



ANGELS IN AMERICA
Part Two: Perestroika
Study Guide

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City Lights Theater Company Presents
Angels in America Part Two: Perestroika
Written by Tony Kushner
Directed by Kit Wilder

I. The Play

A. Synopsis

The play picks up where *Angels in America Part One: Millennium Approaches* left off; Prior cowers in his bed, confronted by an Angel who has just crashed through his ceiling. She tells him that he is the prophet, and gives him an order he is reluctant to follow. In the mean time, Hannah arrives in New York City after hearing her son, Joe, has left his wife, Harper, for his male lover, and attempts to take care of her. Roy M. Cohn, a homophobic gay lawyer, is signed in to the hospital where Belize works. When Joe comes to visit him, Belize realizes the two of them were once lovers, and he tells Prior, who tells Louis. As their lives and dreams become more entangled, the characters struggle to care for each other in an increasingly cruel world.

B. Setting & Characters

Setting

New York City, Heaven, and the characters' imaginations and hallucinations.

Characters

The Angel	The Continental Principality of America. She has magnificent gray steel wings.
Prior Walter	Louis's abandoned boyfriend. Before discovering that he has AIDS, he worked as a club designer, and mostly lives off a trust fund.
Harper Amaty Pitt	Joe's wife, an agoraphobic with a mild Valium addiction and a much stronger imagination.
Joseph Porter Pitt	Chief clerk for Justice Theodore Wilson of the Federal Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. Harper's husband and Louis' lover.
Hannah Porter Pitt	Joe's mother, formerly of Salt Lake City, now in Brooklyn.
Belize	A former drag queen and former lover of Prior's. A registered nurse.
Roy M. Cohn	A New York lawyer, now facing disbarment proceedings and dying of AIDS.
Louis Ironson	A word processor working for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Prior's former boyfriend and Joe's lover.

C. About the Playwright



“Tony Kushner was born in 1956 in New York City, but his family soon moved to Louisiana, where his father ran the family lumberyard. His parents were classical musicians, and their home was filled with art. Kushner dates his interest in theater to early memories of seeing his mother onstage. He also recalls from childhood “fairly clear memories of being gay since I was six.” He did not, however “come out” until after he tried psychotherapy to change his sexual orientation.

After finishing his undergraduate education at Columbia University, Kushner studied directing in graduate school at New York University, partly because he was not confident of his chances to

become a playwright. Among his early plays are (1985), a children's play produced in St. Louis; *Stella* (1987), an adaptation from Goethe produced in New York; *A Bright Room Called Day* (1987), produced in San Francisco; and *The Illusion* (1988), adapted from Corneille, produced in New York, then in Hartford in 1990.

He worked with Argentinean playwright Ariel Dorfman to adapt Dorfman's *Widows*, produced in Los Angeles in 1991. *A Bright Room Called Day*, about left-wing politics in Nazi Germany, was not well reviewed after its New York production in 1991. Frank Rich, for example, said it was “an early front-runner for the most infuriating play of 1991.” But some people saw in it the power that was to show up later in his work. The Eureka Theater in San Francisco commissioned him to write a play that ultimately turned out to be *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1992), the play that catapulted him to international prominence.

His 1998 play *Henry Box Brown* centers on the true story of an African American who escaped slavery by being smuggled out of the South in a crate. Kushner has said, “I’ve always been drawn to writing historical characters. . . . The best stories are the ones you find in history.” His later work includes *Homebody/Kabul* (2001) and, with Jeanine Tesori, the musical *Caroline, or Change* (2002).

D. Historical Context

In order to fully appreciate *ANGELS IN AMERICA*, one must consider the AIDS epidemic in America (particularly during the 1980s), the Reagan administration and its response to the AIDS crisis, and the general stigma regarding homosexuality. The 1980s were a decade of conflict and contradiction that combined the final strained relations of the Cold War with the emergence of new media forms such as MTV. The decade saw a number of important and iconic events, including America's boycott of the 1980 Olympics held in Moscow, attempted assassinations of President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II, and the first reports of homosexual men dying due to a mysterious attack on the bodies' immune system which would become known to all as AIDS.

