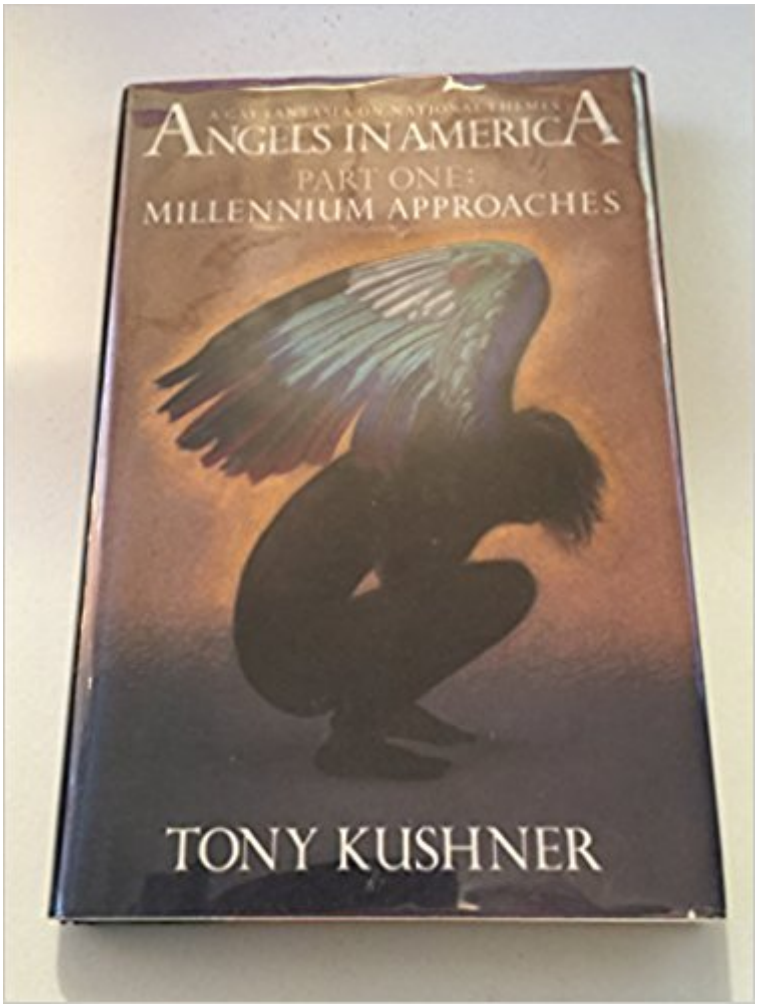
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Angels In America Part 1: Millennium Approaches



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Synopsis

Winner of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Winner of the 1993 Tony Award for Best Play. In the first part of Tony Kushner's epic, set in 1980's New York City, a gay man is abandoned by his lover when he contracts the AIDS virus, and a closeted Mormon lawyer's marriage to his pill-popping wife stalls. Other characters include the infamous McCarthy-ite lawyer Roy Cohn, Ethel Rosenberg, a former drag queen who works as a nurse, and an angel. "Daring and dazzling! The most ambitious American play of our time: an epic that ranges from earth to heaven; focuses on politics, sex and religion; transports us to Washington, the Kremlin, the South Bronx, Salt Lake City and Antarctica; deals with Jews, Mormons, WASPs, blacks; switches between realism and fantasy, from the tragedy of AIDS to the camp comedy of drag queens to the death or at least the absconding of God." Ã¢â ¬â •Jack Kroll, Newsweek "A vast miraculous play Ã¢â ¬Â| provocative, witty and deeply upsetting Ã¢â ¬Â| a searching and radical rethinking of American political drama Ã¢â ¬Â|" Ã¢â ¬â •Frank Rich, New York Times "Something rare, dangerous and harrowing Ã¢â ¬Â| a roman candle hurled into a drawing room Ã¢â ¬Â|" Ã¢â ¬â •Nicholas de Jongh, London Evening Standard "An epic theatrical fever dream Ã¢â ¬Â| a three-hour cliffhanger that leaves you wanting more." Ã¢â ¬â •Variety "A victory for theater, for the transforming power of the imagination to turn devastation into beauty." Ã¢â ¬â •John Lahr, New Yorker "Establishes Kushner as a poet and moral visionary in love with the theater yet awake in the world." Ã¢â ¬â •Don Shewey, Village Voice --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tony Kushner’s plays include A Bright Room Called Day and Slavs!; as well as adaptations of Corneille’s The Illusion, Ansky’s The Dybbuk, Brecht’s The Good Person of Szecguan and Goethe’s Stella. Current projects include: Henry Box Brown or The Mirror of Slavery; and two musical plays: St. Cecilia or The Power of Music and Caroline or Change. His collaboration with Maurice Sendak on an American version of the children’s opera, Brundibar, appeared in book form Fall 2003. Kushner grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and he lives in New York.

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 protÃƒÂ©gÃƒÂ©, 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 3n 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.

This story is so touching, and so timeless. It really stretches across time, and touches the heart of so many who lost loved ones to AIDS. In addition, it is such an eye opening story for those who have not. Beautifully written, and masterfully told.

Tony Kushner, Angels in America: Millennium Approaches (Theatre Communications Group, 1993)I thought Millennium Approaches was going along like a house on fire for the first two-thirds of its length. It's character-driven, it's funny despite its heartbreaking subject matter, it handles an historical figure in such a way as to make him larger than life. (I will admit up front that, despite my

mother having suggested I do so for something like twenty years now, I have not read Citizen Cohn, her favorite Roy Cohn biography, and so I can't actually say how much of Kushner's portrayal of Cohn is accurate; it is, however, all kinds of fun.) And Kushner was getting his message across in just the right way--letting the story impart the message. Then comes Scene 2 of Act 3, where Louis and Belize are sitting in a bar talking. And Louis' logorrhea is message, message, message, message, message, and the whole thing just goes to hell in a handbasket. The funny thing is, Belize recognizes that it's all message, message, message, message, message and calls Louis on it repeatedly. Even Kushner's characters can't stand message drama! (That doesn't stop Louis from prattling on.) I've been seeing this more and more recently; authors trying to insert message drama (or fiction or poetry or...) by making the characters who have to put up with it slap the speaker into senselessness. (Unless it's internal, then they get nasty looks; think about the interminable message paragraphs that Kenzie suddenly comes up with in A Drink Before the War, for example.) Here's a tip, guys: it doesn't matter how you try to cache message-based writing into your work. It's still crap. It has always been crap (well, okay, 95% of the time), and it will always be crap. And here's the kicker, in Tony Kushner's case: if you're already treading on ground that activists have worked over hundreds of thousands of times, there's basically a guarantee that some political activist with a placard has already said everything you're trying to say. And probably said it better. In this case, it's been done hundreds, if not thousands of times. It's not only message crap, it's retreaded message crap.Now that I've spent three hundred words on Louis and Belize's painful, conversation in Act Three, I'll say that the rest of the play is just plain awesome. The characters jump off the page, the pace is fast (despite there being almost no action), the dialogue is, in the main, witty and interesting. Take out that one scene, and this is great stuff. Unfortunately, no one thought to take out that one scene. ***

It was a decent read for school.

Tony Kurshner is a genius. This book is required reading at my sons school in NYC, and I enjoyed sharing and discussing the book with him. Angels in America is as relevent today as the day it was released.

amazing book, must read

Loved it

I read this book and it doesn’t seem to be the average every day angels we would imagine, this book brings a new perspective who angels are and sheds light on the struggles we don’t normally face in life but others often times do.

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