

– SPECIAL ISSUE –

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# Dreamdew

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ONEIRIC COMMUNICATION

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**International Holocaust Remembrance Day**, observed on January 27, is an international memorial day commemorating the tragedy of the Holocaust, the genocide that claimed the lives of 6 million Jews and 11 million others during the Second World War. January 27, 2020 also marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation by the Red Army of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration and death camp.

After Hitler's coming to power in 1933, the level of anxiety amongst the population was understandably high. Charlotte Beradt, a Jewish journalist from Berlin, was having frequent nightmares (for example, being hunted by storm troopers), and she wondered whether other people were experiencing similar dreams. That prompted her to initiate a research project about the oneiric life of the people affected by the Nazi regime. In the end, Beradt obtained dream accounts from over three hundred people, representing a wide cross section of the Berlin denizens. "Enthusiastic 'yes men' or people who drew some advantage from the regime were not readily accessible to me," Beradt writes. "I asked a dressmaker, neighbor, aunt, milkman, friend—generally without revealing my purpose, for I wanted the most candid and unaffected responses possible." This study was dangerous and Beradt took precautions to protect herself. She hid her notes inside bookbindings that she shelved in her library. When book burnings and home searches became common, she mailed her transcripts to friends overseas. In 1939, Beradt emigrated to the U.S., and in October 1943 she published in *Free World*, a New York leftist magazine, an article about her work, which we reproduce in the following pages.

In 1968, Charlotte Beradt published the book *The Third Reich of Dreams, the Nightmares of a Nation, 1933-1939*. She passed away in New York, in 1986.



I AWOKE bathed in perspiration, my teeth clenched. Once again, as on countless previous nights, I had been hunted from pillar to post in a dream—shot at, tortured, scalped. But on this night, of all nights, the thought occurred to me that I might not be the only one among thousands upon thousands to be condemned to such dreams by the dictatorship. The things that filled my dreams must fill theirs, too—breathless flight across fields, hiding at the top of towers of dizzying height, cowering down below, in graves, everywhere the Storm Troopers at my heels.

I began to ask people about their dreams.

"I had a dream," Mr. K., a factory owner, told me, "a dream of terror in which no shot was fired, no blood flowed. Goebbels came to my plant. He had the workers line up in two rows facing each other. I had to stand between them and lift my arm in the Hitler salute. It took me half an hour to get the arm up. Goebbels watched my efforts as though it were a spectacle, with neither approval nor disapproval. But when my arm was finally up, he said six words: 'I do not desire your salute,' and went to the door. I stood there in my own plant, amid my own people, my arm raised. Never in

*By C. BERADT*

my life have I felt so humiliated. I stood there like that—until I woke up."

Mr. K., a man of proved courage and will power, trembled with agitation as he related the dream he had had weeks before. This dream was different. It was not born of fear of brute force. It had arisen simply from the pressure of the dictatorship upon the mind of this man. Were I to find many such dreams of mistreated souls, what a new and explicit proof against dictatorship they would furnish!

Since that night I have systematically collected the reports of dreams under dictatorship. I did not reveal my purpose in asking people for their dreams, for I wanted to avoid replies that were colored. As a matter of fact, it was not at all easy to get replies. Most people wished to forget their agonizing dreams; at any rate, they did not like to speak of them. Some I induced to talk against their own will, by relating dreams of my own or those of others. I wrote down every dream in detail.

### *The Dream of Authorities, Laws, Injunctions*

ABOVE all, it is the plethora of authorities and bureaus, of laws, prohibitions, and penalties, which gives rise to the most varied anxiety dreams in a dictatorship. One official, whose daily life was poisoned by fear of denunciation, invented in his dream an "Office for the Control of Telephone Conversations" that worked with subtle methods and proved that he had committed the crime of saying to his brother over the telephone: "I can no longer find pleasure in anything." He begged and pleaded to be forgiven this one time, not to be reported just this once, yet he knew deep inside that he was ruined. A small shopkeeper from Vienna dreamed that the lamp in the corner of his room suddenly began to talk, repeating to the police every sentence he had



ever uttered against the Government, every political joke he had told. He, too, regarded himself as ruined. A woman teacher of mathematics dreamed that it was forbidden on pain of death to write down anything having to do with mathematics. She fled to a disreputable tavern, and there, in mortal fear, among roaring drunks and half-naked girls, she wrote down a few equations that were important to her. A beautiful young

woman dreamed that black signs had been erected at every street corner. They contained twenty words written in white letters, which the people were forbidden to pronounce. The words included biblical terms, such as "Lord." The last of the twenty words was "I." Another woman wandered about in her dream day and night, accompanied by her husband, passing through streets and houses without finding lodging, until at last a landlady proclaimed to her, in the form and with the gestures of an imprecation by the Eternal Jew:

There comes a law: they shall dwell nowhere.

To walk the streets thus, that shall be their life.

