

## Trabajo Fin de Máster

### Challenging the Status Quo: Transmodernity and Hybridity in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a study of the play by North American author Tony Kushner *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993), focused on the analysis of the character of Belize, an ex-ex-mulatto drag queen. After considering the various attempts by different authors at including this playwright within the categories of either Modernism or Postmodernism, that do not seem to properly fit into Kushner's vision, I propose his categorization within the paradigm of Transmodernity, a term coined by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda which, as I contend, reflects the vision of the author in this pivotal work. Contrary to Modernist and Postmodernist visions of the text, this analysis proves how the sense of continuity and progress have more weight than the eschatological conception suggested by authors like Stanton B. Garner. Moreover, through the analysis of Belize from the perspective of the 'other' based on the concepts of race and genre that highlight his/her marginalization, we see how this character, a clear example of hybridity, can be apprehended from the perspective of relevant critical theories of the frontier. As a result, we observe the way in which Belize embodies the main ideas of Transmodernity since s/he incorporates a number of concepts that reflect the present moment in society.

## **Key words**

Tony Kushner; Transmodernity; gender borders; racial borders, the Other.

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo plantea un estudio de la obra teatral del escritor norteamericano Tony Kushner *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993), centrado en el análisis del personaje de Belize, un/a ex-ex-drag queen mulato/a. Tras examinar los diversos intentos por parte de varios autores de incluir a este dramaturgo bien en el paradigma del Modernismo, o bien en el del Postmodernismo, que no han terminado de encajar en la visión de Kushner, propongo su categorización dentro del paradigma de la Transmodernidad, término acuñado por la filósofa Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, y que a mi entender refleja la perspectiva del autor en esta obra clave. Frente a las visiones Modernistas y Postmodernistas del texto, en este análisis se demuestra cómo el sentido de la continuidad y progreso tiene mayor peso que la concepción escatológica propuesta por autores como Stanton B. Garner. Por otro lado, a través del análisis de Belize desde la perspectiva del 'otro' a partir de los conceptos de raza y género que subrayan su marginación, se relaciona a este personaje con las teorías de la frontera, presentándolo como un ejemplo claro de hibridismo. Como resultado, se observa el modo en que Belize personifica las principales ideas de la Transmodernidad pues incorpora una serie de conceptos que se ajustan al momento actual de la sociedad.

## **Palabras clave**

Tony Kushner; Transmodernidad; fronteras de género; fronteras de raza; el Otro.

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## 1. Introduction

Twenty-two years ago Tony Kushner did not only win the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in the Drama Section with the first part of his play *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (1992), but he also acquired the fame of a serious contemporary playwright in the Broadway of the nineties (Neumann 1). *Angels in America: Perestroika* (1992), the second part of the play, received good reviews as well, winning prizes like the prestigious award of the Drama Desk for Outstanding Play in 1994. The whole two-part drama *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* is considered a “pivotal twentieth-century theatre piece” (Smith 383). In general, either separately or as a single play, what is undeniable is the worldwide recognition it has received over the years since its first performance in 1991 in the city of San Francisco, becoming “the most criticised, commented on, and awarded play on the American stage since the middle 1950s” (Ceballos 1).

*Angels in America* was deemed a success in Broadway almost from the beginning. As for the critical responses to Kushner, James Fisher can be considered the most prolific author dealing with the playwright: he has published two book-length studies—*The Theater of Tony Kushner* (2002) and *Understanding Tony Kushner* (2008)—plus a collection of essays entitled *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays* (2006). In correspondence to the fame obtained by *Angels in America*, the number of works devoted to this particular play is greater than to the rest of his oeuvre. Books that give a detailed analysis of the most important topics in the play are for example Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kugrer’s *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America* (1997), or *Tony Kushner’s Angels in America* (2008) by Ken Nielsen. In this same line, there is a wide range of essays devoted to almost any topic

developed in the play, including Catherine Stevenson's perspective of the role of the mother in "Seek for Something New: Mothers, Change, and Creativity in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, *Homebody/Kabul*, and *Caroline, or Change*" (2005), "Queer Politics to Fabulous Politics in *Angels in America*: Pinklinsting and Forgiving Roy Cohn" (2006) by Atsushi Fujita, Nicholas de Jongh's "Representing Sex on the British Stage: The Importance of *Angels in America*" (1997), or Claus-Peter Neumann's analysis of the Postmodern features of the play "History, Narrative, and Agency in Tony Kushner's Major Plays" (2011).

My project questions the attempts at locating Kushner within Postmodernism, basing my argument in the topic of the apocalypse described in Garner's article "*Angels in America*: The Millennium and Postmodern Memory," and opens the line of including this playwright within the paradigm of Transmodernity. In this line, and focusing on the apparently secondary character of Belize, I will use Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'other' that will help me to examine Kushner's character from the perspective of key issues like race and gender. Finally, I will offer a description of Belize as a 'hybrid' character related to the invisible frontiers constructed by society that marginalize, coerce and silence people of the in-between. All throughout this dissertation, I will be analyzing *Angels in America* as a written literary text, as opposed to the also interesting analysis of particular performances of the play which falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Trying to summarize the plot of *Angels in America* is a difficult task, due to the knots in the relationships as well as in the themes. Set in the New York of 1985, the play opens with the confession of Prior, a WASP, telling his Jewish partner Louis that he has AIDS. Louis cannot stand the pressure of the illness and leaves Prior at the first opportunity, to be more precise at the moment Prior is kept hospitalized. Meanwhile, he meets Joe, a closeted gay Mormon law clerk working in the office of the McCarthyist

Roy Cohn, and who is married to Harper, a woman addicted to Valium who suffers from anxiety crises. With all the main characters introduced, the events are triggered after Prior's confession with the hospitalization of Roy when he is infected with HIV (a diagnosis that in the public eye will be disguised as a fake liver cancer); Harper's ups and downs until she realizes that she deserves better and leaves Joe for good; the helpful and loyal friendship of the mulatto ex-drag queen Belize, Prior's best friend and the nurse of the infected Roy; Joe's mother Hannah's (who comes from Salt Lake City to try to save her son's marriage) process of acceptance of homosexuality; the guilt that surrounds Louis and the different methods he uses to redeem himself; or the tension and constant struggle of Joe's sexuality and beliefs. Yet, Prior is the chosen one among the rest of the characters: he is appointed by the Angel to be the new prophet on Earth and spread the message that will stop the chaos in the world (Kushner 178). Prior's name,<sup>1</sup> not currently in use, certainly calls the reader's attention; however Kushner decided to call him this way to establish a connection with the philosophies of Walter Benjamin, as we will see in more detail in the following section.

The play is set at a time when indeed millennium was approaching: during the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic the atmosphere of the national political scene was embroiled in a debate over national identity and particularly over the relations of race, gender and sexuality. Kushner's major topics in the play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia On National Themes* (henceforth, *Angels in America*) are the problems of racial and sexual discrimination, the struggles of the homosexual collective and the AIDS pandemic; by the same token, he also deals with issues like politics, religion or the challenge to the nuclear family. He was not the first playwright to address the problem of the human immunodeficiency virus; Hoffman's *As Is* (1985), or Larry

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<sup>1</sup> Allen J. Frantzen gives a full explanation of the symbolism surrounding the name of Prior in "Prior to the Normans: The Anglo-Saxons in *Angels in America*" (1997) especially in page 139.

Kramer's *The Normal Heart* (1985) were other examples of successful plays with a harsh critique of the well-known but not often discussed worldwide problem that was also hitting North America. Within the field of drama, the aforementioned plays also deal with the problems derived from the illness: bureaucratic hindrances, relationships broken (whether romantic, of friendship or relatives), lack of medical means and/or social stigmatization supported by a Reaganite government. Kushner and Kramer knew how to capture this social turmoil because they were also living that rejection from the inside; in Kramer's case he would get actively involved in the fight against AIDS after he found out he was infected with HIV.

During the peak years of AIDS, there was a direct association of the virus with homosexuality but this equivalence was scientifically refuted when it was proved that the contagion was not limited to that specific group of people. However, that resolution would come many years later and by the time Kushner was writing *Angels in America* this connection was still relevant. In spite of this, the play stands out as the one that, in the words of David Román, “responded to, reflected, and/or challenged contemporary understandings of AIDS” (157). Furthermore, Kushner included ongoing scenarios that tried to raise social consciousness in the audience towards the rejection of bigotry, homophobia, and political repression. The constant evocation in the play of a ‘millennial’ future takes into consideration these ‘national themes’ (Geis and Kruger 2) present in the lives of Americans.

The playwright's works are strongly marked by sociopolitical issues, an interest he already showed at an early age. *Angels in America* is a good example of a radical and revolutionary play which influenced subsequent works by Tony Kushner showing a well defined social critique like *Slavs! Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (1995), or more recently, *Homebody/Kabul* (2001). This concern

about sociopolitical issues resides in “the intellectual tradition of the Frankfurt school that synthesizes Freud and Marx” (Stevenson 759), which influenced him, and resulted in his socialist and liberal mindset and his clear predisposition to depict middle-class characters. Consequently, it is easy to find traces of the philosophies of Walter Benjamin or neo-Hegelianism when it comes to analyzing Kushner’s views on history, as a disastrous, apocalyptic and catastrophic time (Ceballos 1-2).

In relation to the form and style of the author, Kushner’s most significant influences are Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder’s “technically epical elements” (Neumann 8). All three writers focused their plots on human relationships, uncompromising the emotional link created in the audience with the theatrical components basic to the performances. Another relevant aspect that appears in Kushner’s plays is the integration of different ways of dramatic defamiliarization, which relates him to the epic theater led by Bertolt Brecht (Neumann 8). An easy example can be the direct narration to the audience (Kushner 278), very common in the character of Prior. Beyond the formalistic features of his oeuvre, Ceballos highlights the skillful inclusions of North American allegories and traditions. In this critic’s view, Kushner “deliberately recycles traditional American myths and elements of American culture and pins them all on a reconstruction of identity—whether gender, racial, or political—as the real axes of his plays” (1). In the case of *Angels in America*, biblical references abound. Apart from the angels, there are metaphorical references to the Exodus, which are associated with the state of persecution, oppression and stigmatization of homosexuals, and the outbreak of the AIDS pandemic is also seen as a parallel to the plagues narrated in the Scriptures. Likewise, popular references can also be found between the lines, for example the depiction of Joe as the Marlboro Man (Kushner 223)



that opposes his inner desires towards the same sex, as well as cultural gay references like *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) or the 1939 book *The Wizard of Oz* (Ceballos 9).

Moreover, in terms of sexuality, Roy, Louis, Prior, Belize and Joe suffer the problems of their assimilation as homosexuals in society; in terms of religion, there is a metaphorical fight between Jews and Mormons, with cultural representations, e.g.: Jewish lullabies (Kushner 256), Mormon beliefs (236), or rituals (15-16) all over the play; in political terms, “*Angels* mounts an attack against ideologies” (Savran 14), and there is a clear fight between Republicans and Democrats. But in terms of race Belize is the only character that stands alone, resisting the categorization as part of a specific group and crossing the borders that organize society, namely, those having to do with race and sexual orientation. S/he is the sum of mixed race and gender, which notably marks her/his persona. Henceforth, I will refer to Belize as simultaneously masculine and feminine since in the play it is not specified whether s/he prefers to be defined as her or him. *Angels in America* develops the iconic melting pot of the United States, but instead of giving us a typical representation of the country, it tries to challenge its main pillars, and strict gender differentiation is only one of them.

During the mid-nineties the play won the applause of the audience, becoming a must-see drama, which stretched out its popularity when it was adapted for television as a miniseries of the HBO channel in 2003. Despite its success, the miniseries did not “bear witness to the collective trauma of AIDS to nearly the degree that its source material [did]” (Beadling 229). With respect to this, it is necessary to mention Claire Laurier Decoteau’s argument about how society cannot connect all the problems related to the illness since,

the public sphere, including [the] mass media, “has induced a kind of cultural forgetfulness” that helps mask how the government, the mass media,

medical institutions and the pharmaceutical industry helped sustain “blaming and stigmatizing discourses, exclusionary practices and rituals, and wide-scale economic disenfranchisement.” (Decoteau, in Beadling 230)

Although it is obvious that the miniseries would not have existed without the narrations, performances or campaigns about one of the biggest diseases suffered in the United States, it is clearly thanks to these adaptations that the audience can recall a not-so-long-gone past. In the same way, it helped to bring about a revival of gay-centered TV-series that had already begun with the success of the 2000 series *Queer As Folk*. Later examples of gay-related series are *The L Word* (2004), *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* (2006) or more recently *Modern Family* (2009) and *Orange Is The New Black* (2013).

