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*ANGELS*  
*in*  
*AMERICA*

*A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*

*Part One: MILLENNIUM APPROACHES*

*Part Two: PERESTROIKA*

*Tony Kushner*

*Theatre Communications Group*

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CONTENTS

*Part One:*  
*Millennium Approaches*

1

*Part Two:*  
*Perestroika*

127

Afterword

281





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*ANGELS*  
*in*  
*AMERICA*

*Part One:* MILLENNIUM  
APPROACHES



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The actors, directors and designers who have worked on the play transformed it. What follows is a list of the play's professional productions to date.

*Millennium Approaches* was first performed in a workshop production presented by Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum, May 1990. It was directed by Oskar Eustis. Sets were designed by Mark Wendland, costumes by Lydia Tanji, lights by Casey Cowan and Brian Gale, and music by Nathan Birnbaum. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN	<i>Richard Frank</i>
JOE PITT	<i>Jeffrey King</i>
HARPER PITT	<i>Lorri Holt</i>
BELIZE	<i>Harry Waters Jr.</i>
LOUIS IRONSON	<i>Jon Matthews</i>
PRIOR WALTER	<i>Stephen Spinella</i>
HANNAH PITT	<i>Kathleen Chalfant</i>
THE ANGEL	<i>Ellen McLaughlin</i>

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The World Premiere of *Millennium Approaches* was presented by The Eureka Theatre Company, May 1991. It was directed by David Esbjornson. Sets were designed by Tom Kamm, costumes by Sandra Woodall, and lights by Jack Carpenter and Jim Cave. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN	<i>John Bellucci</i>
JOE PITT	<i>Michael Scott Ryan</i>
HARPER PITT	<i>Anne Darragh</i>
BELIZE	<i>Harry Waters Jr.</i>
LOUIS IRONSON	<i>Michael Ornstein</i>
PRIOR WALTER	<i>Stephen Spinella</i>
HANNAH PITT	<i>Kathleen Chalfant</i>
THE ANGEL	<i>Ellen McLaughlin</i>

The play opened in London, January 1992, in a production at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, directed by Declan Donellan, designed by Nick Ormerod, with music by Paddy Cuneen and lights by Mick Hughes. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN	<i>Henry Goodman</i>
JOE PITT	<i>Nick Reding</i>
HARPER PITT	<i>Felicity Montague</i>
BELIZE	<i>Joe Mydell</i>
LOUIS	<i>Marcus DAmico</i>
PRIOR WALTER	<i>Sean Chapman</i>
HANNAH PITT	<i>Rosemary Martin</i>
THE ANGEL	<i>Nancy Crane</i>
THE RABBI, HENRY, MARTIN HELLER, PRIOR 1	<i>Jeffrey Chiswick</i>

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The first production of *Angels in America*, Parts One and Two, was presented at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, directed by Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone. The sets were designed by John Conklin, lights by Pat Collins, costumes by Gabriel Berry, and music by Mel Marvin. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN	<i>Ron Leibman</i>
JOE PITT	<i>Jeffrey King</i>
HARPER PITT	<i>Cynthia Mace</i>
BELIZE	<i>K. Todd Freeman</i>
LOUIS IRONSON	<i>Joe Mantello</i>
PRIOR WALTER	<i>Stephen Spinella</i>
HANNAH PITT	<i>Kathleen Chalfant</i>
THE ANGEL	<i>Ellen McLaughlin</i>

*Millennium Approaches* opened in New York at the Walter Kerr Theatre in April 1993, in a production directed by George C. Wolfe. The sets were by Robin Wagner, the lights by Jules Fisher and costumes by Toni-Leslie James. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN	<i>Ron Leibman</i>
JOE PITT	<i>David Marshall Grant</i>
HARPER PITT	<i>Mania Gay Harden</i>
BELIZE	<i>Jeffrey Wright</i>
LOUIS IRONSON	<i>Joe Mantello</i>
PRIOR WALTER	<i>Stephen Spinella</i>
HANNAH PITT	<i>Kathleen Chalfant</i>
THE ANGEL	<i>Ellen McLaughlin</i>

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The national touring production of *Millennium Approaches* began its run on September 25, 1994, at the Royal George Theatre in Chicago. It was directed by Michael Mayer, with sets by David Gftlo, lights by Brian MacDevitt, costumes by Michael Krass and music by Michael Ward. The cast was as follows:

