Peter Handke*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, vol. 24 (1969).
- Zeller, Jörg. "Handkes Stellung zur Sprache." In *Über Peter Handke*, edited by Michael Scharang, 223–240. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972.

***Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* von Peter Handke – die Verhaltensanalyse des Protagonisten**

Abstract: *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (1970) von Peter Handke erzählt die Geschichte von Josef Bloch, einem ehemaligen Fußballspieler und heutigen Monteur. Die Analyse seines Verhaltens ermöglicht es, die Symptome einer generalisierten Angststörung zu erkennen. Das Ziel dieses Beitrags besteht darin, den psychischen Zustand von Josef Bloch darzustellen und die Frage zu beantworten wie die Angst in der Literatur dargestellt werden kann sowie welche Auswirkungen sie auf den Textrezipienten hat.

Schlüsselwörter: Peter Handke, zeitgenössische österreichische Literatur, Angst in der Literatur, generalisierte Angststörung

***Strach bramkarza przed jedenastką* Petera Handkego – analiza zachowania protagonisty**

Abstrakt: Opowiadanie Petera Handkego *Strach bramkarza przed jedenastką* (*Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter*, 1970) przedstawia historię Josefa Blocha, byłego piłkarza, a aktualnie montera. Analiza jego zachowania pozwala rozpoznać symptomy uogólnionego zaburzenia lękowego. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie stanu psychicznego Josefa Blocha oraz odpowiedź na pytanie o sposoby przedstawienia lęku w literaturze i jego wpływu na odbiorcę tekstu.

Słowa kluczowe: Peter Handke, współczesna literatura austriacka, lęk w literaturze, uogólnione zaburzenie lękowe