*Angels in America* cannot be understood without the social context of AIDS. Even if there is no clear date of the outbreak of the AIDS disease in the United States, two decades marked the turning point in the mentalities of the American people that used to connect gay people with this illness. It is impossible to think of the eighties and nineties without taking into consideration the problem that took the life of 44.000 people only in 1993 (Wilson and Barringer). New York City and San Francisco Bay were the hot spots where hundreds of homosexual men were treated and diagnosed, and also cities that used to send out the sign of alarm to other doctors over the country (Altman). In John Tierney’s words, “in July of 1988, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, the estimated number of cases in New York City suddenly plummeted” (Tierney). During the outbreak of AIDS, the media turned a blind eye to the pandemic until it was too obvious for society that they could not avoid talking about the issue. As reported in one of the very few articles addressing AIDS at the time, Altman transcribed the surprise among physicians, who in a letter exchange described this sudden

appearance as “rather devastating.” At first, the infected were “men older than 50 years” (Altman) but unexpectedly younger men began to be diagnosed as well, and most of them confirmed that they were homosexuals. In 1981 no heterosexual man or woman was reported to have contracted the disease, however, the panic was beginning to take the streets and “for many, HIV marked the end of what has been called the ‘Golden Age of Promiscuity’” (Landau).

The situation of the persons affected by the illness was not a favorable one, as they felt out of place in society and abandoned by the Republican government led by Ronald Reagan. Even the local councils of New York and California dismissed this pandemic as unproblematic. Although in the early 80s the outbreak was still considered something uninteresting to the authorities, societies like the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (1982)—“recognized as the world’s first provider of HIV/AIDS prevention” (Landau)—were helping and showing homosexual people that first of all they were not alone. In 1991 the worldwide famous basketball player Magic Johnson revealed his HIV-positive status in a press conference (Landau), contributing to change the generalized view of these modern “lepers.” In the words of the writer Edmund White, who was also infected by the virus, the admission of having the disease was “like the original struggle to come out as a gay person [...]. But nobody else was that imprudent, because they really felt that it would lead to discrimination” (Landau). That was another crucial problem because many closeted gays hid for fear or shame of being discovered, as it happens in Roy’s case in the text, for his denial of the illness incurs in a disavowal of identity as a person with AIDS. As confirmed by Roy’s experience, society in general faced this situation with an attitude of presupposing that the infected by “these (diseases) [were] only gays and IV drug users, underdogs, people who didn’t deserve any special attention” (Rich).

In view of this detestable situation, many were the anonymous and famous people that were brave enough to take part in supporting the cause. Celebrities such as Elton John, Queen, Princess Diana, George Michael, Madonna or Rock Hudson, campaigns like the Red Ribbon Project, and films like *Philadelphia* (1993), the musical *Rent* (1994) or songs that became hymns like Queen's *The Show Must Go On* helped to awaken consciousness about the disease. Some of them were infected by the virus, some just supported the cause and helped to spread a message of social awareness around the world. This reaction of famous people, whether they were directly touched by the disease or not, was a good example of the impact that it had, and still has, in Western culture.

In 1992 Frank Rich reviewed *Angels in America* for the *New York Times* and considered it a play that was much more than a seven-hour production or a huge success, for it “[was] nothing less than a fierce call for gay Americans to seize the strings of power in the war for tolerance and against AIDS.” That was the main point in all the cultural projects focused on the AIDS’ disease, a claim to show common people the vulnerability and injustice the infected were suffering, and a rise-up call to those who were hidden to have courage. At the beginning of his excellent review, Rich affirmed that “some visionary playwrights want to change the world. Some want to revolutionize the theater. Tony Kushner, the remarkably gifted 36-year-old author of *Angels in America*, is that rarity of rarities: a writer who has the promise to do both.”

The sociopolitical turmoil brought by AIDS made Kushner reflect on the situation the homosexual community in particular was living in. Claus-Peter Neumann highlights how after the publication of the play “Kushner was automatically moved into the category of gay playwright, which Kushner himself actually embraced, insisting in an interview in 1994: ‘I want to be thought of as a gay writer [writing] from a gay

sensibility’” (2). It was a demolishing and virulent period that Kushner represented flawlessly; his reflection of the social crisis in the play and his commitment to speak about the unspeakable can be counted within his major achievements. James Fisher named him a “political dramatist” (2) who was decided to open the eyes of the audience.

Kushner can be differentiated from the rest of the playwrights of his time, as Neumann points out, “[for] his ‘theatre of the fabulous’” (5), mixing elements of the 60s gay theater characterized by explicit performances of sex or violence during the play combined with fantastic touches, and the realistic interaction among characters that knits different lines of argumentation. Although the applicability of the ‘theater of the fabulous’ category finds its best representative in *Angels in America*, the attempt to classify Kushner in a specific literary movement is still a challenging one. In the elaboration of my analysis, elements and influences of Modernism within Kushner’s work will be traced in the play. As far as his contextualization within Postmodernism is concerned, I have found the perspective given by Deborah R. Geis and Stanton B. Garner particularly interesting. In their essays, included in the book *Approaching the Millennium: Essays On Angels in America* (1998), both authors try to analyze the similarities between Kushner and the Postmodern style, but as Neumann explains in his analysis centered on the playwright as a Postmodernist author, this field is still insufficiently explored. Tony Kushner has a characteristic style that focuses on the progression of history from different points of view that are covered by metaphors and ironies, while at the same time he displays the failure of the current society with the use of vernacular language. The problem is that the author does not see himself as clearly within either of the many categories he has been included in (Neumann 11), with the exception of gay playwright. My intention is to try to place him within Transmodernity, a term coined by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, which has a long-standing but not so

well-known trajectory and which is causing an upturn of interest amongst scholars. I am particularly interested in the way Transmodernity is focused on a near future where all the frontiers, architectonical, religious, cultural or philosophical, will be blurred (Rodríguez Magda “Transmodernidad” 2). Also significantly, Transmodernity implies a change of paradigm that does not break with the past but instead, postulates its continuity affected by the outburst of technology. It is a new globalized world in which everything is interconnected, configuring a constant flux of economy, information or cultures that is incessantly transformed. One consequence of this perpetual change is the review of the challenges left during the Modernist crisis and, in the same way, an acceptance of the Postmodernist critiques to the former one, which confirms the Transmodern intention of avoiding a clear rupture with the past.

In this context of interconnectedness the term ‘hybrid’—originally, a negative term that refers to a mixed-raced person who opposes the purity claimed by the dominant power, but which has gradually been appropriated as an icon of cultural revolutions (Hall “New Ethnicities” 252-59)—can be associated with the play, the character of Belize and Transmodernism. In Alfonso Ceballos’ 2006 article “Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* or How American History Spins Forward,” this critic argues how the different combinations that Kushner incorporates in the play (technical, about the plot and characters, or different authors that influenced him) result in a kind of hybrid play. He continues to affirm that the addition of historical convergences makes this drama a champion in “plurality and crossbreeding—[understood] as the only means for moving forward” (Ceballos 5). It is in this sense of constant connection and plurality that Belize stands, in my opinion, as the best character to illustrate not only Ceballos’ argumentation, but also Rodríguez Magda’s theory of the Transmodern interconnection. Belize, my subject of analysis, is the representative of the inferior part in the

dichotomies depicted in the play, for example, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual and men/women. Following this line, Belize belongs to that group of people who have been marginalized within society by means of the imposition of stereotypes and reduced to a simple 'other,' as can be seen in the relationship with Roy Cohn. Furthermore, s/he is a character that swings between frontiers mostly in terms of gender and race, bringing back the theories of the border that discuss the problems of real and invisible frontiers. It is in the space where these borders are created that the hybrid, like Belize, appears.

In sum, my intention in this project is to deconstruct the character of Belize in the play *Angels in America*. Firstly, I will try to challenge the arguments that favor the inclusion of Kushner in the Postmodern paradigm, suggesting instead his contextualization within Rodríguez Magda's notion of Transmodernity. Once this frame of reference is determined, I will use the depiction and characteristics attributed to the 'other' to analyze the dichotomies related to race and gender. This traditional convention of classification derives in stereotypes that serve to point out a distance between 'I'—wealthy, Euroamerican, middle-upper class—and the 'other'—colored, from a colonized country and poor. This will be applied to Belize to show that her/his place is the inferior, rejected and marginal, in short the place of the 'other.' My proposal tries to see the dichotomies in terms of the frontier, not in a hierarchical way, but as a mode of cultural exchange, and in order to account for this, the concept of 'hybridity' will be brought to the stage. Belize, an apparently secondary character in the play, turns out to be the perfect subject to exemplify not only an emergent conception nowadays, but also to highlight how s/he, who embodies most stereotypes, has little interaction in the play; Belize can recall the presence of minorities in North American society and how these are subjected to invisible frontiers imposed by the dominant power. Throughout my dissertation, I will connect my analysis of Belize to the tenets of

Transmodernity and argue that the problems surrounding Kushner's classification can be solved if we include him within this paradigm.



## **2. The Kushner Challenge: An Author between Borders**

### ***2.1 Between Modernism and Postmodernism***

When Kushner was asked about which literary movement he felt more identified with, he answered: “I think of myself as being a Modernist and not quite ready for Postmodernism in the sense that I’m too terrified by the notion of the decentered subject, and too frightened of the idea of some of the things that Postmodernists seem to be rather eager to embrace” (in Neumann 11). In spite of this attempt of self-classification, Kushner has been included as a member of Postmodernism by authors like Claus-Peter Neumann or Harold Bloom (Fisher 1), who has also published a collection of essays devoted to the playwright called *Tony Kushner: Bloom’s Modern Critical Views* (2005). In the introduction to this thesis, I briefly discussed different elements and influences that characterize the oeuvre of this playwright, which justify the ambivalence of his classification. In this first chapter I will analyze the main elements of Modernism that have influenced Kushner, and the Postmodernist topic of the apocalypse present in his works, to end with the characteristics of what may be considered the new paradigm of Transmodernism. I will refer to Modernist elements that influenced Tony Kushner to explain the impact this movement it had on him, to Stanton B. Garner’s article and Neumann’s thesis that highlight his classification as a Postmodern author, and, to Rosa M. Rodríguez Magda’s depiction of the Transmodern paradigm to illustrate why I think he should be included in it.

The fundamental literary current of the first part of the twentieth century was Modernism, influential in Europe and North America notably; whereas Kushner wrote in a different period of time, he was certainly acquainted with the literature of Modernism. Kushner’s influences made a major difference in his style and form, as it

happened with the socio-cultural context he was living in; the playwright was aware of this inspiration when he asserted “I identify with a tradition within Modernism that is a socialist tradition” (Neumann 11). In the Introduction it was mentioned that Tony Kushner had a strong socialist mindset from a young age, so it is not a surprise that he identifies with this current. Modernist writers were driven by a common feeling of independence and rupture caused by a sense of disenchantment after the outbreak of the Great War, as some of the best-known American writers during this period like Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein or William Faulkner captured in their works. In that feeling of disenchantment it is possible to see a similarity with Kushner’s sociopolitical context in the commotion suffered by the AIDS pandemic; therefore, it is easy to perceive why he also feels more comfortable with Modernism in this sense.

As a fundamental figure of Modernism, Walter Benjamin’s posthumous works on philosophy were a great influence in the projects of Tony Kushner. Although a full account of Benjamin’s theories is outside the scope of this paper, I do think it is fundamental to provide a short commentary about historical materialism to better comprehend its effects on the playwright. *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940) can be counted as a central reference in *Angels in America*, and in this book Walter Benjamin melts his influences (to some extent, Marxism and Jewish mysticism) to criticize the premises of historical materialism—a theory in which the material conditions that shape the mode of production in a society defines the way in which it will be organized and developed. What is important in his review was his rejection of the past as a continuum of progress (Benjamin 258-59); in other words, there was a necessity to change historical materialism according to the present time. This line of thought is visible in Kushner’s sense of history, as something that needs to go forward, and not backward. Following this, it is possible to observe how Benjamin’s use of the

angels was cleverly introduced in the play, since it is the Angel of the play who warns Prior of the necessary change in the world. The similar purpose between the play's Angel and Benjamin's is visible in the following description of the Angel of History that is depicted as a supernatural being,

who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. [...] The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. [...] But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...]. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future [...] which we call progress. (Benjamin 257-58)

Comparing this quote with the play's Angel it is possible to perceive a resemblance to Benjamin's except for the claim that is being made when the Angel visits Prior for the first time,

BELIZE: So Human progress...  
PRIOR: Migration. Science. Forward Motion.  
BELIZE: ...shakes up Heaven. [...]  
ANGEL: Surely you see towards what We are Progressing:  
The fabric of the sky unravels:  
Angels hover, anxious fingers worry  
The tattered edge.  
Before the boiling of blood and the searing of skin  
Comes the Secret catastrophe:  
*Before Life on Earth becomes finally merely impossible,  
It will for a long time before have become completely unbearable.*  
(Coughs)  
YOU HAVE DRIVEN HIM AWAY! YOU MUST STOP MOVING!  
(Kushner 176-78, my italics)

This conversation revolves around the problems of human development, the integration of homosexuals and the spread of AIDS in a metaphorical way. The Angel is demanding a halt in human progress because it is speeding up the apocalypse. In the sentences in italics the Angel is highlighting one of the main problems derived from reproduction; in his view, if homosexuals keep on spreading the disease, there will be no hope for the human race.

