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# Crossing the Boundaries in Kushner and Shakespeare

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## Crossing the Boundaries in Kushner and Shakespeare

Grant Williams

Both the theater and criticism depends upon the  
production of the new and the reappropriation of the old.  
-Charles R. Lyons (97)

[...] the need to rehearse and renegotiate the relationship  
with memory and the past is nowhere more specifically  
expressed in human culture than in theatrical performance.  
-Marvin Carlson (167)

Harold Bloom says, “Genre, frequently metaphoric in Shakespeare, is particularly uneasy in *Troilus and Cressida*, variously termed satire, comedy, history, tragedy, or what you will” (327). Moving forward to Tony Kushner’s two-part epic, *Angels in America*, we find another work that refuses simple classification. David Savran says of it, “*Angels* is a promiscuously complicated play that is very difficult to categorize [...] evoking characteristics that are usually associated with both comedy and tragedy” (15). Many of the reasons for their categorical elusiveness obviously differ, but both plays employ an idea of disease as means by which corruption and politics of exclusion are problematized and changed. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the audience is confronted with an honored society that, underneath a noble façade, possesses a “Most putrefied core” (5.9.1). Shakespeare uses disease as a thematic tool to align theatrical entertainment with society’s own use of marginalization in order to build a connection between the characters onstage and the audience. Kushner uses disease, vis-à-vis the politics surrounding AIDS, as a platform to remedy the historical tendency to marginalize the sick. While Shakespeare’s play can be seen as a dark satire culminating in a spread of corruption, the topos of disease reveals more about the theatre than it does the legend of Troy. Kushner, however, moves beyond the politics of disease and works, as Steven Kruger claims, “to facilitate a

movement [...] into an uncertain but promising future” (168). His epic “fantasia” works to plant the seed of historical change into the theatre itself. I mean to construct a purposeful intertheatrical connection between the two where the diseased individual reveals the site of corruption to be a site of enlightenment. This is a discursive site where both plays seem to be speaking to one another, investigating their own history, and provoking questions of representation via the politics of infectious disease.

In *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson makes the point that “drama [...] has always been centrally concerned not simply with the telling of stories but with the retelling of stories already known to its public” (17). Shakespeare uses this theatrical formula in his treatment of the Trojan War as an opportunity to reinterpret that tradition in order to expose sites of corruption. The heroic characters authored by Homer are now painted as selfish and morally deficient, thus transforming the mythological glory of Troy into what Patricia Parker calls a “bankrupt epic tradition” (227). He constructs this new mythology out of a rhetoric of disease that spreads through the story infecting everyone. This disease rhetoric functions as a metaphor highlighting the immorality of both warring camps. It is a menace that is pervasive in the play’s imagery, although rarely ever literalized into actual sickness. The audience views the escalating presence of disease imagery as the rising force of corruption in the Greek and Trojan camps. At the end, disease does make a real appearance and becomes the agent through which the political corruption of the story is illuminated and transcends its containment on the stage.

The main narrative line of *Troilus & Cressida* is one of the more ambivalent ones in Shakespeare’s canon, making it traditionally cumbersome and troubling. It lacks the high tragic

elements of his great plays and the sophistication of his later romances. The actual love story is just as much derided as notions of war and gallantry, posing love as fleeting as a one-night-stand and fidelity as hollow as a reed. Thus the story seems to sway between the dark and corrupt side of politics and love without delving enough into either to position the play in any solid grounding. Along with this is the total lack of sympathetic characters. One has a hard time identifying with or caring for anyone in this tragic-historical-romance.

The main issue, and the source of contagion, is arguably its politics, a “presentation of the medieval great chain of being” (Barton 481). In the third scene of the first act, the Greek leaders debate the growing complacency among their ranks. Agamemnon begins by posing the question, “What grief hath set the jaundice on your cheeks?” (1.3.2), making it an illness that is weakening their will to fight. He goes on to complain: “Checks and disasters/ Grow in the veins [...] Infect[ing] the sound pine” (1.3.139). The source of this malady is eventually identified as the “*plaguey proud*” Achilles (2.3.174-75; my emphasis). Eric Mallin makes note that since Ulysses calls Achilles the “sinew and forehead of our host,” (1.3.43) he becomes the “figurative body of governance” (149), thus infecting the entire corpus of the Greek camp, from its very center outwards. So, the “putrefied core” revealed by the end is present throughout.

