



# Angels in America

A Gay Fantasia on National Themes

Part one: Millennium Approaches

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A proposal by Gabrielle Goudie

For the Sock 'n' Buskin season of 2019-2020

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## Overview/Introduction

### Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes: Part One: Millennium Approaches

Now, *that's* a title. Of course, it can simply be called *Angels in America*, which it usually is. Tony Kushner, the genius who gave us this *godsent* piece of work, did not stop at three hours when dishing out his masterpiece. No... He gave us not only two parts, but seven fantastical hours of sharing tears, laughs, anger, and political opinions with his mind-blowingly relatable roster of characters. His characters, sharing within themselves parts of one another, whether they realize it or not, are so well-rounded that even I struggle to wholeheartedly love or hate any one of them. There is always a reason to disagree, and there will always be a reason to root for one of the people on stage. When it comes to the characters, they are an integral part of the storytelling, but it is their very existence in the world (a world *our* world used to be, and arguably still is) that brings the audience to the edge of their seat in not only anticipation, but also with the desire to yell at them, call them out, or to console them.

Considered a political drama, *Angels* explores the initial waves of the AIDs epidemic as it reverberated through America, but more importantly the gay community. *Angels* follows the lives of two couples, one gay and one straight, in 1985 around October to November in New York: Louis Ironson, a word processor, and his unemployed but stylish lover, Prior, struggle with Prior's diagnosis in association with the very idea of their relationship; and Mormon lawyer Joe Pitt as he not only struggles with his own sexual identity, but with his Valium-addicted and agoraphobic wife, Harper.

It begins with an unexpected introduction: the drawn-out eulogy read out by a Rabbi at a funeral for a woman named Sarah, who was Jewish (and later revealed to have been the grandmother of Louis, one of the main characters). The Rabbi goes on to speak about culture and of the immigrants that come into America (which he refers to as "the melting pot where nothing melted"), which connects to a later comment made by Louis, "there are no gods here, no ghosts and spirits in America, **there are no angels in America**, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political". But, as the title suggests, Louis is more or less wrong in saying there are *no* angels in america, and when an angel (*the* angel, or Continental Principality of America) comes barreling through Prior's ceiling to present herself to him in his ill and feverish state, it is clear that the very concept that Louis claimed did not exist is the very thing holding America together.

At least in Prior's mind.

Although, whether or not the angel is *within* Prior's mind is not important. What is important is the message she brings with her. And that message is, well... I'd suggest finding the second part (the four hour second part called *Perestroika*) to find this answer for yourself.

## Background

### The Playwright: Tony Kushner

Tony Kushner is a playwright and screenwriter born in 1956 in Manhattan New York.

He has won the Pulitzer prize, an Emmy, 2 Tony Awards, 2 Oscar nominations, National medal of honour, lifetime achievement in American theatre, and many more.

Kushner stated once in an interview that he had been sure that he was gay by the time he was eleven, but by that point he was still deep in the closet. Being certain of his sexuality, however, did not mean Kushner had come to terms with it, and finally around the time of his mid-twenties, Kushner was able to do just that. While *Angels* actually started out as a commission from another person in the theatrical industry, it was undoubtedly driven and formed into what it has become today by Kushner's own struggles.

Kushner began writing this play in 1987, the AIDS epidemic was in its sixth year, the Reagan administration in its seventh. In his introduction he states that it was a "terrifying and galvanizing time."

The play has received endless praise and critical acclaim, collectively winning 24 Tony's throughout its original Broadway production as well as its 2018 Broadway revival.

### A bit about the **AIDs** epidemic...

When the disease broke out it seemed to be overwhelmingly affecting male homosexuals. Because of this, there was no media coverage or political recognition of the epidemic, and gay men were rapidly dying by the thousands. The medical community was baffled, treatment was unknown, as well as how the disease was spread, many refused to treat AIDS patients for fear of being infected. AIDS was almost always a death sentence and it was a rapid and painful deterioration of health. By the end of the 1980's, 21 628 Americans had died of AIDS.

### **Director's statement of the overall themes and messages of the piece.**

Functioning as a sort of political commentary/satire directed towards the AIDs crisis in the 1980s, *Angels* dives deep into the strength and prosperity of the gay community through a time of ignorance and disregard. With a script that explores not only love, sexuality, betrayal, but also the prospects of loyalty, politics, and justice. All of Kushner's themes come together and are presented to the audience through his characters, who are a spectacle even on the page.