The first reported cases of AIDS occurred in 1981, at which point it was a mysterious disease with little to nothing known of its origins, its affected population or its treatment options. It would be three entire years until the AIDS virus was discovered. In April of 1984, Washington US Health Secretary Margaret Heckler announced what she considered to be a monumental breakthrough in AIDS research. The variant of the virus had been identified and a blood test was to be developed and possibly ready in six months time that could identify the virus. There were further suggestions that a vaccine to prevent the virus could be ready to test in two years. In June of 1985 the Food and Drug Administration gave permission for human testing, and the first AIDS patient received AZT on July 3, 1985.

Homosexuality in men and women has been a somewhat unspoken part of worldwide culture throughout the ages; however, the onset of AIDS and its connection to the homosexual community cast it into the limelight. Ignorance and fear were rampant across America, and AIDS was perceived by some conservative religious groups to be the fulfillment of punishment for homosexual behavior by a vengeful god. The gay community was frequently divided by outrage and anger about the conservative response to AIDS in its struggle for acceptance by mainstream society.

For many in the gay community, President Ronald Reagan was the representation of the mainstream's inability to accept their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Reagan and the general public failed to recognize the AIDS epidemic as a legitimate predicament and Reagan has since been heavily criticized for his lack of response to the AIDS epidemic. It was not until March of 1987 that the Reagan administration acknowledged the growing pandemic of AIDS.

ANGELS IN AMERICA (which includes *Part One: Millennium Approaches* and *Part Two: Perestroika*) telescopes these huge political issues into a more focused story, dealing with the individual people who are affected by them. At the same time, it opens the audience to wonder and hope through the use of theatrical elements. The importance of the subject matter, combined with the artistry of the storytelling, garnered the play numerous awards including the Tony Award, the Drama Desk Award and the Kennedy Centre Award (Parts One and Two) and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (Part One).

Timeline: AIDS Epidemic

Key events, important people, activism and breakthroughs 1981-2006

by David Johnson and Shmuel Ross

(excerpted)

1981 "Gay Cancer," later called GRID, (Gay Related Immuni Deficiency) claims 121 U.S. lives since the mid-1970s.

1982 Scientists call the new disease AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Center for Disease Control says sexual contact or infected blood could transmit AIDS; U.S. begins formal tracking of all AIDS cases. 285 cases reported in 17 U.S. states, five European countries.

1983 Dr. Robert Gallo of the National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, and Dr. Luc Montagnier of France's Pasteur Institute independently identify Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS.

1985 Movie actor Rock Hudson dies of AIDS; the resulting publicity greatly increases AIDS awareness. Congress allocates \$70 M for AIDS research. First international AIDS conference held in Atlanta. Blood test for HIV approved; screening of U.S. blood supply begins.

1986 Soviet Union reports first AIDS case. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop sends AIDS information to all U.S. households. Scientists locate second type of AIDS virus, HIV-2, in West Africa; original virus is HIV-1.

1987 FDA approves AZT, a potent new AIDS drug, which prolongs the lives of some patients by reducing infections.



1988 World Health Organization begins World AIDS Day to focus attention on fighting the disease.

1991 10 million people worldwide estimated to be HIV-positive, including 1 million in U.S.; more than 36,000 Americans have died of AIDS since the late 1970s.