The character of Thersites is also identified in the debate scene where he is described as a “slave whose gall coins slander like a mint,” (1.3.192) rendering him a diseased outcast who has nothing to offer but mockery. However, Thersites is allowed to speak as he pleases being later referred to by Achilles as “a privileged man” (2.3.55). This “privileged” position is not uncommon in Shakespeare and elevates his importance to those of characters such as Horatio

and Lear's fool.<sup>1</sup> From this vantage, the "railing" of Thersites posits him as the grotesque narrator

of the Greeks. So while R.J. Kaufmann suggests that "[t]here is no single, reliable choral observer within the play who can orient our responses" (156-57), I believe that, like *Twelfth Night's* "allow'd fool," (1.5.94) Feste, whose function it is "to mediate between audience and play" (Coddin 316), Thersites and, later, Pandarus occupy similar, though different positions. The role of Thersites in the play, one of a slanderous, diseased soldier, is to level the glorious legend, being the satirist that he is. Thersites orients the audience's response to the legend, exposing the "putrefied core." His interpretations have reflective importance on the story itself, making Thersites, like his Trojan counterpart Pandarus, the audience's intermediary. So, when Thersites frames and subverts all of the reasoning behind the war by declaring, "the Neapolitan bone-ache [...] is the curse dependent on those that war for a placket," (2.3.17-19) he not only effectively scorns the war and its cause, but elevates the use of disease rhetoric by invoking a curse that is associated with syphilis. While most of the editorializing is done by Thersites, the real connection between the audience and stage in this play comes from the character of Pandarus. As an outsider himself, Pandarus is the mediator who represents the effect of this destructive and diseased tale and, with his ability to exist outside of the subject, highlights the connection between the story and the theatre, actor and spectator.

Actual disease is not embodied by all of these immoral characters, however. While the character of Thersites reveals and condemns much of the corruption, it is Pandarus alone who is diseased, acting as a kind of repository for all of the sickness and corruption present within the story. Thus, the manifestation of Thersites's rant of cursing, early in the fifth act, becomes

embodied in Pandarus, who floats through the act more a phantom than his Grecian counterpart.

Appearing with a letter from the doomed Cressida to Troilus at the end, he remarks, seemingly to

himself, “a whoreson rascally phthisic so troubles me [...] And I have rheum in mine eyes too, and such an ache in my bones” (5.3.101-02, 104-05). Once figured as diseased, Pandarus is left alone on the stage, absent from the story, seen so apparent in the 1981 Royal Shakespeare production where actor Tony Church seems tangled and impaled on a barbed wire fence, claiming “A goodly medicine for my aching bones” (5.11.35), echoing again Thersites’ curse of the “bone-ache” syphilis.

Shakespeare uses this opportunity to implicate those watching. While still occupying the role as Pandarus the character, his closing metatheatrical address veers into the realm of social commentary, given its blatant anachronistic references. He speaks personally to the audience and develops a shared connection of both pandering and degradation: “Thus is the poor agent despised. O traitors and bawds, how earnestly are you set-a-work and how ill requited! Why should our endeavour be so desired and the performance so loathed?” (5.11.36-9). Feeling his status as a “despised agent,” he reaches out to those listening in order to implicate the audience in his degraded position. He links those present with his own profession of pandering by addressing them as “Good traders in the flesh” (5.11.45). In his bequeathal at the end, the implication is that since it is the audience’s desire for the tale that perpetuates its telling, Pandarus acts as a diseased mediator: revealing, very corporeally, the corruption of the story to the audience by embodying, and then transmitting, all which is corrupt onstage, leaving the audience just as diseased as the characters onstage.

The question becomes then, why did Shakespeare want to implicate the audience if this is merely a story about the corruption at the heart of the Trojan myth? What grounding does he have for implicating those watching as well? In *The Place of the Stage*, Steven Mullaney elucidates many of the possible reasons for this action. Mullaney describes how the stage, because of its supposed “moral incontinence and pollution” (ix), was forced to reside “on the margins of the city” (vii), a place that had usually only contained lepers and other diseased or unfit societal outcasts. Joseph Lenz develops this association further by discussing how the theatre was associated with prostitution at this time, often “providing the site of their contract, if not their actual contact” (837), since the presence and/or employment of prostitutes was not uncommon.

