Angels in America Study Guide

Angels in America by Tony Kushner

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Angels in America is the first major work of playwright Tony Kushner, and its astounding success has turned the man and his writing into cultural icons of the late-twentieth century. Referred to by scholar John M. Clum in *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama* as "a turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture," *Angels* has received numerous awards and critical accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize for drama and the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award for best play. It has been produced in dozens of countries around the world and translated into several languages, including Chinese.

Interestingly, *Angels in America* began as a work made for hire. After writing only a handful of plays, and experiencing only one major production, Kushner was approached by Oskar Eustis, a resident director at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, who had been impressed by the playwright' s first drama, *A Bright Room Called Day.* In 1987, Eustis asked Kushner to write a play about the impact of AIDS on the gay community in San Francisco for the Eureka Theater. The two applied for grants, conducted workshops, and developed the work, which became *Angels in America,* at the Mark Taper Forum. The play then went on to the Eureka and later to the National Theatre of Great Britain, where it began to attract its global following.

Angels in America is an "epic" drama, which means its plot unfolds over great distances of time and place, involves many characters, and more than one story line. Two complete plays form the entire plot: the first part, *Millennium Approaches* and its second installment, *Perestroika.* Together, they present more than thirty characters in eight acts, fifty-nine scenes, and an epilogue.

Kushner subtitled his play "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes." Like a "fantasia," which is a medley of familiar tunes with variations and interludes, the play's scenes often seem musical, like operatic arias, playful duets, or powerful trios. Characters move in and out of conversations with each other, sometimes even overlapping other vignettes, which occur onstage at the same time, and the settings change rapidly from offices to bedrooms, from hospital wards to the imaginary South Pole.

For all its intricacies, however, the plot of the play is quite simple. It is the story of two couples whose relationships are disintegrating, set in America in the 1980s against a backdrop of greed, conservatism, sexual politics, and the discovery of an awful new disease: AIDS. It is this backdrop that provides *Angels in America* its magnitude and sets it apart from other love stories. In this play, the plot is largely driven by its themes, which are viewed from different characters' perspectives, as through a kaleidoscope, as the story unfolds.

Author Biography

Tony Kushner was born in Manhattan, New York, in 1956. While he was still an infant, his musician parents moved the family to Louisiana, where they played with the New Orleans Philharmonic. He developed an appreciation for opera and literature from his father and learned a passion for theatre from his mother, who acted in local plays. Kushner's views on religion, politics, and sex, hallmarks of his later work as a playwright, began to take shape during his early childhood. He attended Hebrew school, where he developed an attraction toward his teacher but would struggle to hide his homosexual feelings for several years. He felt further isolated as a Jew in the American South, where he regularly encountered anti-Semitism. When he left Lake Charles to attend Columbia University in New York he was, by his own estimation, liberal, ardently Zionist, and extremely closeted.

While at Columbia, he discovered new intellectual influences that changed his perspectives and would later shape his writing. He delved into the Middle Ages, found his own fantastical, spiritual side, and thought for a time he would become a medieval studies professor. It wasn't until after he received his B.A. that Kushner "came out" and began to live as an openly gay student and artist. He went on to study directing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Kushner read Bertolt Brecht and Karl Marx and realized the awesome potential of a politically charged theatre. He credits Brecht, particularly the German's play *Mother Courage and Her Children,* with guiding him toward a career as a playwright.

A Bright Room Called Day (1985) was Kushner's first foray into professional theatre. The play, which initially received only a brief run at London's Bush Theatre, concerns a group of friends in pre-World War II and their responses to Hitler and Nazism. Critics were not kind to the work, especially in the United States where it was called "fatuous" and "an early front-runner for the most infuriating play of 1991." Kushner himself called the production a "catastrophe." The writer's next efforts were adaptations: *The Illusion* (1988), taken from Pierre Corneille's play *L'illusion comique;* and *Widows,* adapted from a book by fellow playwright Ariel Dorfman *(Death and the Maiden)* and produced in Los Angeles in 1991.

Kushner's next work would catapult him to the forefront of the American theatre and earn him praise on stages around the world. More than one critic labeled the AIDS drama *Angels in America* a spectacular, monumental achievement, and marveled at Kushner's ability to capture the mood of an era. As a result of his success the playwright emerged as a widely respected spokesperson for many marginalized groups, including not only gays and lesbians but blacks, Jews, agnostics, socialists, and artists, all of whom he depicted in a struggle for dignity, respect, and survival in his play.

Since *Angels in America* took the theatre world by storm in 1992, Kushner has continued writing and adapting plays, including *Slavs!* and his version of the popular Yiddish drama *The Dybbuk.* He has also become a prolific and highly respected

essayist and lecturer, articulating his views on politics, race, class, and the arts in books and magazines and at conferences and college campuses around the country.

Plot Summary

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 1

It is late-October, 1985, and Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz stands alone next to a small coffin, conducting the funeral service for Sarah Ironson. In his eulogy for the deceased, he describes her as a caring, devoted wife and mother who traveled from Eastern Europe to America to make a home for herself and the Jewish people in "the melting pot where nothing melted." Rabbi Chemelwitz says Sarah was "the last of the Mohicans," and warns that soon, "all the old will be dead."

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 2

The same day as the funeral, Roy Cohn is visited in his office by Joseph Porter Pitt. Roy is a vulgar man, who screams and swears as he juggles three different conversations on his office phone. Joe is a Mormon, sensitive to Roy's foul language but eager to advance his career. He is an attorney who has been working as a law clerk in the Court of Appeals, and Roy is ready to give him his big break: He wants the younger man to go to Washington and work for the Justice Department, where he can be Roy's eyes and ears. Joe is stunned, appreciative, and agrees to discuss the opportunity with his wife.

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 3

Joe's wife, Harper, spends her days alone, often in a haze from sedatives she takes, and longing for a closer relationship with her husband, who is drifting further and further away from her. This scene begins with Harper sitting at home, listening to the radio, and talking to herself. She fantasizes about the ozone layer, and what it must look like from space, where "guardian angels, hands linked, make a sort of spherical net, a blue-green nesting orb, a shell of safety for life itself." Alternately paranoid and visionary, Harper is like the canary in a coal mine. She is more sensitive to danger than ordinary people, yet unable to save herself from the trouble ahead.

She is caught in the midst of her reverie by Mr. Lies, an imaginary travel agent who offers to take her on a vacation away from her worries - perhaps to Antarctica or the ozone layer. Harper complains to Mr. Lies that she is worried about the coming third millennium, when all sorts of strange things could happen.

This time, her fantasy is interrupted by the abrupt appearance of Joe. Once again late coming home, Joe claims to have been "out walking" and pitches his news to Harper: Would she like to move to Washington?

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 4

Back at the funeral, Louis and Prior are sitting outside the funeral home, waiting for the service to continue at the cemetery. Louis is Sarah Ironson's grandson, though he hadn't visited her much since she moved into the Bronx Home of Aged Hebrews ten years earlier. The two men have been in a committed relationship for four years and banter with each other about their cat, who has run away, and Louis's closeted homosexuality at family gatherings, where he insists on calling himself "Lou" (to avoid the sibilant S, Prior jokes).

As the couple reflects on life and loss, Prior reveals something startling: He has developed a purple lesion on his arm. It is Kaposi's sarcoma, "the wine dark kiss of the angel of death," and an early visual sign of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). He has been hiding the mark for awhile, afraid that Louis might leave him when he found out. Louis reacts angrily.

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 5

This scene is split between Joe and Harper at home and Louis at the cemetery with the Rabbi and his grandmother's coffin. It is at this point that the relationships of the central couples - Joe and Harper, Louis and Prior - begin to disintegrate.

Joe pursues the subject of his new career opportunity with Harper, trying to convince her that Washington, D.C., would be a fine place to live. Harper is afraid of more change, however, and insists on staying put. Joe observes that her medication may be the cause of her anxiety.

Meanwhile, in the cemetery, Louis quizzes the Rabbi on the church's view of someone who abandons a loved one in great need. He is planning to leave Prior because he cannot face life with Prior's disease. The Rabbi, however, is more concerned with getting himself home, across town, than with counseling the confused Louis.

At the Pitt house, Joe speaks idealistically about the new America, led by the Republican conservatism of Ronald Reagan, a chord struck again later in the play by Roy and his assistant, Martin. Harper has no room for political idealism in her life. She is suspicious of Joe's "walks" and tries to rekindle desire between them by offering him sexual favors and asking for a baby. Joe turns away, obviously uncomfortable with her suggestions, and Harper drifts back into her troubled delirium, mumbling, "The world's coming to an end."

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 6

Joe finds Louis crying in the men's room of the offices of the Brooklyn Federal Court of Appeals, where they both work. Louis is mourning the sickness of his companion and upset about his decision to leave the AIDS-stricken Prior. Joe tries to comfort him and is

"outed" by Louis, who recognizes immediately that the self-proclaimed Reaganite attorney is gay. On his way out the door, Louis playfully kisses Joe on the cheek.

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 7

Sometime after Joe and Louis meet in the men's room, Harper and Prior find each other in a mutual dream scene. In his dream, Prior is seated at a table, applying drag makeup and musing about the distance between the life he longs to lead and the one his sickness has handed him, when Harper appears in a valium-induced hallucination. They confront each other with "revelations." She sees the disease in him but insists there is a part deep inside that is still clean and healthy. He drops the news that her husband, Joe, is a homosexual, something she has been suspecting for a while.

After Harper leaves the dream, a feather floats to the ground and a voice from above calls to Prior, telling him to "prepare the way" for the "infinite descent."

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 8

In another split scene, the two couples are back with their respective partners - Harper and Joe at home, Louis and Prior in bed. Harper summons the courage to confront her husband with the truth they have both been denying. She begs him to confess to her that he is a homosexual, that their marriage has been a facade and a sin against their Mormon religion. Still, given the opportunity to reveal his secret, Joe resists and will say only that he is "a very good man who has worked very hard to become good."

In the other part of the scene, Prior's illness is getting worse, his symptoms more severe, yet Louis cannot even bear to hear him talk about it, let along comfort his lover. Looking for an opportunity of his own, Louis asks Prior if he would hate him for walking out. "Yes," Prior responds.

Millennium Approaches: Act I, scene 9

In a doctor's office, Henry, Cohn's physician, breaks the news to his patient that Roy has AIDS. The lawyer, however, refuses the diagnosis. He does so not because he is afraid of death or disease but because of the social stigma attached: "Roy Cohn is not a homosexual," he tells Henry, "Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man who fucks around with guys."

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 1

A month has gone by, and Prior is deteriorating rapidly. In the middle of the night, late in December, Louis finds him on the floor, incontinent and in terrible pain. Louis wants to call for an ambulance, but Prior is afraid if he goes to the hospital he won't return. He faints in Louis's arms.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 2

The same night, a similar crisis occurs at the Pitt home. Harper's mental anguish is beginning to match Prior's physical suffering. She tells Joe that she feels herself "going off again," slipping away into her pills and troubled dreams. She even suggests it is time for him to leave her, to go off to Washington alone, but he refuses.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 3

It is one in the morning the next day and Louis is sitting near Prior's bed in a hospital, discussing his condition with Emily, a nurse. He tells her about the significance of Prior's name. It is an old, respected name in the Walters family, which dates back to the Norman Conquest (the overthrow of the government of England in 1066 by the forces of Normandy).

Louis's musings on Prior's family history agitates his despair. While Prior's ancestors have been clinging to each other for generations, through wars, death, and the long march of history, Louis can't stand the suffering he sees now. On his way out the door, for a walk in the park, he asks the nurse to tell Prior goodbye for him.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 4

An hour later, Louis is in Central Park, having sex in the bushes with a stranger. When their condom breaks, the harried Louis tells the man, "Keep going. Infect me. I don't care." But the man is frightened away by Louis's strange behavior.

Meanwhile, in a scene that overlaps Louis's park misadventure, Joe is at a bar with Roy, seeking some solace of his own. He is torn between the sense of duty he feels as a Mormon and as a husband to Harper and the sense of dedication he has, to his work and to Roy. The elder attorney goads him, telling him that, "Everyone who makes it in this world makes it because somebody older and more powerful takes an interest." Roy would like to be that somebody for Joe, helping him establish himself in the big time politics of Washington, D.C. To further leverage his position, and take advantage of Joe's sensitivity, Roy admits that he his dying, though he tells Joe it is cancer that is killing him.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 5

A few days later, Prior is still in his hospital bed, sick but improving. He is visited by Belize, the duty nurse, who is a black former drag queen and, coincidentally, former lover of Prior's. Belize tries to comfort him with an assortment of herbal "voodoo" remedies and a listening ear. Prior is distressed about Louis' s absence and confused about a voice he keeps hearing - a voice that is a little frightening but strangely

comforting and arousing. After Belize leaves, the Voice is heard. It tells Prior to prepare for a marvelous work that must be done, then disappears.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 6

It is January, 1986, a few weeks later, and Joe and Roy are meeting Martin, a Reagan Administration Justice Department lawyer in a Manhattan restaurant. The purpose of the rendezvous is to give Joe the hard sell. Because he borrowed half a million dollars from a client (and failed to repay it), Roy is being threatened with disbarment by the New York State Bar Association, and he desperately wants Joe to take a job with the Justice Department, where he can help Roy's case. Joe is disturbed by the ethics of the situation and still concerned about Harper, but he agrees to think about it some more.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 7

Joe and Louis run into each other during lunch on the steps of the Hall of Justice building in Brooklyn. Both men are feeling extreme anxiety, which shows itself in different ways. Louis jokes about Republican politics and his spontaneous behavior. Joe admits to feeling overwhelmed and wishing sometimes that everything he was obligated to, including justice and love, would just go away. For a moment they connect and Louis offers to keep Joe company, but Joe retreats and they go their separate ways.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 8

That night, drunk and desperate, Joe stands at a payphone in Central Park and calls his Mormon mother in Salt Lake City to confess that he is a homosexual. Confused and angry, his mother tells him he's being ridiculous, drinking is a sin and he should go home to his wife. She hangs up on him.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 9

The next morning, Joe nearly confesses the truth to Harper. He admits he has never been attracted to her and that he is the source of many of her problems and hallucinations. She gets more and more agitated by his confession and finally calls for Mr. Lies to take her away. He shows up, dressed in Antarctic explorer's gear, and they promptly disappear. At the same time, Louis breaks the news to Prior that he will not be coming back; as much as he loves Prior, he can't cope with his disease.

Millennium Approaches: Act II, scene 10

Nearly a continent away, in Salt Lake City, Utah, Joe's mother, Hannah, stands in front of her house with Sister Ella Chapter. Hannah has decided to sell the house and move away and has enlisted her friend Sister Ella to help with the sale. They discuss the

Mormon life in Salt Lake, and Sister Ella warns Hannah that the world outside is a dangerous place.

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 1

Alone in his apartment, Prior wakes from a nightmare to find an apparition dressed in the clothes of a thirteenth-century British squire seated next to his bed. The ghost introduces himself as another Prior Walter (Prior 1) - the fifth in the Walter family line. He is soon joined by another Prior Walter (Prior 2), a ghost from seventeenth-century London. Both men died young from plagues - as it seems Prior will as well - and they have been sent to prepare the way for "the messenger." They call Prior a prophet and seer, chant mysteriously, and disappear, echoing the same words as the Voice from earlier scenes: "Prepare, prepare, The Infinite Descent, A breath, a feather, Glory to...."

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 2

In a split scene, Louis and Belize sit in a coffee shop, passionately discussing race, sexual identity, and politics, while, at the hospital, Emily delivers a medicated IV drip to Prior. In the middle of a frenzied tirade, Louis tells Belize that one of America's problems is its lack of spirituality. "There are no angels in America," he rants, "no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political." Louis's contradictory opinions, particularly his views on the importance of race, anger Belize, who is running out of patience with Louis's hysterics. Although Louis calms down, expresses his love for Prior, and asks about his condition, he is still afraid to be near him. Belize leaves Louis behind, frustrated and confused.

Meanwhile, Prior describes the current state of his illness to Emily. Many of his physical symptoms have receded, but he fears he is losing his mind. In the middle of their conversation, he imagines she is speaking Hebrew to him. Then, while she is writing her report, he sees a giant book with a flaming Aleph (the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) rise up through the floor, slam shut, and disappear. Emily notices nothing, and Prior runs away.

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 3

Fleeing a reality she cannot confront, and caught up in her own hallucination, Harper appears in Antarctica with Mr. Lies. A light snow is falling, and she is imagining how she can build a city of her own in the ice, befriend an Eskimo, and give birth to a baby girl with thick white fur and a marsupial pouch. Mr. Lies observes that what she is experiencing is "a retreat, a vacuum, its virtue is that it lacks everything; deep-freeze for the feelings."

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 4

Hannah Porter Pitt, Joe's mother, arrives in New York after selling her home in Salt Lake City. She waited several hours at the airport for her son to meet her, then took a bus in search of Brooklyn, and ended up being deposited at the final stop on the driver's route: the Bronx. She meets a homeless woman, mumbling to herself and warming her hands by a trash fire in an oil drum. The Woman gives her directions to the Mormon Visitor's Center and sends her on her way with the suggestion that, "In the new century I think we will all be insane."

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 5

While Hannah is in search of Joe, he is across town at Roy's house, breaking some bad news to the ailing attorney: Joe will not be going to Washington on Roy's behalf. He explains to Roy that his wife is missing, his mother is on her way, and he finds himself unable to break the law, even for the mentor he claims to love as a father. Angry and toying with Joe, Roy smiles at first, accepting his decision, then shouts insults at him and pushes him across the room. After Joe leaves, Roy collapses on the floor. His own illness is beginning to overtake him. In his delirium he sees the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg - the woman he sent to the electric chair years before as a traitor to her country. She warns Roy that she will be seeing him soon, in death, then calmly picks up the phone and dials an ambulance for him.

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 6

Prior is in his bedroom with the ghosts of his ancestors - Prior 1 and Prior 2. They are trying to help him prepare for the mysterious arrival he has been warned about. To help him relax, they conjure a spectral image of Louis for him to dance with. As Prior and the imaginary Louis dance, the two ghosts disappear. Then, suddenly, Louis vanishes and the sound of wings fills the room.

Millennium Approaches: Act III, scene 7

Louis and Joe meet in the park. Each man is desperate for some kind of meaningful contact but filled with doubt and self-hatred for their recent actions. Finally, they kiss, then walk away together, as the scene's focus changes to Prior's apartment. The sound of the wings is getting louder and louder, until finally a deafening din fills the room, the lights flicker, change colors, then plunge into darkness. There is a tremendous crash, followed by a brilliant white light, and the Angel of America appears, floating over Prior's bed. "Greetings, Prophet," she addresses him, "The Great Work begins: The Messenger has arrived."

Perestroika: Act I, scene 1

The second part of *Angels in America* begins in Moscow at the Soviet Kremlin, where Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov, the world's oldest living Bolshevik, is delivering a passionate speech about the need for a practical political theory to guide his country. Near the end of his oration, a great crashing sound is heard, and the scene changes to reveal the tableau at the end of *Millennium Approaches:* Prior cowering in his bed with the Angel of America hovering in the air above him. Once again she tells him, "The Messenger has arrived" Prior replies, "Go away."

Perestroika: Act I, scene 2

Louis and Joe appear at Louis's apartment. There is an initial awkward moment, as Joe nearly loses his resolve and leaves; but Louis manages to seduce him with kindness and tenderness. As the two men begin kissing and caressing each other, the scene changes to Harper's imaginary Antarctica.

Perestroika: Act I, scene 3

Mr. Lies is sitting by himself, playing the oboe, when Harper appears with a small pine tree. The sounds in the background keep changing from the sea and the wind to the din of city traffic, as Harper begins to fade in and out of her fantasy. In her dream, Joe appears, wrapped only in Louis's bed sheet. She accuses him of falling out of love with her and begs him to come back. He refuses and vanishes, leaving her alone in the park with the flashing lights of a police car.

Perestroika: Act I, scene 4

Hannah has managed to find Joe and Harper's apartment in Brooklyn. As she walks in the door, the phone rings. The call is from the police, who have found Harper in Prospect Park with the pine tree she apparently chewed down. Hannah asks the caller not to send Harper to the hospital and agrees to come and collect her "peculiar" daughter-in-law.

Perestroika: Act I, scene 5

Back in his apartment, Prior has turned a corner in his battle with disease. His encounter with the Angel, which he now thinks was a dream, caused him to have an orgasm in his sleep, and for the first time in months he is feeling exhilarated. He calls Belize at the hospital to tell him the good news. Shortly afterward, Belize calls him back with some news of his own: Roy Cohn has just checked in with AIDS.

Perestroika: Act I, scene 6

Lying in his hospital bed, sick and scared, Roy is as irascible as ever. When Belize comes in to administer an IV drip, Roy hurls a string of foul-mouthed, bigoted epithets at him that causes Belize to bristle and threaten the dying man. As offensive as Roy is, and as much as Belize hates him for what he represents, the nurse can't help but feel sorry for the patient. He warns Roy not to accept the radiation his doctor will surely prescribe and suggests he use whatever contacts he has to secure a trustworthy supply of azidothymidine (AZT), the only drug being prescribed that seems to have some effect on the AIDS virus. After Belize leaves, Roy phones Martin and blackmails him into finding the AZT he needs.

Perestroika: Act I, scene 7

A split scene between Louis's bedroom in Alphabetland and the Pitt apartment in Brooklyn shows three weeks in the lives of Joe and Louis, Harper and Hannah. After finally breaking through to one another, Louis and Joe are spending as much time as they can in bed, in each other's arms. They have sex, argue politics and religion, and try to forget the relationships they have left behind. At the same time, Hannah is working on Harper, trying to retrieve her from her madness by getting her to go to work at the Mormon Visitor's Center. Though he claims to be happy and sleep peacefully through the night, Joe is haunted by visions of Harper, who appears to taunt him for being in love with Louis.

Perestroika: Act II, scene 1

Prior accompanies Belize to the funeral of a mutual friend, who happened to be a well-known New York City drag queen. Prior's appearance and demeanor have changed. He is dressed all in black, wearing a long coat with a fringed scarf wrapped around his head, and he has become very introspective. He explains to Belize that the Angel he thought he dreamt was actually real and that he has become a prophet of some kind.

Perestroika: Act II, scene 2

To illustrate Prior's story, the scene changes to his bedroom three weeks earlier and the arrival of the Angel. While Belize stands nearby and watches, Prior replays his encounter with the celestial being. She has come to instruct Prior in the ways of prophecy, to reveal to him the hidden location of the implements of divination (under the tile near his kitchen sink). She explains to him that God created the world for His pleasure, then split it into two parts - men and women - in order to release the potential for change. As people evolved and sought more and more change, God grew fascinated with his creation's curiosity and eventually left Heaven to pursue the experience for himself. Prior has been charged with spreading the word to humanity: They must stop

moving, stop changing, in order to restore God to Heaven and put the universe right again.

The flashback disappears, and Prior rejoins Belize in front of the funeral home. Belize thinks Prior's vision is simply a reaction to his illness and the loss of Louis, but Prior is nearly convinced. "Maybe I am a prophet," he tells his friend, "Maybe the world has driven God from Heaven, incurred the angels' wrath." And it has been left to Prior to run away or help find God again.

Perestroika: Act III, scene 1

It is February, 1986, a week later. Roy is in his hospital room trying to manage his disbarment hearing by telephone, with the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg standing a deathwatch over him. Belize appears with Roy's prescribed medication and learns the conniving lawyer has secured his own private stash of AZT - more than he could use in fifty years. Roy refuses to share any of the coveted drugs. He and Belize exchange racial insults, and Belize simply takes a few bottles, leaving Roy alone with Ethel and convulsed with pain.

Perestroika: Act III, scene 2

The same day, across town, Prior pays a visit to the Mormon Visitor's Center, where Hannah and Harper have become volunteer caretakers. He tells Harper he is an "Angelologist" conducting research on Angels and his fieldwork has led him to the Mormons. The principal attraction at the Center is the Diorama Room, where mannequins arranged in a wagon-train tableau on a little stage depict a Mormon family's trek from Missouri to Salt Lake. Together, they listen to the recorded reenactment.

