

" Universe of Wounds": Visions of Redemptive Apocalypse in Tony Kushner's Angels in America

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Abstract

Apocalypse is evoked by Tony Kushner in *Angels in America* in order to suggest the necessity of the ends and the redemptive effects those ends may have in the lives of alienated individuals. The play functions as a reminder of catastrophes: AIDS, racism, homophobia, sexism, moral erosion and drug addiction. These are the plays' most obvious examples of the imminent end of history and of America as a nation. These calamities act as a revelation uncovering the catastrophic breakdown in every area of the American politics and culture. These images of the end ignite Kushner's anxiety about radical and possible transformation or redemption of the condition of life in America in the coming Millennium. This is what the present paper attempts to explore.

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon can not hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*

(W.B. Yeats)

In these famous lines from *The Second Coming* the world is on the threshold of an apocalyptic moment. The concept of centrality which is used as a signifier of order, structure and coherence is unable to hold. The world, then, must brace itself for the loosing anarchy and chaos. Here Yeats describes an apocalyptic vision in which the world collapses into anarchy because of an internal flaw in humanity.

1.1 Twentieth Century : " Apocalypse Descending"

As the twentieth century confronts its "last days", Millenarianism and Apocalypticism have increasingly become a fascination, almost an obsession. They form a "nexus" "where high culture and low, belief and behaviour, meet and overlap."⁽¹⁾The apocalyptic concepts are clearly evident in the writings of Jacques Derrida, in the Bible prophecies seminars, in Jean Baudrillard's writings and in the artifacts of what Paul Boyer calls "end time" kitsch : paintings of the Beast from Revelations, Rapture bumper stickers, and wrist watches "One Hour Nearer the Lord's Return."⁽²⁾ Further Eschatological belief has a long heritage, stretching back through Christian Apocalypticism into Jewish messianic.

Critics, like James Berger, use the term apocalypse to refer to the imagined end of the world or the "eschaton," as presented in the New Testament Apocalypse of John and other Jewish and early Christian apocalypse, or as imagined by medieval millenarian movements, or today in visions of nuclear "Armageddon" or ecological destructions.⁽³⁾ In fact the Jewish and Christian strains of apocalypse have influenced the aesthetics of western culture, engendering not only the soaring visions of strange theological narration in works such as the Book of Daniel and the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also in the literary masterpieces like that of Dante's, *Divine Comedy* and William Blake's *America: Prophecy*. For society self-consciously preoccupied with the trauma of change, apocalyptic narrative offers a structure to history and, thus to give a sense of "divine control" in a time of chaos or bewilderment.⁽⁴⁾

Originally apocalypse is " a text containing a medieval unveiling of heavenly secrets." To Bernard McGinn, a leading scholar in apocalyptic texts, apocalyptic narratives are dealing either with the description of the celestial realm or with the course of history and the imminent end of the present age.⁽⁵⁾

There are two poles, McGinn explains, of apocalyptic imagination: one is vertically outer connecting heaven and earth, whilst the other is horizontally inner stretching out through time into apocalyptic future. Both are co-existing and strategically entwined strands of hope and fear that "empower and sustain an all embracing religious decisions."⁽⁶⁾ These apocalyptic poles are intrinsic to the millennial imagination. According to the Bible, the millennialism is the time when the "Messiah" will return and judge all the human beings on earth. Therefore; the devastating scenes in the second half of the twentieth century are interpreted as apocalyptic sings of the doomsday. So the millennial writers offer what is called the "literature of consolation" which is seen as a catalyst for both inner and outer apocalypse, for to be consoled in a time of persecution by the message that the final deliverance is just around the corner is also to be encouraged to deepened one's commitment to the divine power that will bring a deliverance and transcending death.⁽⁷⁾

The interest in such beliefs, as one approaches the third millennium is not a surprising thing. Millenarists tend to intensify them at the close of centuries.⁽⁸⁾ Still apocalypsim has not been restricted to the transitional moments of calendrical history. This "pattern of anxiety," to borrow Frank Kermode's phrase, has emerged during other times of crises and social upheavals like the fourteenth-century plague, the English civil war and the wide spread of the nationalistic movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁽⁹⁾ Hence the term "apocalypse" refers to catastrophes that resemble the imagined final end that can be interpreted as an end of something, a way of life or thinking. These catastrophes act as "definitive historical divides, as rupture, pivots, fulcrums"⁽¹⁰⁾ because they are separating what came before from what came after. "All the preceding history" James Berger believes, "seems to lead up to and set the stage for such events"⁽¹¹⁾ and all that follows emerges out of that central cataclysm. As a result, previous historical narratives are shattered and new understandings of the world are generated.⁽¹²⁾ Thus Apocalypse has an interpretive and explanatory function which is, of course, its etymological sense: as a revelation, unveiling and uncovering. In order for the apocalyptic event to become properly apocalyptic must "clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end in its distinctive moment."⁽¹³⁾

Moreover postmodernism, as a product of contemporary field, is deeply engaged in the narratives and the psychological preoccupations of apocalypse with its sense of "ultimacy", the end of the history and the collapse of the real. The advent of the postmodern condition is defined by its "meta-discursive pondering on catastrophe and change,"⁽¹⁴⁾ Linda Huchean maintains. The postmodern sense of immense "rupture," Jacque Derrida observes, is derived from what he calls the "Nuclear Epoch."⁽¹⁵⁾ The explosion of atom bombs in Hiroshima and the subsequent development of atomic power was the great "catalyst" in questioning the values of the science and technology. This possibility of the destruction of the human species of life on earth motivate the apocalyptic imagination in portraying the human species coming to an end. This hypothesis of "total destructibility," Derrida writes, belongs to this:

nuclear epoch, that of the crisis, and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical horizons of absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse [in the [sense of disclosure] without revelation of its own truth, without absolute knowledge.⁽¹⁶⁾

