Book Review Essay

Lives of Khan

Speak of Me as I Am: The Life and Work of Masud Khan
by Judy Cooper
Karnac, London, 1993; 140 pp; $45.00

False Self: The Life of Masud Khan
by Linda Hopkins
Other Press, New York, NY, 2006; 525 pp; $35.00

Masud Khan: The Myth and the Reality
by Roger Willoughby
Free Association Books, London, 2005; 320 pp; $65.00

What do we know with certainty about the life of Masud Khan? Khan was born in 1924 in the Punjab, the second son of a marriage that united an elderly Shiite Muslim father who had acquired power and wealth in the service of the British and a bride who was still in her teens. Khan apparently suffered a depression during his adolescence and was treated by a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. In 1946, he immigrated to London, where he became a candidate at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis of the British Psycho-Analytical Society. He entered analysis first with Ella Freeman Sharpe, then with John Rickman – these first two analyses were cut off prematurely by the death of each analyst – and then, famously, with Donald Woods Winnicott. After several unsuccessful attempts, Khan was named a training analyst at the Institute in 1959. He published influential papers on schizoid states, perversion, and the role of regression in the analytic setting, among many subjects. Many of these papers are collected in the three volumes, The Privacy of the Self (Khan, 1974), Alienation in Perversions (Khan, 1979a) and Hidden Selves (Khan, 1983). Khan also assumed, and performed with considerable success, important editorial roles in the international psychoanalytic community.

Khan’s career spiraled downward, beginning with the incidental exposure, in 1965, of false claims he had made concerning his relationship with an important analyst. Subsequently, a growing awareness among his colleagues of Khan’s long-standing boundary violations – these included affairs with woman patients, among them a woman candidate – led to Khan’s forced resignation of his Training Analyst status in 1977. Finally, Khan’s publication of a fourth volume, When Spring Comes (Khan, 1988), in which he depicts his interventions with patients as wild rants, infused with anti-Semitism and sexual slurs, led to his expulsion by the British Psycho-Analytical Society. Khan, who had survived a diagnosis of terminal cancer in 1976, died of the effects of alcoholism in 1989, less than a year after his expulsion from the British Society.
Certain aspects of Khan’s life that have aroused considerable curiosity and speculation are unknown and probably ultimately unknowable. What were the important themes of his analysis with Winnicott, and what was Khan’s actual role in the writing of Winnicott’s papers? How close are the vivid descriptions of clinical work that Khan furnishes in his papers to the actual events of the consulting room? Are they exaggerated, fabricated, or some unknown blend of reality and fantasy?

What is startling to the reader of the biographical sketches and biographies of Khan that have appeared since Khan’s death is that these works—even the two recent biographies by Roger Willoughby and Linda Hopkins, which are heavily annotated and apparently well researched—provide the reader with different versions of the very facts of Khan’s history. Who was Khan’s mother, Khursheed, for example? JC (p. 5) tells us that she was a singing and dancing girl; LH (p. 5) describes her as a courtesan; and both these authors tell us that she bore an illegitimate son before she married Masud Khan’s father, Fazaldad. RW, however, tells us (p. 4) that Khursheed was the first cousin of Fazaldad’s third wife, Amer Jan, who stepped in to care for Amer Jan’s children after Amer Jan’s untimely death; Khursheed’s son was not illegitimate, according to RW, but rather the product of an earlier marriage. And Fazaldad? LH (p. 4) tells us that he was born a peasant, acquiring his great holdings through his association with the British. JC (p. 5) and RW (p. 2) say that Fazaldad added the land granted to him by the British to acreage that he had apparently inherited.

That Khan’s childhood in a distant place and long ago time remains shrouded in mystery should not entirely surprise us. However, as we continue to read, we find that Khan’s biographers also provide us with conflicting versions of the facts of Khan’s life after his arrival in London, when he lived and worked among a cast of characters who are familiar to us.