1992 Clinical trials begin using multiple drugs. FDA begins accelerated approval of experimental AIDS drugs.

1994 AIDS-related illnesses are the leading cause of death for adults 25-44 years old in U.S.

1995 Saquinavir, the first protease inhibitor which reduces the ability of AIDS to spread to new cells, is approved.

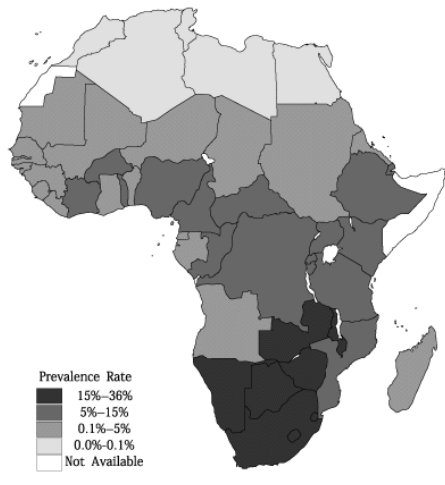
1996 Patients are often able to delay the onset of full-blown AIDS by taking a combination of as many as 60 different drugs called an AIDS "cocktail." AIDS is 8th leading cause of death in U.S.

1997 Worldwide death toll climbs to 6.5 million. U.S. government spends \$4.5 billion on AIDS/HIV treatment, AIDS-related illnesses drop to the fifth leading cause of death for adults 25-44 years old.

1998 Clinical trials began for AIDS vaccine, AIDSVAX, the only one of 40 AIDS vaccines developed since 1987, that is considered promising enough to widely test on human volunteers, U.S. AIDS deaths drop to 17,000 per year, due to drug therapies; AIDS drops to 14th leading cause of death in U.S.

1999 AIDS cases in Russia rise by one-third to 360,000; World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that AIDS has caused the life expectancy in Southern Africa to drop from 59 years in the early 1990's to 45 years after 2005; AIDS infections skyrocket in Southeast Asia; U.S. government spends \$6.9 billion on AIDS/HIV treatment.

2000 Officials note the spread of drug-resistant strains of HIV; 21.8 million people have died of AIDS since the late 1970s; infections rise in Eastern Europe, Russia, India and Southeast Asia; 10% of the population between the ages of 15 and 49 has HIV/AIDS in 16 African countries, while in 7 African countries, infection rates reach 20%



2001 The UN estimates that, worldwide in 2001, there were 3 million deaths from AIDS, of which 2.3 million were in Sub-Saharan Africa. 5 million new cases bring the total to 40 million infected. Africa has the most infected, followed by South and Southeast Asia. AIDS is spreading most rapidly in Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation

2002 HIV is the leading cause of death worldwide for those 15-59; FDA approves the first rapid finger-prick AIDS test.

2003 President Bush announces PEPFAR, a \$15 billion, 5-year plan to combat AIDS in African and Caribbean nations; WHO announces the "3 by 5" initiative, aiming to provide AIDS drugs to 3 million people in poor countries by 2005.

2004 FDA approves a saliva-based AIDS test. A study finds that 95% of those with AIDS live in the developing world. From 1981 through the end of 2004, more than 20 million people have died of AIDS.

2005 FDA begins approving generic AIDS drugs, enabling U.S. funded programs to provide more cost-effective treatments to poorer nations. The number of people living with HIV in 2005 reached its highest level ever- an estimated 40.3 million people, nearly half of them women.

2006 June 5 marks the 25th anniversary of the first journal article (in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*) about what would become identified as AIDS. A UN report issued the week before reports both good and bad news:

Good news: Many countries have achieved targets set in 2001, reducing the number of new infections and providing antiretroviral therapy to more victims. HIV testing, counseling, and education are all up. In many sub-Saharan countries, more young teens are staying abstinent, and condom use is increasing. And with 126 nations reporting, investigators have more data than ever. *Bad news:* Goals for youth education and prevention services aren't being met, those most at risk for AIDS are often not reached, many countries fell far short of all goals, and social issues underlying the spread of AIDS are being ignored. In short, "A quarter century into the epidemic, the global AIDS response stands at a crossroads. For the first time ever the world possesses the means to begin to reverse the epidemic. But success will require unprecedented willingness on the part of all actors in the global response to fulfill their potential, to embrace new ways of working with each other, and to . . . sustain the response over the long term."

