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Translating the Islamicate Symptom: *A Review Essay of* Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran *and* Lacan and Religion

Gohar Homayounpour, *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran*, MIT Press, 2012, 176 pp., $19.95 US (hbk), ISBN 9780262017923.

Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion*, Acumen, 2014, 224 pp., $34.95 US (pbk), ISBN 9781844657049.

Religion, Freud tells us, is a symptom. For the believer, it represents an infantile fantasy of the "enormously exalted father" whose omnipotence and protection alleviates the profound vulnerability accompanying our first flickers of self-awareness, a fantasy whose revival is a common palliative for the difficulties and disappointments of adult life.[1] Freud's clinical experience thus discovered in religion a defense against the reality that we are indeed alone, as individuals and as a species, and a means of refusing responsibility for our personal and shared misery. "The whole thing," he writes in *Civilization and its Discontents*, "is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life."[2] By identifying himself as a friend to humanity, Freud moreover intimates that any attempt to recuperate religion from his critique is at odds with the ethics of psychoanalysis, which exalts the desire to know the truth of the unconscious even and especially when this does violence to our most precious and enduring illusions. And insofar as the ontological irreconcilability of illusion and truth, of fantasy and reality, is the wellspring of the neuroses, there can be no ambiguity concerning where psychoanalysis stands.

Freud's claim that religion betrays an infantile desire for an all-powerful father was the result of his clinical practice, which operated, of course, in a decidedly Western and Judeo-

[1] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter *S.E.*), Vol. XXI, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1964), 74. Freud most extensively elaborated the cultural and psychological mechanisms by which the infantile position of the father is transformed into religion in *The Future of an Illusion* (ibid., esp. 15-20). Also see *Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (*S.E.* Vol. XI, 123 and *passim*).

[2] Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 74.

Christian cultural context. If the paternal function explains the form and function of religion in the West, if Western monotheism and Western neuroses are mimetically conjoined within the fantasy of the omnipotent father, does this permit us to extrapolate a similar mimesis within other cultures, thus to suppose that different theological traditions reflect different etiologies of psychological suffering? And if so, will psychoanalysis have any use, could it even gain a foothold, in societies whose religious foundations are not structured around a paternal metaphor?

These questions are especially challenging with respect to the Islamicate world. "The whole spirituality of Islam," as Fethi Benslama has demonstrated, "proposes that there where there is God, there is neither paternity, nor maternity, nor engendering, nor sexual relation." Insofar as this last monotheism, this other Abrahamic tradition, "immediately presents itself as an objection to the theology of divine paternity, thereby installing a genealogical desert between man and God,"[3] we must ask: can every exercise of psychoanalysis within this symbolic order therefore hope to effect only a partial, imperfect repetition of the Freudian discovery, just as Freud describes the founding of Islam as "an abbreviated repetition" and "imitation" of the origins of Judaism?[4] Is psychoanalysis necessarily a Western affair?

Its limited but definite appeal as a mode of treatment among Islamicate populations suggests on the contrary that we should not allow the uncharacteristically severe deficit of understanding Freud brought to Islam—the most conspicuous example of which is this last quote from *Moses and Monotheism*—to foreclose a meaningful engagement with the Islamicate unconscious. Recent examples of such engagement are Benslama's *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam* and a special issue of *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*.[5] To this emergent field we may now add Gohar Homayounpour's *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran*, an extremely original and deeply personal critique of the Orientalist assumptions behind any suspicion that Islamic peoples or practices are somehow recalcitrant to analysis. Another recent book, Aron Dunlap's *Lacan and Religion*, attempts a broad survey of the revaluation of religion that he claims Jacques Lacan brought to bear on the Freudian field. Dunlap's account is largely a summary of existing introductions to Lacan and mentions Islam only once—the reference is a lengthy quote from Lacan himself—and the Qur'an only in passing. It does show, however, that religion profoundly shapes the symbolic order in which the analytic subject is

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[3] Fethi Benslama, "Of a Renunciation of the Father," *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, "Islam" (2009), 27-28. Benslama also shows that the prophet and founder of Islam is not a father, but rather "is immediately placed in the position of a son and an orphan," so that paternity "will never be, as it is in Judaism, at the center of an alliance with Yahweh as the God of fathers." This holds true even with respect to Abraham, "the central figure of paternity for Islam," who is "presented as the very example of the foundation of monotheism through a disobedience to the father, since Abraham will refuse the polytheistic cult of his father Terah," which "assumes the sense of a liberation from the law of the father […] in such a way that the spirit of monotheism for Islam resorts to an exile through which the son encounters the One [the unicity of God] outside the father" (ibid., 28). Abraham himself, moreover, is not immune from this negative valuation of the father figure and cannot represent the benevolent protector-father, as evidenced in the Qur'anic iteration of his near sacrifice of Isaac and his act of abandoning his son Ishmael to the desert (ibid., 29-32).