Concerning the duration of Khan’s analysis with Winnicott, for example, LH (p. 40) and RW (p. 72) tell us that Khan interrupted his analysis after four years to give his five weekly hours to his first wife who had been thrown into crisis by the breakdown of their marriage. In lieu of analysis, Khan became Winnicott’s editorial assistant, meeting regularly with Winnicott to shape Winnicott’s works for publication. But did Khan ever resume his analysis? RW argues cogently that he did not. LH admits to her ultimate uncertainty in the matter, but tells us, drawing upon Khan’s own Work Books,2 that Khan resumed his analysis after a year, and that the analysis endured in one form or another for 15 years (endnote to Chapter 5, p. 412). JC (p. 20), also relying upon Khan’s own account, says nothing of a hiatus and simply tells us that the analysis was of 15 years’ duration.

The story of Khan’s enrollment as a candidate at the British Psycho-Analytic Institute exemplifies the Rashomon-like quality of these different accounts. LH, acknowledging in her endnotes that it is “difficult or impossible” (p. 405) to know the truth of the matter, again draws upon Khan’s own account to tell us a striking story: Khan traveled to England planning to study Modern Greats at Oxford and

---

1For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the three biographies discussed in this essay by their authors’ initials: JC for Judy Cooper’s *Speak of Me As I Am: The Life and Works of Masud Khan*; LH for Linda Hopkins’s *False Self: The Life of Masud Khan*; and RW for Roger Willoughby’s *Masud Khan: The Myth and the Reality*.

2A complete set of the 39 volumes of the Work Books, in which Khan recorded informal notes and musings, is held by the IPA and will not become available for study until 30 years after Khan’s death. However, several copies were made, and Khan’s biographers have had varying access to these.
to pursue a therapeutic psychoanalysis. He wrote to Bowlby before he arrived, planning that Bowlby would refer him to an analyst for treatment. When Khan arrived at Bowlby’s office, however, a misunderstanding had occurred: Bowlby thought that Khan was applying to be a candidate at the Institute – a course that had never occurred to Khan himself. In short order, Khan was accepted for training and referred to Sharpe; his career was launched!

RW, however, tells quite a different story (p. 21): in this version, Khan always intended to become a psychoanalyst and never planned on Oxford; he wrote to Bowlby from India to inquire about psychoanalytic training. Indeed, as RW points out, Khan’s application to become a candidate is documented to have been received by the Institute of Psycho-Analysis on 2 September 1946, one month before Khan says that he arrived in England and had his fateful meeting with Bowlby.

The authors’ accounts also diverge on the central issue of Khan’s continuing relations with patients after his professional lapses had become known. Writing of the period between Khan’s loss of training analyst status in 1977 and his death in 1989, Eric Rayner tells us in his foreword to Cooper’s book that “with his progressive illness, [Khan] was not treating patients” (JC, p. xiii). Hopkins, however, says, “even in his most disturbed periods, Khan still saw patients” (LH, p. 341), and presents an interview with a patient whose analysis with Khan ended as late as 1986.

What are we to make of these different versions of key events in Khan’s life? At times each biographer provides his own version of an event with an air of complete confidence, as if unaware of the existence of other versions. More often, the three biographers confess to some uncertainty, telling us of the difficulty of sorting through various contradictory sources and accounts – many of them put forward by Khan himself – and the reason why they have selected one or another as more likely to be true. In the end the three biographers have constructed narratives of their subject that are more different from one another than biographies of the same individual ordinarily are. It is interesting to consider the figure of Khan that emerges from each narrative. Likely though, it tells us most about Khan that it has been possible for his biographers to construct three such different lives for him, each with a sense of narrative coherence and each contradicting the others in important ways.

**Cooper’s Khan**

In *Speak of Me As I Am: The Life and Works of Masud Khan*, Judy Cooper (1993) presents us with a Khan who is a brilliant but tragic misfit, poorly understood by his contemporaries, a clinician who, while not entirely reliable, “gave too much of himself to his patients, to the detriment of himself” (p. 110). Cooper tells us at the start that she was both Khan’s analysand and his “disciple” (p. xviii). Khan asked her to write about him, summoning her to him nine months before his death (15 years after the conclusion of Cooper’s analysis). In addition to the stories that Khan told her about his own life, Cooper draws for her account upon the first 15 volumes of Khan’s Work Books, which Khan gave her as a wedding gift when she was in analysis with him, and supplements these first-person accounts and her own impressions with interviews with colleagues and friends of Khan’s. Along with a biographical sketch, Cooper provides the reader with an excellent concise exposition of Khan’s thought.
Cooper’s Khan is a fatherly figure. Indeed she tells us explicitly:

He conveyed to me almost instantly that I had at last found the father I was searching for all my life: a father who could and would rescue me … Throughout our analytic relationship … until his death … he was my father and I, a daughter.

