

NAMES IN HANDKE'S DIE ANGST DES TORMANNS

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Peter Handke's Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter (1970), his first international success, is a good subject for a brief onomastic study. For the author's use of character and place names confirms his acknowledged debt to Franz Kafka, from whose fiction Handke derives his hero's name, Josef Bloch, and from whom Handke's general technique of naming/withholding names is derived. In addition, Handke's story employs a surprising variety of naming techniques for a small number of named characters, ranging from the denotative sprechende Name, paired names, and names with etymological implications to the use of an historically correct "real" name among the fictional ones. There is also an interesting cluster of names, seven mentioned on a single page, in the general environment of name suppression.

The central character, the Tormann, is named Joseph Bloch, an allusive name, combining two names from Der Prozess: Josef K. is the hero and (Rudi) Block is the only other named accused person in the novel. These characters, although not accused of a specific crime, are essentially in the same situation as the Tormann who has murdered a female acquaintance and is trying to escape capture, trial and punishment. (Handke's interest in Kafka is also shown by his use of the name Gregor, suggesting Gregor Samsa of Die Verwandlung, in Die Hornisse [1965] and Die Stunde der wahren Empfindung [1975].)

The names Bloch and Block are, of course, interchangeable in German; Bloch was originally used for Jews who immigrated to Poland

from the West in the fourteenth century (Gottschald: Deutsche Namenskunde, Berlin: 1971), which gives relevant meanings for Block: Klotz, Felsblock, Gefängnis, plumper Mensch, all of which apply to his former role as goal keeper, and one, Gefängnis, to his future fate as a murderer.

While there are no other allusive or embodied names from Kafka in Die Angst des Tormanns, Handke follows Kafka's general practice of the suppression of personal names. His previous novel, Der Hausierer (1967), contains no personal names at all. Here there are only three named characters who actually appear in the novel: Josef Bloch; the woman he murders, Gerda T.; and the woman he seeks refuge with, Hertha. Other names are mentioned without their bearers appearing in the novel. As with the Hausierer name, characters are usually designated by their occupation or role. The boyfriend of Hertha is always referred to as "der Sohn des Gutsbesitzers," which recalls "der Sohn des Schlosskastellans" in Kafka's Das Schloss; Handke's character also lives in a castle (p. 64). Just as Kafka suppresses the name Schwarzer, preferring "Sohn des Schlosskastellans," so Handke uses the role or occupation designation even when the personal name is given; Hertha is called "die Pächterin" almost exclusively, while her daughter is always called "die Tochter der Pächterin."

The suppression of the name of Bloch's victim, Gerda, is more logical, since he only learns her name just before murdering her; a movie cashier, she is called "Die Kassiererin" ten times until Bloch

begins to follow her home, from which point on she is called "das Mädchen" (nine times). Bloch's foreman is called only "der Polier"; his former wife and his daughter are only identified by their relation to him, even though he speaks to them on the telephone. Other women Bloch meets are called "das Mädchen" (a girl he has casual sex with [pp. 11-12]), or "die beiden Friseurmädchen" (pp. 56-60).

No character ever addresses another character by personal name in the story even when it would be natural, as in the family of Hertha, or in Bloch's telephone conversations with his former family, or between the two hairdressers. When Gerda supplies her name after he spent the night with her, we read "Bloch hatte es gar nicht wissen wollen" (p. 20), and on the way to Hertha we learn that Bloch only knows her first name, although they had been lovers earlier (p. 30). Thus Handke's naming practice in the story reflects the reluctance of his protagonist to use personal names in his social relations, which conforms to the Kafka-like limited perspective (einsinnige Erzählhaltung).

Turning now to the two women characters, Gerda, the murder victim, and Hertha, the Pächterin to whom Bloch flees, are linked by similar names, each with two syllables, the er-a pattern, and even related consonants. Kafka used name pairs like Grete and Gregor in Die Verwandlung and also between characters' names and his own name, like Samsa--Kafka. The similarity of Gerda and Hertha suggests that

Bloch relates to both women in the same way, and indeed one senses a potential for violence toward Hertha (and other unnamed women in the story), just as was actually carried out toward Bloch's real victim, Gerda.

Gerda's given name, announced just before her death, possibly a contributing factor to Bloch's decision to strangle her, is enlarged by later newspaper reports, which refer to her as Gerda T. (p. 71). This is consistent with journalistic practice in referring to victims and suspects, but also recalls Josef K. of Der Prozess.

