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BOOK REVIEW

Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and Future-in-Delirium. By Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh
Cambridge, MA: Urbanomic/Sequence and MIT Press, 2019. Pp. xxii + 464.
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Urbanomic/Sequence Press' most recent publication, *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality and Future-in-Delirium* (2019), finds Iranian-American philosopher and comparative literature theorist Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh carving the figure of the diffracted neo-Bedouin wanderer, whose mania we trail through the book's haunted pages. The book's namesake, "omnicide," refers to the complete and total erasure of the Earth--the term has most recently been generally applied in ecological contexts, most markedly in regards to the Anthropocene and futurology. However, it is the explicitly poetic and literary intersection between mania and the grotesque that Mohaghegh inches us towards, lifting omnicide from its proscriptive use in the Western philosophical/sociological tradition and goading it towards an unfamiliar cryptic terrain. Surveying ten contemporary Middle Eastern poets and fiction writers, including Sadeq Hedayat (Iran), Réda Bensmaïa (Algeria), Samuel Adonis (Syria), Joyce Mansour (Egypt), Forugh Farrokhzad (Iran), Ibrahim al-Koni (Libya), Ahmad Shamlu (Iran), Ghada Samman (Lebanon), Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine) and Hassim Blasim (Iraq), Mohaghegh parses curious stanzas and plucks spectral paragraphs from myriad texts so as to navigate the largely occluded and excised narratives of the contemporary Middle Eastern philosophical-literary canon. Not only does Mohaghegh acuminate the multifaceted question of mania and its variegated networks, chambers, byways and sunken burrows--so as to juxtapose two different world literatures (East and West)--but Mohaghegh also illuminates this oeuvre to affront the Western psychoanalytic treatment of mania as an exclusionary vessel. Thus, despite Mohaghegh avoiding any *explicit* references to Western philosophers and scientists, both the codified dictum of the medical decree and the hyper-genealogical superlative tradition of Georges Canguilhem, Michel Foucault and their contemporaries rankle *Omnicide's* annals.

Mohaghegh begins with a frank admission: rather than treat mania as an object of didactic study to be harryingly prodded at and examined in isolation, this book welcomes imbibing in mania's pyrexial haze and gyrating in its drunken stuporous ceremony. Mohaghegh remarks that "[t]he proper approach to a book of mania is to show willingness to enter manic straits and apply

maniacal styles" (p. 14), co-opting mania's rhythm and dance, so as to interpret its syncopation with unrivaled vigor. It is in this enchanted intersection between scrutiny and complicity that we follow our guide through a fragmented *mania tabula*, inaugurating our descent into these subterranean chambers of fatality and omniscient destination with "augomania" (mania qua sunlight). From this point forwards, becoming entwined with mania's seductive grasp is inevitable, albeit richly rewarding.

Each chapter parses a particular strand of mania, as we find Mohaghegh depluming the aforementioned writers' works to hallucinate in half-storytelling, half-theoretical prose. With each instantiation and persona--the fortune teller, the assassin, the fatigued desert-dweller and a host of forlorn renegades--we reach new inflected heights. For instance, Mohaghegh recalls Joyce Mansour's description of an amputated limb, sumptuously gleaming and framed in the flaxen sunlight, which "enables a spotlight effect to entwine seamlessly with horror" (Mansour, quoted on p. 34). In turn, Mohaghegh turns his magnifying glass to the bond between light and mania. This is further inflamed by the recurrent link between the moon and the selenomaniac, through which the dream distends, bursting into a nightmare before lapsing into "ultimate fiasco (disarray of mind)" (p. 89).

Meditating on Ahmad Shamlu's description of the selenomaniac, we are immersed in esoteric ritual with the moon, smuggling tonics and conspiratorial whispers while "drawing blades" against it (Shamlu, quoted on p. 103). Further deliberating on this schizo-position, Mohaghegh reveals one of *Omnicide's* most central concerns:

"[w]hat is it exactly that occurs when one punishes an ocean channel with whips and manacle, or takes a steel weapon to the moon? Are the psychoanalysts right to pore over such dreams only to yield reductive interpretations of paranoia, or is there a grander cosmological tremor in play here, some magnificent determination known only to mad emperors and sorcerer poets, a megalomaniacal gesticulation that actually makes viable for a split second what was otherwise foolish?" (p. 103)

