

# Foreword: In Praise of Perpetual Imminence

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We're all doomed. Every morning it looks more certain that the world will end badly in one way or another, and imminently so. Once in thrall to the cackling fanatic who unwound dusty scrolls to disclose portents and prophecies, we now furtively peer into our private scrying tablets where ceaseless foretellings silently unfurl, personalised to our own predilections yet expressive of a collective malaise of apprehension. Terminal catastrophes that were once the purview of bombastic prophets have been brought under the regime of probability and management, existential risk is now the business of expert panels, thinktanks, and mitigative public policy. Their relentlessly pessimistic findings are transmitted daily, and still the feeds only stimulate our appetite for the end.

*Omnicide II* challenges this terminal mode of Western contemporaneity by opposing to the generalised dread and despair induced by 'doomscrolling' a hyperfocalised

mania, by setting against the dull paralysis of a condemned present the unbearable lightness of no future.

A series of controlled combustions fuelled by fragments drawn from the poetry and literature of the Middle East, *Omnicide II* introduces us to a cast of manic visionaries, from the Selamaniac to the Crystallomaniac, from the Bibliomaniac to the Aeromaniac—all the parts listed in the *Mania Tabula* that were left as intriguing promises in the preceding volume. Whereas *Omnicide* charted the many ways in which a micro-obsession can ripen into the desire for all-encompassing annihilation, this second collection—but needless to say there is no order in this disordered treasury, one could start anywhere, we are always *in medias manias*—is placed under the general heading of *doom*, and highlights how the most vigorous campaigns of intensity sometimes flourish exclusively under the shadow of certain extinction.

To be doomed is to enter into a relation to time in which one is by definition too late, but does that necessarily mean that in the last moments we are condemned to craven contemplation, merely looking on as everything crumbles? What might the phenomenological tonality and the aesthetic timbre of such moments be, were they entered into with wholehearted will? What abilities might they confer upon one who, in losing all hope, gains in acuity of perception, perhaps even developing new sensitivities and preternatural capacities for action? Jason Bahbak

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Mohaghegh's wager is that fully opening the 'exceptional window of consciousness' afforded by the prospect of inevitable demise exposes us to an anticipative form of mania that reaps analeptic quickening from certain doom.

The last moment is of course the very space within which unfold the *Thousand and One Nights*, whose yarns measure out the space between now and the end, postponing execution of the inevitable, buying time at the price of learning to live at the limit of the perpetually condemned. And like Sharhzaad, Mohaghegh is a consummate storyteller—here you will encounter fantastic fates and magical curses, assassins and emperors, murders and suicides, falconers and luxury Persian Gulf hotels, cat-octopuses and bleeding lions, retellings of Mesopotamian fables and urban legends...the common thread being that the ending never arrives, but is always infinitesimally deferred by the telling of some other anecdotal detail. Such is the secret of Mohaghegh's mad method: it is by insistently worrying at an ultraparticular fixation that the maniac produces an entire alternate regime of being and a renewed thirst for life. The tiniest crack in the order of things expands to reveal a new world, another night passes without the Vizier realising he has been fooled again—and then another, and another....

Looking beyond 'doomscrolling' to other new entries into the common lexicon, we draw closer to the oblique contemporaneity of this technique, for the devices of

Mohaghegh's 'book of wonders' operate like dark twins of the clichéd forms of the doomed present. Where enumerated 'listicles' and punctual 'factoids' target the time-poor with their optimised rundowns and digests of must-have info, arresting shallow attention with definitive but soon-forgotten data, Mohaghegh's tales-within-litanies-within-tables-within-lists extract inexhaustible riches from the tiny sliver of time remaining by employing a single empirical detail as a prism through which a vain reality, on the other side of a narrow defile, can blossom into an expansive polychromatic sheaf illuminated by the unreasonable intensity of the incurably obsessed.

In pulling one singular bouquet after another from the same black hat, Mohaghegh resumes the offensive of those writers, artists, and thinkers for whom the fiercest blooms open only in the shade of certain doom, those whose creativity flourishes on the brink of imminent catastrophe, whether that of a condemned individual or that of a whole people, whether in personal intimacy or collective political struggle (the two of course being indistinguishable when it comes to Forugh Farrokhzad before her 'Window' or Mahmoud Darwish speaking of 'A Lover from Palestine', for example).

Scanning the cut flowers of his chosen array of Middle Eastern poets, Mohaghegh examines their vocabulary, metaphors, and images as if they were omens or signs: a literary radiologist spreading out the spectra of their

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ambiguities before us, analysing it to procure models for the maniacal inflammation of an isolated poetic gesture. Mobilising the narrative, the conceptual, the phenomenological, the poetic, and the associative, proliferating meanings through multiple readings, hyperparaphrasis and interpretosis, molecular decomposition and nuclear fission, his precision instruments reveal every verse to be a stem of latent budding-points, with alternate universes or parallel dimensions bifurcating at the juncture of every line and sometimes even within one word. Multiple conclusions drawn from a single interpretation of an image or phrase; an enumeration of alternative readings each harbouring its own dire consequences; a series of oblique associations that lend vastly different colourings to one and the same image...each a glimpse of a potential new madness, the germ of a new mania.

All of these riches once laid out before them, there is no question of commending any one interpretation to the reader as the 'truth'. Instead, we are given to understand that in these last hours what is most important is to muster the strength to *lie* realities into being (what has been called 'hyperstition'). Hence the importance of deception, of those operators—crafty, cunning, duplicitous, underhand—that permit writer and criminal alike to slide imperceptibly from one thing to another, to equivocate, to forge instrumental alliances and conduct illicit commerce, to mesmerise others and even themselves—in short, to do

everything possible to forestall and repel truth's tendency to nullify in advance the capacity for further play.

To we the *truly* doomed, then, this work says: *Deceive!* By whatever ruse is necessary, by seizing upon whatever inessential trifle seizes you and pursuing it through the prism of mania, continue to exacerbate the extravagance that characterises what is most essential to the intensity of the life of thought, however long it has left to live.

Although the entry of 'doomscrolling' into the dictionary indexes a certain collective *jouissance* in our mesmerised contemplation of the end, this dissolute inward-spiralling pathology is really remarkable only for its dilution and its pale democratic character. We have each become our own prophet of a miasmatic terror at once anxiety-inducing (the urgency of multiple insoluble predicaments) and etiolated (the scrolling never stops, the feed is continuous, no one figure holds the attention). It is something different to open these pages and to experience in each of them the infinitely expansive and infinitesimally condensed time of omnicide, its rhythm beat out by the music of stanzas sampled, transformed, fanned out into manifold possibilities. To enter the variegated terrain they project, in search of 'the intense, the impossible, the delirious, the no man's land', is both to finally unshackle the potency of last-days thinking, and to discover an unexpected antidote to the oppressive paralysis and lethargy of the chronic doomscroller.