universität wien

# DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

## Desire, Devotion, Disease and Despair in US-American AIDS Drama

verfasst von / submitted by

Sabine Lehner, BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Magistra der Philologie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna, 2018

| | |
|---|---|
| Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet: | A 190 344 350 |
| Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet: | Lehramt UF Englisch UF Italienisch |
| Betreut von / Supervisor: | Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Alexandra Ganser-Blumenau |

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

Homosexuality is still a controversial topic and even today, in a time when same-sex marriage is legal even in the US, many people consider it unnatural and even sick. However, an especially grim time for homosexuals, and gay men in particular was certainly the emergence of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s. Politics did not recognize the disease in the beginning and gay men organized in groups to raise awareness and preach safe sex. But also later, HIV and AIDS remained critical issues for the lives of many gay men. Today the illness seems to be considered manageable and therefore does not receive a lot of public attention anymore. This development is also reflected in the American theater scene. Larry Kramer in his play *The Normal Heart* writes about the initial period of the pandemic and addresses the struggle activists were subjected to. Tony Kushner in his two-part play *Angels in America* embeds AIDS as one issue of many the gay community struggles with. One very recent queer playwright, Christopher Shinn, hardly ever mentions the disease at all. Also, the fact that *Angels in America* and *The Normal Heart* were both made into films shows that although, or especially because AIDS is not seen as such a threat anymore, the public needs to be reminded of the disease and that the fight against it is only over when there is a cure. In Kramer's movie version from 2014 he says in the end of the Special Features of the DVD:

> The goal is to find a cure, the goal is to get a president to pay attention, the goal is to get a mayor to pay attention, the goal is to get the gay world to pay attention. None of these goals has been reached, by the way. Please, please take care of all the people who are still getting sick and still dying. Please, please fight for a cure. Please, please accept gay people. Please allow us to get married. We're just the same as you. Everything I write and say has to do with that. (Murphy)

This call to action clearly states that people should not forget about the disease and keep fighting and it acts as a reminder that AIDS still exists and is still a death sentence, also if infected people can live a lot longer today than in the beginnings of the illness.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. Part one engages with theoretical approaches and deals with three aspects:

1. queer theory, and its origins,
2. the history and circumstances of AIDS for a historical contextualization of the plays under scrutiny and
3. AIDS plays and where they are situated in the field of gay/lesbian/queer theater.

A thorough analysis of *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer and *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* by Tony Kushner constitutes the second part of the thesis. The analysis focuses on the question how the plays were made into films, so what changed over the years from the first appearance of the plays to the beginning 21st century when they were remade into movies. The focus of the analysis is slightly different for the two plays: in *Angels* the emphasis lies on the theatrical elements of the film adaptation and in *The Normal Heart* it concentrates on how emotions are conveyed in a film as opposed to the stage.

While a lot of research has already been done on *Angels* and its movie adaptation, there is hardly anything on *The Normal Heart*, which will therefore be focused on in greater detail in the analysis part.

# 2. Background: Queer Studies

In this first section of the thesis, the beginnings of the gay movement will be discussed. Furthermore, the emergence of queer as its own theory will be central, especially with the definitions of the word queer as opposed to other terms like homosexual or gay, the different perceptions of the concepts and how the gay community responds to them.

## 2.1 From homosexual to queer

For a long time, homosexuality was seen as an illness, as it was stated in Krafft-Ebing's study *Psychopathia Sexualis* from 1886. The first to defend homosexuality was Karl Heinrich Ulrichs who identified the condition as "a woman's soul trapped in a man's body" (qtd. in Kekki 26). While Carpenter and Hirschfeld saw homosexuality as something between male and female and called

it “the third sex”, Freud in his highly influential work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* declared that all human beings are born bisexual and then develop in a certain direction (qtd. in Kekki 27). Generally, Freud, in not wanting to define a normal includes an idea that will later be of great importance to queer theory. However, psychoanalysis in the US later develops into a different direction rejecting homosexuality altogether (Kekki 28–29). While Freud aimed to show that homosexuality was not pathological, US American psychoanalysis regarded homosexuality exclusively as such, an illness, something they had to find a cure for (Abelove 78). Abelove argues that Freud would not have been surprised by the tendency American psychoanalysis took because “he believed that American analysts often made moralistic judgments that masqueraded as clinical and that their moralizing derived from what he called a “despicable” American sexual outlook.” (Abelove 78). The definition of American psychoanalysts goes in tandem with the assessment of the American Psychiatric Association, which officially classified homosexuality as an illness in 1952 and only retracted their evaluation in 1973 (qtd. in Tontonoz 263).

The first gay rights organization was established before WW2 in 1924 and was called “The Society for Human Rights”. In 1950 followed the Mattachine Society which connected gay rights with civil rights (Kekki 29). The early Gay Rights Movement revolved around two major points: “one was the idea of America as a melting pot, where everyone is supposedly able to assimilate, the other drew an analogy between gay people and racial minorities in order to gain minority status.” (Marotta 6–9). At this point the organizations thought that tolerance was the most they could fight for (Klüßendorf 240). Whereas Marxists thought that minorities are repressed and gay people should change the system and take a more central role in it, Foucault underlined the importance of questioning how and by whom knowledge about homosexuality was created and the force behind those discourses (qtd. in Kekki 30-32).

A turn in the gay rights movement were certainly the Stonewall Riots on 28 June 1969 (Kekki 32; Hall 112), which marked the starting point of many entities like the Gay Liberation Movement, a more practically oriented organization, or the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which addressed a number of issues like race,

sexism, homophobia and militarism. The latter did, however, not survive for long because women did not feel sufficiently represented and joined the women's right movements and therefore the group split into many different organizations. Additionally, not all homosexuals were prepared to fight for more than their own rights which led to the formation of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which was exclusively concerned with gay rights and everything connected to it (Shepard 51–54). This second group also fought for the right of gay men to have sex, which is largely represented in *The Normal Heart* in the character of Mickey, who fought for exactly that and is therefore not prepared to tell gay people to stop having sex in the face of AIDS. Furthermore, many academic disciplines like Lesbian/Women's Studies, Men's Studies and Gay Studies emerged around this time. Generally speaking, the period after the Stonewall Riots was the prime time for gay identity politics with the main strategy of emphasizing the uniqueness of gay and lesbian identity and the special standing of gay culture (Kekki 42).

In their thinking and theorizing about homosexuality the 1990s were strongly or almost exclusively governed by ideas by Freud and Foucault, who both thought that the concept of perversion is indispensable for Western culture, the former claiming that "society requires both the repression of 'perversion' and the reconstruction of its energy in a sublimated form" and the latter rather seeing it "as a construct enabling social organization and control" (qtd. in Dollimore 106).

The starting point of a split in gay rights activism lies in the different approaches of the first gay rights organizations, on the one hand the Mattachine society, which exclusively fought for acceptance, and on the other hand the new radicalism that emerged after the Stonewall riots represented by GLF and GAA. This split remained for many decades and up to now is not completely resolved (Shepard 51–53). One of the key issues on which opinions diverged was gay sex. The assimilationists kept quiet about sexuality and even apologized for it, while the queers, then called liberationists, celebrated gay sex. Later, queer theory would use the idea of emancipated sexuality as basis for their activism (Shepard 53). The split is very clearly represented in Kramer's play *The Normal Heart*, where there are characters who fight anonymously and quietly for their rights,

thankful for every small gesture from politics and there is the main character, Ned Weeks, who represents the radical view and is not afraid to speak up.

Especially in the early years of American gay studies, a number of scholars supported the essentialist claim advocating for a movement away from notions of behavior to identity. Although constructionism was favored later, essentialism was central to the development of a positive gay identity and gay identity politics (Schippers 142). The constructionist strand of homosexuality was mainly occupied with the question of how homosexuality was constructed and invented and mainly based on Foucault's *The History of Homosexuality* (Rubin 9–10). Furthermore, based on Foucault, the constructionists focused on behavior instead of identity, as only acts were punishable in the 19th century and not merely being homosexual (Foucault 43). In an interview Tony Kushner, the author of *Angels in America*, says, regarding the split and how the development towards queer politics prepared for the success of *Angels in America*:

> […] you depend upon the work that's done by the slightly assimilationist but hard-working, libertarian, civil rights groups, […], but then at some point you need the Panthers. You need a group that says, "Enough of this shit. This is going too slow. And if we don't see some big changes now, we're going to cause trouble. We really are here. Get used to it." Up into that point, the American majority – if there is such a thing – fantasizes that the noise will just go away, that it's a trend. The way the play talks, and its complete lack of apology for that kind of fagginess, is something that would not have made sense before." (Savran, "Theatre" 141)

The AIDS epidemic not only brought the Gay Rights Movement to a halt, as it was actively glorifying homosexual desire and gay sex, but it even inflicted a significant step back, not only due to public opinion, but also because of the introduction of conservative values into the gay community itself (Gove 13). Additionally, around the same time Ronald Reagan was elected president of the US, which was another attack on gay rights, as for years he himself saw homosexuality as a disease and refused to acknowledge AIDS as a threat most of his term (Duberman 319). It was in these times of crisis that all gay fractions united, constructionists – or in 2001, when his study was published Shepard already calls them "queers" – and assimilationists, in a fight against racism, homophobia, classism and the lack of access to health care in America (Shepard

50–55). However, as soon as the worst was over, the split manifested again. During the crisis after raising awareness for the disease, the cornerstone of the activism was fighting for reasonable prizes in medication, which was achieved in 1996 mainly by Larry Kramer's constructionist organization ACT UP. After this achievement, the assimilationists started to ignore the other group again. After 1994 the split seemed to grow because Bill Clinton supported the assimilationist fraction (Shepard 55).

In its conservativeness and anti-gay measures, the Bush administration still had a positive effect on gay rights. President Bush intended to ban gay marriage on a constitutional level, which would have embedded discrimination in the American institution. However, due to the severity of his intention, people were appalled and started to actively fight for their rights, which lead to an increase from 38 percent of gay marriage supporters in 2004 to 59 percent in 2014 (Capehart). Obviously, part of this period is also the presidency of Barack Obama, who openly supported gay marriage and during whose administration the 1st US Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional and with that legalized gay marriage in the whole US (Halkitis). With the election of Donald Trump in 2016 gay rights might again move backwards. In only one day in July 2017 "the Justice Department intervened in a private employment suit", stating that "the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not protect workers on the basis of their sexual orientation", president Trump tweeted that he intends to ban transgender people from serving in the military and a gay rights opponent, Sam Brownsback, was named the ambassador for international religious freedom (Shear and Savage).

## 2.2 Making things perfectly queer[1]

Queer theory emerges from a poststructuralist context (Sullivan 39; Klüßendorf 243; Kekki 40). The term queer entered usage in the early nineties, as poststructuralism criticized identity and power within gay liberation and lesbian feminism, which were governed by ideas of identity, as they were the basis for

[1] Inspired by Doty's work *Making things perfectly queer*

political action. Therefore, queer arose from the need of a new conception of identity. Strict constructionism was abandoned and a historical approach, looking for a continuum of gay culture from earlier historical periods was adopted, but from a queer angle (Kekki 41). One of the main premises from which queer theory emerged was the rejection of identity categories and how it was supposed to unite in its political effectiveness (Jagose 101). Furthermore, queer studies resist binary oppositions and the establishment of a norm, which is why they criticize gay and lesbian studies, as they hold on to the idea of a "normal" (M. Warner xxvi; Doty xv; Kekki 45–49). In other words, queer theory criticizes heteronormative thinking and the biological binary of male and female, which take heterosexuality as the norm for granted and ignore every sexual orientation that goes beyond (Stegu 302). Considering this, there is one aspect that also queer studies struggle with; language. Even if the concept rejects binary oppositions, it is still how language is largely constructed and if you think of queer, there is still at least the opposite "not queer", which echoes the idea of normal and not normal (Kekki 50).

Scholars agree that queer theory emerged from the constructionist view of gay studies, Kekki, however speaks of a third paradigm that manifested alongside the constructionist/essentialist ideas (44). As a political strategy it arose in the 1980s from many issues like the gay and lesbian civil rights movements, the anti sex wars among feminists, and above all the AIDS epidemic (Jagose 121; Morland and Willox 2).

Arguably, the two most influential scholars of queer theory are Butler and Kosofsky Sedgwick. The latter, in her essay "Axiomatic", the introduction to her work *Epistemology of the Closet*, describes axioms which she sees as the foundation for queer theory. From the axioms she establishes it is clear that queer studies do not only concentrate on LGBT rights but include everyone who might not fall under the established "norm". Right at the beginning, in her first Axiom "[p]eople are different from each other" ("Axiomatic" 80) it can be observed that she not only refers to sexual orientation, but also to "gender, race, class, nationality [and] sexual orientation" ("Axiomatic" 80). This is especially what makes *Angels in America* such a queer play, as different origins and believes are

represented in the story (see 5.3). Butler, however mentions that “queer” tends to predominantly represent a white movement and fails in including non-white communities (“Queer” 21).

In her 4th Axiom (“Axiomatic” 89) Kosofsky Sedgwick, like many other authors, comes to the distinction between the constructivist and the essentialist view of homosexuality. It seems that scholars always need to decide on one or the other, but her position is that these two views are already that strongly opposed that their distinction has entered the tools which are used to make the distinction. Therefore, she changes the terminology in her study to “minoritizing versus universalizing” view (“Axiomatic” 89) because she wants to concentrate on the question “In whose lives is homo/heterosexual definition an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty” (“Axiomatic” 89), while to her the distinction of constructivist/essentialist is one of phylogeny asking the question “[h]ow fully […] the meaning and experience of sexual activity and identity [are] contingent on their mutual structuring with other, historically and culturally variable aspects of a given society” (“Axiomatic” 89) versus ontogeny, asking “what […] the cause of homo-(or hetero-) sexuality [is] in the individual.” (“Axiomatic” 89). So, in short in the minoritizing view the distinction of homo and hetero matters to only a small homosexual minority, while in the universalizing view the distinction is important to people of any sexuality. For Kosofsky Sedgwick her distinction is to be seen as an alternative, not a substitution of former versions (*“*Axiomatic*”* 89).

Another key figure in queer theory is Butler, who “argues for a genealogical critique of the term queer” (“Queer” 18) and notes that it has to remain a versatile term that is continually contested (“Queer” 18). She says that

> [t]he term “queer” emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity. The term “queer” has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation. “Queer” derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time. The interpellation echoes past interpellations, and binds the speakers, as if they spoke in unison across time. In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts “queer!”. To what extent, then, has the

> performative “queer” operated alongside, as a deformation of the “I pronounce you …” of the marriage ceremony? If the performative operates as the sanction that performs the heterosexualization of the social bond perhaps it also comes into play precisely as the shaming taboo which “queers” those who resist or oppose that social form as well as those who occupy it without hegemonic social sanction. (“Queer” 19-20)

Butler goes on to cite the plurifold and often contradicting meanings of the term. It can, on the one hand, mobilize lesbian activism, but on the other hand often represents a false unity of homosexual men and women where one of the two feels underrepresented. However, the constant contestation and rethinking of the term is where its potential lies and the power to unite people with different genders, sexes, ethnicities, beliefs, sexual orientations or sexual preferences (“Queer” 21-24).

Other scholars in the field have worked based on these considerations and modified them according to their own beliefs. For Stegu, there are two main uses of the word queer, a practical one, being the mere synonym of lesbian and gay and a theoretical one, which is connected to queer theory. Also many others mention queer as synonym for gay and lesbian (Stegu 302; Kilian 233; Bartle 534; McRuer 22; Lauretis v) and also Kosofsky Sedgwick admits that she often uses it as a synonym for gay or lesbian, referring to same sex desire, while she also mentions that it is often preferred in the context of how ethnicity, race and nationality fit into the context (*Tendencies* 8). Jagose, however, explicitly states that homosexual, gay and queer are not synonyms (97), but concedes that it is often used simply because it is easier to write and say than lesbian and gay (125).

Apart from these practical considerations, there are also the theoretical ideas on what queer actually means in an academic sense. Generally, it should be mentioned that queer does not have a universally accepted definition and some scholars even have opposing ideas of the term. Due to this not clearly defined form, however, the term queer remains a site of resistance against everything characterizing the norm (Jagose 127–28; Jakobsen 512; M. Warner xxvi). Sullivan even states that defining queer is a very “unqueer” thing to do, because of the intentional vagueness of the term (43). Kosofsky Sedgwick says that queer refers to everyone, who otherwise cannot be identified:

> […] the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedoes, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or … people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such. (*Tendencies* 8)

Furthermore, she presents the term in a very personal understanding of the concept, one that cannot really be pinpointed, as it can mean something completely different for various people, or it could even make a difference talking about oneself as queer or calling somebody else queer (8-9). Parallel to her considerations, Stegu sees queer theory as an important application of post-structuralist, anti-essentialist thinking and states the openness of the word queer as an advantage since it includes bisexuals, transgenders, transsexual and even heterosexual people, who do not fit into the norm or cannot identify with it. However, in this respect Stegu's investigation of gay online dating platforms suggests something different, which is relevant to show that the gay community is not the same as the queer community in this sense of the word, meaning that many homosexuals are not as understanding of different preferences as queer theory is. In his study there are many gay users who explicitly state that they are not looking for effeminate partners, even suggesting that those do not accept who they are and often even rudely insult feminine gays. Furthermore, members criticize that there is the possibility to choose "heterosexual" in the user profiles, claiming that this was neglecting years of gay rights movements (314-316). From a queer perspective such an attitude obviously defies the nature of queer theory and what it stands for and additionally corroborates Bartle's assessment of queer theory being a supremacist methodology (532). Stegu's conclusion is that homosexual people are not automatically queer, as they do often cling to their categories (317), which also Bartle confirms (533). The exact goal of queer theory is to make everybody see the problem categorization entails and therefore foster

greater acceptance for every sexual orientation (Stegu 317). In that respect Bartle goes on arguing that

> [t]he closed meaning of gay is also validated by the fact that its other meanings from before the second half of the 20th century have not been played with in the manner of queer. They are not stretched to encompass other fields of import, they are not accorded equal significance with our contemporary same-sex meaning, and they are not mobilized in the disruptive manner of queer. (533)

Halperin defines queer as an "identity without an essence", as it does not refer to something in particular (61) and it is due to that lack of specificity that queer became such a popular term (Jagose 124). Doty sees it as a term that marks not-heterosexual production and reception and finds it attractive because he himself searched for an ambiguous term, which comprises a wide field of cultural modes of expression, including the possibility to describe the queerness of bisexuals, transsexuals and heterosexuals (2). Lauretis says that

> [i]n a sense, the term queer was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them – or at the very least problematize them. (v)

Obviously, every term with controversial meaning is prone to criticism and not every homosexual person identifies with it (Jagose 132). In this context Kosofsky Sedgwick observes that there are, on the one hand, homosexual people who would not be considered queers, but, on the other hand, people who would objectively, in the sense that they do not have homoerotic feelings, be called straight, but are still definitely queer (*Tendencies* 8). This shows that queer is rather concerned with the relation of one's identity with the norm, than with sexual orientation. There are those who accept the word queer, and even feel pride in it, because it is new in its positive connotation and therefore eludes the negative connotations of older terms. Others argue that the new perception of a term also adopts the negative connotations of earlier terminology. What must be kept in mind here is that queer is not merely a newly defined term for an old identity, but in this sense new altogether and positive because it creates new discussion about identity itself. It is not a better version of lesbian and gay but is supposed to

question the assumption that the description itself is already a clear characterization. Neither is it a plot to discredit lesbian and gay altogether and does not ignore what was achieved in the name of those terms. The main accomplishment of queer is to draw attention to the requirements that are contained in the mobilization of identity categories (Jagose 133–58).

