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***OH, I LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE THE WORLD!:***

**DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN HOMEBOY/KABUL**

A Thesis Equivalent Project

Presented to the

Department of Theatre

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Sonali Kumar

May 2006

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THESIS EQUIVALENT PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
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University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Douglas Paterson M.A.

Name

Theatre

Department

D. Scott Gasser

Name

THEATRE

Department

Karen Deena AlHindi

Name

Women's Studies

Department

Chairperson:

Cindy Melby Phares

Date:

July 28, 2006

*OH, I LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE THE WORLD!:*  
DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN HOMEBOY/KABUL

Sonali Kumar, MA

University of Nebraska, 2006

Advisor: Dr. Douglas Paterson

ABSTRACT

This thesis equivalent projects documents the internal and external devices of Tony Kushner's 2004 play Homebody/Kabul through the lens of dramaturgy.

Chapter One, *Introduction*, establishes definitions of dramaturgy from noted scholars Anne Cattaneo and Martin Esslin. Chapter Two, *Dramaturgical Analysis of the Text*, provides a frame for the external structure of the play, and investigates questions of the playwright's past work, the play's production history, the use of Nancy Hatch Dupree's book, A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul, and changes in the text from the 2001 *First Edition* to the 2004 *Revised Edition* of Homebody/Kabul. The third chapter, *Areas of Dramaturgical Inquiry*, discusses eight key areas, including the history of Afghanistan; the development of the Taliban; the timeline suggested in the play by the 1998 embassy bombings; the multiple cases of substance abuse; questions about the alleged grave of Cain; the role of Frank Sinatra's music in the play; the seven foreign

languages spoken in the text; and changes in the script since the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

The *Appendix: Production Documentation*, begins the process of compiling the data left behind from this production towards the goal of aiding another dramaturg in finding information about our production of the play. It contains the text from the program and a selection of photographs from technical rehearsals.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Dramaturgy still holds a relatively new position in the realm of American theatre. Developed from German theatre practices of the eighteenth century, dramaturgy became a regular practice of theatre companies during the explosive regional theatre movement of the nineteen sixties and seventies. Today, dramaturgs are charged with the task of making the play relevant to the audience, an assignment which covers all manner of research about the playwright, the play's history, and language. For new plays, dramaturgs work with playwrights and directors to hone and craft the original vision of the play.

American playwright Tony Kushner is a loquacious proponent of dramaturgy. In an interview with Susan Jonas called "Tony Kushner's *Angels*," he describes a multiplicity of processes with dramaturgs for his epic Angels in America. Speaking specifically, in this case, about Chekov's The Cherry Orchard, Kushner believes the work of the dramaturg goes beyond finding out "what a Russian middle-class intellectual would eat for breakfast (478)" into the realm of ideology and partisan politics. For Kushner, "What you need to find out is: What is this play saying? What is this passionately partisan, political, harsh play saying about life that I want to say (478)."

As Joel Schechter explains in his essay, "In the Beginning There Was Lessing . . . Then Brecht, Müller, and Other Dramaturgs" the role of dramaturg essentially



began with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1769 collection, Hamburg Dramaturgy, in which Lessing functioned as the resident critic for the Hamburg National Theatre. The Hamburg Dramaturgy is a compilation of essays on the work being produced at the theatre and on the role of theatre in Hamburg society (16). Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble developed the role of the dramaturg further in 1930s Germany, as "their task was to interpret and respond to the events of the day through the choice of repertory" (Cattaneo 5). The Berliner Ensemble, with their famous production books, became the model by which most dramaturgy is judged. Currently, Mark Bly's The Production Notebooks follows in this tradition by documenting the day to day work of developing and rehearsing a play via the collected insight of the playwright, director and designers. "Today, the job of production dramaturg is performed by many people holding various titles: dramaturg, literary manager, literary advisor, artistic associate, playwright-in-residence, director, and often artistic director" (Cattaneo 5-6).

But what is that work? Dramaturgs, Cattaneo suggest, are responsible for seeing the big picture, in both the individual production process and in the mission of a theatre company. In his book The Experience of Place, architect Tony Hiss "mentions the dramaturg's role in the theatre as one who 'looks after the play itself'. A dramaturg for Hiss, in architecture or theatre, is 'someone who keeps the whole in mind' (Hiss quoted in Cattaneo 6). Dramaturgs work with theatres at every level, with students doing educational outreach, in design teams and rehearsals with actors, directors and production teams, and in conference with the artistic directors and

producers about mission, season selection, and the most essential questions of artistic purpose.

These important questions begin with the most fundamental ones: Who are we as artists? What are our theatrical or extratheatrical models and our ideals? What kind of work do we respond to? Who is our work for? What is our theatre community in terms both of artists and audience? How do we identify and involve our community of artists and audience? ( Cattaneo 6).

Martin Esslin takes this work one step further and tasks the dramaturg with making the theatre relevant to the community it serves, not just the artists themselves. As the popularity of theatre has declined, Esslin believes the dramaturg must invest significant time and resources into bringing the press to the theatre and educating journalists and patrons about the artists and the work. The dramaturg must find ways of “making the work of the theatre and its repertoire genuinely newsworthy, the object of heated discussion and sensational controversy”, by means of “lectures and discussions on related topics, etc., by arranging for discussions with authors and actors after the performances” (27). By doing this, for Esslin, we come to the “main mission of the dramaturg in this country – the mission of making the theatre accepted as a major cultural, social and ideological factor in the community” (30).

Yet this is not the day to day work of dramaturgs in the United States. Because dramaturgs are considered the resident intellectuals of professional theatres, the work of the production dramaturg is fairly specific. Cattaneo gives an explicit job description:

The production dramaturg's job is to convey a detailed knowledge of the text and its variants; an understanding of the way the play was originally performed; biographical information about the writer; a past production history of the play throughout history; and an overview of literary and dramatic criticism of the text" (9).

Clearly, research is the core of the dramaturg's work, and once an established play or new commission has been selected by a theatre company, the dramaturg works with the director or artistic director to develop the script toward the specific needs of the production. "The dramaturg then prepares the text for production, choosing the text of the play selected, editing or translating it, or commissioning or supervising a translation" (7). For classic, contemporary and new texts, dramaturgs need "to have access to original source materials: letters, illustrations, documentation, historical references. Good dramaturgs have highly developed research skills and an often secret network of reference librarians to help them in their quest" (7). Dramaturgs usually read or have familiarity with foreign or esoteric language(s), including the heightened language of verse and epic drama. In seeking to create a play text that works for the specific idea of the production or mission of the theatre, dramaturgs must "discuss with the director modernization of individual words, obscure references, and unclear or obscure scansion, along with any other textual irregularities. [So that] on the first day of rehearsal, the actors should be presented with a finished text, incorporating cuts, emendations, and changes" (7-8). Clearly, as Esslin notes, a dramaturg must be a "highly knowledgeable person, widely read and

cultured, familiar with the demography, sociology, and psychology of his environment” (30).

In developing the dramaturgical work for Homebody/Kabul, I sought to include key features of Cattaneo and Esslin’s definitions. At the center was the work involved in developing Tony Kushner’s epic four and a half hour play into a staged reading suitable for the Laboratory Theatre space on the University of Nebraska – Omaha campus, Weber Fine Arts room 006. Following the guidelines laid out by many of the dramaturgs in Dramaturgy In American Theatre and the dictates of the theatre department, the script was cut to two and one half hours, the dialectical British English was Americanized, and a narrator was added as a formal structuring devise. This, however, was simply the first step into the depth of the plot, themes, and external circumstances of the play. *The text that follows compiles this research and thinking into a form suitable to examine the TRANSITION!!!!*

Chapter Two, *Dramaturgical Analysis of the Text*, provides a frame for the external structure of the play, and investigates questions of the playwright’s past work, the play’s production history, the use of Nancy Hatch Dupree’s book, A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul, and changes in the text from the 2001 *First Edition* to the 2004 *Revised Edition* of Homebody/Kabul. The third chapter, *Areas of Dramaturgical Inquiry*, attempts to answer some of the questions implicit in the work of a dramaturg about references in the play which could be obscure to the production team and audience. I discuss eight key areas, including the history of Afghanistan; the development of the Taliban; the timeline suggested in the play by the 1998 embassy bombings; the multiple cases of substance abuse; questions about the alleged

grave of Cain; the role of Frank Sinatra's music in the play; the seven foreign languages spoken in the text; and changes in the script since the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The *Appendix: Production Documentation*, begins the process of compiling the data left behind from this production towards the goal of aiding another dramaturg in finding information about our production of the play. It contains the text from the program and a selection of photographs from technical rehearsals.

In all cases, I found and used research in the rehearsal process with this specific production in mind. As I was both the dramaturg and the director of the semi-staged reading, I made moment-by-moment choices about whether or not to present information to actors. In some cases, research proved to be too esoteric to use and discuss in the rehearsal process, and non-scholarly sources proved the best means of rapidly bringing a performer up to speed with the needs of the play. These non-scholarly research materials are noted within this text. As Cattaneo notes in her article, *Dramaturgy: An Overview*, a dramaturg's work is often performed by other artists and members of the theatre company. My role as dramaturg-director was not a unique one, but in focusing the production of Homebody/Kabul towards dramaturgy with a low-budget staged reading, the work of a director was occasionally thrust to the side in pursuit of clearer, more accurate information for the cast and my own intellectual curiosity.

## CHAPTER II

### DRAMATURGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

#### Playwright Tony Kushner

Tony Kushner (1956 - ) was born in New York City, but spent his youth in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where his father ran a lumberyard. His mother was a professional bassoonist and amateur actress, and his parents filled their lives with visual and performing arts. Kushner dates his interest in theater to early memories of seeing his mother onstage. He acted in plays as a child, but resisted the theatre in high school so as to keep his homosexuality a secret. He had “decided at a very early age that [he] would become heterosexual” (Fisher 14) and was unable to come out of the closet until he experienced numerous unsuccessful attempts at psychotherapy to change his sexual orientation.

After finishing his undergraduate education in English Literature at Columbia University in 1978, Kushner worked in New York as a switchboard operator and directed small-scale productions of Shakespeare. This led him to studying directing at New York University. He chose directing in part because he was not confident of his chances to become a playwright, although he was writing voraciously at the time. He graduated with his MFA in 1984, after having written and directed children’s plays in Louisiana and St. Louis. Early plays from this time include La Fin de la Baleine: An Opera for the Apocalypse (1982), Yes Yes No No (1985), and The Heavenly Theatre: Hymns for Martyred Actors (1985). As his reputation as a

playwright increased, he began to draw commissions from theatres and spent the mid to late eighties working on Stella (1987), an adaptation from Goethe; A Bright Room Called Day (1987), and The Illusion (1988), adapted from Corneille. He worked with Argentinean playwright Ariel Dorfman to adapt Dorfman's novel Widows into a play which was produced in Los Angeles in 1991.