(p. 90)

Cooper has in fact minimized Khan’s sexual life as a child might do with a father: in her version, Khan’s first marriage to the ballerina, Jane Shore, breaks up, and then ‘some time later’ he takes up with and marries Shore’s rival, Svetlana Beriosova (rather than the adulterous affair with Beriosova precipitating the end of the first marriage, as described by RW and LH). In speaking of the boundary violations that led to Khan’s loss of training analyst status, Cooper mentions only his “social relationships with many of his analysands” (pp. 27–8), omitting Khan’s sexual transgressions.

As we imagine Khan, an impressive and magnetic figure, welcoming Cooper into his consulting room, it is easy for us to see how this kind of idealizing paternal transference might crystallize early on between the two of them, and how it might have been hard to resolve, blending as it did her deepest wishes and central aspects of Khan’s own desires, as well as his outward persona. And it would be hard to counter Cooper’s own assertion that she was greatly helped by Khan. Yet, at the same time, reading Cooper’s book, one wonders at what cost this help occurred.

The story that Cooper tells and the way that she tells it bear the hallmarks of a significant constriction of thinking and feeling. It says little that she often passes on unquestioningly the myths that Khan promulgated about himself, or even elaborates a bit upon them, linking Khan’s two marriages to ballerinas to his mother’s history as a dancing girl (p. 16), for example. It is all too apparent that Khan evoked this kind of credulity in almost everyone he met.

It is more concerning that Cooper springs so strongly to Khan’s defense even when he is so apparently in the wrong. Sometimes she seems simply to echo his complaints about the world, telling us, for example, that the work of Khan, who published widely and held key editorial positions in the analytic establishment, “has never been officially recognized by the analytic profession” (p. xviii). At times, Cooper seems to suspend her judgment entirely. What are we to make of a chapter on Khan’s work in which an exegesis of his sophisticated papers on technique is followed without comment by a separate section entitled “Khan’s technique in practice”?

Perhaps the most significant feature of Cooper’s narrative is that she tells her story in an entirely uninflected style. She gives us the bad with the good: Khan was infuriating, dishonest, provocative, and contemptuous as well as brilliant, creative, caring, and misunderstood. Yet one feels as one reads Cooper’s book that she has seen the bad but not felt it; there is no sense that she has come to terms with what she has learned or that anything she has learned has altered her initial impression of her subject. It seems likely that Khan’s character as well as his manifest behavior made a demand upon Cooper that she not look beyond the persona that he presented to her – or, if she did look beyond, that she give less credence to whatever she saw than to the brightly lit reality that they had constructed together.
Linda Hopkins’s *False Self: The Life of Masud Khan* (2006) is the most inclusive of the biographies and presents the most vivid portrait of Khan. Hopkins has gathered an enormous amount of material, interviewing Khan’s friends, colleagues, and ex-wives, and reading his voluminous correspondence. Through Sybil Stoller, she has had access to a complete set of the Work Books, which Khan had sent to his close friends, the Stollers, for reading and safekeeping. Hopkins has performed the large and important task of tracking down a significant number of Khan’s analysts and supervisees and interviewing them.

The Khan we meet through Hopkins is a charismatic figure who was able to form intense connections with both men and women (the latter primarily in sexual relationships). He is glamorous and exciting, and we can see the qualities that engaged his colleagues and patients and led them, at least transiently, to overlook his faults. Through Hopkins, we see Khan not as a child might see a parent – as we saw Khan through Cooper – but as a seductive peer. Although Hopkins interviews patients with whom Khan did not cross boundaries as well as patients with whom he did, the Khan who comes alive in her version is the transgressive, seductive Khan. An intellectual and analytic Don Juan, Khan courted destruction, and Hopkins details the many debacles that marked his deteriorating course.