One may infer from Derrida's observation that the relationship between postmodernism and the apocalyptic narratives is ambivalent. Though the postmodernist theorists and writers borrow from the apocalyptic narratives of "rapture" and "transformation", yet the postmodernists are skeptical of millenarianism, with its totalizing temporal structures and its sense of "ultimacy." The apocalypse of postmodernism is without finality or without transformation or without a violent emergence of the new. History, thus, is unable to transcend itself, to envisage its own finality, or even to dream of its finality.⁽¹⁷⁾ "In the concept of time," Bandrilled states, "the point at issue is the end of the final calculation ... [T]his concludes the attempts at imagining a rupture."⁽¹⁸⁾ Nevertheless, in every apocalyptic text, the end itself, the moment of cataclysm, is only a part of the point of apocalyptic writing:

the apocalyptic text announces and describes
the end of world, but then the text does not end,
nor does the world represented in the text and
neither does the world itself.⁽¹⁹⁾

It is obvious from this extract that in nearly every apocalyptic narrative something remains after the end. In the New Testament, for instance, it is the descent of the new heaven, earth, and New Jerusalem. In modern science fiction, a world as an urban dystopia or an overt wasteland survives. In this way, "the reader and the writer," Berger concludes, "must be both places at once, imagining the apocalyptic world and then paradoxically "remembering" the world as it was."⁽²⁰⁾ Finally apocalyptic narrative functions as a reminder, a symptom and an aftermath of some "disorienting catastrophe," serving psychological and political purposes. It makes an attack on the existing social order.⁽²¹⁾ The apocalyptic vision is profoundly hostile to status quo, emphasizing the importance of the social reform in curing the world's diseases. The meanings of the apocalyptic narrative and its referents transcend what "is" and point toward what is "other". Both of "what is" and "what is other" can be a source for prophetic hope of liberation.⁽²²⁾ Toward that end, the apocalyptic writing portrays a dying world "whose old structure is infected."⁽²³⁾ In Michel Foucault's words, a post structuralist theorist; this world is :

passing to an end and is so suffused with moral rotteness
and technological, political and economical chaos and/or
regiment on that it should end and must because in some
sense it has ended.⁽²⁴⁾

For the "New Order" to be emerged, these old structures of the world must be destroyed. In fact this weird blend of disgust, moral favour and cynicism prompt many American playwrights, particularly Tony Kushner, to manipulate apocalypse in their plays. During the twentieth century and particularly after the Second World war, a dark vision of apocalypse had prevailed in America. There is a strong sense of crisis:

of old things tumbling and new worlds waiting
in the wings: " we do not know we're going but
it looks as though we're going there faster and faster."⁽²⁵⁾

This sense of anxiety enacts the Christian narrative of the "Last Day". East and West antagonism is frequently interpreted in the context of Biblical prophecy. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Ronald Reagan, and others in his administrations, reads U.S. and Soviet confrontation in terms of the "end-time scenario". In addition, the emergence of the nuclear threat fuels the apocalyptic anxiety :

from "Armageddon" to "New World Order", from the Cuban Missile crisis to Chernobyl, the rhetoric and events of the cold war reflect an obsessive awareness of the eschatological brink.⁽²⁶⁾

These calamities are reinforced by deadly military conflicts, terrorists' attacks, social unrests, economic crises, ecological disasters, overpopulation, the AIDS epidemic, and economic break down. For these reasons, America is seen as a stable nation whose sinfulness makes it a subject for apocalyptic purging.⁽²⁷⁾

II: Tony Kushner's " Universe of Wounds"

Tony Kushner (1956-) is one of the forefront playwrights of American postwar drama. Kushner's most acclaimed Pulitzer Prize winning play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes Part One : Millennium Approaches* (1993), was joined with the second part *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes Part Two : Perestroika* (1993)*. Theatre critics and reviewers hail *Angels* as "the broadest, deepest, and most searching American play of our time."⁽²⁸⁾ John Lahr also considers *Perestroika* as a "masterpiece" and observes that "not since Williams has a playwright announced his poetic vision with such authority on the Broadway stage."⁽²⁹⁾ To Robert Brustein *Millennium* is "the authoritative achievement of a radical dramatic artist with a fresh, clear voice."⁽³⁰⁾ To David Savran, *Angels* is far more than just a successful play, it is the maker of a decisive historical shift in American theatre.⁽³¹⁾ To John Clum, the presentation of the *Angels* on the Broadway " marks a turning point in the history of American drama."⁽³²⁾ In its reception, Savran observes, "*Angels*, so deeply preoccupied with teleological process, is itself positioned as both the culmination of history and as that which rewrites the past."⁽³³⁾ To sum up, one may assume that the success of the play is the result of its ability to a radical rethinking of the whole aesthetics of American drama.

Tony Kushner's imagination has been formed by a number of diverse and sometimes conflicting forces. A southern Jewish homosexual with Marxist learning, he is drawn equally to both:

a dialectical theatre in which the politics of the right are engaged in the context of an unfolding history, and to a theatre of fantasy in which the imagination becomes a primary force.⁽³⁴⁾

* For convenience sake, I will refer in my discussion to Part One as *Millennium* ,Part Two as *Perestroika* ,and the two together *Angels*.

