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**Tony Kushner's Angels in
America: A Play Normalizing
Abnormality**

By

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Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*: A Play Normalizing Abnormality

My argument, as elucidated below, is that Kushner's play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993)¹ is a play that propagates an ideology that runs contrary to normality in life. The play calls for the standardization of homosexuality and supports it by all possible means making it an acceptable pattern of behavior within the community at large. Though I admire the play in its treatment of certain aspects particularly its uncovering of opportunism in politics, I strongly oppose the view that Kushner advocates as regards AIDS and its impact upon gays. He holds the government responsible for the wide spreading of AIDS among gays, and, being himself gay, does not see gays to blame. My view is that the government can play a role in fighting the disease, but this would never be fruitful unless gays stop their shamefully odd and highly harmful sexuality.

When we scrutinize the ideology that the play promotes and supports, we will find it vastly harmful and devastating on a number of levels. On the personal level, it harms people physically as it widens the scope of homosexuality amongst them and in turn increases the chances of getting infected with the deadly plague of AIDS. Moreover, it emotionally harms upright persons as it is replete with foul and obscene language, openly and publicly practiced same sex, as well as nudity scenes. On the societal level, the negative impact is two-fold. First, once persons contract the deadly epidemic, they cannot be productive members within their communities. In addition, they

¹*Angels in America* consists of two separate plays: the first is *Millennium approaches*, and the second is *Perestroika*. However, I'll deal with them both as one work of art, referring to *Millennium approaches* as (Kushner I) and *Perestroika* as (Kushner II).

need health care and highly expensive medication which on the long run weakens the economy of any nation.

Tony Kushner (1956-) is a noted gay American dramatist. He has come to the fore of American theatre after writing the under-analysis openly gay drama *Angels in America*. The play, when it first appeared, gained wide popularity and was largely hailed as it was the first of its own to overtly and differently shore up such an ideology. Despite being preceded by dramas tackling AIDS and gays issues like Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985), William Hoffman's *As Is* (1985) and Harvey Fierstein's *Safe Sex* (1987), *Angels in America* is considered "a turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture" (Clum 1), "the most ambitious American play" (Kroll 83), "a profoundly stage-bound piece" (Bronski 57) and "a political call to arms for the age of AIDS" (Frank Rich C15). With its production, "a shift in the national AIDS ideology seemed possible" (Roman 53). After the play's staging, Brustein hails Kushner as "strong-voiced, clear-eyed dramatist capable of encapsulating...national nightmares into universal art" (211). When it was produced in North Carolina on March 20 1996, some people hailed the play especially those who support gay rights.

Despite all the above praise, some other people despised the immorality and profanity of the play thinking that "It promotes homosexuality and nudity" (Speizer A1). Another opposing view stresses the existence of "a lot of things that go against 'family values'"(Farr 101). Additionally, some religious groups molested the play and severely attacked Kilgore College president and accused him of blasphemy when he helped Drama Department director having *Angels in America* produced on campus in 2000. They launched a campaign and protested

against the production and carried signs that read: "Dr. Holda – how evil to blaspheme the Savior's name, calling it art" (Greenwood, *The Houston Press* Jan 20, 2000). We have briefly seen that the play raises two opposing views: the first sees that a human being should be given the right to do and see whatever they like and the second does not approve this. I myself stalwartly oppose the first as one is free once he does not harm other people physically or even emotionally. Below, I'll try to annul the first view and validate the second.

In order to fully understand Kushner's lengthy two-part work of art, the plot should be very briefly exposed. The play dramatizes "several interrelated stories" (Foster 173). At the first part of the play, we are informed that the long-established love relationship between the non-closeted gays Louis Ironson and Prior Walter collapses as the latter has contracted AIDS and the former has deserted him for fear of being infected. Second, the marriage relationship between Joe and his wife Harper is also doomed to deterioration as the husband is a closeted homosexual and he does not enjoy his life with Harper. Then a business relationship is founded between Joe and the "prodigiously talented but notoriously unscrupulous" closeted character, Roy Cohn, as both of them work as lawyers (Bottoms 157). The relationship continues for some time but eventually it does not prosper. Roy has contracted AIDS but he strongly denies it thinking that this can debilitate his position as a politician. When Louis deserts his lover Prior and Joe deserts his wife, it happens that Joe and Louis meet and begin to practice sex at Louis's apartment. Also, Prior meets Harper and tells her that her husband is homosexual. Then Belize, the fifth gay in the play and Roy's nurse, meets Prior when he is hospitalized. Some other episodes and characters are interweaved in the text most important of which is the Angel that recurrently visits Prior after being deserted by Louis and reveals things to

him. Kushner draws his two-part drama to a close with the death of Roy Cohn, the notorious politician and the closeted homosexual, and the survival as well as high-spiritedness of the other gay characters in the play.

