KABUL  
(Translated by Dr. Josephine Davis)

Literary device:

Effect:

Ah! How beautiful is Kabul encircled by her arid mountains  
And Rose, of the trails of thorns she envies  
Her gusts of powdered soil, slightly sting my eyes  
But I love her, for knowing and loving are born of this same dust  
  
My song exalts her dazzling tulips  
And at the beauty of her trees, I blush  
How sparkling the water flows from Pul-I-Bastaan![[1]](#footnote-1)  
May Allah protect such beauty from the evil eye of man!  
  
Khizr[[2]](#footnote-2) chose the path to Kabul in order to reach Paradise  
For her mountains brought him close to the delights of heaven  
From the fort with sprawling walls, A Dragon of protection  
Each stone is there more precious than the treasure of Shayagan[[3]](#footnote-3)  
  
Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye  
Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass  
One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs  
And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls  
  
Her laughter of mornings has the gaiety of flowers  
Her nights of darkness, the reflections of lustrous hair  
Her melodious nightingales, with passion sing their songs  
Ardent tunes, as leaves enflamed, cascading from their throats  
  
And I, I sing in the gardens of Jahanara, of Sharbara[[4]](#footnote-4)  
And even the trumpets of heaven envy their green pastures **ṢĀʾEB TABRIZI**, Mirzā Moḥammad ʿAli (b. Tabriz, ca. 1000/1592; d. Isfahan, 1086-87/1676), celebrated Persian poet of the later Safavid period.

Why might the speaker blush?

How does this stanza’s imagery help to characterize a personified Kabul?

Archetype:

Significance:

What is suggested by the images of the moons and suns “hidden” in the city walls?

Literary device:

Of what might the Rose be jealous and why?

1. What do you learn about Kabul from reading this poem? How does the poet create this impression for the reader?
2. How are the speaker’s feelings about Kabul conflicted?
3. Connect the description of Kabul in the poem to the descriptions of Mariam and Laila. Which woman is the city most like (or which woman is most like the city)? Explain your answers.
4. Why do you think Hosseini chose to title his novel with a line from this poem? What does this suggest about at least some part of his purpose in writing the novel?

BBC NEWS

**Restoring Kabul's lost beauty**

By Mark Dummett   
BBC News, Kabul

**In the 17th century, the poet Saib-e-Tabrizi wrote about the beauty of Kabul with words still recited in the Afghan capital today.**

*My song exalts her dazzling tulips   
And at the beauty of her trees I blush   
How sparkling the water flows from Pul-i-Bastaan!   
May Allah protect such beauty from the evil eye of man!*

Few poets write about the city's dazzling tulips these days.

Many of its "bricks more precious than the treasure of Shayagan" lie in piles of rubble.

The Kabul River is now a feeble and filthy stream, and most of the trees have been cut down for firewood.

**'Historic'**

War, tyranny and Soviet-inspired urban planning have all left their mark on the Afghan capital.

The worst period was during the 1990s when the historic heart of the city, which Saib-e-Tabrizi wrote his love song for, became a battleground for competing factions of Mujahideen.

The mud-brick walls of mansions, courtyards and mosques were no match for the bombs.

"This was the centre of the fighting," says Khalilullah, who stayed through the bad times.

"Every day, 20 to 30 rockets hit these houses. Many people were killed."

After five years of relative peace in the city, the crowds have returned to the bazaars of Old Kabul.

The city is enjoying something of a revival and what cannot be bought in the packed street markets is being crafted in the noisy workshops.

But the buildings have not recovered so easily.

Those still standing are close to collapse. Many of the original streets are buried under metres of debris and rubbish.

"We want to rebuild our houses but we can't afford to," Khalilullah says. "They are historic monuments."

**Artisans needed**

Two organisations are now helping restore Old Kabul.

The Aga Khan Development Network has rebuilt a residential quarter, while the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, headed by the Prince of Wales and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, has started work in Murud Khane, the oldest area on the north bank of the river.

It is now at risk from "very aggressive and unscrupulous property developers", says author and former diplomat, Rory Stewart, who runs the foundation.

The return of millions of refugees has pushed up property prices in the city, and dozens of large, square blocks, with blue or green mirrored windows, have been built with remarkable speed.

Most are far from the centre, but that could change.

"They want to put up shoddily-built, cheap, multi-storey buildings which don't retain anything of what is so wonderful about Old Kabul," Mr Stewart says.

The foundation plans to restore a series of historically-important buildings to house, among other things, a school of Afghan arts.

It also wants to build new homes using traditional skills and designs.

This requires the instruction of a new generation of craftsmen and women.

"The war took away a large number of our artists and cultural traditions," says Yusuf Suratgar, who teaches the carving of intricately-designed wood doors and shutters.

"Most of our artists were either killed or disabled, or they moved to neighbouring countries."

**'Lost identity'**

"If you can properly restore the city, foreign tourists will come," Khalilullah believes.

"We don't want modern buildings here," he says. "This is the place of our fathers and grandfathers. We're happy here."

One restoration project already attracting visitors is Babur's Gardens.

Here, Kabuli families picnic in landscaped grounds built originally in the 16th century for the tomb of the founder of the Moghul empire, and now restored by the Aga Khan's organisation.

The mood in the gardens is peaceful and playful. It is possible to forget about the conflict in south-east Afghanistan, and the dire living conditions of most Afghans.

One visitor, Akhtar, thinks this is a good thing: "Kabul needs more places like this for families."

His son, Limur, disagrees: "Actually we don't need gardens, we don't need trees, first of all let's make peace."

But Rory Stewart argues that it would be a mistake to abandon Afghanistan's heritage.

"Any hope Kabul has of rediscovering its identity is going to depend on allowing these communities to flourish and these buildings to flourish. They are the last traces of an identity that was lost during the civil war."

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http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south\_asia/5262142.stm  
  
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1. A river in Kabul [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Khwaja Khadir, the Green Man, was the only man to receive immortality from the Fountain of Youth [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A fabulous legendary treasure [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jahanara was the favorite daughter of Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal [↑](#footnote-ref-4)