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FOREWORD
BY DUNYA MIKHAIL

Charlotte Beradt, a progressive journalist in Berlin, wakes up one morning to the unsettling reality of Hitler's ascent to power. Not long after that 30th day of January 1933, she finds herself in the grip of a harrowing nightmare. Drenched in sweat, teeth clenched, she struggles to shake off the horrors that plagued her sleep—chased, shot at, tortured, scalped. Night after night, these tormenting dreams persist until a thought dawns on her: She must not be alone. The dreams that filled her nights must fill the nights of others in these dark times. So Beradt begins to collect dreams from trusted neighbors and friends, documenting the dreamscapes induced by the regime as compelling evidence of its tyranny.

This task proved challenging. Many people were fearful of sharing their dreams. Beradt recounts several instances of individuals dreaming that dreams themselves were outlawed (but they dreamed anyway). A woman confided that, in her dream, the police used a mind-reading device. As her favorite opera *The Magic Flute* crescendoed to the line "That is the devil, certainly," she found herself ensnared. The authorities detected that she thought of Hitler as the devil. Another dreamer, a twenty-two-year-old woman with a delicately shaped but noticeably curved nose, thought everyone assumed she was Jewish. Her dreams were full of noses and identity papers, then "suddenly there was

a scream: They're coming! Everyone there knew who 'they' were and what our crime was. Run, run away! I went looking for a high-up hiding place—up in the trees? on top of a cupboard in the restaurant? Suddenly I was lying at the bottom of a big pile of dead bodies, I didn't know how they got there, but at last I'd found a good hiding place."

Four weeks after Hitler took power, Beradt faced a publishing ban on her work and, amid the sweeping crackdown on Communists after the Reichstag Fire Decree, endured arrest alongside her husband, Heinz Pol. Once released, Beradt secretly resumed her task of gathering dreams from her fellow Germans, Jews and non-Jews. She refrained from revealing her purpose because she wanted their answers to be as unembellished as possible. Over a period of six years, she gathered around three hundred dreams—windows into the soul of a nation in turmoil.

The Nazis viewed intellectuals, writers, and journalists as threats to their system. Many liberal writers, like Beradt, were seen as obstacles to the dissemination of Nazi ideology, and were thus targeted for harassment, arrest, and imprisonment. Beradt's seminal work stands as a powerful testament to one such moment in history, with profound insights that can be gleaned from the dreams of those who lived through it. Witnessing firsthand the erosion of democratic freedoms and the systematic persecution of minority groups, Beradt became increasingly alarmed by the rapid descent into dictatorship, and the chilling ways these dreams mirrored, anticipated, or even enacted Nazi terror. Ranging from the surreal to the hauntingly familiar, they offer a glimpse into the subconscious of a nation under totalitarianism, where even the most intimate thoughts are subject to scrutiny.

In Kafka's story "The Metamorphosis," the protagonist Gregor Samsa awakens one morning to find himself transformed into a

Three days after Hitler seized power, Mr. S., about sixty years old, the owner of a mid-sized factory, had a dream in which no one touched him physically and yet he was broken. This short dream depicted the nature and effects of totalitarian domination as numerous studies by political scientists, sociologists, and doctors would later define them, and did so more subtly and precisely than Mr. S. would ever have been able to do while awake. This was his dream:

> Goebbels came to my factory. He had all the employees line up in two rows, left and right, and I had to stand between the rows and give a Nazi salute. It took me half an hour to get my arm raised, millimeter by millimeter. Goebbels watched my efforts like a play, without any sign of appreciation or displeasure, but when I finally had my arm up, he spoke five words: "I don't want your salute." Then he turned around and walked to the door. So there I was in my own factory, among my own people, pilloried with my arm raised. The only way I was physically able to keep standing there was by fixing my eyes on his clubfoot as he limped out. I stood like that until I woke up.

Mr. S. was a self-confident, honest and upright man, almost a little dictatorial. His factory had been the most important thing to him throughout his long life. As a Social Democrat, he had employed many of his old Party comrades over the past twenty years. It is fair to say that what happened to him in his dream was a kind of psychological torture, as I spontaneously called it

when he told me his dream in 1933, a few weeks after he'd had it. Now, though, in hindsight, we can also find in the dream—expressed in images of uncanny, sleepwalkerish clarity—themes of alienation, uprooting, isolation, loss of identity, a radical break in the continuity of one's life: concepts that have been widely popularized, and, at the same time, widely mythologized. This man had to dishonor and debase himself in the factory that was practically his whole sense of self, and do so in front of employees representing his lifelong political views—the very people over whom he is a paternalistic authority figure, with this sense of authority being the most powerful component of who he feels he is as a person. Such humiliation ripped the roots up out of the soil he had made his own, robbed him of his identity, and completely disoriented him; he felt alienated not only from the realities of his life but from his own character, which no longer felt authentic to him.