In addition to this influence of Walter Benjamin, Tony Kushner was also acquainted with Modernist writers and intellectuals that had tried to break the social framework with a critical reevaluation of society. In this sense, Modernists shared a feeling of skepticism and mistrust derived from the development of new technologies and new ways of living like urbanization, which contributed to the alienation of the people. Another transformation can be noticed after the commotion caused by World War I: the change of utopian and idealistic thoughts carried on by the field of the humanities, especially in psychology and psychoanalysis, into more disappointed and cynic ones. In my view, this general sense of disillusionment can particularly be observed in Kushner's development of Prior as a character. Prior begins the play full of enthusiasm, energy and optimism but with the consecutive failures found in his relationship, the lack of support of the government or the treatment of his disease, he becomes more and more cynical towards the real world. The only reason why Prior is not totally pessimistic is probably the fact that he has been able to fight back AIDS or that he at the end he has more friends to support him, but in any case, there is a clear acknowledgement of the state of disillusionment in which Western countries were living.

In connection with this mistrust, the Modernists shared a common disbelief regarding institutions of power such as government and the church. With regard to this, theories like Henri Bergson's controversial term '*élan vital*'—which hypothetically means an evolution and development of the organisms (Lawlor and Moulard)—tried to debunk the beliefs of absolute truths that were interfering in the development of new concepts and likewise in their purpose of going forward. In the play it is possible to observe that the best character to exemplify the conservative position is the figure of Roy Cohn. The McCarthyist is poisoned by power and corrupted to the most, thus

reflecting the state of North American politics and power relations. Kushner offers a harsh critique of the United States making use of this character to express the worst face of an oppressive and ultraconservative society that is contrary to any change that could mean the destabilization of the status quo.

Tony Kushner was not only influenced by the context or the philosophies developed by Modernism, he also felt acquainted with more formal techniques applied to the literary style. In this case, in the line of well-known examples like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), Kushner uses the stream of consciousness technique subtly on stage rather than adjusting to a more conventional form. This technique is a change from linear time to real moment in time, and it can be visible in *Angels in America* in the shift of scenes, with no black-outs but a constant progression of the events that can frequently be difficult to follow for the audience or the reader as it happens. An example can be seen in Part One of Act Three Scene Two, where Belize and Louis' conversation and Emily and Prior's conversation are inextricably united, though they take place in different locations (Kushner 103). Another valid feature to illustrate Kushner's influence is the fin-de-siècle consciousness, the perception that everything (in this case, the millennium) is going to end soon. This can be recognized not only in the plot or the different attitudes of the characters, but also in the indications to create a proper atmosphere in the stage directions; for example in Act Five of *Perestroika* the opening stage directions state "*(There is the sound of a silvery trumpet in the dark, and a tattoo of faraway drum. Silence. Thunder. Then all over the walls, Hebrew letters appear, writhing inflames. The scene is lit by their light. The Angel is there, suddenly. She is dressed in black and looks terrifying)*" (249). It is easy to deduce then, that the playwright felt clearly identified with all these Modernist characteristics that can be seen throughout the play.

The coming of Postmodernism took and accepted the earlier skepticism led by Modernism. While the former sought the necessity and legitimacy of systemic discourses, the crisis encompassing Postmodernism denounced the impossibility to apply those discourses (Rodríguez Magda “Transmodernidad” 4). The term Postmodernism immediately suggests the problem of periodization entailed by the prefix “post-,” assigned to the time after Modernism. It is more or less possible to situate the beginning of Postmodernism during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, although some scholars think that Modernism and Postmodernism merged in time. During the last few years of that century, millennialism and apocalypticism became the link where high culture and low, belief and behavior, met and overlapped (Garner 174). From the Cuban Missile Crisis to Chernobyl, the discourse and events of the Cold War gave an impulse to the presence of eschatological thoughts. Moreover, the economic crisis, ecological disaster, overpopulation, the AIDS epidemic, and the fall of European communism reinforced the idea of the end of time (175). Grounded in this catastrophic vision, the rhetoric revolved around self-consciousness and metadiscourse reflecting on the apocalypse and the sense of ultimacy. In the words of Garner, “[t]he very instability of the *post* in *postmodernism* [and the] undecidable self-positioning in terms of history and periodization, owes much to such ambivalent appropriation of apocalypse and its narratives of epoch and ultimacy” (176).

Postmodernism has two main objectives: questioning the changes that took place during the XX century and apprehending the root of those changes. There are three basic trends: the conservative thinkers that have remarked the continuity of the past like Craig Calhoun; those who, like Jean Baudrillard, certainly the most apocalyptic of Postmodern writers, are in the extreme position and see a clear disassociation of Modernism and Postmodernism; and finally, halfway between both contraries we find

theories like the “liquid modernity” of Zygmunt Bauman that examines the present as an outcome of Modernism, and which foresees another different process in the near future. Postmodern theorists and writers borrow the rhetoric of rupture and transformation, which has resulted in a division between detractors and followers of the paradigm.

There are those who, like Frederick Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984), made a profound critique of Postmodernism arguing a depthlessness to refer to “a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (9), an increase of the alienation of the subject, the reduction of the artist to pastiche—because he cannot create new aesthetic forms, he can only copy old ones without creating any new meanings—and as a result of that pastiche, a loss of history (in this line there are evidences that show signs of nostalgia in Postmodernism). Nevertheless, a friendlier reading of this paradigm can be found in Linda Hutcheon’s *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). In her view, Postmodernism revises history and lays the foundations of new forms of criticism; this paradigm is not a mere pastiche but a parody that reviews the past and visualizes its ideological outcomes. In fiction, Hutcheon highlights what she calls “historiographic metafiction” to refer to those works like García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, Fowles’s *A Maggot*, Doctorow’s *Loon Lake*, Reed’s *The Terrible Twos*, Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Findley’s *Famous Last Words* or Rushdie’s *Shame* (Hutcheon ix), that combine the tools of metafiction with historical fiction.

Can Kushner, in this context, be considered a member of the Postmodern? Are stylistic and/or formalistic analogies enough to include him even if the author himself has refused to be categorized as Postmodern? According to Claus-Peter Neumann, Kushner should be considered a Postmodern playwright because

his plays reflect a number of issues typically associated with postmodernism, such as: a discontinuous, anti-teleological conception of history that questions the myth of the single origin; a fundamental undecidability that undermines the constructs of binary opposites, including the phallogocentric underpinnings of gender; the disclosure of the discursive and narrative bases of knowledge that leads to a radical questioning of master narratives, exposes the mediated nature of history, and problematizes the question of the subject of history; and the fragmentation of identity in the face of the Other. (242)

In addition to providing a clear argumentation about Kushner's inclusion within Postmodernism, Neumann mentions the articles of Deborah R. Geis "The Delicate Ecology of Your Delusions: Insanity, Theatricality, and the Thresholds of Revelation in Kushner's *Angels in America*" (1997) and Stanton B. Garner Jr.'s "*Angels in America: The Millennium and Postmodern Memory*" (1997), as two of the main texts which most clearly attempt to include Kushner within Postmodernism. The former focuses on the reading of *Angels in America* through Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, exploring the metatheatrical techniques that, for example, differentiate reason from insanity. However, I find the analysis of Garner, who focuses mainly in the apocalypse motif, more illuminating for my own reading of Tony Kushner.

Garner names two relevant features of Postmodernism in relation to Kushner's play, namely, "the idea of finitude" (175) and the act of "challenging totalizing forms of historical narrative" (179). This critic emphasizes Kushner's apocalyptic view of "an angel crashing through the roof, [with] flaming Hebrew letters, and a heaven that (covered with rubble) is designed to resemble San Francisco after the earthquake" (177), to highlight how the play's mise-en-scène intensifies this end-of-times iconography. As he sees it, *Angels in America* is framed within the Postmodern problematic of history and ending, constantly recalling the idea of ultimacy linked to catastrophes and "its dual prospects of annihilation and utopian transformation" (177). It is obvious that the perspective given of the AIDS pandemic by Kushner, the



unfavorable state of the sociopolitical context, and the playwright's use of the biblical imagery and/or the eschatological presence over the play through the use of parody, can all be taken as examples of Postmodernist features if we follow the line of Garner. Normally, this parody comes with the apparition of the Angel or the hallucinations of Roy, Prior or Harper, and likewise, it is also obvious in Kushner's stage specifications. Garner privileges the millenarian vision of apocalypticism to support his analysis of Postmodern strategies. But, while the Angels only see an inexorable destiny of the world toward apocalypse, the rest of the characters maintain the hopeful possibility of improvement which involves "migration, intermarriage, mingling, [as] the catalysts for change, for a potentially better future" (Minwalla 115).

The eschaton is, in the opinion of the author, one of the nexus of a gay writer since "apocalypse is a particularly charged narrative field, in its stark moral polarities, its figurations of sinfulness and evil, and what Barkum calls its 'paranoid style'" (Garner 179). End-of-time narratives seek to depict collective and private stories that ultimately attempt to shape a part of history, its present moment, which is a reminder of the beginning and of the end. In the opening scenes of both plays, Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz and Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov—note the irony of the middle name—recall former times and the decadence of the present moment that will lead the world to the end of its days. With respect to this, gay writers have often been the epitome of catastrophic predictions about the end of the world (e.g. with religious allusions of same-sex couples that trigger the apocalypse). This old idea suffered a revival with the outbreak of AIDS. Psychosis is ultimately used as an excuse for demonizing the 'other' and oppressing it. In the opinion of Garner, Kushner employs this topic to destabilize the ancient forms of historical narrative, thus, he gives priority to the exploration of new ways of historical inheritance (179). At the closing scenes of

both parts of Kushner's play he attempts "to rewrite apocalypse, to borrow its urgency and its transformative imagination while challenging its exclusions and maintaining an awareness of its precarious fictionality" (182).

From the perspective of Garner and in his analysis and contextualization of *Angels in America* within Postmodernism, I have found diverse reasons to reconsider Kushner's position in the same. Firstly, I question the consideration of the idea of 'finitude' that Garner applies to Kushner. Although in the epilogue he opens the line to revise the notion of the apocalypse, Garner puts a clear emphasis on the concept of the 'end' as the main one Kushner's play revolves around. *Angels in America* has definitely a scent of expiration during its course, but I cannot simply agree with the idea of the ending as that which drives the main purpose. Throughout the play, it is possible to perceive a will to keep on, not just a catastrophic idea of what is to come, but a collective willingness to a change that assumes a better future in comparison to the present time. The early psychosis among the characters due to the AIDS crisis fades gradually with the progression of the events. Moreover, if we take into account Prior's health state in the epilogue, it is possible to see how that plague of the end-of-times is no longer so, there is no clear end or rewriting of the apocalypse, as Garner explained.

In my view, the juncture of the end of the millennium and the problem of AIDS may lead to that finitude; however, what Kushner does at the end of the full play is stress the perspective of the new time to come, not the end of everything, but a big problem of humankind that could be solved with the coming of the new era. Moreover, Kushner's resources are subtle and unlimited, and he uses them throughout the play to send to the audience a message that is sometimes coded. If we take a look at the meaning of *Perestroika*, it suggests the reconstruction and renovation of the world. In

my view, there are more arguments in favor of the continuity of the world in the narration than just the surface of an apocalyptic scenario.

## ***2.2 An Introduction to the Transmodern Paradigm***

In 1990, when *Angels in America* was in the process of creation, the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda was witnessing a global change in the established paradigms. The development of new technologies and the generalized access to them on the part of the middle-class increased all connections around the world, creating platforms with historical impact like the Internet. It was in her book *La Sonrisa de Saturno* (1989) that Rodríguez Magda first talked about the concept of Transmodernity referring to the change in the paradigm that could shed light on the relationships of our present about gnosiology, sociology, ethics or aesthetics (133-135), or, in other words, the change of mentality around the world. It is an incipient current created to take the open challenges of Modernism and to seek a way out of the exhausted canon of Postmodernism (Rodríguez Magda “Transmodernidad” 7). The usage of the prefix ‘trans’ is determined by its meaning to designate something that is across, beyond: transnational, trasvanguard, transgender or transtextual are a few examples of how the prefix ‘trans’ is applied in terms that imply a transcendence of their origins. In her article “Transmodernidad: un nuevo paradigma” (2011), Rodríguez Magda explains that since each society has had a term to name its historical moment (Modern, Postmodern), this society of the new millennium needed a new term that could be adaptable to their new perspective of reality. She continued to explain that “lo ‘trans’ no es un prefijo milagroso, ni el anhelo de un multiculturalismo angélico, no es la síntesis de modernidad y premodernidad, sino de la modernidad y la postmodernidad” (“Transmodernidad” 3). For this reason, the application of the prefix “trans” has relevance as to describe a world in which, in her view, there are

*organizaciones transnacionales* (del Banco Mundial a las multinacionales, de las ONGs a la mafia...), *problemas transnacionales* (crisis monetarias, cambio climático, las drogas, el sida, los conflictos étnicos...), *eventos transnacionales* (guerras, competiciones deportivas, cultura de masas, movilizaciones solidarias...), *comunidades transnacionales* (basadas en la religión, estilos de vida generacionales, respuestas ecológicas, identidades raciales...), *estructuras transnacionales* (laborales, culturales, financieras...). (Rodríguez Magda “Transmodernidad” 5, my emphasis)

Transmodernity entails no break with former concepts like Postmodernism, hence this critic does not see the necessity of keeping a prefix like ‘post’ that entails a rupture (“Transmodernidad” 8). Instead of that, she opts for a more suitable prefix like ‘trans-’ which best illustrates the dynamic of former times with a new view brought by the present moment.