Fantasy and reality blur as the mechanical figures relate the history of the Mormons' westward journey. The real Louis walks into the scene and argues with the Mormon father, who looks like Joe. It is a hallucination shared by both Prior and Harper, and it ends when both figures walk off the stage together. Harper pulls the curtain closed as Hannah returns to check on her guest. Not understanding Harper's dementia or Prior's visions of angels, she tells them the diorama is closing for repairs and it is time to leave. Left alone, Harper talks to the Mormon Mother in the diorama, who comes to life and escorts her away.

Perestroika: Act III, scene 3

That afternoon, Joe and Louis are sitting in the dunes at Jones Beach, a once-popular spot for homosexual encounters. They are watching the waves roll over the sand. Joe swears his love for Louis and offers to give up anything for him, including his religion. Louis, however, longs to see Prior again and is beginning to realize his love for his sick companion is greater than his fear of Prior's disease.

Perestroika: Act III, scene 4

Joe and Louis remain on stage as the scene splits to include the New York Hospital. It is late at night, and Belize enters Roy's hospital room to administer his medication. The morphine in Roy's IV drip is causing him to hallucinate, and he mistakes the nurse for the incarnation of Death, coming to take him away.

Perestroika: Act III, scene 5

The scene splits again, as Harper and the Mormon Mother from the Visitor's Center diorama appear at the Brooklyn Heights Promenade. Harper is seeking advice from the Mother. She wants to know how people *change.* While the women discuss the pain and suffering change causes, the scene splits a final time to reveal Prior at home, removing his prophet attire and taking his medication. The four separate scenes now include all the major characters in the play. Louis leaves Joe sitting on the beach, walks to a phone booth, and calls Prior.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 1

It is the next day, and a split scene shows two attempted reconciliations. At the hospital, Joe is visiting Roy, whose condition is deteriorating rapidly. At first the forgiveness Joe seeks seems at hand: The dying Roy offers his blessing of life to his protege. Then Joe, trying to win more approval, tells Roy about his new relationship with Louis. Roy is enraged and leaps from his bed to attack Joe. Belize rushes in to restore order, forcing Roy back into bed and sending Joe away.

At the same time, Louis and Prior meet on a park bench. Prior, who is ready to make Louis's reunion as difficult as possible, is further hurt and angered to discover that Louis does not want to return to him; he merely wants some understanding between them. Prior surprises Louis by telling him he knows about his new lover and even knows he is a Mormon. Louis's defense is that he needed companionship. Disgusted, Prior walks away, leaving Louis alone on the bench.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 2

In an attempt to face his frustration, Prior drags Belize to the Hall of Justice in Brooklyn to find Joe and confront the man who has replaced him in Louis's life. The duo stumbles into Joe's office, then promptly lose their resolve. Prior sees a handsome, healthy man he can't compete against; Belize recognizes Joe as the law clerk from Roy's hospital room. They scramble away before Joe can catch them.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 3

The next day, Louis and Belize meet at the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, one of Prior's favorite spots. Louis wants Belize to help him communicate with Prior, but the nurse is too frustrated with Louis' s antics. He tells Louis about their visit to Joe and shocks him with the news that Joe is connected with the villainous Roy Cohn.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 4

At the same time, in the Mormon Visitor's Center, Joe and his mother, Hannah, appear together for the first time. Like Louis, Joe is hesitantly searching for his mate, seeking some kind of absolution for his terrible behavior but not knowing exactly what he wants. Hannah is stern with him but still wants to help somehow. Between them, they realize that Harper has run away, and Joe leaves to find her.

Prior appears at the Center, passing Joe on his way out. He has come to warn Joe about Louis, that he is weak and unfaithful, but turns to Hannah instead. As he tries to deliver his message, his illness overtakes him and he collapses. Hannah helps him up and they head off to the hospital.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 5

Late that afternoon Joe finds Harper, barefoot and without a coat, standing in the freezing rain at the Promenade in Brooklyn Heights. She is staring at the Manhattan skyline and trying desperately to come to terms with her scattered life. Joe collects his wounded wife, and they head toward home.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 6

At the hospital, Emily examines Prior and scolds him for ruining his condition, just when he was getting better. Prior tries to explain his encounters with the Angel to Hannah, who tells him he had a vision like the one the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith had. The two are trying to come to terms with each other, when a roll of thunder warns Prior that the Angel is returning for him. Hannah promises to stay by his side and watch over him.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 7

Joe and Harper are lying in bed. Apparently, they have just had sex, and Harper tries again to get Joe to admit his homosexual urges to her. They are right back where they were before, which is too much for Joe to handle. He rises, dresses, and again leaves her behind.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 8

Later that night, Joe visits Louis at his apartment. On Belize's advice, Louis has been researching Roy Cohn and the legal decisions Joe has ghost written for the judge he serves. Many of the decisions have been extremely conservative and, in Louis's estimation, unethical. They argue about the cases, Joe's scruples, and his relationship with Roy Cohn. Their debate turns into a brawl, and, in his rage, Joe beats Louis severely. He tries to apologize, but Louis sends him away.

Perestroika: Act IV, scene 9

Back in Roy's hospital room, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg has arrived with some terrible news for the near-dead man: he has been disbarred. For all his struggles, he will not be a lawyer when he dies. As his final act of petty revenge, Roy tricks Ethel into singing him a lullaby. When she is finished, he brags that he finally made Ethel Rosenberg sing (to "sing" is slang for a confession; this is a reference to the confession the historical Roy Cohn never won from Rosenberg during her trial). Cohn dies.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 1

The Angel returns. It is much later the same night in Prior's hospital room, and Hannah has fallen asleep in a chair near Prior's bed. An eerie light appears, then blackness and thunder, and the Angel materializes. Although terrified, Hannah manages to offer Prior advice: wrestle with the Angel and demand to be released from his role as Prophet. Prior grapples with the Angel, and the two wrestle around the room amidst screeching voices, blasts of music, and strange flashes of light. Finally the Angel relents. A ladder appears, leading up to Heaven, and the Angel invites Prior to climb it and return the Book of Prophecy he has been given.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 2

Prior appears in Heaven, dressed in robes like Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments.* Heaven looks like San Francisco after the earthquake of 1906. He meets Harper, who is not dead but merely visiting after her sexual encounter with Joe. Harper disappears and the scenery changes to the Hall of the Upper Orders. The Angel appears to escort Prior to a meeting with the rest of the angelic Continental Principalities.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 3

Down on earth, Belize has called Louis to Roy's deathbed. He wants him to say the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, over Roy's body, then take the dead man's stash of AZT. Louis refuses at first, objecting to prayer for such an evil man and

protesting that he doesn't remember any Jewish rituals. Guided by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, however, Louis manages to recite the entire ceremony.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 4

Joe returns to his apartment in Brooklyn, looking for Harper. Instead he finds the ghost of Roy, who witnessed the fight he had with Louis. Roy commends Joe on his viciousness, kisses him, then vanishes, just as Harper walks through the door.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 5

The scene changes quickly back to Heaven, where the Continental Principalities are gathered in their Council Room. They are huddled around a damaged 1940s model radio, listening to news from earth that tells them what the future holds for God's creation below. A crackling report tells them about a disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant that will occur in two months. The Angel of Antarctica remarks that he/she will be happy to watch the humans suffer, since they are responsible for the misery in Heaven since God left. The group begins arguing about technology, like their radio and nuclear power, and the course of human events, when suddenly the Angel of America appears with Prior.

Prior informs the Angels that he wants to return the book he has been given, abandon his role as prophet, and go back to living his life as before, miserable as he might be. The Angels try to convince him that everyone on earth would be happier if he would help convince them to stop moving and changing, but Prior is determined not to cooperate. Regardless of the suffering it entails, "I want more life," he tells the assembly. He adds that, if God returns, they should sue Him for abandoning everyone. Prior exits.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 6

Out on the streets of Heaven, Prior encounters Sarah Ironson, Louis's dead grandmother, and Isidor Chemelwitz, the Rabbi who performed her funeral service at the beginning of *Millennium Approaches.* They are seated on wooden crates playing cards. The Rabbi helps Prior conjure the ladder back to earth, and Sarah encourages him to struggle with the Almighty, because after all, "It's the Jewish way."

Perestroika: Act V, scene 7

In a quick scene, Prior passes Roy on his journey back to earth. Roy is standing waist-deep in a smoldering pit, seemingly talking to God about the abandonment suit the Angels are bringing against him. As the slickest lawyer in Heaven or Hell, Roy agrees to represent God, even though, he tells his holy client, "You're guilty as hell."

Perestroika: Act V, scene 8

Back in his bed in the hospital, Prior wakes from his adventure in Heaven like Dorothy in the *The Wizard of Oz.* He tries to tell Belize, Emily, and Hannah about the Angels and how he only wanted to go home again, but they are interrupted by the arrival of Louis. Emily leaves to finish her rounds of the hospital wards, Hannah goes to put her life back in order, and on his way out, Belize offers Prior Cohn's AZT horde. Louis tells Prior he wants to come back.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 9

The two troubled couples go their separate ways. Harper confronts Joe in their apartment and demands his credit card so she can go off and start a life of her own. As consolation, she offers Joe her Valium and suggests he goes exploring. At the same time, in the hospital room, Prior tells Louis he still loves him, but he can't come back.

Perestroika: Act V, scene 10

The scene splits to include Harper on board a jet plane, headed for San Francisco. She describes a dream she had in which the souls of the dying on earth floated up in the sky, where they took the place of the angels and repaired holes in the ozone.

Perestroika: Epilogue

Prior, Louis, Belize, and Hannah are gathered at the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, Prior's favorite spot, four years later. The world has changed somewhat - the Berlin Wall has fallen and through the Russian leader Gorbachev's policy of "Perestroika" the Cold War seems to be over. Prior is living with his disease and plans to live longer still. Together, the group relates the story of the angel Bethesda, who appeared in the Temple square in Jerusalem long ago. Where the angel landed, a fountain appeared that could heal anyone who walked through its waters. Hopefully, they say, the fountain will appear again when the Millennium comes and everyone will be healed and purified. Prior blesses the audience, wishes them "More Life," and tells them: "The Great Work Begins."

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 1

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play is set in 1985, at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the western world. The title refers to the coming of the millennium, which historically carries connotations of ill omen and catastrophe. The first Act of the play is subtitled "Bad News," which also hints at approaching doom. The theme of fatalism in the play is directly linked to the spread of AIDS throughout all society.

In scene one, a Jewish funeral ceremony is taking place at a funeral home in New York. Rabbi Chemelwitz presides over the cheap, basic coffin, the lid of which is roughly held in place by two wooden pegs. The service seems badly prepared. Rabbi Chemelwitz gives a faltering and impersonal speech about the deceased, Mrs. Sarah Ironson; however, he gives an emotive speech on the immigrant generation, to which he and the deceased belong. It is a moving tribute to their common heritage, to the establishment of authentic Jewish immigrant cultures within the United States, and to the sad fact that they are a dwindling generation.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The funeral opens the play in an elegiac tone. The Rabbi is lamenting the passing of not only Sarah Ironson, but also the entire generation of Eastern European and Russian immigrants, and their epic journey to America. This scene speaks to the fact that important historical contributions to American culture and society, such as that made by the immigrants, can pass into oblivion without proper commemoration. Thus, the rushed and poorly prepared nature of the service leaves us with the sense that life has become devalued...

The Rabbi's speech is a monologue - a single voice that is not part of a larger conversation. This further emphasizes the alienation of the Rabbi, and the traditions of his people. His culture will ebb under the dominance of modern political and professional ambitions throughout the play.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 2

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Roy Cohn is at the desk in his office, with Joe seated opposite. According to the character notes, Roy is based on the flamboyant and powerful figure of Roy M. Cohn, who was a prominent New York Lawyer and power broker. Joe is a legal clerk who seems to have a history of acquaintance with Roy. The stage direction describes Roy's desk as the hub of frantic telephone business negotiations. Joe waits for a gap in Roy's many conversations. Roy's personality is animated and overwhelming. He comically insults and criticizes his clients either directly or whilst pressing the "hold" key on his telephone.

Between calls, Joe and Roy talk about Joe's job as a clerk in the New York Hall of Justice. The phone jams with calls, and Roy swears. Joe objects to his swearing, telling him he is a Mormon.

Roy offers to help Joe win promotion to the Justice department in Washington, which he boasts he can arrange with a single phone call. Joe says he needs to discuss it with his wife.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene introduces us to Roy's character and role in life. He is a vibrant, forceful man who is firmly embedded within the power structures of American government. He has a natural talent for wit and satirical commentary, which underlines his intelligence and his vanity. One of his comments, aimed at the physical appearance of Joe's current boss, alerts us to the fact that he is privately homosexual.

The contrast from the funeral to the office is striking. We switch from a bleak commentary on human mortality, to a vivid and energetic performance of the vanities afflicting modern society. Big business, power politics and the vitality of individual personalities take precedence over the grander historical narrative of immigration.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 3

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This is a split scene, in which Harper (Joe's wife) is at home alone on one part of the stage, listening to a radio and talking to herself. The character notes and stage direction say this is a common activity for her. Later in the course of the scene, the other half of the stage is occupied by the rabbi Chemelwitz, who is reciting a Kaddish (Jewish prayer for the dead) over the casket of Sarah Ironson, back at the funeral home. The play frequently makes use of these split scenes to show how themes from the private lives of characters reflect upon the events that are taking place elsewhere.

Harper is lamenting the collapse of traditions. She talks about the ozone layer, which she thinks is actually a circle of guardian angels, forming a protective layer around the planet and keeping out dark forces. She is worried that the layer is failing, and life is gradually falling apart. She says that this is why her husband, Joe, should not leave her alone in the apartment. She speaks to Joe as if he is present with her, saying that she wants to go away and travel.

Mr. Lies, a figure of her hallucinations, appears dressed as a travel agent. She tells him that she would like to see the hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica. Peculiarly, she continues to talk to Mr. Lies, though she seems conscious of the fact that he is not real. He tells her that the only cure for her lack of roots is to keep moving.

In the other part of the stage, Rabbi Chemelwitz and the coffin become visible; according to the stage direction, his prayer seems to filter into Harper's reality through the radio. She continues to speak above the noise of the radio. She talks about imminent change, but is uncertain whether the millennium will bring positive or negative events. Mr. Lies says she needs a holiday, but she orders him to leave because she hears Joe returning from work.

Mr. Lies and the Rabbi vanish as Joe enters. He sees that she is distressed, and comforts her. He tells her about their possible move to Washington.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The split encourages us to compare what occurs in the two separate but simultaneous mini-scenes. We notice thematic parallels between the funeral and its commemoration of a lost heritage, and Harper's fears about the collapse and decay of systems on Earth.

From the character notes, we learn that Harper suffers from agoraphobia and Valium addiction. Valium is a sedative prescribed to cure nervousness and sleeplessness. We can think of these as particularly modern ailments, symptoms of alienation and anxiety. She is obsessed by the image of the ozone layer, and is deeply afraid of external threats to her security. The angels suggest the fragility of her imagined defenses. Her

speech is dominated by circular images that heighten her vulnerability. Symbolically, she feels trapped at the centre of a thin and decaying layer of protection - she is closed within the ring of her phobias.

The travel agent, Mr. Lies, urges her to leave, despite her agoraphobia that imprisons her in her apartment. As is the case with her other, subsequent fantasies, he represents both a force for good and evil: he encourages her to move forward, but he is also a sign of her madness. Ultimately, we become aware that travel may be a euphemism for suicide, or simply death. Both are forms of escape from the life Harper knows. Both are types of spiritual journey that are vividly represented by Sarah Ironson's casket.

It is significant that, in such a developed capitalist society, Harper's means of escape should take the form of a salesman and a travel *agent*.

Travel also relates to the theme of immigration. Harper's 'rootlessness' could be said to afflict all second and third generation immigrant groups. Essentially, these people lack a firm sense of heritage or heartland, just as they may not feel entirely integrated into contemporary American society. This poses the question: what constitutes the American national identity? We can also think of Harper's madness as a symptom of the identity crisis suffered by migrant Americans who feel alienated by modern society.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 4

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Louis Ironson (Sarah's grandson) and his lover Prior Walter are sitting outside the funeral home after the service. We know from the character notes that Louis has a low profile job in the same department as Joe.

Louis is telling Prior stories about his grandmother's life. He remembers that when his grandmother went to see a famous public speaker, her only comments were concerned with the woman's manners and dress.

The service has unsettled him a little. Prior jokes that he wants the Rabbi to perform his funeral service. Louis jokes satirically about Jewish funeral custom. He then mentions that Sarah had been alone in the home for ten years before her death, talking to herself. He has not seen her in this time, because she reminds him of his mother.

He apologizes to Prior for not introducing him to the Ironson family. Prior laughs about the 'butch' act Louis puts on for his family, because they do not know he is gay.

Prior says that his pet cat ran away because it sensed something was wrong. He shows Louis a lesion on his skin, a common side effect of AIDS. He jokes about this, and Louis becomes upset. Prior leaves him to attend the graveside ceremony.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

In Jewish culture, faith is passed through the female line; the matriarchs carry on certain important traditions. With Sarah Ironson's death, and the implied rupture between Louis and his mother, a spiritual tradition is in decline. The Ironsons do not appear to be a close family, and it has two repressed homosexuals concealing their lifestyles. The impression is of a weakening in the fabric of society, as traditional family units are replaced by unconventional, homosexual couples. We also notice a parallel between the disease that is physically corrupting Louis and Prior's relationship, and the symbolic disease of secrecy that divides families.

Prior describes his lesion as "the wine-dark kiss of the angel of death." The symbolism of the angels is complicated by this contradictory image. In the context of AIDS, angels bring death through love; they kill with tenderness. The angel of death appears in the story of the seven plagues of Egypt, in the Old Testament book of Exodus. In the final plague, the angel of death passed over every home in Egypt, killing the first-born sons of non-Hebrews (including the Pharaoh's own son), and destroying the youth of Egypt. For many, AIDS was seen as a punishment from God for the sin of homosexuality. Throughout the play, we can see the disease compared, in symbolic terms, to the Biblical Plague of the First-born.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 5

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

A split scene that opens with Joe and Harper at home, discussing the move to Washington.

Harper thinks the city is full of tombs; but, she worries they will be caught up in the Yuppie lifestyle (business-oriented, impersonal), and forget their Mormon ideals if they leave. She says she has to finish decorating the bedroom. A noise that sounds like a man with a knife has been preventing her from completing it. This is another of her hallucinations - a product of her extreme paranoia. Its full significance within the play is yet to be revealed.

Their apartment reminds her of the house from the film *Rosemary's Baby* (a film about demonic possession). She says that the houses in Georgetown, near Washington (where Joe has suggested they live), resemble the house from another, similar movie, *The Exorcist*. Joe asks her how many pills she has taken. Eventually she admits she has had three.

The focus shifts across the stage to Louis and the Rabbi, who are standing by the grave of Sarah Ironson. Louis asks about the small number of pegs in the coffin lid. The Rabbi answers that it is to help her get out easier. He quotes from Shakespeare to comment on Louis's lack of sentimentality: "Sharper than the serpent's tooth is the ingratitude of children."

Louis asks him what the Jewish scripture says about people who abandon their loved ones in a time of need, due to fear of sickness and death. Louis wants to relieve his conscience, but the Rabbi impatiently tells him to find a priest instead.

The focus reverts to Joe and Harper's apartment. Joe is telling Harper that he wants to be near the action in Washington. There is a renewed national purpose and pride within the Reagan administration, and he wants to be part of it. Harper talks about the depletion of the Ozone layer. Joe says that her negative vision of the world is due to the fact that she hides in their apartment all day. She disagrees, and insists that her emotional troubles stem from her marriage to him. Joe tries to calm her with a friendly kiss. She tells him about the radio shows she has listened to: they give advice on everything from oral sex techniques to the hole in the ozone. She thinks the world is ending.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Harper's concern about the collapse of traditions informs not only her own situation, but also that of Louis and his family. Often in literature, a direct structural comparison of this sort juxtaposition) suggests an association, such as thematic unity, between the two

parts. In this case, the ills of modern society, which we can observe in one scene, are the same ills that cause Harper's extreme mental instability. It is as if her agoraphobia arises from the examples of decay and dysfunction, the social diseases as well as the physical. The Rabbi's quotation of Shakespeare underlines the problem of the breakdown in the family unit. Yet the Rabbi is deficient in his duty as a spiritual leader when he refuses to listen to Louis's troubles. From this, we can conclude that social relations are indeed breaking down: people are abandoning their diseased lovers, abandoning their religious responsibilities, and failing in their personal obligations.

Joe's confidence in Reaganism clashes with this surging tide of pessimism. Clearly, the examples we have been shown indicate that the success of Reaganism is not extended to all, and that perhaps many of the problems can be attributed to this new political system.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 6

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Joe interrupts Louis crying in the men's restroom at work. Louis says that he is the first of four colleagues to stop and check up on him. He calls the others "Reaganite heartless macho asshole lawyers." Joe objects to this, explaining that he has twice voted for Reagan. Louis assumes that Joe is the only gay Republican. Joe is shocked by this and denies it, although there is confused joking about which is worse, gay or Republican. Joe offers him his hand to shake on leaving, but Louis playfully kisses his cheek instead.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

Joe's political optimism strikes us as unique in the world of the play. Louis describes Republicans as emotionally repressed and professionally ruthless. These troubles dominate the characters' relationships. For example, all of the couples have difficulty in expressing their emotions and relating honestly to each other. It is as if the ruthless political climate has created a generation of repressed, emotionally under-developed people. Louis believes in liberal, left-wing politics, and tries to point out to Joe the association between Reaganism and social dysfunction.

Their conversation also reveals that Joe might be a repressed homosexual. In the immediate thematic context of Reaganism and neo-conservativism, we begin to see sexuality as an element of the crisis-ridden American identity that is being forced to conform to certain out-dated, heterosexual ideals.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 7

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

The stage direction describes this as a "mutual dream scene."

Prior Walter appears in one of Harper's frequent, Valium-induced hallucinations, and she appears simultaneously in his dream.

Prior is applying makeup before a mirror, and acting like a female matinee idol. He is talking to himself, eloquently, about the human desire for grace and beauty. He curses the fact that his disease has robbed him of these wishes. He laughs at his makeup job.

Harper appears. Both are confused as to what the other is doing in their dream/hallucination. She naively asks why he is wearing makeup. Prior pretends that he is shocked, and makes a big show of slashing his throat dramatically with a lipstick. Harper explains that she has emotional problems, and takes too many pills. Prior says he stole the makeup from Macy's because he had no money, but needed to cheer himself up. Harper says Joe will be angry that she has taken the pills. She says she is not an addict, because Mormons are not supposed to have addictions. He tells her he is gay.

Harper analyzes her hallucination. She understands that hallucinations do not invent material, they use existing memories and experiences. This seems ironic to her, as this imaginary escape only re-enforces her situation. They each exchange surprising observations about the private lives of the other. She states that she knows he is very ill, but that on the inside, part of him is untouched by the disease. He tells her that her husband is gay.

She disappears, and Prior looks in the mirror and expresses doubts about her last revelation. He starts wiping off the makeup, and a large, grey feather falls from above. A beautiful voice, the voice of the angel, calls to him, commanding "Look up!" and "Prepare the way!" A spectacular change in lighting occurs, shining down from the direction of the voice. The Voice announces its imminent arrival. Prior begins to feel ill.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

This scene develops the idea that it is the suppression of sexuality that is causing problems for the characters of the play. On the one hand, makeup can be described as a symbol of conventional gender (women wear makeup, men do not). On another, it is a symbol of oppression: it re-enforces the idea that women must look a certain way and hide what does not fit into society's visual ideal. Makeup *conceals* truth. Yet, in the environment of the hallucination, both characters are able to see through the disguises. The drug-induced hallucination is both good and bad: it illuminates the truth, although that truth might initially be destructive.

In response to Harper's comment about her religion, Prior comically refers to homosexuality as his 'church.' In this way, the scene introduces the idea of personal, secular faith. Conventional religions such as Joe and Harper's Mormon beliefs, and Louis's Jewish faith, appear oppressive in this context. They do not recognize modern weaknesses like drug addiction, and therefore cannot help to cure them. Joe speaks of Reaganism as if it too is a religion. Though it is actually a political vision, to Joe it has an evangelical capacity to heal. Harper and Prior's revelations are pitched as secular alternatives to the radical Christian visions of St Paul in the New Testament (Revelations), and to the false claims of Reaganism.