These occurrences made the theatre more than simple corruption; it became a kind of self-consumption that infected both players and audience. It degraded its status in the eyes of respectable society, as “a brothel, a *pander*, a whore, a way toward debauchery and a site for it” (Lenz 833; my emphasis). These associations, then, define the role of Pandarus. Not only does he figure as the pander for the sexual contact between Troilus and Cressida in the play, but by his status as a theatrical player, he becomes the pander for the audience as well. Thus, Pandarus is posited as a representational character, existing in and out of the action, theatre, and time, but also indelibly linked to it. He is both the marginalized outcast and the licentious sexual character that epitomized the theatre of this time.

Since the theatre was seen as “A kind of running sore [...] threatening the body of London” (Lenz 835-36), the diseased body of Pandarus is defined then by both the conception of

theatre as a site for marginalized outcasts and the rampant spread of disease. So when Pandarus addresses the crowd, his words are eerily poignant for the theatre of his day,

Good traders in the flesh [...]

As many as be here of Pander's hall,

*Your eyes*, half out, weep at Pandar's fall;

Or if you cannot weep, yet give some groans,

Though not for me, yet for *your aching bones*. (5.11.45-50; my emphases)

He does not address the audience as a character, but as a fellow culprit in the business of prostitution and theatre, emphasizing their ailments and “aching bones,” not just his own. He goes on,

Some two months hence my will shall here be made.

It should be now, but that my fear is this:

Some galled goose of Winchester would hiss.

Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases,

And at that time bequeath you my diseases. (5.11.51-6)

His final bequest is acknowledgement and joint involvement, between players and the audience, of the theatre's “legacy of physical and moral putrefaction, corrupted by and reflexively corrupting the eyes of its audiences” (852), as Lenz defines it. This effectively renders the audience diseased in their own society, marginalized from London, as Pandarus has been marginalized from Troy, cast off. Although no stage history before the Restoration is known, many possible assumptions and ideas exist about the earlier stage history, if it indeed existed.

The reasons for it not being performed range from it being too controversial, or too heady, or just



not popular. The Arden edition of *Troilus and Cressida* displays the first page of the 1609 quarto showing how the writers swear that it was never “staled with the stage” (180), but one cannot be certain if that wasn’t merely a marketing scheme, a ploy to sell the play as something new and never before seen. The lack of stage history, however, does not lessen the fact that the target for Pandarus’s speech was the audience of Shakespeare’s day and so characterizes and implicates them to a large degree of being degraded.

Admittedly, the assumed intent behind Shakespeare’s speech for Pandarus here is unknown, cloaked in as much uncertainty as its early stage history. There are some who claim that this was an epilogue appended to the versions performed in the bawdy public houses, while a version performed in the Inns of Court would have ended with the more valiant speech of Troilus. One critic imagines his speech as “a direct insult to the audience” (Bloom 331), but no matter how it is viewed, the rhetoric of the speech testifies to a shared degradation in the business of pandering, of which theatre is a part. As Mullaney writes, the theatre becomes “a place [...] for commentary upon and even contradiction of the [...] body politic itself” (ix), a discursive spot not just for storytelling anymore, but a platform for theatrical as well as societal introspection. *Troilus and Cressida*, then, is constantly working to problematize its own history as well as implicating the place of theatre in its society. Not only is Shakespeare using a rhetoric and materialization of disease to construct a problematized view of the marginalization of the diseased individual, but through Pandarus, is revealing the theatre as well to be a “despised agent.”

The bequest of Pandarus resonates broadly within society because, as Susan Sontag describes, “fears of easy contagion and bizarre fantasies of sexual transmission by *nonvenereal means in public places*” (27; my emphasis) leads to a hateful marginalization. Pandarus, then,

represents a person that is feared in society. This fear and hatred resounds in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, "faggots; we're just a bad dream that the real world is having, and the real world's waking up" (2.34). Viewing the stigma against syphilis in early modern England, which Pandarus represents, and AIDS in '80's America, there is a connection that can be built on how that centers on the idea that society wrongfully represents diseased individuals as outcasts who are to be blamed for their infraction of societal and moral standards. To be more accurate, society uses and needs the ill in order to cleanse itself of illness and, perceived, immorality.