[4] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism, S.E.* Vol. XXIII, 92.

[5] Fethi Benslama, *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, Issue 1, "Islam" (2009), including essays from Benslama, Joan Copjec, Christian Jambet, Joseph Massad, Stefania Pandolfo, Moustafa Safouan, Alberto Toscano, and myself.

captured and therefore is essential to any psychoanalytic practice.[6] These two texts make an odd pair, but placing *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* in conversation with *Lacan and Religion* draws into relief the stakes of Homayounpour's intervention. Dunlap attests to the importance of religion, whatever its cultural specificity or theological structure, for the dynamic formation of the human personality. Homayounpour's personal case history can help us concretize this insight and translate it into an Islamic social and historical frame.

It is a matter of fact that where there is human being, there is language, and where there is language, there, too, is the address of the unconscious. Such universalism does not endorse an aggressive overcoding of cultural particularities, nor does it imply a weak multiculturalism which respects cultural difference by holding it at a safe distance that precludes any potentially transformative encounter. In what follows, Homayounpour's book will show us why, and will help us disappropriate psychoanalysis from its Western roots without either absolving it of its original limitations or abandoning its central insights. And while Dunlap will supplement this effort, we will find that his attempt to draw a harmonious relation between psychoanalysis and religion risks a metaphysical appropriation of the unconscious, ensconces culture within a transcendental frame that thereby renders cultural difference immutable and ultimately inhuman, and needlessly condemns the Freudian discovery to its Judeo-Christian roots. The horizon of this comparison is that psychoanalysis' radical challenge to both imperialism and xenophobia in part hinges upon its uncompromising diagnosis of religious belief as a symptomatic illusion.

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The title of Homayounpour's book invokes, perhaps provokes, a question—*What is it like to do psychoanalysis in Tehran*?—against which her whole discourse is a rebuke. This question, we quickly discover, is one more manifestation of the Orientalist fascination with the exotic Iranian other, an iteration of the timeworn yet still pervasive assumption that history comes to a halt at the invisible border between East and West.

At once, we must recall Edward Said, one of Homayounpour's principle interlocutors, who characterizes "the spectacle of the Orient" in conveniently psychoanalytic terms: "The Orient is *watched*, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the *Description de l'Égypte* called 'bizarre jouissance.' The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness."[7] According to this spectacle, the European is mobile, the Oriental fixed; the former charts a path toward progressive civility and *makes* history, while the latter, trapped in a pre-modern past, *is* history; the West transforms itself through bourgeois revolution, animated by the discourse of liberty and propelled by the momentum of secularization, but the East—of which Iran is exemplary in the Orientalist imaginary—is ordered according to a theocratic despotism that its slavish subjects, only minimally reasoning beings, happily accept. The West, finally, is repressed, while the Orient shelters a queer and "bizarre jouissance," an enjoyment without limit—at least as far as concerns the men. For the women, whether frozen and exposed to the rapacious voyeurism of Ingres' *Le Bain Turc* or

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[6] From the introduction: "Since the laws in which we are raised are very often connected with a particular religion, or even with the rejection of a particular religion, to fail to consider the religious element in the course of an analysis would be a grave error" (Aron Dunlap, *Lacan and Religion* [Durham: Acumen, 2014], 4).

[7] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 103.

completely veiled by the chador which to the liberal Westerner symbolizes their deplorable oppression, seem to partake of no enjoyment at all. And where *jouissance* is limitless, where desire knows no prohibition, where there is no margin of difference between the desiring subject and the object of his desire, where the feminine has no being except in its absolute capture by the masculine—there, in that Orientalist fantasy, *the unconscious is not*. What would an Iranian even speak about on the analyst's couch? As a respondent to an early draft of Homayounpour's book muses, "I wonder how in the world a psychoanalyst can even function in Iran. I wonder if any ayatollahs have sought help" (xxi).

Homayounpour's first response to this tired Western chauvinism is to demonstrate that psychoanalysis is not a procedure or a device but a discourse and an experience, the object of which is at once universal and singular. Universal, because to be human is to be wounded by lack and driven by desire, that is, moved by unconscious fantasy; singular, because the logic of fantasy is precisely that residue of the human experience that sticks to the margins of the frame of reference in which we all find or make our place in our shared reality and refuses any semiotic exchange by which it could be made transparent, least of all to ourselves. The Orientalism at the basis of the Westerner's question, *what is it like to do psychoanalysis in Tehran?*, distorts this universal quality of human being, assuming that because psychoanalysis is a Western invention it can be applied only to a Western subject whose inner discomfort betrays both a psychological depth and a civilizational development that elsewhere, especially in the so-called Orient, does not obtain. The unconscious, so this line of thought presumes, is uncanny, both familiar and strange, proximate but irreducible to the ego, while the "infinite peculiarity" of the exotic Iranian other is strange plain and simple, utterly foreign, untreatable. Against these assumptions, Homayounpour thus offers herself, her own experience, the action of her own unconscious, as indisputable evidence that psychoanalysis can indeed function in Iran. It functions here, on these pages, in the testimony of an Iranian woman who pronounces the language of psychoanalysis, of anxiety and castration, ego ideals and super-egoic injunctions, not above or beyond but *within* the language of everyday life in Tehran.