ROY COHN

*Jonathan Hadary*

JOE PITT

*Philip Earl Johnson*

HARPER PITT

*Kate Goehring*

BELIZE

*Reg Flowers*

LOUIS IRONSON

*Peter Birkenhead*

PRIOR WALTER

*Robert Sella*

HANNAH PITT

*Barbara Robertson*

THE ANGEL

*Carolyn Swift*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I've been working on *Angels in America*, of which *Millennium Approaches* is the first part, for several years, and in the process have accumulated many debts:

I received generous support during the writing of this play in the form of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Gerbode Foundation, and the Fund for New American Plays/American Express. Further financial and abundant emotional support came from my parents, Bill and Sylvia Kushner, Martha Deutscher, and Dot and Jerry Edelstien. Joyce Ketay the Wonder-Agent, and her associate Carl Mulert have been awesomely protective and farsighted; and from Jim Nicola of New York Theatre Workshop I have gotten wonderfully smart advice.

Gordon Davidson and the staff of the Mark Taper Forum provided the play and its author with the best circumstances for development and production any artist could hope for.

Richard Eyre and the staff of the National Theatre made a timorous and occasionally querulous visitor to British theatre



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feel at home. Declan Donellan and Nick Ormerod made the play dance.

*Angels* has benefited from the dramaturgical work of Roberta Levitow, Philip Kan Gotanda, Leon Katz and Ellen McLaughlin; and K. C. Davis contributed dramaturgy, dedication and Radical Queerness.

Sigrid Wurschmidt, actress extraordinaire and angel of light, remains with the play though she's left the world.

Bill Anderson, Andy Holland, Ian Kramer, Peter Minthorn, Sam Sommer and John Ryan are everywhere in this play.

David Esbjornson helped shape the final version of *Millennium* and brought it, fabulously, to San Francisco.

Tony Taccone brought craft, clarity and *menschlichkeit* to Los Angeles.

Oskar Eustis's guidance, talents, intelligence and friendship have been indispensable; he called *Angels in America* into being, shepherded it through many perilous places, and brought it safely home. Without him it would have neither been begun nor completed.

To Kimberly T Flynn, for intellectual and political instruction, and for the difficult education of my heart, I owe my profoundest debts of gratitude.

*Millennium Approaches* is for Mark Bronnenberg, my former lover, my forever friend, my safe haven and my favorite homosexual.

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## THE CHARACTERS

ROY M. COHN, *a successful New York lawyer and unofficial power broker.*

JOSEPH PORTER PITT, *chief clerk for Justice Theodore Wilson of the Federal Court of Appeals, Second Circuit.*

HARPER AMATY PITT, *Joe's wife, an agoraphobic with a mild Valium addiction.*

LOUIS IRONSON, *a word processor working for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.*

PRIOR WALTER, *Louis's boyfriend. Occasionally works as a club designer or caterer, otherwise lives very modestly but with great style off a small trust fund.*

HANNAH PORTER PITT, *Joe's mother, currently residing in Salt Lake City, living off her deceased husband's army pension.*

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.*

THE ANGEL, *four divine emanations, Fluor, Phosphor, Lumen and Candle; manifest in One: the Continental Principality of America. She has magnificent steel-gray wings.*

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*Other Characters in Part One*

RABBI ISIDOR CHEMELWITZ, *an orthodox Jewish rabbi, played by the actor playing Hannah.*

MR. LIES, *Harper's imaginary friend, a travel agent, who in style of dress and speech suggests a jazz musician; he always wears a large lapel badge emblazoned "IOTA" (The International Order of Travel Agents). He is played by the actor playing Belize.*

THE MAN IN THE PARK, *played by the actor playing Prior.*

THE VOICE, *the voice of The Angel.*

HENRY, *Roy's doctor, played by the actor playing Hannah.*

EMILY, *a nurse, played by the actor playing The Angel.*

MARTIN HELLER, *a Reagan Administration Justice Department flackman, played by the actor playing Harper.*

SISTER ELLA CHAPTER, *a Salt Lake City real-estate saleswoman, played by the actor playing The Angel.*

PRIOR 1, *the ghost of a dead Prior Walter from the 13th century, played by the actor playing Joe. He is a blunt, gloomy medieval farmer with a guttural Yorkshire accent.*