Although the show definitely gives a very sharp and intimate exploration of the AIDs epidemic and the struggles that came with it. It is unique in that it explores not only the blunt reality of, well... reality, but also the concept of more mystical existences, like angels, dream worlds, and completely (or is it...) hallucinated characters (Harper's travel agent, Mr. Lies!). The humour in the show comes with the reality of it, and in regards to the character of Prior, it is a direct exploration of how humour can be used to cover up the truth about how you feel. Mental illness is one of the explored themes of the show, but the most prominent theme in that regard is physical illness. Dependence and addiction is also an important factor, twisting itself into Harper's story and drawing out some of the most intriguing moments of the show when Harper and Prior meet in their mutual dream/hallucination world and talk about things that shouldn't really make sense, but somehow really do.

By writing two different scenes into one Franken-scene (simply put, using pairing to connect two scenes and have them overlap) Kushner introduces that types of relationships that another author, Virginia Woolf, so strongly called into question. Kushner shows the audience just how similar the lives of seemingly dissimilar people can be. The types of connections between the characters are explored through seemingly ironic similarities, and even through the use of one actor for multiple different characters. When the angel is seen to also be playing the doctor and also the homeless woman, Kushner successfully introduces his perspectives on how deeply entwined everyone can be, even if the informal relationship seem so out of place (like when Joe's mother meets the homeless woman).

Gender expression and the expression of sexuality plays a pivotal role in this show, as the show revolves around the ignorance towards the gay community in that time. One of the characters, Belize (a former drag queen, and now a nurse) is a strong advocate for all communities to which he is a part (which could change depending on the actor). Belize is a huge part of the theme of sexuality in *Angels*, even with the theme of race, especially in his conversation with Louis when he easily converses with Louis but still receives significant retaliation from the aggravated Louis.

Overall, there are many deep-rooted themes to be explored in this show, and I wholeheartedly believe in the abilities of the team to come to appropriately and respectfully portray them in a professional manner on stage.

### **Important!**

This article is something I read and that I find of utmost importance to move on with this project.

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/angels-in-america-chicago\\_b\\_1311710?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAI0h\\_NTuN593x9c7TUicG\\_RGY7pe-8aDcDjL4x2olrCKgYmdo0WMVA-w9ZPErLOdYLDYdT6CaSOHVDMdxtPTf2U7-4IQP6oHTXTF7-33iUdQ9knX42iYYyZjZGwoxekHh87IB3BHetyRAjFEQuJ31-KSYmEeLJFZGPJNeD5a bsp7](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/angels-in-america-chicago_b_1311710?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAI0h_NTuN593x9c7TUicG_RGY7pe-8aDcDjL4x2olrCKgYmdo0WMVA-w9ZPErLOdYLDYdT6CaSOHVDMdxtPTf2U7-4IQP6oHTXTF7-33iUdQ9knX42iYYyZjZGwoxekHh87IB3BHetyRAjFEQuJ31-KSYmEeLJFZGPJNeD5a bsp7)

Take in these words just as you would when reading the script. It is beautifully written.

### **Warning of sensitive content if applicable.**

There is very strong language strewn every which way in almost every scene. Stage combat, there are a few points in the show when it is necessary to have something like this: namely, when Louis and Man fight for a moment and Man slaps him. Joe and Roy also get into a bit of a skirmish near the end of the show.

There are also many possibly vulgar scenes, especially while Prior begins to feel the full force of his illness.

Joe and Harper kiss a few times, but it is mostly innocent. There is an intimate scene (supposed to be a sex scene) between Louis and Man, but in this proposal I am deciding that this part of the scene will take place offstage, the voices and sounds continuing, and then return to the on-stage setting after it is finished. The dialogue in this scene is important, and relevant to the actions occurring.

There is mild nudity, and while the scripts implies full nudity, I will not be using that in this performance, but will be using a privacy screen to feign nudity when Prior is removing his clothing in order to show Emily his lesions in the hospital.

There are mentions of addiction and mental illnesses in this show, but they are explored safely and respectfully.

### **Why do you think Sock 'n' Buskin should produce this show?**

*Angels in America* will always be important. It will not matter where it's staging takes place, nor when, nor for who it is performed, but what will matter is the message it so desperately yells at the world. To tell the world that they need to change is possibly one of the most difficult things to do, because there are many important and powerful people out there, if anything, that do not want to change. While we hope for a better world, we can only do the smallest things to actually contribute our part in the betterment of society.