His theatre is eclectic. In *Angels*, Kushner introduces a "bold theatricality to the American stage"⁽³⁵⁾ which is at once both naturalistic and poetic, realistic and fantastic as well as demonstrating intellectualism, seriousness, and political activism. Kushner recognizes the importance of the blending of art with the wonderment of the stage. He believes that:

the theatre always has to function as a popular entertainment or at least the theatre that I do. I think ...it has to have the jokes, the feathers ,and the mirrors and the smoke.⁽³⁶⁾

Angels is a complex play to categorize. Critics disagree on how to label it. For some of them, it is an "epic drama", or a " political drama". Other classify it as a "gay drama" or an "AIDS drama". Some go beyond this and call it a "religious" or a " Jewish" play or a cultural and historical document of a certain period of American history. In essence, the play has many visions , but none seems so memorable, so shocking like the vision of apocalypse.⁽³⁷⁾

In *Angels*, Tony Kushner is engaged with the "poetics" of apocalypse theatrically and not ideologically. He attempts to create a stage language that is really "kaleidoscope"⁽³⁸⁾ in which different styles and patterns form, re-form and braid together to create startling images of apocalypse. To Tony Kushner, "we already live in the millennial new age... we already stand at the end of history."⁽³⁹⁾ And in Francis Fukuyama's words "we can not picture to ourselves a world that is essentially different from the present one, and at the same time better."⁽⁴⁰⁾ Accordingly *Angels* is a play about the millennial feelings of America at the end of the twentieth century. It is animated by the terms and images of apocalyptic discourse. The play situations itself within the postmodern problematic concepts of history and ending. It evokes the closure essential to apocalypse with its vision of cataclysm and with its duel prospect of annihilation and utopian transformation.⁽⁴¹⁾ On the stage, *Angels* unfolds like a "landscape of ruins," dramatizing a very large web of catastrophes like AIDS epidemic, the environmental destruction, the ascendancy of the Reagan Rights, and the abandonment of creation by God. These catastrophes can be conceived as the signs of the doomsday or "the end time."⁽⁴²⁾ So the characters in *Angels* feel that they are living in a world that is "coming to an end"⁽⁴³⁾ on the "threshold of Revelation" in which "Apocalypse Descending"(135).

Tony Kushner subtitles his plays *A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Like fantasia which is a melody of familiar tunes with variations and interludes, the scenes of the play often seem musical like operatic arias and playful duets or powerful trios. Further the stage fills with fantasy and magic. It is bombarded by lights and sounds, hallucinations, dead people haunting the living, long forgotten ancestors appearing, spiritual visions, and angelic visitations.⁽⁴⁴⁾ The spectacle of the play is that of the "Theatre of Fabulous"⁽⁴⁵⁾ as Tony Kushner calls it. Formally, *Angels* is an "epic drama," having a rambling episodic form covering over great distances of times and places. It involves more than one story line. *Angels* is a very large play and "sprawl[s]from event to event in heaven and on earth."⁽⁴⁶⁾ In addition, the form of "fantasia" signifies a condition of the modern world. The titles of the play and its subtitles are accurate. Together the plays are fantasies at apocalyptic times when old orders, like Perestroika that has changed the Russian community, are collapsing.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The epoch of the play is "the age of Anomie"(63). This "plastic", flexible form of fantasia so aptly describes the chaotic and disintegrated world of "surreal" America at the closing years of the twentieth century. This is clearly reverberated in Harper's account of the social disintegrations of modern life in one of the play's most direct apocalyptic terms; for her the world is dying:

as beautiful systems dying, fixed order falling

apart, where things are collapsing. Lies are surfacing
systems of defense are giving away.(22)

In *Angels*, characters for different reasons despair over America's future. To Roy Cohn, an infamous lawyer, America becomes "crazy, terminated and mean." (36) To Belize, a black nurse, there is a distinct spirit to America that he does not like: "I hate this country... It is a country of big ideas and stories and people are dying" (91). To him, in America "there is precious little freedom in the land of the free" (*ibid.*). Similarly Louis, a gay Jew, complains that nothing matters in America except power of politics:

there are no gods here, no ghosts, no spirits in America
there are no Angels in America. No spiritual past
no racial, no racial past, there is only politics. (92)

It is here Louis sums up Kushner's vision of America at the coming of the new Millennium as "the evening land, where the promise of utopia is so impossibly remote"⁽⁴⁸⁾ that it brings grief and despair. The land is devoid of the spiritual values. In post modern America, there is only politics which is an "intricate spider web"⁽⁴⁹⁾ of power-relation in common. The idealism of the age seems no longer to have influence on humanity in a civilization where less and less citizens believe in the existence of a common spiritual ideal. The emerging America has abandoned God or to be more precisely God has abandoned it. God has vanished. "God is bastard" because "God is not coming back," desperately Prior declares: "God is off wandering... sailing off in Voyages no knowing where" (195). *Angels* presents the bewilderment of the characters in profound, horrific and dark images in the period of the abandonment of a "departed God." In the play, God's absence is dated back to the day of "Great Earthquake" of San Francisco. It is on that day God "abandoned his angels and their heaven and did not return." Heaven in *Angels*, thus, appears frozen in time "deserted and derelict" with "rubble strewn every where." Even the council room in Heaven, meanwhile: "dimly lit by candles and a single great bulb (which is periodically fails)." The table there is "covered with antique broken, astronomical, astrological, mathematical and nautical object of measurement and calculation" (121). In *Angels* even heaven is no longer a utopian place, it is :

a kind of museum, not the insignia of the NOW,
but of before, of antique past of the absolute⁽⁵⁰⁾

So heaven commemorates disaster, despair and stasis. It has become a true reflection of the angels' fear that God will never return.