In the Bible, angels are the messengers of God, and part of the army that will do battle with Satan at the end of the world. The angel in this play is associated with the millennial theme: it suggests both the catastrophe of the AIDS epidemic, a symbolic 'judgment' on humanity, and the possibility of salvation. The fall of the feather may suggest that, as Harper fears, the angels are themselves in decline; or, it may simply suggest an arrival. The angel is ambiguous, like Prior's lesion. Death and eternal life through salvation are fused together in them.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 8

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 8 Summary

A split scene, which begins with Harper and Joe at home.

She has deliberately burned his dinner, and admits that she has taken many pills today. She demands to know where he has been. He seems like a stranger to her. She feels she is being punished for marrying him by the disturbing dreams she has, in which they have sex. He says that her addiction makes her unattractive, and that this puts him off sleeping with her. She eventually asks if he is gay, and he denies it, unconvincingly.

The focus shifts across the stage, where we see Louis and Prior in bed. Louis is discussing his idea of the afterlife. Prior is joking with him, but he's preoccupied with his thoughts of hell. Prior starts talking about all his symptoms. Louis gets upset with Prior's jokes, so Prior asks him to talk about Justice, as a distraction. For Louis, Justice is a god-like force. Louis asks Prior if he would hate him should he leave. Prior is calm and gentle, but answers, 'yes.'

The focus reverts to Joe and Harper, who are still arguing. Joe suggests they pray, but Harper says God does not speak to her. Instead, he talks to hallucinations.

Joe asks whether it matters that he is gay, if he does whatever he can to deny it and lives normally. Harper says she is pregnant, but Joe will not believe her. She imagines what life would be like for her child.

The focus shifts again. Prior tells Louis about one of his ancestors, a sea captain, who was in charge of a ship that foundered off the coast of Nova Scotia. Seventy passengers (mostly Irish immigrants) were moved to a leaky lifeboat. In order to keep it afloat, the captain and crew randomly threw people overboard, until, when they arrived at Halifax, only nine remained. Prior thinks that the scenario represents his own situation. He is angry that Louis wants to abandon his obligations to him.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 8 Analysis

Kushner is putting the case that it is neither AIDS, nor homosexuality that is destroying society, but the repression of alternative choices and lifestyles. The pressure of conformity is damaging both relationships. Harper is suffering in a marriage without physical or sexual intimacy, and without honesty. Prior is suffering because Louis wants to escape his obligations.

Harper describes their imaginary baby as an addicted, blind child that exists only in its hallucinations, and reflects its parents' problems. Symbolically, this means that she feels their future consists of blindness (dysfunction) and a lack of dreams. In terms of their immediate problems, it is significant that both couples are only able to talk indirectly, in

metaphors, about their troubles. Prior uses the image of the sea voyage to represent the nature of the AIDS epidemic. It is a silent, anonymous killer that chooses its victims randomly.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 9

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 9 Summary

Roy Cohn is at the office of his doctor, Henry, who is explaining to him how the HIV virus works. Roy demands to know what this has to do with him. Henry says he expects recent tests to confirm that Roy is suffering from AIDS. Roy is angry, because he does not want to be labeled as an AIDS victim, and by association, a homosexual. He will lose power and influence if this becomes known. He tells the doctor he will describe his condition as liver cancer instead. Henry says he needs to use his influence to get a place on a clinical trial, as medical science offers no other options.

Part 1: Act 1, Scene 9 Analysis

AIDS affects people irrespective of social rank. A powerful, well-known man like Roy is just as capable of succumbing to it as a man of lesser status, like the drug addicts Roy mentions. This scene emphasizes the stigma attached to this disease. Men like Roy contributed to and prolonged this stigma by concealing their condition, so as not to suffer from the negative social attitude towards homosexuality and AIDS.

Roy argues that all labels are superficial means of conferring status and deciding who will be the underdog. His refusal to recognize his condition is ironically a form of acquiescence to the system (the social norms).

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 1

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Louis and Prior are at home. Prior is lying, extremely ill, on the floor of the bedroom. He calls for Louis, who goes to call an ambulance, despite Prior's desperate protests. Prior tries to get up, fails and soils himself. Louis comes in and notices blood. Before he loses consciousness, Prior warns Louis not to touch the blood.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene advances the plot, and shows us the speed with which AIDS can progress. Here, Louis confronts his fears, which he has been anxious to avoid.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 2

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Harper is at home in the dark when Joe returns. She has heard the man with the knife in their bedroom. She tells him she wants to go traveling.

Joe wants to save the marriage. He says he prays to God to destroy him and start again. He talks about the Biblical story of Jacob wrestling the angel, which seems to represent his inner-struggle to suppress his identity.

Harper says she cannot change the love she has for him. Joe asks if she is pregnant, and she answers inconclusively. She tells him to go to Washington without her.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Joe is still clinging to his heterosexual image. The continued denial seems to be connected to Harper's worsening mental state. She is taking more pills, has had more hallucinations and may be inventing the pregnancy. Her hallucination of the man with the knife is an anonymous killer, and may therefore represent AIDS. The scene reiterates the association between the two important elements of the play.

The Biblical story is a metaphor for the destructive power of the major religions, and their tendency to suppress issues, like homosexuality, that are considered a threat to the order. Joe is involved in an internal struggle between admitting his sexuality and destroying his identity, which will also destroy his wife. On a more secular level, the biblical image also represents homosexual love in the context of the AIDS epidemic. The angel's embrace is fatal.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 3

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Louis has taken Prior to the hospital. It is very late, and he is sitting with a nurse, Emily, outside Prior's room. Louis is telling her that caring for Prior is like being in hell. She says Prior is good looking, but Louis cannot seem to see past the disease.

They talk about Prior's family history, which is long and distinguished. Louis talks about William the Conqueror's wife, who made the Bayeux tapestry as a symbol of her devotion, while William was away fighting wars in England. He is upset that he does not have the same devotion, and decides to go walking, though it is two in the morning. He asks Emily to say goodbye to Prior for him.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Prior's great family history fails to impress Emily. It seems these things are not important to her generation. The comparison to William the Conqueror and his wife illustrates the fact that the homosexual community cannot marry and form legally recognized, lasting relationships. Because society will not give homosexuals the rights to exclusive married status, the community's tendency appears to be towards promiscuity.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 4

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

A split scene, which begins with Roy and Joe at a bar. Roy is drinking heavily.

Joe tells Roy that during her childhood, Harper was abused by her alcoholic father. He says that people do not expect Mormons to have these kinds of problems. He says that it is painful to fall short of your ideals. His conversation reveals that he was initially attracted to Harper's rebellious streak, and the darker aspect of her personality arising from these childhood issues. He suggests that he does not know himself very well. He is worried about leaving Harper, but doubts that she will survive Washington anyway.

Roy talks about his father figure, and says that the father-son relationship is the most crucial. Roy advises Joe not to be afraid of living alone, without responsibility. He has told Joe that he has cancer.

In the other part of this split scene, Louis is out in central park, where he meets a man for sex. The meeting, and the dialogue between the man and Louis, intermittently interrupts at the dinner conversation of Joe and Roy. Louis and the man agree to have sex in the park, and Louis persuades him to use a condom, which he says he does not usually do. It breaks, but they do not stop. Afterwards, Louis jokingly refers to the man's comment that he lives with his parents, and the man slaps him.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Roy and Joe are withholding the truth from one another, although they both seem to want to confess a certain amount. Society and religion are keeping this desire in check. This scene also locates the repressive framework within the family itself. Harper's past is the source of her illness, and Joe has hinted that his father was a cold, strict man.

The encounter in the park highlights the risks involved with the homosexual lifestyle.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 5

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Belize, who is a former drag queen and old lover of Prior's, is visiting him in the hospital. They trade camp jokes and vulgar erection jokes. Prior tells him about his hallucination of the voice, saying that he finds it sexually arousing. When Belize leaves, it becomes evident that Prior has been talking to the voice, which tells him again to prepare for its arrival. It promises to bring truth.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

The angel becomes a figure of salvation; however, we are not sure whether this might involve destruction. Nonetheless, it will bring the only quality that seems to be absent from the play: truth.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 6

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Roy and Joe are having dinner at a restaurant with Martin Heller, who works for the Reagan administration in Washington. The character notes state that he should be played by the actor who plays Harper's role. This direction taps into the ambiguity of Joe's sexuality. Martin is talking enthusiastically about the prospects of Reagan's government. Roy is making sure that Martin is fair to Joe. He orders Martin to rub his back.

Martin hurries Joe for his decision about the job. Roy shows Joe a letter from the American Bar Association. They are threatening to disbar Roy for violating the code of legal ethics. Roy says he needs Joe to take the job in order to block this plan. Joe refuses, and Roy sends Martin out the room whilst he persuades Joe. Joe asks for another day to decide.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The choice facing Joe becomes a choice between idealism and reality. The massage comically illustrates the nature of this reality: there are favors, alliances, unethical acts and power games. In the Reaganite society, friendships must be useful. In a sense, the choice Joe faces now foreshadows a later, more essential choice he will have to make between being what he knows he is (homosexual), and what he feels obliged to be.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 7

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

Joe and Louis meet coincidentally outside the Hall of Justice in Brooklyn, where they both work. Louis says Prior's condition has worsened. Louis jokes that Joe is too nice to be a Reagan supporter. Louis mentions a rumor that Ron Reagan Junior is gay. He talks about the lack of real sentiment in human relationships.

Joe expresses envy over Louis's apparent lack of restraint. Joe mistakenly went to work over the weekend, and found it empty and hostile. He seems to be disillusioned with his life, work and responsibilities. Louis asks if he wants company. Joe seems apprehensive about this offer, but goes with him.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Joe's decision at the end of this scene points towards the emergence of his true sexual identity. Louis tells him "sometimes, even if it scares you to death, you have to be willing to break the law." The implication is that, in recognizing his homosexuality, Joe is breaking an unwritten social rule, as well as his religious principles. It seems that his religion is irreconcilable with this truth about himself. He begins also to associate his legal career, and its connections with the Reagan administration, with the oppression of his sexuality.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 8

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 8 Summary

Joe calls his mom from a Central Park payphone. It is four in the morning. He asks her if his father ever loved him, and he confesses that he is gay. She says his father did not love him. She is determined to forget the contents of the phone call, and complains about the fact that Joe is drunk. She says drinking is a sin, and hangs up.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 8 Analysis

Joe's release from the responsibility of his heterosexual persona is symbolized by his drunkenness, and by the candid question he asks his mother. He seems not only to have reached a fuller self-awareness, but has also thrown off his restraint. This scene associates his mother with strict religious code and the original source of Joe's oppression.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 9

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 9 Summary

A confusing split scene, in which Joe's confession to Harper overlaps at several points with Louis's confession to Prior.

Louis says he is moving out. Prior is furious that Louis left him at the hospital.

Prior acts out a mock judgment of Louis. Louis explains that it is possible to love but to fail the one you love. Prior answers that Louis is incapable of real love. Prior screams at Louis to go. Louis leaves Prior.

Joe says he loves Harper, and she says she wants to leave him. Joe has found out from the doctor that Harper is not pregnant. He says he has always tried to ignore and deny his sexuality, but that he can no longer escape it. She tells him to go to Washington without her.

Harper asks Mr. Lies to help her leave. Joe tells Harper he thinks he is the man with the knives in her hallucinations. Harper agrees that Joe *is* the knife man. Joe doubles over and coughs up blood. Mr. Lies appears, dressed as a polar explorer. He and Harper vanish.

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 10

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 10 Summary

Joe's mother, Hannah, is talking to her friend and real estate agent, Sister Ella Chapter, who is played by the actor playing the Angel.

Hannah wants Ella to sell her house, because Hannah has decided to move to New York. Despite her principles, Hannah takes a sly drag from her friend's cigarette. Ella warns her that she is leaving "the right home of saints."

Part 1: Act 2, Scene 10 Analysis

Thematically, Ella's warning recalls Harper's agoraphobic anxieties about external dangers.

The two women in this scene represent conventional religious morality. Hannah's move to New York is a crusade. She is obviously planning to 'save' Joe from his sexuality. The plot is moving towards a dramatic confrontation between Joe's newly liberated sexuality and the religious principles that initially suppressed it. The sale of the house is symbolic: the site of Joe's early oppression, and of the authority of his religious upbringing, is gone.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 1

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Prior is having a nightmare. He wakes to find Prior 1, a dead ancestor from the thirteenth century, in his room. Prior 1 is played by the actor who plays Joe, thus forging a sense of unity between this part of the story and the other part, which involves Joe directly.

Prior 1 asks what the little things are that Prior has been swallowing. Prior explains they are pills. Prior 1 assumes he has 'pestilence,' a plague like the black death or small pox, which killed whole villages in his time. Prior 1 died of the plague. He asks Prior why he has no children. He cannot understand what Prior means when he says he is gay. Prior 1 had twelve children, which is of course what kept the family line going so strongly. He pities Prior for his childlessness and warns Prior to prepare the way for the coming of the angel.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

The visitation generates a dramatic level of suspense before the angel's arrival. The scene suggests a parallel between the plague and AIDS. The use of the word pestilence again carries biblical connotations of judgment. The communities in medieval England believed that the plague was a direct punishment from God for their failings.

The other theme of the scene is concerned with Prior's lack of children. His lifestyle means that his long family history will end when he dies. So, just as Sarah Ironson's death represents the end of a tradition, Prior's approaching death from AIDS has a similar finality.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 2

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Prior is having another nightmare. The first Prior is joined by a second, dressed in rich, eighteenth century costume. Both Prior ancestors died of the plague, and have come to announce the arrival of the angel. Prior 2 assumes that Prior's plague "is the lamentable consequence of venery," by which he means it was sexually transmitted. Prior 2 refers to Prior as a prophet or visionary. They simultaneously recite different verses about the arrival of the angel, and vanish.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

The ancestors emphasize the difference between their deaths and Prior's modern plague.

They elaborate on Prior's role as a visionary. It seems that the angel will perform some miraculous service, and that Prior has been selected as the human representative. The angel's mission seems to be connected to the AIDS crisis.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 3

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

In the first part of this split scene, Louis is talking to Belize about the flaws of the American political system. He says that AIDS reveals the limits of the principle of tolerance, on which their democracy is based. America is different from Europe, because its society is so diverse and riddled with the issues arising from this diversity. He admits that there is still a prejudice in favor of white male heterosexuals. In Britain, he says, people see racial difference for what it is, but in America, race is simply a political issue and part of the power structure. This means that politics, not spirituality, is at the core of American culture.

Belize is uncomfortable and tries to excuse himself. He confesses that he is just letting Louis go on because he understands that Louis's mood stems from his guilt about leaving Prior. Belize says that Louis is self-indulgent with his guilt.

Louis argues that drag artists like Belize make oppression worse for homosexuals. Belize, who is black, has been offended by Louis's racist arguments. Belize insists that Louis is "ambivalent about everything."

Belize tells Louis about Prior's physical symptoms, and suggests that Prior might be going mad.

Louis asks Belize to help him deal with his guilt. He asks him to tell Prior that he loves him. Belize says love is complicated.

Belize says he can sense a change in the weather, like a gracious gift of forgiveness. After he leaves, Louis catches a scent of snow in the air.

In the other mini-scene, nurse Emily changes Prior's drip. She checks the lesions on his chest whilst the conversation with Louis and Belize continues. The conversation between Emily and Prior, as with the other split scenes, interrupts the conversation between Louis and Belize.

Prior tells Emily that one of his friends (presumably an AIDS victim) caught bird tuberculosis and died. He was too afraid to attend the funeral. This fear seems to be connected to the weakness of his immune system. Prior hears Emily speaking half her lines in Hebrew, although she laughs when he tells her this.

A blaze of light and a chord of music sounds, and a massive steel book appears from the ground on top of a fiery red pillar. The Aleph in the book catches fire, and the book disappears back below the floor. Only Prior has seen this.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

The discussion of concepts like democracy and racism is intended to compare and contrast to the concept of love. As Belize says, with a clarity that cuts through Louis's complicated, scholarly language, love is in a different league than these other concepts. The issue of diversity develops the idea of an American national identity crisis.

Louis is a product of the culture and society he describes so critically. He is so unsure of where he fits into the scheme of things, that he has no simple, strong sentiments about anything. Although he clearly cares for Prior, he cannot understand his feelings, and he cannot accept the responsibility that goes with them. Instead, he looks for individual solutions. It is because of this that he feels so alienated in society.

The events in the hospital are plot devices intended to heighten the drama before the angel's arrival. The Hebrew and the book suggest a traditional, religious dimension to the angel's role. In the other part of the scene, Belize senses forgiveness in the atmosphere. This ties in with the imminent arrival of the angel. It is also worth pointing out that the same actor plays the roles of the nurse, Emily, and the angel. This implies the merciful role of the angel.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 4

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

Harper and Mr. Lies are in Antarctica, a cold, desolate and snowy place. For warmth, she is wrapped in layers of mismatched clothing. She says she would like to build a town in the wasteland. She says that in this imaginary place she can do anything - she could have her baby and build a town. Mr. Lies says the vision is a temporary respite from her feelings. Despite Mr. Lies's limitations, and his insistence that delusions have rules, the Eskimo imagined by Harper actually does appear, and she thinks she feels her baby kick. She hopes her will have a marsupial pouch, like a kangaroo's, that she can crawl into for comfort.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

Mr. Lies explains the ultimate function of her delusions: he says they have rules, like a "delicate ecology." This reflects the theme of ozone depletion, decaying social forms, molting angel wings, and the collapse of the immune system. The scene has an ephemeral quality, although Harper's imagination seems to be in control of the delusion. The violation of the rules of hallucinations seems to indicate a wider change in the events of the play, pointing towards the arrival of the angel.

The image of the baby with a pouch reveals that, like the entire mirage, the baby is a delusion intended as a protective space for Harper. Mr. Lies calls it a refuge. Because the ozone is ripped, we know that this refuge, too, is problematic .

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 5

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

Hannah has arrived in a back street in the Bronx, lugging heavy suitcases. She asks a woman for directions. This woman is played by the actor who plays the angel.

The woman starts raving about people feeding themselves like disgusting, messy animals. She shouts at someone to stay away from her and not waste her soup. She asks Hannah if she's read Nostradamus' prophesies. She explains that Nostradamus was a prophet.

Hannah demands directions to Brooklyn. She eventually gets them, but before she leaves, the woman says, "in the new century… we will all be insane."

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

The woman illustrates the double nature of the angel in all its manifestations: she is mad, shouts and creates fear, but she helps Hannah to find her way in a hostile place. With her comments on feeding and the whore, the woman complains of the deadly sins gluttony and lust. She is both worldly (she has human flaws – she swears and is possessive of her soup), and saintly. The play is creating a long, slow build up to the main revelation of the angel. The implication is that the angels are already visiting people in need, and carrying out minor acts of mercy in preparation. This creates a glimmer of hope amidst all the negative events.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 6

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 6 Summary

Joe visits Roy, who has tried unsuccessfully to cover up the severity of his illness.

Joe turns down the job offer, and explains that he has been ill with an ulcer, and that Harper has gone missing. His mother is coming to New York to help him find her.

Roy is very angry. He describes Joe's decision as a "little moral nosebleed." He says that Joe is naïve. Roy is proud of the fact that he once rigged the trial of a mother who was accused of treason. He is a pragmatist: he is prepared to commit crimes on principle. Roy thinks that Joe will suffer from his idealism. He alternates between behaving tenderly towards Joe, and provoking him with insults. Joe leaves.

Roy is in pain. A woman arrives at the door: it is Ethel Rosenberg, the woman traitor he condemned to death. She is not sympathetic about his illness, and says she will be seeing him soon. His pain gets worse. She takes her time calling an ambulance. Roy says, "I have *forced* my way into history;" she laughs and says ominously, "history… is about to crack wide open, Millennium approaches."

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 6 Analysis

The plot is bringing all the opposing elements of the play towards a final confrontation.

Roy is isolated by Joe's decision: his career is in danger, and he is running out of allies. He switches from rage to gentleness. The nature of his regard for Joe is highly ambiguous. Does he love him? Was he just using him to rig the trial? Both concerns seem to have played a part.

The visitation reveals that Roy's judgment is near. He insists that he will survive because of the power and profile he has created for himself in his life. He has lied again to Joe, denying that he was ever ill. The hallucination of Ethel Rosenberg suggests that Roy is losing control of the situation. He is suffering from mental instability, and the crimes of his past are haunting him.

Ethel's final comment in the scene (quoted above), places his small contribution to politics in the context of the massive event that is about to occur. The millennial theme suggests salvation and/or judgment. It seems more likely that Roy will fall into the latter category.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 7

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 7 Summary

Prior's ancestors are in his room, announcing that the angel will arrive tonight. Prior 1 is dressed in "alchemical robes." They joke about the fact that the angel seems to arouse Prior. They tell him to dance, at which point the music of an oboe sounds. They sense that he wishes someone else to be present. Louis appears, and the music changes to a romantic waltz. He is not really there - this is an illusion - but he speaks to Prior. They dance. The ancestors realize he is a homosexual. Prior 2 comments that the world has grown very old. They vanish, as does Louis. The light fades and the sound of wings beating fills the room.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 7 Analysis

The costume of Prior 1 suggests that this scene is a spectacle of magic. Louis's appearance is a symbolic reunion, an act of fulfillment and reconciliation for Prior. Before the wings beat, Prior 2's comment about the age of the world is linked to the millennial theme and its sense of fatalism. The angel's actual arrival is part of this spectacular, magic scene. The action of the play is building towards a climax.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 8

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 8 Summary

This is a split scene. In one part, Louis is alone in the park when Joe arrives. Louis asks him if he knows the story of Lazarus, and if he believes in resurrection. He jokingly asks Joe if he comes here often (mocking the common, sleazy pick-up line). Joe says he followed Louis all the way from work.

Louis tells him he is wrong to assume that he is a sensitive man. Joe tries to touch his face, and Louis moves away. Joe does touch him, even though Louis says terrible things have happened to men who have touched him.

Joe is convinced he will go to hell for his actions. Louis jokes that hell cannot be worse than New York City. Louis kisses Joe and invites him home. Joe says he does not deserve love, and Louis thinks this is true for himself too.

In the other part of the split scene, Prior is alone in his room, talking frantic nonsense as the noise of the wings continues. The conversation between Joe and Louis in the Park takes place simultaneously on the stage.

Prior hears the wings getting nearer. He is very distressed, and feels intense sexual arousal. The ceiling cracks and spills dust, lights flicker, and there is an amazing spectacle of color, light and triumphal music. Prior comments that it is like a Spielberg movie. There is the sound of a plummeting meteor, and a great crash, which brings down a part of the ceiling. The building shakes. The angel spreads its silvery wings and floats over Prior's bed, amidst a blinding white light. It announces

"Greetings, Prophet;

The Great Work begins:

The Messenger has arrived."

There is a blackout.

Part 1: Act 3, Scene 8 Analysis

The story of Lazarus places the coming of the angel in the context of resurrection and rebirth. Joe says that Jesus breathed life into Lazarus: when Louis kisses him, it is a secular re-enactment of this story. The life he breathes into Joe takes the form of truth and liberation from his former identity. Life on Earth is again compared to hell. This suggests that judgment has already taken place, and that lost souls must form relationships and be true to their identity in order to find redemption. The angel is fulfilling its promise to bring truth to the world.

Recalling the image of Jacob wrestling the angel, which is a metaphor for homosexual acts of love, the arrival of the angel is a moment of intense sexual pleasure for Prior. It is a climax, both sexually and in terms of the plot. Thus, the truth that the angel brings seems to be a release from the conventional religious attitude to sex. The play closes with the possibility of resurrection for the outcasts of society - those who have been forced to lie about themselves.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 1

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

In the Staging Notes, writer Tony Kushner explains:

"*Perestroika* proceeds forward from the wreckage made by the Angel's traumatic entry at the end of *Millennium*. A membrane has broken; there is disarray and debris.

Perestroika is essentially a comedy, in that issues are resolved, mostly peaceably, growth takes place and loss is, to a certain degree, countenanced."

The title is a Russian term, used by President Gorbachev to describe the economic and political 'restructuring' of Russia in the post-Cold War era. Reforms included the liberation of the press, and the extension of other freedoms to the public. The title leads us to expect that the second part of the play will address and perhaps reform the chaotic elements of the first part.

The setting is winter, early 1986, immediately following the events of Millennium Approaches. The stage is in darkness.