Incontrovertibly, Kushner tackles various social, political and religious issues in his plays and *Angels in America* is no exception. However, his ideology concerning AIDS and gays is unreservedly queer as he calls for the normalization of homosexuality and the assimilation of gays within the American life (Freedman 97), and he severely censures all those who consider homosexuality an abnormal act. Before Kushner, several writers called for the assimilation of certain oppressed minorities within the American nation at large like W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963) and Martin Luther King, Jr (1929-1968). The type of assimilation they advocated was strongly recommended as it aimed to safeguard the nation against the bloody confrontation that might ensue from the racism-directed practices of whites against blacks. But Kushner's is queer as it is morally and economically devastating.

A writer feels that it is his responsibility to delve sufficiently into the social, political, religious, and even psychological problems prevalent in his society so as to be able to diagnose their causes, and, afterwards, suggest possible solutions to these problems. This is the ideology of many great writers who have tackled universal themes and issues in their writings to help people overcome the problems and obstacles that can spoil their life. However, Kushner's ideology concerning the problem of gays is that these people should be given their full citizenship rights and should not be regarded as a marginalized minority. They should practice their odd sexuality whenever and wherever they want, and they should be given due medical care when contracting AIDS. My view is that this issue should have been tackled from an

absolutely different perspective showing the vastly detrimental impact of these practices upon the individuals themselves and upon the nation as a whole.

In actuality, the influence of homosexuality upon individuals is concretized from the start of the play. Prior shows Louis a spot on his arm indicating that he has contracted AIDS and Louis denies it:

Prior: See

Louis: That's just a burst blood vessel.

Prior: Not according to the best medical authorities.

Louis: What?

Pause.

Tell me.

Prior: K.S. baby. Lesion number one. Lookit. The wine-dark kiss of the angel of death. (Kushner I. 11)

Medicinally, the spot that has appeared on Prior's arm is known as Kaposi's Sarcoma. Commenting upon its appearance, Ogden states: "In the early days of AIDS diagnosis, the frequent identification of K.S. among homosexual men was among the most puzzling symptoms for physicians to explicate" (250). This spot virulently appears in people with AIDS particularly those practicing homosexuality, and the end of which is certainly death. A person diagnosed with AIDS is looked upon as dying, if not already dead. That's why AIDS is referred to as the 'angel of death' whose kiss finalizes a human being's life. In the above excerpt, Kushner begins to publicize his philosophy that gays are oppressed and marginalized because of AIDS.

Afterwards, Kusner begins to discuss the harsh impact of AIDS upon gays. Both Prior and Louis are terrified, the former because he fears being deserted by the latter, and the latter fears being infected with AIDS. Louis feels torn between his love for Prior and his fear of AIDS. Prior's fear is explicitly stated:

Proir: I was scared.

Louis: Of what?

Prior: That you'll leave me. (Kushner I. 12)

Prior's fears prove to be justified as Louis, a few lines, later declares his intention to leave his friend. He consults the rabbi burying his grandmother: Rabbi, what does The Holy Writ say about someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need? (Kushner I. 14) The rabbi replies: "The Holy Scriptures have nothing to say about such a person. (Kushner I. 15) The words uttered by both Louis and the rabbi are extremely revealing. The importance of friendship is greatly shed light upon. Kushner stresses that a friend should not desert his friend specially when need arises. This is good and recommended but he should have considered the ramifications wrapping the relationship between the two gays. The relationship has been queerly established and, consequently, cannot stand the vicissitudes of time and is doomed to collapse when confronting the first difficulty. Had it been established on mutual moral love, respect and understanding, it could have passed the test. Kushner, instead of blaming Louis for leaving his friend, should have condemned their abnormal relationship and encouraged them both to stop so doing.