E. Production History

Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika was first performed as a staged reading in May 1991 by the Eureka Theatre Company in San Francisco, CA., directed by David Esbjornson. The set was designed by Tom Kamm, the costumes by Sandra Woodall and the lights by Jack Carpenter and Jim Cave. The cast was as follows:

The Angel.....	Ellen McLaughlin
Prior Walter.....	Stephen Spinella
Harper Pitt.....	Anne Darragh
Joe Pitt.....	Michael Scott Ryan
Belize.....	Harry Waters Jr.
Roy Cohn.....	John Bellucci
Louis Ironson.....	Michael Ornstein

The world premiere was presented by the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, CA, in November 1992, directed by Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone. The set was designed by John Conklin, the lights by Pat Collins, the costumes by Gabriel Berry and the music by Mel Marvin. The cast was as follows:

The Angel.....	Ellen MacLaughlin
Prior Walter.. ..	Stephen Spinella
Harper Pitt.	Cynthia Mace
Joe Pitt.. ..	Jeffrey King
Hannah Pitt.. ..	Kathleen Chalfant
Belize.	K. Todd Freeman
Roy Cohn.....	Ron Leibman
Louis Ironson.	Joe Mantello

The *Angels in America* cycle was made into a film by HBO Films, and was released in 2003. The screenplay was written by Tony Kushner, and the production was directed by Mike Nichols. Cary Brokaw was the executive producer, Stephen Goldblatt was the Director of Photography, and Stuart Wurtzel was the Production Designer. The film was edited by John Bloom, with music by Thomas Newman and costume design by Anne Roth. It was filmed with the following cast:

The Angel.....	Emma Thompson
Prior Walter.....	Justin Kirk
Harper Pitt.	Mary-Louise Parker
Joe Pitt.. ..	Patrick Wilson
Hannah Pitt.. ..	Meryl Streep
Belize.	Jeffrey Wright
Roy Cohn.....	Al Pacino
Louis Ironson.....	Ben Shenkman

City Lights Theater Company of San Jose's production of *ANGELS IN AMERICA Part Two: Perestroika* is scheduled to run September 20 –October 21, 2007. It was directed by Kit Wilder. Scenic design was by Ron Gasparinetti; costume design was by Joanne Martin, lighting design was by Brendan Bartholomew; properties design was by Diane Vega; the stage manager was Robyn Winslow. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN.....	Kevin Kirby
JOE PITT.....	Jeff Clarke
HARPER PITT.....	Julianne Arnall
BELIZE.....	Lance Gardner
LOUIS IRONSON.....	Jason Arias
PRIOR WALTER.....	Tomas Theriot
HANNAH PITT.....	Shareen Merriam
THE ANGEL.....	Gemma Beddo Barozzi

II. For Discussion

A. What to Look For as You Watch the Play

1. Compare Hannah's relationship with Prior to her relationship with Harper. Why are they similar/different in these particular ways?
2. In the written script, the stage directions are complicated and extravagant - the scenes in which Prior ascends to/descends from Heaven, for example, call for a ladder with flaming Hebrew symbols on every rung. Special effects of this sort are difficult to accomplish in any theatre. *City Lights*, specifically, has a very intimate performance space, which allows the actors to connect with each other and the audience on a deeper, more personal level. In order to stay as true to the script as possible in such an intimate space, the show's designers made very specific choices. How do you think these choices informed the actors' performances?
3. This play calls for several intimate, sexual scenes between characters on stage. Why do you think the author included these? How do they contribute to the plot?
4. The scene with the Diorama requires a different sort of blocking and lighting than the rest of the play. How does this particular sort of staging, combined with the fact that the actors play multiple roles, contribute to the atmosphere of the scene?
5. Notice the ways in which the characters introduce themselves to each other. As this is Part Two, the author has already introduced them to the audience, and we have had the chance to form an opinion of each of them. Do they represent themselves accurately when they meet each other for the first time? Why or why not?