Similarly the disintegration of the social and ideological rationality is visible in the play's dramatization of what is described as a "cinematic reality." This is presented through "split scenes" which are a kind of dream sequences, subplot, or even bifurcation. Characters move in and out of the conversation with each other, sometimes even overlapping other "vignette" which occurs on stage.⁽⁵¹⁾ At the same time, the setting changes rapidly from offices to bedrooms, from hospital wards to imaginary south pole. These forms of fantasia are very expressive in dramatizing characters almost schizophrenic illusions as to what is real or illusory in the modern American life.

Finally, the core of apocalypse in *Angels* lies in the significance of the visions of fantasia. In *Angels*, "The poetics of apocalypse," Mathew Smith states, "has always a privileged vision over the other scenes."⁽⁵²⁾ Harper Pitt and Prior Walter receive visions of the world in the form of the angles, visiting ghost or impossible landscapes. Harper begins the play terrified by the changes she sees around her. She fears she is losing her husband, her home and her sanity. This is what overwhelms her so she is thoroughly immersed in her

eschatological visions. Consider, for example, her vision of the destruction of the Ozone layer that is metaphorically representing her fear. To her, the Ozone layer is a spiritual realm, it is "a kind of Gift, from God, the Crowning touch to the creation of the world"(22). So she sees its destruction as an eschatological sign, a signal that things are disintegrated everywhere. Here the decay of the Ozone layer is linked with the increasing of the industrial pollutions, and a spiritualization of that pollution, a rendering of it in terms of Revelation. The same is true of Prior Walter's prophetic visions, ADIS sufferer and prophet, when he announces: " I believe I've seen the end of things" (29).

Hence, the play in its form of fantasia offers a nuanced invocation of apocalypse. Angels promises to undertake a " marvelous work and a wonder" to abolish a "great lie," to correct a " great error"⁽⁵³⁾ that is America itself. In Angels, Tony Kushner's dramatic endeavour is to "trouble the waters" of American life in a way that he permits a revelation to his characters.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Characters are mediating on living and dying in America at the turn of the Millennium. In Millennium, some of his characters give their opinion about a disastrous and apocalyptic vision of history and its future. Facing the coming millennium, the characters in Angels suffer form anxiety and despair resulting from man-made catastrophes. Like the AIDS epidemic, racism, homophobia and the dismantlement of the world:

Roy : I see that the universe, Joe, as a kind of sandstorm in outer space with winds of megahurricane velocity had instead grains of sand
Its shards and splinters of glass (11).

These catastrophes make an anonymous Woman predict that "[I]n the new century, I think we will be all insane"(81). Even the angels at the beginning of Perestroika announce:

before the boiling of blood or the searing
of skin comes the secret catastrophe.
before life becomes finally impossible, it will
for a long time before have become completely
unbearable... YOU MUST STOP MOVING! (52)

Tony Kushner presents in Angels a "carnival" exploration of America at a time of plague.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The play is basically about a gay community under pressure. Putting a gay community front and centre, Tony Kushner delineates a portrait of decay in American culture and morality. Most of the characters in Angels are marginalized people representing a "mixed bag of classes, races, cultural backgrounds and ideological principles."⁽⁵⁶⁾ They are a web of men, women, blacks, Mormons, Jewfishes, gays and straights. They constitute what Kushner calls "mongrel" nation made up of :

the garbage, the human garbage that capitalism
created the prisoners and criminals and religious
persecuted and the oppressed and the slave that
have generated by the ravages of early capitalism.⁽⁵⁷⁾

This marginalization of the characters is highly significant in denoting that American society at the turn of the twentieth century is without a holding structure. It is left to chaos, anarchy and decay. The heart of this decay is located in the abandonment of the "old world" ideals. This cultural and historical dilemma is theatrically enacted at the opening scene of the play at the funeral of Sarah Ironsom, Louis's grand mother. the play begins with allusions to a perfect past, now fallen from grace. The character of Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz says in his eulogy for her that she "carried the old world on her back over the ocean with

her,"(10) when she immigrated to America. The Rabbi looks at her as a symbol and not as a person but :

a whole kind of persons, who brought with us
to America, the villages of Russia and Lithuania
how we struggles, how we fought for the Family...
in this place (11) .

To the Rabbi, "such great voyage doesn't any more exist"(ibid.). His comment conveys an idealistic nostalgia for something lost and now totally absent; because of American rootlessness:

Americans do not have a shared history or language,
or religion, and they do not love our land as dearly as
our ancestors had. When we leave, we leave. But we do
not carry an "old world" on our backs and set them down
down where we land.(16)

This is the reason that the Rabbi considers America as "the melting pot where nothing melted" (ibid.). This intersection of the past with the present is an inevitable fact for living for Kushner. What disturbs him, Mc Nutley argues, is "the inevitable failure of America to recognize this, the willful amnesia that threatens to blackout the nation, as it moves for the next Millennium."⁽⁵⁸⁾ This failure again is shown in the catastrophes that face America with the coming of the third Millennium. Angels functions as a constant reminder of catastrophes: AIDS, Racism, Homophobia, pathologization of queer and female bodies. These are the plays' most obvious signs of the imminent end of history and of America as a nation. As Ethel Rosenberg predicts at the end of Millennium at the eve of the Third Millennium: " history is about to crack open...Millennium Approaches, "(112) a fact which is later ratified with the decent of an Angle to the bed of dying Prior: "the great work begins: Messenger Arrives" (120).