It seems that things have got mixed up inside Kushner's mind. Unquestionably, religion should be the reference to consult when people confront something perplexing in their life. In the afore-quoted lines, Kushner scorns religion in two ways. Laughing at men of religion, he has created a rabbi that provides an incorrect answer when consulted. It is stated that friendship is vital in man's life and a friend's desertion of his friend particularly in time of need is an act that all religions denounce. It is clear that Kushner exerts his utmost effort to normalize what is abnormal. Instead of making fun of men of religion, Kushner should have exploited them to help solve the devastating

problem of gays. Men of religion should deliver sermons illuminating people and warning them against the highly devastating impact of sodomy singly and collectively.

Actually, Kushner's play is strikingly and astoundingly against religion as it calls for acts denied in all religions. Sparks spots the irreligiousness of the play and considers it hostile to religious people: "[the play] would offend many religious people in its decidedly unconventional use of religious imagery and explicit sexuality, particularly gay sexuality" (187). To support the researcher's claim that Kushner's view is actually odd and runs contrary to moral, social and religious codes, we need to consider what has been said about sodomy in all religions. Verily, it has been divinely decreed that the end of those who practice sodomy is destruction and suffering before they die, to say nothing of the severe penalty awaiting them after death if they do not repent. By virtue of what is linguistically known as euphemism, lexicographers have tried to avoid reminding people of what happened to the cursed people of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their insistence on practicing the act. That is why they have coined terms like same-sex partnership, homosexuality, gayness, ... etc (consider Macmillan English Dict. Language Awareness LA 17). This is a token of the illegitimacy of the act as it is forbidden in all religions. The two villages, Sodom and Gomorrah, have biblically been told to have been destroyed by divine decree for what have been later known as sodomy as the reference goes back to the village. Their story is referred to many times in the Bible (in both The New and The Old Testaments). Lot has advised and warned them but they declared their sin publicly like what Kushner calls for. Here is a biblical excerpt from the Old Testament consolidating the afore-mentioned point:

{19:4} ... the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: {19:5} And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where [are] the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. {19:6} And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, {19:7} And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. {19:8}.... {19:13} For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. (The King James Version of the Holy Bible. (Genesis 9) Ed. 2004, An electronic version (<http://www.davince.com/bible>))

In the above biblical story, God sent his messenger, Lot, to the villagers of Sodom and Gomorrah, advising them to stop practicing homosexuality as it is against the rules of nature in life, and warning them against what is to befall them if they continue disobeying God and act against his code. The people obstinately refused to be advised and even decided to have sex with Lot's male guests. That is why the two villages perished as God wreaked his vengeance upon them.

Consistent with the above-quoted is what was said about these people in the New Testament:

{2:6} And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned [them] with an overthrow, making [them] an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; (The King James ... 2 Peter 703)

When these people refused stubbornly to attend to God's instructions, the two villages were turned into ashes to stand as an example to those who insist on disobedience of God.

If we consider the Quranic text, the act is prohibited and the story of those deviant people is referred to many times, but we refer to the one exemplified in the Quranic Chapter of Hud (verse no. 78-83)

And when Our messengers came to Lût (Lot), he was grieved on account of them and felt himself straitened for them (lest the town people should approach them to commit sodomy with them) He said: "This is a distressful day."...

So when our commandment came, We turned (the towns of Sodom in Palestine) upside down, and rained on them stones of baked clay, in a well arranged manner one after another;

Marked from your Lord; and they are not even far away from the Zâlimùn (polytheists, evil-doers) (Translated, Khan & Al-Hilâli)

In these Quranic verses, the story told in both the Old and New Testaments, is retold. The people insist that they practice sex with Lot's male guests despite being offered to practice it normally with Lot's daughters. When they insisted on committing the deadly sin, they were destroyed utterly and Lot, along with his people, was saved.

Furthermore, The story of those people and their severe penalty are referred to in the sayings of our Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). It has been narrated in Ibn Abi Shyba's Collection of Prophetic Sayings (no. 32495) that Gabriel asked God's permission to destroy them all, and he was permitted. So, he upraised the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, took it to heaven and turned it upside down towards earth". (Translation mine)

... أستأذن جبريل في هلكتهم فأذن له، فأحتمل الأرض التي كانوا عليها ... ثم قلبها بهم... (مصنف ابن أبي شيبة حديث رقم ٣٢٤٩٥)

Warning people against violating the norms established by Our Great Creator Allah, Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), said long ago on the authority of Ibn Majah(no. 4009): "no sooner does abomination appears among people and be publicly declared, than unprecedented ills and plagues outbreak among them".(Translation mine)

... لم تظهر الفاحشة في قوم قط حتى يعلنوا بها إلا فشا فيهم الطاعون والأوجاع التي لم تكن مضت في أسلافهم ... (سنن ابن ماجة: حديث رقم ٤٠٠٩).