If we talk about Transmodernity it is also fundamental to look into the analysis of the scholar Enrique Dussel. More centered in the development of the cultural and ethnic side of the paradigm, Dussel interprets Transmodernity as a theory that “points toward all of those aspects that are situated ‘beyond’ (and also ‘prior to’) the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a pluriversal utopia” (44). In this sense, he gives prevalence to the example of the ‘other’ to support his argument about the necessary decentralization of the pillars that are still sustaining Euroamerican perspectives. The application of this externalization will give voice to non-Westernized cultures, promoting a feasible establishment of intercultural dialogues which result in a new conceptualization of the world.

Almost at the same time of Rodríguez Magda’s postulation, the discourse of transnationalism was marking a turning point especially in the field of economics, which from the 70s had been “[operating] beyond the control of the nation-state and, by doing so, unwillingly uncoupled cultures from territories” (Mignolo 1). This new mentality contributed to the exchange of traditions, ideas or problems, in a renewed and

unknown form. The outburst of transnationalism reinforced the idea of Transmodernity as a major current of global thought. The new perspectives derived from the ‘trans’ theories influenced North American scholars greatly during the 90s and marked the way in which, in the view of Mihăilă, they combined “American intellectual history in relation with issues of national identity raised by World War I and the outburst of nativism and European nationalism associated with it” (1). It was the beginning of a brand new point of view that would try to turn many philosophies of the past upside down.

In the last decade of the past millennium, when Fukuyama was discussing whether the advent of Western liberal democracy meant the end of history, there was a manifest necessity of capturing this global consciousness of shared history, of worldwide synchronicity (Ateljevic 200) that urgently demanded the formation of a new configuration adaptable to the moment. However, this postulation would be a failure without the implication of the society within the big changes and challenges of Transmodernity. Irena Ateljevic takes this premise and predicts a remodeling towards a post-patriarchal and post-secular state process (203). In order to achieve this transformation, society needs to be capable of undergoing a parallel reconstruction. The aim of such postulation assumes the deconstruction of the historical perceptions of the social, political and cultural dichotomies. Ateljevic sees this rupture as “a necessary deconstruction of the geo-body politics of academic knowledge and its deeply embedded destructive dichotomies and hierarchies of rational/emotional; feminine/masculine; subject/object; internal/external; mind/body/spirit; winner/loser; dominant/passive; man/nature; and agency/structure/resistance” (215). This fundamental change of register can be observed in the work of Rodríguez Magda, who sees a clear progression in time in connection with the expansion of new technologies.

In this view, she introduces a third element according to the necessities of this modern time which helps her define the current situation, and which corresponds with that required change within society predicted by Ateljevic. The following table illustrates this progression of Modernism, Postmodernism and Transmodernity

MODERNITY	POSTMODERNITY	TRANSMODERNITY
Homogeneity	Heterogeneity	Diversity
Temporality	End of history	Instantaneity
Global	Local	Glocal
Innovation	Security	Society of risk
Soul	Body	Cyborg
Masculinity	Femininity	Transsexuality
Oral	Writing	Screen
Narrative	Visual	Multimedia
Press	Mass media	Internet

(Rodríguez Magda “Transmodernidad” 8-9)

If we take the progression in the line of “oral, writing, screen” it is possible to observe how through the passing of time the channel of communication has changed radically from the old analphabetism that needed the oral transmission to spread and maintain folklore, to today’s living in front of a mobile screen without the problem of being disconnected from real time. The same thing happens, for example, with the temporality of life defended by the Modernists, or the pessimist perspective led by the Postmodernists with the approach of the millennium, albeit the new configuration about instantaneity fits perfectly nowadays, due to the integration of technology in daily life. If we compare the third column with the other two, it is plausible to observe that the differential factor is given by technology like in the cases of the Cyborg, the Internet, Multimedia or the screen. These nine examples that aim to illustrate a progression, are

also a way to visualize how society is shaped and constructed around the constant connection of technology that fosters a global and diverse consciousness. The creation of a third column that joins the ancient concepts together is aimed at producing a shared knowledge that would be capable of finding new strategies and practices that could be applied to the present times. The world is still living in a framework of strong dualism. For this reason, it is essential to give a chance to the third renewed option that encourages the process of Othering, which would imply a general respect for difference. By doing so, humanity would be prepared to include “the best of globalized European and North American modernity [and] to develop a new civilization for the twenty-first century” (Ateljevic 206).

Even if the Transmodern trend has have mostly been applied to the fields of the humanities and the social sciences, there have been many remarkable authors from outside these areas of knowledge who are prepared to undertake this new perspective into diverse projects: the architect Marcos Novak exemplifies this integration showing how it has been effective enough to incorporate and apply the concept of the ‘trans’ into the domain of architecture. In 2002 his successful exhibition entitled “Transmodernity. Austrian Architects,” showed the possibilities of combining architecture and Transmodernity, promoting the idea of the transarchitecture. On the other hand, in recent times there has been a monumental investment in the study of transhumanism which “pretende que la especie humana mejore, aumentando sus capacidades físicas y cognitivas echando mano de las tecnologías emergentes” (Sánchez 16), the main objective being to deal with death as if it was a mechanical problem. This would determine an enormous step towards the improvement of humanity involving the combination of flesh and wires. So as it can be observed, in the moment of the “trans” there are changes that go beyond just a shift of mentality, and which imply an enormous

modification of human life. Transmodernity includes all the disciplines which are willing to set this new conception of the world into motion.

At this point I should discuss a relevant point in order to offer a proper and complete definition of the Transmodern paradigm. The origins and development of Transmodernity are founded in the decade of the 1990s, a time that fostered global changes and a reconfiguration of past enmities. Even though many changes were taking place internationally, I will focus on one of the most important events occurring in the United States during this decade. North America was still submerged in the historical moment of the Cold War during the 90s, although it was the thawing stage in the relationship between the Soviets and the Americans. However, this historical process is still a clear example of both the meaning of the dichotomized world and the results after its collapse forty-five years later. From a postcolonial perspective, the deconstruction of the primal argument opposing the First and Third world, unbalancing it, dealing with it and representing new borders and limits, makes the culture revisable and reevaluates “the idea of the purity of First World cultures with that of the hybridity of all cultural values” (Mihăilă 6). The reconfiguration of this new world was beginning to take place; it was a rejection of and a revelation against the hegemonic powers that were trying to maintain their authority as supreme entities. This context is necessary to account for the parallelism established between Kushner’s play and Rodríguez Magda’s theory since it is my contention that both claim for a necessary transition within society. In the same way, there is a similar reflection on how the world is changing, as well as an indication of a new mentality in the process of being created.

With the knowledge of the main premises of the new Transmodern paradigm and the clear perspective brought by the context, I am suggesting that Kushner’s classification as a Postmodernist playwright should be reconsidered. Kushner saw in the



problematic framework in which automatically homosexuality was linked to the AIDS disease a moment in which a change was more than necessary, it was vital to survive. That is why he decided to put into question all the old stereotypes that reinforced the social dichotomies in the plot and nature of his characters in *Angels in America*. By doing so, Kushner laid the emphasis on the topic of change, which can be seen in every single character and line of narration, for example in Roy's treatment of Belize or in the cruel reality captured in the poor medical treatment of Prior; both cases reveal traces of a necessary transformation, both in the representation of social marginalization or in terms of new government measures. This new configuration would entail a new era in which there would be "a rich pluriversity [...] fruit of an authentic intercultural dialogue that would need to bear clearly in mind existing asymmetries (to be an 'imperial-core' or part of the semi-peripheral 'central chorus') like Europe today" (Dussel 44). This can also be applicable to the crossbreeding of voices in the play, for there is no unessential character, but with the combination of all of them, the playwright gives sense to a feasible portrait of the forthcoming millennium. In the same line, Rodica Mihăilă's argument about the duality of the world representing a "critique of a society divided, above all, by differences of race and gender and, to a lesser extent of sexual orientation" (9) supports the premise of the necessary change in this dichotomized society that can only be understood in oppositional terms. The playwright meets two of the main premises of the Transmodern, the obvious notion of a sociopolitical change as well as the inclusion and exchange of all groups that belong to society. It is significant to remember that Modernism's topics and its sense of moving forward is incorporated by Kushner and also by Transmodernism. Furthermore, Kushner's pursuit of the breaking of the frontiers that divide society and his effort to work for a new option viable in the

forthcoming millennium demonstrates that he shares with Transmodernism the aim of creating a third new option that may respond to the needs of society.

During the course of my research I have not been able to find any article discussing this interpretation of Kushner's play as an example of the incipient Transmodern trend, which is why this dissertation is aimed at starting this line of study. In my view, *Angels in America* offers a review on gender, sexual orientation and race that fits in the Transmodern paradigm. By breaking these dichotomies related to categories like man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual or white/colored, the author opens the door to diversity, narrating reality from a visionary point of view and challenging the traditional vision of it. More significantly he outlines a framework in which the combination of past and present will result in a society adapted to the current times. By doing so Kushner, crosses the invisible frontiers related to sexual preference, religion and politics and he creates a dynamic play that illustrates the Transmodern idea of the prefix '-trans' as a view of something that goes between and beyond borders. The playwright captures the Transmodern idea that aims to underpin people's identity while it blurs the boundaries that oppress society. Transmodernity plays a fundamental role in the categorization of this author since it fosters a third new option where frontiers are subverted, and describes how the people of the in-between, the hybrids can be incorporated within society. All in all, as I will further prove in my analysis, it can be concluded that Tony Kushner can be considered an author of Transmodernity.

### 3. Belize, the Rule-Breaking Character in *Angels in America*

#### 3.1 Belize, “*ma belle negre*”

In his description of the characters found in the introductory part, Tony Kushner defines Belize as “a former drag queen and former lover of Prior’s. A registered nurse. Belize’s name was originally Norman Arriaga; Belize is a drag name that stuck.” Interestingly enough, Belize’s actor also performs the character of Mr. Lies, the imaginary friend of Joe’s agoraphobic wife Harper. In my view, it is not a mere coincidence that the actor playing ex-ex-drag queen Belize is also dressed up as Mr. Lies, an ambiguous character whom the reader does not know much about, and whose intentions are unclear: is he set to help or complicate Harper’s life? In spite of this complication of character’s identities Belize’s purposes are not the same as Mr. Lies’, since s/he has other objectives in the play. However, both can be taken as case subjects of Transmodernity. The connection of the two characters resides, on the one hand, in the way both cross boundaries; Belize does so in terms of race and gender, whereas Mr. Lies crosses borders between fiction and reality. Mr. Lies highlights the sense of continuum during his introduction to Harper: “International Order of Travel Agents. We mobilize the globe, we set people adrift, we stir the populace and send nomads eddying across the planet. We are adepts of motion, acolytes of the flux” (Kushner 23). Belize does the same in a conversation with Prior discussing whether the former is going crazy or not, s/he asserts “You better not. You better fucking not flip out. This is not dementia. And this is not real. This is just you, Prior, afraid of what’s coming, afraid of time. But see that’s just not how it goes, the world doesn’t spin backwards. Listen to the world, to how fast it goes. [...] That’s New York traffic, baby, the sound of energy, the sound of time” (181). The key to the Transmodern reading of these characters—and the whole text for that matter—

lies in the way Kushner creatively combines disruption—of rules, of conceptual frontiers—with the affirmation of certain values and assertion of identity.

In the particular case of Belize, although her/his physical characteristics are not described in the text, with the progression of the narration characters like Roy and Louis marginalize her/him due to their racist beliefs. In the play it is not specified, but taking into account how the other characters refer to her/him and with the knowledge of her/his real name, it is possible to image a mulatto character. In this sense, the choice of this title's section is far from hazardous, for "ma belle negre" (Kushner 67) is how Prior refers to Belize during a conversation the first time the reader meets her/him. At that moment, we realize that s/he is not happy with that nickname when she asserts "all this girl talk shit is politically incorrect, you know. We should have dropped it back when we gave up drag" (67). With the knowledge that even her/his best friend errs in his behavior, a good summary of this section could be the combination of how s/he was used to be called, and how s/he stands for potential change. Furthermore, Kushner's choice of the name Belize is significant. Belize is the only country of Central America that still maintains the legacy of the British Empire with English as the official language, a fact that does not interfere with the usage of the other two major languages: Belize Creole and Spanish. Together with this, its population is composed of 10 ethnic groups in which the mestizo has the largest percentage of inhabitants. So, this is how the reader faces Belize for the first time, as a mixed character in various respects due to his/her former life as drag queen, a name that suggests a Latino origin, and her/his current name that bears relation with the exotic and mixed country of Central America. In this manner, Belize's hybridity is announced firstly as something superficial beyond relevant aspects like gender or race that will be developed later on.

