

Theatricalism



Of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*: Theatricalism and other Isms in Theatre

Arnold defines the concept of theatricalism as a “nonrealistic [playwriting] and employs vivid imagery and heightened language” (G-5). In here, there are three major elements characterized in theatricalism. First, theatricalism is a style of theatrical production in which the drama uses, or is embedded in, clear images. In all theatrical production (i. e., on-stage), of course, imagery is commonplace. The visual and auditory images, among other imagery, are imperative in the production of plays. In theatricalism, though, images are more vivid; in terms of visual component, for instance, they are more colorful. Second, theatricalism is a style of playwriting in which the literary work consists of an intense language. That is to say, the language used in the plays that are produced in theatricalism is dramatically pompous. In Kushner's *Angels in America* -- this play is an example of theatricalism -- its lines are utterly grandiose, if not bombastic. The main protagonist named Prior, in fact, speaks a heightened language: “Each angel is an infinite aggregate myriad entity, they're basically incredibly powerful bureaucrats ...” (26). Obviously, the adjectives here are utterly too much. Finally, Arnold categorizes the notion of theatricalism as different from the praxis of realism. Perhaps the vivid imagery and heightened language prominent in theatricalism make such style of playwriting as unreal. Realism, in the general sense, is a style of writing in which it attempts to create or probably recreate the appearance of life as it is experienced by man. Further, realism tackles the kind of life that is common in the day-to-day basis. Kushner's play seems to be an attempt to recreate the gay life as actually experienced by gays prominent in the late-20th-century America. However, such play is far from real by virtue of its inclusion of certain

unrealistic character -- not to mention the heightened language. For one thing, the appearance of the angel in *Angels in America* makes the drama very dramatic or unrealistic. Perhaps there is similarity between theatricalism and realism in that both are representations of, or represent, the human life. Their main variation, though, is how they individually produce such representation of man's world and existence. It must be noted, however, that realism in theater is difficult to pin-down considering that man's reality is in "constant change" (Pavis 303). Since they are both a departure from realism, expressionism and absurdism are categorically types of theatricalism. On the one hand, Arnold categorizes expressionism as a style salient in theatricalism in which it utilizes "exaggeration and distortion in both design and acting" (G-2). In Kushner's play, exaggeration is very pronounced in the text. The protagonist utters an exaggerated and distorted line: "[Angels] have no imagination, they can do anything but they can't invent, create, they're sort of fabulous and dull all at once" (26). Evidently, there are many paradoxes in Prior's utterance; the contradistinctions between fabulous and dull, between can do everything and can not do everything (i. e., without imagination). Nevertheless expressionism in theater is more visible in the production design and acting. For instance, the descent of the angel into Prior's room which eventually crumbles the stone ceiling can make the play an example of expressionism. On the other hand, absurdism is generally defined as a theatrical play in which it focuses on the "lack of meaning in human existence" (G-5). In essence, Kushner's play is far from an example of the theatre of the absurd. *Angels in America*, by and large, is politically entrenched. Works Cited
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