To conclude, these exemplifications are given here to convince the reader how strange, irreligious and harmful Kushner's ideology is. As shown above, the act is consentaneously forbidden in all religions as it is against the rules of God and those who insist on committing the obscenity are cursed and doomed to death. And I think that AIDS, in its new mantle, is the divine punishment for gays as they explicitly insist on their deeds.

To the contrary of what Stevenson (763) stresses, *Angels in America* has its adverse impact upon persons and families as it normalizes what is queer and unacceptable. The impact of homosexuality upon marriage is very obvious in the relationship between Joe and his wife Harper. The wife cannot endure living with the husband as he is homo and tries to hide this from her. However, this can be inferred from the slightest of his acts. The coming part of their conversation is imbued with meanings to the audience:

Harper: And if I do have emotional problems it's from living with you. Or ...

Joe: I'm sorry buddy, I didn't mean to ...

Harper: or if you do think I do then you should never have married me. You have all these secrets and lies.

....

Joe: Buddy kiss...

They kiss. (Kushner I. 16)

The husband accuses the wife of having emotional problems and she defends herself saying if she has, it is because of living with him. She is justified as she is left alone by her husband most of the time. A husband is entitled to come closer to his wife trying to assuage her worries and find solutions to her problems if she has any. Nevertheless, if Joe is not the cause of his wife's psychological disorders, he has escalated them and has done nothing to help her overcome them. He is seriously, and perhaps involuntarily, impacted by his homosexuality. This can be inferred from the lexical item 'buddy' which is used

twice in this very brief part of their conversation. This word is widely used in the gay community between male pairs practicing sex together. The Encarta Manual of Style and Usage defines the word as: "friend or comrade: chum. Used as a form of familiar address, specially for a man or boy". Also, it is used by Naguib to mean "friend: He's my buddy = He's my friend" (18) The word is significant in two ways as it implicitly refers to his gayness on the one hand, and indicates that their relationship is void of the emotions that exist between a man and his wife on the other. He considers her his friend not his wife.

In reality, marriage should be regarded as a sublime relationship between a man and a woman with God in the midst. When it lacks this sense, it turns to be excruciating and does not offer any happiness or satisfaction. Joe's and Harper's relationship lacks this sense. Consequently, the wife is left alone to be eventually thrown into the realm of psychological disorders as she hallucinates very often in the play. Such hallucinations are the outlet through which she can escape the grim and harsh reality of her life. She busies herself thinking about things that an average person has nothing to do with. Once a human being's emotions and feelings do not find a normal outlet, they can be externalized improperly.

Verily, I sympathize most with Harper as she is victimized by "Joe's coldness and inadequacy as a husband" (Foster 178) owing to his homosexuality. She is the only upright person in the group. She is keen on having sexual satisfaction through legitimate marriage, but, owing to the abnormality of her husband, she is denied that basic instinctive need. She explicitly states that she has got fed up with the type of life she has long been leading with Joe. She even hates making love with him:

.... You think you're the only one who hates sex; I do; I hate it with you; I do. I'm glad we don't do it anymore. I dream that you batter away at me till all my joints come apart, like wax, and I fall into pieces. It's like a punishment. It was wrong of me to marry you. I knew you... (she stops herself). It's a sin, and it's killing us both. (Kushner I. 25)

Making love between a man and his wife is an ecstatic act if they are emotionally tied. Though Harper is sex-starved, she dislikes it with her husband and considers it a penalty. She draws an image to illustrate how hateful and harmful having sexual intercourse, which is supposed to be ecstatic, is. In the process, she feels as if she were quarrelling with someone who is stronger and keeps hitting or pounding her hard. That's why she hates sex and is contented that she does not practice it with him anymore. From her words, it is explicit that also the husband himself hates having sex with his wife. He does so because he is gay and enjoys it only with a man. Even when he approaches her, he tries to imagine that he is with a male lover and tries to forget that he is with his wife. This can be indicated from his use of the word 'buddy' above. Joe does not hate Harper as a person, but he does not enjoy his life with her as he is homo and, for him, sexual satisfaction can be attained from only a male partner not a female one. This is just to see how abnormal and harmful the ideology that Kushner advocates and calls for its naturalization is.