In this second chapter, I will analyze the character of Belize as it is described in the play to understand how s/he is introduced to the audience. This will help me to lay the foundations of the subsequent analysis from the perspective of gender and race that highlights Belize's stereotyping and represents her/him as the 'other'; in Minwalla's words, "Belize occupies that space against which we gauge the ideology, morality, actions—perhaps even the very humanity—of Kushner's other inventions" (104). I will take the concept of the hybrid and relevant theories of the border to explain what from my point of view, is the real situation of Belize. The main theories of Stuart Hall, Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi Bhabha will help me to support my line of argumentation.

After the introduction in which Belize is just another character in the set list, we first know about her/him in Scene Five of Act Two, when s/he goes to visit Prior in hospital. It is there that we know more about her/his life as a drag queen stage in a conversation with Louis about national themes

BELIZE: Oh is that a fact? You know, we black drag queens have a rather intimate knowledge of the complexity of the lines of...

LOUIS: *Ex-black* drag queen.

BELIZE: Actually ex-ex.

LOUIS: You're doing drag again?

BELIZE: I don't... Maybe. I don't have to tell you. Maybe. (Kushner 100)

Moreover, we are informed about her/his job as a nurse and her/his previous relationship with Prior. In Act Three Scene Two the reader can see the tension between Belize and Louis. These are the only ties of Belize in the first part of the play, *Approaching the Millennium*, while in the second part, *Perestroika*, Scene Five of Act One introduces the connection of Roy Cohn with her/him. Even if her/his interactions in the play might seem fewer in comparison with the rest of the cast, my view is that s/he plays an important role: firstly in the love triangle formed by Prior, Louis and herself/himself; then, in the task of dealing with Cohn, who is capable of showing the worst face of the American society; and finally in her/his purpose of helping Prior. S/he

is the real savior of Prior when s/he obtains the AZT from Cohn, s/he is the only one capable of talking with Louis and explaining things as they really are, and most importantly of all, s/he is the person that feels real pity for Roy when his final time approaches. S/he is also the one who introduced the problem of the availability of medicines, like the aforementioned AZT (which is also known as Retrovir), the only antiretroviral medication capable of reducing and treating the HIV at that time. Furthermore, in conversation with her/him, topics like race, gender or politics arise easily, which normally occurs when s/he is with Louis. Far from being a marginal or secondary character, then, Belize turns out to be a crucial one.

Next, I will turn to Belize's relationship with the characters of Prior, Louis and Roy. Belize connects Roy and Prior, Prior and Louis, Louis and Roy, Prior and Joe; all use him as an intermediary or are brought together through him, intentionally or not (Minwalla 104). Her/his best friend is undoubtedly Prior, and this friendship is a little compromised by some sexual tension due to their past as a couple. S/he will be Prior's support, his caretaker and his confidant when the "hallucinations" of the Angel come. Louis, on the contrary, has a love-hate relation with Belize; in fact, there is more hate than love between them. This enmity is based, on the one hand, on Louis' guilt for leaving Prior with the AIDS crisis; and, on the other hand, on Belize's feeling of rejection after her/his break up with Prior. Both are poles apart united by Prior, a link that will not save them from having heated debates about 'national themes.' Far from the enmity with Louis, Belize's relation with Roy is simply inexistent until he arrives at the hospital where s/he works; after that, there is a relationship of mutual loathing that involves social and racial hatred mostly on Roy's part.

In this context of connections, Belize will be treated in different ways but all of them share a common factor that marks the distance between her/him and the rest of the

characters. In relation to this, the way other characters behave towards Belize is particularly interesting. It is obvious that depending on the relationship the level of sympathy or cordiality will oscillate. To Prior s/he is “Miss Thing” or “Stella” (Kushner 65); to Louis s/he is simply Belize, his arguments in a conversation are sufficient to observe the distance between them, as I will develop in more depth in the next section; and in the irremediable eyes of Roy, s/he is a “moron” or a “dim black” (157), just to mention some of the names he calls Belize. These are different attitudes and ranges of politeness or intimacy that subvert her/his objectification and stereotyping. Even her/his best friend Prior calls her/him “ma belle negre” (67), or as I have just mentioned before, a “thing” (65). Why is this relevant to the definition of Belize? What makes her/him, as I argue, more important than the rest of the characters, who are also stereotyped? From my perspective, s/he can be thought to be the most vulnerable and marginal character, but on a closer look s/he seems the most stable and sane one. This makes her/him able to fight back the hegemonic discourses that have the only function of reinforcing the relationship of dichotomy between dominant and dominated typical of the Western framework. Kushner manages to balance all these adversities with the positive, caring and hopeful personality of Belize, whose positive values are clearly emphasized.

In order to have a better perspective on Belize, I would like to summarize one of the main topics in Kushner’s play: her/his position and vision of society’s future. Belize is one of the four characters that appear in the Epilogue of the play, *Bethesda*. This is relevant since it is the part where some changes can be seen in characters like Hannah, who becomes less conservative and more open to the New Yorker way of life, or Prior, who is still alive but with visible consequences of the illness five years later. In this context, there is a final moment in which Prior, Hannah, Louis and Belize coincide. The world is changing, and it is doing it “faster than the mind” (Kushner 278), they know

they are being thrown into the unknown, but in this newness they are living, that scenario, which is opened to suffer radical changes, seems the most favorable to them. All of them have different ideas of how that future is going to develop, but they agree with the idea of having the chance to live it after all the obstacles they have found during their lives. This positivism towards the future is poetically interwoven by the myth of the Bethesda fountain: a symbol of hope and optimism. Belize's dream of heaven entails "racial impurity and gender confusion" (Dervin 65), bringing back the Transmodern idea of blurring frontiers and at the same time fostering the third new option suitable for the near future. This new millennium in which changes are already beginning to be felt is the critical juncture all of them were waiting for.

All in all, it is visible how Belize is highlighted in the superficial description of the play as the embodiment of race and gender, making her/him the target of the dominant powers, and as Minwalla argues "Belize is a cipher, an enigma, a blankness. [...] His sexuality, skin color, and ideological bent, however, represent—without the queering distinctions of individual difference—all those communities (gay, black, drag queen) whose identities converge with his" (105). In spite of the mixture that precedes her/him the high caliber of Belize's conversations in general, and in particular when it comes to talking about the different perspectives of American society in terms of race, gender or politics is, as aforementioned, an important feature to take into account in his/her analysis as a character of the play.

### ***3.2 Turn of Millennium (Part One): Belize as the 'Other'***

In the preceding section, I analyzed how Belize is depicted in the play, her/his interventions and her/his relationships with the rest of the characters. Next, I will focus my attention on the analysis of this character taking the perspective of the 'other'—the marginalized, the rejected; in other words, those who stand in opposition to the central



or powerful 'I'. After briefly introducing the theoretical background, I will apply it to the concepts of race and gender to illustrate how they help to fix the dichotomies in society. To do this, Kushner skillfully employs ironies and exaggerated stereotypes to lay the emphasis on how those fixed ideas work.

Considered in a broad sense, literature has often helped to uncover the representation of the 'other,' de-stigmatizing it and trying to deconstruct it. In the attempt to define the meaning of what it is to be the 'other' and which are the reactions of society towards these marginalized, many thinkers, philosophers or scholars within the field of humanities have tried to give form to these questions throughout the years: from Hegel's philosophies concerning the idea of the 'self,' going through the linguistic adaptation of Lacan, to Simone de Beauvoir's usage to explain the social relationship between man and woman. In this ample view, I have found that the definition of the 'other' offered by Julia Kristeva in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) about horror, otherness, the Oedipal complex or the marginalization amongst other topics, is particularly useful for my analysis. It is necessary to remember the advice of the sociologist Stuart Hall, who warned that "binary oppositions are [...] open to the charge of being reductionist and over-simplified" ("Spectacle" 235), therefore, so as not to end up generalizing, I will firstly analyze the concept of the 'other' and then I will apply it to Belize in terms of race and gender.

To Kristeva, the abject—the 'other'—is related to a human reaction like horror, hate or disgust as a result of a confrontation between the self and the 'other.' Among the main qualities of the abject, its position "of being opposed to" (1) and of challenging the master constantly (2) can be highlighted as relevant ones. That defiance to the superior power from the marginalized part is often seen in the behavior of Belize. In this character's case, s/he does not miss the opportunity of confronting both Roy and Louis,

when the issue of race, politics or culture is brought up in conversation, and whenever her/his classification as the 'other' is more intensified. Why does s/he feel s/he is being put in jeopardy during a conversation with one of them? In these cases s/he is under a high pressure with direct attacks to her/his person, yet s/he has to control herself/himself to keep the situation in order. When these conversations occur, to a great extent when s/he is with Louis or Roy, what disturbs the dominant groups is how their status quo is being menaced by a voice of the minority. This is a transgression of borders and rules that normally leaves the challenger in a sort of limbo zone where he is neither dominant nor dominated, where the 'other' has more possibilities of controlling what happens to them. A particular example of this can be seen in the discovery of the AZT during Act Three Scene Two, when Belize confronts Roy in the middle of a rough fight. Roy observes there how s/he is able to defend herself/himself even if in order to do so, s/he uses the same language as he does; at that moment they are both at the same level and Roy knows it,

BELIZE: Kike.

ROY: *Now* you're talking!

BELIZE: Greedy kike.

ROY: Now you can have a bottle. But only one. (Kushner 188-91)

The boundaries have been removed and the argument is held in a more or less equal ground, balancing the position of the 'other.' Roy only reacts when Belize accepts to play the same game he is playing; once he understands that because he is so helpless, both are now on the same level, he gives up the fight. In the relationship with Roy and Louis, it is easy to see that the one who has more problems to face Belize is Roy, due to his racist mind. Taking the explanation of Kristeva about "[how] the one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or

refusing” (8), Roy is that person who is not able to shift into the position of the ‘other.’ As a result, he misses plenty of opportunities to understand why the ‘other’ is supposed to be different, and he attacks Belize. In the same line, Kristeva argues that the problem with this kind of people is that they are reluctant to have a face-to-face meeting with the abject. This is the reason why when Roy meets his assigned nurse, Belize, he is so furious with her:

ROY: Get outta here, you, I got nothing to say to you...

BELIZE: Just doing my...

ROY: I want a white nurse. My constitutional right.

BELIZE: You’re in a hospital, you don’t have any constitutional rights.

(Kushner 156)

Although Louis is not so radical about his non-acceptance of Belize, he also belongs to the white dominant power, which means that even if he has more chances to be rejected for being a Jewish homosexual than Roy Cohn (because he is more powerful and can hide his health state), he will exert his power to mark the distance between him and Belize. Moreover, he performs another type of exclusion different to Roy’s, the one used as an “exclusion or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions, Judaism in particular” (Kristeva 17). This is quite clear during the first encounter of Louis and Belize when the former uses religion as a way to explain his differences with her/him (Kushner 95-102). Power is fundamental for the dominant force to maintain the dichotomy with behaviors like silencing the voice of the ‘other’ and sending the same message of “culture’s beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions, and style” (Winsbro, in Martínez Falquina 76) so that it will penetrate the coming generations, reaffirming their power.

In this context of rejection and superiority on the part of the dominant power, those who do not fit in the accepted groups of society are left aside because they are a threat to the current social state, especially if the threat of challenging the master exists.

To try to understand them, or to accept them would entail “el derrumbamiento de estructuras fundamentales” (Martínez Falquina 195). In relation to this, Kristeva wonders “who, I ask you, would agree to call himself abject, subject of or subject to abjection?” (209). The answer is simple, no one would like to be the ‘other.’ But the way in which society is organized presupposes the classification of people into the dominant and the dominated. The disagreement with this unfair dichotomy resides in how the society’s behavior affects the daily lives of the dominated, and at the same time, how the possibility of being the one who can alter the social state does not seem very attractive to many of the marginalized. The abject does not want to be the protagonist of a disruption, although in many cases he or she retains the main role when a problem arises in society. For example, there is a generalized argument that a growing population of immigrants can be the cause of the increasing rate of criminality.

Notwithstanding the misfortunes of the repudiated, many have been the social movements that have been founded to help them to obtain the same rights as the rest of the people. Earlier above, I mentioned the creation of one of the most important collectives aimed to help homosexual people during the nineties, the Gay Men’s Health Crisis. In this context of the AIDS crisis, “self-proclaimed queer activists sought alliances with people of color, bisexual and transgendered people, and anyone else defined by dominant discourse as somehow transgressing dominant cultural norms” (Bernstein 561). These associations “are seen as a vehicle for organization, education, and resistance” (Rimmerman 7), and more importantly the display of this system makes a revision of the social and political maps indispensable. When groups of oppressed people raise their voice (e.g. blacks, women, black women or LGBT) against the status quo, they are claiming and fighting for their rights. Occasionally, they use more radical discourses in order to defend their own difference and to “oponerse a las prácticas

discursivas dominantes” (Martínez Falquina 161). The final goal of these social movements was, and still is, to achieve a tolerant society; however, the real amend would require a change of discourse.

