

Prologue

The piece begins with a **Blackout**...fade up desert music (percussive)...establish a beat, then slowly fade up video: storm over Egyptian desert. the atmosphere is obscure, gloomy, and windy; the air, nomadic. as the storm builds we hear a faint martial strain embedded deeply within the music...the scene builds to a pitch...then abruptly transforms: the first rays of sunrise over a vast desert landscape; a desert of endless rippling brownish white sand dunes...simple desert rhythms; the distinctive sound of the tar...a man isolated by the desert expanse, bowed in prayer close to the ground, a small rock against an expansive stark deserted background. he is wrapped by what appears a talit, but it could very well be a kefiyah. he begins a chant, a slow, steady chant, a holy chant, a chant which sounds like the endless movement of the desert wind itself. beneath the chant the tar plays sotto voce. 2000 Anno Domini. 2000 BCE. in the desert it does not matter. enshallah!

(prostrate on ground. in arabic) “Motahada, sahi min annoum, manzar khallab tahti, talateen alf qadam. erreeh zayanat alkhareeta taht shebbaki—kothban ramleyya boneya allawn ala sathh assahra’ almisreya, baynama ashams almohreqa toseh kol qemma. ahawel ayni lilahza...”

(stands. back to audience. Hebrew) “Imut, mitorer mishenah lenof otzer neshimah, shenifras milematah b’merchak shloshim elef regel. mashav haruach mekashet mapat tavlit norait me’ever lechaloni—chuliot asuyot chol choom, aveh, tahor, nodedot al pnei hamidbar hamitzri, umatbiot et rishoomam al pnei hashetach. shemesh lohetet tsorevet kol reches. ani maphneh mabat ach leregah kat...”

(begins walking toward audience) “Confronted, roused from sleep by an amazing landscape lying below, 30,000 feet. the wind has emblazoned a terrible relief map beneath my window—thick brown pure sand dunes scratched across and into the surface of the Egyptian desert, as a scorchingly hot sun melts each and every ridge. i turn my eyes for just a moment...”

The prayer-chant comes to an end. Whitman walks (from banner screen) toward the labyrinth. he carries a rod, a staff, or is it a wand? he is lit only by the light of the video projected onto the banner behind him. it is the image of a man walking across a vast desert. the rhythm of his walk is red. the tar plays. at the edge of the labyrinth, Whitman speaks, and the music pauses. we hear the sound of water. we notice the floor is covered by sand. *“into darkness we are plunged...i come unto you...with a story. there is a story i wish to tell. it is my story. it happened to me many years ago. it is the story of a peregrination about the landscape, the landscape of the Sinai; it is the story of a journey across the Sinai Peninsula, a very important journey, a journey which took me from the verge, to the center of my life.”*

Whitman enters the labyrinth. the sound of water continues. music resumes—sotto voce—the video **fades**, and we hear the wind...Whitman walks along the path within the labyrinth. he marks his movement by a slow trickle of sand. at the carpet, he removes his shoes, washes his feet, spreads his talit/kefiyah where he will sit, lights the candles. (lighting and sounds fade to **Blackout**) Whitman quietly chants a prayer, dignifies the space, turns to the audience members

seated on the fringe of the carpet, removes their shoes and washes their feet, and when he is finished, he takes his place upon the carpet.

—**Brief Blackout**—

A Journey into the Heart of the Sinai. Day One, Desire

Bells clang! the Bedouin puppets arrive (lowered from the rafters): Suleiman, the elder; Sheldon Klassfeld; an old grey beard; a few middle aged men; and a separate group of women and children; as well as the puppets of Whitman and Willie in clothes appropriate for the desert—nylon shorts, tank top, and sneakers—in contrast to the Bedouin's garments. lights up on desert nearest the opening to the salty path. we hear the broken accent of the old gray beard, a Bedouin elder; then Whitman the narrator from his vantage point on the carpet.

Old gray beard “75 pounds per day per person. all food, two guides... you want camel?”

Whitman the narrator “they occupy a sloped part of the earth, the side of a hill, where a road has been paved, connecting Santa Katerina with the coast. there is an unexpected view. however, one must take leave of their motorized vehicle to see the valley of silken sand below the steep and sabulous slope where Willie and i have begun our journey. every fifteen or twenty minutes a tour bus pulls up. everyone piles off, takes pictures of the Bedouins, the landscape, maybe has a drink of tea, certainly negotiates with one of the young Bedouin women about the price of any of several trinkets, headdresses or jewelry, (claps) then piles back on the bus (clap) and leaves. the older Bedouin men sit on smooth rocks low to the ground and swap story_after_story_after_story, as they prepare teapot_after_teapot_after_teapot—ahhh the *brass teapot*...the brass teapot is set directly on the fire, filled with tea leaves and loaded with sugar—lots and lots of sugar—then cooked.”

Old gray beard “want tea?...old Bedouin saying, ‘good man has charred teapot, because he is greatly hospitable’.”

Whitman the narrator “Willie and i have come to negotiate with this tribe of Bedouin about a four day camel excursion into the flat, bleached, arid desert. there's a pause in the negotiation. Willie thinks he can play one Bedouin group against the other, so he walks about a kilometer along the pavement where another group are encamped. i wait, alternately sitting on my haunches sipping tea, or perambulating about, gazing at the wondrously scorched beauty of the land, while taking pictures of camels belching, chewing, or pawing over Bedouin goods. i really doubt one group can be played against the other. i think they are all in this together.”

Whitman the puppet “50 pounds per day per person, all our food, two camels...two guides.”

Whitman the narrator “Willie thinks we can get the excursion for 45 pounds after he was willing to accept 60, after i negotiated them down from 75 pounds per day per person. he walks. i wait. enshallah!”

Whitman the narrator “the old gray beard, from his hunkered position, acknowledges me with a look of smiling approbation, a glint in his eye and a far away timeless desert look on his wizened

face. he's entered my life from another epoch. he has come from a time when men (in arabic) did not sit on their haunches all day waiting for tour buses, (resumes in english) but spent countless hours alone in the wilderness tending their sheep, or goats, countless hours alone in the sand shifting mysteriously from the gentle persuasion of a near constant wind. i think the old coot admires our pluck."

Old gray beard, tells a short story: "in Sinai, history of entire world can be read in stones. yes, this true. you look, look, what you see is

In many places visitors from thousands of years ago literally recorded their passage in stone, as at the Rock of Inscriptions near Dahab carvings record earliest emergence of alphabet.

Whitman the narrator "alas, Willie's returned. he's learned, of course, both camps of Bedouin are from the **Muzeina** tribe. they will work together."

Whitman the puppet, as he counts out money "50 pounds per day per person, food, two camels, two guides." (all the male puppets nod)

Whitman the narrator "the old gray beard, sets us down on our haunches for one last round of tea. a couple of young Bedouin men leave to prepare the provisions. i review (we can hear the review in the background) the food list over and over again, spelling each item out, to make absolutely certain we understand one another."

—puppets unless stated—

Whitman	"hummous?"
Old gray beard	"yes."
Whitman	"pita?"
Old gray beard	"okay."
Whitman	felafel?"
Old gray beard	"yes."
Whitman	"tabouli?"
Old gray beard	"yes."
Whitman	"rice?"
Old gray beard	"of course."
Whitman	"beans?"
Old gray beard	(shoulder shrug)
Whitman	"oranges?"
Old gray beard	(another shoulder shrug and a nod)
Whitman	"and yogurt?"
Old gray beard	"yah!"

—repeat. second round ends with, "yah, yah, yah."

Blackout...music up—