Another valid point that has to be made is the question of queer and its significance for sexuality, as sexuality is also present in the plays. Michel Foucault more specifically worked with ideas of sexuality and said that it is not a quality either, but a "kulturell verfügbare Größe [ist], durch Macht hervorgebracht und nicht einfach von ihr unterdrückt," (qtd. in Jagose 103) and sexuality is also a discursive construction and not a natural condition (Jagose 99–104). Stegu contrasts the terms gay and homosexual and concludes that the former is preferred because the latter exclusively refers to the sexual component (302), whereas Bartle states that gay is still primarily denoted by sexual meaning, but has subsumed the historical and identarian meanings, while queer interacts with those meanings (533). Sexuality is also one of the most obvious sites of disagreement between gay and lesbian studies and queer studies. While the former does not explicitly occupy itself with fringe sexual practices, queer "has emphasized sexual practice as an area where social and cultural meanings are contested and negotiated" (Piontek 81) and they are celebrated as relevant not only for homosexual people, but for everyone. In the 1980s many queers (e.g. drag queens) faced exclusion by other gay people, because they did not fit into the picture of a gay person. This illustrates the general problem with the definition of a normal, as soon as one identity is widely accepted as normal, those who do not fit into this frame are excluded. Therefore, queer is seen as such a rewarding term, because it is a site for people who do not fit in (Piontek 83). So, while gay and lesbian studies focus on proving to the straight people that homosexuals are just like them, queer studies embrace fringe elements of sexuality without, however, romanticizing sex as a whole, assuming that it is always good, but rather analyzing sexual practices and how they acquire and form meaning and how that changes over time (Piontek 84). Califia exemplifies this open attitude of queer by explaining that queer sex does not have to mean same-sex intercourse.

Intercourse of a lesbian who occasionally sleeps with a gay man can still be referred to as gay or queer sex (15).

With regards to sexuality Butler criticizes the use of man and woman outside of the biological sphere as it discriminates everyone who does not identify as either. She does not defend homosexuality as something natural but criticizes the term gender altogether and claims that gender identity undermines the legitimation of homosexuality. Gender is the repetition of performative acts until they ossify and therefore create a semblance of fixed identity (Butler, *Gender* 20), meaning that gender's formula includes two necessary premises: "the preexisting, deeply embedded cultural constructs and the enactment or materialization of those constructs by subjects." (Shugart 95).

Here, also the distinction of the sex-positive and the sex-negative view is relevant. The sex-positive fraction considers sexuality as an essential part in the development of gay culture and politics, while sex-negatives believe that homosexuals are reduced exclusively to their sexual desires, which makes straights about love and gays exclusively about lust. Furthermore, there is also the sex conservative group, which wants people to see homosexuals exactly as heterosexual, who merely want to be included in American democracy and show that only a minority of homosexuals is part of the sex obsessed sex-positive fraction (Piontek 34). Kramer, whose play will be analyzed in this thesis, is the most prominent member of the sex-negative group, saying that the public has to see that gays are more than homosexual sex, but

> that we have a sense of self and identity and relating such as exists in any religion philosophy or ethic background, and in which sex plays no more a role than it does in heterosexual identity. And if it takes an emergency epidemic to teach us this lesson, then let this be one of life's ironies. (*Reports* 18-19)

The irony in his argument about AIDS is quite palpable because it was also the AIDS epidemic that brought gay values closer to heterosexual and conservative values, which are also those stating that AIDS is a punishment for disturbing the natural order (Piontek 35). These two views on sexuality are also represented in *The Normal Heart*, where there are the activists who refuse to tell gay men to

stop having sex, in spite of the probability of it spreading AIDS, because they "have singled out promiscuity as their principal political agenda" (Kramer, *Normal* 30–31).

Apart from poststructuralist ideas, the AIDS epidemic had a major impact on the establishment of queer theory. In this context Crimp said that "the AIDS crisis brought us face-to-face with the consequences of both our separatism and our liberalism. And it is on this political conjuncture that the word "queer" has been reclaimed to designate new political identities." ("Girlfriend" 314). AIDS activism was one of the most relevant sites of restructuring sexual identities and where queer was heavily used, so there is a connection between this new form of activism and the new popularity of the term queer (Jagose 123).

In conclusion, it is valid to argue that the discussion of the terminology of homosexuality is still valid and scholars do not agree on the different implications of the terminology. However, Bartle's point of queer theory being a supremacist approach, punctuated by Stegu's findings suggest that the discussion remains a theoretical one, as the masses of neither heterosexuals nor homosexuals seem to grasp a more open attitude towards sexuality and sexual preferences and it still remains a field of homophobia and non-acceptance (317).

# 3. AIDS: a history of suffering

Before starting to investigate drama itself and after the introduction of the theoretical background of queer, it is also central to have a closer look at AIDS as a disease and the impact it had on the gay community. This provides context and shows that the plays are not mere fiction or exaggerations, but really provide a platform to process painful events in times of crisis.

AIDS is an insidious disease, when first infected with HIV people do not realize it as such. They may have a seroconversion illness, but those have not very specific symptoms like tiredness, fever, diarrhea, rash and flu like symptoms. The time until HIV is noticeable varies from patient to patient and may be months or

even years during which the immune system is continually damaged. Only a few patients experience swollen lymph nodes. Also the symptomatic stage of HIV is not particularly discernable as such, it includes “lack of energy, fevers and night sweats, persistent thrush in women and prolonged bouts of diarrhea.” (Healey 23). During the late stage of the infection, which is then called AIDS, patients contract various infections, including Kaposi’s Sarcoma, Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia, Toxoplasmosis, Cytomagalovirus disease and Candidiasis in the oesophagus, throat or lungs. Most people do not die from AIDS as such, but from one of the infections they contract because of it (Healey 24–28). Sontag correctly notes that strictly speaking it is not an illness per se, but a medical condition causing other diseases. Metaphorically AIDS is seen as an invasion, like cancer and regarding the way of transmitting it, it is a pollution, like syphilis, because the bodily fluids “pollute” the body with the illness (16-17).

The AIDS epidemic considerably changed the lives of homosexuals. Everything that has been achieved after the Stonewall riots in 1969 - celebration of sex for pleasure, same sex relationships and gays coming out of the closet and living “normal”, accepted lives - was destroyed, or at least took a considerable step back (Forstein 41). Forstein describes his experiences with HIV and AIDS as a psychiatrist, stating that by 1980 there had been a “significant minority of gay and bisexual men in San Francisco who did not know they had already been infected.” (44).

The first cases of HIV were described in 1981 and it was soon described as Gay Related Immune Deficiancy Syndrome (GRID) (Harden 22–23) and therefore the connection between the illness and homosexuals was drawn and became the public association. Especially as soon as it was apparent that it was a sexually transmitted disease the attitude towards gays immediately became hostile. Anti-gay positions became the center of political campaigns and prior to antibody tests, gays were sequestered to prevent them from having sex. (Forstein 45). Elected president in 1980, Ronald Reagan downsized health agencies aggravating the problems further (Harden 35, 97, 112). AIDS, and with it the homosexual community, was blamed for everything that went wrong in the US at the time. Those who died from the illness were denied burial from families and

churches, in their obituaries other diseases were given and if people knew about them having had AIDS, they would rather say they had been drug addicts than homosexuals (Forstein 45–46).

Contrary to the attitude of the general public, the gay community united in their fight against AIDS. Organizations were founded to raise money, provide information and help. Furthermore, they put pressure on political bodies to address AIDS. ACT UP was only the biggest and most well-known group stationed in New York, and the successor of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) (Harden 38, 112; Forstein 48), both of which Larry Kramer helped found. His experiences working with GMHC are recorded in his play *The Normal Heart*, which will be analyzed later in the thesis. The preaching of safer sex and the prompt to always use condoms, however, was seen as a curtailment of sexual freedom and often heavily criticized (Forstein 48). Forstein states that the disease would have been a much lesser threat, had the use of condoms not been dismissed by most of the gay community (49). Bailey argues that AIDS prevention is crucial not only to contain the epidemic, but also to maintain lesbian and gay culture (211). Even in medicine two scientific camps emerged, one following the path of AIDS as a sexually transmitted infection and the other being obsessed with the idea of overloading the immune system because of continual ingestion or anal entry of male semen. Hospital workers were often reluctant to treat their patients because they were afraid to be infected (Forstein 48).

Those negative feelings also entered the gay community itself. Gay men would feel guilt and shame because they contracted the disease and transported back to when homosexuality was seen as an illness. Many started to believe that it was God's punishment for their sodomy and therefore a lot of the achievements of gay liberation was revoked (NAMES Project 120). Especially gay couples with only one partner infected experienced significant problems. The uninfected partner was torn between love and the fear of infection or loss. The anguish of losing the partner often lead to not taking precautions to counter infection. Couples which had been about to break up stayed together because of the feeling of obligation, on the one hand, and not wanting to die alone on the other hand. In any case, shame was a constant companion for many gay couples. Often families

who had formerly repudiated their sons would rethink their positions for the sake of reconciliation, but often they only appeared after death to claim any properties of the deceased, frequently leaving the partners, who cared for them in times of need, with nothing. Frequently, they were even denied to spend the last days in the ICU with them or not given the information of what happens with the body (Forstein 49-50). These issues are all represented in the American theater scene (see 4.3 and 5).

One, and for many the only site for memorial, was the AIDS memorial quilt first displayed in 1987 in Washington D.C. It is a huge quilt, every section about 3,6 square meters consisting of 8 panels sewn together in memory of someone who had succumbed to AIDS. This art project is not only the biggest communal project in the world, but also an effective tool for HIV activism. In 1987, it consisted of 1,920 name panels. The numbers grew consistently and it now counts about 44,000 names (NAMES Project; Harden 120–21).

It was not only AIDS itself that caused death and suffering. As the illness weakens the body visibly, many men asked their doctors for anabolic steroids and growth hormones to restore muscle mass, but as many doctors would not give in, they injected themselves without medical supervision, thus suffering from side effects like changes in personality, maniac-like behavior and rage attacks. Others who fell ill, or their partners, and were without proper psychological treatment would establish suicidal tendencies, as the fear of pain, wasting away and mental decay was overwhelming (Forstein 53).

The identification of the HIV and with that, the introduction of an antibody test lead to new problems, as no treatment for the disease existed. The question was if knowing the diagnosis would feed into anxiety and suicidal tendencies. Again, opinions diverged, however the hidden existence of the HIV lead to some people living celibate lives and others living as if every day could be their last and therefore enjoying life, which also included unprotected sexual encounters. Still others used sex to manage their anxiety while spreading the disease further. (Forstein 54). Moreover, the antibody test created the myth that being tested HIV negative also meant immunity against AIDS, leading those men to continue in

their sexual practices without protection (Román 227). These facts, the feeling of being neglected and the impression of inevitability of contagion even made some gay men want to be infected (Román 234). Another issue was the stigma of AIDS as a disease of the white gay male, which caused gay and bisexual men of color to underestimate the threat despite numbers of cases in minority communities rising. The discussion on testing was acute until 1995 when the disease's understanding changed from a life threatening to a chronic disease (Forstein 55).

A real breakthrough in the AIDS epidemic obviously was the invention of a successful treatment. The first multidrug trials were approved in 1992, but as the monotherapy in the 1980s failed, people were reluctant to try out another drug. However, with the first success stories hope began to rise, but to such a degree that people were already talking about a cure. Additionally, not everyone had access to the pills, due to insurance issues or because they were excluded for their extensive drug use. Even successful treatment affected some patients negatively because they had already given up all their property and suddenly found out they would live. Still others could not put preparing to die behind themselves and were constantly anxious the effect of the treatment would wear off and so they did not resume their lives (Forstein 55–57; Harden ch. 5).

The new effective medication had also more general negative effects. The fatigue of protected sex lead to people calculating their life span in case newly infected with the outcome that they gave up protected sex, because they had never expected to live that long anyway. Additionally, the younger generations do not see HIV as a death sentence anymore and therefore are less cautious in protecting themselves. Besides, AIDS is not as present as it had been before and consequently the problem did not seem as urgent and life threatening. Additionally, Post Exposure (PEP) and Pre-Exposure (PreP) medication made people even less rigid in their use of condoms. Especially, PreP causes concern, as high-risk patients take it to ward off the infection and might therefore forgo the use of condoms altogether (Forstein 59–60).

Concerning all the cultural implications of the disease, Crimp asserts that AIDS does not exist. Obviously, he does not mean the illness as such, but the

underlying constructions of the disease, the culture and politics surrounding it (Crimp, “Introduction” 3). Similarly, Bailey says that “HIV is only a virus and AIDS merely a medical syndrome. They do not represent moral judgments on those who are sick or infected.” (210).

# 4. Theater – a site of identity formation

Up to now the first and more general part of context for the analysis was covered. Now, queer theater as the larger field to which AIDS plays belong will be explored and within also the significance of theater for activism and raising of awareness.

Sinfield states that it is valid to investigate theater and homosexuality together because of the former’s power as an institution, which can be observed from the censorship and sponsorship it received throughout the years. Additionally, theatricality is in general often regarded as queer in itself and therefore a site for dissident sexual identity formation, being called “a place for both disclosure and subterfuge.” (Sinfield 1-4). Savran awards theater with a higher degree of seriousness than other products of mass culture and therefore finds it is a legitimate site for analysis (*Queer* viii).

This section of the thesis gives a general history of homosexuality on stage, starting with the late 1920s and finishing before the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, to which, as the main concern of this thesis, a separate section will be dedicated. Furthermore, considerations about the terminology of homosexual, gay and queer theater will be considered.

## 4.1 The ‘coming out’ of theater - History

The stage very closely reflects the conditions the gay community faced throughout the years (Clum xi-xii). In 1925, when Jongh starts his history, homosexuality was viewed as illness, sin and crime, therefore homosexuals on stage were depicted as outcasts. But in reality, they were not allowed to be

represented at all, therefore certain stereotypes, like effeminacy or specific signs in look or diction, were used to inform the audience about the sexual orientation of the character (3). More specifically, playwrights oriented themselves to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Wilde, as the character of Dorian Gray was seen as the epitome of a homosexual man, with features that were otherwise appreciated in women. Obviously, also Wilde did not create an openly homosexual character, but for those who were able to read between the lines it was apparent (Jongh 16-17). According to Sinfield, however, though the goal of censorship was to suppress homosexuality, it actually made theater "a thoroughly queer space" (Sinfield 13) and later in his introduction Sinfield even asserts that "[t]he closet […] did not obscure queerness, […] it *created* it (24, original emphasis).

Ackerly's play *The Prisoner of War* (1925) was, according to Jongh, the first play about an obviously homosexual man that was staged in the 20th century and to him it also seems mysterious why it was not forbidden, as it contained hand holding and stroking of the head between two men. The play itself was something new in terms of homosexual plays as it was not about a dandy or an aesthete, but a prisoner who is attracted to a young soldier (Jongh 23-24). Characteristically for the time, Ackerly, although gay himself, was repelled by the idea of homosexuality and did not like effeminacy in men, which added to the reason that he never actually found love because his objects of desire were usually heterosexual (Jongh 27; Sinfield 84-87). Anyway, the play was very successful despite its forbidden homosexual theme (Jongh 30). Here it is observable that, on the one hand, homosexuality started to be accepted, but, on the other hand, the view of homosexuals was still one of disgust, which shows the deep entrenchment of society's negative picture of homosexuality.

The post war depression sparked a will in young people to openly enjoy live and revolt against the rigidity of their parents' generation, which led to a rejection of the patriarchal system and a more open stance toward homosexuality. In theater that inspired plays that were more open regarding sexuality in general. In the 1930ies many fringe theaters were established, which showed social drama (Jongh 19-20). West's play *The Drag* was performed before the censorship was established and therefore showed that a homosexual community existed (Jongh

22). Nevertheless, the play depicted homosexuality as an illness and even played a role in banning plays about homosexuality in New York (30) as even the author's goal was to warn America about the dangers of homosexuality, and women about men seducing their husbands (Jongh 34-35). The play was intended to be played on Broadway, but due to the Wales Padlock Act of 1927, which allowed the police to close a theater showing perverted content, it was closed down before it could be staged (Bernstein 203).

A typical example from that time was Shairp's play *The Green Bay Tree,* in which the homosexual character is represented as the villain. It is about a rich man who buys a boy, with who he then has a sexual relationship, which is obviously only implied. The boy wants to leave and get married, but the man does not allow it and tries to prevent him from leaving. Here homosexuality is typically equated with luxury and pleasure after the Wildean model of Dorian Gray. The lure with luxury, and generally living in luxury, was seen as unmannered and unmanly. The play was a commercial success and critics praised it, despite the unclearness of the subject (Jongh 35–40; Sinfield 117–19; Clum 93–99).

By 1950 homosexuals were said to threaten the US because they did not want to be found out and therefore were prone to being blackmailed by the communists to act as spies. Those suspicions were mainly spread by senator McCarthy, therefore referred to as McCarthyism (Jongh 49-50). Furthermore, homosexuality was portrayed as addiction and heterosexuality, when practiced in marriage, as the only place for sex (Jongh 50). Due to the political fears of the Cold War, even the FBI and the military sought out homosexuals to expel them (Jongh 51). Especially in the army the fear of gays was substantial and while gay volunteers were not even considered for service, many men discovered their sexuality during their time in the armed forces and when found out were dishonorably discharged (McConachie 60). However, the adolescents of the 1950s grew into the counter culture of the 1960s and, encouraged by TV to lead happy and satisfying lives, the generation invented new music, film genres and generally non-conformist practices, particularly noticeable in the theaters (Jongh 52). In the US that manifested in off and off-off Broadway productions (Jongh 53). *Tea and Symphony* was a play from that period, implicitly criticizing McCarthyism. It is

about a tormented boy, who finds save haven with a married woman to shield him from accusations of homosexuality. The new and crucial aspect in the play is that the young man does not show effeminate characteristics, so Anderson wants to show that also manly man can be homosexuals, additionally also saying that a boy with stereotypically female traits can still be heterosexual (Jongh 59; Clum 142-148). One of the most influential gay playwrights of the period was Tennessee Williams, who, homosexual himself, implicitly included homosexual characters and themes, who always suffer or cause suffering for others, as he saw his sexual desire as a sin (Jongh 72-82). A popular example is *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where Blanche DuBois is committed to an insane asylum after she witnesses her husband killing himself because he is homosexual. Another popular kind of theatrical responses to homosexuality were centered around the idea of curing homosexuals, displaying success stories of cured gays (Jongh 82-83).

Between 1958 and 1967 homosexuals still could not be openly displayed, but they were now not the villains anymore, but the “pathetic-unfortunate” (Jongh 5). Due to the building of the counter culture the conception of theater was challenged and the clash between old and new was clearly observable in the theater scene. Homosexual people started to perceive themselves as a minority with an identity and the Gay Rights Movement became more noticeable and climaxed in the Stonewall Riots of 1969. With that also the censorship in theater became less radical and homosexuality started to be more openly described (Jongh 87-88). In order to be able to display homosexuality despite the censorship, an underground theater scene developed, the first and most successful site was the Caffé Cino, which existed between 1958 and 1968 and is said to be the birthplace of openly gay and lesbian theater and the predecessor of Off-Off-Broadway productions (S. Warner 609). In the US the ban to depict homosexuality on stage was lifted in 1965 (Jongh 89), however, though homosexuals were not depicted as evil anymore, they were still looked at in contempt (Jongh 90). Shortly after the ban was lifted in the US, *A Patriot for Me* was staged. The play portrays exactly the fears the public had about homosexuals betraying their country out of fear to be found out and was a harsh

criticism on homosexuality as such. So, even though the bans were lifted on either side of the Atlantic, the public consensus was still that homosexuals are bad and not to be trusted (Jongh 112). This will only start to change significantly with the Stonewall Riots of 1969, but before them the only aspect that noticeably changed was that not all plays were exclusively hostile towards homosexuals, but they often pitied them in plays such as *A Song at Twilight* by Coward, Dyer's *Staircase* or Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (Jongh 120-135).

