

1: "The Great Work Begins: Theater as Theurgy in ANGELS IN AMERICA" | Anthony Lioi - www.enganche

Allen J. Frantzen challenges the long accepted view that the early Middle Ages tolerated and even fostered same-sex relations and that intolerance of homosexuality developed only late in the medieval period.

Angels in America has not been widely acknowledged as religious drama without ironic quotation marks. Writing in *The Progressive*, Bob Blanchard spoke for many when he praised the play as "taut, serious, heart-breaking drama about the AIDS epidemic and. Even the most exhaustive collection of scholarship on the play, Deborah R. Geis and Steven R. Instead, he recasts their sexual dynamics through the figure of Prior Walter and his celestial companion, the Angel of America. In the spirit of his Kabbalistic predecessors, he creates a theater of theurgy where the nature of God, humanity, and the cosmos is transfigured for characters and audience alike. Like the Marxist and feminist liberation theologies of recent decades, Kushner promises freedom-in-exodus from the demonic powers of capitalism, totalitarianism, and patriarchy, though his cry of hope is tempered by the knowledge that the world cannot be redeemed in a night, even a night in the Theater of the Fabulous. Most critics have analyzed the play through a secular hermeneutic" in which its visionary aspects are written off as dreams and drug-induced delusions" or a conservative religious hermeneutic" in which homosexuality is de facto the realm of fallenness and abomination" and thereby fail to detect the strains of prophecy and Kabbalah which provide a coherent religious cosmology amidst disaster and betrayal. In an interview with Don Shewey of the *Village Voice*, he observed: I find deep spiritual faith enormously attractive. On some very deep level, I find repugnant the idea that there is such a thing as the eternal and the unchanging. The biggest intellectual breakthrough of my life was my last year at Columbia when I read Brecht and Marx and took a class in Shakespeare with a professor who was really into dialectical analysis. Suddenly, the world made sense to me. Almost all deep religious thought is dialectical that way. It contains subtlety and sophistication, which only fundamentalist morons read out of it. The answer, I believe, goes to the heart of current debates about the place of religion in twentieth-century Western cultures. Kushner has confounded the aesthetic and political logic of modernity and postmodernity as these have come to be defined in the American and European academy. On the one hand, he has refused the dynamic of secularization, recognizing with Rosemary Radford Ruether that "[t]he social orders created by liberalism and socialism have generated fears of a future impoverished of meaning, if not indeed devastated by pollution, poverty, depletion of basic resources, and war. Kushner desires, after all, is not a Jewish one, nor, despite the trappings of religion angels, Ethel Rosenberg as a martyred saint, a religious one of any kind. It is a secular millennium from which many secular-minded people might reasonably shrink. And the rise of a homosexual culture, of which it is the envisioned triumph, is connected to Jews and Judaism by only the most paradoxical link. Jews are likely to be attracted to the secular millennium insofar as they have become alienated from their own traditional beliefs and so have come to define salvation in secular terms. As Alisa Solomon says, "Subliminal associations between Jewishness and sexuality seep out of it like sweat Angels shakes its fists at God with Old Testament fury; the divine shows itself in frenzied Kabbalistic figures. Cohn, who begins and ends a villain, requires little comment here. Joe is a more complicated character, in some ways the Christian version of Louis in his abandonment of his spouse. Harper, and in his political ambivalence as a gay apprentice to the monstrous, fag-bashing, and equally closeted Cohn. Perhaps the most generous thing to be said about Joe is that he needs to be saved but is not himself a savior. His wife Harper is in a stronger position" her addiction to Valium is also a window into visionary, prophetic experience. Though she does not stand at the center of the play, as Prior does, she is nonetheless his peer in prophecy; like him, she uses her predicament to become an agent in the plot which could have trapped her in mere victimhood. And then there is the angel, America. In accord with his dedication to dialectic, Kushner spends most of Act I elaborating his thesis: In the face of this news Louis falters but does not yet fail. Meanwhile, we are also introduced to the troubled marriage of Couple Number 2, in which a man with deeply buried sexual secrets attempts to comfort his valium-fiend wife who is apparently delusional. But the true master of shadows, Roy Cohn, weaves a protective screen of disinformation around himself after his more advanced stage of AIDS is