Thus without either metaphysics or metalanguage, *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* is a curious experiment. Curious, in a double sense. It is an unusual book, a curiosity, without genre or precedent, written "in the format of a psychoanalytic session" (xv). It is also an inquisitive book, curious in that it expresses a desire to know the truth of its author's own unconscious. As a record or trace of this itinerant desire, the text carries its reader from Homayounpour's office in Tehran to her psychoanalytic training in Boston, from the personalities that populate her clinic to the characters in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, from *The Odyssey* to Ferdousi's *Shahnameh*, from her childhood memories to her imagined future. Occasionally, Homayounpour considers what the differences between Western and Iranian culture mean for her clinical practice, but for the most part this is a testimony of its author's anguished self-examination upon her return to Tehran after years of psychoanalytic training in the United States. As such, it is an insular work, a kind of confession. The process by which its web of signifiers might be translated into a shared system of reference—that is, *interpreted*—is put out of operation by the narrative's proliferating, sometimes incomplete, often disruptive chains of association. These various narrative chains circulate around a remainder, what I above called a residue, of non-sense that cannot be captured and given meaning by any extrinsic code of intelligibility, a kernel of truth which must be lost in translation.

To retain this truth that might otherwise be left behind in the movement from Iran to the West and back, or from childhood to adulthood, or from the unconscious to

consciousness, or finally from experience to language, Homayounpour thus courts "the inevitable anxiety that follows in the absence of any frame of reference" and concedes the psychoanalytic truism that "all we are capable of doing is miscommunicating" (xvi). Recalling Julia Kristeva's assertion that the scholarly apparatus (citation, footnotes, deference to an authoritative field of knowledge, symbolic appropriation of that authority) sustains a contrary illusion of communicative precision, she disclaims academic convention; she drops her defenses against that remainder of sense that resists interpretation and surrenders to the imprecision of a private meditation. The book's final sentence, "It seems that our time is up for this analytic hour" (145), the classic analyst's punctuation, puts a stop to the discourse by enclosing its circuitous path within a circuit whose origin is also its destination. Its addressee is Homayounpour herself.[8]

Such insularity imposes special demands on the reader. For if the work of the unconscious must be lost in the translation from the text to its interpretation, if even its many references—to Kristeva, Freud, Lacan, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, de Beauvoir, or Said, to name only a few recurring characters—appear without citation, then we, too, will not glimpse the truth to which this book bears witness if we cling to a frame of reference that the work alone does not establish. Thus, we will learn nothing by tracking a quotation back to its source or disputing the propriety of its use here. Like her intimate childhood memories, her dreams, and her feelings of professional embarrassment, such references are meaningful only with respect to the singular structure they inhabit: the structure of unconscious fantasy, which, in this curious experiment, is the structure of the text itself. On this view, the narrative is erratic but only apparently random. In fact, it follows a specific logic which can be discerned only in the relations between its various chains of association: at their points of intersection or interruption, in their coincidences and missed connections, in those sporadic shifts in direction when a line of thought that had been abandoned makes a surprise return in another seemingly disparate context. Like the ear of the analyst which hears the unconscious in the disturbances it produces along the surface of speech, Homayounpour asks that her readers adopt an analyst's sensibility, an attunement to the persistent, if muted, murmuring of the logic of fantasy. At stake in such a text is a truth that is not amenable to empirical verification, a singular truth of experience which defies facticity and, as Lacan taught, "has the structure of a fiction."[9]

Homayounpour suggests as much when, paraphrasing Kristeva, she asserts that "One can authentically face oneself only in the highly intimate process of writing a novel" (xv), or while commenting on Kundera's characters in whom she finds figurations or reflections of the different aspects of herself (17-31).[10] But if *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* is a narrative, it is

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[8] From the preface: "These pages are nothing but my fantasies and my fantasies alone (not that anyone can get away from doing anything else), where I once again indulge in the challenge of coming face to face with my own unconscious. In a sense, this is solely a note to myself" (xvii).