As already mentioned, 1969 marks a turn in the lives of homosexuals, as well as the gay theater scene. Sodomy laws were repealed, in England two consenting adult males having intercourse could not be prosecuted anymore (1967), the American psychiatric association did not regard homosexuality as an illness anymore (1973) and in Great Britain and the US gay men and lesbians were not excluded from employment anymore (Jongh 140). In theater the changes were also severe: the off-off-Broadway productions were not only a counter movement to Broadway, but, fired by Gay Liberation, exhibited a whole new aesthetic and technique, with fresh themes and ideology (Jongh 143). The homosexuals on stage emancipated themselves from shame and misery and did not adhere to the stereotypes and examined and reinterpreted the censored past, observable in plays like Sherman's *Bent*, Rabe's *Streamers* Mitchell's *Another Country* or Whitemore's *Breaking the Code*, which were all made into films later (Jongh 144). In these plays the rebellious gay heroes fight to live openly homosexual lives in a world that would not allow it (Jongh 144). Furthermore, there were even playhouses exclusively dedicated to gay theater like The Playhouse of the Ridiculous and The Ridiculous Theater Company (Jongh 144). The last play that has to be mentioned from this period is *Torch Song Trilogy* by Fierstein, which Jongh calls "the first popular drama about homosexuality" (171). It is a play about a drag queen with maternal feelings wishing for a relationship within heterosexual forms (Küßendorfer 254; Jongh 171). The play rather punctuates the similarities of homo- and heterosexuality rather than underlining the differences and was therefore also popular among the heterosexual audience (Klüßendorf 254; Jongh 171–72).

During the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic homosexuality was deemed dangerous again and the illness became a prominent topic in theater, not only depicting the suffering, but it took on an even bigger function in informing and calling the audience to action. Already from this short introduction it can be observed that Jongh in saying "[t]he theatre, in its depiction of homosexuals, reflected the values and beliefs of the world beyond it," (5) summarized the homosexual theater scene very well (1-5). In the following section, the terminology of gay and queer theater will be investigated.

## 4.2 Theater – homosexual, gay, queer

The term queer for gay and lesbian theater was already used before queer theory in the 1960s, however meaning that something about the play is not quite right, so in a more literal sense of the word (Sinfield 5). Homosexual was seen as a more formal term and gay enters usage as a rather self-conscious word at first and is then used for campaigning purposes (Sinfield 5). In the 1980s, still before queer theory, queer as a term for theater returns again when gay and lesbian seem to become inadequate as sexuality in theater becomes more diverse (Sinfield 6).

When queer theater as a concept deriving from queer theory comes in, is questionable and probably not even the right way to approach the topic. Some scholars call it queer theater, some others never mention the term (Jongh) and again others use it for theater before queer theory was even described (Sinfield, S. Warner). Therefore, it is more useful to analyze the action and the characters in terms of their queerness, determining from them if the play could be considered queer in the sense of queer theory. Another possible way of looking at it would be from the point of view of the audience, which again is largely contingent, among other factors, on time: while certain acts might be quite obviously queer from today's point of view, in a time when homosexuality was in itself unthinkable, the audience would also rather not perceive a play as such (Sinfield 19-20). However, those arguments count for the closet plays from times of censorship,

which would most certainly not be considered queer in the sense of queer theory, a theory accepting all kinds of sexualities.

For Savran the end of the times of closet drama comes in the 1990s, so in terms of analysis with regard to queer theory, his considerations are most reliable. He defines queer theater through its method of the deconstructionist performance, calling it a “self-presentation that at once asserts and problematizes identities and desires” and saying that it “carve[s] out a space for an autonomous, dissident subject.” (*Queer* 67). However, his most convincing definition of queer theater, which can truly be seen in the sense of queer theory is, when he says that “the new queer performance attempts less to prove that perverts are normal than to prove that all desire is perverted.” (*Queer* 67). This definition very strongly echoes the definition of queer being a site for every sexual orientation and desire, which does not correspond to the norm. He even goes on saying that queer theater attempts “to problematize the putative oppositions between dissident and normative sexualities, on the one hand, and between realist and avant-gardist dramaturgy, on the other.” (67). The plays he specifically mentions are *Angels in America* by Kushner and *Love! Valour! Compassion!* by McNally. According to him the features that make them prototype queer plays are the direct address, the shuffle of temporal sequence, the mixing of memory, fantasy and desire, the cinematic way in which scenes intercut, the featuring of drag, the spectacularizing of the male body, the representation of the volatile relationship between the private and the public, the introduction of a sense of community and lastly, the foregrounding of the performance itself. Savran even sees a rupture with gay drama that emerged around Stonewall, because now the identity, and its many different aspects, is in the center of attention. There are, for example, the playwrights who explore their own identities through their work, or also the disruption of identity, so the author, actor or spectator taking on different identities than what they would currently identify with (*Queer* 70). If a play is going to work the audience must identify with at least one of the characters, so before theater was centered around the act of looking, but now identification is an integral part, which is “by no means consistent and immutable. Rather, it is as unstable, improvisatory, and unpredictable as the theatrical event itself.” (Savran, *Queer*

70–71). Dolan also defines queer theater through queer theory saying that queer in the context of theater is marked by “[d]ifferences, multiplicities, gaps, contradictions, desires [and] sexualities.” (2-3). Regarding this issue, Graff adversatively argues that queer theater is largely neglected by queer theory, although it was central in the establishment of a visible gay community (11). He explains this development with the shift from gay and lesbian studies to queer studies. The site of analysis shifted from drama to performance, as queer theory focuses on cultural and social practices (Graff 13). Roberts, even says that the term queer never even arrived in the theaters at all, but rather that the queer movement took inspiration from gay theater concerning the identity formation exhibited there (178-79).

While queer theater is often identified by the sexual identity of the playwrights (Savran, *Queer* 81), I would, for the analysis of this thesis rather suggest an identification due to the action and characters in the plays, as Savran legitimately wonders why categorization would take place based on instable identities and that a work of art must not necessarily represent the playwright’s identity (*Queer* 81).

In the following there will be an overview of the most important AIDS plays, with a selection that addresses different issues the AIDS crisis caused, many of which were discussed in section 3 of my thesis.

## 4.3 AIDS plays: theater of suffering

Theater played a special role during the emergence of the AIDS epidemic. Román even argues that “performance has participated in shaping our understanding and experience of AIDS.”(xiii). Moreover, due to AIDS drama’s honesty, as it is mostly written by people from the gay community, who saw their lovers, friends and colleagues die, it gives a moving inside view of the suffering caused by AIDS (Sinfield 315). Also, the authenticity of the plays adds to their honesty as well as the fact that they are very close to real life and to incidents that really happened and people that really suffered through the disease. In order

to successfully reach the audience in that way monologues and soliloquies are often used to gap the distance between performances and playwrights, so they can directly speak to the audience through a character (Sinfield 320–21).

The major aims of AIDS theater are to inform the public about AIDS, to create a community among those affected by the disease and to honor those who have died (Román xxiv; Cady 16). Furthermore, they challenge perceptions of AIDS to help cope with its repercussions (Román xxiv; Cady 16). Drama is said to be specifically suited for those aims (Haas 3). So, more specifically put, the authors want to achieve a catharsis in the audience, guiding them through the stages of grief and acting therapeutically (Sinfield 321). That is especially why identification with at least one character in a play is crucial in AIDS theater (Sinfield 321). What is also prominent in those therapeutic plays is that issues concerning individuals are often at the center of attention, as for example the issue of health insurance in the US. Very often the characters have no sufficient insurance to be treated or the problem arises in a general context, for example in *As Is*, *A Quiet End*, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* or *The Normal Heart*. However, the issues are mentioned and foregrounded as a problem, but no further considerations or solutions are suggested (Sinfield 321).

While queer theater as a whole can be considered rather universally in Britain and the US, AIDS plays are a American phenomenon and few British plays exist that exclusively deal with AIDS as their prime subject, because gay activism in Britain is part of the politically left camp and the issue of AIDS in theater is often embedded within other issues (Sinfield 326).

### 4.3.1 *The Normal Heart* and after - History

Most scholars are in agreement that AIDS theater starts with Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* and William Hoffman's *As Is* in 1985 (Jones ix; Sinfield 321; Haas 8; Cady 16; S. Warner 616). However, Romàn points out that there were productions by Robert Chesley, Jeff Hagedorn, Rebecca Ranson and San Francisco's A.I.D.S. Show collaborators already in 1983 (Román xx) and

additionally he demands that also various forms of AIDS activism should be considered theater; his body of investigation includes

> mainstream and conventional theater, including Broadway; performance art, solo performance, and interdisciplinary performance pieces; and community-based and/or community-specific projects, including AIDS educational theatre initiatives and/or site-specific performances." (Román xxv)

Still, as this thesis concentrates on the written form of certain plays and their film adaptations, and Kramer's is the first widely discussed one, it is still valid to choose it as a starting point for the investigation. Jongh calls *The Normal Heart* one of the most crucial plays about homosexuality, but also finds that its success depended more on Kramer than on the play itself (180). Román cites the immense media coverage of the play which was unparalleled to any other literary work on AIDS up to that point (58).

Especially in the political context the play is highly relevant as it recreates the beginnings of the AIDS crisis from 1981-84 and the founding of one of the most influential and successful AIDS organizations, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), which is the predecessor of ACT UP. The group worked to raise awareness for the illness, provide information for gay men and get attention from the media and politics (Sinfield 321). So, the play primarily depicts the idleness of the government in respect to the AIDS epidemic (Jongh 181), accusing political leaders and reproaching the structures of power (Román 61). Furthermore, the play represents the struggle within gay society, the issues of closeted men, the disagreement between assimilationists, who seek approval in the heterosexual society and queers, who fight for their own identity and sexual liberty (Sinfield 321; Román 61). The problem with the politics in this, and many other plays of the genre is that they are mainly focused on finding someone to blame, often, inspired by the fact that straight society blames homosexuals for the disease, the plays rejects culpability by merely handing it back to the society, which blamed them in the first place (Sinfield 322). The idea of blame is very prominent in *The Normal Heart*, not only are politics blamed, but also the closeted activists who only work in the background out of fear of being found out, the wealthy, dominant gays, because they do nothing and of course all gay men, who do not stop having

sex, although it has been identified as a way of spreading AIDS (Sinfield 322). Jongh argues that Kramer bases his criticism on the gay community of ten years earlier, when they met in bathhouses and back-rooms to enjoy their sexuality, as a homosexual relationship was illegal and therefore bore many risks, this was what many gay men resorted to (181). His criticism is very straightforward and can be observed in assertions like “All we’ve created is generations of guys who can’t deal with each other as anything but their erections” (52) or “guys can only think with their cocks” (51). Kramer’s harsh criticism is a typical way for such a polemic play to call to action. According to Kramer the only achievement of Gay Liberation was the creation of gay promiscuity and that is all they are fighting to achieve again during the AIDS epidemic (Jongh 182). The main character in *The Normal Heart*, Ned, asserts repeatedly that he does not look for a partner, but when he does find one, Felix, with who he leads a relationship according to heterosexual norms, Felix contracts AIDS. In a final death bed scene, the two have a quasi-marriage ceremony (Clum 75; Jongh 183). With his play and consequently generally his attitude, Kramer suggests that Gay Liberation caused the AIDS epidemic because it, as proclaims Ned Weeks, “didn’t […] fight for the right to get married instead of the right to legitimize promiscuity.” (81). To show the problems of gay relationships during gay liberation Kramer uses Ned and Felix. Right in the beginning of their relationship they have sex in a bath house, like many other gay people at the time, however Ned repeatedly proclaims that he does not look for a lover (Clum 76), to which Felix answers with one of the most important messages from the play “Men do not just naturally not love – they learn not to” (Kramer, *Normal* 47). During the analysis of the cinematic adaptation of the play these issues will be revisited.

*As Is* is the stark opposite to *The Normal Heart*. Where the latter condemns sexuality, the former celebrates it. In the play a typical homme fatal falls ill and then reveals his promiscuous past in form of memory sequences. Hoffman’s work is all about sex, the characters lived lives without compromises when it comes to sexuality, until the AIDS epidemic struck which makes them exercise more caution (Jongh 185). Apart from sexuality, also the building of a community around the ill person plays a key role. Rich, the main character with AIDS in the

play, gathers family and friends around him, challenging the idea of AIDS patients being the outcast due to fear of contagion of their loved ones. Additionally, it draws attention to public support installations like support groups and hotline interactions. Most importantly, however, the play shows that having AIDS is not only about dying, but also about living. The main character is still alive in the end of the play, which finishes with a loving seduction scene, showing the audience that even with AIDS, the patient can have a fulfilled sex life until his very end, again contesting the idea of the patient as the social outcast (Román 59–60). Due to its lack of harsh criticism, excluding of political issues and primarily positive tone, *As Is* was a major success (Román 60).

Also Chelsey chooses the sex-positive path. In *Night Sweat* the ill character tells another character that he is going to die and receives the answer that while that is true, until then he will, "[l]ive until the very moment you die! […] And make love! Make love in every possible, safe and sensible way! Enjoy it all, from the most delicate cruising to the heaviest S & M trips." (qtd. in Clum 43). Generally, Chelsey's drama is very sensual and full of erotic charge, even in the saddest moments, much more so than many other AIDS plays (Clum 42).

Interestingly, most of the characters in the plays are white and affluent people who would not have thought, before the outbreak of AIDS, that they would need the State and who are shocked that it would not be on their side (Sinfield 323). In this respect, in an interview with Lisa Power, Kramer said that he has been

> accepting and facing […] that [he has swallowed] all these myths […] about humanity and America and "one voice can make a difference" – these things that we're taught, that democracy works and all – turn out to be bullshit when you're gay or have AIDS or are a member of a minority or whatever reason (qtd. in Sinfield 323)

and Power quite fittingly asks if "[t]hat was a surprise?" (qtd. in Sinfield 323). So, here one immediately realizes that Kramer comes from the beforementioned affluent background and is shocked that he would not be supported. Despite of all the calls for action, Kramer's play ends on a positive note with reconciliation and a marriage, thus the play remains in its therapeutic mode. Due to the positive ending the question that might arise is, if the action, for which it so vehemently

called, is even necessary (Sinfield 323). Here, Sinfield seems to miss the big picture. While it is true that the play ends on a positive note, one cannot forget that Felix still dies and that they actually wanted to spend their lives together, but then only have a few years in which most of the time they were concerned with imminent death and unrewarded hope.

During the 1990s the focus of AIDS drama shifts: the plays do not exclusively concentrate on the disease anymore, but use AIDS as a mode for transporting other issues (Schnierer 174–80). This can be observed in Kushner's *Angels in America*, which takes on a number of issues, among which AIDS is the prime topic, which enables the occupation with other concerns. As *Angels* is such a popular play one section is exclusively dedicated to it.

Shortly after the antibody test was invented, another type of AIDS play, or rather a new character in AIDS plays, emerged, the HIV-negative man as the protagonist. These plays revolve around the characters who are not infected with the disease, which can be observed in Rudrick's *Jeffrey* from 1993 or McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* from 1994. The problem with HIV negativity is that gay men tested negative often define themselves as HIV negative gay men and therefore delimit infected gay men as the other, discriminating them (Román 226). So, gay men generally started to think of themselves as having a status and created a binarism of HIV positive and HIV negative, which was also often represented in theater. The following example is taken from Fierstein's one act play *On Tidy Endings*, part of his trilogy *Safe Sex*. It is a conversation between Arthur, who has just lost his partner to AIDS and this partner's former wife:

> MARION. I keep meaning to ask you; how are you?
> ARTHUR. *(At first puzzled and then)* Oh, you mean my health? Fine. No, I'm fine. I've been tested, and nothing. We were very careful. We took many precautions. Collin used to make jokes about how we should invest in rubber futures.
> MARION. I'll bet.
> ARTHUR. *(Stops what he's doing)* It never occurred to me until now. How about you?
> MARION. *(Not stopping)* Well, we never had sex after he got sick.
> ARTHUR. But before?

> MARION. *(Stopping but not looking up)* I have the antibodies in my blood. No signs that it will develop into anything else. And it's been five years, so my chances are pretty good that I'm just a carrier.
> ARTHUR. I'm so sorry. Collin never told me.
> MARION. He didn't know. In fact, other than my husband and the doctors, you're the only one I've told. (qtd. in Román 227)

This is the very ending of the play, there is no discussion afterwards on what it means to be an HIV negative gay man, or an HIV positive straight woman. It is a dramatic device signaling the reversal of luck and gives the audience something to reflect upon (Román 239). Another example is Rudnick's play *Jeffrey*. Jeffrey, the protagonist with a promiscuous past, swears off sex out of fear of contagion, after a condom breaks at the beginning of the play. He meets a handsome man, Steve, who courts him. After agreeing to go on a date the following scene evolves during a dinner conversation of the two and another couple:

> STEVE. And Jeffrey?
> JEFFREY. Yes?
> STEVE. I just … okay, just so there are no surprises …
> JEFFREY. Uh-huh-
> STEVE. I'm HIV-positive.
> JEFFREY. *(after a beat)* Um, okay, right.
> STEVE. Does that make a difference?
> JEFFREY. No. No. Of course not.
> STERLING. *(dismissing any doubt)* Please.
> DARIUS. HIV-positive men are the hottest.
> STEVE. I mean – I'd understand. I'd be hurt and disappointed, but - I just wanted to be clear.
> JEFFREY. No really, it's fine – I mean, come on, it's the nineties, right? (qtd. in Román 229)

Contrary to what he says in this scene, Jeffrey cancels the date and breaks off any contact to his homosexual friends and even leaves New York City. Later in the play even a dead friend visits Jeffrey, trying to make him enjoy his life once more:

> DARIUS. Jeffrey, I'm dead. You're not.
> JEFFREY. I know that.
> DARIUS. You do? Prove it.
> JEFFREY. What do you mean?
> DARIUS. Go dancing. Go to a show. Make trouble. Make out. Hate AIDS, Jeffrey. Not Life. (qtd. in Román 240)

So, also the anguish and fear of contagion of the HIV negative men is often represented in drama (Román 243).

One aspect that distinguishes drama from other literary work is the performance (Clum 41). Graff calls AIDS performance “a cultural practice keeping the dead ‘alive’,” (16) meaning that theater becomes a site of memorial, where people can mourn those who have succumbed to the disease. This is especially relevant regarding AIDS, as people often would not admit to having known someone who contracted it because being associated with gay men at the time was condemned. Therefore, people had the possibility to grieve at the theater (Graff 16). Additionally, the plays portray people with AIDS as part of the community and thus it also communicates to those not directly affected that the ones who die are people from their immediate surroundings. That is also the reason why AIDS performances were often included in fund raising events or generally in AIDS activism (Graff 16). In AIDS drama acting the part of the ill character bears a certain challenge for the actor, as in the case of disease the body becomes a focal point for the audience. In the special case of AIDS there are not even specific signs of the disease, The most well-known marks were the lesions of Karposi’s Sarcoma, but other than that, there are no specific signs of a person having AIDS (Clum 40–41). Chelsey is one of the most physical playwrights of AIDS drama and in his plays, he wants to force the audience to come face to face with the ramifications of the disease. Not even in his written work he lets the reader escape the markings of his lesions by adding a picture of his naked body (Clum 42).

While gay AIDS dramas are varied in style and focus, they mostly share two elements: “a reaffirmation of the pasts of the characters, and the affirmation of a radically changed present that not only vindicates but celebrates gayness.” (Clum 67). Clum sees *As Is* as the prototypical play regarding the reflection of a changed world, because it reflects the past and builds new links from that past to the uncertain present. Even the basic plot line of the play lies in the intertwining of past and present: Saul leaves his partner, Rich for another lover and then falls ill. When Rich comes to collect his belongings, he learns that Saul has AIDS and that because of it his new boyfriend left him. So, Rich stays with him “Till death

do us part" (qtd. in Clum 69) and they relive their past together. Thus, *As Is* is not only a play about accepting the disease, but also about accepting one's past without regrets (Clum 70).