Hopkins’s interviews with patients, from which she presents extended verbatim excerpts, demonstrate the many complex issues that arise with an analyst who violates boundaries. Khan did not cross boundaries with all his patients, particularly early on, and some of the crossings that did occur were relatively minor – a piece of unnecessary self-disclosure on Khan’s part, the loan of a book, or the offer of a room to rest in after a session. In a sense, Khan presented himself as more of a grand personage than analysts ordinarily do or should, impressing his patients with a staff to usher them about, capitalizing on glamorous and often well-known show-business connections, and operating throughout with a dramatic flourish. It is difficult to draw a line between this dramatic self-presentation and more definable transgressions. One senses, in fact, that Khan intended his persona to be transgressive – to say through his appearance and manners that he was above other analysts and the rules that they followed.

Not all the patients with whom Khan committed boundary violations, including those patients with whom he had affairs, felt harmed by him. Many of his patients, both those who received more conventional treatment and those whose analyses were dominated by seemingly catastrophic enactments, felt helped. Although from outside it seems evident that Khan’s behavior often prevented his patients from analyzing, many of them say they felt helped by his ‘realness’, his larger than life involvement. For some patients, speaking to Hopkins seems to have provided an opportunity to reassess continuing transferences to Khan; and a few reflect at a second interview that they have become newly aware of how self-serving Khan was, and how angry and hurt they feel.

Hopkins’s detailed depiction of the analytic community in which Khan rose and fell also gives a sense of the complex web of loyalties that made Khan’s deviant behavior difficult to acknowledge or address. Khan’s combined status as Winnicott’s patient and protégé meant that criticism of Khan implied a criticism both of Winnicott’s analytic work with him and of the extensive extra-analytic relationship
that the two shared. Patients with whom Khan had had sexual relationships were subsequently treated by other analysts, who faced conflicts between protecting these patients' confidentiality and exposing Khan's misbehavior.

Hopkins, unlike Cooper, never knew Khan personally. Nevertheless, as one reads her work, one has the sense that she has been somewhat seduced by him, too charmed and too willing to take him at his word. Perhaps her access to the Work Books promoted this; it is hard to resist belief in a firsthand account. In addition, the many interviews that Hopkins performed with colleagues and friends of Khan's must have produced numerous stories that, while told to her by others, had initially been circulated by Khan himself. Indeed Hopkins acknowledges the problems she encountered in distinguishing the truth of Khan's life from the many contradictory falsehoods that he told.

There are moments in the book, when Hopkins's credulousness seems quite striking. Describing Khan's childhood, for example, Hopkins passes along two stories that were told to her by two of Khan's female friends. I will quote one in its entirety:

Masud used to suffer at school because the other boys would taunt him about his large ear. One day he confided to his father that he was being bullied. Soon after this, a group of his father's servants showed up at the school and they buggered [i.e. sexually assaulted] the other children as Masud watched.

(p. 10)

"Even if untrue...", Hopkins says, introducing this story, and goes on to tell us that it illustrates the "emotional reality", showing us the harshness of Masud's father (pp. 9–10). 'Even if untrue!' It seemed, to me at least, that Hopkins felt drawn here to call a patently untrue story possible; that, even as a biographer, she had fallen under the sway of Khan's compelling demand for his audience's uncritical belief.

A similar constraint in exposing the dark side of Khan is evident, I think, in Hopkins's depictions of Khan's violent and destructive outbursts. Factually, Hopkins does not spare Khan; and she has amassed a huge dossier of the many terrible things that he did during his lifetime –striking his houseboy, telling malicious lies about his friends, shoplifting, driving his car into the building of a rejecting lover and throwing another to the ground and trying to strangle her. It is all there, but all strangely uninflected; through Hopkins's matter-of-fact descriptions, even those built upon the firsthand accounts that she has gathered, we cannot imagine these events as we can imagine, for example, Khan's mesmerizing sexual 'education' of his virgin patient, 'Caroline'.