By recalling the selenomaniac's rending and lacerating the moon into immortal fragmentary slices, Mohaghegh introduces a critical clarification to our alternate understanding of mania, complicating and upending the Western philosophical-psychoanalytic tradition once more. Riven from its irresponsibly and, often, reductively linked bondage with the pleasure-principle, the manic object--in our case the "unclean moon," a site of infinite abjection--becomes the source of a potentially lethal burden and perceptual ruse, indoctrinating the concomitant transcendent touch to the manic figure rendered unapologetic. Mohaghegh's is an unfamiliar mania, a kaleidoscopic likeness bearing altogether novel trajectories. By inverting the moon's analogical effects and luminescence's terrifying neutrality from its safe didactic reserve, Mohaghegh weaves an arachnean latticework between nocturnal windfall, sleep paralysis,

and mythic reverie, directing us deeper into manic engagement--or, as Mohagheh terms it, the "gift of the nightmare" (p. 114).

Further imbibing from mania's cask, we follow Mohagheh deeper into the esoteric link between mania and willed evisceration, introduced to dromomania (travelling), ecdemomania (wandering), cartogramania (maps), kinetomania (continual movement), dinomania (dizziness, whirlpools), and labyrinthomania (labyrinths). Such is the figure of the wandering migrant, the neo-Bedouin whose stammering wander-lines of nonbelonging and open territorialization supersede alienation, exile, and the thresholds of soil-stricken pathways and bound borders. Mohagheh introduces us to butchers and guerilla fighters alongside figures of the hermetic deviant, crestfallen loner and veiled woodsman, charting supra-psychopathic lines between terrestrial voracity. As we follow Mohagheh's text, we become one with this inevitable process of "going bodiless and going dreamless, offsetting the earth's clench by grasping nothing" (p. 162).

Scouring Forough Farrokhzad's figure of the sacred firefall temple (*atroshan*) and never-extinguishing flame (pp. 222-223) while closely examining Ahmad Shamlu's description of "ghostly poisonous reptiles" and drunken camels (p.229), Mohagheh devises an alternate theory of manic sovereignty by construing mania-as-pharmakon (as both poison and cure). The neo-Bedouin wanderer's logic of false possession and succulent dreams offsets the dialectical distantiation between the material and abstract self. In response to an earlier inquiry, "what comes of a philosophical school (psychoanalysis) that locates almost the entirety of its diagnostic fury in body and dreams when it finally meets the one who willfully masters both bodilessness and dreamlessness?" (p. 162), we now reach a rejoinder, both resolving and liberating the uncanny from its historical chokehold.

Inextricably, the uncanny has remained one of the central inveterate "dinomaniacal" puzzles of vertiginous disbelief and self-mystification. For instance, in psychoanalysis we almost always uncover anxiety as the root cause of robust disorientation, such that the everyday object--"a household article once well-acquainted but now turned threateningly peculiar" (p. 263)--devolves into an archeologically-excavated haunting site of taboo drives and wrecked alienation, thus fomenting the Freudian-Lacanian castration complex and its necessary remedy through sublimation ("the cure"). However, through the "willed dementia" of the "master-poet-becoming-ex-nihilo-child," who reinstatiates the "*omnipotence of thought*" (p. 264) buried and entombed by psychoanalysis, Mohagheh seeks to laud the teratological force of funeral bells, smoke rings, anti-dancers, and shriveled fingers, elbows, and twitching bulges. Traipsing through such streaks of mania and Mohagheh's detailed recounting, the reader finds resolve in the conclusion that there is, in fact, no need for a cure but only the necromancing caper of enchantment.

The reader ought to be braced for catacombs and swarming street children alongside wheezing blood-red flowers floating in streams. Such spatial imaginaries of complexion intently sabotage the transversal divide between feigned delineations and divisions such as East-West or ancient-postmodern. This is comparative literature at its most philosophical and speculative, although Mohaghegh's engagement with literary analysis is entirely self-sufficient, wrested free from the constraints of over-abundant Continental citations; thus, we are privy to Mohaghegh's imagination running wild (and all the better for it). What we are left with is a pulsating, infectious image of mania as the complete victory of the outside, the swarming of sheer circulatory suffocation. This book finds Mohaghegh fully embracing the grandeur of the illusion, giants (colossomania) pressing their footsteps in the reader's cavernous grotto, forming an alloy between mania and paranoia so as to produce a missing link between universal delirium and conspiracy. Not for the weak of heart, *Omnicide* is a truly singular work that finds Mohaghegh at his best, poetically liberated, shrewd and well deserving of the title "literary mystic."