[9] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 12. Lacan continues: "it is within this opposition between fiction and reality that is to be found the rocking motion of Freudian experience" (ibid.).

[10] Homayounpour admits that such a procedure is problematic with respect to literary criticism, but offers the following justification, tellingly addressed to Kundera himself: "[I]t is with sincere apologies to the author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* that I start the psychoanalysis of its characters. These are characters who have over the years become my own versions of themselves within the theater of my mind. Since it is only possible for me to analyze my own versions; since within whatever we write it is only possible to reveal parts of our own unconscious and no more; since the author is dead, and long live the text; since it is only these various and limited levels of construction and interpretation that are possible, I plead for my apology to be accepted" (17).

not a novel. It is, rather, what Homayounpour calls "a lover's discourse" (145).[11] This oblique evocation of Roland Barthes' famous meditation on love and desire is illuminating. For Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* neither exemplifies a genre of speech or writing nor proffers such discourse as an apparatus with which the lover communicates his state of feeling. A lover's discourse is not a mode of expression which *belongs to* the lover, but the trace of an experience that exceeds all external frames of reference, a closed circuit of expression *to which the lover belongs*, in which he is embedded, a language which uses him, which speaks through the lover. It is not a discourse *on* love because it does not adopt some analytic position beyond the experience it evaluates, nor is it a philosophy of love which systematizes the experience and thereby drains it of its euphoria. It is a discourse in the classical sense: "*Dis-cursus*—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken, 'plots and plans': the lover, in fact, cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself. His discourse exists only in outbursts of language, which occur at the whim of trivial, of aleatory circumstances."[12] Like *A Lover's Discourse*, *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* is a record of such aleatory outbursts and a fragmentary figuration of "the lover at work."[13] This record has the structure of a fiction not because it is fictitious but because the experience it articulates cannot be apprehended through any objective procedure, according to some extra-textual shared reality or the referential linguistic framework that would structure such a reality. The object it seeks—the loved object, the object of desire, the object in quest of which the subject sets off on its uncertain adventure, the subject's origin and destination: to be both lover and loved, to be both analyst and analyzed—this object is unique to the logic of fantasy in which the author's subjectivity is inscribed. It is this object, universally human but totally singular to each human being, that the collective Orientalist fantasy of an Iran without an unconscious effaces.

But *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* is not entirely hermetic, no more than the unconscious is indifferent to time, place, or circumstance. As Homayounpour explains, "I am not ignoring the importance of cultural difference, yet neither can we ignore the fact that human beings are a lot more similar than they are different, that pain is pain and whenever we feel differently, we must look for the stranger within. That is the only place we will find an alien, a stranger" (xxvii). Filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami's foreword to the book also suggests that "human pain and suffering [are] an existential phenomenon" (xi), and that psychoanalysis is addressed not to the repressive conditions of the West, but to the human condition as such. *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* thus constitutes a portrait—Barthes would call it a discursive

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[11] Though not quite a novel, the book nonetheless models itself after Kundera's: "Besides the fact that all the different characters provide various modes of identification for the reader," Homayounpour claims, "we love to read Kundera because his discourse is a lover's discourse, and solely a lover's discourse, and that intrigues us, challenges us, terrifies us. We might hate it, we might love it, but we cannot ignore it, and it is precisely the same with the psychoanalytic discourse" (32).

[12] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3. "In linguistic terms, one might say that the figures [comprising this text] are distributional but not integrative; they always remain on the same level: the lover speaks in bundles of sentences but does not integrate these sentences on a higher level, into a work; his is a horizontal discourse: no transcendence, no deliverance, no novel (though a great deal of the fictive)" (ibid., 7).

[13] Ibid., 4. Barthes also helps us resolve the paradox of a text which is addressed to its own author but is nonetheless published and made available to an indefinite multitude of anonymous readers. To such readers it offers "a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*" (ibid., 3), a site at which the ineffable and the intractable in the reader's own experience of love is affirmed in a non-dialectical move of expenditure without recuperation, "a modest supplement offered to the reader to be made free with, to be added to, subtracted from, and passed on to others" (ibid., 5).

site—"of the human condition in Iran, not a touristic photograph of Iranians" (xii). The book therefore admits of cultural difference but situates it within the context of a universal difference that marks the split within the subject *qua* human. The condition of belonging—to our families, cultures, or civilizations—is that we accept the parameters of the speakable and the receivable that structure the social link, and in so doing sacrifice upon the alter of language that part of ourselves which cannot find its place within these symbolic parameters. Culture and community, then, are indeed essential to psychoanalysis, which cannot encounter the unconscious except through the very language from which it is constitutively excluded. In psychoanalytic terms, we are all, men and women alike, *castrated*, but this universal fact of human being is complicated by the shape and material of the instrument, the language, which cuts us, and by the shape of the scar that remains.