A Voice announces that, in the Hall of Deputies in the Kremlin (the Russian centre of government in Moscow), sits Alexii Antediluvianovich Prelapsarianov, the "World's Oldest Living Bolshevik." He asks whether there is a new grand theory to replace his old Marxist ideals and help them carry out their work. He is scathing when he talks about the symbols of American capitalism, and he suggests that Russia is not quite prepared for change.

There is a huge crash, and the scene appears exactly as it was at the close of Part 1, with the Angel hovering over Prior's bed. Alexii, who has remained on stage, says, "we MUST NOT move ahead." The angel repeats its greeting from Part 1, Act III Scene 8. Prior tells it to go away.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The old, blind Bolshevik symbolizes the failure of theory, and the lack of a grand human vision to change and improve the world. Alexii's names contain Latin words which refer to the time of innocence before the Biblical flood and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden [*antediluvian* = before the flood, *prelapsarian* = before the fall]. He represents a civilization that is characterized by the same sins that God sought to punish, via the flood and Adam and Eve's fall from grace. Even though his words are very scholarly, and the content of his speech is complex and difficult to understand, his sentiments are simple. The world is in desperate need of a new doctrine on which to base change. This is a worldly, political commentary. It is dramatically contrasted with the angel's vague but optimistic message.

The Russian political terms provide a key to the nature of the angel's Work. Something higher and more spectacular than simple human ideas will be brought to reform the world. Kushner's notes underline the tone and genre of the play: as a comedy, it will resolve and reconcile, and things will begin to fall into place. This first scene shows us that, where humans have failed in their efforts to reform their world, the angel will offer a new solution.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 2

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Louis and Joe, on the same night as the end of part 1, are at Louis's new apartment in Alphabetland. The flat is dirty and bare of furniture. Louis says it is the first place the Jewish immigrants settled when they arrived in the country. Louis begins to undress Joe, who is nervous and a little reluctant. Joe is worried about the possibility of Louis having caught AIDS from Prior. Louis says they can use protection.

Joe starts for the door, as if he has had second thoughts. Louis says he really should take off his wedding ring when he is cruising for men.

Joe hugs Louis. Louis asks which brand of cologne he is wearing. He jokes that Joe's brand is very heterosexual, but it is obvious that he is very attracted to Joe. He explains to Joe that smell is a powerful sense, very much involved in sexual attraction. He says that smelling people is like breathing in particles of their bodies. He says taste is similar.

They taste and smell one another (Louis leads and encourages Joe). Joe decides to stay, and Louis undresses him.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The setting, and the name of the district, suggest a beginning. What occurs between Joe and Louis is an initiation: when Joe gives himself up to his sexuality, he is beginning life again. The way they touch and mimic each other is like a dance, with each move reciprocated (reflected) by the partner.

Louis communicates by his senses of taste and smell, almost like an infant (another image of beginning). He teaches Joe to appreciate this form of communication, which is in total contrast to the lack of physical intimacy he had with Harper. His relationship with her was dominated by verbal arguments. This new relationship uses a simpler form of communication.

The wedding ring is the symbol of Joe's heterosexual identity and his oppression. When he chooses to stay with Joe, he is symbolically releasing himself from this oppression.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 3

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Mr. Lies is sitting in Harper's imaginary Antarctica (which is actually just Central Park), playing the oboe.

Harper comes in dragging a small pine tree, which she has cut down. Her polar explorer clothes have been replaced by the clothes she chose hurriedly when she left Louis's apartment. She has been on the streets for three days, and she is messy and dirty.

Mr. Lies tells her that she is breaking the rules of delusions, because she has brought a tree into a scene in which they do not belong. She has chewed through the tree trunk to fell it, believing at the time that she was a beaver. The glow of the polar light fades into the glare of city street lighting, and the wind and sea noise is replaced by traffic noise. Harper gazes around the scene, and as she does, some of the polar features return, although the city light and sounds remain.

Joe enters, draped in Louis's bed sheet. Harper says she wanted a real Eskimo. She says she cannot understand why her broken heart has not killed her. She is confused by the fact that she is still sexually attracted to Joe. Joe tells her he has been looking for her, but now he is having a frightening adventure. She asks if she can come back with him. He says he does not want her to see. She curses him for falling out of love with her, which he denies. He disappears.

The scene now fully resembles a city park. Mr. Lies tells her she has been unrealistic with the details of her hallucination, and she admits she got the tree from a botanical garden. Mr. Lies disappears as the flashing lights of a police car approach.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

This scene shows us that Harper's delusions are unraveling. The environment she imagined, compete with objects that did not belong there, is fading to reveal the reality of her situation. She is on the streets, without protection. The delusion, a form of imaginary protection from her problems, is failing. The arrival of Joe in her hallucination, as if straight from his evening with Louis, tells us that she is no longer in full control of the delusion. Elements of reality are beginning to creep back into Harper's world. The arrival of the police car symbolically underlines the return of reality – a world with its own laws that are less flexible than those of the delusion are.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 4

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Hannah has arrived at an apartment in Brooklyn. She answers a phone call from the police. From her side of the conversation, we can tell that it is about Harper. The police seem to find the situation comical. Hannah is shocked about the tree, and angry at the attitude of the police. She says she will take a taxi, because she does not know the city.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene advances the plot, propelling it towards a confrontation of the different value systems. The fact that Hannah cannot find her way around the city is symbolic, because it suggests that she has difficulty navigating a complicated moral landscape like New York. Salt Lake City seems a much simpler place in comparison.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 5

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Prior is alone in his bed. It is still the night of the angel's arrival. He wakes from a nightmare to find that his pajamas are soaked. He has had a wet dream. He calls Belize at work to tell him about it. He tells Belize about the angel. During the call, he realizes that he is crying.

At Belize's end, the doctor, Henry, interrupts to ask him to treat a patient (Roy).

Prior asks Belize to sing. The doctor becomes frustrated, but Belize sings 'Hark the Herald.' Prior joins in on his side. Belize hangs up to speak to Henry about the new patient. The notes he gives Belize clearly describe Roy as a cancer patient, and indeed, we discover that cancer therapy has been arranged for him. Belize questions why he has been sent to the AIDS clinic, but the doctor impatiently tells him the patient is very important.

Later, when he is gone, Belize calls Prior to tell him about Roy, whom he describes as "New York's number one closeted queer."

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Prior seems to be profoundly affected by recent events. His body, his senses, are active despite his illness. We might refer to this as a resurrection, since his condition had previously ruined his sex drive. In addition, in the previous scenes, he has not been given to emotional extremes; but in this one, he is crying. The singing of the hymn, added to his mysterious bodily revitalization, creates a sense of peace and harmony around the subject of the angel. This hymn is about the birth of Christ, who was sent to save the human race from their sins. The implication is that the angel will perform similar miracles. The gossiping about Roy suggests that he will not be able to hide the truth about his sexuality for long.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 6

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Roy is in his hospital bed. He demands to be treated by a white nurse, but Belize ignores him. He continues abusing Belize, who seems quite capable of dealing with him. He tells Belize about how he once used his power to persuade a cosmetic surgeon to perform his facelift without full anesthetic (he hates needles). He boasts about his power and his ability to deal with pain. He asks Belize to stay and talk to him: he is afraid of being alone in the hospital, with the wasting and death around him. He compares himself to a pubic louse, a low form of life which is hard to kill - he says he once suffered from 'crabs', which is how he discovered the likeness.

Belize suggests a change in Roy's treatment, which will cancel the scheduled cancer therapy and prevent him from damaging his health further. He tells Roy to avoid signing sections of his clinical trial consent forms that could allow him to be given placebos. After Belize leaves, Roy calls Martin Heller and demands to be sent his own private supply of drugs.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

In contrast to Prior in the previous scene, Roy shows that his disease, and his brush with hallucinations, have had no effect on his behavior. Though he does reveal a certain amount of emotional weakness in this scene, he is still a vain, arrogant bully. His conversation with Belize touches on the theme of American social history. It spoke to the lack of social harmony in the past, which seems to be a part of Roy's present. This exposes the extent to which there is a need for harmony and peace in the society of the play. Belize shows that there are merciful acts taking place, even between people who are divided by their beliefs.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 7

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

On the same night, a split scene with Joe and Louis in bed in the new apartment, and Harper and Hannah in the apartment in Brooklyn. Hannah mentions the tree. Harper explains that she thought she was a beaver. Hannah says she should not have damaged the tree because it was public property. Harper asks for a toothpick.

Louis and Joe have had sex. Louis asks Joe why he followed him from work. Joe says he feels like he has had an out of body experience, because he was expecting to be punished by God for his actions, but instead he feels happiness. Louis says he is the proof that a just God does not exist. Louis thinks he is supposed to suffer.

The scene moves forward. It is three weeks later, and Hannah arrives home from her job at the Mormon Centre. Hannah complains that Harper has not changed out of her nightdress. Harper talks about a TV documentary in which men chased, captured and artificially impregnated polar bears. Hannah corrects her: there are no bears in Antarctica. Harper curses at her. Hannah complains at this, and tells her she should come and do some work at the Mormon centre. Harper does not want to do this. She says she wants to die.

Days later, Joe and Louis are in bed. Joe says that Louis believes happiness is about being totally happy. Joe tells Louis that he must give up the idea that the world is perfectible. He must accept that the world is slow to change, and that he should try to understand reality without giving in to its pressures. This develops into a discussion about the nature of Republicanism. Joe asks where people like Louis would be without a Reagan to blame. Louis says Joe is his protection.

Louis feels guilty, and is having terrible dreams. Joe tries to comfort him. Harper appears as a hallucination. She says he is lying to Louis about having no dreams, and she tells him he cannot save Louis through love. She disappears.

At the other apartment, Hannah asks if Harper is going to get out of bed. It is 5am and they are getting ready for work at the centre. Hannah starts talking about how disappointing life is. Harper says she misses Joe's sexually, but Hannah refuses to talk about this for religious reasons. These two scenarios are staged simultaneously, alternating the focus between one scenario and the other.

Part 2: Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

This scene contains all the different belief systems, from the Mormon faith to Republicanism, liberalism and idealism; homosexuality, heterosexuality, the fantastical and the real, all are present in the same place. The stage is set for confrontation.

In terms of the plot, the relationship between Joe and Louis is progressing; but the sense of liberation and fulfillment is offset by the revelation that both Joe and Louis are experiencing guilt about their choices. The fact that Joe hallucinates may suggest something seriously wrong, either with his physical health, or his conscience. It is clear that he has not entirely escaped his past: he is tormented by a vision of Harper, who questions his decision and tells him truths about his situation.

Harper expresses a desire for self-destruction. The pressures of living out in the world, amidst her phobias, are taking a terrible toll on her mental health.

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 1

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Belize and Prior are attending the funeral of a former drag-queen friend. Belize is dressed brightly. Prior is dressed in a long black coat, with a huge black scarf draped like a hood over his head. The stage direction states that his appearance should suggest the Biblical. This is to be his costume for his remaining scenes.

It is three weeks after the funeral. Belize has enjoyed the flamboyant funeral, but Prior complains that it was overstated. He says that gays are just a nightmare that the world is having. His mood is dark. He says that the angel he saw was not a dream, but a prophet.

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Prior's personality has changed dramatically. This is strikingly obvious in contrast to Belize, whose behavior was previously very like his own. Prior seems to be carrying out a judgment of the situation, of the ridiculous funeral service and of the attitude of the mourners.

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 2

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is set three weeks earlier, in Prior's room at the time of the angel's arrival. Belize is watching from the street. This scene represents Prior's conversation with Belize, in which he tells him what happened in his room when the angel arrived.

The angel explains that Prior is to be a prophet, and asks him to find the implements that his dreams have told him he needs for his task. He does not understand what she means. She seems to contact something or someone, who tells her that these implements are under the floor in the kitchen. The angel orders him to dig them up. He says no, so the angel commands him again in a terrifying, loud voice. A gust of wind knocks him over. He still refuses, so the angel coughs, and there is an explosion in the kitchen, followed by a puff of dust and plaster. Prior fetches a suitcase from the spot. Inside, there is a pair of gold spectacles, with rocks instead of lenses. He puts them on, and starts fooling around, but what he sees through the spectacles shocks him into silence.

The angel tells him to take out the book. Its pages are made of bright steel, and there is music, light and a blast of wind. Prior has an erection. The angel is chanting a sexually charged verse. Prior becomes so aroused he starts "humping the book."

Belize asks if Prior had sex with the angel, and he answers it was the other way around. Prior says that the world was once fueled by the energy of angels. He describes angels as all-powerful bureaucrats, able to do anything except create or imagine. The chaos caused by migration, mingling and mixing on Earth has been felt in Heaven as massive tremors. The Angel concludes that human progress causes quakes in Heaven. On the day of the great San Francisco Earthquake in 1906, the angel says, God abandoned Heaven, leaving the angels without instructions on how to run things. As a result, things are not working the way they should. The angel thinks that the solution is for humans to stop progressing and put down roots, so that God will return. The angel presses the book to Prior's chest and raises him up into the air. It is as if the contents pass into Prior's being. The angel ascends, the room fades into darkness, and Prior is back on the street outside the funeral with Belize. Belize thinks he is mad. The voice of the angel urges him on.

Part 2: Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The angel's association with sex, and its revelation that sex is the basic creative power of the world, tells us that its religion is a secular version of Christianity. God has symbolically left Heaven, and the angels are no longer able to manage the world. The world moves on according to the direction of human migration, science and social

progress, - and these forces are tearing at the fabric of Heaven. Destruction seems to be bound up with progress and creation.

The angel's message is to stop, and reverse the tide of migration and inter-marrying. This goes against the message that many people in the play have acted upon: Mr. Lies' advice about travel, Harper's desire for travel, Louis's departure from Prior's apartment and Joe's decision to make a personal journey to explore his sexuality are all examples of migration. Change is described as a destructive force, symbolized by earthquakes.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 1

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Roy is still in the hospital, and his pain is worse. He has turned the room into a makeshift office, with an elaborate phone, piles of legal documents, and at the foot of the bed, a locked icebox containing his drugs. He is arguing on the phone, though he is crippled by terrible bursts of pain.

Ethel Rosenberg appears and sits in a chair by his bed. He stares at her.

Belize enters with pills, but Roy continues his call, occasionally stopping to speak to Ethel. He refuses the pills, and lets Belize look at his collection of personal medicines. They are the most up to date drugs available for the treatment of AIDS. Belize threatens to take some of them to give to other patients. Roy protests – he is not bothered by the fact that he has more than he needs. They hurl insults at each other. Roy offers one bottle of drugs, but Belize takes three and goes. Roy has more painful spasms. Roy's trial will be taking place the following day. He tells Ethel that America has no use for sick people.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Roy represents the flaws of the capitalist system. He is personally abhorrent, having used his power to take new drugs from the needy. It is only his money and his status that allows him access to these treatments. In the midst of his health crisis, the most important thing for him is his business - the means by which he sustains his power.

He seems to have befriended, or at least accepted, Ethel's presence. She is an aspect of his condition, a psychological symptom of his immense shortcomings. On the other hand, she is part of the judgment that awaits him. His charisma is such that he does not appear to be afraid of her, just as he is not afraid of death. His last words in this scene reveal that his main fear is that he should be forgotten. He is most affected by the fact that his country values healthy contributors, and that sick people do not fit into this scheme.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 2

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Harper is seated in front of the stage in the small theatre of the Mormon visitors' centre. Hannah brings Prior into the theatre, and goes behind the stage to start a taped presentation.

Harper and Prior talk. She says that one of the dummies on the stage (part of the presentation) resembles her husband. She finds the sound of its voice reassuring. Harper says she is a bad Mormon. Prior says he is studying angels, and that he saw one in his room. They find each other familiar, but cannot figure out where they have met before.

The show starts. The dummy of the father is the actor playing Joe. It is the story of the Mormon trek from Missouri to Salt Lake. The mannequin family speaks about their journey to their earthly paradise, which Harper cuts in to say (to Prior) is not a real lake. The female mannequins do not have any lines. The father tells a story about the Mormon prophet.

A hallucination of Louis appears in the theatre. He is asking Joe how he can possibly reconcile his faith with his job and surroundings. Prior sees him and is shocked. Louis becomes aware of his displacement. Louis and Joe disappear.

Harper stops the show, and sees that Prior is crying. Hannah restarts it, and we see that the father dummy has replaced the actor playing Joe. Prior leaves and Harper calls to the mannequin of the Mormon mother, who tells her to leave her heart behind and come with her.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Prior is discovering his prophetic powers; Harper is again living in the shell of a delusion. She has been re-enacting the original trek, with a dummy that resembles her husband. She is symbolically traveling back to her spiritual heartland in Salt Lake City, even though she understands the irony of the promised paradise. Her running commentary undercuts the idealistic dialogue of the play. The message is that long journeys, themselves metaphors for life, end in disappointment for the travelers. Her own personal trek, the move with Joe from Salt Lake to New York, has proved disastrous. Harper identifies with the mute female mannequin, whose muteness seems to represent her own lack of control over her destiny. It is the man and boy who discuss their future, and who tell the history of their religion. Women have no voice in their society.

The other effect of the show is to symbolize the nature of religious mythology. Events are re-enacted by faltering recordings and artificial dummies. This is unrealistic and

unconvincing. One might go so far as to describe the play as a parody, because it is an inadequate mime of what are considered very significant historical events.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 3

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Later that same afternoon, Louis and Joe are sitting at Jones Beach. Louis tells him this used to be a homosexual haunt. He is feeling guilty that Prior caught AIDS, when he himself took more risks. Joe says he loves Louis, but Louis does not believe him.

Louis is still bothered that Joe is a Mormon. He mentions the special underwear Joe wears as part of his faith. Louis says he wants to see prior again. He says he cannot understand love. Joe starts taking off his underclothes, which he calls the "second skin." Louis re-dresses him, and Joe says that Louis needs to go and work things out for himself.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

This scene represents another stage in the liberation of Joe's sexuality. When he is removing his special Mormon underclothes, he tells Louis "I'm flayed." The removal of the layer next to his body, which is the ultimate symbol of his religious faith, is described as the violent, painful removal of his skin. It is significant that Louis prevents him from completing this process. Nonetheless, Joe does act on a strong desire to expose his true self that lies underneath the layers that have been built up round his identity. The landscape around them, like the apartment in Alphabetland, is bare and desolate, as if it, too, has been stripped of extra features. The sand dunes at the beach are geological formations, which are, indeed, eroded over time by the sea and wind. This is symbolic, because it represents the process by which nature reclaims the land from civilization, transforming it back to its basic state.

The beach is the location for sexual discovery. Louis refers to a journey of exploration, much like the Mormon trek and the sea voyage of the European immigrants, but that it is one of self-discovery. This scene associates the men with forward progress, and therefore sets them in opposition to prior. Prior's job is to arrest the progress of humanity so that they might rediscover God in stillness. It seems that spiritual discovery requires a lack of movement, whereas discoveries of science and civilization rely on movement.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 4

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

It is the night of the same day, and Joe and Louis remain on stage.

Roy is asleep in his hospital bed. Belize wakes him to take his medication. Roy appears to be having morphine-induced hallucinations about a Bogeyman. He thinks Belize is there to take him to the underworld.

He makes "a serious sexual invitation" towards Belize, and asks him what the afterlife is like. Belize says it is like San Francisco, but full of jewels, ravens, dance halls and racial integration. The gods are from the ethnic minorities. Belize says that Roy is not there.

Roy asks about Heaven (he has wrongly assumed Belize was describing Hell). He becomes scared, and asks Belize who he is. Belize answers that he is from the KGB (Russian Secret Police), and that he is Roy's 'negation.' Roy is beginning to identify with Belize in a limited way.

Ethel enters. Belize leaves, describing himself before he goes as "the shadow of [Roy's] grave."

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

The continued presence of Louis and Joe on stage suggests that all the characters are on personal journeys of discovery. There is a loss of forward momentum, a change of emphasis from physical progress to inward reflection.

Belize is played by the actor playing Mr. Lies. , In this scene, this dual role begins to take on greater significance. He seems to take on a role that bridges the gap between reality and hallucination. Roy recognizes Belize as a darkness within himself, or a representative of the afterlife. Belize also says he is a member of the KGB, which recalls Alexii's speeches from the first scene. We can understand this as a reference to the need for a replacement theory for the future of civilization, and to the threat existing within this civilization itself. The KGB was a secret organization that worked within the U.S to help Russia win the Cold War. Belize's comment is loaded with connotations of threat and social discord. In addition, it is a direct challenge to Roy's own political beliefs. Considering these things, it seems appropriate for Belize to describe himself as a symbol of Roy's approaching death, and his final loss of power. Belize's function is also to confront Roy with the truth about his sexuality and thus his powerlessness. Belize's ideal Heaven is a celebration of diversity, a sort of shrine to homosexuality and racial mixing. To Roy, this heaven illustrates the end of the existing power structures.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 5

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

All the actors from the previous scenes remain on stage, as Harper and the Mormon mother appear, at night, on the Brooklyn Heights promenade. Harper feels unsafe because she is outside. The Mormon mother describes city skyscrapers as "Towers filled with fire." Harper asks her how people change. She answers that God cuts them open, wrenches out their insides and stuffs them back in, leaving them to stitch themselves back up. They change by pretending.

Prior appears, at home, slowly unraveling his layers of black clothing. He is very sick and sad. The Mormon mother says she smells a salt wind, which signals that 'he' is coming back. She sings the chorus from 'My Bonnie lies over the ocean,' and Harper joins in.

Louis leaves Joe alone at the beach. He calls Prior at home from a city pay phone. Prior is in the middle of taking his pills. Louis tells him he wants to meet up.

Part 2: Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

By keeping the characters on stage together, Kushner is creating a sense of approaching climax, and association between the fates of all the characters. The Mormon mother's words point towards a spectacular, cataclysmic event. An unnamed man will return. Usually, in Scripture, the personal pronoun is written with the capital ("He") to denote God; so, she could be referring instead to her husband figure, whom we know as the actor playing Joe (who also reminds Harper of Joe). Alternatively, the lower case could "h" could refer to the fact that God abandoned Heaven, and it is he who will return. In a performance, we would, of course be unable to distinguish between "He" and "he."

The salt wind symbolically binds the two scenarios, suggesting a firm link between all the characters. It reminds us of the Mormon spiritual home, Salt Lake, and thus hints at a great reward. Something that is both a reward and a punishment is approaching. The song that the women sing is about loss and longing, both spiritual and physical. While they are singing, Louis acts on his own sense of loss by calling Prior.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 1

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

A split scene, with Louis sitting alone on a park bench the day after, and Joe visiting Roy in hospital.

Roy is describing himself as the last true conservative. He says this means accepting the way things are, the horror and inequality, the injustice and cruelty, and the individual pursuit of success in spite of everything. Life is a hellish, "stygian" reality (from the Greek mythological river that flows into the underworld, the 'Styx'). He tells Joe to remember that he never changed his course. He asks Joe if he sees a lady (meaning Ethel), but remembers she is gone to watch his trial. He asks if Joe's father gave him a blessing before he died. He then acts out the blessing that Joe's father denied him. He mentions the Bible story of Isaac, who was supposed to sacrifice his child to God. Roy's mother insisted on a cosmetic operation to his nose when he was still an infant, and he thinks this was intended to toughen him up.

Joe tells Roy he has left Harper, and that he has been living with a man. Roy gets out of bed, and in doing so, he detaches his intravenous drip. Joe is on the point of leaving, and calls for the nurse to help. Belize tells him to get back into bed, but Roy refuses. He tells Joe to go back to his wife. He grabs Joe's shirt, which becomes smeared with the blood leaking from his arm. Belize warns Joe not to touch the blood. They both insist that Joe leave the room.

Roy complains of his losses to Belize. He says that lawyers are "the high priests of America," that they created the country and are the only ones who know how to run it. He says he will die before he is disbarred, and he will thus beat the men who are trying to destroy his career. He has a terrible seizure, during which Ethel appears. Roy points to her, but Belize cannot see her. Belize says he almost feels sorry for Roy, but Roy answers that he despises pity.

In the other part of the scene, which takes place at the same time, Prior sits down at the far end of Louis's bench. He curses Louis, and is angry when Louis talks about his guilt. Louis notices Prior's strange clothes. Prior shocks Louis by saying he knows he is seeing a Mormon. He tells him he is a prophet. He tries to go, but has an attack of breathing problems. He says that Louis's feelings are not authentic; they only resemble true feelings.