B. Quiz

1. What is Prior's physical reaction to seeing the Angel for the first time?
2. What information does Belize give Roy in their first scene together?
3. According to the Angel, what happened on April 18th, 1906, the day of the Great San Francisco Earthquake?
4. Is Joe religious?
5. Where do Harper and Prior meet?
6. When Louis says he wants to see Prior again, what article of clothing does Joe remove?
7. Act IV, Scene I, shows two conversations at once. One of them is between Roy, Joe and Belize. Who is having the other conversation?
8. What does Belize tell Louis when they meet at Bethesda Fountain?
9. Who takes Prior to the hospital?
10. What quote does Louis want Joe to recognize? Does Joe know it?
11. How does Roy get Ethel to sing to him?
12. How does Hannah say Prior should deal with the Angel?
13. Who does Prior meet in Heaven?
14. What does Belize ask Louis to do for Roy? Does he do it?
15. What object does Harper get from Joe before she leaves.

B. Quiz Answers

1. What is Prior's physical reaction to seeing the Angel for the first time? *He has an orgasm.*
2. What information does Belize give Roy in their first scene together? *Belize tells Roy the doctors will try to give him placebos.*
3. According to the Angel, what happened on April 18th, 1906, the day of the Great San Francisco Earthquake? *God abandoned Heaven.*
4. Is Joe religious? *Joe is a Mormon.*
5. Where do Harper and Prior meet? *In the Diorama Room of the Mormon Visitors' Center.*
6. When Louis says he wants to see Prior again, what article of clothing does Joe remove? *His temple garment.*
7. Act IV, Scene I, shows two conversations at once. One of them is between Roy, Joe and Belize. Who is having the other conversation? *Louis and Prior.*
8. What does Belize tell Louis when they meet at Bethesda Fountain? *That Joe and Roy used to be lovers.*
9. Who takes Prior to the hospital? *Hannah.*
10. What quote does Louis want Joe to recognize? Does Joe know it? *"Have you no decency, at long last, sir, have you no decency at all?" spoken by Joseph Welch in the Army/McCarthy Hearings. Joe doesn't recognize it.*
11. How does Roy get Ethel to sing to him? *He pretends to think she is his mother.*
12. How does Hannah say Prior should deal with the Angel? *She tells him to wrestle her.*
13. Who does Prior meet in Heaven? *Harper, a cat named Little Sheba, the Angels of the world (i.e., Continental Principalities, played by the actors playing Joe, Harper, Belize, Hannah and Roy), a Rabbi and Louis' grandmother, Sarah Ironson. All of these names are acceptable answers.*
14. What does Belize ask Louis to do for Roy? Does he do it? *Belize asks Louis to say Kaddish for Roy. (Kaddish is the Jewish prayer for the dead.) He does it reluctantly, with help from Ethel.*
15. What object does Harper get from Joe before she leaves? *His credit card.*

C. Study Questions

1. When Louis confronts Joe about his work as a clerk for Theodore Wilson, accusing him of being homophobic, Joe responds by beating Louis. Why do you think he does this? What is Louis' reaction to being beaten? Why? What does this tell you about their opinions of each other and themselves?
2. Harper has seemingly supernatural abilities possessed by none of the other characters, even the Angel. She can move from one scene to another easily – this is exemplified when she walks out of her scene with Hannah into Louis' apartment where Joe and Louis are asleep together. Do you think she is supposed to literally possess supernatural powers, or is this Kushner's way of making a point? What do you think her abilities accomplish in terms of plot, character and theme development?
3. Describe Belize and Roy's feelings for one another. Are they friends? Do they like each other? Do they care for each other? Why or why not?
4. Why do Hannah and Prior allow themselves to become friends? What major theme does this relate to?
5. What does the Angel symbolize? What thematic purpose does the scene between all the Angels, in which they discuss the radio, serve?

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