While Joe is sexually petrified with his wife and he blinds himself imagining that he is with a man to enable himself to ejaculate, he is sexually moved while speaking with Louis. Louis alludes that Joe is a homo. Joe tries to deny it at first, but after making sure that no body is around, he gets indulged in a conversation imbued with same-sex connotations. He cannot approach Louis, but when approached he welcomes it:

Little pause. Joe makes sure that no one is around, then

Joe: Do I? Sound like a ...?

Louis: What? Like a ...? Republican, or ...? Do I?

Joe; Do you what?

Louis. Sounds like a ...?

Joe. Like a ...? What are we talking about? I'm ... confused

Louis. Yes. My name is Louis. But all my friends call me Louise. ...

Louis offers Joe his hand, Joe reaches, Louis feints and pecks Joe on the cheek, and exits. (Kushner I. 19)

The above quoted-lines are the beginning of the sexual relationship between Joe and Louis. Two important ideas are raised. First, Kushner, contrasting the relationship between Joe and his wife with that of Louis and Joe, makes it clear for gays that they are free to select with whom to practice sex. So odd is his view that he makes the second relationship more sexually fruitful than the first is. He wants to say that it does not make any difference whether a person has sex with a man or a woman. What matters is attaining the utter sexual satisfaction whether through homo- or hetro-sexuality. Taking into consideration the fact that the marriage of Joe and Harper is not prosperous, we can infer that Kushner votes for homosexuality. He considers it more pleasure-providing. In so doing, he persistently tries to normalize what is abnormal. He tries to legitimize gays relationships making them even more important than legitimate marriage.

The second important idea is that two different categories of gays are introduced. Joe, who "saturates the plays' dialogue with the vocabulary and cultural referents of American" (Quinn 79) politicians, represents the first category. He stands for those gays who are closeted and exert their utmost effort to avoid being seen or even known by others thinking that this can hurt their masculinity and render them less powerful. This is the approach that Kushner hates most and through which he severely criticizes gay politicians as they tend to come under this category. They tend to exploit their positions and practice sex with males without acknowledging their homosexuality. That is why they

are called closeted. Kushner is teased to see such gays "safely hidden in the closet" (Ogden 247). Being a lawyer, Joe tries to hide his sexuality so as not to jeopardize his powerful position. Kushner has made Joe pass through a painful journey till he is finally purified. Kushner's view is that Joe deserves the afflictions he has undergone because he should not have tried to hide his nature as a homo, and once he declares his sexuality, Kushner rewards him by giving him the chance to survive when the play closes.

After having practiced sex with Louis several times, Joe has come to accept himself. In the second part of the play, he has transformed utterly. Kushner's view is tellingly stated in Joe's words:

.... You will always have to make choices, and finally all life can offer you in the face of these terrible decisions is that you can make the choices freely. I did, I made a choice. I followed you. Louis. I came here. And this has taught me. ... To be less afraid. Because the courage to choose enabled me to find you.

(Kushner II. 37-38)

These lines are manipulated to crystallize the immense difference between the closeted homosexual Joe at the beginning of part one when he was trying to conceal his conduct from most of the people around him including his mother and wife, and Joe now. Gradually, he is made to restore his self-confidence. So audacious has he become that he is no longer afraid of his conduct. He has taken a final decision to live his life freely and to practice his odd sexuality whenever, wherever and with whom he desires. Kushner's view, revealed in Joe's words, is that gays should not be ashamed because what they do is their slightest rights. Actually, so strange is the change that Joe has undergone. The researcher's view is that Joe should have been made to resist his sexuality, to feel sorry for his past and to begin a new life with his wife. This is the reformative or rather remedial approach that Kushner should have adopted in his play. His is so queer indeed.

Whereas Joe represents, as illustrated above, those gays who tend to cover their sexuality, and, as a result, are cruelly disparaged by Kushner, Louis represents those gays who are satisfied with their sexuality and do not tend to veil it. This approach is hailed by Kushner as he wants all gays to practice their sexuality openly. This can eschew them the psychological conflict resulting from their trials to be closeted and hide their sexuality. Kushner thinks that this is gays' basic right. Kushner holds Louis to blame only for leaving his AIDS-plagued friend, Prior, and seeking satisfaction with someone else. But, he endorses Louis's sexuality and would like all gays to be as open as Louis is. Really, the researcher feels sorry for quoting such an obscene, highly offensive and loathsome extract below, but just to let the audience see how queer and profane the ideology of Kushner is. So open is Louis that he gets enticed to a man he does not know and has never seen before:

(Louis and the Man are eying each other, each alternating interest and indifference (Kushner I. 37). After a while they begin a talk that starts:

Man: What do you want?