The primary metaphor in Angels is the epidemic AIDS. In her book, ADIS and its Metaphor, Susan Sontag explains, that epidemic ADIS has been socially interpreted "not just as lethal but as dehumanizing."⁽⁵⁹⁾ She points out that the "plague" is the principle metaphor by which ADIS epidemic is understood. According to her point of view, a "plague" always almost associated with social immorality, is conceived as a judgment on the society for their corporate immorality rather than a judgment on the victims of the disease. Hence a PWA (person with AIDS) is viewed as being:

punished since she/he has committed,
not just promiscuity but a specific
sexual practice and unacceptable to the
main stream.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Homosexuality has frequently been interpreted as a sign of the end of the times in many apocalyptic writings. Thus since ADIS was perceived as a "homosexual-related" disease in America, particularly during 1980s, ADIS was often viewed as a means by which God would bring about the end of the corrupt world. So the PWA are "stigmatized" because they are perceived to be "morally suspected" and deserved the "wrath of God."⁽⁶¹⁾

The ADIS metaphor has three thematic implications in Angels. First, Kushner presents ADIS as a catastrophe in itself: the characters in Angels are passive victims doomed by the ADIS viruses. Secondly, the ADIS metaphor takes on "a decidedly apocalyptic tenor in the play,"⁽⁶²⁾ functioning as a revelation uncovering the catastrophic breakdown in every area of

the American politics and culture. The American immune system is already diseased. When Roy Cohn's doctor says that in presence of the HIV virus, "the body's immune system ceases to function" (42); he is describing for a single human body the "woundedness" that is of all the defenseless bodies in what Kushner calls "a universe of wounds"(54). In this, the play suggests that those who are physically sick are in fact a symptom of the general disorder. "The country is sick with its sexual and racial oppressions, conservative brutalities and liberal hypocrisies."⁽⁶³⁾ This is clearly conveyed in the thematics of the "skin" as shown in the suffering body of Walter Prior whose breached, fragile skin dominates the whole world of Angels. Prior's decaying skin has become not simply "a graphic image" of personal, physical pain and suffering but also a "complex site" to decaying and invasion. It is a place at which " the self is endangered and at which oneself may threaten others."⁽⁶⁴⁾ This is what constitutes Walter Prior 's phobia. Prior protectively warns Louis away when his skin begins bleeding: "may be, you shouldn't touch it ...me,"(50) Prior's putrid skin presents personal pain and danger, both for himself and for the others. In this way Prior's suffering body functions as an "interruptive paradigm," suggesting the woundedness of personal, social, moral and political bodies which are interconnected with each other.⁽⁶⁵⁾ What is worse to Tony Kushner than Prior's body is the American society and its political administrations in which there are "no connections", "no responsibilities," and "no justice" (71).

The third thematic function of the ADIS metaphor in Angels is that Kushner offers it as a "primary analogy" to regain meaning , "not only in the wake of ADIS, but also out of the ruins of the entire postmodern collapse."⁽⁶⁶⁾ It is an opportunity for rebirth and renewal. In describing the anxieties and the suffering of the characters with AIDS in the face of millennium, Kushner manifests that progress, and redemption of the human kinds are still possible, even if that catastrophic future is dark and frightening. In other words, the AIDS metaphor carries out Kushner's vision of "another American which might be born out of the blood and mucus of a tainted past."⁽⁶⁷⁾

On a basic level, Angels explores the confusions faced by a set of intersecting individuals at the moments of significant personal crises. Their lives are profoundly touched by the epidemic of AIDS death in New York in the mid of 1980s. Tony Kushner casts his characters into a :

vortex of past, present and future values
and questions, each character faces a profound
personal tragedy, ranging from abandonment
and emotional despair to the collapse of moral
and religious certitudes that have guided his/her life.⁽⁶⁸⁾

This sentiment of tragedy is essential in understanding Tony Kushner's drama. Kushner believes that tragedy-both real and fiction- teaches and changes people.⁽⁶⁹⁾ He shares this feeling of personal tragedies with many dramatists in America, particularly, with the post war generation. His drama of loss and betrayal of the relationship. Kushner sees life as loss:

You can not conquer loss. You lose.
To suggest otherwise would be to suggest
a fantasy... life is about losing. things are
taken from you. People are taken from
you ... you have just to face it.⁽⁷⁰⁾

So Angels is basically about the betrayal, loss and "how the heart learns or does not learn to live up with loss."⁽⁷¹⁾ Kushner in this play presents a portrait of America of lies and cowardice. America is riddled with cruelty. When Prior Walter reveals his first signs of

Kaposi's sarcoma to his lover, Louis, for years he finds himself deserted in a matter of weeks. Louis is unable to deal with his lover's illness. Joe Pitt, an ambitious lawyer, though politically and socially conservative as well as a devout Mormon, Joe struggles in his marriage to Harper, suppressing the fact that he is homosexual, then abandons his wife. On her part, Harper struggles with her addiction to valium, bouts of anxiety and increasingly surreal hallucinations. She has a recurrent dream nightmare that the man with a knife is out to kill her, she has the real reason to find out that the man is her husband himself. Further, Millennium has a threatened death at its heart as the signs of ADIS accumulate on the body of Prior Walter. He appears a helpless victim of ADIS. At first, he desperately declares his AIDS phobia and the horror of its subsequent death: "the wine-dark kiss of the angel of death"(21). This phobia is symbolically captured in the story of his ancestors which is one of the most harrowing moment in Millennium. Prior gives an account of his ancestor, a ship captain, who sent whale oil to Europe and brought back immigrants; "Irish mostly, packed in tight, so many dollars per head"(14). The last ship he captained sank off Nova Scotia in a storm, the crew loaded seventy women and children into an open boat but found that it was overcrowded and began throwing passengers one by one: "they walked up and down, eyes to the waterline and when the boat rode low in the water, they'd grab the nearest passenger and throw them into the sea" (ibid.).The people in the boat are "waiting [and] terrified," while the crewmen, the captain's agents, are "implacable, unsmiling men, irresistibly strong." They seize:

...may be the person next to you.
 Maybe you, and with no warning at all
 with time only for a quick intake of air,
 you are pitched into freezing, turbulent
 water and salt and darkness to drown. (42)

This episode carries out a stark political allegory. Allen J. Frantzen sees it as "a deft miniature that reveals the power of the conqueror over the conquered."⁽⁷²⁾ It functions as a reminder of the right of one group to survive at the expense of the other. America is a "promising land" for the Irish immigrant" but what a failing promise," (34) using Harper's words. This story so aptly describes Prior's ADIS phobia; the ADIS epidemic prays on every one without warning that they are scapegoats of God's retribution against human sinfulness and injustice during the 1980s in America. Due to the ADIS, Prior suffers from a gradual degradation and loss of his human dignity and feels guilt about his infected body:" I don't think there's any uninfected part of me. My heart is pumping polluted blood. I feel dirty." This suggests that Prior does not see himself as a man of dignity, but as a guilty, polluted, and morally corrupted individual Later on because of the ADIS, he is abandoned by his lover, then left isolated in his room in the hospital.

AIDS in Angels also lends itself as a metaphor for a tragic society that has lost its sense of community. Reagan-era individualism as a political force is personified in the play by the "power broker", Roy Cohn. In contrast to Prior, Roy Cohn, who is also dying of ADIS, refuses to be diagnosed with ADIS, even he threatens his doctor, Henry, by using his influential political power:

I will proceed, systematical to
 destroy your reputation and your
 practice and your career in New York
 Henry which you know I can do it. (60)

Roy's attitude to his doctor is important in revealing his personality. Roy's self-image and his values are deeply rooted upon one principle: "power" or as what he calls "clout." This

image is created right from the first scene of the play. Roy sits in his office wishing that he was a "formidable monster, or a kind of "an octopus, a fucking octopus with eight living arms And all of them suckers" (11). Roy Cohn is a corrupted lawyer, now struggling to suppress his manifest calamity of ADIS. To him, being homosexual means to be weak and ineffectual, so he distances himself from other homosexuals. He is always asserting that the successful American man is supposed to be tough, ruthless, competitive and heterosexual. He also justifies his illegal, violent behaviour as being a good marker of his masculinity. From Kushner's political point of views, Cohn symbolized the sum total of the Reagan era; he represents a kind of "trickle- down morality in Angels " that:

If corruption, greed and bad faith in powerful
members of a society, it will ultimately seeps
down into each individual.⁽⁷³⁾

Roy, who is "the heart of modern American conservatism,"⁽⁶⁰⁾ embodies political corruption, hypocrisy, and political injustice in the 1980: "selfish, greedy, loveless and blind Reagan's children"(ibid.) He wants to send Joe Pitt to the Justice Department in Washington D.C. to make him "Roy boy"(51) as "eye of Justice" (ibid.)for his protection. Roy is about to be trailed by the disbarment committee because he "borrowed half a million from one of his clients. And he forgets to return it." Here he shows his immorality by denying this act because " she's got no paper work, can't prove a fucking thing"(66). His ability to "eat off one's plate without ceremony or shame"⁽⁷⁴⁾ is also shown in the use of his political power to secure the medicine, AZT, which is known as an experimental treatment for ADIS patients and is hard to be obtained. Though he has many boxes of AZT, he greedily refuses to share it with Belize, the black nurse, who wants some for his friends: "I have friends who need them "(ibid.). Roy also is responsible for Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's trail and their illegitimate executions in the electric chair when they were alleged to be guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage with communist Soviet Union during the 1950s. Hence Roy Cohn stands for America history of doing wrong for the "supposed sake of right." This can be :

blacklisting communists, beating and arresting
civil right demonstrators, bombing civilian, in
Vietnam, selling arm in return for hostage, or
ignoring the homosexual disease ADIS.⁽⁷⁵⁾

Thus Roy Cohn is considered as a "satanic figure,"⁽⁷⁶⁾ so evil that he threatens to explode the play's central concept of millennium redemption.

Tony Kushner illustrates the struggle of his characters as a journey in search for hope through the process of progress, redemption and reformation. As Harper suggests in the last words of Perestroika :

in this world, there is a kind of
painful progress. Longing for what
we've left behind, and dreaming ahead. (144)

Considering progress as necessary, Tony Kushner reflects that the goal of human progress is redemption which means to attain hope and self-awareness through ones' journey in life. This process of regaining hope itself is the process of the real redeeming. It is only through suffer and struggle, a person is able to attain his/her redemption. In the process of ridding himself of the effect of AIDS plague, Prior seeks truth, self-awareness and meaning for his fate. Tony Kushner uses Prior's crisis as a "means to reveal a universal vision"⁽⁷⁷⁾through which he suggests that people have to redeem themselves without waiting

for the outside redemption. Prior refuses to be stoical: " we're not rocks, we can not just wait...and wait for what? God !"(195) Prior's task is to make sense of death, or as he says to face" loss with grace." So Prior's journey is an expansive one; he travels from one point in another across time and space. This journey is dramatized in the play Prior's discussion with his ancestors of the past centuries, even he intervenes with the subconscious world of other characters, then he is wrestling with the angel in the hospital and finally he confronts the angels in Heaven.