Love is very central to many AIDS plays and will be a substantial part of the analysis of *The Normal Heart* (see 5.3.2). Often relationships, which are already doomed to end, or have already ended are revived with a lot of emotion and caring. Very often love is questioned by the ill partner, who is wondering if the other will still love him when the disease progresses. In *As Is* Rich and Saul have the following conversation:

> RICH. But what happens when it gets worse? It's gonna get worse.
> SAUL. I'll be here for you no matter what happens.
> RICH. Will you?
> SAUL. I promise. (qtd. in Clum 75)

A similar scene can be observed in *Eastern Standard* by Greenberg:

> PETER. When are you going to leave me?
> DREW. *(turns to him; simply)* When you aren't there anymore. (qtd. in Clum 75)

In *The Normal Heart* the search for love is punished, as Felix contracts AIDS while looking for love in the baths. He himself says, "I sometimes make mistakes and look for love in the wrong places" (Kramer, *Normal* 47). *Angels in America* is the counter example, as here Prior, the ill partner, is left by Louis because he cannot cope with the his partner's illness.

### 4.3.2 The first and second generation of AIDS plays

AIDS plays are divided into first and second-generation AIDS plays, which are mostly, but not exclusively categorized by when they appeared. Additional characteristics are the dramatic mode and matter. First generation plays are mostly educational, they aim to inform the gay community about AIDS and are "designed to ensure and enhance the physical, emotional, spiritual, and political survival of the gay community" (Jones x). Furthermore, they have a traditional form, a sentimental tone and an assimilationist aim, so they are often sex-

negative and support monogamy and the traditional family values (Jones x). Traditional first generation plays are Hoffman's *As Is* and Fierstein's *Safe Sex* (Jones x). According to Sinfield, first generation plays are, due to their primarily educational goal, not that ambitious concerning form and theme. The plays aim to reach a wide audience and want to help gay people with their struggles due to the epidemic (Sinfield 317).

In second generation plays AIDS is no longer an event that has just happened and shocked the gay community, but a reality that has to be accepted and integrated into life, therefore first generation plays are very serious and take a lot of responsibility, whereas second generation plays include a lot of humor (Jones xi). Kekki says that second generation drama revolves around the genres of "comedy, farce, satire, and romance," but also defines a third phase, which is dominated by *Angels in America* (Kekki 278). Another shift in the second generation plays takes plays in the reality of the illness. In first generation plays AIDS is a relatively immediate death sentence, while in second generation plays the plot revolves around how to live with the disease, so the plot revolves around the coping with the disease, rather than the coping with death (Barnes-McLain 117). Jones starts her anthology of second generation AIDS plays with Holsclaw's *The Baddest of Boys*, which she describes as a typical second generation play because of its variety of characters, the festive and fearless tone and the grotesque representation of AIDS, provoking consternation and mirth at the same time (Jones xi-xii).

Another way to categorize AIDS drama is in outside and inside drama. An outside play shows the homosexual and the people with AIDS as problems for "normal" society and an inside play deals with the way in which the sick person handles his illness (Clum xiv). No matter how well intentioned a play is, they are mostly outside, or problem plays, marking the person with AIDS as the problem (Clum 54). Still, no matter if first or second generation, if inside or outside, what AIDS drama does is "dismantle the misapprehensions about AIDS while affirming the person with AIDS. They also, in the process, deconstruct oppressive constructions of homosexuality that have been perpetuated by popular dramatic representation." (Clum 39).

### 4.3.3 The Great Work Begins: *Angels in America* and its Queerness

*Angels in America* by Tony Kushner is a two-part play. Part one, *Millennium Approaches* was first staged in 1991 at the Eureka Theater in San Francisco with a reading of the draft of part two *Perestroika*. The first performance of the whole play was in 1992 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and lasted up to 7 hours (Román 202–03; Kekki 267).

Both parts, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* start with monologues. In the first part a Rabbi speaks at the funeral of Louis's grandmother, Sarah Ironson. The Rabbi is used as a metaphor for the voyage from the old to the new world, and in this case, it is the voyage into a world full of crisis, as already the beginning is marked by bad news (the name of the first act). Harper finds out that her husband is gay, Roy Cohn learns that he has AIDS and Prior Walter tells his boyfriend that he is infected. Following is the act of break-ups: Harper and Joe as well as Prior and Louis separate. The whole fictional world becomes more and more chaotic and the chaos is designated by appearances: an angel emerges to speak to Prior, Cohn is visited by Ethel Rosenberg and also Harper escapes into imaginary realms (Kekki 283). The monologue at the beginning of *Perestroika* is held by a Bolshevik Aleksii Antedilluvianovich, who, as well as the Rabbi, signifies the world before chaos, in this case the world before the end of the Soviet Union. The plot starts with Cohn being hospitalized and Belize becoming his nurse. Generally, the angel is much more present in the second part, repeatedly visiting Prior, telling him about the commencement of his prophetic work to restore the chaotic world to its stasis. Later, in the fourth act all the secrets are revealed with a focus on relationships and intrigues. The finale of the play partly takes place in heaven and feels apocalyptic (Kekki 283–84).

Kekki calls *Angels in America* the epitome of the universalizing view Sedgwick talks about in *Axiomatic* (see 2.2), because "the homosexuality that resides within heterosexuality is constantly brought out into the daylight, [so] heterosexuality will shift closer toward queer sexuality" (Kekki 263). He calls the plays "a queer work in progress" and "a set of queer practices". According to Kekki the queerness of

the plays manifests in the fact that they do not underline the binary opposition of hetero- and homosexual, but gayness is in the center of attention, without an opposition (264-65). Therefore it acknowles the identity without an essence (see 2.2).

> […] Kushner's *Angels in America* is a queer text. My argument, following the central idea of queer theory, is that the play, more or less deliberately, takes into account the existence of the center and the margin, but constructs them differently. By repeating all the features connected to homosexuality, it universalizes homosexuality into a component of the historical and social construction of the nation. By constantly turning hegemonic assumptions upside down, *Angels in America* radically transforms the epistemological basis of homosexuality. Defining homosexuality as the center, the play presents a radical vision of a culture that is undergoing a profound change." (Kekki 266)

Kekki identifies five different gay identities in the play and therefore argues that the play queers gay identity, as it punctuates the fact that there is no need for one prototypical gay identity anymore, but that there are numerous possibilities (286).

The first gay identity is represented by Roy Cohn. Modeled after Senator McCarthy's chief counsel, he was one of the prime adversaries of homosexuality, although presumed homosexual himself and he even died of AIDS in 1986, which he never admitted, claiming other diseases. In the play Cohn represents the conformist fraction of homosexuals and is an extremely homophobic gay man, who exclusively strives for power and also thinks that identity is constituted by power (Kekki 288). When his doctor informs him that he has AIDS, he answers:

> ROY. AIDS. Your problem, Henry is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.
> HENRY. No?
> ROY. No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does on individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. Not who I fuck or who fucks me, but who will pick up the phone when I call, who owes me favors. This is what label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a puissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council.

> Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me, Henry? (Kushner 46)

Despite his ruthlessness, Cohn embodies some views of militant queer activism, which also shares the opinion that the liberal gay movement cannot change society, because it does not possess enough power or, as Cohn phrases it, clout (Kekki 288).

Another gay identity is that of the prototypical Jewish gay man, embodied by Louis. He is a good, though self-conscious man, who aspires to do honorable deeds and to be politically correct. That is why he is ridden with guilt because he left his former boyfriend Prior, who suffers from AIDS, and he is constantly troubled by what he did (Kekki 289–90). At one point he says, “I have no right not to suffer, if I failed to suffer the universe would become unbalanced.” (Kushner 204).

Belize represents the third gay identity in the plays, the gay black man, the most discriminated group of all in this context, who cannot adjust to the American society. He is also the least known character, the audience does not get to know his background and even his real name appears only in passing (Kekki 291). In a discussion with Louis he says:

> Well I hate America, Louis. I hate this country. It’s just big ideas, and stories, and people dying, and people like you.
> The white cracker who wrote the national anthem knew what he was doing. He set the word “free” to a note so high nobody can reach it. That was deliberate. Nothing on earth sounds like freedom to me.
> You come with me to room 1013 over at the hospital, I’ll show you America. Terminal, crazy and mean. (Kushner 230)

Another suppressed minority represented in the plays are the Mormons, portrayed by the gay Joe Pitt who separates from his wife Harper due to his homosexuality. Furthermore, he is the typical closeted gay married man who has not yet fully accepted his sexual orientation (Kekki 293).

> JOE. Not gay. I’m not gay.
> LOUIS. Oh. Sorry. *(Blows his nose loudly)* It’s just …
> JOE. Yes?
> LOUIS. Well, sometimes you can tell from the way a person sounds that … I mean you *sound* like a …

> JOE. No I don't. Like what?
> LOUIS. Like a Republican.
> *(Little pause. Joe knows he's being teased; Louis knows he knows. Joe decides to be a little brave.)*
> JOE. *(Making sure no one else is around)* Do I? Sound like a …?
> LOUIS What? Like a …? Republican, or …? Do *I*?
> JOE Do you what?
> LOUIS Sound like a …?
> JOE Like a …? I'm confused. (Kushner 30)

Joe represents not only the minority of the Mormons, but also a coming out story, marked by the migration to the big city. Joe came from Utah to New York City, which is often the turning point for characters to find their sexuality. For a Mormon his coming out is especially painful, because in Mormonism homosexuality is regarded as a sin (Kekki 294–95).

The last identity Kekki identifies is the one he regards as the typical queer identity, which is represented by Prior, the play's protagonist and determined by his sexual indeterminacy. This indeterminacy is represented in a scene in which he prepares his drag outfit:

> One wants to move through life with elegance and grace, blossoming infrequently but with exquisite taste, and perfect timing, like a rare bloom, a zebra orchid … One wants … But one rarely gets what one wants, does one? No. One does not. One gets fucked. Over. One … dies at thirty, robbed of … decades of majesty. Fuck this shit. Fuck this shit.
> *(He almost crumbles; he pulls himself together; he studies his handiwork in the mirror)*
> I look like a corpse. A corpsette. Oh my queen; you know you've hit rock-bottom when even drag is a drag. (Kushner 31)

Prior here exists as neither man nor human, but his identity is unspecified, therefore queer (Kekki 296–97). Kekki quotes Butler's *Bodies that matter* in that context, where she says that a body does not exist as man or woman and it does not produce sexual identity, by defining as a corpsette Prior's body is unintelligible and thus in the domain of the abject (qtd. in Kekki 297). Due to the fact that Prior is sitting in front of a mirror in this scene also Lacan's mirror stage can be applied, which generally talks about children who resume an ideal-I when they first look in the mirror. When Prior sees himself, he realizes that he has no ideal-I, that there is no ideal self, and this shows the constructedness of the gay identity and

through his comment of even drag being a drag, he feels that not having a true identity is hard, because he always has to challenge and newly invent himself. Therefore, it also shows that Prior does not want to be identified as either hetero or homo, but as a queer person (Kekki 299). Furthermore, the Angel is personified queerness, with its eight vaginas and numerous phalli it surpasses any idea of gender or sexuality. Vejdovsky fittingly says that "[t]he angel is both (super)human and angelic, male and female, gay and straight, maternal and paternal, protective and threatening, oracular and blundering." (78).

*Angels in America* prioritizes the feelings of fear, anger, despair and rage (Román 211) which inform the political dimensions of the play and of the times. The interplay between the structures of feelings sanctioned by the dominating center and the acts of intervention which suggest new structures of feelings emerging from people engaged in the fight against AIDS lies at the heart of *Angels in America*. In the play Kushner sets out to examine the system of feelings in respect to AIDS, among others hope (Román 211). On the microlevel hope emerges from the restructuring of relationships. Generally, all the characters utter are despair, loneliness and insecurities. There are only small instances that let the audience feel hope, fractions of scenes which show that hope is not pointless, for example in act I scene 7 Harper and Prior connect, or Joe and Louis' short relationship has hopeful moments, but is otherwise primarily marked by isolation (Román 212). *Millennium Approaches* is mostly defined by the isolation of the characters, whereas *Perestroika* is more positive by focusing on the friendship of Belize and Prior as sign of the new structure of feelings based on community and solidarity (Román 213).

# 5. Analysis[2]

After an extensive introduction to all relevant aspects in connection to AIDS and how it is turned into a major theme in theater and a basic introduction to Kushner's two-part play *Angels in America* and Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, these will now

[2] Terminology used for film analysis see Ryan and Lenos or Faulstich

be analyzed. The emphasis of the analysis of *Angels* lies on the theatrical instances in the play and how they are transported onto the screen, while in *The Normal Heart* the depiction of emotions in theater and film will be contrasted.

However, before the actual analysis there are two theoretical points that need to be addressed beforehand: on the one hand some considerations of adaptation studies are given, especially in regard to the distinction of theater and film, as those are two very similar media, which have many aspects in common. On the other hand, a small introduction to emotion studies is given, with considerations about the nature of emotions and the importance of literature for the study of emotions.

## 5.1 Adaptation studies – Theater or Film, does it matter?

A lot of literature about literature-to-film adaptations exists, the interesting aspect though, is that they mostly talk about fiction being turned into films, not theater. The question in that respect is if stage adaptations are not even closer to a film than to a novel, therefore using adaptation studies, which mostly deal with novels might not really be the suitable tool to analyze the film adaptations of *Angels in America* and *The Normal Heart*. In the following I use Snyder's consideration of film analysis and compare them to theater.

Theater and film do share a lot of aspects, even much of the terminology and subjects of analysis are used in both genres, for example mis-en-scène and within the costumes, make-up, lighting, props and actors and their gestures, movements and behavior. Additional information in a film, which has to be considered is the camera work. While in theater the audience always sees the whole stage, the camera moves and can highlight certain aspects, which often offers a lot of material for analysis (Snyder 177–78).

Editing, in the sense of how to join scenes together is another issue that largely concerns film but might also be an issue in theater. While there is more variety in

film, in theater the question of transitions of one scene to the next is still crucial. Good examples are the split scenes in *Angels in America*. Often in the play two scenes are presented at the same time, mostly to directly compare the relationships of Prior and Louis and Harper and Joe, so a few sentences are exchanged in one relationship and then in the other, resulting in a to a forth between the scenes. In theater it is possible to divide the stage and let two scenes be played next to each other, in film this effect has to be created through cuts (Snyder 179–80).

Sound is another factor that can be observed in theater and film. In both there are four types of sound: music, sound-effect, speech and silence. It can be argued though that in theater sound is often more exaggerated and noticeable while in film, music either functions as background noise underlining certain scenes or natural noises. Silence can always play an important role in both genres (Snyder 180–81).

One issue that is very often raised when addressing adaptation studies is the question of fidelity and how much of the source text is preserved in the adaptation. This approach is criticized by many scholars in the field of adaptation studies (Snyder; Leitch; McFarlane; Stam and Raengo), especially when fidelity is used as a marker of quality, which often leads to two camps: those regarding literature as the more refined art, and those exclusively defending film as not being inferior. Fidelity will not be an issue in this thesis, as both films are very close to the source texts which is due to two straightforward factors: firstly, a script is very similar to a screenplay and secondly, Tony Kushner and Larry Kramer wrote the screenplays for the respective films.

This is just a small collection of basic factors that can be analyzed in films, and how it correlates to theater. Still, it shows that theater is clearly in its basic form closer to film than it is to a novel, therefore the use of classic considerations of adaptation studies do not apply for the analysis. Stam legitimately asks at the beginning of his introduction “Do not adaptations “adapt to” changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, and aesthetic

norms?" (Stam and Raengo 3) Especially, in *The Normal Heart* this aspect is noticeable and will be the focus of the analysis.

## 5.2 The Theory of Emotions

In the analytical part of this thesis the feelings portrayed by the actors will be explored. In order to successfully carry out an analysis of the emotional states of the characters in the play, and specifically how the representation of emotions takes different forms in film as opposed to theater, an introduction to the study of emotions is necessary.

Many fields of study are invested in the analysis of human feeling, first and foremost, medicine and biology. Those are particularly interested in what happens in the brain when a person feels something, for example which hormones are released when we face fear and why, specifically speaking, adrenalin is released when a human is threatened or dopamine is released when people look at somebody they love. In short, the biological analysis of emotions in the above examples end with the release of adrenaline or dopamine (Colm Hogan 18–19). This is where philosophy and psychology take over by analyzing the experiences the hormones evoke in a person and more specifically how these experiences are represented. In reference to the above example this means human studies would further investigate how the experience of fear or love translate into representations. This is exactly the point where literature can play an important part in the analysis of emotions. Literature provides a large corpus of data of representations of emotions, which can be analyzed from two stances: the depiction and the induction of emotions (Colm Hogan 2). Though there might be some insights and speculations about which emotions are triggered by the plays, the main part of the analysis will be concerned with the representation of emotions.

Before looking at how emotions can be investigated and what role literature can play in the field, it is beneficial to explore different definitions of emotions. The difficulty of defining emotions is that they are highly personal and subjective, and

although people can try to describe them, their impressions cannot be pinpointed or generalized. Agreement exists for some basic emotions like fear often inducing excitement and making people think faster, or grief feeling cold. However, emotion research cannot substantiate these commonsense findings (Reddy 3). Reddy cites a number of experiments and studies and basically comes to the conclusion that not even an assessable number of possible explanations exists. All theories that tried to define a manageable number of emotions from which other feelings derive were later refuted. For example in the 1970s Ekman published theories about the connection of emotions and facial expressions, concluding that biologically only six emotions exist: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust, as those were facial expressions which were largely agreed upon during experiments carried out in various countries (qtd. in Reddy 12). In the 1980s this research found its limitations, as questions like how other emotions fit into this theory could not be answered. In the 1990s Ortony and Turner with their finding that there are different kinds of fear, with different reactions of the body ended this line of thinking altogether (qtd. in Reddy 13). Another important distinction which cannot be explained is the question of the connection between emotion and cognition. Commonsense suggests that feelings operate outside of thinking, but why and how is a question that remains. Many researchers have found that mood influences the humans' way of thinking. While a person in a good mood would assess a situation, like seeing a dark corner, more positively, a sad person would be more cautious or even afraid in the same situation. Why however, the fear of the sad person is not defined as the cognition, but as an emotion leading to a certain cognition is only explained by common sense, not by actual science. The only connection in the comparison of cognition and emotion is that a thought is intentional, while an emotion is unintentional, so it could be seen as unintentional cognition (Reddy 15–16). Apart from the discussion about intention, which was not very fruitful, psychologists mostly agree that emotions, as opposed to cognitions have valence and intensity, which lead to goals in life. So, generally speaking, emotions are what provides humans with a sense of meaning as Fridja and Bower found (qtd. in Reddy 22). Keltner, Oatley, and Jenkins at the beginning of their definition of emotion also say that "[a]n emotion is a psychological state or process that mediated between

our concerns (or goals) and events or our world.” (4). Reddy concludes his overview of definitions of emotions as such:

> Blushing may be a good indicator of embarrassment, but embarrassment often occurs in the absence of blushing. Sexual arousal may be an indicator of (romantic) love; but the two are quite independent of each other in many circumstances. Clenched fists and a furrowed brow may be good indicators of anger, but anger often subsists for long periods without yielding any psychological, facial, or behavioral signals. (Reddy 31)

While Reddy never truly committed to a definition in his book, Keltner, Oatley, and Jenkins do arrive at a definition. After first giving the beginnings of emotion studies they conclude that emotions are multifaceted (behavioral, physiological and experiential) reactions to events that lead us to our social goals. They do concede though that in fact a good understanding of the process is much more important than a clear-cut definition (27).

There are generally different ways to investigate emotions and the chosen tests influence the precision of the findings. One standard experiment is the showing of pictures to test subjects and recording their reactions through questions, verbal reactions or analysis of facial expressions. Such experiments are very precise for certain emotions, for example disgust, so the reaction upon seeing a picture of feces is quite clear and will not differ much from the reaction to actual feces. However, when it comes to more complex emotions like romantic love such a test has limitations due to the artificial nature of the experiment. In short, it has to be distinguished between spontaneous emotions in natural settings and prompted emotions in unnatural settings and the more complex the emotion, the less adequate is the outcome in a prompted setting (Colm Hogan 20–21).