Louis: I want you to fuck me, hurt me, make me bleed

(Kushner I. 39).

The man welcomes the chance and suggests that they go to Louis's apartment, but Louis refuses as he is not living alone. The man accepts to fuck him in the Park:

Man: Here, then.

Louis: I ... Do you have a rubber?

Man: I don't use rubbers.

Louis: You should. (He takes one from his coat pocket.) Here.

Man: I don't use them.

Louis: Forget it then. (He starts to leave.)

Man: No, wait. Put it on me. Boy.

....

Louis: What?

Man: I think it broke. The rubber. You want me to pull out?

Pause

Louis: Keep ... keep going. Inject me. I don't care. I don't care.

(Kushner I. 41)

The above excerpt is replete with lecherous, immoral and even irreligious lexicon. Observing that homosexuality is dealt with differently in Kushner's play, Meisner comments: "Contrary to most popular representations of gay sexuality, the sex in *Angels* is not air-brushed to avoid offending a mainstream audience. Further, gay eroticism and gay sex are not demonized, but celebrated" (184). Overt gay sex scenes are deliberately concentrated upon by the writer to make homosexuality acceptable within the society. When we brood over the conversation above, two important things about Louis can be easily grasped. First, his carrying of condoms inside his pocket indicates that he is willing to practice sex whenever, wherever and with whomever he wants. At the start he repudiates making love with the man without an insulator for fear of infection, but once he indulges in the act he cannot resist even if he is to get infected with AIDS. By letting the condom break and the act be completed, Kushner makes it explicit that even AIDS cannot spoil the life of gays.

Oddly enough, Kushner wants to say gays should not consider their behavior a stigma. They should feel comfortable with themselves and, simultaneously, fight for their rights. Surprisingly, Kushner implicitly levels his relentless criticism to the political scene during the Reagan Administration for nothing but their negligence of AIDS and its impact upon gays. It seems that Kushner believes in the theoretical discourses that tend to see AIDS signifying: "overdetermined set of possible referents", important among which are: "a politically conservative conspiracy to eliminate homosexuality; a threat to the singularity and uniqueness of one's body; ... fear; [and] death" (Piggford 171). Kushner's stance is that gays are let be crushed by AIDS because the

government is hostile to them. The word 'rubber', used in the process as an insulator to guarantee that partners will not infect each other, is significantly exploited by Kushner as it refers to both 'fear' and 'death': fear of being infected with the death-inviter AIDS. For Kushner, the great happiness that a male can get from having sex with another male is spoiled by the fear of AIDS-infection which inevitably and subsequently ends in death. Things have got reversed in Kushner's mind; in stead of blaming gays for their abnormality and urging them to stop it, he blames the government for not finding a cure for the pandemic. In this particular instance, Kushner has not met his responsibilities to the rest of the society since a writer is supposed to lessen the suffering of the nation not to overburden it with further obligations.

Another aspect that proves Kushner's normalization of abnormality is his manipulation of the past. Actually, the past can be used as a positive power, and if understood and channeled properly, it can improve both present and future. It was perfectly used by August Wilson (1945-2005) in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988) and even by Kushner himself in *A Bright Room Called Day* (1985). However, in *Angels in America*, Kushner does not manage to deal with the past appropriately as he considers AIDS similar to any hardship that once appeared and was lucratively overcome. It is well-known that people get empowered from the afflictions they undergo as they avoid being taken twice from the same snare. But Kushner's story in the under-analysis play is comprehensively different.