Here we have a man who dreamed of political and psychological phenomena drawn directly from real life—a few days after a current political event, the so-called "seizure of power." He dreamed about these phenomena so accurately that the dream captured the two forms of alienation so often equated or confused with each other: alienation from the environment and alienation from oneself. And he came to an accurate conclusion: that his attempt in front of everyone to toe the Nazi line,[1] his public humiliation, ended up being nothing but a rite of passage into a new world of totalitarian power—a political maneuver, a cold and cynical human experiment in applying state power to break the individual's will. The fact that the factory owner crumbled without resistance, but also without his downfall having any purpose or meaning, makes his dream a perfect parable for the creation of the submissive totalitarian subject. By the time he stands there at the end of the dream, unable

to lower his arm again now that he's finally raised it, staring at Goebbels's clubfoot in petty revenge against the man who holds all the true power and only in that way managing to stay on his own two feet at all, his selfhood has been methodically demolished with the most up-to-date methods, like an old-fashioned house that has to make way for the new order. And yet what has happened to him, while sad, is hardly a tragedy—it even has something of a farce about it. The dream depicts not so much an individual's fate as a typical event in the process of transformation. He has not even become unheroic, much less an antihero—he has become a non-person.

This dream kept its grip on Mr. S. and recurred many times, always with new humiliating details. "Sweat ran down my face as I struggled to raise my arm, and it looked like tears, like I was crying in front of Goebbels." Or: "I looked at my workers' faces, in search of sympathy or reassurance, but the faces didn't even show scorn or contempt—they were empty." On one occasion, the dream expressed its message with devastating clarity, dumbed down to the most obvious level: During the half-hour struggle to raise his arm, his spine broke.

None of this should be taken to mean that Mr. S.'s dream made him a broken man in real life, or, in the other direction, that he had these dreams because he was broken. While suffering somewhat under the regime, he remained free, in relatively good spirits, and encountered no particular difficulties in his business for a long time. But the dream left a deep impression on him—"left its mark" on him, as he put it. When he told me his dream, during a discussion of politics, his face turned red and his voice shook. Even though it recurred, this dream should not be seen as a retreat into the pathological world of obsessive thoughts; it expressed the real compulsion and coercion going on around him, and even if he may not have understood the

underlying nature of these circumstances, he picked up on it and logically thought it through in his dream.

Paul Tillich, the philosopher and theologian, had the same kind of dream for months after leaving Germany in 1933 and testified to its nature and effects on the dreamer: "For months I dreamed about [the experience of Nazism], literally, and woke with the feeling that our existence was being changed. In my conscious time I felt that we could escape the worst, but my subconscious knew better."[2]

The factory owner's dream—what should we call it? "The Dream of the Raised Arm"? "The Dream of Remaking the Individual"?—seemed to have come directly from the same workshop where the totalitarian regime was putting together the mechanisms by which it would function overall. It confirmed an idea I had already had in passing: that dreams like this should be preserved for posterity. They might serve as evidence, if the Nazi regime as a historical phenomenon should ever be brought to trial, for they seemed full of information about people's emotions, feelings, and motives while they were being turned into cogs of the totalitarian machine. Someone who sits down to keep a diary does so intentionally, and shapes, clarifies, and obscures the material in the process. Dreams of this kind, in contrast—not diaries but nightaries, you might say[3]—emerge from involuntary psychic activity, even as they trace the internal effects of external political events as minutely as a seismograph. Thus dream images might help interpret the structure of a reality about to turn into a nightmare.

And so I began to collect the dreams that the Nazi dictatorship had as it were dictated. It was not entirely an easy matter, since more than a few people were nervous about telling me their dreams; I even ran across the dream "It's forbidden to

dream but I'm dreaming anyway" a half dozen times in almost identical form.