Literature is one alternative to prompted experiments, has however other limitations. Colm Hogan finds that the problem is primarily that past emotions are depicted and that memories are imperfect representations of actual events and therefore fallible because of the inaccuracy of the memories and of the representations (19). It is important to note here that literature might not only rely on memories, but also on mere fiction. So, the emotions depicted might also only originate from the imagination of the authors. Still, Colm Hogan stresses the

potential of literature as data because it can be successfully used with these limitations in mind (20-22).

Colm Hogan sees a number of advantages in using literature to explore human emotions. Compared to real-life and laboratory conditions, literature takes an in between position. It is neither completely natural nor entirely prompted. Colm Hogan even calls it “quite natural and spontaneous,” (23) because verbal art is part of all societies and there are emotions humans experience more often through stories, than in their real lives. Furthermore, literature is often constructed as a replica of the world and is therefore equal when it comes to the complexities of life, so the reader will often experience emotions similarly while reading or watching a play (Colm Hogan 23). Knaller also talks about literature as a replica of life and stresses the importance of emotions for literary understanding, consequently looking at it from the opposing point of view seeing the importance of emotions for literature, rather than the promise of literature for emotion studies (17). The reaction to a literary work also depends on the audience and the work, however with successful works, which stimulate a majority of people from different societies, literature is the closest substitute for a real-life emotion (Colm Hogan 21–22). A drawback that has to be kept in mind when investigating emotions through literature is that the reaction of the readership will always be empathic and not egocentric emotion, meaning that there is no action necessary. Still, empathic emotions are closely connected to egocentric emotions and provide helpful insight into how people would react if they were in the same situation. Furthermore, also empathetic emotions are a large part of life and therefore also important to investigate in a theory of emotions (Colm Hogan 22–23).

As already mentioned before, the reader’s reaction to literature and the intensity of it depend on the work that elicits the emotion. Here, it is not given that the most accurate representations are most successful, but often exaggerated representations provoke stronger reactions (Colm Hogan 25). Colm Hogan cites romantic love as an example, saying that it is never unambivalent, but often appears so in literature. So, the elicitation of emotion in literature depends on idealization (25). His choosing of the word (un)ambivalence is very fitting and his

point can be underlined by a quote from *Angels in America* where Belize says, “Real love isn’t ambivalent” quoting his “favorite bestselling paperback novel” (Kushner 100). So, while in real life love might often not be without problems and straightforward, in literature it is often portrayed as perfect. Therefore, it elicits strong feelings, which would probably not be the case if the romantic history or everyday problems of a couple would be addressed´(Colm Hogan 26). Furthermore, Colm Hogan also stresses that disgust often inhibits emotional reactions, thus in a love story digestion or flatulence would not be depicted, but it is obviously part of human life (26). Here, I would like to note that in *Angels in America* as well as in *The Normal Heart* due to some symptoms of AIDS (e.g diarrhea) disgust is a topic and especially in the latter it is how the strength of the love between Felix and Ned becomes even more apparent (see 5.4.2).

Nünning also occupied herself with the importance of literature for emotions and found numerous reasons for the potential literature has for emotion studies. Firstly, readers can experience certain emotions more purely, because they are completely immersed in the story and can block out all their own problems and therefore even learn to feel more strongly or emotions that they would normally not allow (Nünning 46). In relation to that even neuropsychologist Hüther found that reading provides the perfect conditions to form new synapses and therefore actually learn to empathize (qtd. in Nünning 46). Still, in connection to the safety of immersing oneself in a story, emotions can be felt much more intensely, because the readers do not have to engage in a guilty conscience or think about repercussions for them or others, but they can be completely immersed by the feelings the stories evoke. Moreover, through literature people experience what they would never be able to experience, simply because our lifespan would not allow it, but also because of any other restriction (Nünning 46–49).

In emotion studies, romantic love is determined by two axes. The first is the axis of disgust and desire and the second the axis of trust and fear. The former is related to sexuality and the second to attachment, so basically love is measured in how much another person is desired and how close one wants to be to another person. For both axes a default case exists that is activated when people see strangers. For the second axis the default case is mild fear or apprehension,

because people cannot know if a person wants to harm them. Through interaction the feeling shifts in one or the other direction and either trust is established, or the fear grows. Love is built on trust, so while getting to know another person, humans feel more and more secure in each other's proximity. Generally, it is not enough to want to be close to someone, i.e. feel attachment, in order to trust, so the ideal form of attachment is trust and trust can only be reached through the security of the attachment, so that the feeling is reciprocated (Colm Hogan 80–81). Another feature that influences trust is the availability of the partner, so that the other person knows about one's problems and fears and is there to comfort in times of need. This is not necessarily only contingent on spatial proximity, but generally availability, which could be disturbed for a number of reasons. Biologically speaking, when people are in love the same processes in the brain are activated as in drug addicts. This dependency is distinguished by the fact that it can only be satisfied by one person (Colm Hogan 82). Colm Hogan gives the example of hunger: if one is hungry there are endless possibilities on how to appease it, but when it comes to love, there is only one person that can satisfy the need. So, the lack of substitutes is what distinguishes attachment from addiction (83).

After a close examination of the trust – fear axis, the desire – disgust axis will now be explored. As already mentioned disgust inhibits people from desiring someone and this disgust is usually linked to natural bodily functions and fluids. This would theoretically mean that love cannot exist because of biology. So, in reverse, desire, or attachment, can also make people ignore signs that would trigger disgust. For example, a person spitting on the street might be perceived as disgusting, but kissing involves saliva and does not prevent people from doing it. Naturally, this does not mean that disgust is repressed altogether, as sexual arousal might wane, or the signs of attachment might diminish. So, people in a relationship would on the one hand suppress anything that might trigger disgust in the partner, but on the other hand also expect understanding that in times of need the partner would not leave due to disgust (Colm Hogan 85–86).

Many of the issues discussed here will serve as the basis for the analysis of Ned's and Felix' relationship (see 5.4.2). In the following sections the plays and their

respective movie adaptations will be analyzed based on the theoretical considerations up to this point.

## 5.3 *Angels in America* – a theatrical film

The adaptation of *Angels in America* features many popular actors like Al Pacino (Roy Cohn), Meryl Streep (Hannah Pitt) and Emma Thompson (the Angel) and some up-and-comers like Justin Kirk (Prior Walter), Ben Shenkman (Louis Ironson), Patrick Wilson (Joe Pitt) and Jeffrey Wright (Belize) (Pugh 271). *Angels in America* is not really a film, also if it is often referred to as such, but a miniseries with six episodes each about an hour. The feedback was largely positive (Pugh 271). The following analysis mainly revolves around the question of how the play was transformed for the screen. As will be discussed, there are two points of view which provide the starting point of the analysis: on the one hand, the film is described as theatrical, and on the other hand the play is called cinematic. So, the analysis primarily investigates which aspects turn the movie into a theatrical experience.

Pugh claims that “[n]o matter how faithfully a cinematic adaptation adheres to the words and spirit of its theatrical forebear, the material cannot help but be changed in its transition from live theatrical experience to filmed dramatic event” (271). Though that is theoretically true, the semblance of the play and the film is greater than expected, which shows in it being called “theatrical cinema” by Kirk in a telephone interview with Pugh (274), or as “meta-theatrical experience that did not attempt to cloak its very theatricality” (Pugh 272–273). Brietzke and Pearl look at it from the opposing point of view, quoting the cinematic effects Kushner transports to the stage, for example the split scenes being cut in the middle of an argument and switching back and forth between conversations (159; 765). Both stances confirm the impression of only minor differences between the stage and the film version. As Theater of the Fabulous, as Kushner describes his theater in which “it’s OK if the wires show, and maybe it’s good that they do […]” (Kushner 313), the focus does not lie on making the staging seem real. Kushner calls it a “pared-down style of representation, with minimal scenery and scene shifts done

rapidly […]" (311). Not only the stage version, but also the film seems "pared-down" from today's point of view because it is not as fulminant as what Hollywood creates in the 21st century. This can be observed in minor details like the colors and camera work, but especially in the supernatural scenes, which are extremely obvious. Therefore, it is valid to suggest that this is the way in which the movie "shows its wires", so also the film incorporates aspects of Kushner's Theater of the Fabulous. This renders watching the film a very similar experience to watching a stage adaption (Pugh 275). Brietzke even calls the opening credit "[t]he most cinematic moments" (156) and the fantasy elements "quite lame" (161). Moreover, he suggests that the Spielberg reference at the beginning of the long initial Angel scene is deleted because it would lead to a comparison of Nichols, the director of *Angels* and Steven Spielberg and underline the former's weakness in special effects. He says that

> "[…] the giant book on its pillar cracking through the floor is just silly; the destruction of Prior's apartment when the Angel bursts through the ceiling looks like a toy model with Styrofoam fragments of plaster and lath; the Angel (Emma Thompson) is made up to look like a pinup from the 1980s complete with a wind machine to keep her hair in constant brushed-back motion; the thunderbolt she wields looks ridiculous; she levitates Prior, flames peel away their clothes, and they share "plasma orgasmata" in another encounter that is hard to watch without laughing. (Brietzke 161–62)

The impression of the film being theatrical is also conveyed through long dialogues and monologues. Theater is driven by characters talking, be it as dialogue, monologue, soliloquy or aside and the same can be observed in the film version of the play. There are dialogues with very long turns, characters talking directly to the camera and monologues, which would usually not be found in a movie to such an extent.

The beforementioned use of split scenes cannot be as easily transformed into film, as it is not possible to have two scenes revolve next to each other like on stage. In *Angels* Kushner regularly lets two scenes be played at the same time, for example it is repeatedly the case with conversations between Harper and Joe and Prior and Louis. They often find themselves in similar situations and through the parallel technique the dialogue of one couple also comments on the situation

of the other (Brietzke 165; Pearl 766; Dixon 103). Act I, scene 9 is a perfect example for this phenomenon. The stage directions read, "[…] *Split scene: Harper and Joe at home; Louis and Prior in Prior's hospital room. Joe and Louis have each just entered. This should be fast. No freezing; even when one of the couples isn't talking, they remain furiously alive*" (Kushner 79). These directions are very clear and in this specific scene there is also "no freezing" necessary because there are many quick shifts between the two conversations. In the film this scene is realized with many cuts, always focusing on one conversation, the script is practically unaltered in the movie and also the shifts are exactly the same (Brietzke 166).

> HARPER. Oh God. Home. The moment of truth has arrived.
> JOE. [Harper.]
> LOUIS. I'm going to move out.
> PRIOR. The fuck you are.
> JOE. Harper. Please listen. I still love you very much. You're still my best buddy; I'm not going to leave you.
> HARPER. No, I don't like this. I'm leaving.
> LOUIS. I'm leaving.
> I already have.
> JOE. Please listen. Stay. This is really hard. We have to talk.
> HARPER. We are talking. Aren't we? Now please shut up. OK?
> PRIOR. Bastard. Sneaking off while I'm flat out here, that's low. If I could get up now I'd beat the holy shit out of you. (Kushner 79–80)

The scene starts with Prior lying in his hospital bed and Harper in her armchair both watching Reagan talking on TV. Then Louis and Joe enter the scenes. Visually, the instances are displayed in parallel: the audience sees Prior angrily looking at Louis and Harper doing the same with Joe and both scenes are filmed with mostly close-ups. In this first part of the conversation, the couples talk about abandonment. Louis left Prior because he cannot cope with his illness, while Joe swears that he would not leave Harper in spite of him being homosexual. However, Harper cannot deal with the situation and wants to leave herself. In Mormonism homosexuality is considered a disease or criminal act, so from this point of view one could argue that also Harper wants to leave Joe due to his illness.

> JOE. Did you take pills? How many?
> HARPER. No pills. Bad for the … *(Pats stomach)*

JOE. You aren't pregnant, I called your gynecologist.
HARPER. I'm seeing a new gynecologist.
PRIOR. You have no right to do this.
LOUIS. Oh, that's ridiculous.
PRIOR. No right. It's criminal.
JOE. Forget about that. Just listen. You want the truth. This is the truth.
I knew this when I married you. I've known this I guess for as long as I've known anything, but … I don't know, I thought maybe with enough effort and will I could change myself … but I can't …
PRIOR. Criminal.
LOUIS. There oughta be a law.
PRIOR. There is a law. You'll see. (Kushner 80)

Here Prior's "criminal" can be applied to both conversations, for Prior Louis abandoning him seems criminal, and Joe's homosexuality can be seen as criminal, when read from a Mormon point of view. Additionally, it could also refer to Joe's efforts to change himself and that he married a woman despite him knowing that he was homosexual, which to Harper is as much a betrayal as Louis's. Both scenes are very animate. Joe follows Harper around the apartment because she is collecting her belongings and although Prior cannot stand up he is gesturing violently.

LOUIS. I'm doing the best I can.
PRIOR. Pathetic. Who cares?
JOE. My whole life has conspired to bring me to this place, and I can't despise my whole life. I think I believed when I met you I could save you, you at least if not myself, but …
I don't have any sexual feelings for you, Harper. And I don't think I ever did.
HARPER. I think you should go. […] [To] Washington. […] Without me, Joe. Isn't that what you want to hear?
JOE. Yes.
LOUIS. You can love someone and fail them. You can love someone and not be able to –
PRIOR. You *can*, theoretically yes. A person can, maybe an editorial "you" can love, Louis, but not *you*, specifically you. I don't know, I think you are excluded from that general category.
HARPER. You were going to save me, but the whole time you were spinning a lie. I just don't understand that.
PRIOR. A person could theoretically love and maybe many do but we both know now you can't. (Kushner 81–82)

The theme of love surfaces in both dialogues. Louis says he still loves Prior, and Joe says the same to Harper in the beginning of the scene. Again, Prior's skepticism about Louis's love pertains also to Joe's, and Harper mirrors it by

accusing Joe of “spinning a lie.” Furthermore, in both instances love and abandonment are connected. While Louis thinks he has to leave Prior to save himself, Joe believes the same about staying. As a religious man he does not even consider deserting Harper, still however hopes for her absolution. In terms of Colm Hogan’s theory of love (see 5.2) Louis might still love Prior, but his feelings on the desire – disgust axis moved closer to disgust because of AIDS. Joe does not feel any desire for Harper at all because he is gay, but loves her on the attachment level as a friend. So, while part of them still love their partners, it is not enough to speak of the true love Colm Hogan describes with the two axes.

Another way, in which the split scene technique is transferred into film is through voice-over. This can be observed in act III, scene 2. Louis is sitting in a coffeeshop with Belize holding a long monologue about America, power, freedom and human rights, while the viewers see Prior being examined (Brietzke 166). Louis basically questions the meaning of freedom and human rights, saying that “you have Bush talking about human rights, and so what are these people talking about, they might as well be talking about the mating habits of Venusians, these people don’t begin to know what, ontologically, freedom is.” (Kushner 94). All the while, the viewers see Prior. The examination is shown with extreme close-up of Prior’s drip being removed, then he is displayed from behind, so the lesions on his back can be seen. When his face is shown in a close-up he does not seem in pain, hopeful or desperate, as will later be observed in *The Normal Heart*, but angry, as if he heard Louis saying that “what AIDS shows us is the limits of tolerance, that it is not enough to be tolerated because when the shit hits the fan you find out how much tolerance is worth: nothing.” So, he talks about AIDS and the lacking tolerance of politics, while he could not support his boyfriend when he fell ill.

Especially revealing in a comparison of film and theater is the adaptation of dialogue. As can be expected when the playwright is also the author of the screenplay, the dialogue is largely unaltered (Brietzke 158), which is also suggested by the minor difference (1 hour) in playtime. Brietzke suggests for example another perspective would have created a completely new work of art, but as it is he criticizes the similarity of film and original (158). Pugh, contrarily talks about the unavoidability of change and does not see the adaptation as

unaltered and names all the differences he found. He quotes Louis's conversation with the Rabbi, when he asks him what "the Holy Writ say[s] about someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need?" (Kushner 25). In this conversation, sequences of Louis's replies were deleted, which, as Pugh argues, renders Louis a more likable character, but also gives the audience less insight into his feelings (Pugh 277). It is not only Louis, whose character is slightly altered by leaving out lines. Also, Prior's aristocratic side is largely left out. The viewer does not know about him living off a trust fund, there are no stories about his ancestors included and his showy traits, like adding a French phrase here and there, were also jettisoned (Pugh 278). Much more cause for speculation provides the cancelation of parts of the following telephone conversation[3]:

> PRIOR [I'm drenched in spooj.]
> BELIZE (*Continuing to work*) [Spooj?]
> PRIOR [Cum, Jiz, Ejaculate.] I've had a wet dream.
> BELIZE [Uh-huh, bound to happen, you've been abstemious to excess: Beaucoup de spooj.] {The Calvin Klein underwear, man?} (Kushner 147)

It is interesting and hard to find an explanation to why "ejaculate" and its various synonyms might be deleted in the film, considering that tirades such as Cohn calling Belize a "butterfinger spook faggot nurse" (Kushner 155) would remain unaltered. Pugh theorizes that certain parts of conversation were deemed inappropriate for the traditional American heartland, as opposed to Broadway (Pugh 278).

A very central strategy Kushner uses in his play is the doubling of characters, i.e. the use of one actor for various characters to create additional meaning and provide an aid for the audience to make certain connections. Additionally, as Brietzke states the playing of multiple roles takes away the focus "from the identification of the actor with the role and directs attention instead upon the function of the part" (163). In some instances, this aspect is retained, for example Streep plays the Angel Australia, Hannah Pitt, Ethel Rosenberg as well as the Rabbi. Or Prior plays also the man Louis has sex with in the park. Those doublings are however an instance where cinema destroys the effect, because

[3] Square brackets represent parts of dialogue which were deleted in the film version; braces represent lines added in the film, which are not in the play

of heavy make-up and costume. Mostly, the actors are that heavily made up that they cannot be recognized and therefore the effect vanishes. Other doublings are even left out altogether, like for example Prior I and Prior II, antecedents of the main character of the play, Prior Walter, should actually be played by the actor of Roy Cohn and Joe Pitt, representing Prior's two main enemies, a connection that without the doubling cannot be made and therefore a lot of meaning is lost in the scene (Pugh 279–280; Brietzke 163).

Apart from minor changes and the missing doubling, some scenes are deleted, most of which are either non-consequential for the plot, or for the character development (e.g. the scene of Roy Cohn in hell) or are heavy and strange even in the play (e.g. act I in *Perestroika*). The most relevant connection which is almost entirely deleted, is the one between Harper and Prior, the two both being left by their partners and suffering from it. Although Pugh rightly argues that "such poignant connections between Harper and Prior would build a deeper emotional core to the narrative" (Pugh 282), it is still a very obvious connection, therefore a conscious viewer still sees the relation through the split scenes or generally their similar situation.

After having established the most important theatrical elements of the movie, its theatricality will now be investigated with regards to the representation of desire. Desire is one of the most central themes in *Angels in America*. Basically, one could argue that the play is about desire in all its different manifestations, sexual desire or any desire for something.

Sexual desire mostly manifests in Joe, as he is the one who first represses his longings but loses against his bodily urges and in the end has to accept that only being with a man is what can make him happy. The scene which most clearly portrays sexual desire is when Louis seduces Joe (Brietzke 168). At the end of *Millennium Approaches* Louis and Joe meet in the middle of the night during one of Joe's walks, and Louis asks him to come home with him. In the second scene of *Perestroika* the two are together in Louis's apartment and Joe is not yet sure if he wants to stay and Louis seduces him.