diagnosed. In doing so he initiates the ironic mirror-dance he will share with Prior throughout the play, despite the fact that the two never meet. Though there is only a hint of it now, this liar-to-prophet dynamic, centered on bitter denial and bitter embrace of AIDS, begins the motif of co-dependently-arising opposites derived from Kabbalah rather than Buddhism which will structure the dramatic action henceforth. For the moment, though, we receive only one explicit hint of the spirit-to-come: Scene 7 marks the first break with the realism that dominates Millennium. As the stage directions indicate. Harper is having "a pill-induced hallucination" in which Prior appears while Prior is dreaming of Harper at the same time. Together they create a communal visionary space in which each is lucid, far more lucid than they are in quotidian consciousness. It is this lucidity that should signal the audience, reviewers aside, that the vision should be taken seriously, because Prior and Harper tell the truth. Tellingly, as if in endorsement, the Voice from heaven makes its first appearance, speaking the traditional words of a biblical herald: Prior and Harper should not be taken as absolute authorities; rather, they are frightened, struggling mortals who occasionally snatch traces of the Real from the haze of their afflictions. This renders their prophecy more believable and more poignant—finny, even. But it does not detract from the message of the Voice; realism is only the beginning of wisdom. Act II contains only one explicit break with the mundane located in Scene 5. After Prior has displayed a traditional, if gender-reversed, mark of pollution—a flow of blood—in Scene 1, Louis abandons him at the hospital, despite the rabbinic warning that "the Holy Scriptures have nothing to say" about those who abandon loved ones in a time of need Act I, Scene 5. Their badinage is similarly curative, calming Prior long enough to report the presence of the Voice, who we discover has never left the room once Belize exits. Despite his doubts, Belize seems to embody the very Comforter the Voice announces. Though the audience has no way of knowing at this point in the play. Kabbalah—the word itself means "tradition" or "that which is received"—is the fountainhead of Jewish mysticism and biblical revision in the era of Christendom. The singular number of the term is deceptive because it implicates a number of textual corpora across at least four centuries and several Mediterranean cities, as well as the subsequent popular appropriations which would become the Hasidic movement and the modern theosophical traditions. Though it is crucial to remember the diversity of texts, teachers, and techniques in Kabbalah, my treatment will, for reasons of space, remain relatively schematic. Early, Zoharic, and Lurianic. The Early Period, typified most often by the Sefer ha-Bahir "The Book of Brilliance", involves an efflorescence of speculation on the nature of the Godhead in twelfth-century Iberia. But at least one of its primary inspirations—Gnosticism—is Late Antique. Already, in a corpus composed of various philosophical, highly speculative tracts, we find unmistakable signs of Gnostic-Neoplatonic cosmology transposed into a rabbinic milieu. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has been imagined in a scheme of ontic and spacial descent reminiscent of the systems devised by the Jewish philosopher Philo and the Gnostic Christian theologian Valentinus, among others. In this scheme, the transcendent, unsignifiable Godhead known as Ein-Sof, the Infinite, emanates ten sefirot-vessels of divine power—which channel various aspects or attributes of YHWH. In order of descent, they are: Thus, the first sefirot after the Crown, the pair Binah-Hokmdh, are the transcendent parents of the seven lower sefirot which carry the primary responsibility for relating to the world. Given the hierarchical nature of this scheme, lowness in the sefirotic tree often identified with the Tree of life in Genesis corresponds to greater materiality; thus the lowest sefirah, Shekhinah or Malkhut, is the mystical gate from the phenomenal world into the intra-divine realm. Building on the Talmudic notion of the Shekhinah as the "Presence" of God on earth. Kabbalah says it is She who appears to the questing mystic. Note, however, that the Presence is female only in post-Talmudic tradition; the Talmud thinks of shekhinah as an abstract noun, "dwelling". Therefore it is no surprise that the Angel of America is gendered female, nor that there are seven continental principalities in Perestroika; Kushner appears to have patterned America after the Shekhinah, and her angelic siblings after the other six lower emanations. And there is ample precedent for this—in the systems that developed after the Early Kabbalah, each sefirah is associated with its native angel who carries its power into relation with humanity. But the true charisma of Kabbalah—and the true precedent it has set for Kushner—lies in the many stories about the sefirot which cast them as characters in a cosmic drama which God is playing out with Godself and the created world. Through the Zoharic optic, the stories of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of the desert exile, usually considered