It is important to notice that Tony Kushner derives his visions of redemption from Walter Benjamin's theses of redemptive history. James Fisher asserts that the Angels is certainly inspired by Brechtain theatre but it is primarily fueled by Walter Benjamin's writings,⁽⁷⁸⁾ especially Benjamin's essays "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1968). Tony Kushner is deeply affected by this essay that one may feel Benjamin's powerful presence in the play. In this essay, Benjamin employs a "strange" visual allegory to envision his theories on history within the context of the Nazi advances over Europe. In the ninth theses, the philosopher develops a "parable" of history when he gazes at Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1920):

a Klee paint, named " *Angelus Novus*" shows one angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating: his eyes are staring, his mouth is open. This is how one pictures the angel of history.⁽⁷⁹⁾

Benjamin's angel of history symbolizes the intolerable situation of a present time. Trapped between a past and a horrific future, the angel just passively gazes at the catastrophe of human kind. Thus paradise becomes a real "tempest" that gets under his wings and pushes into an unknown future. It is from this prospect of history, Tony Kushner captures his angelic imagery in the play but he transforms Benjamin's angel of history of "bad omen" into prophetic messenger of apocalypse. Moreover Walter Benjamin believes that the power of history is a redemptive one.⁽⁸⁰⁾ He felt that the moral duty of criticism is "to redeem the past, to save it from oblivion by revealing its concealed truth."⁽⁸¹⁾ Once revealed, the truth of the past, particularly as it is embodied in the "oppressed," the marginalized might have some hope for future. In this Kushner shares Benjamin's belief that history whether political or personal teaches profound lessons. As Benjamin emphasizes that one is :

constantly looking back at the rubble of history
because the past carried with it a temporal index
by which it is referred by redemption.⁽⁸²⁾

"every second of time," Benjamin observes, "was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter."⁽⁸³⁾ For both Benjamin and Kushner, the concept of apocalypse and redemption are filled with the same struggle, confusions and pain encountered in the real life. And the most dangerous thing for both of them is to set upon " some notion of the future that is not rooted in the bleakest, most terrifying idea of what's piled up behind you."⁽⁸⁴⁾

It is true that Kushner looks to the past to help him to frame eternal questions about existence, yet he does not propose to simply re-commit to its value. Instead he calls for a new kind of Socialism that might be labeled "progressivism", a politics that Kushner calls a "socialism of the skin"⁽⁸⁵⁾, the one that sees history as a gradual motion toward great happiness, equality and freedom without a slavish adherence to beliefs or systems whose traditions have oppressed people. To Kushner, Socialism is about to struggle in :

a really, really powerful way with why economic justice
and equality are so inevitably uncomfortable for us and why

we still our worth...it has a human being... but I really believe that the world is doomed unless we can re-create ourselves as social beings as opposed to little ego-anarchists.⁽⁸⁶⁾

Kushner's remark seems to express directly about his belief in Socialism as redemptive force functioning as an alternative to individualism politically and capitalism economically. He states that Socialism "most surely have as its ultimate objective is the restriction of the joy of living we may have lost when we first picked up a tool."⁽⁸⁷⁾ To Kushner, American society is an age of intellectual stagnation, profound upheavals and social crises. He believes that the greatest threat is "the internal moral emptiness." This moral vacuum stems from what he views as an abandonment of the fundamental commitment to justice, compassion, love and mercy that are required to moral survival in the universe. Like Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, *Angels* sees the selling of America more in terms of a "selling out or the abandonment of principle or the loss of compassion for the less fortunate."⁽⁸⁸⁾ This is in fact a failure to believe in the fundamental connectedness of all the members of humanity, despite the racial, ethnic, religious and cultural differences. This might explain Tony Kushner's belief in the "hard progress" that is built of compassion and humanity. These are, Tony Kushner asserts, the main prerequisites for a society as it proceeds most effectively into unknown future.

As *Angels* progresses, one may find two conflicting concepts of history: the one holds by the angel-or "the Continental Principality of America"- and the one defended by Prior, who becomes a kind of a gay prophet. The angel conceives history and time as immobility which will lead to God's return. The angel in the play is the harbinger of apocalypse because "she" is associated with the impending end, with death and with Stasis, i.e. the power of the ancient spirit to resist change. Indeed the angel manifests the ideology of "Manifest Destiny" which claims for the chosen people:

a pre-eminent social worth and distinctly lofty mission
and consequently unique right in the application
of moral principle.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Thus "she" sees America as "the site of a blessed past and millennial future."⁽⁹⁰⁾ In this regard *Angels* confronts the audience with modern millennium faith of Mormon enthusiasm of nineteenth century. The Mormon believe that America "lives on a threshold between this world and millennium...and holds on hard to this world and the next." Mormonism shapes the apocalyptic discourse in *Angels* through its influence on Joe Pitt, Hannah and Harper Pitt. Those "characters who retain," Matthew Smith asserts, "a certain Millennial fervour even as the influence of the Latter-day Saints over their lives slips away".⁽⁹¹⁾ Joe, for example, shows his admiration for Reagan's administration in a way as to show his millennial mood:

America has re-discovered itself...its sacred position
nations. This is a great thing. The truth restored, among
law restored. (32)

Joe's admiration here, for Reagan presidency, recalls the emphasis in Mormon theory of America as a "chosen nation." Hannah, on her part, holds the same view even she takes the existence of the angels at the present time for granted. In addition, Mormonism formulates the play in a different way, particularly in the revelation scene of prophecy to Prior. The entire "scenario" of the angelic visitation and the command to unearth the sacred

book of Mormon are influenced by Joseph Smith's discovery was itself marked by apocalyptic overtones.⁽⁹²⁾

The angel who appears to Prior at the end of Millennium claims to herald new age, a feather drops into his room and an angelic voice " an incredible beautiful." At first he is unwilling to become a prophet when the angel proclaims him as such because he believes that he is not mature enough. Although he refuses to be a prophet, the angel insists that he is an American prophet:

I unfold my leave, Bright steal. In salutation
open shed before you: Prior Walter, long descended,
well-prepared ... American Prophet tonight you
become Prior (135).

