

## Shabbat Dinner excerpt

*A dinner table is set up in a theatre, gallery or restaurant, with ten place settings. There are seats for the audience fringing the table.*

*Each place at the table is set with silverware, plates, a wine glass and a paper napkin.*

*The hosts welcome guests into the space with a glass of wine, and small talk. They are told not to drink the wine until instructed.*

*(Note: The English translations of Hebrew songs in this script are in square brackets. They are not to be read aloud.)*

### PROLOGUE

*A folksong (from the culture of one of the performers) is sung, as the audience settles into their seats.*

*JESS, the host, moves to the head of the table.*

JESS: Shabbat Shalom!

Shabbat greetings, and a peaceful Shabbat.

Broochim ha ba-im!

Welcome, and blessings on your arrival.

There are angels who accompany us home on a Friday night, and we ask them to bless us for the week to come, to leave our house in peace, and to return again next week, in peace.

Many people who, way back, are somehow my ancestors, never really saw peace. I say ancestors, because we're apparently all connected via our founding fathers, and founding mothers. Orthodox blessings connect me to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov. Reform blessings allow me to also acknowledge Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Laya.

I also claim familial connection to a lot of more contemporary Jews. Comedy Jews, history Jews, literary Jews, theatre Jews.

I claim it because, why not? I've earned some sassy brethren. If I'm labelled Jewish before I'm labelled as an artist, vegetarian,

feminist, or dog-enthusiast, then I might as well be linked to some amazing Jews.

So. This means I'm related to Tony Kushner, Lenny Bruce, Sarah Silverman, Lena Dunham, Gary Shteyngart, Joan Rivers, the girls from Broad City, and the Marx brothers.

I claim Walter Benjamin, too. Why not?

*(to a member of the ensemble)* Hey, can I borrow you for a sec?

*Jess asks HISTORY to come and give History.*

HISTORY: Walter Benjamin was a philosopher, communist and intellectual.

He wrote his Theses on the Philosophy of History in 1940. The essay was probably his last work. He wrote it in the lead-up to his flee from Vichy France, via Fascist Spain, with the aim of eventually making it to America.

JESS: Fleeing – another common Jewish experience.

HISTORY: The Franco government retracted refugee visas of Jews. They informed Benjamin of their plans to repatriate him to France, where he would be handed over to the Nazis. With few options left, Benjamin killed himself with an overdose of morphine. His twenty theses on history were published after his death.

Benjamin wrote about the Angel of History, who sees things differently to you or I. We see history as a chain of events, one thing after another. We impose logic onto the order of it. We see cause and effect.

The Angel of History sees one single catastrophe upon which further ruin grows. Ruin upon ruin, piling up, until the mass of it is hurled in front of his feet.

It is all connected to one great tragedy. One word, one moment.

JESS: The word that sticks with me, with my own furrowing into the past, is "shame".

HISTORY: Left with this pile of shame, of memory, of life, the Angel wishes to fix the wrongs spread out before him. To awaken the dead. Make whole what has been smashed.

But a storm is blowing in from Paradise, with an agenda larger than his. The storm gets caught in his angel wings with such

violence, that he can no longer close them. It propels him forward, pulling him backwards by those hairs and feathers.

The pile of debris grows higher and higher. He reaches out for these scraps and shards and bones of the past, but he is pulled into a new future.

The catastrophe continues to smoulder before him, but he cannot reach it.

This storm. This storm is what we call progress.