by Christians as salvation history, are utterly reconfigured as myth which underlies all history anyway, according to Kabbalah. Thus the pillars of cloud and flame that guided the Hebrews through the wilderness are seen as Malkhut, while the glory that shown forth from Moses after he descended from Sinai is associated with Hod. But the separation of Israel from God becomes a division within Godself, and the Shekhinah goes with the people into exile. Nonetheless, the divine King still longs for the Queen and Israel, as in the following passage: When the king began to yearn for the queen and her son he climbed up on roofs, ran down stairs, scaled walls; he peered through the holes in the walls just to see them! When he caught a glimpse of them he started to cry from behind the wall. Then he went away. In this way it possesses more flexibility than standard Christian accounts of realized eschatology in which the world is already completely saved. It also implicitly critiques its Gnostic sources by showing that brokenness need not lead to a demonized material world created by an insane Demiurge. Scene 2, *Perestroika* Given that "God" is always spoken of as male, and given that the angels are still present and powerful, it seems reasonable to conclude that "God" might not be all of YHWH but in fact represents only a male persona who has abandoned the world. Against interpretations of Angels as merely nihilist or existential-atheist, the Zoharic myth of divine self-exile allows Kushner to overcome the nauseating Absence within existential thought while affirming that the world has not been ordered by a perfectly powerful Daddy. As an act of theurgy, Angels must use the wound in language to heal the wound in language, which is also a wound in God. But until this healing is fully accomplished, language cannot be trusted to be perfectly mimetic. The Zoharic myth of the split within God is amplified into a cosmogonic-eschatological system in the third main phase of development, Lurianic Kabbalah. Isaac Luria was a sixteenth-century rabbi who lived in Safed, Palestine, after the expulsion of the Sephardim from Spain in 1492. In the beginning, when Ein-Sof emanated the Crowns, Understanding, and Wisdom, these highest sefirot were strong enough to contain the energies of creation. But Din, the sefirah of Justice and Judgment, was too rigid and could not contain the energies flowing from above. Justice shattered, and his shards referred to as "shells" fell into the void and became demonic powers. Din is associated with Samael, the Devil. Because of this initial disaster in the fourth sefirah, the six others below it also shattered, though not to the same extent. Because the sefirotic tree forms the image of God, it provides the pattern for the world as a whole and human beings in particular, for the tree can also be seen as Adam Kadmon, the Original Androgyne. In any case, Lurianic cosmology asserts that God cannot effect tikkun, the repair of the world and Godself, without the help of humanity. Meant to herald America before her first appearance, this formerly mysterious mantra contains the word "Zefiroth" as well as the epithets "Daughter of Light" and "Daughter of Splendor," possibly references to the Bahir and the Zohar? But this gesture is complicated. Though gender and sexuality as performance, an idea classically theorized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, may seem commonsensical to an academic audience, 80s gay activism and the conservative backlash against it were grounded in a far more static view. Therefore, Kushner has pandered to no orthodoxy, least of all a sexual one. As the Angel and Hannah Pitt observe at different moments in *Perestroika*, many biblical prophets have attempted to refuse: Isaiah, Jonah and Jeremiah chief among them. But in the biblical stories, God always convinces the shirker to accept his calling, by hook or by crook and sometimes by whale.

2: Table of contents for Tony Kushner

Frantzen then jumps to the shadow 'angels' (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) in the play by Tony Kushner, Angels in America, to gloss everything that has come before.