To thoroughly comprehend Kushner's treatment of the past, we need to get back to the AIDS-stricken Prior who has been deserted by his lover Louis. Act three in Part One starts when Prior wakes up after having seen a strange nightmare. Afterwards, he sees a ghost "dressed in the clothing of a 13th-century

British Squire" (Kushner I. 64). The following night, Prior sees another nightmare and wakes up to face a second ghost "dressed in the clothing of an elegant 18th-century Londoner" (Kushner I. 65). As the conversation between Prior and the two ghosts goes on, we are informed that their names are Prior I and Prior II. They tell him that they are his ancestors and they both died of plagues. Prior the first states: "The pestilence in my time was much worse than now. Whole villages of empty houses. You could look outdoors and see Death walking in the morning, dew dampening the ragged hem of his black robe. Plain as I see you now" (Kushner I. 65). As for the second, he puts the story of his death: "Black Jack. Came from a water pump, half the city of London, can you imagine? His came from fleas. Yours, I understand, is the lamentable consequence of venery..." (Kushner I. 66). Using his "theatre to serve as an arena for reform" (Foster 174) as he thinks, Kushner manages to manipulate the past in a way that serves his view. He exploits the stories of Prior's ancestors to further support his vision that AIDS is a disease like all other diseases or plagues that appear every some centuries. Those plagues, despite being severe and epidemic could not have decimated humanity completely and eventually they were overcome.

Kushner sees AIDS as an endurable plague that needs urgent interference from the government to be eliminated and put under control. All this is humane as in times of dangers and epidemics efforts should be accumulated and exerted to halt such dangers. What cannot be accepted, at least from the researcher's viewpoint, from Kushner is the comparison he draws between AIDS and the two plagues mentioned above, or rather the affinity he claims between Prior and his ancestors. Of prime importance to be clarified here is the accountability for our acts and deeds. But we cannot be held responsible for certain happenings as they

might be beyond our reach. If we are to apply this upon Prior's plague and those of his ancestors, our claim is obviated. Prior's forefathers cannot bear the responsibility for the two plagues that attacked the country at large when they were alive. The two plagues were natural catastrophes that people had nothing to do with but to be patient and do their best to overcome them. However, the present plague, AIDS, is caused by our abnormal deeds; homosexuals have transgressed the rules of nature and, in so doing, have helped the disease to spread countrywide.

In stead of the normalization policy he advocates in *Angels in America*, Kushner should have taken a different direction. He should have rid himself of his queer sexuality, and should have heartened gays to do the same. He should have understood that once the natural course of things is violated, cataclysms ensue inevitably. Instead of holding the government blamable, he should have adopted a reformative tendency. Both Priors should have been exploited by Kushner to remind Prior Water that he has descended from a family with a history, a family that has endured the ruthless plagues in the past and could survive them both. This aspect, as referred to earlier, has been successfully manipulated by Wilson in the transformation of Loomis and rendering him proud of his past. Similarly, Kushner's Prior is told by his ancestors to be proud of his past. However, this type of pride should have been exploited positively, to help Prior rid himself of homosexuality and, thus, eliminate AIDS and its decimating impact.

Kushner manages to consolidate his strange view that gays are indivisible and noteworthy part of the nation. Through the character of Prior, the writer declares that nothing can defeat gays. The development that has happened to Prior is rendered in a way that foster Kushner's outlook. At the beginning of part

one, he was low-spirited and scared of being deserted by his lover, Louis. He used to see himself as a dying person and this can be easily grasped from the lexical items he tended to select while speaking with Louis at the start of the play. However, as the action progresses, he is made to accept himself and AIDS does not manage to affect his morale. He has been elevated by Kushner to the extent that he is revealed to. Rationalizing this elevation, Meisner comments: "The protagonist Prior, a gay man who in other circumstances might be condemned by the Christian right for his sexual choices, becomes a prophet" (176). Meisner's words clarify that homosexuality must be indubitably disapproved and denounced in a society governed by religion.

While speaking to the Angel, Prior expresses his desire to survive and to defeat AIDS: "... I want to be healthy again. And this plague, it should stop. In me and everywhere. Make it go away" (Kushner II. 133). Lamenting the past and aspiring for a prosperous future, he also states: "... I want more life. I can't help myself. I do. I have lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but. ... You see them living anyway" (Kushner II. 135). Looking at Prior's words, it is noticeable that he has gained hope and more confidence when compared to the helpless and disappointed Prior at the start. Perhaps, Kushner wants to say nothing is impossible in USA. "Tony Kushner has resuscitated a vision of America as both promised land and land of infinite promise" (Savran 221).

