

"No one", Hem had said to me at the time, "no party, no world-view or movement, can afford to propagate absolute evil declaratively and from the outset. Because most people are not fundamentally evil! They are stupid, selfish and tactless. But not evil. Therefore, it would not be possible to win over a large crowd with a recognisably evil programme. Consequently, all isms and ideologies that have ever existed, whether that be the Catholic Church or Communism, have had to appeal to people first in well-meaning and decent maxims."

This conversation had taken place in his large flat where he lived alone as a widower. The flat was in an old house on Fürstenberger Strasse near Grüneburg Park, and from the window one could see the beautiful trees and the wide meadows of the park and the high-rise buildings that had sprung up in it.

This flat was much too big for Hem, he didn't use all the rooms. He had already lived here with his father until his father died thirty years ago. Hem collected old scores and had a large library of musicians' biographies, works on the history of music and interpretations of all important compositions. He had the largest record collection I knew of and a complicated stereo speaker system. He still had his cello, and sometimes when I visited him he would play for me. His favourite composer was the Swiss Othmar Schoeck. He loved him more than anything, he was of course a member of the Othmar Schoeck Society and owned all the records of recordings of Schoeck's music.

On the day he spoke to me about human malevolence and human small-scale thinking, the Concerto in B flat major for violin and orchestra (>Quasi una fantasia<), written in 1911 - 1912, sounded from the stereo speakers in his music room. It was not a concerto in the true sense of the word, but rather the monologue of a violin accompanied by the orchestra, with horn, clarinet and oboe dominating.

The music rang through the beautiful room with its Empire furniture. I sat opposite Hem, who was sucking on his pipe, and listened to the music of his favourite composer and himself.

The first movement sounded.

Romanticism à la Eichendorff. So came the introduction. The calls of the horn sounded as if from wonderful forests. As if the moon were rising, a G flat major string chord sounded. And there was the violin, the dreaming violin! It rose above all the other instruments, wistfully mourning a love, an enchanted love, long gone, past, lost ... .

Hem said: "It is becoming clearer and clearer to me, boy, that certain people use beautiful, correct and noble concepts only to represent their own interests. I don't understand why so few understand. The maxims serve these people. But these people never serve their maxims! They should live according to their own beliefs-synton, as they say in psychiatry - but they never do. They use their alleged beliefs aggressively, to achieve power, for no other reason ... ."

The violin sang. Hart tried to interrupt an allegro, but it was displaced by the calls of the horn. The horn was one with the violin in its grief. Suddenly an interlude of high and low strings blared forth. Then the violin was alone again with its love, its memory, its longing.

Hem said: "It always depends on the motive from which one uses guiding or faith phrases. The motives, God help us and our world, were and are evil at all times. The sentences were not, could not and should not be!

How else could they have seized the masses, carried them away, roused them, made them compliant and ready to sacrifice? That, Walter, you see, is the greatest crime ever committed against human beings - at all times, under all regimes: that they were entered into with concepts and qualities and pipe dreams which from the outset - if we forget their corrupt, criminal initiators - were absolutely good, had to be good!"

The wild feelings of the first movement calmed down, the recapitulation came, cautiously, more gently, more composed. I looked out of the window, it was September, and the trees and bushes were glowing red and gold, yellow and brown, and in an already altogether unearthly splendour once more before they would fall and die. And I heard Hem say: "It is grotesque, and everyone avoids talking about it now, but I do: That

someone should be honest, faithful, brave, athletic, hardened and healthy, there is really nothing to object to, by God. But the fact that people who proclaim such things and want to be so, then murder six million Jews and break out their teeth and make lampshades out of their skin and are responsible for the greatest war of all times and nameless misery and suffering - that shows particularly clearly how mendacious this mentality was, how deeply diabolical and evil. But that does not mean that you can also call the qualities I mentioned evil and diabolical in one go! You can never say that brave and faithful, daring, honest, sincere and sacrificial are bad qualities! They are good qualities!"

"You don't exclude the Nazis?" cried I, startled. "But the Nazis were really criminals, Hem! You can't ... ."

"Slow down," he said, "slow down, boy. Of course they were criminals. The biggest. But even they had built good into their programme, into their ideology, had had to build it in. They couldn't just say: 'We want war! We want to exterminate the Jews and so and so many peoples! That simply didn't work. That wouldn't have worked!'"

"But in the party programme they were already talking about Lebensraum and racial purity, and then they were already blatantly anti-Semitic!"