Critical success arrived when the Eureka Theater in San Francisco commissioned him to write a play which became Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes in 1992. A play in two parts, Angels' epic structure brought Kushner's political and artistic stance as a progressive liberal to international prominence. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and two Tony awards. Major work since Angels include: The Good Person of Setzuan (1994), adapted from Bertolt Brecht; Henry Box Brown; or the Mirror of Slavery (1997), and the musical libretto Caroline, or Change (1998). Kushner co-wrote the screenplay for Steven Spielberg's 2005 film Munich and his adaptation of Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children opens at the Joseph Papp Theatre in New York this year.

### Homebody/Kabul Production History and Cast Breakdowns

The production history of Homebody/Kabul is as varied as the play itself, especially as the piece has sustained so many changes between 1997 and 2004. It was originally conceived as a one-woman-show for British actress Kika Markham. After being produced as a staged reading December 1997 at the Chelsea Theatre Centre in London, it was fully mounted as a one-woman monologue production in July of 1999 (Kushner xvii). By 2001, the monologue was the first scene in the first act of the three

act, thirteen-actor play at the New York Theatre Workshop premiere which opened on December 19<sup>th</sup>, directed by Declan Donnellan. Oskar Eustis directed the same version in March 2002 at Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island. The original version was then directed by Tony Taccone with a cast of eleven actors at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in April 2002. Donnellan directed a slimmed down cast of ten in the May 2002 production at The Young Vic in London. All of these productions were what this study will call the *First Edition*, noted as (v1). In July 2003 Frank Galati directed the first draft of the *Revised Version* for the Steppenwolf Theatre Company. A character called The Marabout was cut from the script and a number of Supernumeraries were cast in addition to the cast of ten. The *Revised Version*, referenced as (v2) in this study, was then produced at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle. Directed by Bartlett Sher, the production opened in September of 2003. Frank Galati brought the Steppenwolf design team, but re-cast the play extensively for the October 2003 production at The Center Group Theatre/Mark Taper Forum. It was this production which moved to the Brooklyn Academy of Music in May 2004.

As evidenced in the production history, the script was never produced with fewer than ten actors, although the 2003 Intiman Theatre production used eight actors in ten roles and two “Ensemble”. The doubling of roles changes from production to production, but of the eight major productions listed in the *Revised Version* history (v2. xvii – xxi), six doubled at least one role. Of these six, The Munkrat and The Border Guard were always doubled. Doctor Qari Shah was doubled with The Border Guard twice, and once with The Marabout in the Berkeley Repertory production. Mahala was doubled with The Lady in Burqa in three productions. Although



Kushner has used doubling to great success in other work like *Angels in America*, the doubling in Homebody/Kabul is not written into the script. Needless to say, the construction of the cast has been flexible. It is outside the realm of this study to hypothesize how doubling worked in each production, but we can imagine that discrete doubling could build the sense of a conspiracy about the Homebody's missing body in each production, especially in cases where The Lady in Burqa is doubled. In the 2002 Young Vic production, both Kika Markham (Homebody) and Souad Faress (Mahala) are credited with "Lady in Burqa (v2.xx)". The image of Priscilla seeking assistance from Mahala and her mother-in-hiding is searing and adds high dramatic irony.

For a dramaturg, resolving the scriptural changes and casting questions must be handled on a production-by-production basis. While the *Revised Version* of the script is considered the only produce-able version, knowledge of the changes provide the production team with a deeper understanding of Kushner's intentions.

### Changes In The Text

As noted in the production history, the text of Homebody/Kabul underwent great changes between 1997 and its final published form in 2004. In James Fisher's The Theatre of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope, published in hardcover in 2001, Homebody/Kabul is only a monologue, performed in July 1999 by Markham (Fisher 188). In the preface to the subsequent paperback edition, written in April 2002, Fisher discusses the rest of play from the New York Theatre Workshop production, but even a source as authoritative as Fischer has only half the story.

Numerous versions of Homebody/Kabul exist, in rehearsal copy and unauthorized play collections, but the two worthy of significant study are the May 2002 *First Edition* of the text printed after the March 2002 Trinity Repertory Theatre production and the December 2004 *Revised Edition* printed after the May 2004 BAM production. Both versions of the script were published by the Theatre Communications Group. The order of the scenes and their lengths were changed dramatically. Moments were condensed and expanded, lines cut and moved, and characters gained and lost. Speaking about the March 2005 production by Boston Theatre Works, Iris Fanger of The Portland Phoenix writes,

At its New York premiere in the fall of 2001, Kushner's play was eloquent and disturbing in equal measure, filled with imaginative complexity of language but attempting to cover too much ground in its multiple, messy plot lines and wide-ranging geography. Since then, the playwright has reworked the drama, compressing it into a three-hour chronicle that maintains its passionate voice while tightening the action. He has even managed to integrate the themes of the first act – a long monologue by the Homebody, as the retiring British matron at the play's center is called – more securely.

To make sense of the changes, I include here a diagram of the two scripts side by side.

| <u>First Edition from 2002</u>                  | <u>Revised Edition from 2004</u>        |
|---|---|
| Act I, scene I: Homebody Monologue              | Act I, scene I: Homebody Monologue      |
| I,ii: A hotel room in Kabul                     | I,ii: A hotel room in Kabul             |
| II,i: On a street in Kabul                      | I,iii: On a street in Kabul             |
| II,ii: Quango & Milton alcohol <i>and</i> opium | I,iv: Quango & Milton w/alcohol         |
| II,iii: In Khwaja's apartment                   | I,v: Priscilla & Khwaja on a hilltop    |
| II,iv: Zai Garshi's hat shop                    | II,i: The hotel room, after dark.       |
| II,v: Priscilla & Milton in the hotel room      | II,ii: In Khwaja's apartment            |
| II,vi: Mahala's house                           | II,iii: Quango & Milton w/opium         |
| III,i: Priscilla & Khwaja in an Alley           | II,iv: Zai Garshi's hat shop            |
| III,ii: Quango & Milton w/heroin                | II,v: Mahala's house                    |
| III,iii: Cheshme Khedre                         | II,vi: Priscilla & Milton in hotel room |
| III,iv: The Khyber Pass                         | II,vii: Quango & Milton w/heroin        |
| Periplum: London, 1999.                         | III,i: Cheshme Khedre                   |
|   | III,ii: : The Khyber Pass               |
|   | Periplum: London, 1999.                 |

From a quick glance, the most obvious change from 2002 to 2004 is the addition of two scenes in the *Revised Edition*. The added scenes are both in Act Two, and actually represent a change in three scenes. Act Two, Scene 1 is newly constructed and replaces the original Act Three, Scene 1—“Priscilla & Khwaja in an Alley”. Act One, Scene 4 and Act Two, Scene 3 in the revision were originally compressed into Act Two, Scene 2. Act Two, Scene 6 in the *Revised Edition* was originally Act Two, Scene 5.

From a casting standpoint, the biggest change is the elimination of a character called “The Marabout” described as an “Afghan man, very old, a Sufi hermit”

(Kushner 4) in the original version. The Marabout is only in Act Three, Scene 3, at the graveyard, as a self-appointed protector of the grave of Cain. In the scene, the Marabout asks Priscilla to remove her burqa, and invites her to pray at the grave of Cain. He blesses Priscilla with the Arabic words “Hafazakee Allahu ala al-dawaam (May God keep you in His embrace forever.)” after creating a grotesque Waiting For Godot-like moment in the play’s climax (v1. 116):

PRISCILLA: Last night I dreamt if I came to this place I’d find her. She’ll meet me here.

*(The Marabout looks up suddenly, apparently seeing someone. He points in the direction in which he’s staring.)*

THE MARABOUT: *(In accented but good English)* Ah, and here she is!

*(Priscilla and Khwaja turn in the direction the Marabout’s pointing.*

*They stare, watching, waiting. They wait and wait for a long time. No one comes.*

*The Marabout watches this for a moment, then goes back to his book.*

*Khwaja gives up first. He turns back to the Marabout, then back to Priscilla.*

*She keeps staring, waiting.*

*No one comes.*

*Khwaja touches her shoulder. She turns away. She looks at the Marabout, who pays her no attention.)*

PRISCILLA: Why did you...? *(To Khwaja)* Why did he say that? Did he see someone? (v1.111-2).

The Marabout's blessing was given to Khwaja in what is now Act Three, Scene 1, and the horrific moment of waiting for a mother who never appears is cut in the *Revised Version* along with the character. In the Afterword, Kushner references a speech about Cain that was cut from the first draft of the show, saying "It's still a long play, but it used to be longer. This speech, about Cain, Adam's first son who is according to legend buried in Kabul, was whittled down to help bring the play into tighter shape" (149). The quotation is followed by a much longer version of a speech Khwaja gives in *First Edition's* Act Three, Scene 3. Perhaps as the play developed, from production to production, Kushner cut the Marabout in further efforts to tighten the shape of the play. This tightening took many forms and may have included playwright-authorized use of doubling, a tactic Kushner has employed successfully in previous work.

The *Revised Edition* is a tighter script, despite the presence of more scenes, because there are fewer words and characters, but the differences stretch far beyond that. From the very beginning of *Kabul*, the characters evolve in different ways. Both versions begin with Doctor Qari Shah describing the supposed beating of the Homebody in Cheshme Khedre, but in the *Revised Version* this speech is approximately one third shorter. Elongated descriptions of her crushed limbs are missing, including "the left orbit vacant, and canines, molars, incisors absent both her superior and inferior maxillaries, and from dull force many of the skull's two and twenty bones are found to be compromised (v1. 32)". The extreme detail of the descriptions in the *First Edition* serve to heighten the visual image of the Homebody's broken and beaten body, but is dissimilar to the stark, non-

communicative nature of the rest of the characters, who rarely speak in such detail. Perhaps the details in the *First Edition* are too distinct to allow for the possibility that the Homebody survived and, I think, would force an otherwise sympathetic audience to believe Doctor Shah is a liar instead of a man stretching the truth in an impossible situation.

What follows instead in the *Revised Edition* is a different kind of image. Mullah Durranni tears up a paper, starkly illustrating the Homebody's wretched state. It is followed by a curious new image of Doctor Shah. In both versions Mullah Durranni and Doctor Shah leave after explaining the body's disappearance, but the *Revised Edition* includes the following stage direction: "*(Doctor Qari Shah gives Milton a sudden, fierce embrace before following Mullah Durranni out)*" (v2. 36). This unexpected gesture of communion heightens the conspiracy that develops. Is Doctor Shah expressing his condolences to Milton, or is he thanking him for giving him a new wife (Homebody), in exchange for his old one (Mahala)?