It is a weakness of Hopkins's otherwise interesting book that she proposes overly simple diagnostic and psychoanalytic formulations to explain Khan's disastrous life trajectory. It seems likely, from the evidence that Hopkins has amassed, that Khan suffered from a bipolar disorder as well as from alcoholism, as Hopkins argues; but this does not go far enough to explain the rich, multifaceted figure that comes across in her depiction. Similarly, her tracing Khan's core pathology to a 'false self' structure seems possible but too reductive. Hopkins argues that Khan's analysis with Winnicott failed because Khan was unable to achieve a regression to dependence, likely because Winnicott was intolerant of Khan's aggression. As we read the history that Hopkins details, however, it would be reasonable for us to question whether Khan could really have benefited from psychoanalysis in any case. Kernberg (1984) argues that patients suffering from narcissistic personality disorder with
antisocial features (a diagnosis that Khan clearly merits in Hopkins’s description) have a poor prognosis in psychoanalytic treatment. And Khan’s precarious ego structure and alcoholism place him within the group of patients whom Wallerstein (1986) describes as presenting ‘heroic’ indications for psychoanalysis. Referred for analysis because it was felt that more superficial treatment would not be effective, patients in this group had the worst outcomes of any cohort in a long-term follow-up study of patients treated at the Menninger Clinic (Wallerstein, 1986).

Willoughby’s Khan

If Cooper and Hopkins present us with experiences of Khan as we might find him if we met him, Roger Willoughby is on the trail of the private Khan, the man behind the compelling performance. Willoughby is a debunker. Although he has entitled his biography *Masud Khan: The Myth and the Reality* (Willoughby, 2005), his chief interest is in the reality side of this equation; and his interest in the mythic, performing Khan tends to be in the concrete ways that Khan constructed his myth and put it across, and in the distance that specific myths stood from factual reality.

Willoughby has interviewed many of Khan’s friends and colleagues, and, like Hopkins, has plowed through Khan’s extensive correspondence. He has also directly and indirectly gathered the accounts of a number of Khan’s patients, but these accounts do not make up a major portion of the book as they do in Hopkins’s volume. Unlike Cooper and Hopkins, Willoughby has not had access to Khan’s Work Books.

Willoughby’s strength is in his persistence in discovering the paper trail that Khan left behind throughout his life. Thus from Willoughby’s account of Khan’s early years, we learn of Khan’s actual mediocre record at school in India, which contrasts strongly with the brilliant claims he made for himself. From the early years in London, Willoughby documents the number of supervisory hours that Khan completed as an analytic candidate – the bare minimum – and his resistance to paying fees, as well as *The Times*’s refusal to print the announcement of Khan’s wedding to Jane Shore as it was initially submitted, because Khan could provide no supporting evidence for the spurious title of ‘Khan Bahadur’ that he had claimed for himself. And from Khan’s last days, Willoughby furnishes the fantastical obituary that Khan composed for himself claiming that the editors of the *Financial Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Daily Telegraph* had requested it.

The dossier Willoughby has compiled also gives us a sense of the operational side, the mechanics of Khan’s presenting himself falsely. We hear from Jane Shore that Khan sometimes instructed her to pretend to be a maid who would usher patients into his home office. Willoughby traces in Khan’s correspondence the way in which Khan concealed aspects of his life from his most intimate confidants; and he shows us how a similar process of the ablation of historical reality can be seen in Khan’s scholarly work, where Khan first built upon Fairbairn’s work and then, in successive papers, omitted Fairbairn from his references.

The Khan whom we meet through Willoughby is more persistently troubled and much less charismatic than the Khan we meet through Cooper and Hopkins. Reading Hopkins, we are most aware of Khan’s ascent and fall, of the way he
dominated his audience, making his way by force of intellect and personality, to the center of the analytic world and then actively destroyed himself. Reading Willoughby, we see Khan, the eternal outsider, who suffered from his sense of inferiority and attempted first to compensate with grandiosity and then to punish those who excluded him.

Willoughby’s account emphasizes the meaning for Khan of having grown up in colonial India, and the double identification that Khan formed with the denigrated Indian subjects and the ruling British elite. Immigration to England reflected the choice of an identification with a ruling class who saw Khan as lesser. As a member of the British Psycho-Analytic Society, Khan continued to encounter unthinking racism, often in projected form. In making a referral to Khan, for example, Winnicott asked the patient if he had an “objection to seeing a Pakistani analyst” (Godley, 2001, pp. 4–5, quoted by RW, p. 87). Curiously, even the photographs that accompany Willoughby’s biography portray a Khan who appears darker skinned, less glamorous, and less European than the Khan who figures in Hopkins’s photographs. (This effect may result in part from Hopkins having selected a larger proportion of pictures from the zenith of Khan’s career, when he was most European in dress.)