Despite its title, *Angels in America* has not been widely acknowledged as religious drama without ironic quotation marks. Even the most exhaustive collection of scholarship on the play, Deborah R. Geis and Steven R. Essays on *Angels in America*, tends to efface Judaism as a spiritual path in favor of Judaism as a cultural tradition, a move that many contributors seem not to recognize as skewed towards secularism as an ideology. Instead, he recasts their sexual dynamics through the figure of Prior Walter and his celestial companion, the Angel of America. In the spirit of his Kabbalistic predecessors, he creates a theater of theurgy where the nature of God, humanity, and the cosmos is transfigured for characters and audience alike. Like the Marxist and feminist liberation theologies of recent decades, Kushner promises freedom-in-exodus from the demonic powers of capitalism, totalitarianism, and patriarchy, though his cry of hope is tempered by the knowledge that the world cannot be redeemed in a night, even a night in the Theater of the Fabulous. Despite the imputed atheism in his profession of faith in dialectical materialism,⁹ Kushner makes no bones about his attraction for things spiritual, insisting that love of the world and love of God are intimately related. In an interview with Don Shewey of the *Village Voice*, he observed: I find deep spiritual faith enormously attractive. On some very deep level, I find repugnant the idea that there is such a thing as the eternal and the unchanging. The biggest intellectual breakthrough of my life was my last year at Columbia when I read Brecht and Marx and took a class in Shakespeare with a professor who was really into dialectical analysis. Suddenly, the world made sense to me. Almost all deep religious thought is dialectical that way. It contains subtlety and sophistication, which only fundamentalist morons read out of it. The answer, I believe, goes to the heart of current debates about the place of religion in twentieth-century Western cultures. Kushner has confounded the aesthetic and political logic of modernity and postmodernity as these have come to be defined in the American and European academy. On the one hand, he has refused the dynamic of secularization, recognizing with Rosemary Radford Ruether that "[t]he social orders created by liberalism and socialism have generated fears of a future impoverished of meaning, if not indeed devastated by pollution, poverty, depletion of basic resources, and war. But these anti-dualistic gestures, which critique modernity through a renewal of its biblical roots and fashion a queer spirituality within a religion that has divinized heterosexuality, render his religious vision undetectable to those who cling to secular or spiritual traditionalism as the answer to our problems. Kushner desires, after all, is not a Jewish one, nor, despite the trappings of religion angels, Ethel Rosenberg as a martyred saint, a religious one of any kind. It is a secular millennium from which many secular-minded people might reasonably shrink. And the rise of a homosexual culture, of which it is the envisioned triumph, is connected to Jews and Judaism by only the most paradoxical link. Jews are likely to be attracted to the secular millennium insofar as they have become alienated from their own traditional beliefs and so have come to define salvation in secular terms. As Alisa Solomon says, "Subliminal associations between Jewishness and sexuality seep out of it like sweat. *Angels* shakes its fists at God with Old Testament fury; the divine shows itself in frenzied Kabbalistic figures. Cohn, who begins and ends a villain, requires little comment here. Joe is a more complicated character, in some ways the Christian version of Louis in his abandonment of his spouse, Harper, and in his political ambivalence as a gay apprentice to the monstrous, fag-bashing, and equally closeted Cohn. Perhaps the most generous thing to be said about Joe is that he needs to be saved but is not himself a savior. Though she does not stand at the center of the play, as Prior does, she is nonetheless his peer in prophecy; like him, she uses her predicament to become an agent in the plot which could have trapped her in mere victimhood. And then there is the angel, America. In accord with his dedication to dialectic, Kushner spends most of Act I elaborating his thesis: In the face of this news Louis falters but does not yet fail. Meanwhile, we are also introduced to the troubled marriage of Couple Number 2, in which a man with deeply buried sexual secrets attempts to comfort his valium-fiend wife who is apparently delusional. But the true master of shadows, Roy Cohn, weaves a protective screen of disinformation around himself after his more