> LOUIS. Go if you're going. Go. […]

JOE. I'm not staying.
LOUIS. *(Sniffing)* What kind of cologne is that?
JOE. *(A beat then)* Fabergé. […]
LOUIS. Smell is … an incredibly complex and underappreciated physical phenomenon. Inextricably bound up with sex.
JOE. I … didn't know that.
LOUIS. It is. The nose is really a sexual organ.
Smelling. Is desiring. We have five senses, but only two that go beyond the boundaries … of ourselves. When you look at someone, it's just bouncing light, or when you hear someone, it's just sound waves, vibrating air, or touch is just nerve endings tingling. Know what a smell is?
JOE. It's … some sort of … No.
LOUIS. It's made of the molecules of what you're smelling. Some part of you, where you meet air, is airborne. […] Little molecules of Joe … *(Leaning in, inhaling deeply)* Up my nose. […]
JOE. I should –
LOUIS. *(Quietly)* Sssssshhhh.
Smelling. And tasting.
*(Moving in closer)* First the nose, then the tongue.
JOE. *(Taking a half step back, scared)* I just don't –
LOUIS. *(Stepping forward)* They work as a team, see. The nose tells the body, the heart, the mind, the fingers the cock – what it wants, and the tongue explores, finding out what's edible, what isn't, what's most, mineral, food for the blood, food for the bones, and therefore most delectable. (Kushner 140–42)

Brietzke's argument regarding this scene is that it is "an interactive moment" (168) and therefore works better in theater, because the audience shares the same space as the actors. Although, the scene is very erotic in the film as well, and the viewer senses the desire and especially the conflict in Joe, as this is the moment when he final gives in to his desire, there is truth to Brietzke's point. Also, in theater you cannot smell Joe's Fabergé cologne, but theoretically it is possible, but in front of the TV, the viewers know that they cannot, and therefore it takes away some of the authenticity of the moment. Visually, the scene is very dark. The two are displayed in a full shot as long as they are not talking about sleeping together. As soon as they discuss if Joe wants to stay the camera shifts to a medium shot. Then Joe seems to have decided to go and the camera shifts to a full shot displaying both characters again. When Joe hugs Louis to say goodbye the camera displays them in turns in close-ups, so the viewers note that they linger, and Joe starts hugging Louis a little tighter. With the close-up the audience clearly sees that Joe is changing his mind about leaving. As soon as they stop

hugging Louis starts explaining smell to Joe and the scene is in a close shot again shifting from one character to the other. When Louis talks about taste the camera moves closer again shifting to close-ups and even an extreme close-up following Louis' hand moving from his chest into Joe's pants. The camera work visually underlines the scene in moving closer the more heated the situation gets, ending in an extreme close-up when Louis puts his hand into Joe's pants.

In the context of disease, one relevant desire is the desire for a longer life and for progress. When Prior is visiting the angels in heaven, he rejects his work as a prophet because he cannot preach stasis, which is what the angels want him to do:

> We can't stop. We're not rocks. Progress, migration, motion is … modernity. It's *animate*, it's what living things do. We desire. Even if all we desire is stillness, it's still desire for. […] Even if we go faster than we should. We can't wait. And wait for what? (Kushner 275)

So, what Prior desires is "more life" (Kushner 279) and while the play touches upon many different desires this is the central desire in the play. Also Brietzke and Dixon find the desire for more life as an important theme in *Angels*, saying that it is not a pretty desire (176; 123), as more life with AIDS, also means more suffering. Brietzke also quotes Roy Cohn, who puts the yearning for a longer life "in more graphic, more physical, even physiological terms" (167):

> This is – this is gastric juices churning, this is enzymes and acids, this is intestinal is what it is, bowel movement and blood-red meat! This stinks, this is *politics*, Joe, the game of being alive. And you think you're … What? Above that? Above alive is what? Dead! In the clouds! You're on earth, goddammit! Plant a foot, stay a while. (Kushner 71)

Apart from the fact that in this scene Roy wants to persuade Joe to help him by taking a job in Washington and interfere in Roy's disbarment committee, he also says that being alive is hard and implies that Joe is not really participating. In the context of desire this is certainly true, as Joe desires to be with a man, but at this point in the movie still strongly rejects the idea. By suppressing his urges, Joe is more dead than alive, as he notes in *Millennium Approaches* act II scene 9, "I try to tighten my heart into a knot, a snarl, I try to learn to live dead, just numb, but then I see someone I want, and it's like a nail, like a hot spike right through my

chest, and I know I'm losing." (Kushner 81). So, by giving in to his desires also Joe obtains "more life".

When Prior demands more life from the angels, he also compares the people's will to live to an addiction, because objectively speaking, why Prior would not stay with the angels, without pain, without suffering, has no logical explanation. In an interview with Pacheco Kushner says that that is the mystery he tries to explore through Prior and the main theme of *Perestroika* (Pacheco 21). Prior says:

> I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but … You see them living anyway. When they're more spirit than body, more sores than skin, when they're burned and in agony, when flies lay eggs in the corners of the eyes of their children, they live. Death usually has to *take* life away. I don't know if that's just the animal. I don't know if it's not braver to die. But I recognize the habit. The addiction to being alive. We live past hope. If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do. It's so much not enough, so inadequate but … Bless me anyway. I want more life. (Kushner 278–79)

Thus, what Prior basically says is that as long as one has only a small spark of hope left, the survival instincts will not cease. Considering that AIDS is a disease that takes away the body's ability to defend itself, hope is hard to find, but if the body cannot fight against the illness, the spirit has to and that is basically the message Prior wants to convey. This is the point where the play explores the limits of human life, the point many terminally ill people will reach sooner or later, fight or give up. Friesen calls *Angels* a play about limits, "[t]he limits of humanity [and] its ultimate powerlessness in the face of nature. Disease and death as nature's great levelers." (90). The sequences in heaven are mostly black and white, the only color being Prior's red cape, therefore he is marked not only as the prophet the angels are awaiting, but also as the main character of the movie, who conveys the most important message to the audience. Only, when he steps before the panel of angels, the colors return to normal. In *Angels in America* heaven is not a beautiful paradise but lies in ruins, because God has left due to humans' progress. Dixon compares mankind to the HIV of the universe (114). From the angels' point of view humans advance faster as they should and that is why God left and consequently heaven was destructed. Also, AIDS progresses very fast, that is why Prior is supposed to preach stasis, because if all progress

stops, also disease cannot move forward. During all of Prior's speech he is in a close-up, articulating every word with emphasis. Now and then the camera shifts back to the angels, who have shock written on their faces and do not understand why under all those circumstances he would still want to live.

In the end Prior survives and although he does not deliver the angel's prophecy, he still closes the play with a message and a positive outlook on the future. In the last scene Belize, Hannah, Louis and Prior meet in Central Park in front of the fountain with the statue of the angel Bethesda on it, Prior's favorite place in the park. In this final scene, Prior steps away from his friends and looking directly into the camera, he addresses the audience:

> I'm almost done.
> The fountain's not flowing now, they turn it off in the winter, ice in the pipes. But in the summer it's a sight to see. I want to be around to see it. I plan to be. I hope to be.
> This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.
> Bye now.
> You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.
> And I bless you: More life.
> The Great Work Begins. (Kushner 290)

Kushner told Pacheco in an interview that he wanted to show that people can live with AIDS and that it is not an immediate death sentence (20) and that is why Prior not only survives, but even blesses his audience, telling them to choose life over death just like he did. With him being given the power of blessing the viewers, he becomes a living angel and a prophet after all, however proclaiming more life and progress instead of stasis.

## *5.4 The Normal Heart*

The movie adaptation of *The Normal Heart* appeared in 2015 and was directed by Ryan Murphy. The screenplay was adapted by Larry Kramer himself, who was also there to assist in the filming process. The cast includes many popular actors like Mark Ruffalo (Ned), Julia Roberts (Emma), Matthew Bomer (Felix) or Jim

Parsons (Tommy), who are all well-known from other successful movies or TV series (Murphy). McNamara, in her review on the movie, very well catches the essence of the film:

> It is a moment of fury and grace and wonder that this "Heart," in which a brutally specific story is deftly re-tailored for another medium and time, loses none of its original passion or pointedness. Where the play sought to make the personal political, this "Normal Heart" steps back enough to make room for characters to develop as fully as the message. The political comes full circle and is personal once again.

In the general introduction to AIDS theater, *The Normal Heart* was already described as a highly political play, which largely concentrates on activism and leaves the personal stories at the margins. That is why the following analysis steps back from a political analysis, as the play has already been analyzed according to its political agenda numerous times. This thesis concentrates primarily on the movie, in which the emotional and interpersonal aspects are foregrounded. The main question that should be answered is how the play was adapted to the screen, so which aspects changed and why. In order to investigate this question, I looked at two specific issues to exemplify the findings: on the one hand the representation of AIDS will be explored and with it the character's desperation in the face of disease. On the other hand, the love story between Ned and Felix will be looked at closely. The most important shots in the movie are close-ups, so the audience would see the characters' faces and be able to read their emotions. Feng and O'Halloran argue that from the facial expressions alone an audience can activate the emotional understanding in their brains, so filmmakers can trust this ability and elicit the desired emotions mainly through facial expressions. Apart from the face also gesture and voice adds to the representation of emotion (82-84). This section gives a first overview of the differences between source text and movie adaptation and the sub sections will deal with the beforementioned issues.

What is apparent right at the beginning of the movie is that the political message is not as urgent as in the play. The source text begins with the disease, without hope, but with gruesome realities (see 5.3.1). The film, however, starts with life and party. The first scenes in the movie are extraordinarily good-looking, gay men

in swim trunks at the beach and at the pool having fun together with sex, music and drinks. This stark difference between the beginnings is probably due to the lesser urgency of AIDS actvism at the times they appeared. When the play was first staged, the world was in the middle of a crisis which was hardly acknowledged at all: it is set between July 1981 and May 1984, as is the film, but was first staged in 1985, while the film came out in 2015. Only in 1996 the number of newly infected people declined (Harden 16), so when the play was first staged there was still a long way to go in terms of medical advancement. Therefore, the source text can be seen as part of the activism it talks about, while the movie is more of a remembrance. The disease is central in the film as well, but other plotlines are given more weight than in the play. One of these plotlines is, for example, the relationship between Ned and Felix (see 5.4.2), which is given a lot more prominence in the movie, as also McNamara found in her review in the *LA Times*. What can be mentioned already without elaborate analysis is that the number of scenes in which Felix appears is much higher in the movie. Generally, the play is straightforward citing realities with no embellishments and even with almost no stage directions. So, reading the play does not provide further information apart from monologue and dialogue. Also, the stage version, one of which can be found on YouTube[4], reflects these findings. There are hardly any props or special effects, but the playing is passionate and full of rage. Brantley, in his review for *The New York Times*, writes

> [t]he stage is a mess at the end […]. Milk has spilled and spattered; food is smeared across the floor; pages from a medical report are strewn everywhere. When the cast members come out to take their bows, they look battered and disheveled, as if they, too, had been hit by a storm.

Concerning the script, the movie is not as close to the source text as *Angels*, but still all the conversations are represented. Mostly the lines are shorter or in a slightly different order, but most of the play can also be found in the movie. However, unlike in *Angels*, the dialogues were altered in a way that they adhere to movie conventions: there are hardly any long monologues or long turns in conversation. Someone who has never heard of Kramer's original might not

[4] "The Normal Heart." By Larry Kramer, directed by David Esbjornson, Joseph Papp Public Theater, 29 June 2004. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yReg5vk6By8&list=PLqksNubBG-SrL6zKS-RVVHZpK3dUDHZFg>

suspect that the film is based on a play, whereas in *Angels* it is immediately noticeable that it is not an ordinary film. Furthermore, there are many scenes added in the film, so when the relationship between Ned and Felix is analyzed later, most of the scenes will be taken from the film version, as they do not occur in the play. In some instances, the beforementioned 2004 stage version in New York's Public Theater will be used in order to add to the impression of the written form of the play, which is especially necessary due to the limited stage directions.

Often, the added scenes are not entirely made up but are instances that are only referred to in the play. For example, there are two dances mentioned in the story, the fundraising dance comes up when Ned tells his brother Ben that they raised 50.000 dollars, and the dance at Yale's Gay Week at the hospital when Ned tells Felix about it. In the movie both dances are represented in separate scenes. At the fundraising dance, the viewers see many people who obviously have AIDS because they have the Karposi's Sarcoma lesions, so healthy and sick men are having fun together, trying their best to stay positive and fight. In the film, Felix is at the dance as well and there is a scene added afterwards, where the both of them go for a walk at the water and Ned gets to his knees and asks Felix to move in with him and he replies, "Yes, yesterday." (Murphy). Ned is so incredibly happy about it that this serious character starts running around shouting, "yes, yes, yes," (Murphy) something that would not really be possible in the play, because mostly Ned's role there is to lead the fight against AIDS. This scene can be read as a marriage proposal and the engagement of the two men and in the end, shortly before Felix dies, they marry (see 5.4.2).

After this short introduction to some basic differences between the play and the film, the following section will now examine the emotions in specific scenes more closely.

### 5.4.1 Disease, Death and Despair

In *The Normal Heart*, the themes of disease, death, and despair are at the forefront in a much more literal sense than in *Angels*. The reason for that is quite

clear: *The Normal Heart* recounts the very beginnings of the AIDS pandemic and functioned as information for the public, which explains the informative tone in the beginning. The play opens with disease and death, so even people who would leave the theater after the first five minutes of the play would still know that the disease kills. Due to the fact that *The Normal Heart* is set much earlier than *Angels*, death is much more closely linked to politics and its ignorance, which can be observed already at the beginning and it will be a constant connection throughout the whole play.

In the first scene of the play, the audience gets to know Emma, the wheelchaired doctor who is one of a few willing to treat AIDS patients. She meets the main character, Ned Weeks, because she wants to convince him to inform the gay community about AIDS and to tell gay people to stop having sex. When Ned asks her about the disease, she says:

> Not even any good clues yet. All I know is this disease is the most insidious killer I've ever seen or studied or heard about. And I think we're seeing only the tip of the iceberg. And I'm afraid it's on the rampage. I'm frightened nobody important is going to give a damn because it seems to be happening mostly to gay men. Who cares if a faggot dies? (Kramer, *Normal* 27)

In the film, Emma is introduced almost like a villain: she starts talking to Ned with her back turned and demands he takes his clothes off in a bossy tone. The audience then sees an extreme close-up of her hand on the joystick of her electric wheelchair when she turns around. This gives her introduction a dramatic effect and very well suits her serious and distanced character. Generally, this passage shows the urgency of AIDS research and it already includes political criticism, setting the tone for the whole play. Additionally, the first scene also provides medical information on the disease. Emma explains:

> EMMA. […] Any fever, weight loss, night sweats, diarrhea, swollen glands, white patches in your mouth, loss of energy, shortness of breath, chronic cough?
> NED. No. But those could happen with a lot of things, couldn't they?
> EMMA. And purple lesions. Sometimes. Which is what I'm looking for. It's a cancer. There seems to be a strange reaction in the immune system. It's collapsed. Won't work. Won't fight. Which is what it's supposed to do. So, most of the diseases my guys are coming down with – and there

> are some very strange ones – are caused by germs that wouldn't even hurt a baby, not a baby in New York City anyway. Unfortunately, the immune system is the system we know least about. (Kramer, *Normal* 29)

So, from their first conversation on, it is clear that disease is the main issue in the play. The tone here is still more distant and much less emotional than in later scenes, as Ned is neither politically nor personally involved yet. In the movie most of the medical information is left out, as everything Emma tells Ned in the beginning is common knowledge in 2015. Instead of the long explanations of the symptoms, the movie focuses on the circumstances during the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic. In a newly added scene Emma shows Ned the conditions in the hospital. She explains that she admits patients who are actually not insured and that she basically does not have room for all the cases:

> EMMA. I'm seeing three to four new patients a week. I've got seven in ICU. The whole hospital only has room for 30. I've had to admit some of them under other illnesses. That's a no-no. I've got 20 in private rooms they can't actually afford.
> NED. Okay, what about the guys who don't have health insurance? Artists, actors?
> EMMA. I've got eight of them in another ward where I shouldn't put them.
> *(They enter the ward with the "GRID" patients, as the sign next to the door says)*
> NED. Why don't you wear gloves and a face mask?
> EMMA. I never have and I never will, and I'm still here.
> *(Ned stands in front of a patient's room and sees the trays standing outside)*
> NED. Why is all the food sitting outside their rooms like this? It's getting cold.
> EMMA. It's always cold because the appropriate staff won't bring it into the rooms, so it sits and rots until one of my staff can.
> *(Ned looks into the room and recognizes the patient.)*
> NED. I know him. Can I go inside with you?
> EMMA. Only if you wear all the protective shit.
> NED. If you don't, I don't. *(Takes the tray of food and enters the room.)* (Murphy)

So, while the play gives more information about the disease itself - what people needed to hear at the time - the movie adds more information about the circumstances, because it is well known what AIDS is and how it basically works, but the conditions the infected were finding themselves in is not part of common knowledge. Therefore, it makes sense to give less information on the disease

and more information that is new to people in 2015 and also shocks the viewers enough to keep fighting against the disease even when it is considered manageable. Additionally, also straight people's attitude is shown more prominently, which can be observed, still in the hospital scene, when Emma asks an employee to fix the TV in one of the patient's rooms and he answers, "My union says I don't gotta risk my life for some contagious fairy. If I have to go in there, then I fucking quit." (Murphy). This clearly shows what kind of ignorance, but also uncertainty about the disease, people were faced with. As Julia Roberts says in the Special Features of the DVD, "A lot of people in their twenties will watch this movie and say, "This has to be a dramatization," but most of what is shown in the film is not only a representation of the conditions, but actually happened to Larry Kramer." (Murphy). Her comment confirms the above-mentioned thesis that the circumstances are not familiar to people who did not live at the time.

Another aspect that is not represented in *Angels* is the uncertainty of every facet of the disease. In the beginning of Kushner's play, Prior finds a lesion on his arm and he immediately knows what it means, or when Louis has sex in the park he insists on the use of a condom, because he is of aware of how the disease is spread. Emma theorizes that it might be transmitted sexually and therefore suggests that gay men stop having sex and Ned calls it a "preposterous request" (Kramer, *Normal* 30). This uncertainty is also later represented in Mickey's outburst during a GMHC meeting:

> I have written about every single theory. Repeated infection by a virus, new appearance by a dormant virus, single virus, new virus, old virus, multi-virus, partial virus, latent virus, mutant virus […]. No, we mustn't forget about fucking and sucking and kissing and blood and voodoo and drugs and paupers and needles and Africa, Haiti, Cuba, blacks, amoebas, pigs, fucking Uranus! What if it isn't any of them? (Murphy)

This scene not only shows the lack of information about AIDS, but also how it connects to despair. Mickey does not have an ill partner, but still the disease is obviously wearing him out to an extent that takes away his energy. Not only because of the death of many of his friends, but also because his job is threatened due to his involvement in AIDS activism. Additionally, Mickey was an activist

during the Stonewall riots, actively fighting for the right of gay men to have sex, thus Ned telling people to stop, to him means neglecting everything he fought for. The trigger for his outburst here is an argument with Ned, who wrote an article attacking the mayor's assistant. The scene is very hectic and mirrors Mickey's mood and restlessness. He paces around the room gesturing frantically and the camera records him in a following shot. This type of camera work adds to the turmoil in Mickey, as it seems very unsettled as well and therefore underlines the content of the scene and adds to the desperation and helplessness he utters with his words and body language. Furthermore, the more desperate he gets, the closer the camera approaches him, cutting from a close shot to a close-up, so the viewers see his face in more detail and be able to read the desperation in his facial expressions. In order to create a similar effect on stage (Esbjornson), Mickey is sitting in the beginning of his monologue and then stands up and starts pacing, so while in the film the shot is altered, on stage Mickey's posture changes, which also gives the impression of him being more and more agitated. Even before the shot with Mickey's outburst, the scene was frenzied: the characters are talking on the phones working for the hotline and with wiping transitions the camera cuts from one character to the next. This again gives the scene a sense of restlessness.