The accounts of Khan’s clinical work that Willoughby has gathered from Khan’s patients give the strong impression that Khan’s work was marked by serious boundary violations from the very beginning. A control case, Mr A, who continued the analysis after Khan’s graduation, recounts that Khan told him how to dress so that he would look better when he came to Khan’s office, that Khan boasted to him about his family and his own accomplishments and introduced him to show-business friends; ultimately Khan terminated this analysis abruptly and unilaterally after eight years, to the patient’s great distress (RW, pp. 47–8). By contrast, Hopkins tends to portray Khan as a “fairly traditional analyst” (LH, p. 52) early on, and as doing good work in some analyses even later when some of his analytic work was markedly deviant. It seems likely that Hopkins’s free-form interviews with patients convey more of a sense of what it felt like to be with Khan — including the way patients felt pulled to exonerate or idealize him — while Willoughby’s drier, more factual style has yielded a clearer sense of Khan’s actual behavior.

Like Hopkins, Willoughby ventures psychodynamic explanations of his subject’s behavior. Willoughby’s orientation is predominantly Kleinian. Thus he speculates that Khan’s confabulation reflected a “psychic retreat” (RW, p. 5) and links Khan’s sense of personal incoherence to the incoherence of Khan’s internalized representation of the parental couple (RW, p. 9). Although these formulations may be accurate, they seem too reductive, too general to tell us much about the complex figure whom Willoughby depicts. Like Hopkins’s evocation of the false self, they add little to an otherwise well-researched volume. Likely this reflects a general problem with the use of psychoanalytic concepts in biographies: these constructs which so richly organize our understanding of analytic data often seem hollow when they are removed from their anchorage in the data of the clinical situation.

Many Khans

What can we make of the many chronicles of Khan? At the risk of adding yet another set of reductive hypotheses, I will add my own speculations to the mix. It
is common knowledge that each of us comes alive differently with each of the important others to whom we are tied. Analysts writing from many different perspectives\(^3\) have argued that this phenomenon reflects important qualities of the internal object world, where there reside many versions of the self, each felt to exist in relation to a specific version of the object. As I have argued in a recent paper (LaFarge, 2008), the idea that the self exists in multiple versions may be extended to our private or solitary experience as well: we feel ourselves to be different when we are, in fantasy, apart from our objects from how we feel when we are with them. In some sense Khan may be seen as an extreme example of the multifaceted nature of self experience, someone for whom the selves that he presented to others were more different from one another – and much more distant from the self that he inhabited when he was alone – than is ordinarily the case.

Khan also differed from most of us in his extraordinary ability to influence his audience to believe in the often confabulated selves that he put forward. To read Cooper and Hopkins is to become aware of the magnetism that Khan exerted upon those who knew him, inducing them to notice and confirm his exciting self-presentation and to scotomotize or discount evidence that contradicted it. Greenacre (1958) has described the impostor’s ability to compel belief with a surprisingly unshaded performance, as well as the cruder and more psychopathic aspects of self that lie outside the impostor’s dramatization. We are indebted to Willoughby for documenting both the thinness of Khan’s performance and the less organized, bleaker aspects of Khan that lay outside it.

In his clinical writing, Khan often explored the way the object is used to bring aspects of the self to life. It seems likely that this interest stemmed in part from his wish to understand himself. One of Khan’s most brilliant contributions was his exploration of the mother’s usage of the child, and the role of the mother’s specific psychology in the shaping of the child’s developing self. In Khan’s depiction, mother and child were interacting players with potentially different aims; the mother might sacrifice the child to her own needs, drawing the child into a collusive relationship where development was distorted or stopped (Khan, 1969a). Khan also extended the concept of object usage to encompass the idea that in perversion the object is used to bring alive parts of the self; in this transaction, the object’s own unique nature is lost, as the child’s may be with the mother (Khan, 1969b). Khan emphasized the way in which complex, early modes of object usage come alive in the clinical situation and may be reconstructed.