PRIOR 2, *the ghost of a dead Prior Walter from the 17th century, played by the actor playing Roy. He is a Londoner, sophisticated, with a High British accent.*

THE ESKIMO, *played by the actor playing Joe.*

THE WOMAN IN THE SOUTH BRONX, *played by the actor playing The Angel.*

ETHEL ROSENBERG, *played by the actor playing Hannah.*

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## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

A DISCLAIMER: Roy M. Cohn, the character, is based on the late Roy M. Cohn (1927-1986), who was all too real; for the most part the acts attributed to the character Roy, such as his illegal conferences with Judge Kaufmann during the trial of Ethel Rosenberg, are to be found in the historical record. But this Roy is a work of dramatic fiction; his words are my invention, and liberties have been taken.

A NOTE ABOUT THE STAGING: The play benefits from a pared-down style of presentation, with minimal scenery and scene shifts done rapidly (no blackouts!), employing the cast as well as stagehands—which makes for an actor-driven event, as this must be. The moments of magic—the appearance and disappearance of Mr. Lies and the ghosts, the Book hallucination, and the ending—are to be fully realized, as bits of wonderful *theatrical* illusion—which means 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.

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In a murderous time  
the heart breaks and breaks  
and lives by breaking.  
—Stanley Kunitz  
"The Testing-Tree"

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ACT ONE:

# *Bad News*

*October-November 1985*

## *Scene 1*

*The last days of October. Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz alone onstage with a small coffin. It is a rough pine box with two wooden pegs, one at the foot and one at the head, holding the lid in place. A prayer shawl embroidered with a Star of David is draped over the lid, and by the head a yartzheit candle is burning.*

RABBI ISIDOR CHEMELWITZ (*He speaks sonorously, with a heavy Eastern European accent, unapologetically consulting a sheet of notes for the family names*): Hello and good morning. I am Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz of the Bronx Home for Aged Hebrews. We are here this morning to pay respects at the passing of Sarah Ironson, devoted wife of Benjamin Ironson, also deceased, loving and caring mother of her sons Morris, Abraham, and Samuel, and her daughters Esther and Rachel; beloved grandmother of Max, Mark, Louis, Lisa, Maria . . . uh . . . Lesley, Angela, Doris,

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ANGELS IN AMERICA

Luke and Eric. (*Looks more closely at paper*) Eric? This is a Jewish name? (*Shrugs*) Eric. A large and loving family. We assemble that we may mourn collectively this good and righteous woman.

(*He looks at the coffin*)

This woman. I did not know this woman. I cannot accurately describe her attributes, nor do justice to her dimensions. She was. . . . Well, in the Bronx Home of Aged Hebrews are many like this, the old, and to many I speak but not to be frank with this one. She preferred silence. So I do not know her and yet I know her. She was . . .

(*He touches the coffin*)

. . . 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.

(*Little pause*)

You can never make that crossing that she made, for such Great Voyages in this world do not any more exist. But every day of your lives the miles that voyage between

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MILLENNIUM APPROACHES

that place and this one you cross. Every day. You understand me? In you that journey is.

So...

She was the last of the Mohicans, this one was. Pretty soon ... all the old will be dead.

## *Scene 2*

*Same day. Roy and Joe in Roy's office. Roy at an impressive desk, bare except for a very elaborate phone system, rows and rows of flashing buttons which bleep and beep and whistle incessantly, making chaotic music underneath Roy's conversations. Joe is sitting, waiting. Roy conducts business with great energy, impatience and sensual abandon: gesticulating, shouting, cajoling, crooning, playing the phone, receiver and hold button with virtuosity and love.*

ROY (*Hitting a button*): Hold. (*To Joe*) I wish I was an octopus, a fucking octopus. Eight loving arms and all those suckers. Know what I mean?

JOE: No, I . . .

ROY (*Gesturing to a deli platter of little sandwiches on his desk*): You want lunch?

JOE: NO, that's OK really I just . . .

ROY (*Hitting a button*): Ailene? Roy Cohn. Now what kind of a greeting is. . . . I thought we were friends, Ai. . . . Look Mrs. Soffer you don't have to get. . . . You're upset. You're yelling. You'll aggravate your condition, you shouldn't yell, you'll pop little blood vessels in your face if you yell. ... No that was a joke, Mrs. Soffer, I was



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