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The concepts of castration and unconscious fantasy prepare us to contend with Dunlap's core claim that religion is an essential determinant of the limits of the symbolic. Now, this is obvious enough insofar as religion is utterly pervasive and, as Freud noted, "the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life." Dunlap's position runs into trouble, however, when he explains the relation between castration and unconscious fantasy—a relation that Homayounpour's text performs—through a religious metaphor. "Whereas desire never leaves any doubt," he argues, "that both subject and Other are marked by lack (otherwise, how could there be desire?), fantasies are constructed so as to plug up this lack, to give one the assurance that either self or other is whole and unimpeded." Fantasy forestalls the avowal of castration. This is entirely consistent with Freud's critique of religion. But the ethical demand which follows from this—namely, the demand for a fidelity to one's desire, thus a resistance against the illusion of its possible satisfaction—leads Dunlap to assert that "Lacan's affirmation of desire is […] something like asceticism; to desire is to remain unsatisfied, refusing the cold water of any fantasy or act which would quench the ember of the longing which is the heart of desire" (70-71). Such an analogy is exemplary of *Lacan and Religion*'s critical gesture, the rather startling thesis of which is that Lacan "ultimately sides with religion against psychoanalysis" and "sees behind the mystics' monuments to style adumbrations of something real" (121).[14]

Our first objection to this claim must come from Lacan himself, who responded to the question whether psychoanalysis might one day become a religion: "Psychoanalysis? No. At least I hope not." Lacan's usually esoteric rhetorical style can sometimes trick us into finding ambiguity where there is none, but here he does not equivocate. Like religion after Freud,

[14] Dunlap offers a number of variations on this thesis. For example, he situates the analyst literally as a modern saint: "It is the duty of the analyst no less than the saint to go beyond the pleasure principle—a societal and symbolic principle of limits—to the extremes of *jouissance*. While a Christian might say that it is in the extremes of suffering and dejection that the saint touches upon the real of God's love by embracing the most abject aspect of man's materiality, Lacan's point is that, even in an age where such saintly actions are rejected rather than praised there must still be a figure willing to go to the limit of what society can accept, for the very sake of that society" (76). Even if we accept this strange formulation of Saint Lacan as a *secular* miracle-worker, Dunlap repeatedly collapses the secular into the prophetic, thus mitigating the value of such a distinction. "Lacan works towards a secular sense of revelation in his analytic practice. And yet his revelation is *no less mysterious than what we find in the Bible or the Koran*, for it would efface the subject in the name of a truth that is not so much unconscious as, via the unveiling of *objet a*, going beyond the 'unconscious signifying supports' that is [sic] apparent in the subject's demand" (157; emphasis added).

the analyst, too, is a symptom, and "can only last as a symptom. But you will see," Lacan continues, "that humanity will be cured of psychoanalysis. By drowning the symptom in meaning, in religious meaning naturally, people will manage to repress it."[15] Dunlap's book admirably catalogues the variety of allusions to religion in Lacan's teaching, but at the same time it imposes a religious significance on what has always been a fundamentally secular intervention, serving precisely the repressive function of which Lacan warned us. The latter's references to the relation between psychoanalytic experience on the one hand and religion, revelation, or mysticism on the other do not prove the religious quality of psychoanalysis, but rather magnify the reality that the unconscious defies the totalizing pretensions of any discourse of objective fact. Psychoanalysis, in other words, is always a lover's discourse. The point is that the singular truth at stake in the work of analysis is irreducible to empirical verification, and that this truth persists at the core of the human being no matter how militantly our civilization wishes to apprehend (understand; capture) it and translate, or mutilate, it into an object of knowledge among others.

Dunlap therefore is right to detect a proximity of psychoanalysis to religion, but this was already apparent to Freud himself. In his contrary effort to distinguish Lacan from Freud on these grounds, Dunlap fails to admit that Freud indeed took religion seriously—more seriously than perhaps any other atheist before or since. He had to, given its importance to his patients, his culture, his civilization, and his sense of himself. But he also knew that, precisely because of their proximity, religion and psychoanalysis must be rigorously distinguished. By minimizing their differences and assimilating psychoanalysis to religion, Dunlap mitigates the challenge to religion that Lacan did not reverse, but radicalized.