In Prior Walter's first scene in *Angels*, he confesses to Louis that he has AIDS, by showing him a lesion on his arm, "the wine-dark kiss of the angel of death" (1.21). Unlike Roy Cohn who rejects what his doctor and his body tell him, Prior does not shy away from the first sign of AIDS, but instead, readily accepts the news that he is "going to die" (1.21). For Roy, having AIDS, means losing everything he has worked to gain. AIDS, to him, is a homosexual disease and "Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout" (1.45). However, while his earthly, political power is able to win him AZT, it seems to have little effect on his condition since he is the character chosen to die at the end. For Prior, however, there can be no evasion, denial, or reliance on a divine power; for him, there is "No wall like the wall of hard scientific fact" (1.22). Prior's strength as a character in this play stems from this reliance on scientific truth and acceptance of his disease. Kushner explains some of his reasons for writing Prior this way,

It was important for me to create a character with AIDS who was not passive, who did not die at the end, but whose illness was treated realistically. So it wasn't just one lesion on the shoulder and then a little coughing fit and then he dies in

time for the surviving lover to make a moving little speech that gets everybody in the theatre to cry and then leave feeling uplifted. (Pacheco 16)

From the beginning, even before he realizes it, Prior's mission is to act as a prophet, heralding in a new age, standing for a new representation of the diseased individual.

It is no coincidence that the faithless lover of Prior is Louis, a character that seems to embody all of the ambivalence of the play, and mires himself deep in his own contradictory politics. Louis is a character divided by his own sense of how the world acts.<sup>2</sup> He wants to help Prior, but he "can't incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to go" (1.25). Louis believes in progress, but can't move beyond an ingrained sense of inertia, because to him "such Great Voyages do not any more exist" (1.10). He dreams of being released from moral obligation, to have "the questions and shape of a life, its total complexity" (1.38) judged, not simply whether or not he stays with Prior, hoping that at death his life would be deemed as having been lived well over all. He wants an escape, one beyond Alphabet Street; an escape into a guilt-free existence; an escape that, for Kushner, does not (cannot) exist. Louis is written as a victim, the victim that Prior is not able to be, representing all of the anger, frustration, and confusion that Prior ignores. Louis's focus, and reliance, on the rhetoric of religion and politics sets him as an earthly, grounded foil for Prior. While Louis can declare, however ambivalently, that there are "no angels in America," (1.92) Prior is actually conversing and wrestling with angels that are all too real.

Kushner fashioned Prior out of one of his main inspirations for the story, Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Benjamin tells of the "Angel of History," who looks through the "pile of debris," the wreckage of the past ages that lies in destruction at its feet, towards the past. A storm blowing from Paradise holds the Angel in this position, forever hurtling it backwards into the future; this storm is identified as progress (Benjamin 261).<sup>3</sup> In *Angels in America*, the Angels sit in their dilapidated and antiquated Haven, seemingly bogged down by the destruction of the past and the abandonment of God, and merely looking for ways to stop the storm. Their solution and plea to Prior as their prophet is to "STOP MOVING" (2.44), hoping that if progress stops, so too will the destruction. Though Prior will struggle and wrestle with the Angel, he is eventually able to repudiate their message and is posited as a solution to Benjamin's fatalistic outlook on the ever-continuing destruction of history.

Unlike *Troilus and Cressida*, the rising force of the disease in this play does not stand for a growing corruption in the play. The corruption, instead, is all too real and present in the world of 1985; valor is lacking from the start. It is a world of extreme fragmentation along political lines: identity, religion, and sexuality. There is "some sort of profound displacement" (2.64) in *Angels* where characters veer and break from any stereotypical categorizing, much like the play itself.<sup>4</sup> So instead of a rising idea of disease to expose society as corrupt, Kushner works to show how corruption already exists and that disease is merely human, neither a by-product nor a factor of corruption.

Kushner's main individual for exposing this corruption is the very lucid, though Valium-addicted, Harper. After listening to a program on the deteriorating ozone layer, she realizes, rather prophetically, that "beautiful systems [are] dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart [...]"

everywhere, things are collapsing” (1.16-7). Her ability, however, to see things at the “threshold of revelation” (1.34) also makes her a character of hope and optimism. In her first meeting with Prior she says to him: “Deep inside you, there’s a part of you, the most inner part, entirely free of disease” (1.34). Though in society, and even to himself at this point, Prior is nothing more than a lonely, sick individual, it is Harper who is able to instill strength in him and the knowledge that who he is, is not defined by his disease. Thus, Harper’s foresight into the corruption of the world around her allows Kushner to condemn what he sees, but through Prior offer a redemptive rather than jeremiad tale.