The etymology of the women's names may be mentioned. Both are from Germanic mythology: Gerda was the wife of the God Freyer, while Hertha is equivalent to Nerthus, the Mother Earth of old German folklore. It seems likely that these are accidental echoes just as would occur with many common German given names. More interesting is the allusive quality attained for Hertha's name by the fact that Bloch is a former football player: Hertha is the name of a well-known Berlin team. Thus in a sense Bloch regains at least a nominal proximity to his old sport by travelling to "Hertha."

The most familiar naming device in literature is the sprechende Name, the tag name which denotes a quality through the normal meaning of the name-word. When speaking to Gerda before the murder, Bloch mentions the name of another football player, Sturzen (p. 20). The name is given added importance by the fact that Bloch writes it on a newspaper which is left in Gerda's apartment and serves as a clue in

the search for the murderer, as reported in newspapers (p. 107). The theme of dumbness, inarticulateness, permeates the border town setting to which Bloch goes after his deed. A missing boy there who is later found drowned by Bloch himself (p. 62) is referred to as "der stumme Schüler" (p. 72). A school custodian tells Bloch that all the children of the neighborhood are hardly able to speak complete sentences: "'Eigentlich sind alle mehr oder weniger sprechbehindert,' sagte der Schuldiener" (p. 89). "Sprechbehindert," as well as "stumm," is used about the missing boy (pp. 31, 107). Of course, Josef Bloch himself shares the village problem of communication difficulties, so that after his tortured attempts to converse, his final eloquent analysis of a goalie's role in a game has been viewed by some critics as an act of liberation or mental recovery: Christa K. Dixon in Sprachkunst 3 (1972), H. 1, pp. 75-97 and Gustav Zürcher in Text und Kritik H 24/24a (1976), pp. 38-56.

In addition to Stumm, Bloch also refers to "Viktor... ein Bekannter von mir" (p. 59); this could also be viewed as a denotative tag-name in the context of a sports career of victories and defeats.

Immediately before, in identifying himself to the two Friseurmädchen he has just met, he states that he has been a football goal keeper. "Er erklärte, dass Torhüter länger aktiv sein könnten als Feldspieler. 'Zamora war schon ziemlich alt,' sagte Bloch" (p. 57). In contrast to Stumm and Viktor, Zamora is an historical figure: Ricardo Zamora played internationally for Spain

between the world wars. One of the best goalies of the period, he nevertheless suffered a great failure in a game against England where he allowed several easy goals at the beginning. Thus he was in disgrace, discredited, which we can imagine may have been the fate of Bloch, who is unable to accept his early retirement from professional sports.

All of these "other" names in Die Angst des Tormanns—names of persons who do not appear in the story—are mentioned in two conversations with women, in both of which Bloch feels the same disorientation because of his partners' way of speaking: their assumptions of shared knowledge contrast with his pedantic correctness. In the first, Gerda mentions a "Freddy" and a place, the "Stephanskeller," while he mentions his former supervisor the "Polier" and a "Fussballspieler namens Sturm" (p. 20).

In the second conversation, with the two "Friseurmädchen," Bloch mentions "Zamora" (p. 57), "Viktor" and a "Schiedsrichter," a football referee (p. 59). In between the two girls produce a little explosion of gossip which is reported indirectly.

Ausserdem sprachen sie von Dingen und vor allem von Personen, die er nicht kennen konnte, als ob er sie kennen müsste und eingeweiht sei. Maria habe Otto die Krokodilledertasche auf den Kopf geschlagen. Der Onkel sei hinunter in den Keller gekommen, habe Alfred in den Hof gejagt und die italilenische Köchin mit einer Birkenrute geschlagen. Eduard habe sie an der Abzweigung aussteigen lassen, so dass sie mitten in der Nacht zu Fuss nach Hause gehen musste; sie sei durch den Kindsmörderwald gegangen, damit Walter und Karl sie nicht auf dem Ausländerweg

gehen sahen, und habe schliesslich die Ballschuhe ausgezogen, die ihr Herr Friedrich geschenkt habe. (p. 58)

This apparently random free association montage in which not even the individual speaker is distinguished--the two girls are treated as a unit, like the drei Zimmerherren in Kafka's Die Verwandlung--is nevertheless thematically related to the events of the story. Violence and aggressive behavior in erotic situations echo the depicted incidents in the life of Bloch. While the Maria-Otto incident is obviously unrelated to the uncle's breaking up of an apparent tryst between Alfred and the Italian cook, the following "sie" who is put out of Eduard's car may refer to one of the Friseurmädchen or, as would be grammatically correct, to the last mentioned feminine person, the cook. Her foreignness relates to the "American" money motif and to the location of Grenzort where the action is taking place, as well as to the geographic designation "Ausländerweg" which follows. The other location mentioned, "Kindsmörderwald," relates to the "stumme Schüler," who was believed to have been murdered. The locations are also linked phonetically in various ways, as were the names Gerda and Hertha; the "Krokodilledertasche" is like the "Ballschuhe," and the "Birkenrute" relates to "Abzweigung" and "Wald."