"I know what a crazy programme it was. But it was also a crazy time, boy! I only want to prove to you that even the greatest criminals did not dare to appear before the people without the propagation of good, decent aims ... >freedom and bread< ... >work for all< ... >cleanliness and order< ... ." "And the Jewish question?"

"That was particularly hell-bent," Hem said. "I'll get to that, later. The Nazis wanted to appeal to the German people and simply called the Jews un-Germans. In response, promptly the faithful, honest and brave disciples of the Sun God raped and then dismembered Jewish girls! The venerable clergy invented I don't know how many hundred kinds of fornication at some council, then, in the confessional, got horny for hours confessing the girls and finally seduced them ... . But that is not why the Morag terms are to be rejected in themselves! That is the great confusion that occurs again and again in our time. Do you realise that now?"

"Yes, Hem," I said. The >grave< of the second movement began hopelessly and darkly. An organ. Woodwinds. They were trying to fight the darkness. And there was the solo violin again, and it truly sounded as if the instrument was weeping, weeping for a love that no longer existed. And autumn sunshine made the colourful leaves of the Grüneburg Park glow wonderfully ... .

Hem said: "You can, like everything else, also pervert the guiding principle of freedom! This has happened with all ideologies since time immemorial and is happening today - in the East and in the West! The Nazis did the complete opposite of what good they preached! They let their youth, so pure, strong and brave, die senselessly in their millions on the battlefields so that Goering, that pig, could steal his artwork together and inject himself with his morphine and Goebbels could sleep with all the film actresses and Hitler, that horrible psychopath, could grow from a petty bourgeois existence into that of a god! Look at communism! I subscribe to its maxims one hundred percent! What comes closer to a religion than communism? Freedom! Equality! Fraternity! Abolition of all property not acquired by the individual! What can be more wonderful? And where are the twenty-five million who lost their lives in Stalin's purges? Or, please, name me a more beautiful sentence than >Love your neighbour as yourself<! And what oppression, what horror, the death of how many millions did the Crusades and the Inquisition bring? What enormous guilt has the Church brought upon itself? And all this in the name of the cross, in the name of God!"

"And what about the others? With the democracies?" I asked. "A democracy is not an ideology," Hem said. "But that's why my theory applies here too. With one small reservation: if a democracy is very old and firmly established - as in England - then even the most corrupt can struggle to destroy it. But they do succeed. They just have a harder time - that's the whole difference. Just look at it, the American Declaration of Independence!" He quoted: " >We hold the following truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable

Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ... !< - Wonderful, eh? Magnificent, eh? All men are created equal! And what is happening to black people in the USA? To what extent has corruption and violence and crime already undermined this democracy? The right to happiness! Who cares about the millions of miserable people? A few hundred families in America own three quarters of the entire wealth of this earth! The right to life! And if you walk through Central Park, even during the day, you must expect to be killed today! Nowhere in the world is there such crime! What happened to the murderer of Kennedy? What happened to the murderer of Martin Luther King? Born free and independent! And what is going on in Vietnam? Who is slaughtering the Viet Cong there like cattle in a war that has not even been declared, because he sees the enemy only as cattle, as vermin to be exterminated, just as the Nazis exterminated and destroyed the >Untermenschen< ... . It's the same, it's always the same everywhere and at all times and in all places," Hem said.

The second movement. Fear, misfortune, futile toil resounded in it. The main theme came again - still full of hope, in contrast to the sadness and lament of the introduction. There! A joyous B major passage overwhelmed everything, and as if to redeem, liberate and relieve themselves, the violin and clarinet cheerfully joined in. "Look at the programmes of the Blacks and the Social Democrats," Hem said. "How much difference are they really? Hardly at all. Because in our time there are no other programmes than those that want to promote an improvement in the social structure, public health, prosperity, security, monetary stability and cultural development! Today it is clear to everyone, from the shoe-shine boy to the general manager, what can be done alone! Who will declare in his programme: " >We do not let the children do gymnastics, because we want them to have pot bellies< ? Or if a party declares: >We propagate the smoking of hashish<, then they will be sent packing! So the programmes have become quite insignificant! They are never fulfilled! They are nothing but the slogans of advertising agencies designed to keep groups of ice-cold egocentrics and egotists in power ... . Listen, that's the main theme of the final sentence that comes forward here, but it doesn't assert itself. The repressed suffering comes forward full force. There, now we're in B flat minor, and what follows is something like a love monologue that you could almost put into words, do you feel? There is unhappiness and fear ... . And there, in the third movement, come once more the love memories of the introduction ... ." Hem listened to the music of this genius for a long time. Then he said, in his mind: "It is unfortunately the case that the assertion of a party's aims is ultimately possible only for a primitive type who has neither the intelligence nor the maturity to really see through the situation. Therefore, once in power, this type will immediately turn on the time factor! He will say: Now, in order to remain in power, I must eliminate all political opponents as quickly as possible, fill all posts with my people and - there you have it - make rotten compromises in my programme and come to a sham understanding with groups that are hostile in themselves - be it with the Church, be it with the Communists, be it with the Nazis, be it with the hawks or with the doves, with Democrats or Republicans , just so that I remain in power! And by this primitive mechanism, all systems will ultimately, by law, never represent the interests of the good, the decent, the poor and the small. Only the power pool will ever be promoted.