advanced stage of AIDS is diagnosed. In doing so he initiates the ironic mirror-dance he will share with Prior throughout the play, despite the fact that the two never meet. Though there is only a hint of it now, this liar-to-prophet dynamic, centered on bitter denial and bitter embrace of AIDS, begins the motif of co-dependently-arising opposites derived from Kabbalah rather than Buddhism which will structure the dramatic action henceforth. For the moment, though, we receive only one explicit hint of the spirit-to-come: Scene 7 marks the first break with the realism that dominates Millennium. As the stage directions indicate, Harper is having "a pill-induced hallucination" in which Prior appears while Prior is dreaming of Harper at the same time. Together they create a communal visionary space in which each is lucid, far more lucid than they are in quotidian consciousness. 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Note, however, that the Presence is female only in post-Talmudic tradition; the Talmud thinks of shekhinah as an abstract noun, "dwelling". Therefore it is no surprise that the Angel of America is gendered female, nor that there are seven continental principalities in Perestroika; Kushner appears to have patterned America after the Shekhinah, and her angelic siblings after the other six lower emanations. Through the Zoharic optic, the stories of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of the desert exile, usually considered by Christians as salvation history, are utterly reconfigured as myth which underlies all history anyway, according to Kabbalah. Thus the pillars of cloud and flame that guided the Hebrews through the wilderness are seen as Malkhut, while the glory that shown forth from Moses after he descended from Sinai is associated with Hod. But the separation of Israel from God becomes a division within Godself, and the Shekhinah goes with the people into exile. Nonetheless, the divine King still longs for the Queen and Israel, as in the following passage: When the king began to yearn for the queen and her son he climbed up on roofs, ran down stairs, scaled walls; he peered through the holes in the walls just to see them! When he caught a glimpse of them he started to cry from behind the wall. Then he went away. In this way it possesses more flexibility than standard Christian accounts of realized eschatology in which the world is already completely saved. It also implicitly critiques its Gnostic sources by showing that brokenness need not lead to a demonized material world created by an insane Demiurge. The King of the Universe: Act II, Scene 2, Perestroika Given that "God" is always spoken of as male, and given that the angels are still present and powerful, it seems

reasonable to conclude that "God" might not be all of YHWH but in fact represents only a male persona who has abandoned the world. Against interpretations of Angels as merely nihilist or existential-atheist, the Zoharic myth of divine self-exile allows Kushner to overcome the nauseating Absence within existential thought while affirming that the world has not been ordered by a perfectly powerful Daddy. As an act of theurgy, Angels must use the wound in language to heal the wound in language, which is also a wound in God. But until this healing is fully accomplished, language cannot be trusted to be perfectly mimetic. The Zoharic myth of the split within God is amplified into a cos-mogonic-eschatological system in the third main phase of development, Lurianic Kabbalah. Isaac Luria was a sixteenth-century rabbi who lived in Safed, Palestine, after the expulsion of the Sephardim from Spain in 1492. In the beginning, when Ein-Sof emanated the Crown, Understanding, and Wisdom, these highest sefirot were strong enough to contain the energies of creation. But Din, the sefirah of Justice and Judgment, was too rigid and could not contain the energies flowing from above. As a result, Justice shattered, and his shards referred to as "shells" fell into the void and became demonic powers. Because of this initial disaster in the fourth sefirah, the six others below it also shattered, though not to the same extent. Because the sefirotic tree forms the image of God, it provides the pattern for the world as a whole and human beings in particular, for the tree can also be seen as Adam Kadmon, the Original Androgyne. In any case, Lurianic cosmology asserts that God cannot effect tikkun, the repair of the world and Godself, without the help of humanity. Each good deed performed in obedience to halakhah, Jewish law, empowers God to heal the fractures in the sefirot. Though Kushner never provides an abecedary of Kabbalah for the audience, he does drop hints for those who have ears to hear. Meant to herald America before her first appearance, this formerly mysterious mantra contains the word "Zefirot" as well as the epithets "Daughter of Light" and "Daughter of Splendor," possibly references to the Bahir and the Zohar. But this gesture is complicated. Though gender and sexuality as performance, an idea classically theorized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, may seem commonsensical to an academic audience, 80s gay activism and the conservative backlash against it were grounded in a far more static view. Therefore, Kushner has pandered to no orthodoxy, least of all a sexual one. As the Angel and Hannah Pitt observe at different moments in *Perestroika*, many biblical prophets have attempted to refuse: Isaiah, Jonah and Jeremiah chief among them. But in the biblical stories, God always convinces the shirker to accept his calling, by hook or by crook and sometimes by whale. Prior, on the other hand, actually succeeds in denouncing and returning the Epistle of Anti-Migration, which may itself be part of the Primal Torah, the Original Letters through which God made the world. He does not become a prophet to the World of Manifestation at first, but sings a new song among the sefirot themselves throughout Act V. Here he is addressing the Angels at the pivotal moment of refusal: I want to return this. He holds out the Book. No one takes it from him. What is the matter with it? Even if we go faster than we should. And wait for what?