Louis tells Prior about Joe. Prior gets angry, and says harsh things to Louis about his lack of feeling. He tells Louis to come back when the hurt is visible, so that he can believe it.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene is concerned with the state of the country. For Roy, the Law has a spiritual significance in American society. Legal practice is described as an exclusive club, which does not recognize gay or black members. It has created a language that only its members can understand. His profound belief in the rules of this club means that he cannot allow anyone whom he might influence to break its rules. This is why he orders Joe to go back to his former way of life. He does not seem to accept that he is responsible for his losses, and he says that 'they' have taken everything from him. Symbolically, he has left a mark on Joe (the blood on the shirt). This suggests that the mark of the disease is on him.

Louis's disease, on the other hand, is psychological. He is unable to experience deep feelings or express himself properly. Prior asks for physical proof of Louis's feelings - for a change in his personality. Roy's inadequacies are displayed in the wider context of his extreme conservative vision, which is summed up in his hatred for sympathy. The suggestion is that these people and their problems are products of the cruel society in which they live.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 2

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

Joe is sitting dejectedly in his office the next day. Prior and Belize enter the corridor immediately outside. Prior wants to meet his "replacement." He tells Joe that he does indeed look like the Mormon dummy. He says he is a prophet. He shouts vaguely about judgment, and pretends he is in the wrong room. He goes out. Belize goes in to see what Joe looks like, and Joe recognizes him as Roy's nurse. He denies this and goes out to Prior. Joe also comes out into the corridor. He wants to know what Prior meant by mentioning his wife. Prior pretends to be a mental patient. He says that Joe should talk to her himself, and blows a raspberry at Joe.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene begins to stitch together the play's web of relationships. The content and tone is comic, although Belize's comment at the end points towards the reality of racial politics. He implies that, amidst the chaos and comedy of this scene, it is the rules of the white man's world that are causing the problems.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 3

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 3 Summary

The next day, Louis is sitting on a bench in a tunnel that looks out on the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park. Belize enters, carrying an umbrella against the drizzle, which he shakes over Louis before sitting down. Belize comments on the angel in the fountain, which commemorates naval dead in the Civil War. Belize tells him that they went to see Joe at the courthouse. He criticizes Louis for abandoning Prior and taking up with "Roy Cohn's buttboy." Louis defends Joe. Louis says that Belize hates him because he was the reason that Prior and Belize split up. He says Belize's view of the world is too simple, although he seems to be wondering if the rumor about Joe and Roy is true. Belize says that the only things Louis loves are big ideas, like America. Belize says he hates America, because the idea is so far distanced from the reality. He suggests that Louis should come and visit the real America - Roy.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 3 Analysis

The fountain symbolizes the subject of Belize's commentary on America: it commemorates a concept, like glory or bravery, but does not reveal the reality of the thing it represents. It is a memorial, like the tombs in Washington that Harper mentions in Part 1. It conveys an idealistic, white version of America.

Belize uses the metaphor of the national anthem to describe the unattainable nature of the American dream. The lyric, 'freedom,' which represents the highest ideal of the American constitution, is such a high musical note that nobody can reach it. Belize's "Manichean" view of America (Manicheans believe in a simple division between right and wrong, and a very strict moral code) is contrasted with Louis's faith in abstract political concepts. Belize tries to expose these concepts to the harsh reality of his work at the hospital, and the underlying hypocrisy of the national anthem. For him, America is characterized by its ruthless politics and racial inequality.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 4

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 4 Summary

Hannah and Joe meet at the Mormon center. He has not been in contact with her for over a month since she arrived. Joe asks how Harper is doing. He wants Hannah to go back to Salt Lake. They argue about Joe's plan to take Harper back to his old apartment. Hannah says she must have escaped from the place in Brooklyn. She says men always make mistakes, and asks him what he was running from when he originally left Salt Lake.

Joe leaves and Prior enters. Prior tells Hannah he came to warn Joe about what happens when Louis loses interest in him. He starts to cry. He asks Hannah to help him to the hospital. Hannah helps him and says there is a storm on the way.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 4 Analysis

Joe symbolically confronts his mother, and his former life, in this scene. In searching for his wife, he seems to have decided to revert to his former lifestyle. He tells his mother that she has brought the desert with her. This perhaps refers to the way he sees his religion.

His mother's vision of the world, and her morality, resembles Belize's description from the previous scene. She has brought the bleakness and desolation of her religious beliefs with her to the city. Here, there is the growing sense of conflict between different beliefs and visions of reality. The scene closes with she and Prior on their way to the hospital, which is where the truths about AIDS and American culture coexist in the form of Roy. The metaphor of the storm leads us to expect a dramatic outcome.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 5

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 5 Summary

It is the same day. Joe arrives at the promenade to find Harper in a light dress and bear feet, staring at the city skyline. She says the end of the world is near. The storm begins. She has thrown her shoes in the river. He says he has come back to her. She says that it will be a fire, not a flood, which ends the world.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 5 Analysis

Harper is symbolizes her physical vulnerability by dressing inappropriately for the weather. By throwing her shoes away, she is demonstrating that she has chosen stillness over movement. She tells Joe that the city is going out of business. This seems to be a metaphor for the collapse of reality as they know it. The judgment is described as devastating and catastrophic - the opposite of the great flood of the Bible, which was intended to cleanse and provide a new start. The fire will be all-consuming. The stage direction begins to build towards this crescendo with storm sound effects.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 6

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 6 Summary

Prior, Emily and Hannah are in the Emergency Room, where Prior is being assessed by the nurse. Prior is very angry, because he is sure he has pneumonia, but the nurse is asking him questions about his weight. The nurse leaves. He tells Hannah he has been running in terror ever since he saw the angel. Hannah tells him about the angel who appeared to the founder of her religion. He tells her that he finds her beliefs repellent; she says she felt that way about her son's confession, but that in truth she hates the thought of men in general. He asks her if Biblical prophets ever refused their calling, and she tells him about the example of Jonah.

He shows her his lesions. Hannah comments that illness is natural. He prays aloud for an end. Hannah says that angels are just ideas. They hear the sound of thunder. Prior tells her it is the angel returning for him. He makes a subtle reference to the fact that his body is telling him that the angel is approaching.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 6 Analysis

The nurse who is treating Prior's disease is played by the actress playing the angel. It is significant that she leaves before Prior begins to sense the approach of the angel. This suggests that the angel has been appearing in the guise of the nurse, as well as other minor characters, all of whom have contributed to the course of events.

Hannah describes angels as ideas with wings. In the play so far, ideas have been heavily criticized. The descent of the angel represents the reconciliation of concept and action. The distance between theory and practice, the ideal and the real, is closing. Prior's "infallible barometer," (a vulgar erection joke) suggests a comic resolution.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 7

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 7 Summary

The same night, Harper and Joe are in bed. She asks him why he closes his eyes during sex. She says she knows it is because he imagines he is with a man. He confirms this. She says that when she is with him she stops imagining, though the reality she gets from him is part of her imagination. He gets up and says he has to collect some things he left behind. She demands that he look at her. He says he sees nothing, which seems to be what she expected him to say. He leaves and she says goodbye.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 7 Analysis

Harper's rhetorical questions are aimed at getting Joe to speak the truth about his relationship with her. They are still, and she forces him to confront their reality. This reality is ironically based on the fantasy of a functioning, heterosexual marriage. She has realized that what she thought was real was merely a delusion on her part. This honesty spurs Joe into movement. He runs from the truth because he does not want to confront it.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 8

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 8 Summary

Joe arrives at Louis's apartment. Louis is reading from the legal records of all the case decisions that Joe wrote on behalf of his boss. Louis picks a case where Joe prevented a company from paying damages to children harmed by industrial waste, and a case in which he blocked the appeal of a gay ex-serviceman, who was being cheated out of his army pension. Joe becomes desperate. Louis asks him if he slept with Roy Cohn. He insults Joe, who punches him, and this develops into repeated punches. Louis asks Joe whether he figured out that Roy was gay and had AIDS. Eventually Louis falls to the ground. He seems to believe that he deserves to suffer.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 8 Analysis

The clash of ideologies becomes physical in this scene. It is as if the peaceful coexistence of different ideologies is impossible. Significantly, Joe's Reaganism is stronger, and emerges victorious. Louis adopts the submissive, indulgent liberal role he has been joking about throughout the play. He now has the physical signs of his internal anguish. The Truth is proving to be destructive but liberating. The fight mirrors the basic structure of American politics, with two opposing sides locked in constant battle.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 9

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 9 Summary

Ethel appears to Roy, whose condition is now very serious. He is singing a verse from the Civil War song, 'John Brown's Body.' He is triumphant, because he thinks he will die before they disbar him, but Ethel tells him they have already ruled against him. She says she has always hated him, and that although he killed her, he did not defeat her. He becomes confused and believes she is his mother, and asks her to sing to him. She sings a song in another language. Belize enters, and thinks Roy has died, but Roy sits bolt upright. He has been pretending so that Ethel would sing for him. He says he has won, and dies.

Part 2: Act 4, Scene 9 Analysis

Roy, who has become a symbol of ruthless political ambition, dies. He is defiant to the end, playing games to demonstrate his power. Before his death, Ethel brings him news that the legal world, the exclusive club of which he was so proud to be a member, has finally rejected him. Just before his death, he loses his power and becomes a victim of the games he has previously played. A member of the council that decided his fate publicly expressed his pleasure in disbarring Roy. The legal trial mirrors the moral judgment enacted by Ethel. Roy's death scene represents the relentless march of truth throughout the last section of the play. His colleagues know about his secret sexual identity, he discovers that he has been expelled from his profession, and the other characters gradually become aware of important truths. As the angel said, problems are being straightened out, and truth is cutting through the lies.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 1

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

The angel reappears in Prior's hospital room, dressed in black robes. Prior rejects his calling. Hannah tells him he has to wrestle the angel and demand to be blessed and released from his task. They wrestle, and Prior wins. A ladder of light appears, and the angel tells him he must ascend to Heaven and give the book back. He goes. The angel turns to Hannah, who is terrified. It kisses Hannah passionately, and tells her that "the body is the garden of the soul." The angel leaves, and, as it does, Hannah experiences an intense orgasm.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

Prior symbolically rejects and rewrites the prophesy. The wrestling recalls Joe's speech in Part 1 about the biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the angel. The difference is that this angel resembles a woman - Prior refers to it as a "She." Their wrestling also recalls Joe and Louis's fight, which was a similarly violent embrace.

The angel releases Prior from his unwanted spiritual obligation; he insists that the angel's "antimigration" idea is not good enough. It also releases Hannah from her intense hatred of things sexual, and tells her that the physical body is associated with the spiritual being. This represents a symbolic and ideological reconciliation. Hannah has both a spiritual and sexual/physical experience with the angel. She is exposed to a force that was previously in opposition to her strong religious beliefs.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 2

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Prior is in Heaven, which resembles the ruins of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. Harper is there, playing with a cat. He asks her if she is dead, and she says no, she just had sex. Prior recognizes the cat as his own, which ran away in Part 1. After Joe left her, Harper took too many Valium pills. She says she realizes that life is about moving on, migrating and starting again after experiencing loss. She says she does not think God loves his people. Prior is torn between staying in Heaven, which neither of them like, and returning. Prior says the real San Francisco is very beautiful. Harper and the cat disappear.

The scene changes to a corridor in the Hall of Upper Orders, which resembles San Francisco City Hall after the great quake. The angel greets Prior.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

Heaven is less than ideal, like Salt Lake for the Mormons. This truth has revealed to Harper that she must accept loss and move on in the world, rather than staying still. She now desires to travel for real - travel different from her metaphorical, delusional travel to Antarctica. She is no longer imprisoned within her phobias, nor dependent on Joe for reality.

It is highly significant that the earthly reality of San Francisco should be better than heaven. Human progress moved on after the destruction of 1906 and created an earthly paradise. The play is now reconciling characters to their realities, and heading towards a confrontation of ideas. The human has more substance and more beauty than the divine does.

Prior is a representative of the human ideology, favoring movement and progress over stasis.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 3

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

Belize has a plan to smuggle Roy's special drugs out of the hospital room before the doctor discovers them. He has asked Louis to pretend to be a Rabbi, and recite the Jewish prayer for the dead, whilst secretly taking the drugs from Roy's room. Louis refuses to say a prayer for Roy, whom he despises. Belize tells him it is an opportunity for forgiveness.

Louis uses a Kleenex instead of a drape with the Star of David. Ethel joins in the chant, speaking the lines first, which Louis then repeats.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

The service that Louis performs is a parody of the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead that we saw at the very first scene in Part 1. The Kleenex replaces the drape; Louis, who confesses to being only a very secular Jew, acts the part of the Rabbi; and the final line of the Kaddish is warped into a final insult to Roy ("yousonofabitch"). In comic fashion, Louis rediscovers his spiritual side, and performs a funeral service for a man whom he despises, and Belize finds a way for Roy to benefit others. The service is very much in the spirit of resolution and reconciliation.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 4

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 4 Summary

Joe returns from Louis's apartment, with his suitcase.

Roy appears, wearing a black velvet robe. Joe is terrified, and questions him about his having AIDS rather than cancer. Roy says everybody needs to be beaten (referring to the fight with Louis). Joe is upset that Louis will never see him again. Roy kisses him and tells him that his love will take him to places he never dreamed of before. He disappears, and Harper enters. She says she has been to paradise.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 4 Analysis

Joe and Roy are reconciled. Roy describes love as a means of liberation. This suggests movement and exploration. Roy's death points towards freedom and progress. Roy's speech is vague, so we cannot know at this point whether he is encouraging Joe to return to his old lifestyle, or to follow the new one. Harper has returned, with her new understanding of life.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 5

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 5 Summary

This scene takes place at the council of angels, at the Hall of Upper Orders in Heaven. The angels are all seated around a large table, which is strewn with old writing tools and tablets, books and a succession of objects invented by humans through the centuries. They are listening to an old crackling radio, which is broadcasting a story about the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Belarus. It has not happened yet in reality. The angels are discussing what the human response to the disaster will be. They will die in multitudes, recover, rebuild and repeat the process. The council is chaotic, and the angels argue over how to fix the radio - their means of watching over humanity.

The Angel of America arrives with Prior, who holds out the book. Prior says humans must have progress. He says that if God returns to the mess that his absence has caused, they should sue him. He puts the book down, and asks to be blessed with life. He removes his cloak to reveal the hospital gown. He makes an impassioned speech about the human desire for life despite its low points.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 5 Analysis

Prior is like a lawyer, representing humanity at the council of angels. He makes a case for continued human progress and movement towards the perfection of the species. His arguments are not logical, as a lawyer's is supposed to be: they are emotive. The council is like a committee of badly prepared judges who are trying unsuccessfully to interpret the instructions left behind by God. In the absence of God, the play seems to be arguing that the solution to humanity's problems does not lie in its oppressive religious or social customs, but in co-operation, migration and mixing. Chernobyl's explosion, and the resulting storm of radioactive fall-out, is the fire that has been mentioned by Harper. We know that these events exposed the flaws of the Soviet government, and brought about the reform of the country, and the end of the Cold War. The fire destroys but causes reconciliation. Human mistakes cause horrific loss. The solution is to move on and renew. In a God-less Heaven, the angels have no inspiration, and are no longer carrying out their function to inspire humanity towards progress. They are like a useless bureaucracy, failing to accomplish anything. Prior's answer is to seize responsibility back for humanity, who should, themselves, take on the duty of inspiration. He is not just a lawyer, but also a judge: he finally criticizes God for abandoning humanity in their time of need.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 6

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 6 Summary

On the way out of the council, Prior meets Sarah Ironson and Rabbi Chemelwitz in Heaven, playing cards. He recognizes her, and asks her if she knew her grandson was gay. She explains that they play cards in Heaven to offset the idea that everything is already decided. The Rabbi helps Prior find the ladder to go back to Earth. He leaves with a message from Sarah to Louis: Louis should struggle with God, because it is the Jewish way.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 6 Analysis

Louis had said before that the Jewish faith did not have an afterlife. What Sarah tells Prior effectively releases her grandson from his ideological and religious crisis. She gives him a symbolic blessing. To Prior, she gives the message that humans are yet capable of influencing events in their own way, even if their destiny is fixed. The scene creates a positive sense of reconciliation and hope.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 7

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 7 Summary

Prior descends from Heaven, and sees Roy far below, waist-deep in a pit of flames. He is speaking about representing the King of the Universe in a case of family law, which has to do with abandonment. He says he can bribe the judge, but might have problems if it is a trial by jury. He tells his 'client' that there is no chance of victory.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 7 Analysis

The scene with Roy is an enactment of cosmic justice. He is still a lawyer. He appears to be defending God in a case about his abandonment of humanity. There are paternity issues, because Prior has just argued successfully for humanity's independence. There is a satisfying sense of resolution that Roy, who rejected the idea of Heaven whilst alive, is somewhere in between earth and Heaven (Hell, Purgatory – the stage direction is unclear), representing God, who he knows cannot win.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 8

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 8 Summary

The next morning, Prior descends to bed, where he wakes up and disturbs Belize, who has been sleeping in a chair. Emily comes in and says that his fever has broken.

Prior tells them he has had a wonderful dream, in which they all appeared. He thanks Hannah (the actress playing Hannah also plays the Rabbi Chemelwitz; Emily is played by the actress playing the angel). Hannah has also had a strange dream.

Louis enters. Prior sees his bruises, and Louis reminds him that he asked to see physical scars. The others go out of the room. On the way, Belize hands Prior the bag of special medication from Roy's cabinet. Louis tells Prior that he wants to come back to him.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 8 Analysis

The fever represents a kind of physical storm, a manifestation of the trial that took place during Prior's ascent to Heaven. His recovery is a minor miracle, which leaves a sense of triumph and salvation. The gift of the special drugs is an added gesture of resolution. Prior seems to have passed through his spiritual and physical trial, and, with Louis's proposal, he seems to be moving towards a resolution of his personal trauma. Prior's recognition of those people who appeared in different guises in his 'dream' suggests that he is able to recognize divine traits in the humans who surround him. The scene is full of hope.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 9

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 9 Summary

A split scene that begins with Harper and Joe at the apartment. She asks for his credit card, because she is going to leave him and go traveling. She interrupts him when he begins to apologize, she does not want to talk anymore. She says that if she can get a job, she will get rid of his card. He asks her to stay, and she responds by slapping him. He gives her the card and asks her to call him. She refuses. She tells him to go exploring, and gives him her Valium from its hiding place in the living room.

The focus shifts across the stage to the meeting between Prior and Louis at the hospital. He says he wants to come back, and he admits he failed Prior. Prior says he loves Louis, and Louis replies that he loves Prior. Nevertheless, Prior tells him he cannot come back.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 9 Analysis

The plot places Prior and Harper in control of their futures. They both choose progress and motion, and this involves rejecting their partners and their former lives. In stark contrast to her former self, Harper is particularly collected and resolute. She no longer wishes to talk, whereas this had formerly been the basis of her flawed marriage. She has chosen action instead. It is as if Prior's great trial in Heaven has granted her the power to free herself from her fears and her dependence. She symbolically hands over her pills to Joe, which also shows that she is now fully integrated into reality, and has no need for escape. She suggests that the cure for their losses is migration, the thing that Prior successfully appealed for and won. It is her salvation. Prior's progress is personal: he expresses his feelings honestly, but turns Louis down. Louis has shown that he is now capable of love and loyalty. It is at this moment of personal progress that Prior insists he keep his independence.

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 10

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 10 Summary

Prior and Louis remain on stage. Joe is seen alone in the surroundings of the Brooklyn apartment. Harper appears before him, seated in a jumbo jet. She has taken a flight to San Francisco, and now seems truly content. She says that the plane will take her as close to the ozone as she will ever get. She talks about a dream in which she saw the souls of all the dead on Earth ascending to form a protective layer around the planet. The ascent of these souls repairs the holes in the ozone layer. She ends with the words:

"Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead."

Part 2: Act 5, Scene 10 Analysis

The main characters are silent witnesses to Harper's departure. Her words refer to all their situations. Her commentary describes the very nature of humanity: the dual tug towards what has been lost, and what is still to come. Her final metaphor of death as the means of healing the depleted ozone layer is an expression of hope. It offers consolation for the losses that occur in life, and it resolves her past fears. It is most significant that a woman who was formerly afraid to leave her house has now chosen to fly across a continent, to an earthly paradise.

Epilogue: Bethesda, February 1990

Epilogue: Bethesda, February 1990 Summary

Prior, dressed warmly for the cold clear day, wearing thick glasses and walking with a cane, Hannah, who now dresses like a native New Yorker, and Louis and Belize are sitting beneath the angel at the fountain in Central Park. Louis is talking about the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and is very enthusiastic about Gorbachev's political plans. For Louis, it is a revolution. Belize is more cautious, and comments that Gorbachev is not popular with his own people. Hannah wonders what will become of the Balkans.

Prior turns away and addresses the audience. He has been living with AIDS for five years, and has been living without Louis for four and a half of these years.

Louis is praising the Russians for "making a leap into the unknown. You can't wait around for theory," he says. They seem to agree that the expanding international community is too vast for a single theory. Louis says politics is progress.

Prior asks Louis to explain the story of the angel Bethesda. She descended in the middle of the temple square in Jerusalem, and, where her foot touched the earth, a fountain sprang up. When the Romans destroyed the temple, the fountain ran dry.

Prior asks Belize to describe the fountain before it stopped. Belize says that its waters cured any physical or spiritual disease. Hannah has told him this story, which he has passed onto the others. She has promised that, when the fountain flows again at the coming of the true Millennium (not the year 2000), they will all go to bathe in it. Belize and Louis start arguing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Prior states that the disease will continue to take its victims, but that sufferers will no longer hide the condition. The struggle for equality will begin. He proclaims at the end:

"I bless you: *More Life*.

The Great Work Begins."

Epilogue Analysis

The epilogue re-enforces the sense of salvation and resolution at the end of Act V. Although he is clearly in physical decline, Prior is coping with his disease and he is reconciled to friendship with Louis. In addition, Hannah has been released from the grip of her Mormon beliefs.

The discussion about Russian politics places the play in the context of the wider international resolution of 1990, when Eastern Europe threw off the shackles of communism and took control of its own destiny. This symbolically fits with the sentiment

that no single theory can solve all human disputes. Where Part 1 ended with foreboding, Part 2 closes on a note of optimism. The world is progressing, and there is the promise of spiritual reward at the end of the struggle. This reward is symbolized by the story of the fountain of Bethesda. Human conflict is reduced to the mild banter between Louis and Belize. Hannah's fears, though, highlight the fact that there are more wars on the horizon for other regions of the world, where countries are liberated from one regime only to be thrown into internal chaos.

Prior seems to be a sort of secular prophet, predicting future reforms that will end discrimination against homosexuals, and shed light on the AIDS epidemic. His words suggest that there is something angelic in all men. His final comment is a quotation from the Angel, preceded by his own personal prophecy: he translates the Angel's original message into one of reform and progress.

Characters

Angel of America

The Angel is one of seven celestial beings who form the Continental Principalities, one representative in Heaven for each continent on Earth. She is the Continental Principality of America, a beautiful being with magnificent gray wings. In *Millennium Approaches* her appearance is preceded by strange lights, music, voices, and ghostly messengers. She crashes through Prior's ceiling at the end of *Millennium Approaches* to tell him he has been chosen as the Prophet who will help the world stop changing and return God to Heaven. In *Perestroika* she loses a wrestling match to Prior and is forced to take him up to Heaven, where he confronts the Continental Principalities and demands to be released from prophecy.

Norman Arriaga

See Belize

Norman Arriaga

Belize, whose real name is Norman Arriaga, is a former drag queen and a former lover of Prior's. He is a nurse at New York Hospital who cares for Roy Cohn when he is admitted with AIDS. Throughout the play he acts as friend and counsel to Prior and adversary to Louis. When Louis abandons Prior it is Belize who visits the sick man, comforts him, and even secures drugs for him (Cohn's stash of AZT). Each time they meet, he and Louis argue over politics, race, religion, and the meaning of love. Belize is smart, witty, and capable of being dismissive and offensive, but his actions speak louder than his words. In one way or another, he helps everyone he meets, like an angel on earth.

Sister Ella Chapter

Sister Ella Chapter appears only once, briefly, in *Millennium Approaches.* She is a friend of Hannah Pitt's in Salt Lake City, as well as a real estate saleswoman who helps Hannah sell her house for her move out East. Sister Ella, like the angels, believes people should stay put, and in her mind Salt Lake City, the home of the Mormons, is the best place to put down roots.

Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz

The Rabbi appears twice, once at the beginning of *Millennium Approaches,* when he conducts the funeral service for Sarah Ironson, and once in *Perestroika,* where he plays

cards with the dead woman in Heaven and helps Prior find his way back to Earth after his confrontation with the angels. Rabbi Chemelwitz sets the tone for the entire play in his eulogy when he warns that, "Pretty soon ... all the old will be dead."

Roy M. Cohn

The character of Roy M. Cohn is based on the real-life lawyer who prosecuted Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for treason in 1951 and died of AIDS in 1986. Like the real Cohn, he is loud, vulgar, mean, and treacherous. He is a closeted homosexual who flatters, bribes, and threatens people to get what he wants, both in and out of the courtroom. In the play he is fighting for his professional status and his life, both of which he loses. In spite of Roy's efforts to plant a friend on the inside, the New York Bar Association revokes his license to practice law because of his unethical behavior. At the same time, he is stricken with AIDS, which he tries to pass off as liver cancer. He dies in a hospital bed with the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg watching over him.

Later, in the afterlife, Roy becomes God's attorney, defending the Almighty against the abandonment lawsuit brought by the Continental Principalities. Although Cohn existed in history, Kushner is careful to note that he has invented his character's words in the play and taken liberties with his actions.

Continental Principalities

The Continental Principalities are a group of seven powerful angels who represent each of the continents of Earth. They appear in the play only once, as a group, assembled in their Council Room in Heaven, where they have convened a "Permanent Emergency Council" and stand perpetual watch over the dismal state of human affairs below. They bicker and fight and are easily distracted. For all their splendor and power they seem oddly human. When Prior arrives in Heaven, escorted by the Angel of America, they try to convince him to be their Prophet who will instruct the world to cease its constant change, but they are unsuccessful. When Prior leaves, he suggests they should sue God for abandonment, which, with Cohn as their lawyer, they do.

Continental Principalities

Emily is a nurse at Saint Vincent's Hospital who cares for Prior each time he is admitted. She is tender and sincere and has seen many cases of AIDS in the last few years. She offers hope that Prior's condition is better than many and tries to help him learn ways of living with his illness.

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Martin Heller

Martin is a lawyer in the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., and a friend of Cohn's. He appears briefly in *Millennium Approaches* to help Roy convince Joe to move to Washington and take a job in the Justice Department, where he can watch out for Roy's best interests. Appearing in a Manhattan restaurant, Martin is the voice of extreme right-wing Republicans in the play. He boasts about the Republican revolution in Washington and predicts "the end of Liberalism. The end of New Deal Socialism. The end of ipso facto secular humanism. The dawning of a genuinely American political personality. Modeled on Ronald Wilson Reagan."

Doctor Henry

Henry has been Roy's doctor for nearly thirty years and has treated him for a variety of sexually transmitted diseases. He knows Roy is a homosexual in denial, but he has to break the news to him that he has contracted AIDS and will likely die soon. Under threats from Cohn, Henry attempts to cover up the real nature of the lawyer's disease. The doctor gets Cohn admitted to the hospital as a patient with liver cancer.

Louis Ironson

Louis is a word processor for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in New York and the lover of first Prior then Joe. He is a semi-closeted homosexual, openly gay around his friends but reserved and "butch," as Prior describes his exaggerated macho behavior, around his family and coworkers. Louis's political ideology, religion, and philosophy of life seem as complicated as his sexual identity. In the course of the play he claims that God and angels don't exist yet later finds himself saying the Jewish prayer for the dead in Hebrew over the body of Cohn. He detests bigots and hypocrisy and admits to voting for Jesse Jackson, then claims race is unimportant in America and finds himself in bed with a right-wing Republican Mormon. Louis desperately searches for the underlying, defining meaning of life and continually finds confusion and disappointment.

At the beginning of the play, he has been in a serious, monogamous relationship with Prior for four years, when Prior reveals a terrible secret: he has contracted AIDS and will soon begin to suffer the disease's worst symptoms. Wracked with guilt but panicked that his comfortable, somewhat predictable world is changing, Louis abandons his lover and runs straight into the arms of Joe, who is facing an identity crisis of his own. Louis spends the rest of the play sparring with Joe about his conservative politics and trying to reconcile his love for Prior with his fear of disease and decay. Near the end, when he has finally summoned the courage to ask Prior to let him return, it is too late. Although they remain in love with each other, Prior can't forgive him for the pain he has caused.

Sarah Ironson

Sarah is Louis's grandmother. Although she doesn't appear until late in *Perestroika,* her presence is known from the beginning of the play, when Rabbi Chemelwitz eulogizes her as "the last of the Mohicans." On Earth, she was a Russian-Jewish immigrant who raised a large family in New York before retiring in her old age to the Bronx Home of Aged Hebrews. In Heaven, she plays cards with Rabbi Chemelwitz and tells Prior, "You should struggle with the Almighty! It's the Jewish way."

Mr. Lies

Mr. Lies is Harper's imaginary friend, who appears each time she retreats into fantasy or hallucination. He takes the form of a travel agent dressed like a jazz musician and alternately leads Harper away from her worries and directs her back to them.

Man in the Park

The Man in the Park is a stranger Louis meets after fleeing Prior's hospital room. He lives with his parents, so he tries to get Louis to invite him home. When Louis refuses, he agrees to sex in the park but runs away when their condom breaks and Louis starts acting strangely.

Mannequins

The Mannequins are the principal attraction in the Diorama Room of the Mormon Visitor's Center in New York City. They represent a Mormon family, arranged in a wagon-train tableau on a little stage, trekking westward from Missouri to Salt Lake. The Father Mannequin looks like Joe, and while Prior and Harper are watching the reenactment he comes to life and talks to Louis, then leaves the stage with him. Afterward, Harper strikes up a conversation with the Mother Mannequin, who also comes to life and escorts Harper to the Brooklyn Heights Promenade.

Hannah Porter Pitt

Hannah is Joe's Mormon mother. After her son calls her late at night from a payphone to confess he is a homosexual, she sells her home in Salt Lake City and flies to New York to help him. Her culture shock is traumatic at first, as she encounters the homeless and the eccentric on the streets of New York City, but she summons her inner strength and quickly adjusts to her surroundings. Abandoned by Joe, she takes a job at the Mormon Visitor's Center and tries to help Harper, her daughter-in-law, cope with the crisis.

When Prior wanders into the Center, she thinks his talk about angels is crazy and dangerous, in spite of what her own religion tells her, but later she becomes his

protector. When Prior collapses in her arms, she takes him to the hospital and sits near his bed as the Angel approaches. It is Hannah who remembers Jacob's mythical bout with his angel, and she tells Prior if he wants to be free from the burden of Prophecy, he must wrestle the Angel into submission. At the end of the play she has been absorbed into the New York landscape and sits near the Bethesda Fountain with the others, reading the *New York Times.*

Harper Amaty Pitt

Harper is Joe's wife and a link between the real and imagined worlds of the play. In the playwright's words, she is "an agoraphobic with a mild Valium addiction and a much stronger imagination." Her pills and her imagination are her defense against the real world, which she finds overwhelming. Much of her frustration and anger comes from her relationship with her husband. Harper thinks she loves Joe, but he has grown less and less affectionate toward her and spends more and more time away from home. Although she finds it hard to admit to herself, she suspects Joe's homosexuality and is desperately trying to find a way to live her life contentedly, either with or without him.

When the stress of the world becomes too much for her, Harper calls upon her imaginary friend, Mr. Lies, to take her away to some imaginary realm where she can be free and happy. In her mind, she travels to Antarctica, to Heaven, even into other people's dreams. Her journeys have made her one of the more perceptive and poetic characters in the play. She thinks of the ozone layer as "a kind of gift, from God, the crowning touch to the creation of the world: guardian angels, hands linked, [making] a spherical net, a blue-green nesting orb, a shell of safety for life itself."

Joseph Porter Pitt

Joe is the chief clerk for Justice Theodore Wilson of the Federal Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, New York. He is a Mormon, married to Harper, and a completely closeted homosexual. For most of his life he has not admitted his homosexuality to his family, friends, wife, or even himself, but a turning point is near. He has been chosen by the great Roy Cohn to be his right hand man in Washington, and Joe now faces a tremendous crisis of conscience: He must decide whether he can transplant his paranoid, delusional wife, who he is growing less and less fond of, from her relatively familiar surroundings in New York to the politic world of Washington; and he must determine whether his own principles will allow him to work for a man as dangerous and unethical as Roy Cohn.

As if to compound his troubles, Joe meets Louis in his self-imposed exile from Prior and is seduced by him. He is both terrified and invigorated by the experience, still unsure of his life's direction but starting to sense his true identity. He turns down Cohn's offer and stays in New York. He admits to his mother, to Roy, to himself, to everyone but Harper, that he is gay. He spends several weeks completely absorbed in his new boyfriend. Still, like Louis, Joe is continually plagued with guilt and drawn back to the relationship he left

behind. Also like Louis, he returns to his mate too late. By the end of the play Harper has found enough resolve, and stability, to leave Joe behind.

Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov

Introduced as "the World's Oldest Living Bolshevik," Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov appears briefly at the beginning of *Perestroika* delivering an impassioned speech in Moscow at the Soviet Kremlin. His topic is the need for a practical political theory to guide his country, and the most important quality he asks for in this new theory is one the Angels abhor: Change.

Prior 1

Prior 1 is the ghost of one of Prior's ancestors from the thirteenth century. In life, he was an English farmer, from near Yorkshire. In death, he appears in *Millennium Approaches* as a messenger on behalf of the Angel, come to prepare Prior for her arrival. He recognizes Prior's illness as a form of the pestilence that ravaged England in his day and caused his own death.

Prior 2

Prior 2 is another of Prior's ancestors - a sophisticated seventeenth century Londoner. He also appears in *Millennium Approaches* to prepare Prior for the Angel's arrival and, like Prior 1, he, too, was killed by a form of the plague that wiped out half the city of London. Just before the Angel's arrival, when Prior is deep in despair, the two apparitions summon a vision of Louis for Prior to dance with, then they disappear.

Ethel Rosenberg

Like Roy Cohn, the character of Ethel Rosenberg is based on an actual historical person. Ethel Rosenberg and her husband Julius were convicted of atomic espionage in 1951 and sentenced to death as traitors to the United States. Roy Cohn was instrumental in their prosecution. In the play, Ethel's desire for revenge compels her to haunt Roy from the time he is admitted to the hospital, dying of AIDS. She appears from time to time to taunt him with death and bring him bad news from the outside, where the New York State Bar Association has decided to disbar the treacherous attorney. Just before his death, Roy tricks her into singing him a lullaby.

Prior Walter

As much as any other character in this large ensemble work, Prior is the protagonist of *Angels in America.* He is also the only principal character whose personality seems to be forged by the events of the plot. Early in the play, Prior reveals his illness: He has

AIDS and will soon become very sick and probably die. Soon afterward, he hears the first Voice, announcing the impending arrival of the Angel. From that point forward, everything Prior is, and everything he does, is related to his disease and his role as unwilling Prophet.

Prior also faces what may be the most difficult choices in the play and, in the process, grows stronger. He spends most of *Millennium Approaches* as a victim, being acted *upon.* He is battered first by his disease, the physical effects of which are beyond his control. Then he is abandoned by his lover, Louis, and left in mental anguish. Finally he is spiritually assaulted by the ghosts of his ancestors and the arrival of the Angel, who has come to burden him with a task he doesn't want.

The choices he must make define his new personality in *Perestroika,* when instead of being a victim, he becomes a fighter, someone who *acts.* He learns that, although he cannot cure his disease, through discipline and careful care, he can limit its effects on his body. Next, he comes to terms with Louis, who he still loves deeply. Although Louis returns, seeking reconciliation, Prior has found the strength to live by himself and reject Louis for abandoning him in his time of need. Finally, and perhaps most important to the universal scheme of the play, Prior successfully battles the Angel, gains admittance to Heaven, and refuses to serve as Prophet for the Continental Principalities, who wish to stop the forward progress of the world and find God again. It is this encounter with the celestial figures of the play that stands as a metaphor for all of the characters' conflicts, including Prior. In a moving speech to the Angels he sums up the spirit of his own struggles, and all of humankind, when he says, simply, "We live past hope."

Woman in the South Bronx

The Woman in the South Bronx appears once, near the end of *Millennium Approaches.* She is a schizophrenic, homeless woman who meets Hannah, fresh from Salt Lake City, getting off the bus at an abandoned lot in the South Bronx. After some uncontrollable, disturbing outbursts, she gives Hannah directions to the Mormon Visitor's Center and tells her, "In the new century I think we will all be insane."

Themes

Change and Transformation

Change and transformation are at the center of *Angels in America.* In one way or another, each strand in the plot is related to change of some kind, and every major character faces some manner of transformation. Some characters are frightened by change and prefer the comfort and familiarity of the world they know.

Harper, for example, begins the play terrified by the changes she sees, or thinks she sees, around her. She fears she is losing her husband, her home, and her sanity, and it is all overwhelming. She finds a metaphor for her fear in the ozone layer, high above the earth, which she likens to protective, guardian angels surrounding the planet. "But everywhere," she says, "things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way." Through the course of the play, Harper does indeed lose everything she held dear, and in the process finds a new perspective on change and transformation. As she sits in a plane, bound for San Francisco and a new life, she suggests, "Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind and dreaming ahead."

Other characters are encouraged by change, even thrive in it. Louis's view is somewhat Darwinian. He tells the Rabbi that his sense of the world is that it will change for the better with struggle, which is why he can't accept Prior's sickness into his philosophy of life. Instead, Louis runs away, immersing himself in change to avoid deterioration. He finds Joe, who earnestly echoes the sentiments of his newfound right-wing Republican friends, Roy and Martin. Joe tells Harper that things are starting to change for the good in the world. "America has rediscovered itself," he insists, "Its sacred position among nations." To Joe, the country has been reinvented, for the better, during the Reagan years. Interestingly, though, by the end of the play both Louis and Joe are longing to return to the way things were, but both are denied this homecoming.

Prior and the Angels are caught up in the play's biggest struggle over change. On a personal level, Prior is having change after change thrust upon him. First, his disease attacks, changing his body. Then, Louis abandons him, changing his world. Finally, the Angel calls upon him and asks him to become a Prophet on behalf of the Continental Principalities. Stasis, the opposite of change, is what the Angels seek. Prior thwarts their plan, however, and tells them, "We can't just stop. We're not rocks - progress, migration, motion is ... modernity. It's *animate,* it's what living things do."

Identity

A search for identity is underway, beginning with the opening monologue of *Angels in America,* and each of the characters becomes involved, whether they intend it or not. In his eulogy for Sarah Ironson, Rabbi Chemelwitz describes the deceased as one of a

special breed of immigrants who crossed the ocean and established a new homeland in America, carrying along bits of the Old World and passing them along to her children. To the Rabbi, Sarah Ironson is part of America's identity; she was an essential ingredient in "the melting pot where nothing melted."

On a more personal quest, Joe seeks a different kind of identity. All his Mormon life he has tried to deny the nature of his sexuality: He is attracted to men. In an attempt to change his true identity, he went so far as to marry Harper. Contrary to his beliefs, he helps write decisions in court cases that deny the rights of homosexuals. Through the short relationship he finds with Louis, he is nearly liberated. He admits his longings to himself, and to Louis, but stops short of coming out to the world. At the end of the play he is still torn between his life as a heterosexual, married, Republican law clerk and the fleeting glimpse of happiness he found in Louis's arms.

In keeping with his character traits, Louis's search for identity is more abstract. Though he thinks he has come to terms with the world, and has developed opinions and answers for any situation, his philosophies are constantly being tested, and he, like Joe, lives a life of contradictions. He criticizes Joe for hiding his sexuality, yet he has a "butch" side himself, an overtly masculine, heterosexual facade that he assumes around his family. He is a tortured agnostic who was raised Jewish but can't find a religion that accepts him for what he is. Politically, he is an extreme liberal but is attracted to a confused right-wing Republican. Louis' s quest for identity does not end with the play: During the Epilogue, he is still arguing religion and politics with Belize (who, as a black ex-drag queen and confidant to both Prior and Louis has an identity crisis of his own).

American Dream

Kushner suggests that his play is "A Gay Fantasia on *National* Themes," and the concept of America - its social dynamics, political identity, and uncertain future - are prominent themes in the play. Set in the 1980s, a decade of greed and conservatism, *Angels in America* can not avoid exploring the impact of Republican politics on the country. Roy Cohn represents the worst the right wing has to offer: political monopoly, economic disparity, discrimination, and censorship. His henchman, Martin, crows, "It's a revolution in Washington, Joe. We have a new agenda and finally a real leader" and brags that soon Republicans will control the courts, lock up the White House, regain the Senate, and run the country the way it ought to be run.

In contrast to these conservative combatants, Louis and Belize despair over America's future, each for different reasons. Louis complains that nothing matters in America except politics and power, the very things Roy and his associates covet. "There are no gods here," he rails, "no ghosts and spirits in America, there are no angels in America, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political." To Belize, however, there is a distinct spirit to America, and he doesn't like it. "I hate this country," he counters, "It's just big ideas and stories and people dying and people like you." To Belize, there is precious little freedom in the land of the free.

These extreme views of America are left unresolved at the end of the play. The Epilogue, which occurs in 1990, four years after most of the play's action, explains that in the intervening years the Berlin Wall has fallen, the Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev's vision of "Perestroika" or "radical change" has helped bring an end to the Cold War, and America has emerged as a leader of nations. Still, the ragged band of survivors gathered around Bethesda Fountain in Central Park are both champions and victims of the American Dream.

Hannah left her comfortable Mormon life in Salt Lake City and, like her ancestors before her, migrated to a new land (New York City) to be reinvented. Her struggle will continue. Louis and Belize remain, at best, marginal members of society, still misunderstood, still mistreated, and still struggling for the rights enjoyed by society's heterosexual majority. And Prior, though he has survived his disease much longer than he expected, knows his story is not the end but only a beginning for homosexuals with AIDS in America. "We won't die secret deaths anymore," he warns, "The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come ... The Great Work Begins."

Style

Epic Theatre

Angels in America is built with an epic plot construction. In early storytelling, *epic* referred to the kind of tale Homer told in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad:* stories that cover long periods of time, perhaps months or even years; involve many locations, ranging from small rooms to forests and battlefields; follow many characters through multiple plot lines; and alternate short and long scenes, with a series of crisis points, rather than a single strong climax near the end. Many of Shakespeare's plays follow in the epic tradition, and other notable modern examples include the plays of Bertolt Brecht *(Mother Courage and Her Children),* and Robert Schenkkan's *Kentucky Cycle,* a six-hour, nine-play saga covering two hundred years of history in the lives three eastern Kentucky families.

Kushner's massive undertaking with *Angels in America* is divided into two complete plays: *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika.* Together, they span more than four years, from October, 1985, to February, 1990. Settings range from living rooms, offices, and hospital wards to New York City streets, Antarctica, and even Heaven.

Scenes in *Angels in America* are both long and short and often overlap each other, occurring on the stage simultaneously. This provides two qualities that are important to epic plots: *juxtaposition* and *contrast.* In *climactic* plots, the story moves forward in a cause-and-effect fashion, with the action in one scene influencing the action in the next. In epic plots, however, the action may alternate between the plot and subplot, with little connection between the two. The effect of two seemingly unrelated scenes placed next to each other is a *juxtaposition* of action, characters, and ideas, which often produces a contrast that makes the play more meaningful.

For example, Act II, scene 9 of *Millennium Approaches,* is a split scene involving Joe and Harper at home, and Prior and Louis in Prior's hospital room. The two scenes, juxtaposed together, each present someone abandoning a loved one. Joe has already drunkenly confessed his homosexuality to his mother on the telephone and now seeks a way to escape his wife, who needs him desperately. Louis, on the other hand, still loves Prior but can't stand living with his sickness. Playing the two scenes simultaneously amplifies the confusion and agony each man feels and makes it difficult to simply dismiss their actions as heartless. Similar juxtapositions occur throughout the play.

Perhaps most importantly, the overall effect of an epic plot is *cumulative* rather than catastrophic. In a climactic work, such as Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* or the plays of Henrik Ibsen *(A Doll's House)* and Arthur Miller *(Death of a Salesman),* events are compressed and occur quite near the end of the story, making an explosive confrontation inevitable. Epic plots allow events, circumstances, and emotions to pile up, one on top of the other, overwhelming the characters and audience alike. Rarely does a single event - a character's error in judgment or an antagonist's vile deed -

decide the outcome. Accordingly, *Angels in America* ends in uncertainty. The ultimate fate of the characters is unknown, but the events and emotions that have accrued impart a sense of enormity and importance to the play's ideas - progress, identity, community, and acceptance.

Political Theatre

Theatre has been a forum for political ideas and agendas for as long as audiences have been attending plays. In America, the Federal Theatre Project of the depression-era 1930s mounted "Living Newspapers," short plays integrating factual data with emotional, often melodramatic vignettes. Topics usually addressed some kind of social cause, such as slum housing for the urban poor or the plight of the American farmer. During the radical 1960s, several black theatre groups, such as Imamu Amiri Baraka's (formerly LeRoi Jones) Spirit House and the Negro Ensemble Company, were organized with the goal of producing plays written by, and for, blacks in America, often with anti-white themes. Whatever the cause, political theatre is often driven by the *themes,* or ideas, in the play, as much as by the plot or characters.

Kushner follows in the tradition of large, important, political dramas, influenced mainly, he claims, by Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright who is credited with the creation of a unique brand of *Epic Theatre.* Brecht's theories for his Epic Theatre contain many of the qualities of epic plot structure but also assume a strong political aspect; he was a staunch communist and held virulent antiwar beliefs. His plays were *didactic,* which means he wanted to *teach* his audiences something, and his lessons were usually stated strongly and openly. Furthermore, Brecht wanted his spectators to be active participants in the theatre and think critically while watching his plays, rather than become absorbed in emotion as passive witnesses. To manage this, he attempted to "alienate" his audiences by exposing theatrical devices (lighting, scene changes, etc.). He also broke up the action of his plays - with disruptive elements such as ironic songs and placards that explained forthcoming plot points - so spectators were not allowed to become absorbed in the story but were instead constantly forced to reevaluate characters and their actions. Through this process, Brecht felt, audiences would better understand and appreciate a play's political messages.

Like Brecht, Kushner strives for a very *theatrical* presentation that doesn't attempt complete illusion. He recommends a minimal amount of scenery for *Angels in America* - with all the rapid changes of location, realistic scenery would be quite cumbersome to a production. Furthermore, Kushner suggests the scene changes be handled quickly, in full view of the audience (without blackouts) using both stagehands and actors, a very Brechtian technique. As for the moments of magic in the play, such as the appearance of the Angel, the ghosts, Mr. Lies, and other fantastic occurrences, the playwright says in his introduction, "It's OK if the wires show, and maybe it's good that they do, but the magic should at the same time be thoroughly amazing."

Kushner is also extremely political, and he, too, wants his audiences to learn something, though he allows more subtlety of expression than Brecht. In Kushner's play, the strong

political ideas are woven into the fabric of the plot and sub-plots, and the audience is left with an *impression* rather than an obvious *message.* Controversial ideas are usually presented from both sides, leaving the audience free to draw their own conclusions. While Brecht strongly advocated communism and often hit audiences on the head with his overt pacifist rhetoric, Kushner lets his characters and their philosophies speak for themselves.

The concept of the American Dream, for example, is viewed from several perspectives, none of which is presented as "right:" Roy and Martin find the American Dream in the struggle for political power; Joe harbors an idealistic, perhaps naive vision of America as a land of freedom, opportunity, and justice for all; embittered Belize and Louis, scorned by mainstream society for their openly gay lifestyles, find America oppressive and hypocritical, yet they continue their struggles for rights and recognition. By presenting political ideas in this kaleidoscopic fashion, Kushner opens a political *dialogue* with his audiences, rather than simply shouting messages at them.

Historical Context

The Political 1980s

Angels in America is steeped in politics, particularly influenced by the platforms of the Republican party. Ronald Reagan, Republican President of the United States from 1980-1988, is mentioned often in Kushner's play. He is the era's most recognizable political icon, and the success or failure of economic and political policies from the 1980s is usually attributed to his administration. Reagan's far-reaching economic policies, termed "Reaganomics," were an attempt to correct many of the economic and social problems Americans had been experiencing since the 1970s, when many felt the country had lost its confidence.