As Act One, Scene 2 develops, there are further changes. Of particular note is the adjustment of Quango's exit. Originally, Quango exits after thirteen additional lines of dialogue, explaining "Music. It's contra Islam, as the Taliban read it" (37). In the revision, Milton makes the same observation privately to Priscilla. Instead of Quango being the expert, Milton and Priscilla share information they know about life under the Taliban. They, like the audience, realize in the moment the far-reaching consequences of lines like "Drinks are illegal here" (38). These epiphanies are made personal in the last line of the scene. Milton's "I am unmarried." creates a portrait of

an exhausted, hopeless man, very different from the angry, frustrated image of him screaming “DEAD! DEAD! DEAD!” in the original.

An important change in the act structure occurs in the next scene when Priscilla, having run out of the hotel room, is confronted by a member of the military police. The following scene begins Act Two in the original, but occurs in Act One, Scene 3 in the revision. A new stage direction for the Munkrat sets a tone far different from the original image of a ruthless Taliban soldier, with emphasis added.

*Priscilla picks up the guidebook, sits on the curb, lights a cigarette, starts to peruse the map.*

*Immediately a bearded man in a green shalwah kamiz appears, wearing a black turban, carrying a Kalashnikov and a rubber hose.*

*He watches Priscilla, who is unaware of his presence. A moment, then he advances on her, brandishing the hose, frightening her – although his tone is more bemused and curious than vicious (v2. 44).*

Khwaja steps into their confrontation, offering words of peace in both scripts, but after the Munkrat exits there changes are numerous. Originally, Priscilla spoke in her mother’s tongue, using words as weapons and shields. She says more, but none of it significantly develops the plot. Khwaja is substantially more politically minded in the *First Edition*, saying:

Missile attacks sour the mood of a city. A pity your mother did not anticipate Mr. Clinton’s intentions. I shall take you to the hospitals, where sepsis is pervasive. And to the Minister; who will be unavailable, at prayers, these

ministers are always at prayers. It would be wise to replace the burqa (v1. 52).

This revision may be related to a small change in the cast listing. In the original, Khwaja Aziz Mondanabosh is a “Tajik Afghan man, fifties or sixties, a poet and guide for hire” (v1. 4). In the *Revised Edition*, he is a “Tajik Afghan man, thirties/early forties, a poet and mahram (male escort/guide for women)” (v2. 4). There is an implication here that only an older man, a hardened survivor of the Taliban, would speak with such brashness about the current government. This rendering of the older Khwaja as an unabashed protestor of Taliban rule, and a bit of a curmudgeon, continues from the declaration above, especially in Act Two, Scene 3. In contrast, the younger Khwaja appears more circumspect about criticizing the government or disobeying the law. Additionally, the younger Khwaja allows for the possibility of a true sexual attraction with Priscilla, setting up a contrast to the delusional love of Quango, a circumstance heightened by a similar drop in age for Quango, from “early to mid-to-late thirties” originally to “mid-to-late twenties/early thirties” in the *Revised Edition*.

A principal change from the *First Edition* to the *Revised Edition* throughout the three acts is the complexity of Priscilla’s language in the original text. Priscilla was originally conceived as her mother’s mouthpiece, employing the Homebody’s esoterica for her own uses – as comic effect, as a weapon, and as a coping mechanism. It begins as a means of cheering up her dad in the first scene – Milton is “(Amused, unnerved) Hah. That’s very . . . like her. Sempiternal. Didn’t know you could do . . . that.” (v1. 38) – and progresses into the streets of Kabul. The words



spring from her almost by accident in the following scene with Khwaja and she uses them as weapon, to have power over Khwaja:

PRISCILLA: But she didn't step on a mine, they said she was torn to pieces.

Something about her . . . . occiput. (*She cries*) Her . . . skull. Oh my God.

(*She forces herself to stop crying*)

Evanition? Or Evagation? That is the question.

KHWAJA: I do not know these words.

PRISCILLA: That's why I'm using them. This answer is amphibologous.

I have to stop doing that, it's . . . creepy. (v1. 51-2)

As the play continues, a tougher, more succinct Priscilla emerges, one who is less apt to entertain, and it is in this direction Kushner took the play. The Priscilla in the *Revised Edition* hates her mother's words, but she needs them. The earlier Priscilla loves the words, but doesn't want them anymore:

PRISCILLA: May I tell you something? She won't come.

A junkshop, her, discarded needs, pamphlets from defunct societies for dashed hopes, loss, loss. All her forgotten words: Cosmolatry. Idolatrous worship of the world. Cosmognosis, that's a lovely one, the secret knowledge an animal has, a bird for example, which teaches them to migrate and where to go.

*Corpus vile*. She was a mother who demanded interpretation. She loved everything the world's forgotten. It's why she came here.

And we'll leave her here. In Afghanistan. So at the heart of the world the world's forgotten it. (v1 115)

Reading the two versions side-by-side, we can see the revision hidden in the original. The revision is, as Fanger says, an integrated, passionate, action-filled work in its present form, free of the unnecessary flourishes or sloppiness critics noted in the *First Edition*. In his 2002 article “Angels in Afghanistan” Robert Brustein remarked “Kushner is one of the few playwrights who publicly acknowledge and even seem to advertise a need for a dramaturg – the current production boasts two. Yet his material is still sorely in need of dramaturgical attention.” Dramaturgs Oskar Eustis, Mandy Mishell Hackett, Luan Schooler and Mame Hunter achieved this slimmer, more complex version through careful ministrations.

#### Complex Language in the “Homebody” Monologue

The complexity of the language in the “Homebody” monologue has garnered wild praise, but it also functions as an alienation device. Even for the extreme literati, the Homebody’s language is far beyond the scope of contemporary speech. Therefore, in listening to her language, we are continually forced to evaluate what she is saying for sense – for the simple meanings of the words, and in this process, are examining how we each use language individually and as a society.

There are three kinds of language working in tandem in the monologue, not including the song and verse at the end. The first variety is the borrowed prose from Nancy Hatch Dupree’s travelogue A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul. The second is the Homebody’s effusively lyrical use of her extensive vocabulary. Binding the two together are her contemporary colloquialisms and absent-minded flourishing hand gestures.

Kushner begins his acknowledgments in the Homebody/Kabul script to Dupree, saying:

Most importantly, Nancy Hatch Dupree gave me her kind permission to use several sections and sentences from *A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul*, altered to suit my purposes, in the Homebody's monologue. Ms. Dupree's elegant prose, dazzling erudition and deep love for her subject had a profound shaping effect not only on the style but also in the substance of *Homebody/Kabul* (v1.vii)

Ms. Dupree's prose is indeed elegant and dazzling, and marks each major section in the script. The monologue charts Afghanistan's history and development in chunks of text read directly from the guidebook. It begins with her phrase "Our story begins at the very dawn of history, circa 3,000 B.C. . . ." (v1. 9) and uses selections from Dupree throughout the one-woman show, ending with the sentence "Modern Afghanistan is born when, in 1747, heretofore warring Afghan tribal chiefs forge for themselves a state, proclaiming Ahmed Shah Durranni, age 25, King of the Afghans (v1. 22)". After the final quotation directly from the *A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul*, the Homebody closes the guidebook and appears to speak with knowledge of the text, but not from it. It is implied that the final poem, by the seventeenth century Persian poet Sa'ib-I-Tabrizi, is quoted from the text, as the stage directions read, "(She picks up the guidebook, but does not open it) (v1.29)." In charting over 4,700 years of Afghanistan's history, the guidebook uses geographic names and historical references to places and people beyond the scope of everyday knowledge. The Homebody takes many of these names (Darius the Great, Herodotus, and the Maurya

Dynasty) for granted, implying she knows who or what they are, but even she is perplexed by some of the historical encounters.

“In the middle of the second century B.C., during the Greco-Bactrian confusion, a Chinese tribe, the Hsiung-Yu, attacked a rival tribe, the Yueh-Chih [. . . .]”

“By 48 B.C. the Chinese tribes are united under the banner of their largest clan, the Kushans. From the city of Kapisa, the Kushan court came to rival the Caesars in Rome.” And I’d never *heard* of the Kushans, have you? Nor for that matter the Greco-Bactrian Confusion! Though it *feels* familiar, does it not, the Greco-Bactrian Confusion? When did it end? The guidebook does not relate. *Did* it end? Are we perhaps still in it? (v1.16)

This contrast of the familiar and the foreign is at the heart of the Homebody’s musings. We, as an audience, must ask the same questions as the Homebody, and examine our own knowledge about Afghanistan, and the forces which created it. Living in the West and growing up with an idea that Ancient Greece and Rome had the largest and most developed civilizations in the world, we expect forgiveness for our belief that the rest of the world, particularly Central Asia, was a product of rustic, barbaric tribal groups. *It is* a shock to learn about a civilization as advanced as the Kushans and realize that Afghanistan is the product of incredibly sophisticated nations. These moments of intellectual re-examination are key to the audience experience of the Homebody’s monologue.

Another form of this re-examination comes from the bewilderment of the Homebody’s extensive vocabulary. The monologue is strewn with words ranging

from the esoteric to the abstruse. Some words, like *hymic*, *illumine*, and *expiry*, are homophonic enough to make sense to an intently listening audience. But others, like *senescence*, *synchisis*, and *epexegeisis*, come from arcane roots beyond the comprehension of most audience members. In some cases, the Homebody's speech becomes so gnarled with unfathomable words that she apologizes.

In my mind's eye, yet from memory: I had seen these abbreviated fezlike pillboxy attenuated yarmulkite millinarisms, um, *hats*, I'm sorry I *will* try to stop, *hats*, yes, in a crowded shop . . . a dusty shop crowded with artifacts, relics, remnants, little . . . doodahs of a culture once aswarm with spirit matter, radiant potent magic the disenchanting dull detritus of which has washed up on our culpable shores . . . Precisely as my salt-wounded mind's eye's corneal rotogravured sorry sorry. I found the shop (v1. 17).

We cannot escape the fact that the Homebody is more intelligent than most of us, but we do not envy her for it. Her language is her cage. She cannot escape it, saying "I speak . . . I can't help myself. Elliptically. Discursively . . . So my diction, my syntax, well, it's so *irritating*, I apologize (v1.12)". There is a high price to pay for her words. She "live(s) with the world's utter indifference, which I have always taken to be a form of censure-in-potentia (v1. 12)". Her language has ruined her relationship with her family: "My husband cannot bear my . . . the sound of me and has threatened to leave on this account and so I rarely speak to him anymore" (v1. 13). In *Kabul*, Priscilla talks about the effect of the Homebody's language on her in Act Two, Scene one,

I learned it from her. How to be wrong on any occasion. Her weird forgotten words, yeah? *Murder* the conversation: “I’m suffering from psychopannychy.” That’d stop a casual chat. If I asked her what it meant – what’s it mean Mummy, what’s it mean – she’d shake her head.