I asked the people I came into contact with about their dreams; I didn't have much access to enthusiastic supporters of the regime, or people benefiting from it, and their internal reactions in this context would in any case not have been particularly useful. I asked the dressmaker, the neighbor, an aunt, a milkman, a friend, almost always without revealing my purpose since I wanted their answers to be as unembellished as possible. More than once, their lips were unsealed after I told them my factory owner's dream as an example. Several had been through something similar themselves: dreams about current political events that they had immediately understood and that had made a deep impression on them. Other people were more naïve and not entirely clear on the meaning of their dreams. Naturally, each dreamer's level of understanding and ability to retell their dreams depended on their intelligence and education. Still, whether young lady or old man, manual laborer or professor, however good or bad their memory or expressive ability, all had dreams containing aspects of the relationship between the totalitarian regime and the individual that had not yet been academically formulated, like the elements of "crushing someone's personhood" in the factory owner's dream.

It goes without saying that all these dream images were sometimes touched up by the dreamer, consciously or unconsciously. We all know that how a dream is described depends heavily on when it is written down, whether right away or later—dreams written down the same night, as many of my examples were, are of greatest documentary value. When written down later, or retold from memory, conscious ideas play a greater role in the description. But even aside from the fact that

it is also interesting to hear how much the waking mind "knew" and supplemented the dream with images from the real environment, these particular dreams about political current events were especially intense, relatively uncomplicated, and less disjointed and erratic than most dreams, since after all they were unambiguously determined. Typically they consisted of a coherent, even dramatic story, and so were easy to remember. And in fact they were remembered—spontaneously, without artificial help—unlike most dreams, especially painful dreams, which are quickly forgotten. (Remembered so well that quite a lot of them were told to me with the same introductory words: "I'll never forget it." And after my first publication on this topic, several people told me dreams that lay ten or twenty years in the past by then, dreams that clearly *were* unforgettable; these retrospective accounts are labeled as such in this book.)

I gathered material in Germany until 1939, when I left the country. Interestingly, the dreams of 1933 and those from later years are remarkably similar. My most revealing examples, however, are from the early, original years of the regime, when it still trod lightly.

Some friends who knew what I was doing helped me, asking around and writing down what they heard. My most important helper was a doctor who had access to a wide range of patients—and he could ask them about their dreams without attracting undue attention. Including the material I obtained second- and thirdhand, I collected dreams from more than three hundred people, so the principles of polling samples would lead to the conclusion that the Third Reich sentenced a very large number of people indeed to similar dreams.

When I received a dream, retold or in writing, I camouflaged my notes or transcriptions as well as I could, for instance replacing "Party" with "family"; calling Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels

Uncle Hans, Uncle Gustav, Uncle Gerhard; writing "flu" instead of "arrest." I hid these bizarre-sounding family stories in the spines of various books in my large library. I didn't have much hope that such pitiful methods would help me if worst came to worst—but what would? Later, I sent the transcriptions to various address in various foreign countries, as letters, where they were waiting for me when I myself had to leave the country.

During the war, I published a small selection of this material in a magazine, as "Dreams under Dictatorship." I was unable to make use of the whole body of material at the time, due to external circumstances.

I'm now glad I didn't compile and discuss my material until a substantial firsthand historical record—facts, documentation, testimony—became available, along with scholarly studies based on it. With its help, I have now been able to try to show psychological reactions and typical behaviors, the immediate effects of total domination on its individual subjects, in a new way: through the documentation of dreams.

I have not included any dreams of physical violence or physiological symptoms of fear, even the most extreme ones. Many dreams began: "I woke up soaked in sweat; yet again, as on so many nights before, I had been shot at, tortured, scalped . . . Blood was streaming down my face, my teeth had been knocked out, I was running for my life with the SA right on my heels." Even among the regime's supporters there were no doubt many who occasionally had such dreams. But there was nothing new about these dreams, except perhaps how common they now were. "Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep": Tyrants have always done so, violence has always done so, and this was not my area of interest. In every era, we find horrible dreams caused by a collective threat, not just by an isolated threat facing a single person, or from psychological tension within a highly

sensitive individual (writers such as Hebbel and Lichtenberg have recorded truly hellish dreams of theirs). Take one such collective situation that is all too common: war. Anxiety dreams from numerous wars have been preserved, but human nature and the expression of human fears remain so similar over time that it is often hard to tell which war they're from, except insofar as the dreams from modern wars overwhelmingly feature modern weapons and the effects of such weapons, since the population as a whole is overwhelmingly vulnerable to them. A dream from World War I symbolizes the dreamer's fears with a frozen prisoner hanging on a pole as starving people rush over to him with knives to carve out the choicest pieces of flesh for their cooking pots, but that same dream might just as well have been dreamed during the Thirty Years' War if it hadn't taken place in a Berlin subway station.