Despair takes many shapes in *The Normal Heart*. Many of them are connected to the helplessness in the face of AIDS, but often characters have already accepted the imminent death of their loved ones and find themselves in desperate situations even after they have died due to people's disregard for their feelings. A scene representing this is Bruce' recollection of the death of his partner, Albert. The circumstances of his death describe closely the facts given in section 3 of my thesis:

> His mother wanted to see him in Phoenix before he died, and this was the last week when it was obvious, so I got permission from Emma and took him to the airport. And when we got to the airport, the pilot refused to fly the plane, so I refused to get off of it. You would have been very proud of me, Ned. So finally, we get another pilot, and when we take off, Albert just loses his mind. He doesn't recognize me. He doesn't know where we're going. That we're going to see his mother in Phoenix, nothing. […] When we land in Phoenix and when we get to the hospital where his mother had fixed up the room real nice, Albert's dead. The hospital doctors refused to

> examine him and give him a cause of death on his death certificate. Without the death certificate, the undertaker will not take him, and neither would the police. Finally, some orderly comes and then stuffs my Albert in an oversized Glad garbage bag and puts him in the alley with the rest of the garbage. He's gone, he's gone. (Murphy)

Apart from what the viewers hear in Bruce's recollection, they also see the orderly from the hospital demanding fifty dollars because he helped them to secure the corpse, and the cremator, who burned the body even without death certificate, wants three thousand dollars for the favor. So, this scene mirrors what is described earlier in this thesis (see 3): the parent who, after not wanting to see her child anymore because of his homosexuality, is rushing back just shortly before he dies, people not showing any empathy for AIDS victims constantly afraid of infection, and even the dead ones are denied any sign of respect. Due to the possibility of showing the whole incident in the movie it is not described as closely, while in the play Bruce uses more graphic language to help the audience' imagination.

### 5.4.2 Ned and Felix – a true love story

The love between Ned and Felix is what, in terms of emotion theory (see 5.2), is full of trust and desire, so the two axes both indicate fully devoted love. No disgust or unreciprocated feelings interfere with it, but it is the idealization Colm Hogan refers to when he describes romantic love in literature. Felix' and Ned's fate is the main carrier of tragedy in the story and captures the theater and the movie audience. In the following the major scenes that characterize their relationship will be analyzed and the versions contrasted to see how the character of their relationship is different in the movie. As already mentioned, the love story in the film is much more prominent. In the play it seems minor as opposed to the political discussions. Only considering the lower number of scenes Ned and Felix occur together in the play suggests that the love story is less central in the source text. However, Cohen claims that Kramer favors the love story in the play. His argument is based on the assumption that Ned is only removed from GMHC because then Kramer has the possibility to give more weight to Ned and Felix'

relationship, without having to explicitly decide for either the one or the other plotline. He goes on contending that in order to close the circle and return to the political agenda of the play, Felix dies so Ned can dedicate his time to activism again (203–04). In spite of Cohen's view, I would still see the play favoring politics, not only in respect to the movie, but also when looking at the play individually. Cohen correctly argues that the love story in *The Normal Heart* is necessary, because otherwise the heterosexual middle-class theater goers would not have been reached (202), but that is exactly the impression that the love story leaves in the play: it is merely added to appease a wider public. That is why I maintain that Ned's removal has a political reasoning, it shows that the organization, or even the whole gay community of the time is too afraid of being either found out or lose their free promiscuous lifestyle that they would rather dismiss their most efficient member, than fight according to his example. In the film, the characters' experiences are clearly at the center of attention and the viewers get more insight into their personal struggles and activism is of minor importance. Still it is a film about AIDS, but it transports the political message through personal stories, instead of political instances. The view of the movie being a love story is also confirmed by Ruffalo in the Special Features of the DVD when he says

> [M]ore than anything, this movie is about love. Love and resilience. Two people who really are grateful, and can see how important it is to them, and how fleeting it is, and how precious it is, and how frail it is. It turns out to be a really beautiful love story. (Murphy)

In the following the movie's love story will be analyzed in detail, mainly focusing on the differences between the versions. The scenes present in both will be contrasted to support the claim that the movie favors the love story.

In both versions Ned and Felix officially meet when Ned goes to see him at *The New York Times* to make him write about a new disease, but as a lifestyle reporter Felix cannot do anything for him. Still, Felix asks if he is in the phone book and they soon have a date. When Felix first lays eyes on Ned, he has this look of recognition in his eyes. This is an advantage of a movie production as opposed to a stage play: most of the audience would not see the face of the actors that closely, so this cannot be conveyed on stage.

At the beginning of their date the two are having small talk while they set the table. In the movie the scene is sexually charged: the camera follows the two characters going back and forth from the table to the kitchen, often following Ned's gaze when he, for example, watches Felix's bottom. Furthermore, Felix frequently touches Ned and looks at him with desire in his eyes. In this scene another advantage of film as opposed to theater can be noticed, especially when considering the 2004 Off-Broadway production (Esbjornson): in a movie a situation can be displayed exactly as it would look like in real life. So, Ned and Felix are in a real apartment, there is a real kitchen and a dinner table. This authentic representation of events makes it easy for the audience to empathize with the characters. On stage there are only a few props, in the case of this staging, there is only a bench and the two characters are talking with little additional information on the circumstances. When Ned starts talking about AIDS the three versions I had at my disposal, written, stage and movie, each triggered different emotions. Only reading it conveys a feeling of awkwardness, one is wondering why Ned would suddenly talk about such an uncomfortable topic at a date. On stage most of the scene has a comical effect and Esbjornson represents it as a joke, also the serious parts, for example Ned comparing AIDS to National Socialism, is debilitated by comical remarks. So, the uneasiness of the situation is relieved by humor. In the movie this is achieved by Felix' laid back reaction and by keeping his face relaxed and unfaced. Naturally, on stage the tension cannot be attenuated by facial expressions and not even that easily with gesture, because the audience does not see the faces of the actors, so most of the meaning has to be transmitted verbally. Ned is very nervous and tense in both versions because he is suspicious why a man like Felix would go out with him, he says for example, "You're very good looking. What are you doing here?" (Murphy). This is more obvious in the play, where they talk more about Ned's insecurities about his body and his looks. Additionally, Ned is much more adamant about not wanting a lover in the play, but it is still obvious in both versions that Ned is torn between his rejection of love and his attraction to Felix. This is noticeable when, in the middle of the argument when Ned wants to find out Felix' motivation to meet, he kisses him and without a pause or comment continues to talk about AIDS after. In the movie their kiss is at the dinner table,

Felix is sitting, and Ned stands up and kisses him. The shot is in a close up with shallow focus first and then cuts to an extreme close up of their faces, so the attention of the audience is guided through the encounter and the extreme-close-up underlines their passion.

The moment when Felix tells Ned about their first encounter is very relaxed in the movie and the impression arises that Felix was waiting for the moment to tell him the whole time, as he wears a smile on his face and he also uses the revelation to shut Ned up:

> NED. Everybody had a million reasons for not getting involved. The American Jews knew exactly what was going on. *(Felix laughs to himself)* Can you imagine if every Jew had marched on Washington proudly, huh?
> FELIX. Ned. You don't remember me, do you? It was at the baths a few years ago.
> *(There is a commercial for "the baths" and suddenly you see Ned and Felix there and the commercial turns into a memory, Felix sees Ned and follows him, Felix tells the story and the screen shifts between their date and their meeting in the baths, so partly Felix's recollection is in voice over.)*
> FELIX. You would have thought I was applying for the CIA the way you looked at me.
> NED. And then what happened?
> FELIX. I followed you into your room. You couldn't even open your eyes. You told me your real name was Alexander. I asked what you did, and you said something like you tried a number of things, and I asked if that included love. That's when you said, "I… I have to get up early in the morning." Yeah. Men do not naturally not love. They learn not to. I think you're a bluffer.
> NED: How could I not remember you?
> FELIX. *(chuckles.)* I don't know. It was very dark.
> NED. Do you think we could start over?
> FELIX. Yeah. (Murphy)

This is a scene that is significantly different in the play. Here Felix' posture and facial expression are calm, and the viewers get the impression that he was waiting for the moment to tell Ned the whole time. He does not get angry with Ned but is rather amused and there is no comic effect in the scene. A film also provides the opportunity to insert flashbacks, so the audience also sees what happened years ago. In the play the discussion becomes much more heated and Felix does not remain as relaxed:

NED. The American Jews knew exactly what was happening, but everything was downplayed and stifled. Can you imagine how effective it would have been if every Jew in America had marched on Washington? Proudly! Who says I want a lover? Huh?! I mean, why doesn't anybody believe me when I say I do not want a lover?

FELIX. You are fucking crazy. Jews, Dachau, Final Solution – what kind of date is this! I don't believe anyone in the whole wide world doesn't want to be loved. Ned, you don't remember me, do you? We've been in bed together. We made love. We talked. We kissed. We cuddled. We made love again, I keep waiting for you to remember, something, anything. But you don't. […]

NED. Maybe if I saw you naked.

FELIX. It's okay as long as we treat each other like whores, it was at the baths a few years ago. You were busy cruising some blond number and I stood outside your door waiting for you to come back and when you did you gave me such an inspection up and down you would have thought I was applying for the CIA.

NED. And then what?

FELIX. I just told you. We made love twice. I thought it was lovely. You told me your name was Ned, that when you were a child you read a Philip Barry play called Holiday where there was a Ned, and you immediately switched from … Alexander? I teased you for taking such a WASP, up-in-Connecticut-for-the-weekend name, and I asked what you did, and you answered something like you'd tried a number of things, and I asked you if that included love, which is when you said you had to get up early in the morning. That's when I left. But I tossed you my favorite go-fuck-yourself when you told me "I really am not in the market for a lover" – men do not just naturally not love – they learn not to. I am not a whore. I just sometimes look for love in the wrong places. And I think you're a bluffer. Your novel was all about a man desperate for love and a relationship, in a world filled with nothing but casual sex.

NED. Do you think we could start over?

FELIX. Maybe. (Kramer, *Normal* 47)

Already without reading the two passages it can be observed that the stage version is a lot longer, which is partly due to the lack of a flashback and Felix has to explain their encounter in more detail. Furthermore, the issue of Ned not wanting to commit to a relationship is elaborated on here and only hinted to in the movie. When looking at the scenes more closely it is apparent that, although in the core they are the same scenes, they are completely different. The way Felix describes their sexual encounter in the play does not correlate to what is shown in the movie. He refers to it as "love making" and "cuddling", the movie rather portrays a rough sexual encounter the word love making seems at odds to. In the written play hardly any physical aspects of homosexual love are described, in the

2004 stage version (Esbjornson) only kissing is part of the play and in the movie also sex scenes are included. This perfectly shows the evolvement of society and the steadily increasing acceptance for homosexual love. With regards to love this scene contains one of the most important lines of the whole play, “man do not naturally not love, they learn not to.” (Kramer, *Normal* 47). In this uttering there are many crucial aspects to be found. First, it is interesting that Felix utters them. Although the audience gets to know Felix as an openly gay character, he is more closeted than others, despite him having the “gayest job” at *The New York Times* saying “I […] write about gay designers and gay discos and gay chefs and gay rock stars and gay photographers and gay models and gay celebrities and gay everything. I just don’t call them gay.” (Kramer, *Normal* 34). So, although Felix is closeted, at least at work, he believes in love between men more strongly than Ned at this point in the plot. Ned’s struggle with love certainly comes from the fact that he was in therapy when he was younger, and many therapists wanted to “cure him” of his homosexuality. Although, rationally he has understood that homosexuality is nothing one has to be cured of, those are definitely experiences that are engrained in him and it takes someone he can truly love to overcome this resistance. Another difference that is noticeable here is that in the movie the outcome of their date already seems obvious, while in the play it is rather portrayed as a normal date with the aim of getting to know one another better. This difference is realized predominantly in Felix’ behavior. The beforementioned calmness is an indicator that Felix already feels quite confident in the relationship, which is also underlined by the sexually charged atmosphere. His loud and irritated reaction in the play rather points to his own insecurity about reaching Ned and convincing him that it is worth to give a relationship a chance. A very straightforward sign is that in the end when Ned asks if they could start over, Felix answers, “Yeah” in the film and only “Maybe” in the play. This fact can be seen as a consequence of the film first and foremost being a love story. The movie tops off the scene of their first date with a passionate and affectionate love-making scene which is close to how the sex is described in the play, with cuddling and talking. Visually the sex scene is portrayed with the audience quite far away in the beginning. First, the couple is blurred out and the viewers only see books and blurred figures in the back, then the camera cuts to a medium long shot,

which gives the impression as if the viewers were watching from another room. The camera gradually approaches the couple from one shot to the next, so with cut-ins it moves from a medium long shot, to a medium shot, to a close-up. In close-up the camera then starts to follow Ned touching Felix, also alternating with extreme close-ups where the viewers see only their entwined hands or their legs. In the end the camera blurs out, so the sequence ends the same way it begun. So as a whole, their date in the movie is what is usually expected from a love story nowadays and it is very clear at the end of the scene that the two are a couple now, while in the play the scene ends in suspense.

Act I finishes with the revelation that transmutes the story from a tragedy about AIDS into a personal love story about two men who are truly devoted to each other and how they cope with the disease. The words are taken from the movie, but the main lines are the same.

> NED. If I had it, would you leave me?
> FELIX. I don't know. Would you if I did?
> NED. No.
> FELIX. How do you know?
> NED. Because my mother ran the local chapter of the Red Cross, and she put me to work in the blood mobile when I was eight. I'm not programmed for anything else.
> FELIX. Ned, I have something to tell you.
> NED. You're finally pregnant.
> FELIX. *(chuckles)* I was married once.
> NED. You never told me that.
> FELIX. Yeah, I … She said I had been unfair to her, which I had been. I have a son.
> NED. You have a son?
> FELIX. She won't let me see him.
> NED. You can't see your own son? But didn't you fight? That means you're ashamed, so he will be, too.
> FELIX. This is why I didn't tell you. Who says I didn't fight, Ned? Well, what happens to people who can't be as strong as you want them to be?
> NED. Weakness scares the shit out of me. My father was weak and I'm afraid I'll be like him. His life didn't stand for anything and then it was over! So, I fight constantly, and if I can do it, I can't understand why everybody else can't do it too, okay? *(Felix stands up and goes into the next room and slams the door)* Where are you going? Felix where are you going? *(Ned follows him.)* Felix, I didn't mean anything by that, Felix. I'm scared of lots of things, really. Heights. I never told you I'm terrified of … *(enters the other room, Felix sits on a chair and seems desperate)* What?

> FELIX. *(Lifts his foot and shows Ned a lesion.)* It's … It keeps getting bigger and bigger. It doesn't go away. *(Ned punches against a wall and starts to cry.)* (Murphy)

The play version stops after Felix' "Okay" and he takes off his sock telling Ned that the lesion is getting bigger. So, in this case the stage version is less agitated before Felix' revelation and in the written version of the play Kramer gave no stage directions to how Ned is supposed to react. In the New York Public Theater's production of 2004 (Esbjornson), the two are sitting next to each other and Ned does not respond at all; he just lifts his arm to touch the lesion and then the stage goes black. Considering that only a minimal part of the audience will be close enough to the stage to see what Felix refers to, a more obvious reaction would help those in the audience not familiar with the play and not close enough to realize what is happening. Here again the movie is charged with emotion. First, the two fight about Felix not fighting for his son. The camera films the two in a close-up with shallow focus, so the faces are the focal points and the viewers only concentrate on the face. As mentioned in the beginning of this section facial expressions are the prime carrier of emotions and in this scene the focus is almost exclusively on the character's faces, in turn catching the speaker and the reaction of the listener. When Ned accuses Felix of not fighting for his son, both their faces are angry. After Felix storms off, Ned feels sorry for what he has said and tries to make it up by explanations and humor, but upon entering the room it becomes obvious that Felix is not angry because of their discussion over his son. We see him in a full shot sitting in an armchair, his elbows propped on his knees holding his head in his hands. The camera cuts back to a close-up of Ned, whose face immediately shows signs of worry. Looking up Felix says nothing, he just takes off his shoe and shows Ned the lesion, which we see as an extreme close-up. In Felix' face and in his voice the viewers see and hear the helplessness. Ned starts crying immediately, well aware of what this means. The play refrains from creating too much agitation in scenes which do not have anything to do with AIDS activism directly, which is the main issue, the play gets passionate about.

When considering Colm Hogan's assertions about love (see 5.2), the true love shows after Felix falls ill and Ned stays at his side despite of sources of disgust. This can be observed in a scene in which Ned comes home and Felix had

diarrhea in bed and is sitting on the toilet crying in desperation. Ned goes to him, first cleans him up with toilet paper, then puts him in the shower and goes in with him and washes him. Felix is desperate and sobs uncontrollably. Ned is taking care of the sheets, putting new ones on the bed and the dirty ones in the washer. Afterwards, they are in front of the TV and then in bed cuddling, all the while Ned is talking in voice over:

> Once upon a time, there was a little boy who always wanted to love another little boy. One day, he finally found that love, and it was wonderful. I'm supposed to use gloves. I'm supposed to do this. I'm supposed to do that. I'm supposed to not kiss him. […] I'm not supposed to be only 45 years old and taking care of a 35-year-old young man who's hundred years old and dying. Emma calls it a seesaw. He's fine. He gets sick. He gets better. He gets sicker. […] He's afraid I'll leave him. I told him I wouldn't leave him, that I never, for one second, would think of leaving him. But he doesn't believe me. It's hard to believe in much these days. But we must never stop believing in each other. I'm a mess. That's what I am. You cry and cry until you think you can't cry anymore. And then you cry some more. Not only for Felix, but for all the little boys who finally found their other little boys they've wanted all their lives now that they're men. (Murphy)

This is one of the most emotional and moving scenes in the whole movie and the one where the strength of Ned's love becomes apparent because he is not disgusted by Felix or leaves when he asks him to but remains by his side in times of need. Due to the whole scene unfolding in the background with Ned's voice as the main focus, it is even more touching. Ned's stream of consciousness in connection with the pictures of Felix being taken care of while crying in pain and desperation results in the beforementioned impact on the audience. The whole scene seems slow, there is a slow, hypnotizing music in the background and when Ned enters the room and sees the bed the camera takes his point of view and follows the way from the bed into the bathroom slowly, so the viewers can picture Felix desperately trying to get to the toilet in time. There we see Felix in a long shot hunched over, like he was before he told Ned about his first lesion. Like it is frequently done in the movie, also here the faces of the characters, especially Felix in this case, are filmed in a close-up with shallow focus, to underline the feelings represented in the facial expressions. Ned stays completely calm during the scene and is supportive and caring, until he is alone in the laundry room where he cries to himself. At the end of the sequence when the two are lying in front of

the TV they seem at peace, smiling at each other, enjoying every happy moment they have together. This scene represents what Louis from *Angels* was afraid of and the reason why he would leave Prior, he is not strong enough to see a loved one suffer like that.