Psychopannychy – it means: the all night sleep of the soul.

I looked it up. Daughter of a dictionary, me.

Who has a mother who says such things? She gave – nothing – and so she ... demanded interpretation (v2. 65).

Many things other than the Homebody’s language “demand interpretation”.

Written into the script on six occasions is a gesture, annotated the first time as “So I took the tube to \_\_\_\_\_, (*She gestures; see prefatory “Notes” above*) where there are shops full of merchandise from exotic locales . . .” (v1. 10). The note in question is as follows:

*A Note for the Homebody:*

When the Homebody, in Act One, Scene 1, refers to the street on which she found the hat shop, she doesn’t mention its name; instead, where the name would fall in the sentence, she makes a wide, sweeping gesture in the air with her right hand, almost as if to say: “I know the name but I will not tell you.” It is the same gesture each time (v1. 5).

What is this gesture? And how is it distinguished from a gesture that says “I know but I can’t remember right now” or, “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you”? The notion of a gesture that says “I know the name but will not tell you” would seem to indicate a kind of teasing relationship between the Homebody and the audience.

However, such a friendly dynamic is at odds with what the Homebody says. Beyond the world's "utter indifference," the Homebody defines her relationship to her audience in explicit terms:

And all conversations such as we are having, and though you've said nothing whatsoever we are still conversing, I think, since what I say is driven by fear of you, sitting there before me, by absolute terror of your censure and disdain, and so you need say nothing, you would only weaken your position, whatever it is. . . . (v1. 24).

But her oft-repeated gesture belies this feeling of antagonism. She wants the audience to like her, thus her constant apologizing and her self-deprecating humor in lines such as "Synchitic expeseges. Jesus." (v1. 14). Much of the Homebody's humor is a matter of interpretation. For some audiences, she might be more comic if she is unaware of her ticks and personality quirks, but the text supports a variety of interpretations. It is also possible that she is a born story-teller, and plays to her audience until she becomes caught in her own narrative. Without the humor, from the actress or the text, the hour-plus monologue would become extremely dreary.

The monologue ends with a poem about the beauty of Kabul just before we are transported to a bombed-out shell of that city. Moments prior, the Homebody sings along to Frank Sinatra's "Come Fly With Me," and in terms of the earliest dramatic theory, it is fitting the monologue ends in music and spectacle. As the Homebody disappears, so does her audience move away from virtual conversation, into the role of an eavesdropping observer. In *Kabul* we only get echoes of her language via Priscilla, who mocks her mother's arcane language as a means of escaping her own

cages. In exchange, as examined in the section *The Polyglot Problem*, Kushner develops his Tower of Babel into eight languages which highlight the very problems of language itself on Afghanistan's stage.



## CHAPTER III

### AREAS OF DRAMATURGICAL INQUIRY

#### Life in Afghanistan

The *Homebody* monologue provides an in-depth history of the creation and development of Afghanistan, but Nancy Hatch Dupree's stirring prose can overwhelm. In seeking to introduce a group of actors to the Afghan landscape, I used images of the country from *National Geographic Magazine*, and excerpts from *Lonely Planets: Central Asia*, and Martin Ewans' *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics*. There are a number of key facts necessary to capture the spirit of the play; this section will outline key geographic, historical and political features.

Afghanistan is a land-locked nation in southwestern Asia, bordered by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan on the north, China on the far northeast, Pakistan on the east and south, and Iran on the west. Kabul, the largest city and capitol, sits in a valley of the Hindu Kush mountains, separating the east and west sides of the nation into distinct climactic areas of mountains, deserts, valley and plains. "Situated at the eastern end of the Iranian Plateau, it covers some 250,000 miles, an area about the size of Texas . . . Some two-thirds of it lie above 5,000 feet, and several of its mountains are among the highest in the world" (Ewans 1).

Afghanistan continues to be one of the least developed countries in the world, with urban, rural, and semi-nomadic populations.

Islam is the great unifier among the twenty-plus ethnic groups, many of whom have distinct languages and cultural traditions. As the *Homebody* notes, most Afghans are a blend of early invaders or settlers, including the Moghuls, Mongolians,

Macedonians, Aryans, Persians, Arabs, and western Chinese. Each ethnic group is comprised of a number of tribes, with a distinct dialect. The language barrier creates tribal loyalty while also fostering xenophobia. The Pashtuns of southeast Afghanistan comprise almost seventy-five percent of the population and speak Pashto. Tajiks, the second largest ethnic group, live in central and northeastern Afghanistan, and make up the majority population of Kabul. Both Pashto and Dari (the language of Tajiks) are considered official languages in Afghanistan. Ewans suggests “it is Islam, with its concept of community and universality (*umma*), which has superimposed itself on the ethnic diversity and provided the main focus of loyalty (8)”.

The *Homebody* monologue is, in part, about the history of conquest in Afghanistan, and needs not be repeated here, but the Homebody’s history lesson becomes less specific after the crowning of Ahmad Shah Durranni in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As she reaches the climax of her own hat-buying adventure, she quickly brushes over the Anglo-Afghan wars, in which Britain and Russia competed for control of Afghanistan, the former in the hope of preventing Russia from spreading into British-controlled India, and the latter wanting access to the Indian Ocean. In 1839, British troops invaded Afghanistan to reduce Russia's influence in the region, setting off the First Anglo-Afghan War, which lasted until the British withdrew in 1842. Russian influence near Afghanistan increased during the mid-nineteenth century, causing Britain to invade the country again, starting the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1878. Amanullah Khan gained Afghanistan’s independence by starting the Third Anglo-Afghan war in 1919 after his father, then emir, was assassinated.

As Khwaja notes to Priscilla, Amanullah rapidly modernized Afghanistan by sweeping away ancient customs and traditions. He reformed the legal system, created schools for girls, sent young Afghans abroad for study, abolished domestic slavery, reorganized the tax system, and campaigned against corruption (Ewans 128). The nation's first constitution was adopted in 1923, and Amanullah changed his title to king in 1926. Khwaja remembers his Esperanto teacher, a polyglot old man as “a real product of the cosmopolitan days of old King Amanullah Khan (v2. 58)”. But tribal and religious leaders resisted the reform movement and forced Amanullah to give up the throne in 1929. The next twenty years were spent in civic turmoil. By the early 1950's, under the leadership of Muhammad Daoud Khan, the king's cousin and brother-in-law, Afghanistan maintained cordial relations with the West, who viewed them as strategically unimportant, but mistrusted the intentions of the communist USSR. In 1953, Daoud took control of the government, making himself prime minister. Under his leadership, Afghanistan attempted to remain neutral to Cold War developments by asking for aid from both the United States and the Soviet Union. But border disputes with Pakistan, many of which were credited to Daoud's lack of foresight, and proposals which would have increased dependence on the Soviet Union, came to a head, forcing Daoud's resignation in 1963. In the next decade, Afghanistan enjoyed a significantly less tense climate under the rule of Dr. Mohammed Yousuf and King Zahir. “A cosmopolitan society began to develop, in which Afghans mixed with diplomats, UN personnel, aid workers and foreign residents (Ewans 164)”.

July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1973, Daoud led a bloodless military coup that overthrew then prime minister Zahir, took control of the government, and established the Republic of Afghanistan with Daoud as president and prime minister. Despite Daoud's relatively good relationship with the USSR during his coup, in 1978, rival left-wing military leaders and civilians, having received significant financial and military aid from the Soviet Union, staged a revolt, killing Daoud, and established a quasi-Marxist government. The anti-Islam stance of the new government created rebel groups who formed the seeds of the mujahideen who ignited widespread guerilla terrorism against the ASGA secret police. In 1979 and 1980, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, joining the government forces and throwing the country into a larger civil war. "By the end of 1979 [Pakistan had] given asylum to some 80,000 Afghan refugees (207)," thus beginning the largest refugee population in the world today.

It is due to the influence of Mikhail Gorbachev that in 1988, the Soviet Union began withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan. It took four years for the full withdrawal stipulated by the Geneva Accords, at the end of which "the final civilian death toll was over one million (235)" in Afghanistan. By 1992, a coalition of mujahideen groups overthrew the communist government, but Afghanistan continued to be at the mercy of rival factions, with several interim governments made up of coalitions of the factions. By 1997, the Taliban, an extremist fundamental party, had taken control of most of Afghanistan. Although the Taliban set up a Council of Ministers to rule the country, only Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia recognized their authority.

## The Taliban

One of six newborn babies die here. One in every six. About half of the remaining Afghan children die before they reach the age of five. And thirty-five percent of those hardy survivors are drastically malnourished. I mean little potbellied skeletons, starving slowly to death. On the Human Index Rank this place is 169<sup>th</sup> of 174 countries, it's not really a state at all, it's a populated disaster. The only reason it's not considered *the* worst for women is because the Afghans don't do genital mutilation. Most of the arable land is land-mined (v2. 51).

Two sources were unparalleled during my research and discussion process on the Taliban. Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* provided a comprehensive approach to the Taliban's roots, developments and agenda from a scholarly perspective. In contrast, Christina Lamb's *The Sewing Circle of Heart: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan*, provided a necessary humanizing touch to the discussion by presenting soldiers and civilians side-by-side, engaged in a personal, intimate battle over nationhood and faith. Without Lamb's insights, characters in Homebody/Kabul like Mullah Aftar Ali Durranni, would have remained one-dimensional images of hate.

The Taliban is a cluster of militant Islamic political group which continues to control most of Afghanistan, with the combined agenda of making Afghanistan a united Islamic nation. Derived from the word *talib* meaning "student" or "seeker of knowledge," the Taliban were formed from young male students in *madrassas*,

“religious schools”, in refugee centers throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1994. The Taliban drew its forces from Afghan and Pakistani Muslim students, Afghan refugees who had fled to Pakistan, former rebel fighters from many Arab nations, and former Communist soldiers. “All of this was paid for by donations from rich Muslims, often Arabs, though Sami-ul Haq [Head of Haqqani School] insisted that he had never received any money from bin Laden” (Lamb 98).

These boys were from a generation who had never seen their country at peace – an Afghanistan not at war with invaders and itself. . . They had no memories of the past, no plans for the future while the present was everything. They were literally the orphans of the war, the rootless and restless, the jobless and economically deprived with little self-knowledge. They admired war because it was the only occupation they could possibly adapt to (Rashid 32).

Most of the group's members belonged to Afghanistan's dominant Pashtun ethnic group, whom also formed the bulk of the refugee population. “For a poor family struggling to feed their children, particularly in a refugee camp, the free board and lodging offered by *madrassas* constituted a huge incentive to hand over their boys as wards (Lamb 98).”