During the 1970s and early-1980s, Americans found renewed interest in ecological awareness and demanded that industry take steps to save the imperiled environment. This led congress to pass strict measures that forced American companies to divert profits to environmental controls and cleanup, reducing their ability to modernize and compete with less regulated foreign companies. At the same time, the cost of gas and oil was skyrocketing, unemployment reached 7.1 percent, and the inflation rate soared to 12.5 percent.

America was not doing any better abroad, where the Cold War seemed to be favoring the communists and the Middle East was rapidly becoming a foreign policy embarrassment. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan and installed a communist leader in 1979 and the communist power was also gaining leverage in Africa and Central America. Terrorists from the Middle East hijacked U.S. aircraft, and fifty-three Marines and civilian personnel in the American embassy in Iran were held hostage for more than a year, from November, 1979, to January, 1981.

Amidst all this chaos, Reagan was swept into office on a platform promising a strong national defense and a tough stance against the communist Soviet Union. He also vowed to reduce the size and cost of government, lower taxes by 30 percent, reduce spending, and curb inflation. With the help of a largely Republican senate, Reagan's foreign policy and "supply-side economics" met with a mixture of success and failure. On the positive side, inflation and interest rates fell. Between 1983 and 1989, 18 million new jobs were created, and the average price of stocks nearly tripled in value. A lot of Americans grew very rich, and the country experienced what has been called the longest period of peacetime economic growth in the nation's history.

Growth had its downside, however. The national debt tripled, the nation's trade deficit quadrupled, and much of the credit for economic growth was attributed to the burgeoning defense industry. In his first year in office, Reagan convinced Congress to budget nearly $200 billion in defense spending, creating an economic windfall through the largest peacetime defense buildup in American history.

Still, the buildup had its payoff. Kushner took the title for the second part of his epic, *Perestroika,* from the policies of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev who, faced with America's tremendous military might and economic boom under Reagan, chose to radically change the direction of Russian society. Gorbachev sought to reform the Soviet economy through *perestroika,* a Russian word for "restructuring," and he introduced *glasnost,* or "openness," into political and cultural affairs. Within a few short years the spread of communism around the world, a threat once characterized by Reagan as the "Evil Empire," had reversed itself. The Berlin Wall, a longtime symbol of the division between the communist east and the capitalist west, was dramatically dismantled in 1989. Two years later, in December, 1991, the Soviet Union's communist dictatorship collapsed; the Cold War was over.

AIDS in America

The other "war" that really matters to Angels in America was a domestic one that was being fought between an outnumbered, marginalized, terrified homosexual community and the rest of America, which was largely heterosexual. The discovery of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in 1981 threw both sides into a feverish struggle over rights, recognition, and morality in America.

Americans have always been, at best, ambivalent about homosexuals in their midst. It wasn't until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders; and the U.S. military continues its "don't ask, don't tell" policy for gays in the military. For a time, AIDS was used by some as justification for anti-gay sentiments (some made outrageous claims that the disease was a biblical curse sent down by God to eradicate homosexuality). In the early-1980s, the disease became known as the "gay plague," in spite of the fact that other groups of heterosexuals□ notably Haitians, drug addicts, and hemophiliacs□ also suffered the syndrome's debilitating symptoms. The government□and President Reagan in particular□seemed disinterested in the suffering of gay Americans. Serious research at the National Institutes of Health did not begin until early-1983, eighteen months after AIDS had been declared an epidemic in the U.S. Gay rights activists compared their treatment by the United States government to the suffering of Jews in Nazi Germany during the Holocaust.

While there are a great many important themes in *Angels in America,* it is this crisis, at once historical and timely, that Kushner chooses to return to at the end of the epic. Prior closes the play's Epilogue with a direct address to the audience, during which he tells them, "This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away." In many ways, the struggle that began for homosexuals in America with the AIDS crisis in the 1980s defined the relationship between gay and straight America in subsequent decades.

Critical Overview

Angels in America followed a rapid, if circuitous, route to success. The first part of Kushner's epic work, *Millennium Approaches,* was originally commissioned and planned for San Francisco's Eureka Theater in 1989. The play actually premiered in a workshop production in Los Angeles at the Mark Taper Forum in 1990, then landed briefly at the Eureka Theater in 1991 before getting its first major production at the Royal National Theatre in London in 1992. Later that year, *Perestroika* was added, and the full production was performed for the first time back in Los Angeles. By the time the play reached Broadway in 1993, it had already garnered numerous awards and accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize for drama and the adoring praise of critics around the world. As expected, it won the Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award for best play in 1993.

Sometimes success draws detractors, and many a critic has made his reputation by savagely criticizing what all his colleagues seem to adore. *Angels in America,* however, seemed to carry a special blessing - in spite of what were seen as a few minor flaws, most reviewers agreed that its greatness couldn't be denied. Shortly after the Broadway opening in 1993, and long after the play had already been praised and canonized by writers everywhere it had appeared, Jeremy Gerard wrote in *Variety,* "Believe the hype: This smartly ambitious, unabashedly sprawling, glintingly provocative, frequently hilarious and urgently poignant play is as revelatory as the title suggests, both in its kaleidoscopic account of life in the Reagan '80s and its confirmation of a young writer's dazzling, generous vision."

Reviewers found a lot to like in Angels. Hal Gelb, writing for the *Nation,* suggested, "Tony Kushner has written an enormously entertaining play while at the same time treating important matters seriously." Gelb also praised the balance Kushner found in his political stance, noting, "Unlike many playwrights on the left, Kushner does a good job of allowing the characters on the right their humanity." In the *New Republic,* Robert Brustein, a critic and scholar known for his rigorous standards and candor, admitted, "Kushner is that rare American thing, an artist-intellectual, not only witty himself but the gauge by which we judge the witlessness of others. His very literate play once again makes American drama readable literature."

For many commentators, Kushner's characters, and the opportunity they provide performers, were the most appealing aspect of the play. In the *New York Post,* veteran critic Clive Barnes observed, "Kushner peoples his phantasmagoria with great, sharply realistic characters - the savagely comic Roy Cohn, played with expectorating, explosive bile by Ron Liebman, Steven Spinella' s whimsically wicked, spindly, long-dying prophet and Jeffrey Wright's raw and motherly nurse, are luminously wonderful." Audiences and critics alike are often drawn to villains. A good villain, like Shakespeare's Richard III, is articulate, charismatic, and wickedly appealing. Accordingly, much praise was lavished on Kushner's depiction of Roy Cohn, the historical epitome of right-wing conservatism in the 1950s and hypocrisy in the 1980s. In the *New Yorker,* John Lahr asserted, "As written, Cohn is one of the great evil characters of modern American

drama. In him Kushner personifies the barbarity of individualism during the Reagan years, and also the deep strain of pessimism that goes with the territory."

Other reviewers appreciated the remarkable humor the play contains, in spite of its deadly serious subject matter. "The big surprise is how funny it is," wrote David Patrick Stearns in *USA Today,* "Hysteria and humor flip back and forth in Marcia Gay Harden's portrayal of the mousy, Valium-addicted Mormon housewife who hallucinates herself into a vacation to Antarctica." Referring to *Perestroika* in *New York* magazine, John Simon said, "Kushner is a funny fellow, and there is both nicely elaborated humor and rapid-fire wit throughout much of the three-and-a-half hour span."

Perhaps the most complimented aspect of Kushner's play was his ability to create a monumental work of art that deftly handles so many important ideas. In *New York Newsday,* Linda Winer wrote, "Kushner uses a huge canvas, but a very delicate brush. This is a play of big ideas - politics, religion, love, responsibility and the struggle between staying put and our need to move, preferably forward." It's a lot to take in, Winer suggested, "And, yet, this heretofore almost unknown playwright is such a delightful, luscious, funny writer that, for all the political rage and the scathing unsanitized horror, the hours zip by with the breezy enjoyment of a great page-turner or a popcorn movie."

Criticism has been leveled at *Angels in America* - though usually leavened by compliments for the play's literary ambition and stage production. Gelb's review in the *Nation,* for example, which was mainly glowing, still noted that, "despite Kushner's daring theatricality, endlessly fertile imagination and ambitious sense of form, *Angels in America* has its problems, some of them serious. The 'angels' plot itself, for one, isn't as fully imagined or its tone as clear as the earthbound narratives, and the angels' cause - anti-migration, cessation of relentless human movement - isn't compelling." Gelb also found parts of the play redundant, noting, "A still more obvious flaw is the way Kushner hits the same points over and over. For a good long stretch in the middle section, you feel he's taken the angels' enjoinder to heart: Nothing moveth."

Kushner's epic American drama also managed to raise moral objections in more conservative publications and on some college campuses. In the *Christian Science Monitor,* critic Ward Morehouse III wrote, "The play, which won this year's Pulitzer Prize for drama, has a power and boldness seldom seen on Broadway, but its homosexual themes may eliminate it from some theatergoers' agendas." Morehouse also warned his readers about the nudity and sexual situations in *Angels in America,* suggesting that director George C. Wolfe may have gone too far, including some scenes the critic felt were inserted solely for shock value. Objections turned into actions at the Catholic University of America, where campus administrators refused to allow advertisements to be posted for a planned production of the play in 1996. The administrators forced a student group to move to an off-campus location for the performance.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Glenn is a Ph.D. specializing in theatre history and literature. In this essay he explores the changing nature of faith and spirituality in the twentieth century and the way these changes are reflected in Angels in America.

The characters in Tony Kushner's magnum opus *Angels in America* are reflections of the modern, millennial age. Like so many of us, they are on a quest for *spirituality,* for some kind of inner fulfillment, and their search seems to have taken on a desperate significance in the closing years of the second millennium.

Philosophically, the twentieth century has been called an "age of uncertainty," of individuals seeking meaning for their lives and order in an increasingly chaotic universe. Traditional beliefs are being altered or ignored, while new faiths and new icons appear daily. Some people continue to enrich their lives with the religious doctrines of their ancestors - Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism - while others explore direct experiences through mysticism or paganism. Some find comfort and meaning in newly created, "cult" religions or abandon the search entirely and call themselves atheists or agnostics. In America, "Materialism," the quest for money and goods, has often been called a new religion of the age. This sense of anxiety and uncertainty, so prevalent in *Angels in America,* is rooted in the not-so-distant past - the changes in science, philosophy, and technology wrought by the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century taught the western world uncertainty, and the lesson - as much as any discovery, war, or disaster since - has shaped the identity of the modern age. Charles Darwin published his famous *Origin of Species* in 1859, presenting the world with revolutionary, and troubling, ideas. In suggesting that all forms of life evolved from a common ancestry, and that the evolution of species continues through the "survival of the fittest," the British naturalist pulled the rug out from under many of the world's most cherished faiths. If true, Darwin's theories reduce human beings to the status of natural objects, no more spiritual or glorious than animals, plants, or any other living organism. *Origin of Species* also suggests that humans are shaped primarily by their *heredity* and *environment.* The spiritual concepts of fate and destiny, central to many religious faiths, play no part in the drama of human existence: People have free will, make their own decisions, and are responsible for their own actions.

By the turn of the century, other great thinkers had also widely influenced the way people view the world and their existence in it. The French philosopher Auguste Comte suggested in his *Course of Positive Philosophy* (translated into English in 1853) that only primitive or partially evolved groups of people base their societies on religions or hopeful political theories, and that the ideal society is one governed by the principles of scientific observation. Renowned psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud reinforced some of Darwin's ideas about the primitive origins of human beings when he suggested that many of our actions are guided by deeply-rooted subconscious thoughts. The nineteenth century scientific and political notions of Darwin, Comte, Freud, and others have had a deep and lasting impact on how we view the world today.

Faith shaken by the rigors of science and the heartlessness of politics in the twentieth century fills *Angels in America.* Kushner's epic drama encompasses a variety of beliefs, including Judaism, Mormonism, and Agnosticism, and incorporates supernatural elements such as visions, ghosts, and angels. The play never claims the superiority of one belief over another but suggests that all faiths may be important to the progress of humankind at what is perhaps a crucial moment in history: the dawn of a new millennium.

In a 1991 interview with *Theatre Week* magazine, Kushner suggested, "There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be utterly transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two.... During these periods all sorts of people - even people who are passive under the pressure of everyday life in capitalist society - are touched by the spirit of revolution and behave in extraordinary ways." Kushner's belief in climactic moments in time is echoed by Ethel Rosenberg, a character in *Angels in America,* who warns: "History is about to crack wide open. Millennium approaches."

Although Kushner didn't intend it, Judaism is one of his play's most important religious motifs. The playwright himself is a third generation Jew, though he claims he is deeply ambivalent toward his faith and is actually a "serious agnostic." In a 1995 interview with a Rabbi at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, Kushner described his own family, the generations after his grandparents, explaining, "We didn't know Yiddish, we didn't know Hebrew, we didn't know prayers. We went to a very, very Reform - I mean sort of reformed out of existence - Jewish congregation."

Angels in America suggests that Kushner's experience growing up Jewish in the American South is shared by many Americans - the children and grandchildren of immigrants who packed their faiths along with their suitcases for their voyage to America. As younger generations make their own way in this "melting pot where nothing melted," they may turn their backs on the traditions and beliefs of their ancestors, but the human spirit, like nature, abhors a vacuum. The empty space left behind must be filled with something - the soul requires it.

Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz is the first character who appears in *Angels in America.* He stands alone onstage, conducting the funeral service for Sarah Ironson. In memorializing Sarah, he appeals to the assembled mourners to remember their Jewish heritage:

She was ... not a person but a whole kind of person, the ones who crossed the ocean, who brought with us to America the villages of Russia and Lithuania - and how we struggled, and how we fought, for the family, for the Jewish home, so that you would not grow up here, in this strange place, in the melting pot where nothing melted. Descendants of this immigrant woman, you do not grow up in America, you and your children and their children with the goyische names. You do not live in America. No such place exists. Your clay is the clay of some Litvak shtetl, your air the air of the steppes - because she carried the old world on her back across the ocean, in a boat, and she put

it down on Grand Concourse Avenue, or in Flatbush, and she worked that earth into your bones, and you pass it to your children, this ancient, ancient culture and home.

Yet already Sarah Ironson's own grandson Louis, present at her funeral, has strayed far from his Jewish roots. Kushner has called Louis the closest thing to an autobiographical character he has ever created. Like his creator, Louis is Jewish, gay, and deeply ambivalent toward the faith of his family. He finds no comfort in a religion that rejects him for his sexuality, and he doesn't hesitate to criticize the shortcomings of Judaism. "Jews don't have any clear textual guide to the afterlife; even that it exists," he tells Prior. "I don't think much about it. I see it as a perpetual rainy Thursday afternoon in March. Dead leaves." Instead of the organized, traditional faith of his family, Louis has embarked on a lifelong quest to develop his own philosophy of life, one that doesn't demand purity or pass judgment and encompasses his unique experiences and allows for all the political and social vagaries of the world in which he lives. He doesn't believe in God and insists, "It should be the questions and shape of a life, its total complexity gathered, arranged, and considered, which matters in the end, not some stamp of salvation or damnation which disperses all the complexity in some unsatisfying little decision - the balancing of the scales."

Traveling a spiritual path alone is difficult, however. Louis is criticized throughout the play for his unorthodox views on relationships, politics, and religion. Furthermore, like Kushner, who has never completely shaken his Jewish roots, Louis keeps returning to the faith of his ancestors subconsciously or against his will. In one of the play's more haunting scenes, Louis visits Roy Cohn's hospital room and, possessed by the spirit of Ethel Rosenberg, chants the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, over Roy's body.

Cohn, while alive, is the play's other prominent Jewish figure, and he, too, has his own unique way of identifying with his faith. For Roy, everything in life is a tool to use to his best advantage. The telephone and the law are equal extensions of his ambitious personality, and he uses and discards people like newspapers. When it comes to his Jewishness, Roy recognizes faith can get in the way of political aspirations. "I'm about to be tried, Joe, by a jury that is not a jury of my peers," he complains. "The disbarment committee: genteel gentlemen Brahmin lawyers, country-club men. I offend them, to these men ... I'm what, Martin, some sort of filthy little Jewish troll?" Even on his deathbed, salvation and the afterlife are an afterthought. The ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, a restless spirit who has been haunting Roy like a "dybbuk" (from Jewish folklore; a disembodied spirit that possesses the living) materializes to forge some sort of absolution between them, but the cantankerous lawyer chooses a practical joke as his last act on earth. He tricks Ethel into singing him a lullaby, then promptly dies.

The other important faith presented in *Angels in America* is Mormonism. Appropriately enough for the play, both Judaism and Mormonism have histories of dislocation, of rootlessness seeking a physical and spiritual home. Judaism began with God's command to Abraham to remove himself and his family to a new land, while Mormonism started with a westward movement across America, revealed by an angel to the sect's founding prophet, Joseph Smith. In a 1992 discussion at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, Kushner told interviewer Adam Mars Jones, "Mormonism is a theology

that I think could only really have come from America. . . . The theology is an American reworking of a western tradition that is uniquely American: the notion of an uninhabited world in which it's possible to reinvent."

Like the founders of their faith, the Mormons in the play are constantly on the move, seeking their destinies. Early on, Joe Pitt tries to convince his wife, Harper, to move to Washington to better his career in politics. Harper, who describes herself as a "Jack Mormon," someone who is flawed in her faith, has already followed Joe from Salt Lake City to New York and is afraid of more geographical dislocation. Instead, she travels the world in her mind, ranging as far as Antarctica in her struggles to escape her troubled life at home. After receiving a phone call in the middle of the night from her son, during which he drunkenly confesses his homosexuality, Hannah Pitt sells her house in Utah, the Mormon homeland, and travels to New York to set him "straight."

Kushner illustrates both the positives and negatives of the faiths represented in the play when he juxtaposes them on top of one another and characters with clashing ideologies meet. For example, when Harper and Prior find each other in a mutual dream, Harper asserts, "In my church we don't believe in homosexuals." Prior, patient and tolerant, even in the face of death, jokingly retorts, "In my church we don't believe in Mormons."

The divisions run deeper, however, among some of the play's more serious-minded characters. When Louis discovers Joe's religion, it signals the beginning of the end of their relationship. "I don't like cults," he tells his Mormon lover. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is not a cult," Joe insists. Louis becomes unusually conservative and angrily replies, "Any religion that's not at least two thousand years old is a cult."

In spite of all the contrasting views of faith presented, from agnosticism to mysticism to Mormonism to Judaism, one of the most important conflicts in the play occurs on a higher plane, largely unconcerned with categories of belief. The Continental Principalities are one of the play's principal motivating forces. This group of seven angels, representing each of the continents on earth, is a significant spiritual symbol, though they are not allied with any particular faith. Instead, these angels represent history and the unstoppable evolution and progress of human events. Kushner has alluded to the influence of the political theorist and philosopher Walter Benjamin on his work, and it has been noted that a particular passage, from Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* significantly shaped *Angels in America:*

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. The angel of history must appear in this way. He has turned his face toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, there he sees one single catastrophe, which incessantly piles ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and join together what has been smashed apart. But a storm blows out from Paradise, which has captured him in his wings and is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm

irresistibly propels him into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. That, which we call progress, is *this* storm.

Like the angel of history in Benjamin's description, the Continental Principalities feel battered by the course of human events, particularly in the twentieth century as the pace of change has accelerated to a manic rate. They believe that God has abandoned heaven in pursuit of the thrill that change and progress has provided his creation, which is why they have called upon Prior to be their Prophet. The job he has been given is to convince humankind to *stop* moving, to cease their progress. As the chosen spokesman for creation, however, Prior has other ideas. "We can't just stop," he tells the Angels. "We're not rocks - progress, migration, motion is ... modernity. It's *animate,* it's what living things do. We desire. Even if all we desire is stillness, it's still desire *for.* Even if we go faster than we should. We can't *wait.* And wait for what? God.... He isn't coming back."

If there is an ultimate message within the exploration of twentieth century spirituality in *Angels in America,* it is the concept of *inclusion.* While different faiths, ideologies, and political stances are debated throughout the play, there are no clear victors. For every champion of a cause, whether it is Republicanism, Zionism, or free will, there is an opponent, equally armed and, at least in his own experience of the world, justified. The former prophet Prior Walter's final words suggest just such a common bond:

Bye now.
You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.
And I bless you: *More Life.*
The Great Work Begins.

Source: Lane A. Glenn, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In this review of a production encompassing both parts ofKushner'splay, critic Gelb praises the playwright's ability to fuse entertainment with important social issues while maintaining an epic scope.

In *Angels in America* (most recently at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles), a two-part, seven-hour workup, Tony Kushner has written an enormously entertaining play while at the same time treating important matters seriously. Kushner de-ghettoizes the AIDS play, placing the disease, like the destruction of the ozone layer or Americans' flight from mutual responsibility in the Reagan era, at the heart of a national and planetary collapse. Mixing realism, fevered hallucination and otherworldly theatrical effects, he pulls back from the tight close-up of so much American drama to underscore a connection between public destiny and love and responsibility in personal relationships. *Angels in America* stands as a kind of lighthouse on the coast of a new era, signaling renewed feelings of hope and longing for community.

The characters - who are both types and not types, and that's the point - include the reverent Ethel Rosenberg (Kathleen Chalfant), a saintly gay black nurse (K. Todd Freeman) and a Jewish cappuccino intellectual named Louis (Joe Mantello) who is endlessly opinionated about democracy, revolution and other big topics but falls apart when illness and death strike close to home. Early in *Millennium Approaches,* Prior Walter, his lover - so well-born he can trace his roots to the Bayeux Tapestry - announces he has AIDS, and Louis flees.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the political spectrum, a repressed Reaganite attorney, Joe Pitt, also struggles with responsibility. He wavers between accepting his homosexuality and conforming to his Mormon upbringing by remaining with his wife, Harper (who, suffering Joe's indifference has turned into a Valium visionary). The play's paradigm of Reaganesque evil is Roy Cohn, who denies he's subject to the same laws of nature and society as everyone else, and who crows, "They say terrible things about me in *The Nation.* Fuck *The Nation."* Strangely, considering Kushner's condemnation of Reagan-era selfishness, his conservatives are intent only on social order and moral decency. They don't talk about deregulation or keeping more of what they've got.

Cohn, who views responsibility and love as a trap - and is represented here without his real-life loyal-to-the-end lover, Peter Fraser - attempts to install Pitt in the Justice Department so he can influence Cohn's disbarment hearing. During the course of the play, Cohn also discovers he has AIDS. These events, along with the disintegrating relationships, Joe and Louis's affair and an attempt to check the unraveling of God's grand design by an angel who flies in, Mary Martin-style, are the play's core.

Yet, despite Kushner' s daring theatricality, endlessly fertile imagination and ambitious sense of form, *Angels in America* has its problems, some of them serious. The "angels" plot itself, for one, isn't as fully imagined or its tone as clear as the earthbound narratives, and the angels' cause - anti-migration, cessation of relentless human

movement - isn't compelling. A still more obvious flaw is the way Kushner hits the same points over and over. For a good long stretch in the middle section, you feel he's taken the angels' enjoinder to heart: Nothing moveth. And in *Perestroika,* particularly, Kushner generates enough irrelevant material to keep what he's talking about from standing out clearly. The play also conflates different kinds of self-interest. Louis's abandonment of Prior comes from his gut fear of mortality; he can be faulted for spinelessness and betrayal, but not selfishness in the same sense as Reaganite greed. Yet his action comes in for the play's greatest moral heat.

But as Woody Allen movies used to, *Angels* in America generates so much good will that you don't care about its flaws. When it flies - which is much of the time - it *flies.* That has a lot to do with the play's attempt to heal divisions and its penetrating description of the gulfs between us. Kushner's dialogue is remarkable in the way it reveals the love the characters are requesting, requiring, giving and withholding, and I found myself hurting for them in a way I don't for characters in other plays. He also supplies them with a flood of laugh lines.

The writing is complemented by fine ensemble acting under the direction of Taper resident director Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone. To mention just a few of the wonderful performances, there's Jeffrey King's beautifully revealing portrait of the tortured self-hatred behind Joe Pitt's square-jawed strength; Kathleen Chalfant' s dry-as-dust rendering of Joe's constantly surprising Mormon mom; Ron Leibman's ferocious Cohn, a dog who's sunk his teeth into life and won't let go; and hovering over it all, Stephen Spinella' s Prior Walter, an enormously compelling mixture of feistiness and fragility, bitchiness and childlike wonder. The only weakness is Cynthia Mace, who suffers by comparison with Anne Darragh, who in the original San Francisco production played Harper's mental problems as though they could be overcome.