The angel asks Prior to stop the phenomenon of "human progress," to stop movement and modernism and to get him to turn back the clock to bring God back to Heaven: "[Y]ou have driven him away! You must stop moving"(100). The angel tells Prior that she written "The End" in his blood. She attempts to persuade Prior to take her prophecy that she has come to expose the fallacy of change and progress. The angel demands Prior to be the prophet of the end of human progress by giving him "The Book of Anti-Migratory Epistle." However according to Tony Kushner's point of view, the angel's demand suppresses Prior's autonomy and subjectivity, plus, the angel is "irresponsible". Therefore; Prior "wrestles" with angel and returns her book of Prophecy to heaven. Then he announces his apocalyptic revelation. He stresses the importance of progress and change in showing the persistence of human goodness and more life in the face of death saying:

The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time
has come. You are fabulous creatures, each are every one
and I bless you: More Life. The Great Work Begins. (148)

In this context Tony Kushner affirms a vision which is neither queer nor Jewish. He desires a dramatic form and an understanding of transcendence that allows a space for all people regardless of their religion, race, gender or sexuality. Prior believes that life only exists in a continuous evolution and that progress is possible only by accepting others. This is culminating in Perestroika. Basically Perestroika is about progress. "There is a wind blowing from the future," Bigsby states, "but it is a future that has to be constructed, a future compromised by present evil and suffering."⁽⁹³⁾ Millennium evokes an image of "impending end" by depicting the dark side of the American life, whereas Perestroika recalls a historical moment, Gorbachev's attempt to liberalize the Soviet Union peaceably from the inside. A definite feature of Perestroika is the poetics of apocalypse. "The pressure of reality," McNulty observes, " seems to have induced an evangelic fervour in Kushner, in which social and political reality has become subordinated to religious fantasy."⁽⁹⁴⁾ On this point Savran agrees that in Angels, Tony Kushner designs a project wherein the theological reality is constructed as a "transcendent reality" into which politics and history finally disappears.⁹⁵ This cultural anxiety is often transmuted into the myth of apocalypse. In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Frank Kermode explains that this is a condition of man's thinking about the future that one should assume:

one's time to stand in an extraordinary relation to it...
we think of our crisis as pre-eminent, more worrying,
more Interesting than other crisis.⁽⁹⁵⁾

A good example for this, in Perestroika ,is Harper's declaration, while standing barefoot in the rain on the Brooklyn Heights, Promenade : " nothing like storm clouds over

Manhattan to get you in the mood for the Judgment Day,"(101) saying this with the accompaniment of thunder and lightening.

Angels drifts toward a Utopian closure in which the fragmented, the damaged and the marginalized learn to come to term with the messy reality of human existence. To celebrate the Third Millennium at the end of Perestroika, Prior, Hannah, Louis, and Belize gather in the Central Park at the Bethesda Fountain, Prior's favourite place in New York, where the figure of an angel at its top commemorates the dead in the Civil War. This place has a symbolic meaning in the play. According to Christian myth when the angel Bethesda appeared in Roman-occupied Jerusalem in the previous Millennium, a healing fountain sprang where she touched the earth. The fountain juxtaposes two pasts: one is of rubbles, defeat, destruction and death belonging to the Civil War; whilst the other is a legendary, it is of hope and cure. The fountain in this respect acts as:

a dialectic image; an image of the past filled with tensions (between death and life, despair and hope, reality and utopia) which can be mobilized by present concerns. The positive moment in the image signal the possible overcoming of the negative one sickness and devastation.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Symbolically, the characters celebrate their reconciliation and their resurrection while acknowledging the power of death. They accept and even embrace the agonies of life. In this way, they achieve a redemption born of a renewed hope. Even if that hope is characterized by the knowledge that the joy of living is linked to suffering and loss. "Insisting that no matter what humans are given to endure," James Fisher concludes, "a belief in a progressive change is a path to a hope and salvation."⁽⁹⁷⁾ This is the strategy for survival, both for the individual and for the American society in the new millennium.

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الخلاصة

عالم الجراح /رؤية نهاية العالم والانبعاث في مسرحية توني كوشنر: ملائكة في أمريكا

يعد توني كوشنر من أهم كتاب المسرح الأميركي المعاصر، إذ قدم في مسرحيته: ملائكة في أمريكا فكرة نهاية العالم وإمكانية الانبعاث من جديد، وذلك برفض كل روايت الماضي والإيمان بالتغيير والتقدم. تتألف هذه المسرحية من جزئين، يصور الجزء الأول منها الذي اسماه: الألفية تقرب، الجوانب المظلمة من الحياة الأمريكية المعاصرة، الذي جسد معاناتها شخوص المسرحية من خلال كفاحهم ضد الايدز. في حين قدم الجزء الثاني من المسرحية، الذي اسماه: بروستركيا فكرة التغيير، فلا يمكن للمجتمع الأميركي النهوض أو الانبعاث من جديد إلا من خلال نشر فلسفة مستقبلية جديدة، متقبلة للأخر تماماً كما هو، ومحترمة لحياته، ومدافعة عن حقوق الأقليات في علاقات إنسانية مبنية على الحب.