The peak of despair is reached in another scene at the house on the countryside, so the same location Felix first showed Ned the lesion on his foot. Felix is sitting while Ned is standing up and again they have a fight which ends with Ned crying. Ned comes home with groceries and Felix is sitting on the floor eating junk food when the scene evolves:

> NED. Why are you sitting on the floor?
> FELIX. I fell down trying to get from there to here. *(Ned goes to him and wants to help him up.)* Oh, don't touch me. God. I hate it when you look at me.
> NED. You hungry? I'm hungry. How about you?
> FELIX. I looked in all my date books. No one else I slept with is sick. Maybe you're the carrier.
> NED. We don't have to do this to each other. You're gonna get better, Felix. […]
> NED. Stop eating that shit! *(Wants to take it away from Felix.)*
> FELIX. No!
> NED. You know how important it is to watch your nutrition!
> FELIX. I have a life expectancy of 10 more minutes. I'll eat what I want to eat. Ned. It's getting messier, okay? I don't want to make you see it.
> NED. Nobody can make me do anything. You should know that better than anybody. Now are you gonna sit there on the floor for the rest of your life? […]
> FELIX. I've had over forty treatments. […] I've had three, no, four different kinds of chemo. […] I've had three different experimentals. Emma has spent more time on my than anyone else, and it hasn't done a thing! You cannot force the goddamn sun to come out!
> NED. I am so sick of fighting and everybody's stupidity and blindness and guilt trips. You know, if you can't eat the food, don't eat the food. I don't care. Take your poison. I don't care! Fish is good for you! Don't want any of that, do we? *(Ned starts to throw the groceries at Felix.)* No green salad! No broccoli! No vegetables! No bread with seven grains! Why would anybody ever want any milk? You might get some calcium in your bones! *(The milk carton explodes on the wall above Felix.)* Do you want to die, Felix? Die! *(Goes over to Felix and puts his head on Felix's lap and starts crying desperately.)* Please don't leave me, Felix.
> FELIX. I'm sorry. (Murphy)

This scene portrays all the negative feelings that occur in a relationship when one partner has AIDS. Felix is feeling much worse and blames Ned for his disease

because nobody else he slept with is ill. Implicitly, Ned also blames Felix for not getting better because he does not watch his nutrition. However, all the blame they pin on each other represent the worries and devastation boiling over. Apparently, both of them cannot cope with the situation anymore. In the movie in this scene the characters meet each other with calm hostility. It does get more heated, but not to the extent like it does on stage. It is the only sequence that is even more stirring in the stage adaptation. There, Ned and Felix are screaming at the top of their lungs. Ned smashes the milk carton between the two of them and in order to get to him Felix crawls through the milk puddle. In the movie the same technique referred to numerous times is used: close-ups with shallow focus to punctuate the characters' facial expressions. In this scene, however, the screaming on stage is that loud and hysteric that it has a stronger effect.

All this desperation and guilt culminate in a loving death scene, when all that remains is love and Emma quasi-marries Ned and Felix uttering the wedding pronouncements, shortly before Felix dies. While in the play Ned comes back from Gay Week and still tells Felix about it during their final scene, Felix dies beforehand in the movie (see 5.4).

The analysis clearly shows that the movie and the film vary in focus. While the play is almost exclusively concerned with AIDS activism in order to reach the public as well as city and country officials, the movie wants to portray the conditions and ignorance of the public through personal struggles and a love story. Furthermore, the film reminds people that although AIDS is considered a chronic disease today, rather than an immediate death sentence, we should still not stop fighting, until it is not an issue at all anymore and a cure is found.

# 6. Conclusion

The AIDS pandemic unleashed a crisis on the world and claimed many victims, particularly in the initial period between 1983 and 1996. Especially gay men were hit in the beginning, which is why it took such a long time for politics to even care and acknowledge the disease as a threat to human life. In order to gain attention

from officials, playwrights used the stage as mouthpiece to inform the gay community about the disease and to put pressure on politics. In that period many AIDS plays were written, which had different approaches, but all united under the common goal of informing and raising awareness.

The main question the present thesis was concerned with was how the plays *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner and *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer were transformed into movies. In the former the emphasis lay on what makes the film a theatrical experience and the analysis of the latter concentrated on the shifting focus of the film as opposed to its source text. Nichols retained most of the play, which rendered it a theatrical experience, observable through obvious supernatural scenes, long dialogues and monologues or the split scene technique. Furthermore, *Angels* is called a play about desire. On the one hand sexual desire, especially portrayed through Joe, because he just starts to explore his sexuality. On the other hand, the desire to live is central and the main character, Prior, prompts the audience to keep fighting against AIDS.

In the case of *The Normal Heart* a lot more changes could be found. The movie focusses on the emotional realities of the characters, their love and struggles with AIDS. The main finding of the analysis shows that the story was very specifically adapted to the different times it appeared. The original is mainly concerned with politics' ignorance at the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic and can therefore be said to be an activism piece. Furthermore, it also served as information for the public and included more medical details. The movie appeared in 2015 and focuses on the conditions the infected found themselves in, because what AIDS is and how it is transmitted is part of common knowledge today. Additionally, the movie concentrated on the love story between Ned and Felix and leaves more room to explore their personal fate.

Although this thesis is very extensive it also suggests further research that could be done based on it. On the one hand, it would be interesting to procure as many stage recordings as possible and analyze the differences according to the times they appeared and how different theaters and directors present the stories. On the other hand, various other plays could be used to do a more comprehensive

comparison. Hoffman's *As Is* was made into a movie only a year after its premier in 1985, Rudrick's play *Jeffrey* was adapted for the screen only two years after it's stage premiere in 1993 and McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* three years after its premier in 1994. Additionally, one could widen the scope and look at AIDS fiction and how and if those were adapted for the screens.

Leaving aside the movie adaptations, a closer look at second generation AIDS plays might also shed more light on the development of AIDS theater. Plays like Kearns' *Myron*: *A Fairy Tale in Black and White*, Pickett's *Queen of Angels*, or Miller's *My Queer Body* are certainly good starting points for such an investigation.

AIDS literature provides a nearly inexhaustible fountain of great work because it is written with clear focus and a lot of passion. While it is often hard to face the realities they depict, it is also important to never forget such harsh times in history and no matter how one might describe one's sexuality or if they do not even describe it at all, what AIDS literature teaches us is to never stop fighting for one's rights.

# 7. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit beleuchtet die AIDS Epidemie durch das Analysieren von drei AIDS Theaterstücken: *Angels in America: Millenium Approaches* und *Perestroika* von Tony Kushner und *The Normal Heart* von Larry Kramer. Um diese Stücke umfassend analysieren zu können, beginnt die Arbeit mit einer umfassenden Einführung in die Queer Studies. Hierbei beginnen die Überlegungen schon bei den ersten Theorien zur Homosexualität und enden mit der heutigen politischen Lage. Die ersten Schwulenbewegungen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts waren der Auffassung, dass Akzeptanz das höchste sei, für das gekämpft werden kann. Erst mit den Stonewall Aufständen von 1969 begann eine großflächige Schwulenbewegung, die für viele unterschiedliche Rechte kämpfte. In der akademischen Welt entwickelte sich die Queer Theorie, als Gegenspieler zu den Gay und Lesbian Studies. Der Hauptfokus bei dem Begriff queer liegt auf dem Zurückweisen jeglicher Definition eines Normals, somit dient der Begriff queer als Sammelbegriff für all jene, die sich in den typischen Bezeichnungen wie heterosexuell, homosexuell oder bisexuell nicht wiederfinden. Die Hauptcharaktere in der Gründung von Queer Studies sind Judith Butler und Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

All die Bemühungen der Schwulenbewegungen wurden durch den Ausbruch von AIDS gestoppt beziehungsweise teilweise sogar negiert. AIDS ist eine Krankheit, die das Immunsystem immer mehr schwächt, bis sich dieses gegen keinerlei Eindringlinge mehr selbst schützen kann und Menschen mit dieser Krankheit sterben deshalb an Krankheiten, die sonst nicht einmal Kindern schaden würden. Zu Beginn der Epidemie erkrankten vor allem schwule Männer, weshalb die Politik eine Intervention als nichtig empfand. Dies führte dazu, dass sich schwule Männer vereinten um auf die Krankheit aufmerksam zu machen und zu informieren, weshalb sich viele schwule Dramatiker dazu entschieden, Stücke, die sich mit dem Thema befassen zu veröffentlichen und durch diese die Aufmerksamkeit der Öffentlichkeit zu erlangen.

Als erstes AIDS Theaterstück wird meistens Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* genannt, das einen wichtigen Teil in dieser Arbeit einnimmt. Es handelt von den

Anfängen der Epidemie und beleuchtet vor allem die Ignoranz der Politik, die die Krankheit komplett ignorierte. Im Jahr 2014 wurde das Stück verfilmt, wobei es hierbei den Fokus mehr auf die persönlichen Schicksale der Charaktere richtet und weniger den Aktivismus in den Fokus stellt, da zu dieser Zeit AIDS keine derartige Bedrohung mehr darstellt.

Andere Theaterstücke konzentrieren sich mehr auf den lebensbejahenden Aspekt und unterstreichen, dass AIDS nicht das Ende ist. Beispiele hierfür sind Hoffmans Stück *As Is* oder Chelseys *Night Sweat*. Das zweite Stück, das zentral in dieser Arbeit ist, ist Tony Kushners *Angels in America*, welches AIDS als ein Thema unter vielen bespricht, wobei die Krankheit mehr zum Aufzeigen anderer Probleme in der Gesellschaft hergenommen wird. Die Verfilmung von Angels bleibt zum Großteil wie das Original und es wurden nur kleinere Veränderungen vorgenommen, was sogar dazu führt, dass der Film als theatralisch bezeichnet wird.

Word Count: 32 174

# 8. Works Cited

Primary Sources:

Esbjornson, David. “The Normal Heart.” *YouTube*, uploaded by SunlightFire, 21 Sept. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yReg5vk6By8&list=PLqksNubBG-SrL6zKS-RVVHZpK3dUDHZFg>

Kramer, Larry. *The Normal Heart and The Destiny of Me: Two Plays*. 1985. 2nd ed. New York: Grove, 2014.

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America: Revised and Complete Edition*. 1992. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2014.

Murphy, Ryan. *The Normal Heart*. Screenplay by Larry Kramer. DVD. HBO Video. 2014.

Nichols, Mike. *Angels in America*. Screenplay by Tony Kushner. Amazon Prime Video. HBO Video, 2004. <https://www.amazon.de/gp/video/detail/B072HSTGWX/ref=atv_hm_hom_2_c_obwan_2_2?ie=UTF8&pf_rd_i=home&pf_rd_m=A3JWKAKR8XB7XF&pf_rd_p=1668752507&pf_rd_r=71YKJ0NWV3M1YXWZTXZA&pf_rd_s=center-3&pf_rd_t=12401>

Secondary Sources:

Abelove, Henry. “’Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans’ Revisited: A Brief Contribution to the History of Psychoanalysis.” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 17.2 (2016): 78–79.

Bailey, William. “The Importance of HIV Prevention: Programming to the Lesbian and Gay Community.” *AIDS, Identity, and Community: The HIV Epidemic and Lesbians and Gay Men*. Ed. Beverly Greene and Gregory Herek, 1995. 210–25.

Barnes-McLain, Noreen. “Death and Desire: The Evolution of the AIDS Play.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 12.1 (1997): 113–20.

Bartle, Chris. “Gay/Queer Dynamics and the Question of Sexual History and Identity.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 62.4 (2015): 531–69.

Bernstein, Robin. “Staging Lesbian and Gay New York.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York*. Ed. Cyrus Patell and Bryan Waterman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 202–17.

Brantley, Ben. “THEATER REVIEW: Back When AIDS Was New, and the Stage Was a Soapbox.” *The New York Times* 22 Apr. 2004. 15 June 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/22/theater/theater-review-back-when-aids-was-new-and-the-stage-was-a-soapbox.html>.

Brietzke, Zander. *American Drama in the Age of Film*. Tuscaloosa: Alabama UP, 2007.

Butler, Judith. “Critically Queer.” 1993. *Queer theory*. Ed. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 18–31.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. New York: Routledge, 2006.
Cady, Joseph. “AIDS Literature.” *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader’s Companion to the Writers and their Works, from Antiquity to the Present*. Ed. Claude Summers. New York: Holt, 1995. 16–20.
Califia, Patrick. *Macho Sluts*. 1988. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 2009.
Capehart, Jonathan. “Gays and Lesbians Owe Thanks to President George W. Bush and Justice Scalia.” *The Washington Post* 20 Oct. 2014. 12 Feb. 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/10/20/gays-and-lesbians-owe-thanks-to-president-george-w-bush-and-justice-scalia/?utm_term=.c36bc425c80e>.
Clum, John. *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
Cohen, Peter. “Strange Bedfellows: Writing Love and Politics in *Angels in America* and *The Normal Heart*.” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 19.2 (1998): 197–219.
Colm Hogan, Patrick. *What Literature Teaches us about Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction. Second Series.
Crimp, Douglas. “Right on, Girlfriend!”. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner. 4th ed. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2000. 300–20.
---. “Introduction.” *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp and Leo Bersani. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996. 3–16.
Dixon, Graham. “The Obscene Paradox: Hope and Despair in *Angels in America*.” *Essays on Kushner’s Angels*. Ed. Per Brask. Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1995. 97–126.
Dolan, Jill. “Building a Theatrical Vernacular: Responsibility, Community, Ambivalence, and Queer Theatre.” *Modern Drama* 39.1 (1996): 1–15.
Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
Doty, Alexander. *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993.
Duberman, Martin. *The Martin Duberman Reader: The Essential Historical, Biographical, and Autobiographical Writings*. New York: The New Press, 2013.
Faulstich, Werner. *Grundkurs Filmanalyse*. 2nd ed. Paderborn: Fink, 2008.
Feng, Dezheng, and Kay O’Halloran. “The Multimodal Representation of Emotion in Film: Integrating Cognitive and Semiotic Approaches.” *Semiotica* 197 (2013).
Forstein, Marshall. “AIDS: A History.” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 17.1 (2013): 40–63.
Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. 1976. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
Freud, Sigmund. *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*. 1905. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005.
Friesen, Patrick. “’How like an Angel Came I Down!’”. *Essays on Kushner’s Angels*. Ed. Per Brask. Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1995. 89–94.
Gove, Ben. *Cruising Culture: Promiscuity, Desire and American Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.

Graff, Torsten. “Gay Drama / Queer Performance?” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46.1 (2001): 11–25.
Haas, Astrid. *Stages of Agency: The Contributions of American Drama to the AIDS Discourse*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2011.
Halkitis, Perry. “Obama, Marriage Equality, and the Health of Gay Men.” *American Journal of Public Health* 102.9 (2012): 1628–29.
Hall, Donald. “A Brief, Slanted History of Homosexual Activity.” *Queer theory*. Ed. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 96–114.
Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
Harden, Victoria. *AIDS at 30: A History*. Washingon: Potomac, 2012.
Healey, Justin. *HIV and AIDS*. Thirroul: Spinney, 2011.
Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: Eine Einführung*. Trans. Corinna Genschel. 1996. Berlin: Quer, 2005.
Jakobsen, Janet. “Queer is? Queer does? Normativity and the Problem of Resistance.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4.4 (1998): 511–36.
Jones, Therese, ed. *Sharing the Delirium: Second Generation AIDS Plays and Performances*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994.
Jongh, Nicholas de. *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
Kekki, Lasse. *From Gay to Queer: Gay Male Identity in Selected Fiction by David Leavitt and in Tony Kushner’s Play Angels in America I-II*. Bern: Lang, 2003.
Keltner, Dacher, Keith Oatley, and Jennifer Jenkins. *Understanding Emotions*. 2006. 3rd ed. Hoboken: Wiley, 2014.
Kilian, Eveline. “Queering Gender Studies.” *Travelling Gender Studies: grenzüberschreitende Wissens- und Institutionentransfers*. Ed. Beate Binder. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2011. 220–39.
Klüßendorf, Ricarda. *“The Great Work Begins”: Tony Kushner’s Theater for Change in America*. Trier: WVT, 2007.
Knaller, Susanne. “Emotions and the Process of Writing.” *Writing Emotions: Theoretical Concepts and Selected Case Studies in Literature*. Ed. Ingeborg Jandl, et al. Berlin: Transcript, 2017. 17–28.
Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *Tendencies*. 1993. London: Routledge, 1994.
---. “Axiomatic.” *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. Ed. Donald Hall. London: Routledge, 2013. 81-95.
Krafft-Ebing, Richard von. *Psychopathia Sexualis: The Classic Study of Deviant Sex*. 1886. New York: Skyhorse, 2011.
Kramer, Larry. *Reports from the Holocaust: The Story of an AIDS Activist*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1994.
Lauretis, Teresa de. “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities An Introduction.” *Differences* 3.2 (1991).
Leitch, Thomas. “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory.” *Criticism* 45.2 (2004): 149–71.
Marotta, Toby. *The Politics of Homosexuality*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
McConachie, Bruce. *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962*. Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2003.
McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

McNamara, Mary. "'The Normal Heart' still a Powerful Call to Action." *The LA Times* 22 May 2014. 12 June 2018. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-st-normal-heart-review-20140523-column.html>.

McRuer, Robert. *The Queer Renaissance: Contemporary American Literature and the Reinvention of Lesbian and Gay Identities*. New York: New York UP, 1997.

Morland, Iain, and Annabelle Willox. "Introduction." *Queer theory*. Ed. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 1–5.

NAMES Project. *AIDS Memorial Quilt*. 8 Jan. 2018. <http://www.aidsmemorial.info/memorial/id=36/aids_memorial_quilt.html>.

Nünning, Vera. "The Affective Value of Fiction." *Writing Emotions: Theoretical Concepts and Selected Case Studies in Literature*. Ed. Ingeborg Jandl, et al. Berlin: Transcript, 2017. 29–54.

Pacheco, Patrick. "Tony Kushner Speaks Out on AIDS, Angels, Activism & Sex in the Nineties." *Essays on Kushner's Angels*. Ed. Per Brask. Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1995. 13–26.

Pearl, Monica. "Epic AIDS: *Angels in America* from Stage to Screen." *Textual Practice* 21.4 (2007): 761–79.

Piontek, Thomas. *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies*. Urbana: Illinois UP, 2006.

Pugh, Tison. "Theatrical, Cinematic, and Domestic Epic in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*." *Modern American Drama on Screen*. Ed. William Bray and Barton Palmer, 2016. 271–88.

Reddy, William. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Roberts, Brian. "Whatever Happened to Gay Theatre?" *New Theatre Quarterly* 16.2 (2000): 175–85.

Román, David. *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Abelove. New York: Routledge, 1993. 3–44.

Ryan, Michael, and Melissa Lenos. *An Introduction to Film Analysis: Technique and Meaning in Narrative Film*. New York: Continuum, 2012.

Savran, David. *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theater*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2003.

---. "The Theatre of the Fabulous: An Interview with Tony Kushner." *Essays on Kushner's Angels*. Ed. Per Brask. Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1995. 129–54.

Schippers, Jan. "Homosexual Identity, Essentialism and Constructionism." *Which Homosexuality? Essays from the International Scientific Conference on Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Ed. Dennis Altman. London: GMP. 139–48.

Schnierer, Peter. *Modernes Englisches Drama und Theater seit 1945: Eine Einführung*. Tübingen: Narr, 1997.

Shear, Michael, and Charlie Savage. "In One Day, Trump Administration Lands 3 Punches Against Gay Rights." *The New York Times* 27 July 2017. 12 Feb. 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/27/us/politics/white-house-lgbt-rights-military-civil-rights-act.html>.

Shepard, Benjamin. "The Queer/Gay Assimilationist Split: The Suits vs. the Sluts." *Monthly Review* 53.1 (2001): 49–62.

Shugart, Helene. “Parody as Subversive Performance: Denaturalizing Gender and Reconstituting Desire in Ellen.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21.2 (2001): 95–113.

Sinfield, Alan. *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.

Snyder, Mary. *Analyzing Literature-to-Film Adaptations: A Novelist‘s Exploration and Guide*. New York: Continuum, 2011.

Sontag, Susan. *AIDS and its Metaphors*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.

Stam, Robert, and Alessandra Raengo, eds. *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. Print.

Stegu, Martin. “Keine Heteros auf Gayboy! Diskrepanzen zwischen Gay Discourse und Queer Theory.” *Let‘s Talk About (Texts About) Sex: Sex and Language*. Ed. Marietta Calderon and Georg Marko. Frankfurt: Lang, 2012. 301–19.

Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010.

Tontonoz, Matthew. “Sandor Rado, American Psychoanalysis, and the Question of Bisexuality.” *History of Psychology* 20.3 (2017): 263–89.

Vejdovsky, Boris. “Hidden Truths and Open Lies: The Performance of U.S. History and Mythography in Tony Kushner‘s *Angels in America* and Its Film Adaptation.” *American Secrets: The Politics and Poetics of Secrecy in the Literature and Culture of the United States*. Ed. Eduardo Barros-Grela and Jose Listé-Noya. Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2011. 73–85.

Warner, Michael. “Introduction.” *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Ed. Michael Warner. 4th ed. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2000.

Warner, Sara. “Lesbian and Gay Drama.” *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*. Ed. Ellen McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 2014. 607–25.