Rather than trying to grasp the sequence, which has the inner logic of a dream, the repetitions of a modern poem as a whole, Bloch

drives the reported incidents further apart by specific questions which isolate the separate items.

Endlich fragte er, ob Alfred ihr Freund sei; ob immer eine Birkenrute auf dem Schrank liege; ob Herr Friedrich ein Vertreter sei; und ob der Ausländerweg deswegen so hiesse, weil er vielleicht an einer Ausländersiedlung vorbeiführe. (p. 59)

On the onomastic level I applied a number of tests to the seven names in the Friseurmädchen sequence. Since E. M. Rajec has published a complete study of Kafka's names (Namen und ihre Bedeutungen im Werke Franz Kafkas. Bern: Peter Lang, 1977) I could quickly establish that each name, except Walter, occurred in one or another of Kafka's works, but in no meaningful pattern. (Of course uncles and cooks occur in Kafka as well.) We seem to have accidental repetitions of common German names, even though the embodied name of Josef Bloch leads us to search for other Kafka name allusions.

Maria is the name of Handke's own mother, but his father's name was Bruno, and connections to other figures in Handke's own life could not be established. Various anagram and acrostic patterns could not be discovered, nor did the group seem to be prefigured in any historical, political, or literary name set. Apparently Handke is here simply using realistic names, appropriate to the social class and geographical setting of the speakers, without exploiting the allusive or denotative opportunity provided by this cluster of names in a text otherwise notable for proper name avoidance.

One might say finally that Handke's use of personal names is not very systematic. A few clear examples of significant nameplay, both allusive and denotative, are not supported by other examples, such as this name group which is purely self contained and inwardly organized like a dream or a poem, without external reference.

Turning to the identification of locale in Die Angst des Tor-  
manns, it may be noted that no specific place names, either real or fictional, are provided in the story. The country (Austria) is not named, although places where Bloch's team played abroad like the United States or Brazil are indirectly referred to (p. 84). Neither the city in which the story begins (Vienna) nor the border town to which Bloch flees after the murder (identified by critics as Jennersdorf in Burgenland) is named in the text. This corresponds to the masking procedure of Kafka, who never mentions Prague, Austria-Hungary or Czechoslovakia in his fiction; Das Urteil, Die Verwandlung and Der Prozess take place in an unspecified home city, while Karl Rossmann goes out to an Amerika full of exact, correct place names.

Handke's two locales are not treated in exactly the same way. For the opening city, many clues are provided which make it clear that we are in Vienna, although the city-name is suppressed: the Prater (p. 16), the Naschmarkt (p. 7), the Stephanskeller (p. 20), as well as the zweiter Bezirk (pp. 16, 21, 23) where Bloch lives, clearly reveal the Viennese location. Kafka never gives widely-known Prague

locations such as the Hradschin, the Moldau, or Josefstadt to indirectly reveal the setting of Der Prozess.

The town to which Bloch goes by bus is always referred to as the "Grenzort," a characteristic Kafka symbolic double name, like "Strafkolonie" or "Hungerkünstler." The country across the border is never identified, although Bloch may have to cross the border to escape the fast-closing police net. Although Bloch's wanderings through the town and its environs up to the border itself are described in detail, specific names such as his hotel, the inn run by Hertha, or street names are never given. Naturally in a small-town environment they would not have the easy recognizability which Viennese locations have.

Handke exploits the allusive quality of "Grenzort" much as he does the personal name "Stumm," but beyond this prefers the anonymity which suggests universality, familiar from Kafka. The border here is not only between two countries, but between insanity and normality, between life and death, freedom and capture. The city locale, not being named, is like all big cities, but Handke also reveals through minor place names that it is his own place of residence, that the story is in some way autobiographical or relevant to his own life. Yet he eschews the same self-referential possibility in naming his hero in a literary-allusive rather than a self-allusive way as his model for naming procedures, Kafka, does. On the level of personal names, his hero's name says he is like Kafka's accused characters in

Der Prozess--who are like Kafka, who is like Handke, in that Handke uses him as a model for naming and in many other ways. Thus Josef Bloch refers ultimately back to Handke himself.

From the total suppression of personal names in Der Hausierer, Handke has moved on to a rather arbitrary onomasticon, using individual names on an isolated basis for specific purposes, generally consistent with Kafka's practice, but without seeking an integrated pattern of nomenclature.

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