This modification will entail a reformulation of the dichotomized framework in which society has been living over the years. The ‘I’ meeting the ‘other’ needs to be changed, since the identity of one of them runs the risk of being the subject of abjection. In this line, the demands of these groups call for a necessary reformation in the oppositional way of perceiving the world. This would mean a rupture of the status quo as we know it putting an emphasis on the space among individuals for an enhancement of their exchange. Id est, it is not a mere reversion of contraries, but a reformulation that would situate them on the same level, canceling all the possible conflicts between dominant and dominated.

### ***3.3 Belize in Terms of Race and Gender***

In order to analyze Belize from the perspective of the ‘other,’ I have taken the terms of race and gender to see how the marginalization and stereotyping of these minorities can be applied to Belize. The examples given are an illustration of what Stuart Hall asserts to be the main cultural disturbances, like “when things turn up in the wrong category, or when things fall to fit any category” (“Spectacle” 236). The election of these concepts allows us to see the basis of the ‘otherness’ within North American society (Martínez Falquina 11). In this sense, gender or race often entail conflict, contradiction and oppression (Savran 31). As Martínez Falquina asserts, the only fruitful way to study terminology like the one I am using is a twofold formula: involving the dissolution of those terms and paying attention to their consequences. In other words, this means a deconstruction of the concepts that paves the way for the creation of a “nuevo discurso que permita cambios políticos tangibles” (43). *Angels in America* has a wide range of

characters which in some way or another belong to one of the groups marginalized by American society and history (Ceballos 6), for example, Joe's rejection of Harper's addiction to Valium, or his treating her like a child (Kushner 29-33). However, it is interesting to see how the sum of Belize's differences is more highlighted in comparison with the rest. All the characters are members of the rejected, which means that they belong to the group of people who have the capacity to alter the status quo.

On the one hand, although the application of the concept of race for anthropological studies is in decline, the classification of human beings by the color of their skin was frequent in the past, like in the case of eugenics during the XIX century. History and society have played an important part in the definition and shaping of the different terms, for example as a tool in racist speeches addressed to the population during the Nazi era. The problem with the concept of race is not only its old and colonialist sense, but the negative implications of their meanings that derivatives like racism or racist still have. A proper definition of race and racism attends to how they both imply "hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or 'people' toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes" (Fredrickson 1). The aversion from one group—normally the most powerful—that loathed the other just because of their color was enough to marginalize it; likewise, religion can be named as another common factor of racism. However, even if society has not forgotten this shameful way of classification, the field of science has taken a step forward into modernity and has offered a redefinition of the term race with relation to the present time to refer to "a self-contained breeding population that has a higher percentage of individuals with certain physical characteristics than some other population" (Zach, in Martínez Falquina 48).

One of the key books dealing with this concept in recent times is the 2002 book *Racism: A Short History*. There, George M. Fredrickson revises the most important

racist acts in the history of humanity; from the implications of religion in Medieval times, to more contemporary perspectives of what it means to use the term racism in the twenty-first century. He makes reference to the link between culture and racism as a fundamental insight in which it is submerged. In this context “the qualities of social groups are fixed, made natural, confined within a pseudobiologically defined culturalism” (Fredrickson 8). Races are now more integrated by a society with a tendency to the tolerance, openness and acceptance of differences, although there are still “strong continuities in the articulation of the images of the ‘other’” (8). In this author’s perspective, racism inexorably involves power and difference and, therefore, a frontier between “me” and “you” is built, creating a line that is both “permanent and unbridgeable” (9).

Taking into consideration these premises and bringing them to the analysis of Belize, I will concentrate my attention on two different types of racism to which s/he is confronted. Firstly, the clearest and plainest example is brought up by Roy Cohn. The most common form of racism is shown when he uses the argument of color to manifest his loathing to her/him. In the following case it is possible to see how Roy behaves with Belize:

BELIZE: You expect *pity*?

ROY: (*A beat, then*): I expect you to hand over those keys and move your nigger ass out of my room.

BELIZE: What did you say.

ROY: Move your nigger cunt spade faggot lackey ass out of my room.

BELIZE (*Overlapping starting on “spade”*): Shit-for-brains filthy-mouthed selfish motherfucking cowardly cock-sucking cloven-hoofed pig.

ROY (*Overlapping*): Mongrel. Dingel. Slave. Ape. (Kushner 190-91)

As I have previously discussed, Belize does not stay still, s/he reacts against Roy to defend herself/himself. Despite the high level of insults they exchange, I think that the cruelest could be ‘slave,’ ‘mongrel’ or ‘lackey.’ Roy is confirming a view of a

historical superiority in relation to the dichotomies of white/black, American/African, colonizer/colonized or master/slave. Even the insult ‘ape’ comes from one of the oldest and lowest types of discrimination, for Roy is treating Belize as if s/he were an animal, not a human being, which was not an uncommon way for racists to refer to black people. Roy cannot be dismissed when he insults, he hits where it hurts, using all the available methods to test and win his adversaries.

Secondly, and with a less intensified racism, Louis marks his line of difference with respect to Belize in connection with religious topics. In a long conversation about American history, politics and the maintenance of lines of oppression, the truth about how Louis actually feels towards her/him arises:

BELIZE: NO! What, (*talk*) You’ve been running your mouth nonstop since I got here, yaddadda yaddadda blah blah blah, up the hill, down the hill, playing with your MONOLITH ... [...] and girlfriend it is truly an *awesome* spectacle but I got better things to do with my time than sit here listening to this racist bullshit just because I feel sorry for you that...  
LOUIS: I am not a racist!  
BELIZE: Oh come on...  
LOUIS: SO maybe I am a racist but... [...] You know what I think?  
BELIZE: What?  
LOUIS: YOU hate me because I’m a Jew.  
BELIZE: I’m leaving. [...] Someday you’ll have to explain that to me, but right now ... *You* hate me because you hate black people.  
LOUIS: I do not. But I think most black people are anti-Semitic.  
BELIZE: “Most black people.” That’s racist, Louis, and I think most Jews...  
LOUIS: I’m ambivalent. The checks bounced.  
BELIZE: All your checks bounce, Louis; you’re ambivalent about everything. (Kushner 99-101)

This ambivalence in which Louis lives his life makes him feel confused about how he should behave when controversial topics like race come up in a conversation. He is Jewish, and as stated in this conversation, Jews and blacks do not get on well. However, Louis resorts to Belize to obtain information and to redeem his guilt after what he did to Prior. But taking a deeper look into the religious argument, Louis does not speak of him openly or freely because, as mentioned in section 3.2., Judaism treats



the 'other' as a taboo. That is why Louis takes time to verbalize his real thoughts. He does not hate Belize for being black; he just excludes her/him, making it clear at some points in the play that their irreconcilable differences are not just a matter of opposite points of view, but that there is a confrontation between what his religion has taught Louis to think and what he really thinks. At the end, it seems that the indoctrination exerted by religion is more powerful than his thoughts, since in the epilogue of the play Belize and Louis still maintain their debates over national themes without reaching an agreement.

In both Roy and Louis' cases, the alleged manipulation that culture, politics or religion has imposed on them has led them to their racist behavior to a lesser or greater extent, but that victimization is not accurate as it has been proved. Roy represents white America at its worst, he is the radical racist that opts for the easiest way of expressing it, while Louis is the ambivalent one; however, both admit their racist perspectives in conversation with Belize. By doing so, both of them dismiss the fact that they can also be rejected by racist groups targeting homosexuals or Jews. Even if Louis recognizes his position in this double discrimination, he still does not shift in Belize's position. That characteristic ambivalence that Belize usually reproaches Louis can be taken as a feature of Transmodernity. If we take a look from the point of view of how Louis crosses his own invisible frontiers (about sexual preference, religion and politics) and at the same time how he seems to strengthen them, we notice that he is a dynamic character that illustrates the Transmodern idea of the prefix '-trans' as a view of something that goes between and beyond borders.

On the other hand, in the case of the concept of gender, Martínez Falquina's treatment of the term fits perfectly in a reasonable and modern way to understand it. She examines in a section of her aforementioned book, how the historical application of

gender (amongst other factors) has influenced the marginalization of Native American women. In spite of her specific application of the term, it is possible to extrapolate her definition to other cases like that of Belize. In this critic's view "los seres humanos desarrollan una identidad de género (masculino, femenino o ambivalente), es decir, una autodefinición subjetiva que se expresa socialmente a través de ciertos roles de género o la serie de conceptos que cada cultura y época interpreta como afines a un género determinado" (194). That is to say, the stereotyping of gender will be given in one way or another depending on the culture and the historical moment. In the play, this line of gender stereotyping is not so visible, and as David Savran explains "the play is filled with political disputation—all of it between men, since women, unless in drag, are excluded from the public sphere" (29); this is the case of Belize's controversial job, or Harper's opinion about the diorama in the Mormon's church (Kushner 195-201).

Although a proper analysis of the female characters, Hannah and Harper, is outside the scope of my project, a brief review is relevant here. Both characters are strongly stereotyped, Harper is characterized as a dependent woman addicted to Valium who is incapable of dealing with a toxic marriage, and Hannah as a controlling mother that rules her life according to the strict ideas of Mormonism. However, as the play develops, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law prove to be two characters that have accomplished a real evolution. Harper finally assumes that she can be an independent woman and leaves her husband Joe to live a life on her own, whereas Hannah has suffered a radical change in her mentality, transforming herself into a more tolerant and open woman, far from her previous religious radicalisms.

Until not so long ago, male nurses were considered effeminate; hence in the context of the play, there were many chances to be stereotyped as a homosexual for doing that job. On account of this, Belize is highlighting this stereotype, which I think,

in her/his case fits Minwalla's assertion that "Kushner shifts blackness and effeminacy from the margins to the center, polishing the heterosexistly tarnished surfaces of these identity categories" (105). Moreover, this argument is made visible if we observe how the characterization given by Kushner captures the Transmodern idea that aims to reinforce people's identity while it blurs the boundaries that oppress society. Fortunately, thanks to an arduous campaign aimed at raising consciousness, this topic of stereotyped works appears less and less frequently in our days.

Butler asserts that the correlation between nature and sex is not followed by culture-gender in the same way. For this critic, the discursive or cultural methods affect the way "by which 'sexed nature' or 'natural sex' is produced and established" (7), that is to say, there is a primal discourse which affects this process of gendering. On account of this, the role of culture is extremely important to fix the given characteristics imposed on each gender. These implications granted by society are well portrayed in *Angels in America*; a good example is how the reading and believing of the Scriptures, in Hannah's case, restrains her from understanding homosexuality—most notably when her son Joe tries to tell her that he is a homosexual and she ignores him. The same happens with Roy Cohn, who advises Joe to continue his marriage with Harper to give the appearance of normality. The maintenance of the socially established rules makes the integration of the 'other' difficult, in this case those who do not follow the old patterns of the nuclear family.

Taking these arguments into account, it is indispensable for the realization of a proper analysis to describe, even if briefly, the position of the people that do not fit in the cultural canons: "lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people [who] have persistently occupied a place at the margins of American societies" (Rimmerman 6). These minorities have been persecuted, stigmatized and silenced in general. It was, and

still is, not easy to be different in a society that did not give these people the voice to express themselves freely, but instead of that offered a negative image of them. In most cases, this image of homosexuals or bisexuals had a negative connotation that helped to fix the idea that belonging to that group of people was not natural. At this point it is necessary to recall Martínez Falquina's reflection about the influence of man on these constructions, since there is an implicit "relación del logocentrismo con el falocentrismo, o la centralidad y supremacía de la identidad masculina" (122), which affects gender minorities and the vision of the same. In the course of *Angels in America* the supremacy of the masculine attitudes is quite obvious in two groups: those who reaffirm the established canons of the nuclear family—Hannah, Joe or Roy—and those who are against the image of the macho—Prior, Louis, Belize. This drama is more centered in the demystification of firstly, the masculine perspective, and secondly, the femininity of homosexuals.

Two common components in the definition and explanation of the terms race and gender can be isolated. On the one hand, both have a strong meaning as a consequence of the implications given by the society historically. On the other hand, both target minority groups to strengthen the superior power of the dominant. This context gives preference to the development of dichotomies like man/woman, white/black or heterosexual/homosexual, giving advantage and power to the first element and stigmatizing the second one. In this sense, First-world countries use all the available tools to maintain their position of privilege and therefore, they use discriminatory discourses to classify the marginalized and then be able to construct a definition favorable to them. On the ground of this argument, it is visible that the conflict with oppositions appears with the first contact, hence, in that moment frontiers are created. The formation of these boundaries implies an "estructura de interacción que

resalta y mantiene las diferencias culturales, estableciendo una pauta binaria de inclusión y exclusión, de unidad y separación” (Martínez Falquina 54); this means that one cannot exist without the other and vice versa. In order to protect its supremacy, society builds “symbolic boundaries [to] keep the categories ‘pure,’ giving cultures their unique meaning and identity” (Hall “Spectacle” 236). In other words, the dominant power will highlight the frontiers between them and the ‘other’ in order to preserve their power and “purity.” Minority cultures are necessary for the dominant to be able to keep their supremacy and emphasize their culture as the ‘real’ one.