The Taliban enforce an unorthodox, strict adherence to Islamic laws, including restrictions on contemporary entertainments and modest dress, forcing men to wear beards and women to wear burqa. Upon joining, every boy became a soldier-priest, engaged in protecting a hard-line Sunni faith from the infidel. “Although he had introduced himself as Mullah Hassani, he [Khalil Ahmed Hassani] explained with a nervous laugh, ‘I became a mullah just by joining the Taliban. I’m not a religious

scholar' (Lamb 12). Charged with upholding the Taliban's dictates, young men like Khalil devised torture techniques for those caught engaging in banned activities, but "[T]hey banned everything," he continued. "The only entertainment was public executions. The only safe activity was sleeping" (Lamb 16). At her request, Khalil provided Lamb an unofficial list of thirty banned or required activities, including:

1. All men should attend prayers in mosque five times a day. . .
7. Ban on laughing in public. No stranger should hear a woman's voice. . .
9. Ban on cosmetics. Any woman with painted nails should have her fingers cut off. . .
20. No keeping of birds – any bird-keepers to be imprisoned and their birds killed. . .
23. Anyone carrying un-Islamic books to be executed. . .
28. Any non-Muslim must wear a yellow cloth stitched onto their clothes. . .
30. All audiences at sporting events to refrain from cheering or clapping but only to chant Allah-o-Akbar (17).

The Taliban, led by the one-eyed Mullah Omar, established its power base in southeastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, where Pashtuns form the majority and captured Afghanistan's second largest city, Khandahar, in November 1994.

They said that since the capture of Khandahar some 20,000 Afghans and hundreds of Pakistani *madrassa* students had streamed across the border from refugee camps in Pakistan to join Mullah Omar. Thousands more Afghan Pashtuns had joined them in their march northwards. The majority were

incredibly young – between 14 and 24 years old – and many had never fought before although, like all Pashtuns, they knew how to handle a weapon (Rashid 32).

In January 1995, the Taliban seized the province of Ghazni, northeast of Khandahar and spent the rest of the year strengthening their position in southern Afghanistan. In September 1995, they took the western city of Herat. “Khalil and his men were told to be particularly cruel to the Heratis who were Persian-speaking and had a large Shia minority, unlike the Pashto-speaking Taliban who were Sunni Muslim. Speaking Persian was forbidden and a strict curfew imposed from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m.” (Lamb 18).

A year later, they seized the capital city, Kabul. The government forces retreated to the northeast of Afghanistan. In 1997, Taliban authorities changed the official name of the country to the Islamic State of Afghanistan. But only three countries recognized the Taliban as a legal government--Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. By the time the Homebody reached Kabul, the Taliban had control of the majority of country, having captured Bamiyan in August 1998. “Testimony collected by human rights organizations suggest that between four thousand and six thousand people were massacred in Bamiyan after its surrender that August of 1998” (Lamb 23). Without a doubt, the Taliban are one of the most violent and repressive regimes today. Their reading of Islam is, as Quango notes in Act One, Scene four “unlike . . . any in the world” (v2. 53).

Kushner focuses a great deal of the discussion about the Taliban to the issue of Pashtunistan, which Quango describes: “Oh, the *Big Dream*: Pashtunistan. The



Pashtuns of Afghanistan and their near-relatives, the Pathans of Pakistan, dream of creating it by joining Afghanistan with Pakistan's North-West Frontier territory.

Major worry for Pakistan, that" (v2. 98). In a convoluted way, Kushner suggests that these are people who simply want a home. Lamb also illuminates some of the hidden psychology behind the young men in the Taliban. She asked a Pathan Pakistani attorney, Iftikhar Gilani, "what he thought of the Taliban and why they preached such an extreme form of Islam. 'Talibs used to be figures of fun,' he said. . . the only class we have always looked down on in Pashtun society is the Talib. When I was a child the Talibs were used for begging" (Lamb 104-5).

'We're talking about a society where in my village a boy and a girl kissing is an unpardonable crime seen as worse than murder,' said Iftikhar. 'The inevitable result is sodomy. It's the done thing in Pashtun society because of women being shut away in houses. . . I was a very handsome youth and had lots of problems but fortunately our family name and standing protected me. These Talibs have no such protection and it starts with the kind of people who run these seminaries. We used to say, 'Oh my God, he's a Talib,' and that means he's a sissy or he's available. Over a period of time they must become very angry people. And very frustrated, mostly against women, coupled with the hurt of childhood trauma you can never get rid of and never, never talk about. It must leave a permanent scar' (Lamb 105).

### Timeline Suggested By the 1998 Embassy Bombings

The 1998 Embassy bombings are the hidden frame of Homebody/Kabul. Kushner explicitly sets the play in “London, England and Kabul, Afghanistan just before and just after the American bombardment of the suspected terrorist training camps in Khost, Afghanistan, August 1998” (v2. 5). But other than a single line of exposition by Mullah Durranni, “Since last week President Clinton have bombed the people in Khost, many killed, the people are angry against Western aggression-disregard-disrespect for Afghanistan” (v2. 33), the bombings are rarely mentioned. In rehearsal, internet sources provided the bulk of our information.

The exact timetable of the Homebody’s departure from London and the arrival of Milton and Priscilla in Kabul is never specifically stated in the text, but we know from Priscilla in Act One, Scene 2 that the Homebody has been missing for five days (v2. 40) and from the Mullah that the bombings occurred a week ago. In fact, the act of “Western aggression-disregard-disrespect” was a retaliation for an earlier attack. According to The 9/11 Commission Report, on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998 “bomb-laden trucks (70)” drove into the United States embassies in the African capitol cities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. “The attack on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi destroyed the embassy and killed 12 Americans and 201 others, almost all Kenyans. About 5,000 people were injured. The attack on the other U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam killed 11 people, none of them Americans (70)”. CNN.org correspondent Jamie McIntyre reported the event “killed 257 people, including 12 Americans”.

The Americans retaliated with *Operation Infinite Reach*, a “cruise missile strike on purported terrorist bases in Afghanistan and Sudan on August 20, 1998

(wikipedia.org)". According to McIntyre, "U.S. officials say the six sites attacked in Afghanistan were part of a network of terrorist compounds near the Pakistani border that housed supporters of millionaire Osama bin Laden". From The 9/11

Commission Report:

The day after the embassy bombings,[then Director of Central Intelligence George] Tenet brought to a principals meeting intelligence that terrorist leaders were expected to gather at a camp near Khowst, Afghanistan, to plan future attacks. According to [then National Security Advisor, Samuel "Sandy"] Berger, Tenet said that several hundred would attend, including [Osama] Bin Ladin. The CIA described the area as effectively a military cantonment, away from civilian population centers and overwhelmingly populated by jihadists . . . The principals quickly reached a consensus on attacking the gathering. The strike's purpose was to kill Bin Ladin and his chief lieutenants (11).

In Act Two, Scene 7, Milton mentions the attack in his heroin-induced stupor and Quango explains that they "Killed quite a number of people actually. Ten, twenty-eight, forty-eight, a hundred and eight, depending on the source" (v2. 101). Writing at 5:10 AM the day after the attack, McIntyre reported, "An official of the Taliban, Afghanistan's Islamic rulers, reported 21 were killed and 30 were injured in the missile strikes in eastern Afghanistan". Wikipedia.org states that 75 cruise missiles landed in Afghanistan, and "a spokesman for the Taliban, Mullah Abdullah, said the U.S. attacks were in Khost, about 90 miles (144 kilometers) south of the capital, Kabul, and Jalalabad, 60 miles (96 kilometers) east of Kabul" (McIntyre). The 9/11

Commission Report reveals that “Later on August 20, Navy vessels in the Arabian Sea fired their cruise missiles. Though most of them hit their intended targets, neither Bin Ladin nor any other terrorist leader was killed. Berger told us that an after-action review by Director Tenet concluded that the strikes had killed 20-30 people in the camps, but had probably missed Bin Ladin by a few hours (117)”.

World reaction to the U.S. retaliation varied, and as Jill Dougherty wrote for CNN.com, some countries called the attacks a distraction from domestic events. From Kushner’s perspective, Afghanistan’s point of view falls in line with “Cuba’s state run new agency [which] said, ‘President Clinton ignored the sovereignty of Sudan and Afghanistan and launched a theatrical bombardment which overshadowed his recent sex scandal’” (Dougherty). Mullah Durranni expresses it vehemently in the line “United States betray us, bomb us, starve us to . . . *distract* on adulterous debauch Clinton and his young whore” (v2. 133).

Kushner uses the violence of these events to create an atmosphere in the play in which the Homebody could be beaten to death on the streets of Kabul. If one assumes that the Homebody’s emotional reaction to her own monologue is the impetus for the fight Priscilla describes in Act One, Scene 2 (v2. 40), then the Homebody must have left for Afghanistan right after Operation Infinite Reach. The bombings were “last week” according to the Mullah, and she has been gone for five days according to Priscilla. At the latest, the Ceiling’s must arrive in Kabul on September 1<sup>st</sup>, but it’s possible they could have arrive in the city as early as August 25<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, the monologue must occur between the embassy bombings on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998 and *Operation Infinite Reach* on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

### Substance Abuse and Other Therapies

One of the major criticisms leveled against Homebody/Kabul is that all of the Western characters are flawed, are, in fact, despicable human beings. In Robert Brustein's March 2002 review of the New York production in *New Republic*, Brustein notes that "With the exception of the Homebody, all of the Western characters are singularly unappealing... Milton (Dylan Baker) is a sour drudge; Priscilla (Kelly Hutchinson) is a whining bore; and Quango (Bill Camp) is a self-hating drugged-out sexual opportunist out of Graham Greene". A key aspect of this is all of their experiences with depression and medication. Both the Homebody and Milton are on anti-depressants, Priscilla hospitalized herself after a suicide attempt and agreed to electro-convulsive therapy, and Quango is a heroin addict. Unraveling the causes and cures of these addictions is a necessary early step in unlocking the character's motivations.

The first of myriad references to mental health in the *Homebody* monologue occurs at the same time the Homebody mentions her husband. "My husband cannot bear my ... the sound of me and has threatened to leave on this account. We both take powerful antidepressants. His pills have one name and mine another. I frequently take his pills instead of mine so I can know what's he feeling" (v2. 13). She never mentions how long either of them have been on the anti-depressants, or what conditions led them to taking anti-depressants, but she has an eccentric attitude about drug interactions. In the monologue, the Homebody refers to the drug as "something, a made up word, a portmanteau chemical cocktail word concocted by

punning psychopharmacologists” but she can never “remember precisely what to ask for” (v2. 15). She refers to the drug as “Ameliorate-za-pozulac” (v2. 15) and “Mealy-aza-opzamene” (v2. 27), which sound quasi-scientific. Although there is no tangible evidence, it is likely that the drug she refers to is something like *Amitriptyline with Perphenazine*, commonly known by its brand names *Etrafon* and *Triavil*. According to WebMD.com, this “combination medication is used to treat depression, anxiety and agitation. The amitriptyline component is an antidepressant which elevates depressed moods. Perphenazine relieves anxiety and agitation”.