Reading Khan’s papers with the advantage of hindsight, one imagines that Khan’s understanding of the adult’s use of the child may have reflected in part his own wishes and enacted experiences with his patients. Attention to variations in the structure and tone of Khan’s papers supports this hypothesis, and gives us a sense of the different trajectories that Khan’s usage of the object may have taken. In the papers compiled in his first book, *The Privacy of the Self* (1974), Khan’s descriptions of clinical work tend to be detailed. We have a sense of the process, of the transference and countertransference, and often of the way the evolving events of the treatment reflect the patient’s early experience. In *Alienation in Perversions*

---

\(^3\)An incomplete list would include Klein (1946); Racker (1957); Sandler (1976); Kernberg (1978); Feldman (1993); Bromberg (1998).
we catch glimpses of another aspect of Khan. The papers on perversion are original, often brilliant, but some elements of Khan’s narrative give the impression that they are designed to excite rather than inform the reader. In Khan’s 1969 paper, *Role of the ‘collated internal object’ in perversion formations*, this shift in narrative form is particularly marked: the sense of a detailed process recedes altogether, and the analysis becomes a kind of platform for exciting perverse stories that the patient gradually reveals to the analyst, and that the analyst in turn passes on to the reader.

Considering these papers as well as the accounts that have been gathered from his patients, it seems possible that, in his best mode, Khan used his patients, as he used Cooper, to bring to life his vision of himself as an analyst. This vision might have been idealized and distorted, but it involved some idea of using the analytic situation to be therapeutic. At other times, as we sense at certain moments in the papers on perversion, the balance shifted: Khan used his patients to bring alive different sexual and omnipotent aspects of himself; and the patients’ own needs and the therapeutic nature of the treatment were lost. Finally, with Khan’s last book, *When Spring Comes* (1988), the structure of analysis was lost altogether. Khan depicts his use of the analytic relationship to hurt his patients; and, in parallel with this, uses his writing primarily to inflict suffering upon the colleagues and friends who would read it.

Who was Khan, all in all? Toward the end of her book, Hopkins quotes André Green (1997) as saying, “In the end, Masud … didn’t realize that he was in England in the 20th century. He thought it was Pakistan and the 17th century”. “If Green is right,” Hopkins says, “and the True Self Khan experienced in Pakistan was based on a fantasized reality, it is of interest to question whether it is appropriate to call it a True Self” (LH, p. 388).

It seems inaccurate to say that Khan was finally the collection of historical facts that Willoughby has traced, for Khan was also the man whom people met, believed, and loved. If that self was false and impostrous, nevertheless Khan lived partly within it, producing a body of written work that still has merit. It is also unclear how much of Khan’s confabulated history he himself came to believe. How would Khan himself have regarded the problem of our knowing him? Ultimately, Khan felt, there are mad parts of each of us that cannot be known by another. As analysts we mistakenly, like Klein and Winnicott, “try to make sense of the nonsense of the analysand’s spoken madness” (Khan, 1979b, p. 182). In the end, however, “each adult is mad in a very private way, and also alone” (1979b, p. 181).

In concluding, one might ask why so many biographies of Khan have appeared so soon after his death. Other analysts who have made important contributions to the field have received far less attention. And why is the attention that Khan receives so focused on his life rather than on the considerable body of his work? Although we might attribute the spate of Khan biographies to a wish to resolve our reactions to the considerable disturbance that he caused in the analytic world, impostors and other deceivers have in fact always received more than their fair share of biographical attention, and interest in their lives has always tended to overshadow interest in the works that these often gifted individuals have accomplished. Deceivers fascinate us. As Kris (2005) points out, their use of splitting stirs
up something similar in ourselves. We wish alternately to believe them and to unmask them, and it is difficult for us to see them whole or to put them to rest.

References


Lucy LaFarge
239 Central Park West, Suite 1-BE,
New York, NY 10024, USA
E-mail: lafzim@earthlink.net

© 2008 Institute of Psychoanalysis

Int J Psychoanal (2008) 89