*Angels in America* portrays these cultural differences mostly in the field of religion, where Mormonism, Judaism and Christianity confront and criticize the contrary/rival in various argumentations over the play. It is possible to observe that there is no real tolerance between one and the other but a constant reproach for not being like one of them. However, these differences are not only illustrated in terms of religion; the first time we meet Belize and Prior we confront a variant of the cultural clash, in which the mix between dominant power and the dominated tries to unbalance the status quo but fails in the attempt, which is visible in this excerpt:

BELIZE (*Taking little plastic bottles from his bag, handing them to Prior*):  
Not to despair, Belle Reeve. Lookie! Magic goop!  
PRIOR (*Opening a bottle, sniffing*): Pooh! What kind of crap is that?  
BELIZE: Beats me. Let’s rub it on your poor blistered body and see what it does.  
PRIOR: This is not Western medicine, these bottles...  
BELIZE: Voodoo cream. From the botanica ‘round the block.  
PRIOR: And you are a registered nurse.  
BELIZE (*sniffing it*): Beeswax and cheap perfume. Cut with Jergen’s Lotion.  
Full of good vibes and love from some little black Cubana from Miami.  
PRIOR: Get that trash away from me, I am immune-suppressed. (Kushner 65)

This misunderstanding and anticipated rejection of unknown cures is a clear example of how even between friends the assimilation of foreign cultures is still

difficult to achieve since “inherited identities get subsumed by a communal identity (used as a shield and a weapon against oppression) and by the values and rituals prevalent in the dominant culture” (Minwalla 106). A boundary between Western medicine and other treatments which are not so common in these societies highlights how Prior is cautious about remedies unknown to the majority of people. To cross the line would mean to accept that maybe that exotic medicine is as good as the rest of the first-world cures. It is true that Prior’s health is not at its best, but his reaction to a traditional remedy brought by Belize is at first an attitude aimed to discredit her/him within her/his profession. But apart from that, Prior assumes almost without knowing which are its supposed benefits, that the cream was just ‘trash.’ It is, just as in the example of religion, a way to exclude the ‘other’ from the dominant power. Belize uses her/his culture in a positive way but instead of receiving an appreciation for her/his gesture, s/he witnesses how a representative of the main culture rejects it. The dominant power consolidates its status of ‘better’ or ‘trustable’—related to scientific, civilized—and reinforces the indivisible line drawn between both cultures. Kushner uses these stereotypes of race and gender to show how their use helps to strengthen the dominant discourses of the ‘other.’

### ***3.4 Turn of Millennium (Part Two): Belize as the ‘Hybrid’***

In the last part of my project, I will try to connect the term hybrid and the theories of the frontier based on Gloria Anzaldúa’s book to the analysis of Belize. After the analysis of the character as the ‘other’ in terms of race and gender and the consequent outcome that has shown the preservation of the dichotomies to reinforce the dominant power, I propose the reconsideration of Belize as a member of the frontier, and, therefore, a hybrid within society. In this sense, Transmodernity plays a fundamental role, firstly to

foster a third new option where frontiers are subverted, and secondly, to describe how the people of the in-between, the hybrids can be integrated within society.

As a result of Anzaldúa's book, theories coined under the name of *border studies* focused on the problems surrounding the Mexican-US frontier in the first place, to expand to almost any field in which there was a need to question the stability and authority of borders. To analysts and researchers of this tendency borders are seen as an evolution of a split state towards another state in which these boundaries are subverted by highlighting the possibilities of liberation to the people in-between, the hybrids (Martínez Falquina 137). Gloria Anzaldúa tried in 1987 to capture what life on the frontier of Texas and Mexico was like in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. It is an autobiographical text that combines prose/verse and English/Spanish to provoke a constant feeling of frustration to the non-bilingual. This discomforting position is aimed at showing the difficulties of living in a place with invisible borders, e.g.: language, culture or identity. Something similar occurs in the first encounter of the reader with Belize, where some of these invisible frontiers can be identified. In a conversation with Prior, both of them mix French and English words, evoking their former years as drag queens (Kushner 65). Frenchglish is the language used within their space and consequently those who do not know it will be excluded. These invisible frontiers emerge with the conceptualization of criteria aimed to differentiate who belongs to a specific group when both groups confront each other for the first time, and then establish a binary organization of inclusion/exclusion.

But before turning into the specific case of the invisible frontiers, let me focus on the original meaning of the frontiers, as areas delimiting peoples or countries. In Anzaldúa's view, places like the Mexican-US geographical border highlights the differences between oppositional groups, and she names these areas 'borderlands.'

Spaces like this underline the relationships between one country and the other. In consequence, these locations are favorable to 'la mezcla,' people that are neither Texan nor Mexican but a mixture of both, as in the author's case. To Anzaldúa, to be called and American or a Mexican was not appropriate, since she did not feel part of the first one, nor ever would she be part of the second one, for due to her position between frontiers, "she was something else, a hybrid" (Gideonse 5). In this manner, it is possible to observe that the 'mezcla,' the hybrids, have a special knowledge about their ambivalent situation, as in the case of Belize. S/he knows that due to her/his situation as ex-ex-black drag queen and homosexual and the current state of society depicted in the play, s/he is living between frontiers, crossing from one to another all the time. This happens when Belize gives Prior the medicine of the botica nearby and the sick rejects it almost from the beginning. The introduction of a new treatment, which Belize considers a good one, is not welcome by the dominant class. This is an illustration of the life between invisible frontiers, an automatic rejection of anything or anyone that is not fully American.

The outcome of this 'mezcla' is a generation who develops in a time-space with two different cultures embracing them equally; hence, there is no differentiation between them: languages, lifestyles or even traditions are joined together in this process. This mixing is seen as a threat to the purity of the dominant country; if the hegemonic power does not accept the outcome of the borders, then the general society away from these frontiers will not assimilate them either, hence, a racist discourse will arise. In consequence, rhetorical frontiers are built to "ridiculizar y castigar a los miembros del grupo" (Martínez Falquina 38). Anzaldúa condenses these problems with the example of Chicana lesbians in a male dominant world and theorizes the idea of the 'new mestiza' to talk about the removal of the boundaries between man/woman within



the borderland. In this space in which borders are blurred, she goes on to transmit the many characteristics that borderlands comprehend. It is an ode to her heritage and culture, which claims for a change in the dominant white male rule and attempts to open the way to the assimilation of both cultures.

As we have seen, there is a shared sensation of mixed feelings towards the people living in-between frontiers. In the section *Half and Half*, Anzaldúa uses ambivalence to define a third element due to the hybridization of the frontier. This outcome would perform the “hieros gamos: the coming together of opposite qualities within” (19). As she understands it, an improved third new race or country will emerge. This theory takes its form from an early essay by José Vasconcelos in which he proposed the ideology of the ‘fifth race’ or ‘bronze race’: an agglomeration of all the races in the world, where Latin America has the best conditions to start it up. Even if Vasconcelos used a radical and utopian discourse, the idea of a new race product of the mix and later exchange of cultures has been used by currents like globalization, transnationalism or Transmodernity. In the play it is possible to find a place where the convergence of different cultures and groups of society has been achieved; it is the fountain of Bethesda acting like a hybrid spot that gives shelter to everyone.

Anzaldúa not only introduced the idea of the ‘new mestiza’; in connection with this, the chapter entitled *Entering Into the Serpent*, discusses an element owned by the ‘hybrids.’ She explains this as the “capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (38) that is owned by those who are left outside the tribe for being different. The people capable of this kind of sensitivity have what she calls ‘la facultad.’ To her this aptitude is included in the people who suffer the most: females, homosexuals, the darkskinned, outcasts, the persecuted, the marginalized or the foreign (38). All these so-called minority groups

embrace the same common factor in their lives: fear. This fear makes them more open to identify and perceive the pain of other people.

Taking the idea of ‘la facultad,’ if we go back to the chapter mentioned before, *Half and Half* the author highlights how the “maimed, mad, and sexually different people were believed to possess supernatural powers by primal cultures’ magico-religious thinking” (Anzaldúa 19). Therefore, outcasts and oddities were a threat and at the same time they were feared within society because of this ability found in the people of the in-between. The controversy has its roots in the fact that it is not favorable to generalize the idea that all the people left at the margins of society have a special sense, because that would mean a homogenization of their inner selves and of their purposes. This is a mark of difference that would not entail an inclusion, quite the opposite, it would reinforce their position as outcasts by means of questionable essentialization. In the example of my case analysis, Belize, it is possible to see how during her/his interventions s/he performs this faculty shifting into the position of Roy, Louis or Prior and looking into their souls. By the time Roy is at the death’s door, Belize gives the perfect illustration of ‘la facultad,’ when she uses Louis to give Roy a religious prayer,

BELIZE: *Stop whining.* We have to move fast, I’m supposed to call the duty nurse if his condition changes... (*He looks at Roy*) It’s changed. Take off those glasses you look ridiculous. [...]

LOUIS: What am I doing here?

BELIZE: Expiation for your sins. I can’t take the stuff out myself, I have to tell them he’s dead and fill out all the forms, and I don’t want them confiscating the medicine. I needed a packmule, so I called you.

LOUIS: Why me? You hate me.

BELIZE: I needed a Jew. You were the first to come to mind.

LOUIS: What do you mean you needed...

BELIZE: We’re going to thank him. For the pills.

LOUIS: *Thank him?* [...] I can’t believe you actually pray for...

BELIZE: Louis, I even pray for you. He was a terrible person. He died a harsh death. So maybe... A queen can forgive her vanquished foe. It isn’t easy, it doesn’t count if it’s easy, it’s the hardest thing. Forgiveness. Which

is maybe where love and justice finally meet. Peace, at least. Isn't that what the Kaddish<sup>2</sup> asks for? (Kushner 255-56)

Belize is an empathic character that can be helpful when the right time comes, due to the coincidence of many frontiers in her/his persona. In this excerpt Kushner illustrates how Belize's Christian beliefs and her/his difficult life make her able to forgive all the sins committed by Roy Cohn, who at the end was one of his/her major enemies. Furthermore, with this act of benevolence Belize highlights how the hybrid is transgressing ideological frontiers as some positive values are emphasized, in a double move that can be associated to the Transmodern.

Belize mixes the Latino and Anglo-Saxon race, mixes her/his gender, languages and the traditions and cultures of her/his heritage and her/his current life; s/he tries ancient remedies while being a qualified nurse, melting heritage and modernity, for example. These contrasts make her/him outstanding among the rest of the cast, and consequently, in the society it represents. Anzaldúa denounces how the imposition of dichotomies within society makes the people of the in-between unable to be free. Belize makes this statement clear many times, but one of the most obvious ones is when s/he asserts "I have to go. If I want to spend my whole lonely life looking after white people I can get underpaid to do it" (Kushner 67). From this sentence we may derive two main points that reinforce the structure of the dichotomy: the irony of the black caretaker and the reality of the class struggle. While Belize is a valuable person because of her/his understanding of the pain of others, reinforced by her/his job as a nurse, s/he is also a crucial one to perceive how s/he is rejected due to her being an embodiment of different worlds, a hybrid between many frontiers.

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<sup>2</sup> The Kaddish is the Jewish prayer for the dead (Kushner 255).

Anzaldúa also talked about a necessary change so the people within the borderlands could be incorporated into society. Her perception of the hybrid was further developed by other scholars like the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha. It is indispensable to talk about one of his pivotal books *Location of Culture* (1995), where Bhabha develops the idea of hybridization as a new form of multiculturalism aimed to unveil the contradictions and ambivalences of colonial discourse. Bhabha locates the creation of boundaries in their origin using a colonial/cultural discourse (Martínez Falquina 131). The concept of ambivalence is crucial to the understanding of his idea of the hybrid since it set its basis. Bhabha understands ambivalence as a multiple mindset that moves colonization. Ambivalence appears for example when the colonizer integrates within the colonized/native to seem like one of them, but at the same time he does that without leaving his authoritative position. In other words, the colonizer adapts himself to the medium of the native in order to gain his/her respect and then uses his power to obtain what he really wants, which usually involves preserving his own power. In the longest conversation held between Louis and Belize it is possible to observe how the former uses this ambivalence to get closer to Belize:

LOUIS: *Power is the object, not being tolerated. Fuck assimilation. But I mean in spite of all this the thing about America, I think, is that ultimately we're different from every other nation on earth, in that, with people here of every race, we can't... Ultimately what defines us isn't race, but politics. Not like any European country where there's an insurmountable fact of a kind of racial, or ethnic, monopoly, or monolith [...]; when the race thing gets taken care of, and I don't mean to minimize how major it is, I mean I know it is, this is a really incredibly racist country but it's like, well, the British. I mean, all these blue-eyed pink people. And it's just weird, you know, I mean I'm not all that Jewish-looking, or... well, maybe I am but, you know, in New York everyone is... well not everyone, but so many are but so but in England, in London I walk into bars and I feel like Sid the Yid.* (Kushner 96-97, my emphasis)

On the ground of this excerpt, it is possible to grasp how Louis not only tries once and again to stay where he thinks Belize stands, in the place of the 'other'; but in the

italicized sentences, it is also worth noting that Louis hesitates and reformulates his statements moved by the fear or shame of being integrated within the marginalized group automatically.