There is little textual evidence to hazard a guess at what kind of drug Milton is taking. All we know from the Homebody is that his pills “are yellow and red, while mine are green and creamy-white” (v2. 13). From Milton, we learn in Act Two, Scene 3 that “[ I ] had to stop taking my antidepressants because they interact poorly with the nivaquine” (v2. 74), which is an anti-malaria drug. It is, as he says, “a pity because, well the circumstances recommend” that he takes his medication. Instead, he self-medicates with alcohol, opium and heroin.

On the other hand, Priscilla does not appear to be on any drugs. She is the only Westerner without an explicit addiction of some kind. Instead, we find out from Milton in Act Two, Scene 1 that she attempted suicide and checked herself into a mental hospital. Priscilla gives the details: she took “many many many pills,” that “the electroshock was just dramatic effect, I agreed to it,” and she was in the hospital for months (v2. 63-4). Since leaving the hospital, she has ensconced herself at home and refuses to leave for any reason, preferring to remain indoors than exploring the treachery of her life prior to the suicide attempt. It is a great shock to Milton, then,

that she feels free to wander the streets of Kabul, as she “Left hospital two years ago and steadfastly refused to move out, yet in this ghastly place you stay out all day” (v2. 64). Instead, Priscilla feels safe in Kabul.

I know what they said, but. . .

The twilight outside, it’s . . . powdery. Everything feels close here, the air, the mountains, not crowding in but there’s . . . well, proximity. Intimacy.

Perfume. Like stepping into her clothes closet.

I have this feeling (v2. 65-6).

Milton, on the other hand, is unwilling to traverse the streets of Kabul and uses Priscilla’s absence to indulge in some psychopharmacological experiments of his own. With Quango’s aid, the two men leap into drinking and drugs despite the dangers of Taliban-controlled Kabul.

Milton is well aware that drinking is illegal in Afghanistan as he and Quango rapidly consume a bottle of scotch in Act One, Scene 4, and is not startled to learn the punishment for his crime:

MILTON: (*Hold the glass towards Quango*) Make me a criminal.

(*Quango pours.*)

QUANGO: For the commission of which crime one can jolly well find oneself Toyota-trucked out to the old soccer stadium and . . .

(*He makes a gesture indicating a hand being chopped off*)

Rough boys, these Taliban. Growing up in a refugee camp, it coarsens the sensibilities. They have a reading of Islam unlike . . . any in the world (v2. 53).

They get drunk, Milton sleeps poorly, and he asks for more booze, yet it comes as a great surprise that Quango offers Milton further means of escape with the fruits of the poppy flower: opium and then heroin.

Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of heroin, supplying "80 percent of Europe's supply of heroin and 50 percent of the world's supply of heroin" (Rashid 123) in 1997, yet most Westerners believe the only good the Taliban has created was the destruction of the drug trade. In fact, an inimitable reading of Islam by the Taliban allows for the growth and exportation of heroin for Westerners. While the Taliban initially curtailed the production of opium and heroin in 1995, "by 1998 heroin exports had doubled in value to US\$3 billion. Drugs money funded the weapons, ammunition and fuel for the war" (Rashid 124). A chapter entitled *High on Heroin: Drugs and the Taliban Economy* in Rashid's Taliban provides a compelling argument from the Taliban's point of view for maintaining opium production.

The Taliban have provided an Islamic sanction for farmers like Wali Jan to grow even more opium, even though the Koran forbids Muslims from producing or imbibing intoxicants. Abdul Rashid, the head of the Taliban's anti-drugs control force in Kandahar, spelt out the nature of his unique job. He is authorized to impose a strict ban on the growing of hashish, 'because it is consumed by Afghans and Muslims'. But, Rashid tells me without a hint of sarcasm, 'Opium is permissible because it is consumed by kafirs [unbelievers] in the West and not by Muslims or Afghans' (118).

Quango Twistleton is Kushner's example of the addicted kafir. In Act Two, Scene 3, he admits: "I'm a junkie. Yes. Why else would I be here? Afghanistan supplies the



world. I came to do good, biscuits and bandages and wooly blankets. Heroin was a great surprise” (v2. 72). Quango offers opium to Milton as a sleep aid, saying “It’s like a toddy. Truly.” (v2. 73) and by Act Two, Scene 7 they are shooting up and smoking heroin, respectively.

It is conjecture to guess that Kushner intended for his Western characters to be mentally ill and addled for one single specific reason, but in reading the play, it is impossible to not notice how this need to escape reality contrasts so strongly with the real experiences on the streets of Kabul. Yet, Kabul is also a place of fantasy and fairy stories. We are never certain if the Homebody is dead, for example, or what to believe from Khwaja and Zai Garshi. In the midst of the rubble, legends emerge for many reasons.

### The Grave of Cain

The grave of Cain is a richly evocative image throughout Homebody/Kabul. It is the source of enormous inspiration for the Homebody, and Priscilla chases her mother who is chasing the legend through the streets of Kabul. The Homebody mentions the grave of Cain once in her monologue,

I did know, well I have learnt since through research that Kabul . . . was claimed by the Moghul Emperor Babur founded by none other than Cain himself. Biblical Cain. Who is said to be buried in Kabul, in the gardens south of Bala-Hissar, in the cemetery known as Shohada-I-Salehin.

I should like to see that. The Grave of Cain. Murderer’s grave. Would you eat a potato plucked from *that* soil (v2. 21-2).

After Priscilla receives her mother's copy of *A Historical Guide to the City of Kabul*, she asks Khwaja to take her to the grave in Act Two, Scene 2. Khwaja refuses, pointing out a question mark on the guidebook's map, "This says not 'Grave of Cain,' but rather, 'Grave of Cain?' She was pursuing a rumor. On no official map is there ever a question mark. This would be an entirely novel approach to cartography" (v2. 68). Priscilla finally convinces him in Act Three, Scene 1, and Khwaja subsequently suggests the open grave at Chesme Khedre is indeed that of Cain. The Marabout of the original version was written to protect the grave, and we know from the *Afterword* that Kushner cut a much longer speech about Cain. "Cain was marked not as a sign of the evil he had committed when he murdered his brother, but as a protection: God warned the human race to leave the murderer unharmed. He who killed Cain would be punished sevenfold. Did Cain die violently in Kabul? Is the city in some sense cursed?" (v2. 148).

There are numerous folktales about Cain and Abel throughout the world, and on the internet D.L. Ashliman's repository of *Cain and Abel: Scriptures and Folktales* consolidates tales from the Islamic, Jewish and Christian faiths. Although his collection does not contain a tale about Cain founding Kabul, a Palestinian folktale supplies a linguistic clue. "Kabil and Habil" from J.E. Hanauer's 1907 text *Folk-lore of the Holy Land: Moslem, Christian and Jew* is a bloodthirsty tale of the marriage of each brother to his brother's twin sister, the martyr-like death of Habil/Abel after the offering of grain and lambs, and the burial of the decomposing body following the example of a raven. It is a highly detailed account, integrating images from many other legends in the anthology, and clearly a development of the

Cain and Abel story. The homophonic translation of *Cain* to *Kabil* is small proof of the legend, but one step in the right direction. Whether or not the legend has historical roots, the image of Cain haunts the play. Kushner suggests that Cain was allowed his final rest in Kabul because of the renowned hospitality of the Afghan people, and it is almost reassuring to imagine Cain dying in a safe, welcoming place. In the *Afterword* Kushner writes eloquently about the necessity of Cain in the play.

This legend has a resonance with the passage in the Holy Scriptures in which we are told that Cain's sons, Jabal, Jubal and Tubalcain, were the human race's first musicians and metalsmiths. There is attached to this destroyer, this hunter, this solitary desperate, cursed figure of ultimate barrenness, some potential for that renewal of life which is human creativity. Cain is the founder of a city as well as a fratricide, the father of the arts as well as the first person to usurp God's power of determining mortality, the first person to usurp the role of the angel of death.

Tragedy is the annihilation from whence new life springs, the Nothing out of which Something is born. Devastation can be a necessary prelude to a new kind of beauty – necessary, perhaps, but always bloody (v2. 148).

This “devastation” occurs in the play when people are displaced, as the Homebody is to Kabul and Mahala is to London. In both cases, like Cain, distraught people find themselves welcomed in new cities.

### Frank Sinatra

Long considered the greatest singer of the Great American songbook, the work of Frank Sinatra is elevated to mythic proportions in Homebody/Kabul. The Homebody mentions his work, sings along near the end of her monologue, and her CD of “Come Fly With Me” becomes a pivot point in Priscilla’s search for her body. Sinatra’s music is an image of freedom in the bleak landscape of Kabul.

The monologue comes full circle as the “hats at the party are a brilliant success” (v2. 29) and the Homebody describes the intimate gathering. She relates the story of her hat-buying adventure and realizes “Frank Sinatra is playing: such an awful, awful man, such perfect perfect music! A paradox!” (v2. 29). The stage directions inform us,

*(Frank Sinatra starts to sing “It’s Nice to Go Trav’ling.” She sings the first two verses with him, putting the hats back in the shopping bag, one by one: )*

It’s very nice to go trav’ling  
 To Paris, London and Rome,  
 It’s oh so nice to go trav’ling,  
 But it’s so much nicer yes it’s so much nicer  
 To come home ... (v2. 29).

During the rehearsal process, we used a biography of Frank Sinatra available via the website [music.lycos.com](http://music.lycos.com), which informed us that Sinatra’s “private persona is multi-faceted. He has been described by acquaintances as quick-tempered, pugnacious, sometimes vicious and capable of extreme verbal cruelty, and has often displayed serious lack of judgment in the company he has kept” (2). Perhaps the

Homebody considers him “awful” for his history of broken marriages, supposed mob connections, or dogmatic political beliefs. These things are a matter of personal opinion. In contrast, his music is widely considered exceptional for his phrasing and style.

He consciously learned breath control, in particular circular breathing, and the use of dynamics ... which aided the smooth phrasing of his best ballad work... More than any other singer of his or previous generations, Sinatra learned the value of delayed phrasing and singing behind the beat, and he and his arrangers invariably found exactly the right tempo (2).

Sinatra’s 1958 album “Come Fly With Me” becomes a necessary object in *Kabul*. The CD and guidebook are the lone articles left by the Homebody, and Priscilla travels the city with the CD-player in tow. In Act Two, Scene 4 the CD becomes a calling card by which Zai Garshi, an actor-turned-hat merchant identifies the veracity of his information.