This show explores the disregard America has for its citizens, accepting the healthy and prosperous, and ignoring, even shunning the ill and different. The relevance of this statement is immediate, as the world reacts in anger and protest to the decisions of Alabama's government on the legal state of abortion. *Angels in America*, as mentioned in the article I provided in this file, explored the actual truth about what happens when the government is not as involved as it should be. I believe the importance of this show will never fade, and not only will it be a deeply inspiring and educating process to produce and perform this show, I can confidently say that it will be impactful on everyone involved, whether this person be a member of the cast/production team, or an audience member.

Sock 'n' Buskin is the epitome of community and togetherness, and what a better message to deliver than one that calls for a reevaluation of the governing forces upon which we rely so heavily.

### **Director's statement of their production's overall concept and aesthetic.**

My overall goal for this show is to be honest. I want to have my actors perform Kushner's piece just as he had intended, and to have every word they speak mean something. I intend for all participants of this show to be well informed of the relevant issues and how they can be explored and how we can inspire change. *Angels in America* is all about unveiling the unseen, and while things may seem simple at first, they are definitely not as simple as you would have hoped. You will learn and cry and smile, but in order to do that, there must be a support to the actors who entice these emotions.

Each scene will consist of one or a few, large, prominent set pieces that easily demonstrate where this scene is taking place. In a bedroom, one large bed; on a bench, a bench!; in a hospital room, a raised hospital bed or simple gurney with an IV; in a kitchen, a dining table; in the park, a tree and a bench; an office, a biiiig office desk and chair, and a telephone; etc, etc, etc... There will definitely be a sense of camp style when it comes to this production, as I believe it is a prominent weapon used by Prior to combat the horrors of his illness, alongside comedy. I hope to bring about this sense of style in not only the acting by the characters, but also the set pieces and the show in and of itself.

I hope to keep the set fairly dull and dark, but with warm colours as the bases. The costumes of the characters will be the more prominent aspects of each scene, to go along with the extravagance of each person, especially Prior and Belize. I can see certain colour schemes for each character, and this will be inserted into the character requirements and descriptions below.

**M1 - Red** - to play **Roy Cohn**, a successful New York lawyer and unofficial power broker. Avoidant and angry, Roy's actor must be willing to be disliked by many. His gruff demeanor and inability to admit to himself that he is a homosexual are crucial to his character building. Wearing what appears to be quite expensive clothing, Roy wear a three-piece suit with a red tie and pocket square, and is hunched slightly even when he stands. Even though he is not too old, he struggles to move with ease as he did in his youth.

**M2 - Orange** - to play **Joe Pitt**, the chief clerk for Justice Theodore Wilson of the Federal Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. Sure he loves his wife, but unsure of why. Sure there is something different about him, unsure as to what. The actor must be able to envelop Joe's inability to know for sure, particularly towards himself and how he feels. He is a very simple man, or so he thinks. Typically seen in a grey suit with a white button up, Joe wears an orange tie, and loosens it when he is home (but only after a while, as if he tries to remain professional even at home). Although he might loosen his tie, he may never really loosen up. ALSO to play, the **Eskimo**.

**M3 - Blue** - to play **Louis Ironson**, a word processor working for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Louis struggles with loyalty, and is quick to resort to giving up and running away from his issues. This character experiences a spiral as he tries to understand how he feels and what he truly wants, and whether it really matters what others think of him. Louis wears a dull mix between informal and formal wear, tending to dress up a very blue pair of blue jeans that he always wears, or looking quite informal when with Prior.

**M4 - Green** - to play **Prior Walter**, formally the boyfriend of Louis. Occasionally works as a club designer or caterer, otherwise lives very modestly but with great style off a small trust fund. To put it simple, Prior is fabulously tragic, and uses humour and a camp-ish style to cover for the fact that he feels there is nothing left for him to do but give in. Or pray for an Angel to come for him. Prior's outfits are usually outlandish, and he will show skin when unnecessary and wear exaggerated clothing most of the time, sometimes wearing bow ties loose around his neck. He has a green cap that he wears most of the time, or it is always seen on stage with him. His clothing in the hospital is a hospital gown, but when sick at home he wears baggy pajama pants and a wife beater.

**M5 - Purple** - to play **Belize**, a former drag queen and former lover of Prior's. A registered nurse, Belize's name was originally Norman Arriaga; Belize is a drag name that stuck. Belize is a blunt and carefree character, strict with his own morals and unwillingly to change himself for the likes of others. He will, however, be the first one to call someone out on their bullshit. While the script can easily be changed, it is suggested that Belize's actor is not caucasian. Costume consists of a defining purple scarf at all times, even in scrubs, which are whatever colour. He is stylish and very feminine, which matches his personality to a T.