### *Shame Is Coupled with Fear*

OFTEN agonizing shame is added to fear in dreams under the dictatorship. Thus a lawyer in whose life the ideal of bourgeois respectability had played a prominent part dreamed:

There are two benches side by side in the park, an ordinary one and one that is painted yellow. Between them stands a wastebasket. After some hesitation I sit down on the wastebasket and fasten to my neck a sign reading: "If necessary, I shall make room for paper."

A young girl, facing examination as a nurse, dreamed night after night a timely variation of the well-known examination dream. She passed with a mark of "Excellent," and then listened with horror and shame as the examiner passed sentence of death on her in her professional career: "I shall let you flunk all the same, because you are a member of the Confessional Church." (Pastor Niemoeller's church.) Another young girl heard almost every night the voice of her landlady saying words that struck her like the blows of an ax: "My roomers steal like Jehovah's Witnesses." (A religious sect to which the dreamer adhered fanatically.) Deeply hurt, she hoped each time that it was only a slip of the tongue, that the woman would correct herself and say "like magpies," but each time she was disappointed.

A writer who had been in difficulties with the Chamber of Culture (to which he had to belong in order to be allowed to publish his works) dreamed that he had been invited for a few days to the house of one of his best friends, in a little town a few hours away by train. Upon his arrival, a party was given in his honor, the host delivering a speech paying tribute to him and vowing unswerving friendship. Suddenly a neighbor appeared and gave a hint to the host. Parties, she said, were hardly in keeping with the government line—and inviting unreliable elements on top of that, well. . . . Instantly, he was chased from the house, his host not even taking time to tell him about train connections. He stood there on the highway at night in the rain, establishing by his wrist watch that his friend's change of heart had taken just ten minutes. And the humiliating situation was aggravated by his sense of shame for his friend, whom he had loved all his life.

Similarly an old lady, a devout Protestant, mingled shame on behalf of the German people with her own humiliation. She dreamed that she fainted at one of Berlin's busiest corners. None of the hundreds of people who passed by troubled to help her up—none even turned around to look at her. "How do these people know that they *must* let me lie, because I believe in my Lord Jesus Christ?" I ponder frantically in my dream. I do not feel easier until I notice that at least the person closest to me, a newspaper vendor, is sitting paralyzed in her wheel chair and thus cannot hasten to my aid."

Not only the method but the ideology of dictatorship, too, gives rise to anxiety dreams of all kinds. Thus, the theory of the superiority of the fair-haired race seeks its victims among the dark-haired. Or, people are wrenched from the population group of which they feel themselves a part and are at random pressed into some other. They respond by making the "group" concept the *idée fixe* of their dreams. One man went to such extremes that in his dreams he no longer spoke alone but only in chorus. But these dreams, typical as they are, are too complicated to be reported here.

### *Dreams of Underground Workers*

THE dreams recounted above have one common characteristic. The principals all suffer without taking any action. The thought of offering opposition does not occur to them—fear is too deeply ingrained. But another man, active in the Underground struggle against the dictatorship, had dreams of a different nature: he went into action, put up a fight. In the first part of his long-drawn-out dream, hectographed handbills, discovery, hours in which he is gripped by fear, play a role. In the second part of the dream, the Gestapo is already coming up the stairs; he locks the doors, but the locks fall off; then he escapes through the window. In the third part, while he is fleeing, he notices two men in front of a famous café, the one whispering to the other, "We must protest." He steps between them, places his hands on their shoulders, and shouts into the café, "We protest." Then he rushes on, dragging the two men along. At the end of the dream all three run side by side, in step, calling out aloud in unison, "We protest."

Another to resort to action in dreams was the wife of a man whose Underground activities had been discovered and who had escaped across the border. In every one of her dreams her husband returned to continue his work, was recognized, and put under arrest. One night she dreamed that he had returned disguised as a German soldier: "I was afraid that he would not behave correctly, since he was unfamiliar with army details. I rushed to some barracks to get hold of the printed service regulations in some way. I wanted to sew sergeant's stripes to the collar of his uniform so that privates would have to salute him first and he would not make himself conspicuous by giving the wrong salute."

This dream, however, soon shifted back from the realm of action into that of suffering; the man was arrested and the woman led into a cellar that resembled a crematory. Built into the wall was a compartment that held the man and bore the inscription, "Forty-seven cubic inches, temperature 167 degrees."



### *Dreams that Anticipate the Future*

ANXIETY dreams anticipating the future—this particular brand of dream is reserved for the Jews as the most cruelly persecuted population group. An aged woman of about seventy dreamed: "My husband and I had emigrated to a faraway place. We were quite alone; we had no one to help us. 'Why not draw some money from the savings bank?' I say to my husband. 'We haven't any left,' he replies. 'Well, get some money from the bank.' 'We haven't any left.' 'Take some from the safe-deposit box.' 'We haven't any left.' 'Then take some from your wallet.' 'But we haven't any left!'"