*(Quietly)* If I may speak. *(Pointing to Priscilla’s discman, and speaking with reverence)* In the yellow Sony disc player is Frank Sinatra thirteenth album from contract of he with Capitol Records, fateful “Come Fly with Me,” yes? Nelson Riddle-wallah, Axel Stordahl-wallah, Heinie Beanie-wallah?  
*(Priscilla is looking at the discman. She opens it, looks at the CD.)*

...She also have love for Sinatra, your mother, she have with her pacooli hats and her guidebook, marked “Grave of Cain,” which she searched in Chesme Khedre. It is all correct, yes?” (v2. 78-80).

Zai Garshi's love of Sinatra is developed through the scene with references to his albums and lyrics, as in the esoteric information about Sinatra's recording contract. "In 1953 he was signed with Capitol Records. Sinatra's first session at Capitol was arranged and conducted by Axel Stordahl whom Sinatra had known in the Dorsey band. For the next session, however, he was teamed with Nelson Riddle...The results of this partnership set Sinatra's singing career firmly in the spotlight" (1-2).

As all music is banned in Taliban controlled Afghanistan, Zai Garshi's expression of love for Sinatra is an especially poignant moment in the play. While listening to the album, he breaks into song, singing along with the title track, "Come Fly With Me," and then breaks down into tears over his lost nation. It is a sobering moment as we, the audience, confront the many human tragedies the Taliban have inflicted by removing music and art from the lives of the Afghan people. Even Priscilla is silenced in the face of Zai Garshi's terrible grief, and this experience awakens her to a previously unknown desire to fulfill her mother's final wishes.

### The Polyglot Problem

MAHALA: They seek to ... destroy all who are not Pashtun.

*(In Dari)* Een haw khod raw Mullaw maygoyand, manzooram Ulamaw ast, een haw khod raw dar shawlay payombar paychawneeda, refugeecamp gutter rats az Jalalabad wa Qandahar may auyand, walay een haw bah ferosh-ay taryok wa mawod-day mukhaderah, wa ba kushtar-ray atfal maypardawzand, wa ba dushmanawnay-shawn reshwah may dehand taw bahonhaw zameenah-ay moowahfaqeeyat raw barroyay on

haw muyahsar sozand. *(They call themselves mullahs, the ulema, they wrap themselves in the Prophet's mantle, these refugee-camp gutter rats from Jalalabad, from Khandahar, but they sell drugs and murder children and bribe their enemies to give them their victories.) . . .*

The CIA posylaiet denezhnyie sredstva etim ubliudkam cherez Pakistan, gdie vooruzhionnyie vlasti, c'est tout les Pashtuni-wallah, sumasshedshikh i terroristov, auf die eine odere andere Art werden sie an den Tueren alle ihrer Herren erscheinen, but still Se She Ah platit im den'gi, posylaiet im oruzhiie. *(The CIA sends these bastards funding through Pakistan, where the military high command, it's all Pashtuni-wallahs, these madmen and terrorists, they'll turn on their masters sooner or later, and still the U.S. pays them money and sends them guns.) . . .*

The gas pipe of Unocal! For U.S., yes? Il faut subir le Taliban so all must be calm here so gas . . . flows to ships, for American profit, to . . . to . . . Afin de vaincre L'Iran! Pour que les États-Unis puissent régler un compte de vingt ans avec L'Iran! *(So that Iran can be bested! We must suffer under the Taliban so that the U.S. can settle a twenty-year-old score with Iran!)* (v2. 83-5).

As we have seen, language is at the heart of Homebody/Kabul, and in the *Foreword to the Revised Edition*, Martha Lavey, then Artistic Director of the Steppenwolf Theatre, describes the use of language in the play:

Certainly it is a political play; it is, as well, a story about a family. Embedded in both of these narratives is, further, an inquiry into language, into the personal and cultural codes of the mother tongue. The play opens with a sustained and virtuosic speech act, and from there moves to a field of speakers who invoke a variety of languages and codes: Esperanto, the various tribal languages of Afghanistan, English, French, the Dewey Decimal System, Milton's computer languages. It is a veritable tower of Babel (v2. x-xi).

To be more specific, the play makes use of eight modern languages: English, Dari, Pashto, Esperanto, French, German, Russian, Arabic, and two language systems: the Dewey Decimal System and Binary Code. In addition, there is the language of translation: the Homebody must translate her vocabulary for the audience, Zai Garshi uses broken English peppered with Dari, Khwaja translates most of Mahala's lingual explosion, and, as seen here, Mahala uses both Dari and Pashto with the Border Guard and Mullah Durranni as a means of controlling the situation.

MULLAH AFTAR ALI DURRANNI: *(To Mahala, in Pashtun)*

Munzh-tah parwah neshtah cheh chertazeh. Angleezee injalai seh asnod cheh deh Afghanistan day Islami Imawrat marboo tadah warsara dah. Ow haghah dah waw kawee cheh asnodo deh haghah la boxna relah shawneedah cheh woorsarah oos neshtah. *(It doesn't matter to us if you leave or where you go. The English girl has papers belonging to*



*the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. She claims they were stolen from her luggage. They are not with her.)*

*(Pause.)*

MULLAH AFTAR ALI DURRANNI: *(In Pashtun, with menace)*

'I'khawmakhaw bayad mawtah za wab raw klay! *(You must answer me!)*

MAHALA: *(In Dari)* Agar man bakhshawyesh az shomaw jenawbay

Mullah saheb. May khaw ham shomaw bawiyad khaw he sheh maw raw qabool conayd. *(If I ask for mercy, Minister Mullah Sahib, you must grant it to me.)*

BORDER GUARD: *(In Pashtun)* Mullah saheb, haghah khazah droghjana-dah. *(Mullah Sahib, she is a liar.)*

MILTON: Might someone tell me what's going on? (v2. 123).

For the dramaturg, the challenge was to bring some semblance of authenticity to a primarily English-only group of actors. Fortunate casting and the assistance of many people made it possible.

From the director's perspective, the most difficult role to cast in terms of language is Mahala, who must speak the brunt of the foreign tongues: English, French, German, Russian, Dari, Pashto, and the Dewey Decimal System. I was extremely fortunate that the UNO theatre department community auditions brought forth Bethany Elliott, a new graduate student fluent in French. Qadir Khan, another new graduate student, is a Pashtun Afghan-American, and brought knowledge, if not

fluency, of Pashto and Arabic, as well as a deep understanding of Afghan culture to the ensemble.

The UNO Center for Afghanistan Studies put me in contact with Shaista Wahab, the librarian in charge of the Afghanistan Collection at the UNO library, and Munira Amini, an undergraduate student from Afghanistan working for the College of International Studies. Wahab and Amini spoke both Pashto and Dari, and proved to be indispensable resources as translators, dialect coaches, and cultural observers. As we had four weeks to cast, rehearse, and perform the staged-reading, none of the cast members were required to see a dialect coach, nor was rehearsal time allotted to the task. Happily, the majority took the work up themselves and invested considerable time outside of rehearsal. Of particular help was a Dari dialect tape Josh Olson found of unknown origin that helped the actors believe they could achieve good results in such a constrained rehearsal period. Directing instructor D. Scott Glasser was another indispensable resource, working one-on-one with actors to achieve the vocal and breath control necessary to speak clearly in the less-than-ideal setting of room 006. Additionally, he aided Bethany to achieve the dialectic Russian and in the difficult task of grounding her voice while switching back and forth from language to language.

The strangest language and dialect issue came with Esperanto. From a childhood fascination with the language, I was able to share what I knew pre-research: there are no silent letters and it sounds a bit like Italian. Research on-line and in a number of texts did not provide much more, and we were unable to find a sound recording of a fluent speaker. In the end, we let the few simple rules we found

in addition to Khwaja's own statements about the language inspire our imagination.

Qadir and I worked together to create an evocative, sensual sound for Khwaja's

poem:

KHWAJA: I had written three hundred poems in prison, all in Esperanto. I find that I have an ear for its particular staccato music, with its regular system of affixes attached to simple roots, connoting verb, place, opposition . . . I love its modern hyperrational ungainliness. To me it sounds not universally at home, rather homeless, stateless, a global refugee patois.

PRISCILLA: I don't know what it sounds like.

K H W A J A: Sidante en la gardeno, mi audis bruon.

Vidante sin en la gardeno,

mi vokis al si. Vokite, si tuj venis.

La tera estis tute kovrita per nego.

Sidante, atendente, mi audis bruon.

It's nice, no? (v2. 58-9).

Despite all of the resources necessary in bringing together the people to aid in our Polyglot Problem, it was in this work that my role as dramaturg took a back seat to the director's chair. As the director of the semi-staged reading, it was my responsibility to mold and shape the dialect work towards a specific meaning. In some cases, I asked actors to drop or pull back from a dialect when it became an impediment to understanding what the character was saying or why the line of dialogue was important to the scene.

Kushner's Response to September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001

In his *Afterword* to the *First Edition* from April of 2002, Kushner wrote “My play is not a polemic; it was written before September 11, before we began bombing and I haven’t changed anything in it to make it more or less relevant to current events” (v1. 144). The same afterword is included in the *Revised Edition* with some new annotation, but the above sentence remains the same. The following speech of Khwaja’s was not so lucky.

Missiles attacks sour the mood of a city. A pity your mother did not anticipate Mr. Clinton’s intentions. I shall take you to the hospitals, where sepsis is pervasive. And to the Minister; who will be unavailable, at prayers, these ministers are always at prayers. It would be wise to replace the burqa (v1. 52).

It was dropped from the script. By removing the reference to Clinton and the 1998 embassy bombings, the circumstances surrounding the play become about a less specific act of aggression. It opens the play to the post-9/11 world.

Kushner is adamant.

The play was written before 9/11. I’m not psychic. If you choose to write a play about current events there’s a good chance you will find the events you’ve written about to be... well, current. If lines from *Homebody/Kabul* seem “eerily prescient” (a phrase repeated so often that my boyfriend Mark suggested I adopt it as a drag name: Eara Lee Prescient) we ought to consider that the information required to foresee, long before 9/11, at

least the broad outline of serious trouble ahead was so abundant and easy of access that even a playwright could avail himself of it (v2.144).

Yet there are sticky choices made in the script. In the Theatre Communications Guide script there are a series of seven quotations, evidently part of Kushner's research into the world of the play. They range from quotations from travel guides to lines from Byron's verse play *Cain*. The first six quotations illuminate and/or add depth to images in the play, and serve as a jumping off point into the text. They reflect ideas grounded in the *First Edition* of the play and the 1998 setting. The final quotation, though, is an image of a post-9/11 world. It quotes the *New York Times*, October 13, 2001:

In Washington, Pentagon officials said that a U.S. warplane missed a Taliban military target at Kabul airport and that a 2,000 pound bomb the plane was carrying apparently struck a residential neighborhood.

At the scene of the hit, one man sat in his wheelchair, weeping next to a pile of rubble where his house once stood. Other residents wandered about in a daze.

