



## **Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)**

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Tony Kushner's complex and demanding play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* has been the most talked about, analyzed, and celebrated play of the decade. The critic Harold Bloom has included Kushner's play in his "Western canon" alongside Shakespeare and the Bible, and drama scholar John M. Clum has termed it "a turning point in the history of gay drama, the history of American drama, and of American literary culture." While we might be somewhat wary of the instant canonization that such critical assessments confer, clearly Kushner's play is an important work, honored by the Pulitzer Prize, thought worthy of recognition on "purely aesthetic" grounds at the same time that it has been embraced--and occasionally rejected--for its politics.

Kushner's play explicitly positions itself in the current American conflict over identity politics, yet also situates that debate in a broader historical context: the American history of McCarthyism, of immigration and the "melting pot," of westward expansion, and of racist exploitation. Furthermore, the play enters into the politically volatile struggles of the AIDS crisis, struggles themselves interconnected with the politics of sexuality, gender, race, and class.

The original essays in *Approaching the Millennium* explore the complexities of the play and situate it in its particular, conflicted historical moment. The contributors help us understand and appreciate the play as a literary work, as theatrical text, as popular cultural phenomenon, and as political reflection and intervention. Specific topics include how the play thematizes gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity; the postmodern incarnation of the Brechtian epic; AIDS and the landscape of American politics. The range of different international productions of *Angels in America* provides a rich basis for discussion of its production history, including the linguistic and cultural shifts required in its "translation" from one stage to the next.

The last section of *Approaching the Millennium* includes interviews with Tony Kushner and other key creators and players involved in the original productions of *Angels*. The interviews explore issues raised earlier in the volume and dialogues between the creative artists who have shaped the play and the critics and "theatricians" engaged in responding to it.

Contributors to this volume are Arnold Aronson, Art Borreca, Gregory W. Bredbeck, Michael Cadden, Nicholas de Jongh, Allen J. Frantzen, Stanton B. Garner, Deborah R. Geis, Martin Harries, Steven F. Kruger, James Miller, Framji Minwalla, Donald Pease, Janelle Reinelt, David Román, David Savran, Ron Scapp, and Alisa Solomon.

Deborah Geis is Associate Professor of English, Queens College, City University of New York. Steven F. Kruger is Professor and Chair of the Department of English, Queens College, City University of New York.

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