**F1 - Yellow** - to play **Harper Pitt**, Joe's wife, an agoraphobic with a mild Valium addiction. Harper struggles most with the concept of reality, and allows herself to easily fall into the beckoning calls of fantasy and dream worlds. She struggles with truth and cannot easily be persuaded into any kind of change. Typically seen in dull or old pajamas (pants and a tank top) she also wears old house slippers and a dull yellow cardigan shawl/sweater that she keeps wrapped around herself. Her hair is always messy, but still plainly tucked away by a wide white headband. An overly large white parka is worn when in the cold weather.

**F2 - White/Grey** - to play **The Angel**, four divine emanations, Fluor, Phosphor, Lumen, and Candle; manifest in One; the Continental Principality of America. She has magnificent steel-grey wings, which are shimmering pieces of fabric held up by two cast members always at her side, dressed in black. Strength emanates from this character, and she is always seen with a glowing light at her back. Her voice will be supported by a choir of voices (the rest of the cast backstage) whenever she speaks, including echoes. Dressed in white and gold and grey fabric dripping from her bodice, she appears to be a Greek Goddess mixed with a waterfall. You can never see her feet, and her robes drag shortly behind her. ALSO to play, **Sister Ella Chapter**, the **Woman in the South Bronx**, the **Voice**, **Emily**.

**F3 - Rose Pink** - to play **Hannah Pitt**, Joe's mother, currently residing in Salt Lake City, living off her deceased husband's army pension. Hannah is a very faithful women, who is strict on her family duties, but still hard on her son. She does her best to make her harshities seem loving, but fails constantly. She is a difficult woman who has her nose in the air to prove her righteousness. She dresses modestly, with a long skirt and buttoned shirt with a jacket and over-curved hair. She dresses her age, which is around 60.

**C9** - Could be either gender. To play **Mr. Lies** (imaginary travel agent), and **Henry** (Roy's Doctor). There is a range of acting in this role, to be filled by someone who can fulfill both requirements of humour and drama at the same time.

**C10** - To play the **Man in the Park** (Louis's late-night hookup, the guy who lives with his parents), and **Martin Heller** (a Reagan Administration Justice Department flackman), and **Prior I** (ghost of dead Prior Walter from 13th century. Blunt, gloomy medieval farmer with guttural Yorkshire accent).

**C11** - To play **Ethel Rosenberg**, and **Prior II** (the ghost of dead Prior Walter from the 17th century. Londoner, sophisticated, High British accent).

Although Kushner intended for there to be more of a shared acting experience, by means of having the primary eight (8) characters play the rest of the supporting roles, I believe it is important to have a larger cast, with a number closer to ten (10). I have added three gender-neutral positions for actors, and while all positions are open for any gender of actor, the genders of the characters are mentioned with the blurbs for each one.

To stage the show, I have no pressing preferences in regards to the semester during which it will be done. The only concern in that regard is the available time, so if possible, the Fall semester is more appropriate.

### **Preview of possible set plans.**

Here is a tentative (or, more appropriately, terrible) sketch of Scene 9 and the set at that point in time. I will reiterate, a simple set for each scene setting to set apart where the scenes are taking place. As they are happening at the same time, it is crucial that the lighting be harsh enough to create an obvious line between both sets on either side of the stage, coming to connect where the connecting doors (set pieces) would be upstage.



Every set and prop count will be minimal, so as to bring to attention to the actors, who are the most important and integral part of telling this story. Their words (or the words of Tony Kushner) are the scripture of this play. The sets and props are only there to bring even more severity to the characters and the importance of their stories.

### **Tentative production plans.**

Being a long and heavy show, this production will require complete dedication and commitment from every participant. There are not only three acts, but it is a veery long show. I believe this is entirely possibly with the right dedication from the cast and production members. That beings said, most everything is flexible to school hours, because that comes before

everything and success a hard work is equally as important. Especially around Midterm time, or perhaps if a scheduled test is unchangeable, I am lenient.

There will obviously be set times that I will set aside for help with the memorization of lines, or to take any suggestions or possible changes that need to be made. I trust that everyone involved will be independent in their work, but I hope that it is not a difficult thing to reach out to someone to help. I hope to instill a sense of familiarity with the group, as this show requires a family-tight team to pull it off.

