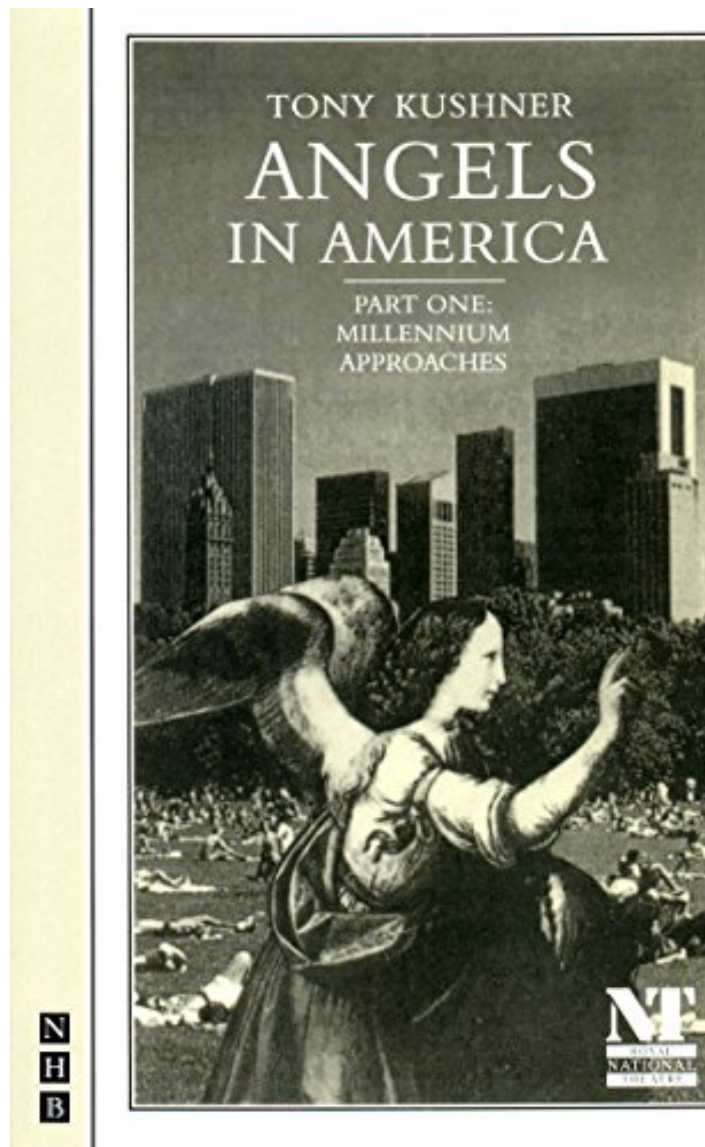


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Angels in America: Part One: Millennium Approaches: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Pt.1)

Tony Kushner

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Tony Kushner : Angels in America: Part One: Millennium Approaches: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Pt.1) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Angels in America: Part One: Millennium Approaches: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes (Pt.1):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. You Have To Be Damned To Be Saved By Kevin L. Nienstiel This play has the secondary title "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes," but the "Gay" portion seems unnecessary. Reflecting the self-seeking, ambitious attitude that dominated the middle 1980s, Kushner uses jagged language, a clash of characters, and tension born from manipulating audience stereotypes to make us wonder if perhaps we've lost sight of our original national purpose. Not for nothing does this play begin at an immigrant's funeral. This nation is a fusion of peoples drawn from elsewhere, a mix that cannot be made again. We know the officiating rabbi means it in the most literal sense when he says, "You do not live in America. No such place exists." This America is a created land, but created of all the anger, frustration, and venality of the assembled characters. The lies these characters tell themselves are phenomenal. After the funeral, Louis, a relative of the deceased confesses that he didn't introduce his male lover to the family because "I get so closety at these family things." This is probably the most direct any of the characters are at any point in the play. Perhaps it's introduced very early to let us know that levels of dishonesty will be calibrated in every scene. And no dishonesty is more powerful than when the characters come to believe their own lies. When Roy Cohn is diagnosed with AIDS at the end of the first act, before he does anything else, he revises his own prognosis to correspond to his own self-figuration. Not only does he tell himself that he has cancer, he bullies his doctor to ratify the diagnosis so that he can go out and tell everyone else the same thing. Even when his protégé, Joe Pitt, admits his own homosexuality, Cohn continues to hide from the world, and excoriate himself for hiding. Cohn's self-loathing is epic in scope, entirely consistent with the hatred Kushner implies he pushed out into the world with his militancy. Though she is not as open with other characters as Louis, Harper Pitt has the most elaborate system of self-deception of the play. She invents friends to talk to, justifying her refusal to interact with the world. She manufactures an illusory pregnancy to get pity--but who from? Herself? It's hard to imagine who else she might elicit sympathy from, because she alienates her only ally, her husband Joe, as her world turns more inward upon itself. Her imaginary friend, Mr. Lies, gives away his identity with his very name. But even Mr. Lies won't participate unreservedly in the process. "You can be numb and safe here, that's what you came for," he tells her. Perhaps because of the lies, all the characters seem to seek their own destruction. Faced with his lover's increasing illness, Louis flees to reckless sex with an anonymous partner--and, it is implied, more partners than we see. Likewise, Joe first admits his homosexuality by calling his mother, a judgmental Mormon unlikely to take kindly to such a revelation. On top of that, he calls her from a pay phone in the most dangerous part of New York's Central Park at the most dangerous time of night. He's asking to get killed, and perhaps he's asking for it because he wants to be punished. Though it's not the end of the play, the summation of the themes takes place in the Act 3rd Scene 2. Louis' garbled, self-justifying monologue tries to make sense of the way in which a gay man can face himself in the disapproving world that is Reagan's America. But what actually comes out of his mouth is an incomprehensible hash of American national mythology, half-remembered Nietzschean philosophy, a badly scrambled reading of race and cultural relations across borders, and more. As a court word processor, Louis has made his life out of comprehending the rhetoric and literature of justice. But he cannot remember how it actually goes. This play, being actually half a play, culminates with the potential for redemption, in the final scene. Prior Walter, ravaged by AIDS-Related Complex, is the one character who cannot lie to himself. We watch, over the course of three acts, as each untruth and every easy self-deception is progressively expunged. At the end, devastated and alone, he is the only character fit to bear audience to the titular Angel. But honest Prior Walter, and the lying characters all around him, do not yet have that redemption. They cannot have it, they cannot be saved, until they have reached the very bottom of their arcs. And that is what we see in this play. We see them being burned away, bit by bit. We see them being made ready for the possible salvation that comes in Part Two.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Aristotle, we need a rewrite: Fulfilling a genre's capacity and promise By Alan Crowley Kushner's play, more than being one of the great jewels of American drama, succeeds at achieving the great promise and potential of drama as a genre, to become a sacrament of empathy, an experience of cathartic compassion. The distinction between art for art's sake and its social purpose, as well as the false dichotomy of truth and beauty, are subsumed in the fires of emotional and intellectual passion of this "play."

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Still great! By rjones2818 One of the great American plays (well, two unless you take it as a whole). I don't think I've read anything as broad in its vision and as well written as *Angels in America*. Go out of your way to read this!

First performed in Britain at the National Theatre in January 1992, this play is written from a gay perspective and with an AIDS theme. The author is the award-winning writer of *A Bright Room Called Day*.