In order to justify his theological revisionism, moreover, Dunlap must overlook the logic of fantasy at stake in religion, mystical or otherwise. Asceticism, for instance, the mortification of the flesh for the elevation of the spirit, often evinces a masochistic fantasy whereby the separation of human from divine might be healed or at least diminished: exactly the kind of "cold water" that impedes the avowal of castration and its attendant ethics of desire. Such an ethics, moreover, when oriented toward the desire to know one's own unconscious, is at the basis of Lacan's understanding of transference and, as Homayounpour's self-contained narrative demonstrates, it is the real engine of analysis. By characterizing the analytic experience in terms of revelation, Dunlap confuses transference for prophecy, which in the religious traditions he evaluates is always the unfolding of a truth imposed from without, proffered from an incontrovertible "subject-supposed-to-know"—that is, from the ruse of the symbolic that the analysand must refuse on her way to the unconscious.

Homayounpour's text, on the contrary, shows that psychoanalysis can take religion seriously without assuming a religious discourse. For if religion is a symptom, it is an expression of the unconscious, a return of the repressed, a way of mitigating the anxiety and denying the reality of castration, and an address to the ear of the analyst. I argued above that *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* is ordered according to an unconscious fantasy whose logic can be discerned only through attention to the peculiar structure of discourse it animates. This discourse is built around a few key signifiers, terms whose symptomatic qualities are evident in the frequency of their repetition and in their weight of meaning. Of these signifiers, none is more often repeated or more charged with meaning than *banality*. "Hell is not the Other," Homayounpour writes, "but banality. It is not the Marquis de Sade who should be burned,

[15] Jacques Lacan, "The Triumph of Religion," in *The Triumph of Religion preceded by Discourse to Catholics*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 65-67.

but banality" (12). According to this rhetorical move, Homayounpour implies that exoticism, the opposite of banality, must be heaven. And indeed, this and every other flight from banality are resistances to the dissolution of the exotic mystique which for Homayounpour is a cornerstone of her ego narrative, thus a principle defense against the fact of castration. To be exotic, the text suggests, is to possess that "something special" which distinguished its author, as Iranian, from the other training analysts in Boston, and which also was supposed to distinguish her, as analyst, from the Iranian culture to which she has returned.

This is a productive complication of Said's critique of the fetishizing Western gaze. It indicates that the West is not solely responsible for the persistence of Orientalism. "We are attached to our oriental reflection in the eyes of the Other," Homayounpour claims, "we do it to ourselves, for there are so many neurotic gains to be had from the process" (xix). Her wandering narrative alights upon memories of her childhood in Tehran and her analytic training in Boston, weaves relations between the great myths of the West and those of Iran, circulates around her perfectly common professional anxiety, in order to diminish her apparent strangeness and to divest herself—perhaps her whole cultural location—of the "many neurotic gains" that derive from being exotic. To refuse submission to the Orientalist gaze, to reject the Western fantasy by which Iran is reduced to a fictive dystopia where repression is without remainder and where the unconscious is not, Homayounpour elaborates a series of perfectly common, perfectly *human* insecurities. In a word, she submits to her own banality.

Banality, then, is Homayounpour's fate as she pursues the truth of her own unconscious: it names her accession to castration, defined here as "the essence of what moves the individual from neurotic misery to common unhappiness" (21). This emphasis on castration stresses that what makes each of us unique is not something Homayounpour or anyone else can possess; it is precisely the *lack* in being, the gap in the symbolic order which marks the absence there of both the subject of the unconscious and the object of fantasy. To be subject to castration, to be set upon the path toward subjectivity by castration—nothing could be more human, nothing more banal. So while the text flees from banality, spinning a new web of signifiers each time the prosaic, the predictable, or the ordinary threaten to encroach upon the authorial ego's purported exceptionalism, so too does it tend toward banality, toward the order of the signifier to which we all must capitulate, without exception though not without remainder.[16] In so doing, Homayounpour abdicates her fantasy of salvation from the hell of the banal and into the heavenly bliss of exoticism. This is not a religious experience. To flee from that which drives us, to stumble over the very thing we wish to escape, to repeat over and again what disturbs our fragile self-images: it was for the sheer banality of this phenomenon that Freud called it the psychopathology of everyday life. As Homayounpour makes clear, there is nothing mystical about it.

Another striking feature of *Doing Psychoanalysis in Tehran* that bears upon Dunlap's attempt to entwine psychoanalysis with religion is the near absence of any specific engagement with the theology of Shi'a Islam, the politics of the Imamate, or the particularities of the West's antagonistic attitude toward Iran before or since the revolution. In her emphasis on the everyday, Homayounpour implies that to formulate the unconscious in Iran by way of such phenomena risks resuscitating the fantasy of exoticism that her work means to unravel. A more useful starting point would be the myths and traditions which

[16] I am following Homayounpour's emphasis on neurosis here. For the pervert or the psychotic, castration has a different valence. It is this difference in which the distinguishing characteristics of all three psychic structures—neurosis, perversion, and psychosis—inhere.