Do you understand?"

I nodded.

"The primitive has his hands full with eliminating or even liquidating those who could be dangerous to him, with whom no lazy compromises can be made. Your question from earlier - the Jews! Hitler and his gangster friends knew that the Jews were cleverer, that they possessed an older culture - what do I say older, culture is enough, the Nazis had none at all! - that they had power thanks to cleverness. So it was to be expected that the Jews would be Hitler's mortal enemies, that they would and had to bring him down! So Hitler anticipated their fight in the party programme as an incentive for the rabble, and, once in power, he destroyed the Jews! The Catholic Church knew very well that it was threatened by the Enlighteners. So: Kill them quickly, exterminate the rabble - even

if they were many thousands! Stalin knew that the intellectuals, that anyone who developed independent socialist thoughts, represented a deadly danger to him. So: kill them, exterminate them! Even if it was many millions! The American patent democrats feared that their corruption and exploitative economic methods would be exposed. So: the witch hunt of Mr McCarthy! Anyone who was not in favour of the hot-blooded hero of the New World, anyone who expressed the slightest doubt, had to be persecuted, was a ... ."

"Communist," I said.

"That's right, a communist. You had to lock him up, you had to ban him from working, you had to eliminate him. From this stupidity, from this imbecility, from this narrow-mindedness, this low way of thinking, arise all the crimes of our earth. Narrowness is the misfortune, not the fundamental evil of man ... ."

Over the music, through the open window, I heard the laughter and shouts of children playing in the park, and I am thinking, as I write this, that the children in the Vrchlického sady park in Prague were playing and laughing and shouting just as they were in the parks of Moscow and Rome, of New York and Warsaw, of Peking and Johannesburg. Hem said: "It is so, it was so, it will always be so, that individual people or groups of people use a doctrine that is correct in itself - there are only a few, most likely the great religions, not their propagators, I exclude them! - misuse it to develop their own power. Oh, and the counter-movements today all over the world, under all regimes, in the Church, who say what I have just said, they go ahead blindly, seeing ghosts, and throw out the baby with the bathwater, destroying the last good thing about order! Inexperienced in the actual circumstances, thoughtless and revolutionary, the new prophets strike to the right and to the left and let everything go to pieces that still holds this world together ...!

Freedom! Happiness! At least in an interlude. The violin sang blissfully, the woodwinds rejoiced with it ... .

Hem said, "Why am I talking about this? Why do I have to think about it all the time? Because I and you and all of us face this phenomenon every day - in a small way."

"You mean at BLITZ?"

"At BLITZ, yes," he said sadly. "There was the time of the beginning, the time without ideologies and maxims and computers."

"A beautiful time," I said. Gone was happiness and freedom for the violin. Despair, sorrow and suffering came to the fore. And the violin, the violin sang, sang in the prison of its memories and its longing. "A good time," I said again.

Hem nodded and sucked on his pipe.

"Because we had no ideology," he said, "no schemes, no dogmas. Today we can choose the cleanest and best subjects in the world. The moment we put them into words and images within the framework of this apparatus, they are corrupted, all of them! Look at your own series of triumphs. What is actually wrong with sensible sex education?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Nothing," he said. "In our age of communication, such sex education would be heartily welcomed - if only, and here we are, the whole enterprise were not designed and set up from the outset to make Mr Herford and his mummy earn crooked and lame!"

"And me too," I said.

"And so do you, and so do I, and so do we all," said Hem. "In the Bible that Herford is so fond of reading, it says, >If you do not come to your senses, you will all perish<." He shook his head, "We will not reflect. No one. No one in this world. Not us little ones, not the big ones. We will all perish."

The full orchestra began, once again the violin gathered all its strength in a tragic revolt, then its last farewell faded away, touching the heart.