3: Table of contents for Library of Congress control number

Mark Steyn Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How Angels in America Reconstructs the Nation
David Savran Angels in America: Tony Kushner's Theses on the Philosophy of History
Charles McNulty Notes on Angels in America as American Epic Theater
Janelle Reinelt Alla, Angli, and Angels in America
Allen J. Frantzen Angels.

Ethnic Groups in Angels in America 3. Afro-Americans in Angels in America 3. The Relationship between Prior and Belize 4. A Successful Collaboration Works Cited 1. This seminar paper analyses the theme of social reconstruction. As I will expound, hybridity is the form of society aimed at by the characters of this play who strive for social change. In order to demonstrate the concept of a hybrid society, I analyse the characters who represent this idea with regard to their ethnic group membership and their position in society. On this basis, their views and interests become more evident and easier to understand. After that I analyse and interpret their role in the play in order to point out the consequences for the concept of social reconstruction towards a hybrid society. First, the terms ethnicity and hybridity, which are essential for the analysis, are explained briefly. The next part of this paper presents two characters from different ethnic groups Prior and Belize striving for social change. On the basis of their position in society and their role in this play I then expound the concept of hybridity in the drama before analysing the relationship between Prior and Belize with regard to this idea. In chapter 4, other indications demonstrating if and how a social reconstruction is achieved are pointed out. The result of this analysis is summarized in the conclusion. The chapter providing background information is mainly based on articles in reference books. Chapter 3 and 4 are built up on the analysis of Angels in America itself, whereas essays dealing with ethnicity and the concept of social reconstruction in this play serve as support for my work. Background Information The focus of this seminar paper lies on ethnic groups and their importance for the process towards a hybrid society. Therefore, I will shortly define the terms ethnicity and hybridity. Furthermore, I differentiate ethnicity from the term race, the usage of which might seem appropriate as well in this context. It was coined in contradistinction to race, which assumes that human beings are divided into fixed, genetically biological types. Ethnicity states that similar racial attributes may serve as characteristics for an ethnic group as well, but furthermore members of this group may also share such features as religion, language, occupation or politics. Ethnicity is more a cultural than just a genetic criterion, although it does also include race. It is important to distinguish ethnic groups from social classes because membership of an ethnic group does normally not depend on membership of a socio-economic class. Ethnic groups are relative to time and place and fluid in composition. They are dynamic and subject to change. Thus, we can define ethnicity as a group or category of persons who have common ancestral origin and the same cultural traits, who have a sense of peoplehood and Gemeinschaft type of relations, who [â€] have either minority or majority status within a large society. Nevertheless, one must be aware that the dividing line between ethnic groups is blurred and that they cannot always be separated clearly. Hybridity As analysing the concept of hybridity in Angels in America, I now explain this term and differentiate it from multiculturalism and the idea of the American society as a melting-pot. In the nineteenth-century, it had a negative connotation and applied to results of racial mixing that was frowned upon. In contrast to multiculturalism, which refers to the coexistence of different cultural identities in a society and implies the idea that ethnic groups maintain their own culture within this society, hybridity carries the implication that their mingling, rather than the division into ethnic groups, is the norm. However, hybridity is not the same as the idea of a melting-pot. On the contrary, it implies a confluence of heterogeneous cultures resulting in internal differences and states that these differences are essential to the formation of identity. Bhabha adds to the definition of hybridity: Hybridity refers to the process of the emergence of a culture, in which its elements are being continually transformed or translated through irrepressible encounters. Hybridity offers the potential to undermine existing forms of cultural authority and representation. All in all, hybridity is a concept settled between multiculturalism and the concept of a melting-pot. As a process, it aims at overcoming the coexistence of different ethnic groups by mixing. It does not imply assimilation, but internal differences. Ethnicity in this