Kushner’s decision to write Prior as a strong character who happens to have AIDS is a conscious reworking of the theatre’s tradition of embracing victimization. Even after wrestling with the Angel and facing the Principalities in Heaven, Prior does not ask for a cure solely on his behalf, but instead says, “And this plague, it should stop. In me and everywhere” (2.131). The disease itself has given Prior agency and such a thirst for life that he recognizes that a cure for just him is not a solution. There can be no going back and fixing that. It is not simply Harper who is able to help him with this decision, but Belize as well, who reminds him, “that’s not how the world works, Prior. It only spins forward” (2.44). Instead of embracing the Angels’ message of “STASIS” and finding contentment there, Prior’s vision is that of a time where individuals with AIDS “won’t die secret deaths anymore [but] will struggle on with the living” (2.145). One hears in his resolute message the storm of progress, the time of change. While the Angels remain powerless, stuck in their position of looking upon destruction, Prior can both look at the past differently and, through the very virtue of the storm, turn to look towards the future, towards

change, “the capital M millennium” (2.145). Prior’s message of always moving forward in defiance of the message of “STASIS” then becomes, in Savran’s words, “the culmination of history and as that which rewrites the past” (14).

Disease does not function in this play as a site of infection or a sign of corruption. Neither does it function as mere heroism, but becomes, through Prior, a site of opportunity, of making a connection. In Steven Kruger’s words, this idea of a “crossing of... boundaries” in *Angels in America*, “provide the opportunity... for connection” (159). It is Harper who hits upon the real opportunities for connection. In her last dream sequence in the play, she is on a plane and sees “the souls of [the dead *with*] *joined hands*, clasped ankles” forming a great net of souls” (2.141-42; my emphasis) in order to fix the “shell of safety for life itself” (1.16-7). Kruger makes the claim that the skin is the “place at which the self is endangered and at which one self may endanger another” (159). However, realization and understanding is also made at this exact point of infection.<sup>5</sup> Just as there was contagion between Pandarus and the early modern theatre, so too is a connection made with the contagious body of Prior. Harper’s hopeful vision can only succeed when the dead, or infected, have “joined hands.”

Much like the final scene with Pandarus, Prior’s last address removes him from the narrative and places him in direct communication with the audience. The final scene is at the Bethesda Fountain, but because Prior directly addresses the audience it is any theatre that an audience may view *Angels*.<sup>6</sup> As Roger Brechtel says, Kushner “creates another level of suspension: the space becomes not just Central Park, but the theatre, not just February, 1990 but the present” (112). However, while Pandarus attempts to infect his audience, to draw them into an acknowledged, shared association with the theatre, Prior’s speech is more of a benediction.

His blessing is one of “*More Life*” (2.146; Kushner’s emphasis), closing *Angels* quite

optimistically. There is, however, a connection to be built between Prior and Pandarus that goes beyond the one between character and audience, but with telling implications between theatre of the past and the present.

In the summer of 1995, Mark Wing-Davey directed a production of *Troilus and Cressida* for the Public Theatre’s Shakespeare in the Park. To play the part of Pandarus, Stephen Spinella, who had just recently won a Tony Award for his portrayal of Prior Walter on Broadway, was selected. This connection between the two plays did not go wholly unnoticed. One reviewer even referred to this “recycl[ing]... as an interesting characterization” (Stearns 6D). While a reviewer like Ben Brantley did not mention the connection, spectator-turned-blogger Chris Stroffolino was not unaware when he claimed that the best part about the production was Pandarus (Stephen, ‘Angels in America’). Online reviewer Don Shewey also mentioned Spinella as the best reason to see the show and that here, “as in all seven hours of *Angels in America*, Spinella rules.” The *Wall Street Journal* reviewer, however, made the most significant connection when he marked how Spinella was “redeploying that mix of camp and acid he brought to *Angels in America*” (Donald Lyons A10). He goes on to say how the character of Pandarus “is in the grip of a very wasting sexual disease (syphilis in Shakespeare, but not without hints at AIDS)” (A10). Whether or not this connection was totally apparent to the average spectator, the connection was made and thus, conclusions can be drawn.