Iran's contemporary theological and geopolitical realities represent and reproduce. More to the point, the Iranian unconscious may be discerned through the mimetic correspondence between this originary mythological structure on the one hand, and, on the other, recurring patterns of speech and fantasy in Homayounpour's psychoanalytic clinic.

As we have seen, such already was Freud's method for arriving at his vituperative diagnosis of Western monotheism; it was also his rationale for choosing Sophocles' *Oedipus* as the primary metaphor for the modern subject's troubled introduction to the social link. To this same end, and with attention to the concept of cultural difference elaborated above, Homayounpour insists upon "the universality of the Oedipus complex, and the struggle for power and control it represents while embodying within itself the universal fear of castration," but emphasizes that "the culturally specific element seems to be the reaction to this fear" (54). The Western psyche, like its mythical hero, is structured around the friction between two contrary, coeval, and mutually constitutive modalities of desire: the first, the desire to please the Father, to live up to his commands, thus to earn His love and thereby guarantee His benevolence and protection, to be the perfect child; the second, the desire to determine one's own law, to be free from the tyranny of inheritance, thus to usurp the Father's place and in so doing to invite the retributive violence of castration. A will to absolute obedience and a will to power, so clearly evident in the ambivalence between love and hate at the base of the neuroses, together generate the guilt, or what Nietzsche famously called the "bad conscience," which characterizes the fear of castration in the West.[17]

Homayounpour locates the essential difference between this Greek formation and what she discovers in Tehran in what she calls "our Oedipus" (54), Ferdousi's "Rustam and Sohrab" from the *Shahnameh*, another tale of paternal misrecognition but one in which the son Sohrab is killed by his father. "Greek mythology," Homayounpour argues, "seems to be populated with myths about killing fathers, while it is impossible to escape the common pattern of killing sons all over Iranian mythology" (54). From this she extrapolates that "the Iranian collective fantasy is anchored in an anxiety of disobedience that wishes for an absolute obedience"—a fantasy which, like Ferdousi's tale, is the inverse of its Western counterpart—and that within Iran "the demand for absolute obedience" is a "reaction formation to the anxiety of the potential rebelliousness of the culture (in this case the sons)." She therefore accounts for the paradox of a culture whose values are both revolutionary and intensely traditionalist: "ironically, this culture of absolute obedience on the surface is indeed a rebellious one internally. […] This means essentially that laws in Iran are followed as long

[17] The proto-Freudian valence in Nietzsche's explanation of the origin of bad conscience is undeniable: "All instincts which are not discharged outwardly *turn inwards*—this is what I call the *internalization* of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his 'soul'. […] Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying—all this was pitted against the person who had such instincts: *that* is the origin of 'bad conscience'. Lacking external enemies and obstacles, and forced into the oppressive narrowness and conformity of custom, man impatiently ripped himself apart, persecuted himself, gnawed at himself, gave himself no peace and abused himself, the animal who battered himself raw on the bars of his cage and who is supposed to be 'tamed'; man, full of emptiness and torn apart with homesickness for the desert, has had to create from within himself an adventure, a torture-chamber, an unsafe and hazardous wilderness—this fool, this prisoner consumed with longing and despair, became the inventor of 'bad conscience'" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 57). This passage's resonance with certain aspects of psychoanalysis calls for a word of caution: what Nietzsche calls instinct is correctly translated from the German *Instinkt*, whereas the corresponding term in Freud's lexicon is *Treib*, that is, drive. Whatever their potential agreements, this distinction between instinct and drive discloses a profound (if productive) discontinuity between Nietzsche and Freud.

as the police, the law, and the father are present. If not, within this culture of no rebellion, every rebellious act becomes possible" (55).[18]

It would seem that Iranian culture imposes the fear of castration juridically, and that such fear thus results less from repression than from oppression. But here Lacan's insistence that the law is irreducible to the juridical offers a helpful corrective. Dunlap quotes Lacan's claim that, "In the Islamic sphere," the law "will on no account permit the isolation of the juridical from the religious plane" (3). In other words, here the coupling of religion and the state comprises a vital component of what psychoanalysis calls the Law; they are complimentary manifestations of the frame of reference in which the Islamicate subject must locate herself, and together determine the limits of permissible identity within this cultural sphere. The fact that such limits assume the valence of a prohibition demonstrates the particular anxiety that in Iranian culture is produced with respect to desire and the unconscious. In the West, meanwhile, the ideology of secularization would have us believe that religion and politics are separate and that this separation guarantees relatively greater subjective freedom. But ideology is misrecognition plus time. In fact, the liberal humanist mandate to self-determination is no less imposing, no less violent, and no less generative of the remainder of unconscious fantasy which, without any signifier to pin it to the symbolic, does not stop circulating under the veil of repression. Homayounpour is right: the fear of castration, the collective anxiety that holds the symbolic order in place, will differ according to culture and circumstance, but such differences manifest themselves only upon a subtending plane of consistency.