On the other hand, to Bhabha hybridity characterizes the double consciousness of the colonized hovering between submission to authority but with a difference, that is, submission to authority on one's own terms. During the conversation above, Belize seems to be ignoring what Louis is saying, therefore, with her/his passivity s/he is accepting that position as given; but at some point in the conversation s/he stops Louis to make her/his opinion visible. By the same token, Bhabha exemplifies this hybridization in the colonizer's text to explain that the presence of the colonized in a colonizer's text makes it automatically a hybrid text. This is because the implied dichotomy shows how Louis, in this case, needs the colonized to express part of his history, for without the colonized, his supremacy is meaningless. A clear case in point is the subject of their conversation, racism; it is not possible to formulate a history of the United States without talking about slavery or the problems of segregation. In connection with this, Louis gives another example of how a history of inclusion/exclusion works in the United Kingdom when he tells Belize how "at one point I met this black gay guy from Jamaica who talked with a lilt but he said his family'd been living in London since before the Civil War—the American one—and how the English never let him forget for a minute that he wasn't blue-eyed and pink" (Kushner 97). The common factor in both countries is the hegemony of the colonizer that will not forget his past in order to maintain his power in the long term, and therefore will make the colonized (or the different) remember that s/he does not belong there. Even if Louis is an ambivalent character, he makes use of his white superiority to

reinforce his colonizer position, although he knows that he can also be discriminated against by means of religion or sexual preference.

Hybridization is in the end “a result of power struggles, of inclusion and exclusion, of subordination and resistance” (Gideonse 7). This is why almost all the characters in *Angels in America* can be characterized as hybrids, which can be seen in terms of sexual preference, or in cultural and religious terms. Roy, Joe, Prior, Belize, Hannah or Louis belong to different minorities, and they live in a society with invisible boundaries that reinforces their feeling of hybrids in a borderland New York City. The inclusion/exclusion dynamic in the play reflects how North American society lives in a constant confrontation daily. Instead of embracing the ancient myth of the melting pot that in the long term would help them to displace the current situation of antagonism, the dominant powers have created an oppositional society. In this way both are the supplement of the other because they have been shaped in this mindset, they are interdependent. It is important to take into account that these hybrid cultures are refuted as objects of study since their limits are questioned “de raíz, y se reinterpretan no como causa y origen de conflictos entre culturas, sino como efecto de prácticas discriminatorias” (Martínez Falquina 143).

What are the options to counteract this dichotomized paradigm that restrains the development and assimilation of the hybrid? Walter Mignolo visualizes different standards within hybrid cultures as processes searching to transcend or deviate from the control of modern and national paradigms (5). On this ground, the deconstruction of frontiers between colonizer/colonized, and the destabilization of hierarchies is essential to the progression of society. To achieve this, a revision of structures within the dominant cultures is necessary, so that the subversion of dichotomies can be accomplished. However, the inversion of opposites needs to be avoided, because that

would just mean a continuation of the same paradigm but under another authoritative power (Martínez Falquina 128). By the same token, the ultimate goal in deconstructing these boundaries would mean the disintegration of the patriarchal and westernized paradigms to clear the path towards a tolerant society. In this sense, the hybrids would be assimilated within common people without the fear of being left outside. It would be a natural step that should be taken if we agree that there is no such thing as a pure culture or identity. If we take into consideration all these arguments, the definition of Transmodernity can be consistently applied here, since the target of this paradigm entails the deconstruction of frontiers that do not exactly break with the past, but instead it focuses on a continuity and social progression by means of which different paradigms and parts of the world are interconnected.

## 4. Conclusions

This dissertation has attempted to open the debate about the possibility of including *Angels in America*, and consequently Tony Kushner, within the new paradigm of Transmodernism. With this intention, I have chosen the apparently secondary character of Belize, an ex-ex-black drag queen, to illustrate such possibility. The project has discussed the convenience of interpreting the play and the author within this paradigm from a twofold perspective. An initial part that has exposed the Modernist and Postmodernist influences and viewpoints in this playwright's works, and that ultimately has led me to examine Transmodernism. To support my idea of Kushner's incorporation to the new paradigm, I have focused my attention on the study of the 'other' and I have applied the terms of race and gender to highlight the stereotyping and subsequent rejection of Belize in a Westernized country. This has showed me how the playwright articulated that third new option suggested by Rodríguez Magda, and besides, how the concept of the hybrid becomes relevant in relation to the creation and subversion of invisible frontiers in the colonial dynamic that characterizes Belize and her/his relationships.

Over the first part of the project, I have taken the influences of Modernism in Kushner to see how, above all, the philosophies of Walter Benjamin and his conceptualization of historical materialism not as finite but as a continuum is present in this author's work. In essence, this influence highlights what can be discerned with the naked eye: a marked leftist line that is reinforced by the philosophies and a general feeling of change of the Modernists. In my analysis of these two topics, it can be observed why Kushner finds himself so comfortable with the ideas of Modernism.



On the basis of this influence, I have used the article of Stanton B. Garner, who interprets the play as a Postmodern example framing it mainly within the eschatological motif. With the perspective of the apocalypse as one of the most important features to take into account, I think that although an end-of-times narrative can be found on the surface of the play, as I have argued, there is a constant presence between lines that forces the narrative towards the future not just as a forthcoming catastrophic end, but as a chance to achieve all the necessary transformations to improve the world. Nonetheless, Tony Kushner finds the complete rupture with the past that characterizes Postmodernism problematic. The playwright affirmed that he was not yet ready to undertake some of the ideas of that paradigm because of such radical break. Kushner is an author who prefers the assimilation and incorporation of different elements and influences rather than a drastic positioning into a particular category. Some scholars have found real traces of Postmodernism in Kushner, not only in his use of the apocalypse but also in his view of history or his use of parody. But as I have argued, Kushner neither seeks a rupture with the past nor thinks of the apocalypse as something radical and totalizing; he goes beyond oppositions like these. In view of this, the idea of Transmodernity adjusts to the way in which Kushner makes use of different discourses applied to the play's characters to cross not only ideological frontiers established within society (like sexual preference, religion or politics), but also to show the playwright's depiction of the future as a forthcoming time in which everything and everyone will be interconnected.

This is why rounding off the argument of Kushner's contextualization, I have introduced the paradigm of Transmodernity and the reasons why, to my contention, its main characteristics can be seen in the play, especially in the character of Belize. Transmodernity does not seek to negate Modernity or Postmodernity; instead of that, it

tries to assimilate the current global changes and, therefore, it attempts to find alternatives to the problems that society faces. In the approach offered by Rodríguez Magda to the third new option breaking through the dualism of the world, it is possible to make a connection with the position of the 'other.' It would entail a de-marginalizing process that could be feasible through sociopolitical changes, and likewise, a challenge to the purity claims of the dominant power. Kushner uses these premises similarly on account of how he captured the sociopolitical turmoil of AIDS, the end of the Cold War and the alleged end of history that claimed for a change in the global depiction of hegemonic powers: patriarchy, secular institutions, and dualism. In this sense, it is true that Kushner's play seems to follow the Transmodern motivations of looking for the assimilation and integration of different cultures to achieve the right development of society. In the configuration of Transmodernity the crossing of boundaries is established so there will be no limit that can divide and marginalize people; on the contrary, interchange will be fostered, even if society needs to make a great effort to reach this objective. Belize is then the perfect subject case to exemplify this fundamental change, s/he sees in the future a space-time where everything and everyone are interconnected, where there is actually a tangible acceptance of all people.

The visible preference of the 'other' within the Transmodern paradigm made me embrace that perspective and analyze it in the character of Belize, who is undoubtedly marked by race and gender stereotypes that accentuate her/his depiction as a marginal character. In her/his portrayal Belize meets the requirements to illustrate why s/he can be the embodiment of most stereotypes and why similarly s/he is the manifestation of the third option offered by Transmodernity as the new way of looking at the past and moving forward to the future. Belize, as the real abject, is the threat of the racial hostility of Roy, the subtle critique of society in terms of gender and the rejection of

her/his culture that discloses the real attitudes of Prior. Belize belongs to the minority group in the dual view, but rather than remain still, s/he is constantly fighting to break the boundaries that oppress her/him.

To reinforce the conceptualization of the ‘other,’ I have made use of one of Gloria Anzaldúa’s key texts to observe how Belize is eventually positioned in an invisible space of the border, which in turn is the outcome of social rejection. It is in that space that the hybrid coexists with the rest of the inhabitants. In connection with this, the formation of these frontiers was necessary for the creation and maintaining of the colonial/hegemonic discourses and, therefore, the dichotomy in society in the view of Homi Bhabha. Even if the differences of Belize are more visible in the dualism that is maintained until almost the end of the play, it can be seen that ultimately, the barriers that obstructed the approach of the characters due to their prejudices have been blurred. Contrary to the desperate efforts of the dominant power to maintain the hegemony of their concept of purity—visible in the mindset of Roy—hybridity emerges as the right alternative ready to set the machinery towards the future in motion. In consequence, linking this premise with the paradigm of Transmodernity, the final scenario of the epilogue thought by Kushner in his play is conceivable. To him the end is just a process of change in which integration is possible, instead of being an apocalyptic or traumatic one. It is an integration of everyone that does not mean either a homogenization—at least not in the way Vasconcelos suggested—or a utopian thought in which after the achievements of the formulations laid by Transmodernity, everything will be perfect; as Prior rightfully appoints,

[t]his 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. We will be citizens. The time has come. Bye now. You are fabulous

creatures, each and every one of you. And I bless you: *More Life*. The Great Work Begins. (Kushner 280)

*Angels in America* unfolds the necessary transition of a new mentality that should be built to obtain a real progress in society. The deconstruction of borders between colonizer/colonized, and the subsequent destabilization of hierarchies is essential to the progression of society. As Kushner skillfully suggests through the development of the plot and characterization, this is a revision of the structures within the dominant culture; it is a proposal that requires the subversion of dichotomies to support the consolidation of a new society where everyone can become a part of it, another citizen, not just an outcast that does not fit in the dominant canon, but a person that can introduce and vindicate his/her identity. A harsh critique of the North American myth and traditions is offered, and the irony of the melting pot where indeed nothing melted is highlighted. This analysis has exposed the case of Belize to exemplify how old attitudes of discrimination become very real when we take a closer look at concepts like hybridity, Othering or the frontier. The destabilization of antagonistic discourses configured to the prolongation of their supremacy is the main target of the narrative in Kushner's text. *Angels in America* upholds plurality as the only means for moving forward and eventually the playwright abandons conservative attitudes from religious, social, political or even emotional backgrounds that appeared at the beginning of the play. This is what happens when Belize is asked by Roy Cohn what heaven is like:

ROY COHN: (*delirious, under the impression that Belize is the Angel of Death*) Can I ask you something, sir?

BELIZE: "Sir"?

ROY COHN: What's it like? After?

BELIZE: After...?

ROY COHN: This misery ends?

BELIZE: Hell or heaven?

ROY COHN: (*laughs*)

BELIZE: Like San Francisco.

ROY COHN: A city! Good! I was worried... it'd be a garden. I hate that shit.

BELIZE: Mmmm. Big city. Overgrown with weeds, but flowering weeds. On every corner a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty corner to that. Windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens.

ROY COHN: Isaiah.

BELIZE: Prophet birds, Roy. Piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian, and diamond-colored cowspit streamers in the wind. And voting booths. And everyone in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion. And all the deities are creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers. Race, taste and history finally overcome. And you ain't there.

ROY COHN: And Heaven?

BELIZE: That was Heaven, Roy.

ROY COHN: The fuck it was! (Kushner 209-10)

The image of Heaven offered by Belize is an allegory of Kushner's final aim. There, nobody can be targeted for their differences, whether sexual, physical, religious or political. The fact that Belize is describing this to Roy, who is opposed to any kind of change, is more than symbolic; the playwright is giving him/her the voice to say what s/he really thinks about Heaven, or the future. Even if the reader is not able to witness in the play what happens when the millennium comes, *Angels in America* offers as a possibility the union of race and history, becoming representative of Transmodernity and laying the foundations for a new context in the future.

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V<sup>o</sup>B<sup>a</sup>

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