play is represented by several characters: Their positions in the social hierarchy of the US differ considerably. WASPs are regarded to be members of the most powerful social group[12], whereas Afro-Americans have a relatively low rank in the social hierarchy. In the play these two groups are the most important ones when it comes to the reconstruction of society. These interests are represented by the Angel, who is included into the analysis. Afro-Americans are represented by Belize and Mr. Lies will be left out as he does not play a major role for the idea of social change and progress. The last part of this chapter describes the relation between Prior and Belize and demonstrate how their interaction paves the way for the social change, which starts off at the end of the play and materializes in the prototype of the new society gathering round Bethesda Fountain in the Epilogue of *Perestroika*. The first important thing about him is the name Prior itself. The symbolic meaning of this name is shown in a conversation between Louis and Emily: Lots of Walters before this one. Prior is an old old family name in an old old family. The Walters go back to the Mayflower and beyond. Back to the Norman Conquest. However, this long genealogy of the Walters is about to break[18] as Prior is infected with AIDS and has neither children nor brothers and sisters. *Twentieth-Century Indian Literature*, ed. Essays on Angels in America, Eds. Geis, and Steven F. University of Michigan Press, Blizzard Publishing Inc, *A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Millennium Approaches New York: Theatre Communications Group,

Before the closet: same-sex love from Beowulf to Angels in America / Allen J. Frantzen.