In his important work, *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson takes on the very deliberate act of recycling that David Patrick Stearns mentions above. The recycling of Stephen Spinella, I argue, is the real power and connection between the two plays. Marvin Carlson tells us that

...the opportunities for an audience to bring memories of previous ones to new productions are enormous. [...] The most familiar example of this phenomenon is the appearance of an actor, remembered from previous roles, in a new characterization. The recycled body of an actor, already a complex bearer of semiotic messages, will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghosts of previous ones. (8)

Due to the mass popularity, in theatre circles, of *Angels*, many could recognize the actor playing Pandarus. If there wasn't recognition from having seen the play itself, the program for *Troilus and Cressida* for Shakespeare In the Park directly noted Spinella's Tony and Drama Desk Award-winning performance in *Angels in America*; a play that brought forward issues of AIDS. Carlson describes how what was thought of as "something else," whether that is the space or the text or the body of the actor, "has the potential, often realized, of 'bleeding through' the process of reception" (133). This 'bleeding through' has the power to change or reimagine how things are perceived. In this way, then, a crossing of boundaries can occur between these two plays and these two characters; the ghost of Prior Walter haunts the physical stage presence of Pandarus; it "presents the identical thing [...] encountered before [...] with results that can complicate this process considerably" (Carlson 7). The complications are such that, instead of Pandarus being simply viewed as a marginalized, diseased character, the audience now sees the liberated, hopeful body of Prior Walter. Instead of it being a negative contagion, it becomes a positive



opportunity to connect, a shared involvement at the site of the theatre. But what does this positive opportunity do? Does it do anything more than provide an anecdotal link?

Both characters seem to be playing different roles in evaluating the destruction of historical progress. Shakespeare shows how the politics of exclusion marginalize diseased individuals and grounds it in a theatrical sense, making the audience, and the theatre, just as contagious as Pandarus. Theatre is part of a diseased sect of society and is and should be kept on the margins. With Prior we see another diseased individual whose marginalization becomes not a sign of guilt or repudiation, but a show of strength. Prior, though still diseased and thus, marginalized from society, is strong and, for the moment, healthy. He is not on the margins, but in the middle of Central Park at a figurative healing fountain. Prior does not rescue Pandarus or the theatre from their position, but does acknowledge the change. What we have in Harper's final dream is a counter vision to Benjamin's Angel of History, forever caught in the wings of progress, unable to change anything or look to the future. Harper's vision sees the souls of those caught in a Benjaminian historicism working together to repair the same net that progress rips apart. While Benjamin's storm still persists, Pandarus becomes not just another figure caught up in this storm, but the center of a contagious past, linking the theatre of early modern times with the theatre of *Angels in America*. So the connection between the two characters is a remembrance of theatre history, a history, like the one of marginalized victims of disease, that is not clean, but marked by exclusion and stigmatism. The connection between Pandarus and Prior displays this range and this shift from marginalized to vindicated. Kushner offers a vision that suggests that while history has the potential to poison the present, progress is not a destructive device and the present can indeed be redeemed. Thus, their categorical elusiveness lies in their individual

Crossing the Boundaries in Kushner and Shakespeare  
Grant Williams

marking of theatre's place in society and the different forms and positions it has taken,  
functioning as much as a record of theatre history as a performative piece.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Bloom calls him the play's "appropriate chorus" (330).

<sup>2</sup> Discussed in length by David Savran in "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation."

<sup>3</sup> For a further discussion of Kushner's use of Benjamin, see David Savran's "Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," and Roger Brechtel's "'A Kind of Painful Progress': The Benjaminian Dialectics of *Angels in America*."

<sup>4</sup> Joe finds corruption in none other than his idol and father figure, Roy Cohn. Prior realizes the fragility and betrayal of love and both Harper and Hannah are exposed as "Jack Mormon[s]" (2.59), and Angels care nothing for humanity but merely for avenging God's abandonment.

<sup>5</sup> This is seen quite frequently in the play. Note how Louis must become "black and blue" in order for Prior to accept his apology and, in the same scene, Roy's transmission of infected blood to Joe leads to Joe's true understanding of his idol and father figure. (2.84-7)

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that not only is Bethesda Fountain a site of healing, based on the Biblical story of the angel told by Louis, Belize, and Hannah, but it was Bethesda Hospital that produced AZT. Thus, the metatheatrical address is done at a site of healing.

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