"We lost everything, our house and property," one woman said. "We are so afraid of the attacks we have forgotten our own names and can't even understand what we are saying to each other." (v2. 8).

The quotation sums up many of the key themes of the play with simplicity, but we cannot ignore the date of the news article. Kushner chose to make the invasion of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks part of his script.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

In his *Afterword* to the play, Kushner writes “Tragedy is the annihilation from whence new life springs, the Nothing out of which Something is born. Devastation can be a necessary prelude to a new kind of beauty” (v2. 148), and it is from these lines that the power of the final image of Homebody/Kabul is revealed. Priscilla and Mahala, safe again in London, look out the Homebody’s kitchen window into Mahala’s garden and hear a nightingale. It is, Kushner suggests, in this garden that “Something” will be born.

As dramaturg and director for UNO’s September 2005 semi-staged reading of Homebody/Kabul, I spent almost no time in rehearsal imagining with the cast the nature of this Something. Instead, we tended to focus on the negative, on the devastation wrought in our hearts by the tragic circumstances of the play, and on the horror brought to the world by the actions of our government and the Taliban of Afghanistan. The program notes in September 2005 the United States government and NATO had 17,900 troops in Afghanistan. As I write this in May 2006, that number is still growing. For all of the “eerie prescience” of Kushner’s script in its original incarnation as a monologue in 1997, we are still in the midst of the tragedy and cannot see the “new life”.

Yet, in some ways this is Martin Esslin’s demand in “Towards An American Dramaturgy” brought to fruition, making the theatre “genuinely newsworthy, the object of heated discussion and sensational controversy” (27). Here we have theatre

about an event almost eight years ago, but still shaping and focusing our ideas about the world and our place in it. As theatre artists, we are fortunate to have this work in our hands and to tell these stories to our community.

Working as both dramaturg and director, I was invigorated to experience both worlds – to delve into the research and then use it in a specific, timely way with a group of actors. When I was writing my Thesis Proposal in Spring 2005, I wrote about the project as being a catalyst towards a decision about pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in Directing or my PhD in Theatre. The first would develop my director's voice and give me the professional connections to work as an artist; the second would strengthen my skills as a scholar and prepare me for an academic life. A year later, I am still without an answer to this debate. Anne Cattaneo suggests, with my emphasis, that it is possible to do both: “the job of production dramaturg is performed by many people holding various titles: dramaturg, literary manager, literary advisor, artistic associate, playwright-in-residence, director, and often artistic director” (5-6), and perhaps that is the path I will choose.

What is clear, is that the project has shaped my work and my life this year in unexpected ways. I wrote in my thesis journal last summer that:

I am the Homebody (or, see parts of her in myself) – complicated, articulate, hiding from the world, using language as a weapon or shield, getting trapped by my verbosity, yearning for something more, failing to truly connect with loved ones, in need of an adventure – one that challenges me physically, mentally, metaphysically and spiritually – Lost and desperate enough to do something drastic. Homebody/Kabul speaks to me on a visceral level. It

says: This is what theatre can be – full of horrors and hope – terribly, terribly important in the moment and having global implications. This is what theatre must do: inform and entertain, be totally and completely human – allow us to be complex and terrible.

It is this idea of *complexity* that resounds so deeply within me. Homebody/Kabul is, if anything, a profoundly complex play, providing no easy answers to complex problems. In turn, this project, as my title suggests, was about *exploring* these complexities, not finding the single greatest answer.

The question of *hope* and its role in the play lingers. Throughout the rehearsals and the production, I was asked what happened to the Homebody upon her arrival in Kabul and I would not answer, preferring we each had our individual perspective. I never said it, but I hoped the Homebody lived and stayed in Afghanistan, hoping more still that she found forgiveness and the freedom she craved. It was our goal, in the production, to let the final moment be one of hope, of devastation leading to beauty. This, this hope, was the greatest message the dramaturg, the one charged with “keeping the whole in mind,” could leave for an audience.



## APPENIDX

### PRODUCTION DOCUMENTATION

#### PROGRAM INFORMATION

#### CAST

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| The Homebody, a British woman living in California | Charleen JB Willoughby |
| Milton Ceiling, her husband                        | Doug Paterson          |
| Priscilla Ceiling, their daughter                  | Shannon Jackson        |
| Khwaja Aziz Mondanabosh, a Takij poet and mahram   | Abdul Qadir Khan       |
| Quango Twistleton, an American relief worker       | Joe Koll               |
| Mahala, before the Taliban, a librarian            | Bethany Chloe Elliott  |
| Mullah Aftar Ali Duranni, Taliban minister         | Aaron Michael Gomez    |
| Zai Garshi, a former actor; now sells hats         | Joshua James Olson     |
| Dr. Qari Shaw, a Pashtun medical doctor            | Arnett Barnes, Jr.     |
| The Narrator                                       | Maria Rose Vacha       |

#### SETTING

The play takes place in Oakland, CA and Kabul, Afghanistan before and after the American bombardment of suspected terrorist training camps in Khost, Afghanistan, August 1998.

There Will Be One 10-minute Intermission.

After each performance, please join us for a short talkback with the cast.

#### PRODUCTION TEAM

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Director & Dramaturg            | Sonali Kumar  |
| Stage Manager                   | Wesley A. Houston   |
| Assistant Stage Manager         | Sabrina Kinney  |
| Technical Director              | Megan White   |
| Lighting Designer               | Chris Wood  |
| Sound Designer                  | Wm. Thomas Whiteman   |
| Costume Coordinator             | Bethany Chloe Elliott   |
| Dari & Pashtun Language Coaches | Shaista Wahab &<br>Munira Amini   |
| Thesis Committee                | Dr. Douglas Paterson &<br>D. Scott Glasser &<br>Dr. Karen Falconer Al-hindi |

## A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>1979</b>               | The Soviet Union invaded the nation of Afghanistan.  |
| <b>1980s</b>              | The US “supplies billions of dollars of secret assistance to rebel groups in Afghanistan fighting the Soviet occupation.” (9/11 Commission Report) |
| <b>1992 - 1996</b>        | After decades of strife, the Taliban, a fundamentalist group aided by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the US gain control of Afghanistan                |
| <b>February 2, 1997</b>   | A Taliban delegation visits the US, including the UNO campus.  |
| <b>December 1997</b>      | The “Homebody” monologue is 1st performed in London  |
| <b>August 7, 1998</b>     | US embassies in Kenya & Tanzania are bombed by Osama bin Ladin in joint terrorist acts   |
| <b>August 17, 1998</b>    | President Clinton admits to his affair with Monica Lewinsky  |
| <b>August 20, 1998</b>    | The US government “wags the dog” with Operation Infinite Reach, bombing six sites in Sudan and Afghanistan.  |
| <b>September 9, 2001</b>  | Ahmed Shah Massoud, head of the Northern Alliance, a guerrilla organization fighting the Taliban, is assassinated.                                 |
| <b>September 11, 2001</b> | Fundamentalist terrorists attack the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon   |
| <b>October 7, 2001</b>    | Operation Enduring Freedom begins.   |
| <b>December 19, 2001</b>  | Homebody/Kabul opens in New York   |
| <b>January 2, 2004</b>    | The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is ratified  |
| <b>September 2005</b>     | The US government currently has 17,900 troops in Afghanistan   |

## GLOSSARY

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Dari       | the Afghan dialect of Persian, spoken in Kabul                               |
| Hejab      | a headscarf for women required by some sharia.                               |
| Kaafir     | Non-Muslims or unbelievers.  |
| Mahram     | A male relative required to accompany a woman during travel                  |
| Mujaheddin | Holy warriors fighting <i> Jihad </i> , a holy war to defend or spread Islam |
| Mullah     | Traditional leader of prayer at mosques                                      |
| Pashto     | the language of the Pashtun people in western Afghanistan                    |
| Sharia     | the canon of Islamic law   |
| Zakat      | One of the 5 pillars of Islam, compulsory almsgiving                         |

## INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Martin Ewans: *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics*

Christina Lamb: *The Sewing Circle of Heart*

Ahmed Rashid: *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*

Danielle Robinson: *The Simple Guide to Islam*

The 9/11 Commission Report: *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*

Please visit the UNO Theatre Dept. website for more resources.

**SELECTED FROM KUSHNER'S "AFTERWORD"**

*Homebody/Kabul* is a play about Afghanistan and the West's historic and contemporary relationship to that country. It is also a play about travel, about knowledge and learning through seeking out strangeness, about trying to escape the unhappiness of one's life through an encounter with Otherness, about narcissism and self-referentiality as inescapable booby traps in any such encounter; and it's about a human catastrophe, a political problem of global dimensions. It's also about grief. I hate having to write what a play is *about*, but I suppose these are some of the themes of the this play....

What time in history is comparable to this? It's nearly impossible to locate a plausible occasion for hope. Foulness, corruption, meanness of spirit carry the day. I think a lot about 1939, of the time the Russian writer Victor Serge called "the midnight of the century," when women and men of good conscience, having witnessed the horrors of World War I, watched helplessly, overwhelmed by despair, as fascism and war made their inexorable approaches; as Leninism turned to Stalinism; a time, when, in Brecht's immortal phrase "there is injustice everywhere / and no rebellion"....

Tragedy is the annihilation from whence new life springs, the Nothing out of which Something is born. Devastation can be a necessary prelude to a new kind of beauty – necessary, perhaps, but always bloody. In the preface to his verse drama, *Cain*, Byron tells us: "The world was destroyed several times before the creation of man." That makes a certain sort of sense to me. The history of revolutions and modern evolutionary theory lend credence to Byron's breathtaking assertion. But how frightening! Are cataclysm and catastrophe the birth spasm of the future, is the mass grave some sort of cradle, does the future always arrive born on a torrent of blood?...

I read the following sentence, which suggests another kind of prologue to creation, perhaps offers hope for some prelude other than destruction, some other way for the future to commence, from the Talmud (BT Nedarim 39B):

Repentance preceded the world.

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**PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS**

**THE HOMEBODY (CHARLEEN WILLOUGHBY) REVEALS HER  
FASCINATION WITH AFGHANISTAN – ACT ONE, SCENE ONE**



**MILTON (DOUGLAS PATERSON) GOES TO AFGHANISTAN WITH HIS  
DAUGHTER PRSICILLA (SHANNON JACKSON) – ACT ONE, SCENE TWO**



**PRISCILLA (SHANNON JACKSON) AND ZAI GARSHI (JOSHUA OSLON) LISTEN TO  
MAHALA (BETHANY ELLIOTT) AS KHWAJA (QADIR KHAN) TRANSLATES – ACT**

**TWO, SCENE FIVE**



**PRISCILLA (SHANNON JACKSON) BARGAINS WITH QUANGO (JOE KOLL)**

**FOR MAHALA'S LIFE – ACT TWO, SCENE SEVEN**



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