Tony Kushner American playwright. For further information on his life and works, see CLC, Volume 1. Kushner established himself as an internationally celebrated playwright with the critical and popular success of his epic two-part Broadway production, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, for which he earned the Emmy Award for best writer in a miniseries for the television adaptation of *Angels in America*. Both of his parents were classical musicians. Kushner became aware of his homosexuality at an early age, but attempted to change his sexual preference during his college years with psychotherapy. Eventually, he came to accept his sexuality, which has become a central focus of his theatrical writings. Kushner graduated from Columbia University, earning a B.A. While working as a switchboard operator at the United Nations Plaza Hotel, he enrolled in the graduate program in directing at New York University, completing his M.F.A. Since then, Kushner has maintained a successful career in theater as a playwright, director, and educator. He has served as assistant director of the St. Louis Repertory Theatre from 1983 to 1985, artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop from 1985 to 1990, director of literary services for the Theatre Communication Group in New York from 1990 to 1995, playwright in residence at the Juilliard School of Drama from 1995 to 2000, and as a guest dramaturge in the theater programs of New York University, Yale University, and Princeton University. Major Works *Angels in America* includes over thirty characters and numerous interconnected subplots, totaling seven and a half hours of performance time. *Millennium Approaches, Part One of Angels in America*, introduces a smorgasbord of characters—fantastical, historical, and fictional—including an African-American drag queen, the oldest living Bolshevik, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg, a rabbi played by a gentile actor, and an angel. In one subplot, Cohn, a ruthlessly ambitious political player intent on gaining power within the ranks of the Reagan administration, defines homosexuality as a position of powerlessness; because he holds political power, Cohn argues, he himself is not a homosexual but is simply a heterosexual man who has sex with men. Further, although a doctor has just informed him that he is HIV-positive, Cohn argues that, since he is not a homosexual, it is not possible for him to have AIDS. Another set of subplots focuses on the loss experienced by Prior and Harper when each is deserted by his partner, while Louis and Joe develop a new relationship with each other. *Millennium Approaches* ends with a sense of apocalypse as an angel appears to Prior. *Part Two of Angels in America, titled Perestroika*, follows the personal struggles of each of the central characters as they come to terms with the various changes and losses they experienced earlier. While many of the characters transform these crises into positive experiences, Cohn dies of AIDS, steeped in self-hatred, without truly learning anything from his experience. In the final scene of *Perestroika*, Prior addresses the audience directly with the personal gospel he has developed as a result of his experiences. *Perestroika* ends on a positive, hopeful note, emphasizing the power of the imagination to transform tragedy into beauty. *Thinking about the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness*, which Kushner considered his coda to *Angels in America*, is set amid the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In an epilogue to *Slavs!* An early play, *Hydriotaphia, or, The Death of Dr. Browne*, is an imaginary reconstruction of the last day in the life of the historic figure Sir Thomas Browne, a seventeenth-century scientist and writer. While lying in his deathbed, Dr. Browne is visited by characters such as his Soul, the Devil, a witch, and a grave-digger. In this play, a group of friends is dispersed under the pressures of the Nazi regime; some flee into exile, others retreat into hiding, and one woman is left alone, vulnerable to persecution. *Zillah Katz*, a young American woman living in contemporary times, is the narrator of the play. In commenting on the actions of the drama, *Zillah* draws parallels between the oppressive forces of the Nazi regime and current events. Set in 1941, Act I of the play introduces the *Homebody*, an elderly English housewife who recites an hour-long monologue in which she reads from an outdated travel book on Afghanistan and fantasizes about going to Kabul, where she makes love to an Afghan man. Act II takes place in a hotel room in Kabul, after the *Homebody* has traveled to Afghanistan and possibly been beaten to death for failing to observe the strict cultural codes of the Taliban regime. *Caroline, or Change*, a musical, is set in the South during the Civil Rights era of the early 1950s, and

concerns the relationship between a Jewish family and their African American maid, Caroline. Recent changes within the family structure are examined in the context of changes brewing in the South as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Kushner has also written a number of adaptations of plays by other authors. *Stella* is an eponymous adaptation of a play by German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *The Illusion* is adapted from the work by French playwright Pierre Corneille. *Widows*, co-written with Ariel Dorfman, is adapted from the novel by Dorfman. *The Good Person of Szechuan*, adapted from a play by German playwright Bertolt Brecht, emphasizes the relevance of the original story to contemporary American society. *Ansky*, addresses questions of the impact of history on the notion of individual choice. The story concerns Leah, the daughter of a wealthy man who wishes to marry her off in the most profitable match he can find. **Critical Reception** The initial critical response to *Angels in America* was overwhelmingly positive. The initial wave of essays on *Angels in America* from academic critics was equally laudatory. Kushner was applauded for his representation of the intersections of gay and Jewish identity, as well as his examination of the relationship between individual experience and the collective interests of the broader human community. More recent criticism of *Angels in America* from the academic sector, however, has pointed out contradictions in its ideological underpinnings. Some have censured what appears to be a subversive political message in *Angels in America*, asserting that the play ultimately expresses a complacent political attitude that is easy for popular audiences to accept without truly challenging their values. Some feminist critics have argued that *Angels in America* relegates women to marginal status as opposed to the privileging of gay male identity. Despite these criticisms, however, Kushner is widely recognized as one of the most important playwrights of his generation—an openly gay, Jewish, and political writer unafraid of addressing contentious social issues with ambitious productions that offer a sense of hope for the future of humanity.

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6: Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from "Beowulf" to "Angels in America", Frantzen

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In "Alla, Angli, and Angels in America," Allen J. Frantzen notes that the prominence of migration and movement away from racial purity are basic elements of Kushner's thesis about change (Bloom, 92).

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