Again gesturing toward Kundera, Homayounpour muses, "Maybe in the West people suffer from an unbearable lightness of being, while in the East it is the heaviness that becomes unbearable" (59). Perhaps. But the second, much shorter section of her book outlines the troubles some of her patients have brought to her clinic in ways that minimize this distinction. "In Tehran," she reports, "today's sexuality is still Freud's sexuality. Since the very beginning my couch has been full of good old hysterics, and various other kinds of neurotic" (129). We have to ask: does this not contradict the cultural specificity of the fear of castration we just discussed? Is Homayounpour's Tehran really Freud's Vienna?

Of course not. The way out of this apparent contradiction is once again to return to the everyday, which is precisely what Homayounpour does with a series of brief reports on her work with her patients. A woman dressed in a thick black chador confesses the "disgrace" of losing her virginity and the guilt of having "dishonored my father's name"; a truck driver dreams of having sex with his mother and begs the analyst for some relief from this torturous work of the unconscious; a girl from Isfahan complains that the men in Tehran are uncomfortable with her sense of sexual empowerment; a patient recovering from chemotherapy wants help revitalizing her sex drive (117-128). The culturally determined set of available terms with which each of these characters articulates their trouble is specific to contemporary Tehran, but the troubles themselves are strikingly *ordinary*, almost mundane, in light of the polymorphous perversity of the drives that Freud found at the core of human sexuality, thus of the human as such.

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[18] This introduces one of the only explicit mentions of Islam in the whole book: "Is this not also seen in the differences between Catholicism and Islam? Islam means submission, and demands absolute obedience to God the father, while in Christianity the demarcation between God the father and Christ the son is not quite as clear" (55). This is at odds with Benslama's position that Islam is structured *against* paternal authority and to the exclusion of any paternal metaphor for God (see note 3), but is consistent with Benslama insofar as, according to Homayounpour, Iranian culture unconsciously emphasizes infanticide, while the West emphasizes patricide.

If our endeavors to respect cultural differences allow us to lose sight of this banality, we hazard a sanctification of culture that imposes upon it a transcendental—fixed, permanent, essential, and exceptional—significance. In his eagerness to approximate psychoanalysis with religion, Dunlap makes just such a move. "While Lacan dismissed the transcendental assumptions of religion," he admits, "he had his own way of understanding why those assumptions were made, namely, to emphasize the life-or-death character of the symbolic register. While the Catholic Christian realizes her authentic nature by being baptized 'in the name of the Father', and the worshipper of Indra sees the world rightly only by seeing it all as an offering to the eternal law, for Lacan, it is the symbolic order alone that defines the origins and limits of human civilization. In his emphasis on a law exterior to and predominant over nature and man Lacan was in whole-hearted agreement with the hymn-makers of old" (61). Here, Dunlap asserts that Lacan dismissed the transcendental with respect to religion only to reintroduce it on the level of the symbolic, in a law that is "exterior to and predominant over nature and man." The universal human fact of castration—the imposition of the law of the signifier onto the living being, so compellingly expressed by Homayounpour—is denied its fundamental banality and given a positively metaphysical significance. The symbolic is transindividual, yes, but this does not mean that it is "exterior" to human beings, nor does Lacan's emphasis on its importance constitute the kind of praise of transcendental divinity found among "the hymn-makers of old," whoever they may be.

And as we have seen, the unconscious is in the disconnect between the symbolic and the subject, in the gap which renders impossible the translation of the singular truth of the subject into an objective discourse. Insofar as that truth can find no signifier, no final term, which will arrest its action upon the life of the culture-bound individual—whence the interminability of any analysis—*the symbolic is also riven by lack*. The same cannot be said of the Father of Christianity or the eternal law of Indra with which Dunlap constructs his analogy, nor, returning to Benslama, can it be said of the eternal and unengendering God of Islam. These formations of the divine elide the lack in the symbolic and, like any fantasy, forestall the ethics of desire at the heart of psychoanalysis.

In Homayounpour's Tehran, what Benslama calls Islam's "renunciation of the Father" adumbrates a complementary and no less psychologically complex exaltation of the Sons. Here and elsewhere, the intersections of paternity, maternity, and filiation determine the position of the unconscious, the contours of which are partially expressed by a culture's religious formations. Here and elsewhere, it is only by sustaining the non-religious, radically atheistic, anti-metaphysical foundations of psychoanalysis that the question of its applicability among Islamicate cultures can unfold. These symbolic orders—their theologies and mythologies, laws and practices, languages and histories—are *human* inventions. This is why psychoanalysis takes them seriously. Religion in Tehran, as in the West, is a symptom.

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