<b>Auditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The audition process will take place over the span of two days, flexible for anyone who cannot make these dates.</li> <li>- Auditioners (day one) will be required to perform a monologue (either dramatic or comedic) and a song of the opposite genre (either dramatic or comedic).</li> <li>- As Kushner intended, the auditions (day two) is where the close bonds will begin within the cast, instilling confidence in one another right from the beginning. Trust games, get-to-know-me games, and generally fun games will be played.</li> <li>- One important game to play is when the actors stand in a circle, facing away from one another, as this show requires you to be fully aware of everyone on stage with you, especially during pairing scenes.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rehearsals occur a minimum of 3 times a week for approximately 2-3 hours each time. Twice during the week, once on the weekend.</li> <li>- A submission of availability will be required from each cast member to ensure the planning of specific days of scene rehearsals are efficiently done so.</li> <li>- Facebook/Microsoft Teams page created for everyone to be connected and have contact with all members of the team.</li> <li>- First read through!</li> <li>- Make connections with cast members, make friends, possible Timbits to be brought because food improves everything.</li> <li>- Plan for team building outings/gatherings.</li> <li>- All members of the team will be informed that if ever they find any news clipping that have relevance to the show, or to do research regarding the AIDS epidemic in New York at the time, or any historical (and relevant) facts, to use the five minutes before rehearsal begins to do a show-and-tell for the cast. The most important thing for this show is to be informed and accepting.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Begin regular rehearsals.</li> <li>- Begin blocking Act I.</li> <li>- Actors will be required to submit a character analysis document on the production page or directly to myself or the SM.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finish Act I. Begin Act II.</li> <li>- Opportunity for a mental health evening with myself and the SM to</li> </ul>	

	discuss the issues within the play and how they are still relevant today. How have the issues progressed? Changed? How can we move forward and create a more accepting community through and after this show?	
<b>Week 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plans for set-building/costuming.</li> <li>- Sloppy Italian Run.</li> <li>- Finish Act II. Begin Act III.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tentative offbook date, exemptions can be made for certain struggling actors or characters with lengthy lines. Extra help will always be available, especially at this time.</li> <li>- Finish all blocking!</li> <li>- Collect all costumes by this point, and set building should be well on its way.</li> <li>- Rehearsals will be scene-wise this week, and more frequent! Be attentive to whether or not your characters are called for the scenes! Getting down to business.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The REAL offbook date. In the voice of Edna Mode, "No Scripts!!!"</li> <li>- Stumble through a full run. Efficiency is key, no distractions! Get your sillies and antics out BEFORE you come to rehearsal.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Polishing and dress-rehearsals + props.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tech time!!</li> <li>- Time to put on an amazing show!!</li> </ul>	

The most important thing when it comes to this show is to ensure everyone is informed about the issues we are dealing with on stage, and ensuring there is a mutual support system between everyone. To ensure there are strong bonds, there will be many chances to spend time with fellow team members to build those relationship over the course of the two months.

#### **List of production team/roles to be filled.**

Director: Gabrielle Goudie (Myself)      Stage Manager: Unfilled      Tech Manager: Unfilled

#### **Copy of script or where it can be obtained.**

I have a copy of the script from an online source that I purchased for a class in the first semester of first year, which can be shared via dropbox if needed, as it is the full script and thus a large file on my computer.

The price of producing this show is \$50 per performance, on top of the \$12 per script book.

<https://www.broadwayplaypub.com/the-plays/angels-in-america-part-one/>

This is a link to the document outlining the payment process for the show's production, and how to calculate the costs overall.

<https://www.broadwayplaypub.com/wp-content/uploads/Nonprofessional-Payments-Schedule.pdf>

## Conclusion

As Belize so wonderfully puts it (in telling Louis off), “real love isn’t ever ambivalent”. Although, when it comes to *Angels in America*, I may have to disagree. This show is a wild ride emotions, and love rises high to the top of it all, but when you watch/read/hear about this show, and then really get to know it, and truly love it just as I have come to do, you will not find yourself sitting comfortably with how you feel. You will love it, but you will also want to scream when it is over. It gives the audience a reason to think and a reason, more or less, to love.

*Angels* makes you love it with every piece of your ambivalent heart, because that is what it was meant to do. It was not meant to give you an evening of thoughtless stories, although those are enjoyable whatever the case, but rather deliver you into a world where there is nothing but yourself in that chair, watching love and life thrash about on stage.

To say that love is never ambivalent is to say this show is not love, in and of itself, which is a big fat lie. This show is love, hatred, jealousy, lust, anger, justice, injustice, and at the same time a horrible nightmare and a colourful dream. You will not be settled on one specific thing when it comes to this show. It is everything, but most importantly, it is a reflection of our very own world.