Her husband's nightmares went further. When Hitler grants him one free wish, as in a fairy tale, he replies without hesitation: "A passport for myself and my wife."

Passports, documents, visas—long before they are actually needed, they run like a red thread through the dreams of this group. One man carries his papers in a brief case with him wherever he goes in his dreams. Another, finding himself on a sinking ship, does not stop to consider, "How can I save myself?" but "How can I save my papers?" And his first cry after the disaster refers to his papers!

All the minor and major difficulties—where to and what then?—are anticipated by the frayed nerves of these people. They are stopped at the border; they are forbidden to land; they are laughed at for mispronouncing words, so that they no longer dare talk at all; they are unwelcome guests in the homes of strangers and dare not appear at the dinner table; they sleep six to a room; they are fearful of bleak walls and dark courtyards; they pass through unfamiliar streets, hear a German song and are

ashamed of their own emotion. One dreamer chooses as the ghostly setting for his prophetic nightmare a Trappist monastery, evidently fearful of having to remain mute in a strange language. There is a man whose dream takes him to "the last country on earth where Jews are still tolerated." That is the only name by which he calls this country; for him it has no other name. It seems to lie at the end of the world, since he must cross Lapland; no other way will take him there. He is very happy when he reaches the border on foot, loaded down with heavy bundles, leading his blind mother, his wife at his side. Mile after mile of ice and snow are behind him, but before him stands a smiling, polite customs official, rosy as though made of pink sugar candy, asking: "May I help you, sir?" The wanderer hands him his passport, saying: "I am a professor of—" "You are a Jew!" the official roars after a glance at the passport stamped with a large red "J."

That is the most tragic anguish of these people—the fear that the persecutions from their old country will follow them. One man dreamed that he was doing well in the new land, that he was able to afford his first vacation, a mountain-climbing trip. And then it happened: on the highest mountain peak of the foreign continent the guide suddenly threw off his coat and hood and stood before him in full Storm Trooper's regalia.

### *Dreams of Subconscious Desire*

THE counterpart to these anxiety dreams is wishful dreams. Their range is narrower. They express people's natural longing for equality and recognition, their yearning for things lost. These dreams, too, are full of sorrow, although at first glance they may

appear ludicrous or even repulsive. Like the anxiety dreams, they show how the wounds inflicted by dictatorship bleed and hurt, even though they are not bodily injuries.

An eye specialist who had been removed from his clinic dreams he is treating Hitler. He has been called in preference to all others since he is the only person in the world who can carry out this treatment. A lawyer who had been forced to resign dreams that he is employed in a government bureau; during a personal inspection, Goering singles him out with a nod of satisfaction.

Dozens of women have an almost identical dream. They attend a recital seated in the first row, or they find themselves in a brilliantly lighted box in the theater. Suddenly a nazi leader appears, usually Hitler himself. He shakes hands with them, and when they say that they are Catholics, Jews, Social Democrats, he replies: "That makes no difference to me." Frequently the women react to this double-dealing with a sense of insult and outrage, but there is always some feeling of pleasure. One girl dreamed that at a folk festival Goebbels personally gave her a handbill; she defined her feelings at this point as follows: "I tried just to laugh it off and not to be proud." Another girl thought hopefully, when Hitler in the presence of many people descended a wide flight of steps with her in Munich, her home town, "Now they can all see that he shows himself with me; perhaps he is not quite so bad?"

The rarity of dreams of revenge is notable—additional proof of how deeply fear reaches down into the subconscious. A petty city official, who was dismissed because he refused to enter the SA, dreamed in ever-changing variations that he had to pay double taxes and that the post office would sell him no stamps. By chance a

foreigner would then step up to the window and say to the official (who would often wear the hated uniform) what the man in his dream would himself have liked to say, but did not dare: "You are treating this man shamefully and I shall report it abroad."

The only person I know who dared to talk back to Hitler even in a dream is a woman. In her dream Hitler did not resemble his picture but looked rather round and friendly. What she said was merely, "You should have acted differently in this and that respect, then you would have become still greater." Suddenly she found herself in a different room; there were a great number of Elite Guards who nudged one another, pointing to her with great respect, and saying, "That's the woman who gave Hitler a piece of her mind."

When I came to this country, I ran across a girl I knew, who in Germany had suffered from many anxiety dreams. After her rescue, she dreamed of life under the dictatorship only when she was reminded of its methods by concrete experiences. One day, for example, in the subway she openly read a booklet that was forbidden in Germany. That night she dreamed that a child had denounced her on that account. Later on she suffered from only one nightmare: that she might be forced to return to nazi Germany. When she had been in this country about a year, she had a dream in which she wrote a poem of twelve lines in the language of her new homeland. It dealt with a certain book and a certain American scene, both of which were close to her heart. She forgot the first eight lines. The last four are as follows:

*I can sit for hours  
Calling every tree,  
Reading through my window,  
America, of thee!*