However, even if we didn't know in advance which era the dreams I collected between 1933 and 1939 came from, there could be no doubt about what events underlay them, as widely varied as these dreams are. Their time and place of origin is instantly obvious: They could only have emerged from the paradoxes of life under totalitarianism in the twentieth century, and most of them specifically from Nazi Germany.

Since it is difficult nowadays to narrate dreams without touching on psychological theories, I find it necessary to add the following here: The dreamers in this book are not dealing with conflicts in their private lives, much less conflicts from their past that have left them personally damaged somehow; rather, they are dealing with conflicts caused by a public realm full of stress and agitation from all the half-truths, half-intuitions, facts, rumors, and conjectures floating around in it. These dreams do deal with damaged human relationships, but it is the environment that has damaged them. The "link between

dreams and waking life" here in these "transparent pseudo-dreams," to quote Jean Paul, is rooted directly in the political present that the dreamer finds himself or herself in—fertile soil indeed. They are all but waking dreams. What lies behind them is far from invisible—indeed it is all too visible; their surface content is the same as what underlies them. They have no façade concealing personal contexts and associations, and there is no need for anyone else to interpret how events in the dream are related to events in waking life, the dreamer has already done so in the dream itself.

This kind of dream too employs images, but no one needs to explain its symbols, interpret its allegories—at most, we might have to decode some simple ciphers. The dreams make use of disguises and metamorphoses as easy to understand as the ones in satire or political cartoons; the true identity of the person behind the mask is as easily known as in a masquerade ball or carnival.

So such dreams are not prophetic, despite often seeming to be. Their metaphors came true because these dreamers, with sensitivity sharpened by fear and repulsion, perceived almost imperceptible symptoms in the profusion of daily events, and at least in their dreams refrained from charitably explaining them away. The dreams seem a little like mosaics—surrealistically assembled, perhaps—whose individual tesserae are pieces of the reality of the Third Reich. This is what justifies treating them as relevant to the psychology of totalitarian systems, interpreting them with reference to the concrete situations they illuminate and leaving aside whatever references they may contain to the individual dreamer's psychology. (As we know, representatives of more psychological schools of dream interpretation—Bruno Bettelheim, for instance—were astonished to realize how inapplicable their theories were to the

most extreme circumstances of the totalitarian state: the concentration camps.)

What we have in these dreams, then, is an unreal reality against the backdrop of a distorted, distorting environment and disintegrating values. The dreams are a blend of logical thought and guesswork; rational details combined into fantastical contexts and thereby made more, not less, coherent; ambiguities that remain ambiguous despite being interpretable; things hidden beneath the surface, or even in unfathomable abysses, brought up into everyday life. This sounds like a description of modern art of all kinds, which should come as no surprise given the role that dreams, even nightmares, have played as artistic devices in the twentieth century. Still, it is nothing short of astounding how closely the expressive means of dreamers in the thirties, exploring their present moment, correspond to the ways that writers today, finding realism inadequate, go about trying to elucidate the past.

It has been claimed often enough that Kafka's parables can be applied to the conditions of life under totalitarianism. In the same sense, we might say of these dreams that they can be applied to the significant results of studies of the Third Reich—not merely as sources of content, but in terms of form. Were someone to publish a selection of the more coherent, dramatic dreams from this book, under a title like *Fragments from Ten Dreamers*, the organized chaos of the dreams, their detailed understanding of external events and psychological processes, would absolutely make the selection qualify as contemporary literature. In struggling to find a way to express the inexpressible, these dreamers blurred the boundary between tragedy and comedy, coming up with parables, parodies, and paradoxes that described the phenomena of the time in only slightly defamiliarized form. They arranged situation after situation in snapshots,

in sketches, allowing echoes of daily life to reverberate—eerily loud, eerily soft, radically simplified, radically exaggerated. Whatever the form in which these dreamers, "in slumberings upon the bed," unspooled a thread through the labyrinth of the political present and spun it further even as it threatened to coil around their necks, their power of imagination is impressive.

The Nazi official who remarked that people had a private life under the Third Reich only while they were asleep actually underestimated the dictatorship's powers. The dreamers recorded here, on their way to becoming completely subjected to the regime, saw their situation even more clearly "in a dream, in a vision of the night."

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