Tony Kushner

Honorary Degree Citation

Tony Kushner
Doctor of Letters
May 25, 2004

Playwright, social critic, activist, you, Tony Kushner, are one of the most important dramatists of our time. You used your art to make a nation take notice of the tragedy of AIDS, and you continue to create great theater that garners rave reviews and challenges audiences.

You were born in 1956 in New York City, but your family soon moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where your father ran the family lumberyard. Your parents were classical musicians, and your home was filled with art. Seeing your mother onstage was one of the first things that sparked your interest in drama.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Columbia University, you studied directing in graduate school at New York University, partly because you were not confident of your chances to become a playwright. Among your early plays are Stella (1987), an adaptation from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and A Bright Room Called Day (1987).

In the early '90s the epic, seven-hour, two-part masterpiece you authored transformed you into the most highly acclaimed playwright of your generation. Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes became a Broadway blockbuster and earned you a Pulitzer Prize, two Tony Awards, and two Drama Desk Awards, among many others. Recently made into an HBO film, your groundbreaking play focuses on themes of homosexuality, AIDS, and spirituality in the United States at the end of the second millennium.

Your work has been produced at the Mark Taper Forum, the New York Shakespeare Festival, New York Theatre Workshop, Hartford Stage Company, and the Los Angeles Theatre Center as well as theaters in over 30 countries. You taught at New York University's Dramatic Writing program and have received numerous awards, including two Obie Awards for Playwriting; a Whiting Writer's Fellowship; an Arts Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; the PEN/Laura Pels Award for a Mid-Career Playwright; a Spirit of Justice Award from the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders; and a Cultural Achievement Award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Your other plays include Homebody/Kabul, a play written before September 11 that links the modern worlds of London to the fundamentalist politics of the Taliban, and the musical Caroline or Change, a work set in Civil Rights-era Louisiana.

The Dyson College of Arts and Sciences honored you with a Distinguished Achievement Award in 2002. And this spring you brought your talents to Pace University's Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts. A cast featuring stars from several of your acclaimed shows read a series of short works, including your work-in-progress Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy.

For insisting on the playwright's role as political provocateur, and for your commitment to the arts at this institution, Pace University is honored to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Letters, honoris causa, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto.

Aniello A. Bianco '61
Chairman, Board of Trustees

David A. Caputo
President, Pace University

Source URL: http://www.pace.edu/commencement/commencement-2004/honorary-degree-recipients-3/tony-kushner