That production in the spring of 1991, at the Eureka Theater, where Eustis and Taccone commissioned the play, offered a fully mounted *Millennium Approaches* and a staged reading of *Perestroika.* (The Taper's was the first full-scale production of both.) At that time, with Reagan/Bush still apparently invincible, the play's apocalyptic vibrations were more than a little disquieting, particularly in the scene where Cohn and a crony picture a conservative dominion lasting well into the next century. Whether it's the new context or rewrites that reshaped the play's outlook, *Angels in America* now seems more optimistic. In front of John Conklin's Federalist facade with its enormous, jagged fault line, Kushner reasserts the interconnectedness of our multicultural, sexually and politically diverse populace. And in an ending that, unfortunately, probably says more about the sweetness of Kushner's heart than about the future, he points to a metaphorical *perestroika* of our own, a passing away of old enmities (well, sort of) and the disappearance of old divisions, with tolerance not just for gays but for Mormons too. Unlike many playwrights on the left, Kushner does a good job of allowing the characters on the right their humanity - except for Cohn, whom he uses for the most part as a focus of conservative evil. But he needs to address the further prejudice of the left - the one that makes the black nurse saintly and the Jewish intellectual the object of greatest moral heat - if the old divisions are to be dealt with.

Source: Hal Gelb, review of *Angels in America* in the *Nation,* Vol. 256, no. 7, February 22, 1993, pp. 246-47.

Critical Essay #3

Lahr is a noted theatre critic and biographer. In this essay, he reviews a complete production of Angels in America *marking the debut of* Perestroika, *the work's second segment. The critic praises the breadth of the play and lauds both Kushner and the cast of this production. Lahr terms the performance a victory for both the playwright and for the dramatic genre, proving "the transforming power of the imagination to turn devastation into beauty."*

High on a hill in downtown Los Angeles, the thirty-six-year-old playwright Tony Kushner stood watching an usher urge the people outside the Mark Taper Forum to take their seats for the opening of' *'Angels in America,*" his two-part "gay fantasia on national themes." it was the premiere of the play's long-awaited second segment, *"Perestroika,"* which was being performed, together with the first part, ' *'Millennium Approaches,*" in a seven-hour back-to-back marathon. "I never imagined that this was going to come out of sitting down in 1988 to write what was supposed to be a two-hour play about five gay men, one of whom was Mormon and another was Roy Cohn," Kushner said. "The level of attention that's being paid to the plays is completely terrifying." On the first day the Taper opened its box office for Kushner's twin bill, it took in thirty-two thousand eight hundred and four dollars, far exceeding the previous record in the theatre's distinguished history; and just last week ' *'Millennium Approaches,"* which ran for a year at the Royal National Theatre in England, won the London *Evening Standard's* award for best play. Driving to the Taper for his opening, Kushner said, he had thought, If I have a fiery car crash, the play will probably be really well received and no one will dare trash it, and it would be this legendary thing. Now Kushner was experiencing the actual rush of first-night terror: he couldn't feel the pavement under his feet. "I feel like I'm walking on some cushion, like dry sponge," he said. "Unsteady. Giddy."

Every playwright has a ritual for opening night. Some playwrights walk. Some drink. Some tough it out and watch from the back of the theatre, silently coaxing the players over every production obstacle. Kushner takes himself away for a Chinese meal; in the case of this doubleheader, he'd need two meals. He had already taped his opening-night ticket into his journal. He'd fitted himself out with a lucky ceramic lion given him by his mother and with a medal of the Virgin Mary from Majagure, in what was formerly Yugoslavia. He had one more thing to do. "Once the curtain goes up, I sing 'Begin the Beguine' - it's the longest pop song without a chorus," he explained, shouldering a blue backpack. "I have to sing it *well* from start to finish. If I can get through the whole thing without fucking up the words, it's going to be O.K." I left him to it.

Inside the seven-hundred-and-forty-two-seat auditorium, the Taper's artistic director, Gordon Davidson, shmoozed with the first-nighters like a rabbi with his congregation. Over the twenty-five years of Davidson's stewardship, the Taper has generated a prodigious amount of theatre work, some of which has invigorated Broadway and Off Broadway. Although the local press likes to bite the hand that feeds it, and periodically snaps at Davidson, no other American regional theatre approaches the Taper's creative record. Recently, Davidson and his theatre seem to have had a second lease on

creative life, giving George C. Wolfe's innovative musical "Jelly's Last Jam" its first production and staging Robert Schenkkan's "The Kentucky Cycle," which was the first play to win a Pulitzer Prize without being put on in New York. With *"Angels in America,"* which Davidson workshopped, and into which he has already sunk a million three hundred thousand dollars of the theatre's budget, the Taper is poised for another scoop. Davidson worked the room, handing out butterscotch candies, as is his opening-night custom, and smiling the smile that has launched a few hundred shows but none more brazenly ambitious or better produced than Kushner's. The occasion felt more like a feeding frenzy than like a first night. Robert Altman was there, checking out the play as movie material. A good proportion of the New York theatre's high rollers seemed to be there, too, eager to get a piece of Kushner's action: JoAnne Akalaitis, of the Public Theatre, with whom Davidson will produce the cycle in New York in February; Rocco Landesman, of Jujamcyn; the Broadway producers Margo Lion and Heidi Landesman; and a host of critics, including Frank Rich, of the *Times,* and Jack Kroll, of *Newsweek.* As the houselights dimmed, Davidson found his seat and glanced at the copy of "Moby Dick" that Kushner had given him as an opening-night present. "I felt it was appropriate for the occasion," Kushner's inscription read. "It's my favorite book, by my favorite writer, someone who spent years pursuing, as he put it in a letter to Hawthorne, 'a bigger fish.'"

Just how big a fish Kushner was trying to land was apparent as the lights came up on John Conklin's bold backdrop of the facade of a Federal-style building, leached of color and riven from floor to ceiling by enormous cracks. The monumental design announced the scope and elegant daring of the enterprise. It gave a particular sense of excitement to the evening, and bore out one of Kushner's pet theories. "The natural condition of theatre veers toward calamity and absurdity. That's what makes it so powerful when it's powerful," he said before he decamped to Chinatown. "The greater the heights to which the artists involved aspire, the greater the threat of complete fiasco. There's a wonderfully vibrant tension between immense success and complete catastrophe that is one of the guarantors of theatrical power." From its first beat, *"Angels in America* " exhibited a ravishing command of its characters and of the discourse it wanted to have through them with our society.

Kushner has not written a gay problem play, or agitprop Sturm und Schlong; nor is he pleading for tolerance. "I think that's a terrible thing to be looking for," he told me. Instead, with immense good humor and accessible characters, he honors the gay community by telling a story that sets its concerns in the larger historical context of American political life. "In America, there's a great attempt to divest private life of political meaning," he said. "We have to recognize that our lives are fraught with politics. The oppression and suppression of homosexuality is part of a larger political agenda. The struggle for a cure for AIDS and for governmental recognition of the seriousness of the epidemic connects directly to universal health care, which is connected to a larger issue, which is a social net." Set in 1985, at the height of the Reagan counter-revolution, "Millennium Approaches" maps the trickle-down effect of self-interest as Kushner's characters ruthlessly pursue their sexual and public destinies. Louis, unable to deal with illness, abandons his lover, Prior, who has AIDS; Joe, an ambitious, bisexual Mormon Republican legal clerk, abandons his dippy, pill-popping Mormon wife, Harper ("You, the one part of the real world I wasn't allergic to," she tells him later); and Roy Cohn, in

his greed, is faithless to everybody. "There are no angels in America, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political," Louis says, in one of the idealistic intellectual arabesques meant to disguise his own moral and emotional quandary, which Joe Mantello's droll characterization both teases and makes touching. Louis invokes Alexis de Tocqueville, and it's Tocqueville who put his finger on that force of American democracy whose momentum creates the spiritual vacuum Kushner's characters act out. "Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him," Tocqueville wrote. "It throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."

This isolation has its awesome apotheosis in the dead heart of Roy Cohn. "Hold," Cohn barks into the phone - his very first word. Turning to Joe (Jeffrey King), whom he's singled out as a potential "Royboy," he says, "I wish I was an octopus, a fucking octopus. Eight loving arms and all those suckers. Know what I mean?" This is a great part, which calls out of Ron Leibman a great performance. Roaring, cursing, bullying, jabbing at the air with his beaky tanned face and at the phone with his cruel fingers, he incarnates all that is raw, vigorous, and reckless in Cohn's manic pursuit of power. "Love; that's a trap. Responsibility; that's a trap, too," he tells Joe while trying to set him up as his man inside the Justice Department and spell out the deep pessimism behind his rapacity. "Life is full of horror; nobody escapes, nobody; save yourself." With his rasping, nasal voice swooping up and down the vocal register, Leibman makes Cohn's evil incandescent and almost majestic. ("If you want the smoke and puffery, you can listen to Kissinger and Shultz and those guys," he confides to Joe at one point. "But if you want to look at the heart of modern conservatism you look at me.") Cohn is the king of control and the queen of denial. He tells his doctor when he learns he has AIDS, "Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a piss-ant anti-discrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Does this sound like me, Henry?"

But Cohn's hectoring gusto doesn' t overwhelm the piquancy of the other stories. Kushner's humor gets the audience involved in the characters, and the play works like a kind of soap opera with sensibility, whose triumph is finally one of design rather than depth. Kushner doesn't impose personality on ideas but lets ideas emerge through careful observation of personality. He listens to his characters and, with his percolating imagination, blends the quirky logic of their voices with their hallucinatory visions. Prior (played by Stephen Spinella) dances with Louis in a dream. In her lovelorn grief, Harper (Cynthia Mace) fantasizes herself in the Antarctic, and later Joe comes hilariously alive, stepping out of a pioneer tableau, during Harper's vigil in the Diorama Room of the Mormon Visitors' Center in New York City. Ethel Rosenberg, who owed her execution to Cohn's single-handed, improper intervention with the presiding judge, appears at Cohn's bedside. These hauntings are sometimes dramatized as projections of parts of the self that have been murdered in order to survive. "Are you a ghost?" Prior asks Louis as he sways in the arms of his guilty lover to the tune of "Moon River." "No," Louis says. "Just spectral. Lost to myself." The final, ambiguous image of *"Millennium Approaches,"* which brings the play to a halt, if not to a conclusive end, is the appearance of an angel to Prior while he languishes in his sickbed. " *Very* Steven

Spielberg," Prior says as the set parts and the angel (Ellen McLaughlin) swings down on wires, to proclaim him Prophet and tell him tantalizingly that his great work is about to begin. With the help of jets of smoke, Pat Collins' evocative lighting, and the strong directorial hands of Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone, the audience is brought bravoing to its feet. The production is far superior in every scenic and performing detail to the celebrated English version.

"Perestroika" is the messier but more interesting of the two plays, skillfully steering its characters from the sins of separation in the eighties to a new sense of community in the embattled nineties. Though "Perestroika" should begin where *"Millennium Approaches"* breaks off, it opens instead with an excellent but extraneous preamble by the oldest living Bolshevik, bemoaning this "sour little age" and demanding a new ideology: "Show me the words that will reorder the world, or else keep silent." Kushner can't keep silent; but, while his play refuses ideology, it dramatizes, as the title suggests, both the exhilaration and the terror of restructuring perception about gay life and about our national mission. The verbose Angel that appears to Prior now turns out in *"Perestroika"* to be the Angel of Death or, in this case, Stasis. She takes up a lot of time broadcasting a deadly simple, reactionary message of cosmic collapse. "You must stop moving," she tells Prior. "Hobble yourselves. Abjure the Horizontal, Seek the Vertical." But, once the characters get back on the narrative track of the plot, "Perestroika" finds its feet and its wisdom.

The real drama of *"Perestroika "* is the fulminating, sometimes funny battle the characters wage in trying to deal with catastrophic loss. Here, as in *"Millennium Approaches,"* Cohn, the fixer, is shrewdly placed at the center of the argument. Cohn will not accept loss, always stacking life's deck to maintain his fantasy of omnipotence. "I can get anyone to do anything I want," he tells his black male nurse, Belize (played with panache by K. Todd Freeman), before picking up the phone to blackmail an acquaintance for the drug AZT. "I'm no good at tests, Martin," he tells the acquaintance. "I'd rather cheat." And later, with his stash of AZT in a locked box in the foreground, he crows at his nurse like a big winner: "From now on, I supply my own pills. I already told'em to push their jujubes to the losers down the hall." All change requires loss, and Cohn's power is a mighty defense against change. His emptiness is colossal. Significantly, Cohn dies mouthing the same words that introduced him in *"Millennium Approaches."* Kushner shows his other characters growing through an acceptance of loss. "Lost is best," Harper says, refusing to take Joe back after his fling with Louis, and going with the flow of her aimlessness. "Get lost. Joe. Go exploring." Prior, too, has finally wrestled control of his life and what remains of his momentum from the Angel of Stasis. "Motion, progress, is life, it's - modernity," he says, unwilling to be stoical. "We're not rocks, we can't just wait.... And wait for what? God." His task is to make sense of death and, as he says, "to face loss, with grace."

Part of this grace is humor, the often heroic high-camp frivolity that both acknowledges suffering and refuses to suffer. When Cohn brags to his nurse, "Pain's . . . nothing, pain's life," Belize replies, sharpish, "Sing it, baby." Kushner uses laughter carefully, to deflate the maudlin and to build a complex tapestry of ironic emotion. He engineers a hilarious redemption for the politically correct Louis, who is forced by Belize to say Kad-

dish over Cohn's dead body in order to steal the remaining AZT to prolong Prior's life. Louis prays with Ethel Rosenberg's ghost over the body, and they end the Hebrew prayer with "You son of a bitch." And at another point in his emotional turmoil Prior turns to Louis and accuses him of having taken a Mormon lover. "Ask me how I knew," Prior says. Louis asks, "How?" Prior rounds on him: "Fuck you. I'm a prophet." Even Cohn gets off a cosmic joke, making a last-minute appearance from Purgatory as God's lawyer. "You're guilty as hell," he growls at the Deity. "You have nothing to plead, but not to worry, darling, I will make something up."

"Perestroika" ends by celebrating community, not individualism, auguring with eerie serendipity the spirit of the new Clinton era. Even the monstrous Cohn is acknowledged as a fallen victim by the brotherhood. "The question I'm trying to ask is how broad is a community's embrace," Kushner says. "How wide does it reach? Communities all over the world now are in tremendous crisis over the issue of how you let go of the past without forgetting the crimes that were committed." In the play's epilogue, which jumps to 1990, Kushner confronts the audience with the miraculous. Prior has lived four more years. He sits in Central Park in animated conversation with his friends. Then, turning the conversation up and down at his command (Kushner's homage to the ending of "The Glass Menagerie"), Prior steps out of the play world to talk directly to us. It's an extraordinarily powerful (if haphazardly staged) moment, in which the community of concern is extended by the author to the human family, not just the gay world. "Bye now," Prior says. "You are fabulous, each and every one, and I love you all. And I bless you. *More life.* And bless us all."

Backstage, Kushner stood dazed and rumpled among a crowd of well-wishers. "I've been working on this play for four and a half years," he said. "Tonight, a whole era in my life comes to an end. It's been an incredibly strange ride." His exhaustion and the happy fatigue of the cast members, who lingered in doorways, seemed to bear out part of Kushner's opening-night message, which was pinned to the stage-door bulletin board. "And how else should an angel land on earth but with the utmost difficulty?" it read. "If we are to be visited by angels we will have to call them down with sweat and strain, we will have to drag them out of the skies, and the efforts we expend to draw the heavens to an earthly place may well leave us too exhausted to appreciate the fruits of our labors: an angel, even with torn robes, and ruffled feathers, is in our midst."

Kushner and the excellent Taper ensemble had made a little piece of American theatre history on that cloudless California night. *"Angels in America "* was now officially in the world, covered more or less in glory. It was a victory for Kushner, for theatre, for the transforming power of the imagination to turn devastation into beauty.

Source: John Lahr, "Beyond Nelly" in the *New Yorker,* Vol. LXVIII, no. 40, November 23, 1992 , pp. 126-30.

Adaptations

While several attempts at adapting *Angels in America* to film have occurred since the play's initial acclaim, the project remains in development, with various directors, including Robert Altman, attached at one time or another.

Topics for Further Study

Kushner has cited the German playwright Bertolt Brecht as a major influence on his writing. Read one of Brecht's major plays, perhaps *Mother Courage and Her Children or The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* and compare and contrast Brecht's style of epic, political theatre with Kushner's. Consider such things as plot structure, depth of characters, and how each man treats important themes in his work.

Angels in America is subtitled "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes." In music, a "fantasia" is a free-form composition in which the composer lets imagination, or "fantasy," prevail over rules of a particular musical form. Fantasias may also be a medley of familiar tunes woven together with variations and interludes. Listen to a fantasia, perhaps Johann Sebastian Bach's "Fantasia in G" or Ralph Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis," and determine ways in which Kushner's play is constructed like a musical fantasia. Consider the number of scenes and characters in *Angels in America,* as well as the play's themes and the way they are woven into the plot.

The setting for *Angels in America* is extremely important to the plot and its characters. The 1980s are viewed as a time of economic greed and rising political conservatism. It was also the decade in which AIDS was discovered and homosexuals in America had to fight for rights, recognition, and survival. Pick a year during the eighties and research top news stories in politics, economics, and medicine. Then return to Kushner's play and see how your findings may have influenced the characters and their behavior.

The first part of *Angels in America* is subtitled *Millennium Approaches.* The word "millennium " has a dual meaning. It refers to a time span of one thousand years, and, in some religions, it suggests a hoped-for period of joy, prosperity, and justice that will occur near judgment day. Research the significance of changing millennia in history. How did people act near the changing of the last millennium in the year 1000? What events are planned around the changing of the next millennium in 2000? How is the prospect of a new millennium important in Kushner's play?

Compare and Contrast

1980s: In 1981, the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, identifies a new syndrome initially called "Gay-Related Immune Deficiency." The disease is named AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in 1982. By the end of 1985, AIDS has spread to at least fifty-one countries. In 1988, the United States becomes the last major Western industrialized nation to launch a coordinated education campaign. By the end of the decade, an estimated 1 million people worldwide have contracted AIDS. In the United States, nearly 150,000 cases have been diagnosed and almost 90,000 people have died.

Today: Globally, an estimated 33.4 million people are living with AIDS. In the worst-affected countries, such as Zimbabwe and Tanzania, more than 10 percent of the adult population might be infected. In developed countries, however, massive education and disease prevention campaigns, along with new experimental drugs, have slowed or even reversed the spread of AIDS. In 1992, the first successful combination drug therapy for the treatment of AIDS begins in the United States; there is still no cure. Education and disease-prevention counseling occur in public schools, and national advertising campaigns promote safe sex or abstinence. In the United States, the number of new cases diagnosed and deaths from the disease have been dropping rapidly since 1993.Over 48,000 people die from AIDS-related illnesses in 1994. By 1997, that number falls to just over 14,000.

1980s: The Executive Office is held by Republicans from 1980-92. Republicans also control the Senate, occupying just over half the seats. The House of Representatives is mostly Democrats, as it has been since the end of World War II.

Today: Embattled Democratic President Bill Clinton is elected to two terms, beginning in 1992. While the Democrats also wrest the majority of Senate seats away from Republicans for a short time (1987-1994), the GOP rallies and gains control of the entire Congress in 1995.

1980s: The eighties "bull market" begins on August 17,1982, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average rises 38.81 points to 831.24□the biggest one day gain in the hundred-year history of the Dow. Over the next five years the value of most stocks nearly triples as the market soars.

Today: After climbing steadily since 1990, the market sets a new record□9337.97 points□on July 17, 1998. At that height, rises and drops of hundreds of points a day are not unusual. Investing in stocks is a white knuckle ride enjoyed by more Americans than ever before.

What Do I Read Next?

More of Kushner's provocative writing can be found in *Thinking about the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness: Essays, A Play, Two Poems, and a Prayer* (1995). As the lengthy and descriptive title indicates, the work contains another play, *Slavs!,* as well as some of Kushner' s thoughts, in essay form, on relationships, sexuality, identity, and American politics.

Larry Kramer's 1985 drama *The Normal Heart* examines the AIDS epidemic as the public was just becoming aware of the problem. The play dramatizes the early history of the disease and accuses the government, media, and conservative religious groups of ignoring the public health threat by labeling the epidemic a "gay plague."

Kushner cites the work of German playwright Bertolt Brecht as a strong influence on his writing style. Some of Brecht's better known epic plays are *Mother Courage and Her Children, The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* and *The Threepenny Opera.*

After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s (1998) by Robert Wuthnow suggests Americans in the last few decades have shifted away from a "spirituality of dwelling" and toward a "spirituality of seeking." Part of the seeking process means exploring new beliefs and religions, as well as personal encounters with spiritual figures, such as angels.

Citizen Cohn (1988) by Nicholas Von Hoffman is the biography of Roy Marcus Cohn, ruthless lawyer, communist-basher, closeted homosexual, and loathed icon of the Cold War era. The book (a feature film adaptation starring James Woods as Cohn is available on video) provides a disturbing look at the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s, the Rosenberg trial, Cohn's behind-the-scenes manipulations and secret sexual identity, and his death of AIDS in 1986.

Further Study

Adelman, Deborah. *The 'Children of Perestroika': Moscow Teenagers Talk about Their Lives and the Future,* ME Sharpe, 1992.

Interviews with Moscow teenagers that describe their views on the former Soviet Union, socialism and capitalism, the culture of the West, and how they view the future of their society after the Cold War.

Barlett, Donald L., and James B. Steele. *America: What Went Wrong?*, Andrews & McMeel, 1992.

A critical view of the 1980s that faults corporate greed, government short-sightedness, and the social and economic policies of President Ronald Reagan with undermining the American Dream.

Brask, Per, editor. *Essays on Kushner's Angels,* Blizzard (Winnipeg), 1995.

An early collection of essays about Angels in America, published shortly after the play was produced, that attempts to view the work from North American, European, and Australian perspectives to see how Kushner's brand of political drama fared around the Western world.

Christie-Dever, Barbara. *AIDS: Answers to Questions Kids Ask,* Learning Works, 1996.

Informative question-and-answer style approach to AIDS awareness and education for teenagers. Includes biographical sketches of Ryan White, Magic Johnson, and other notable AIDS figures.

Geis, Deborah R., and Steven F. Kruger, editors. *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on* Angels in America, University of Michigan Press, 1997.

An anthology of essays about *Angels in America,* written by theatre and film directors, scenic designers, professors, and critics. Topics range from perspectives on racial and sexual politics in Kushner's work, to explorations of religious imagery and postmodern theoretical analysis.

Mann, Jonathan M. *AIDS in the World,* Harvard University Press, 1992.

An analysis of the spread of AIDS around the world, including the effects of the disease on different populations and the response to the pandemic in different geographical locations.

Pemberton, William E. *Exit with Honor: The Life and Presidency of Ronald Reagan (The Right Wing in America),* ME Sharpe, 1998.

A biography of Ronald Reagan, the iconic president of the 1980s. Describes the life of President Reagan and explores his presidency in detail, along with critiques of his political successes and failures.

Shilts, Randy. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic,* St. Martin's, 1987.

An in-depth examination of the genesis and spread of the AIDS virus that views the disease from cultural, political, and popular perspectives. Shilts was a homosexual journalist and gay-rights activist who died of AIDS in 1994.

Stine, Gerald J. *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Biological, Medical, Social, and Legal Issues,* Prentice Hall, 1998.

Informative look at the history and current state of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, including statistics, social reactions, economic costs, recent medical findings, and references.

Twist, Clint. *1980s (Take Ten Years),* Raintree, 1993.

Examines the most important news events of the 1980s, including AIDS, the Cold War, and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Vorlicky, Robert, editor. *Tony Kushner in Conversation,* University of Michigan Press, 1998.

A collection of accessible, entertaining, and extremely informative interviews and conversations with Kushner, documented by journalists, teachers, directors, and other playwrights. Also includes an afterword by Kushner, in which he wryly describes "the Intelligent Homosexual."

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BOOKRAGS

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Project Editor
David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535