Kushner's perplexing view in Prior's words is tri-dimensional. First, he concentrates on the idea that gays should accept themselves and enjoy their life to the full on the one hand, and urges them to fight for the attainment of their rights on the second. Second, a message is severely directed to the government. His view is that the government is to blame as they have not done what they are

entitled to do to eradicate AIDS or at least to lessen its deadly impact. Indirectly, he would like to say that the government should take urgent and effective measures to invalidate the equation that AIDS is death. Gays have suffered a lot and now it is high time for them to suffer no more. AIDS should be defeated. Third, his rejection and defiance of religion can be implicitly grasped as his gay protagonist refuses to die and states that he needs more life. Kushner has fulfilled the wish of the AIDS-stricken Prior as the play ends while he is still alive and high-spirited. Not only has the writer given more life to Prior, but he has also elevated him to the position of prophets by revealing to him. In that way, the play is ironic in dealing with religion (Lioi 96). The dramatist wants to say even death cannot threaten gays and they can continue living and enjoying their sexuality. In so doing, he declares the victory of gays over their strongest enemy. Strangely enough, no message is directed to gays to convince them give an aiding hand in solving the problem by stopping their abnormal act.

Prior concludes the second part of the play by emphasizing the idea raised and discussed above. Gays will never be defeated either by a society long disparaging them and neglecting their cause or by an epidemic harvesting some of them and trying to shake their self-confidence:

... 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 the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. The time has come (Kushner II. 148).

The closing lines of the literary work make it clear that Kushner still supports these people considering them an oppressed minority living "in the midst of a gay holocaust" (Ogden 243). He elucidates that those who are already dead have paved the way for those who are still alive. He compares those who have

died of AIDS to those who have died in battles fighting for their countries. Both, to Kushner, deserve to be venerated and memorialized. Concentrating on AIDS and its impact upon gays, Kushner states that it has managed to terminate the life of many gays, but will never be able to end them all. He still determinedly believes that gays are on the right path and they should conduct their life that way. He thinks that the time has come for closeted homosexuals to stop being ashamed of what they do. They have the right to practice their sexuality openly. Furthermore, the time has come for the government to stop oppressing gays. Instead of discriminating against homosexuals, the government should meet their obligations and responsibilities towards AIDS.

So queer is what Kushner calls for that gays are not even slightly blamed. The society is all the time held to blame. Actually, we are not too cruel to say that those with AIDS should be neglected and left easy victims to be ruthlessly harvested by the disease. Humanistically, they are our brothers and should be hospitalized and taken care of. The epidemic should have been fought by all possible means as it does not harm only gays, but the whole nation as well. Kushner's stance should have been directed towards achieving the purpose that gays are part and parcel of the nation and their destruction will inevitably weaken it. In stead of advocating the rights of gays to practice their sexuality, the play should have been educationally channeled. It should have been exploited to make the audience in general and gays in particular aware of the unquestionable and deadly impact of AIDS. Those gays with AIDS and those without should have been advised and assisted to stop their abnormal deeds. The drama should have been used to make people consider AIDS their severest enemy and, consequently, fight it hard with all possible means. Additionally, it should have been used to encourage fundraising to build hospitals and to make

the needed azidothymidine available. The aspect greatly neglected by Kushner is that prevention is better than cure. It is logical to call on the government to provide medical care and expensive medicine for the disease. Yet, the situation should have been rationalized thoroughly. Kushner should have recognized that these efforts are not to be crowned with fruition unless they are fostered by fighting the causes of the disease, most important among which is homosexuality.

In conclusion, in *Angels in America*, Kushner has adopted an ideology that normalizes what is abnormal. He has advocated urging gays to gain their full citizenship rights, most important of which is practicing their sexuality whenever and wherever they want. Noticeable is the masterfulness by which Kushner constructed the play to serve that cause. The characters that openly declare their homosexuality are rewarded and those who try to hide it are penalized and eventually redeemed. Kushner meant the play to concentrate on the impact of AIDS on gays and he holds the government responsible for not finding a cure for the epidemic. I have approached the play from a totally different perspective, seeing that it falls short in its discussion of this thorny problem. In spite of being victims, gays, I think, have played a big part in their victimization by letting themselves be fully controlled by their queer sexuality. I see that gays are responsible for their distress and suffering by following a path that is opposite to the natural course of things in life. Moreover, they are responsible for extending the agonies and wretchedness to other innocent people as we have seen in the play. Kushner, instead of supporting their acts, should have guided them to stop their sexuality, and, in so doing, could have saved them and the nation at large a lot of suffering.

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