



THE TULIPS OF EVIL
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Being out on the fringes of the Grunewald, the seasons are sharp at the Wiko. Our flat was surrounded by green leaves when my son and I arrived on the last day of August. Sitting on the balcony, with branches pressed up against the metalwork, was like sitting in a tree house. It was not long before the leaves around the Villa Walther started to fall, revealing for the first time the lake, and shortly afterwards a trace of early-winter ice. The woods became stark, the air a little crisp on the fingers. There was a little snow, though not much, and some harsh winter rides on the bicycle. I was enjoying this contact with the seasons right up until the first signs of spring. What could be more delightful, I

thought, than those early flowers of the new year, poking up through the grass by the lakeside like a collection of happy little smiles on sticks?

One day in March it occurred to me that the meaning of these seasons was horribly inverted. Spring was to be understood as the autumn of my sabbatical. It was a time of foreboding; it was the beginning of the end. The flowers of the Wiko garden are death-like. In vain I looked each morning for that trace of ice on the lake, for something that might keep warmth at bay. I was confronted with withering, dressed as renewal. Never has the crocus seemed so cruel; I am still haunted by those awful tulips.

You will infer I'd become attached to the Wiko. It is a year I shall look back on fondly, the pain of its passing aside. I suppose it was somewhat different from what I imagined – I arrived with the notion I was going to write. A successful year, it seemed to me then, would be measured in words written. I'd been building up to my first sabbatical for a few years, and I'd heard it was a time to set thoughts down. By the end of September I'd written two articles – things were moving fast and I was not unsatisfied, some concerns about sustainability notwithstanding. If I could write two pieces in one month, and if the Fellowship was a ten-month stint, then ... well, we can all do the maths.

One of the early dividends of the Wiko year was to relieve me of this mindset. By October, I was exploring a different conception of the sabbatical year. The big lie of research leave, it now seemed to me, was the notion that it should be a time of visible productivity. On the contrary, what distinguished this period, I now felt, was the licence *not* to write. It was a time to read, talk, and change one's mind. This is a model I was fairly faithful to throughout the year, though I did, alas, do some writing too.

The Wiko is a place of reassuring structure, where everything has its right place. Its institutional rhythms, one week to the next, are a significant part of its charm. Who says Wednesday, says salad buffet. Who says Tuesday, says tables with tablecloths, and a Colloquium too, let's not forget. I found these banal repetitions a great source of comfort, easing my passage to an unhurried outlook. Rhythms are the opposite of deadlines, unburdening each moment of its claim to be the last. They helped me push back the future a little.

The sense of structure was enhanced as our four-year-old son Arbien also became attuned to the rhythms of Wiko life. The autumn months were when he first started to organise expectations around the different days of the week. Thursday became "Wiko dinner day", and Wednesday the day before Wiko dinner day – these landmarks set seamlessly alongside Kindergarten highlights such as Music, Gym, the once-a-week

Breakfast, and the daily dash to be in time for the morning *Kreis*. As a family – my wife was a Fellow too – I believe we can say with some certainty where we were at any given moment in the week. If the timetable has its origins in the monastery, the combined force of Kindergarten and Wiko keeps it prominent in the lives of Fellows and their families, in a form that is largely soothing.

My research in this period took two main directions. On the one hand I worked on issues of politics and time, especially the relationship between democracy and the periodicity of institutions. I was interested in the different temporal structures of competing forms – of elections and referenda, for example – and in the disruptions posed by irregular forms of politics whose temporality is unclear. The contemporary crisis of the EU was a source of inspiration. In parallel, I completed a book manuscript with my wife Lea on the philosophical foundations of the political party. At a time when this mode of citizenship appears in trouble, institutionally compromised and widely despised, our research looked at why parties were ever thought conducive to democracy, what was ethically specific to this political form and why credible political movements continue to seek to reinvent it in the light of the limitations of competing forms.

Did the Wiko environment contribute something distinctive to this work? I guess it is too soon to say. Certainly I had some intriguing lunchtime discussions that pointed me to fields of reading I would not otherwise have visited – on the place of rhythm in musical theory for example, which I came to believe offers more than just a metaphor for the place of periodicity in political institutions. I benefitted greatly from colleagues' analysis of live political developments in our EU study group – a regular gathering of the Fellows working on politics and law – and from the Wiko's organisational support in arranging a workshop on "Ideologies and EU Design". And the library support, of course, is famously excellent. As I digressed for a month into some work on the temporality of climate change, that support looked increasingly like full-blown research assistance.

But something more diffuse that stuck with me, the quiet lesson of each Colloquium perhaps, was simply the value of a large research project. In the social sciences especially, researchers at British universities are assessed increasingly by reference to the articles they write. There is no professional need to dedicate oneself to a long-term, cumulative project, and conferences typically consist of stand-alone papers. At the Wiko, the presence of Fellows from disciplines and countries where this is less true, and the idea that one identify oneself by reference to one's project, was a valuable reminder and corrective. It may be that this is the influence that will stay with me longest.

I enjoyed almost every Colloquium hugely. Fools admire, but men of sense approve. I admired. The quality of presentations seemed very high to me. If anything, they lapsed occasionally into a performance, something almost too accomplished. Perhaps it was in the discussions thereafter over lunch that the Wiko felt most like itself, as we grappled with the topics in more speculative fashion. It felt even more so in the German class and at the weekly *Deutschisch*. There is something about speaking under the heading of language-learning that seems conducive to exploratory discussion. Maybe it's to do with relieving people of their authority, or with a kind of "plausible deniability" that comes when words are said just for the purpose of saying, when they fulfil their purpose in the moment of delivery. I don't normally talk much about traditions in farming or why parents may be more reluctant to kill off Father Christmas than God, but led by the thoughtful efforts of our teacher Eva, such topics were surprisingly compelling *auf Deutsch*.

One of the striking features of contemporary Berlin is the contrasting connotations it carries as a city. It stands, famously, on the one hand as the capital of alternative cool, a status shaped amongst other things by cheap housing, its music scene, the absence of a major financial sector and a certain tranquillity on the streets. Maybe Grunewald is not the obvious place to experience this cool, but Reinhard's can offer you a lazy brunch, and the Wiener Café's cakes are pretty cool. *On the other hand*, Berlin is the capital of political Europe – a symbol of power, even of domination. Our stay at the Wiko coincided with the sharpening of this tension, as Berlin the capital became paired with Athens as two poles in a pan-European contest. As the events progressed, one had to wonder whether the dissonance would become too much.

I look back on this year also as the year that my father died. He died towards the end of winter, sometime when the vegetation was filling up outside. The Wiko staff were characteristically sensitive and kind, both when I was regularly travelling to London, and in the period thereafter, especially in making my mother feel welcome. For both my parents, as scholars of *Germanistik*, Berlin has been an important city over the years, a place of many extended visits. Their Berlin was a divided Berlin, but also a place of new beginnings. The warmth of the Wiko staff had particular meaning for me, in the context of their affection for the city and its intellectual life. I shall remember the year not least for its place in the family record.