

Forum

Women in *Angels*: Does this amazing play make a statement about women as well as gay men?

Joanna Shunk
STAFF WRITER

Angels in America finished its run last Saturday. The play more than filled up every one of its six shows, and was passionately embraced by almost all of the students that viewed it. It transcended major sexual boundaries with its humor.

The play is far more than a sentimental look at AIDS as it afflicts four gay men directly and indirectly. The play delves into homosexuality and AIDS, but, as director Jack Zerbe tells, it is a story about life in New York City, how it (to use New York comedian Lewis Black's word) *terrorizes* everyone that lives in it. The play is about a variety of different reactions to "the shit hitting the fan" in New York City.

"*Angels in America*" is obviously not a one-man play. "Harper (the female lead) is supposed to be just as important as Prior (the male lead)," says theatre major Lis Tyroler, who read Tony Kushner's play before Guilford produced it. Zerbe agrees and says furthermore that the play is not making a statement about gender in its juxtaposition of Harper and Prior. In the initial production, many of the women's parts were played by men and vice versa. The director of that first rendition felt the need to compensate for something. I think that something is a bias toward the gay men that is deeply ingrained in the play. The play, as all plays do, pushes the audience toward certain players more than others. It pushes the audience toward four gay men, and in so doing obscures five women.

All the women in the play -- from Hannah to the homeless woman to Ethel Rosenberg -- seem to be less reasonable and less human than the men. The women could simply be foiling gay male protagonists in a play exclusively focused on gay men, but in a far reaching play like this, the positive inclination toward the men raises ques-

tions. The protagonist in this play is ambiguous: it could be Harper, or it could be Prior. This shows that women are not just a supporting element in this film, a stool the men step on in order to elevate themselves to a more glorified position. This would be demeaning, regardless of whether the play intended the statement that women are inferior in sanity and rationality, to the men. The women's thrust in this play is not to repress the men's campaign of sexual freedom. No, the women have missions of their own in this play; they are battling their own monsters in New York City.

The structure of the play invites us to compare and contrast the issues the males and females are dealing with and how they handle them. Yet this must be done in the light of the fact that the sex of the players is not supposed to be given close attention. The meaning of the play is not supposed to be gender-specific.

A more extreme instance of intentional juxtaposition used to convey a message is propaganda in a war film from the forties. Look at those stinking animal-like Japs; now look at the glorious American boys. Not quite so caustically, the audience is challenged, look at that Harper stuffing her mouth with pills and listen to that Mormon b*tch Hannah talking to her son in a machine-like voice; now look at Joe doing everything he can to be a loving husband, despite the circumstances! And look at Prior arching with primitive passion -- bringing fond memories to all of us -- as an angel infuses him with the divine. If that's not enough to pull you

to the cause of the gay men, and unfortunately estrange you from the women at the same time, juxtapose the homeless woman and her frantic declaration, "in the next century, everyone's going to be insane" with Louis' agonizing over the morality of his actions.

I think that we should be keenly aware of this portrayal of women. Once aware of the fact that the female players bear much of the negative characterization of New York -- the selfishness, the aggressiveness, the neurosis -- we can carefully embrace the gender-blind meaning of the play. This play is nigh perfect; it conveys a humanity and charm on the homosexual man's part. Our society continues to deny the homosexual man, especially the homosexual man with AIDS, these traits. That is a major problem that needs to be fought with all of Guilford's artistic might. Congratulations to Jack Zerbe and all of the Guilford Theatre Company. Yet, I believe that I can only appreciate the play to this extent because of my assumption, which Zerbe and Kushner encourage, that the women represent a much larger demographic. Unfortunately, not everyone who saw the play knew this. They are the world's non-homosexuals. The men are not just men in general: they represent homosexuals afflicted with AIDS...a group that happens to be predominantly male.

Finally, I think it's important to mention that gender, especially in this play, is not to be confused with sex. Rosa Levasseur pointed out to me that "Belize is pretty effeminate." Hats off to Belize.



Does "*Angels in America*" encourage gender bias?

COURTESY OF BOB ELDERKIN

Bauman saves

Mark Merkel
STAFF WRITER

In response to Ginny's commentary on the Hege Library I would like to defend that old bastion for late-night work, Bauman.

I cannot stand writing papers in the labs, but the time I have spent on the second floor goes well beyond a healthy relationship with one building.

Like Ginny, I feel compelled to vent my power trip. After four years of kissing *ss we believe we deserve respect from somebody. Well, we don't, but that's not the point. Seniors believe we have some god-given right to tell everybody else their business, and I write for the paper so I know that somebody somewhere will read this article or at least look at the headline as they use it to mop up spilled beer. To tell the truth of the matter, I'm just passing along some powerful advice -- the computer lab is a place of awesome mercy.

It is quite possible that I have spent more time there than in Duke, King, Founders, and Dana combined.

Why, you might ask, would I choose the sterile, funny-smelling lab over the quiet (or not so quiet) comfort of those big cushy couches in the library?

Well: I can get all the snacks I want, when I'm actually getting something done nobody kicks me out or turns the lights off, I can't pass out in the furniture because it makes your back and *ss hurt, the lights are so damn bright that you can't do any napping, and there's absolutely nothing to look at or distract you.

Obviously, the positives outweigh the negatives. You are in the lab because your room is a Mecca of procrastination. The library, well, it stinks, and there are no other options.

I do not have ADD or any other circumstance that would allow me a bountiful supply of low grade speed, so I can rely on the good 'ol discomfort of Bauman to keep me up while I crack out on coffee and papers.

So, I advise you young'uns to find yourself a room, and a seat with no view because otherwise you'll end up crazy, like Ginny, because everybody talks in the library.

P.S. If I catch anybody in my seat (in the notorious naked room) I'll strangle you with my belt.