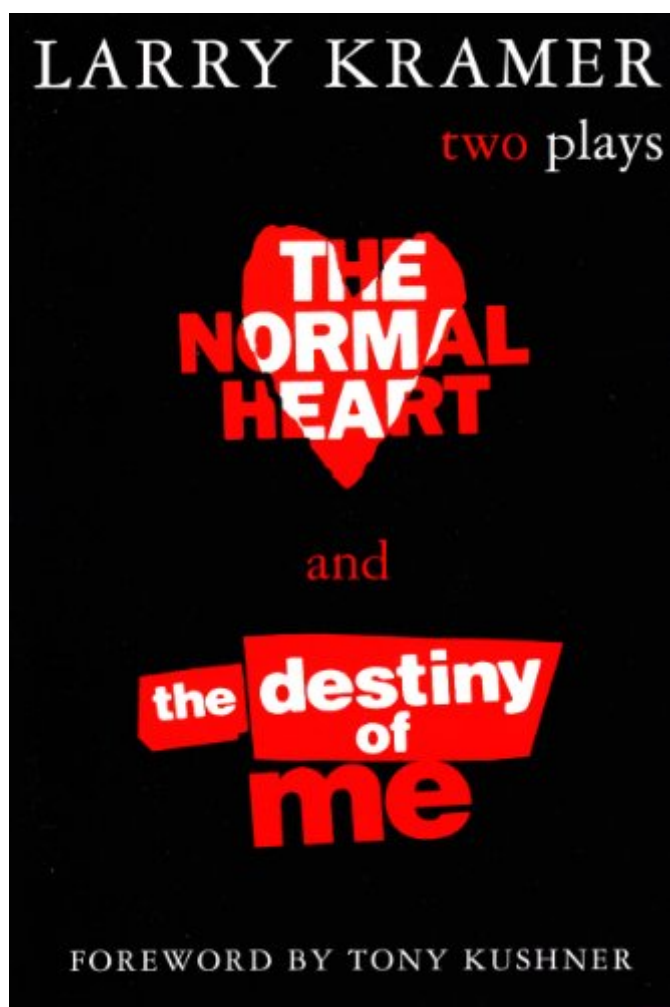


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# The Normal Heart And The Destiny Of Me: Two Plays



## Synopsis

The Normal Heart, set during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, is the impassioned indictment of a society that allowed the plague to happen, a moving denunciation of the ignorance and fear that helped kill an entire generation. It has been produced and taught all over the world. Its companion play, The Destiny of Me, is the stirring story of an AIDS activist forced to put his life in the hands of the very doctor he has been denouncing.

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## Customer Reviews

Larry Kramer is a man with strong emotions, and he has a special talent for translating those emotions to the written word so that they may be translated back to the spoken word by others in the form of a drama without any loss of that emotional urgency. I had the opportunity to see the original production of a stellar example of Kramer's dramatic skills, The Normal Heart, at New York's Public Theater in 1985 with Brad Davis as its star, the original Ned Weeks. It was a shattering evening, and the play struck me with the force of a hurricane. Reading the play for the first time over 30 years later, I'm still powerfully impacted by the forcefulness of Kramer's words. Although the play

is set in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, when the number of the dead was still only in the thousands, it does not seem dated in the least. The Royal National Theatre of Great Britain has included the play in its list of the 100 greatest plays of the twentieth century, and the honor is well deserved. Kramer's play speaks to universal values and passions which can withstand the passage of time. Undoubtedly students will be studying this text and actors will be performing this play for many years to come. *The Destiny of Me*, a companion play to *The Normal Heart* also featuring Ned Weeks as the protagonist, is a memory play and is not quite the primal scream of the earlier drama. It is set a number of years after *The Normal Heart* when Ned Weeks has become ill, but, occasionally confusingly, it also is set in Weeks' youth. Despite the muted emotional tones (as contrasted with *The Normal Heart*), the play still packs quite the powerful punch, a punch sufficiently strong that the play was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in drama the year it was first produced. Because of the ebb and flow in time setting from Weeks' childhood to his present, this play probably works much better when seen in performance than when read as a text. *The Destiny of Me* requires a reader with a skilled imagination to play out the drama in his or her head in order for it to be fully appreciated. Merely reading and absorbing the words will not do this drama justice. Nevertheless, the effort should be made because this drama, too, is one that is likely to withstand the passage of time. It is a play very much of its time at the same time it is a play that, like its predecessor, takes up universal values and passions. These are the elements of great drama; these are the elements of the two plays by Larry Kramer in this timeless volume.

The rating and description are mainly for the first of these two plays, "*The Normal Heart*," which is Kramer's angry and heart-wrenching account of the social response to AIDS in the early years of its appearance in New York. A long-time admirer of Randy Shilts' book "*And the band played on*" I found this to be a condensed, angrier, and more impassioned companion piece; in fact I'm assigning it as the first of three pieces on AIDS in a course I've developed on disease narratives. Kramer's play is the artist/playwright/care-giver/activist's perspective; Shilts (excerpts only) will be the journalistic viewpoint and Abraham Verghese's "*My own country*" rounds it out with a doctor's account. "*The Destiny of Me*," while doubtless brilliant and troubling in its own way, did not quite do it for me maybe because it was a much more personal story that I couldn't relate to. I still think it's worth a read.. but am glad that I'd decided on the former for the course. My other choice would have been "*Angels in America*" by Tony Kushner but ultimately I went with Kramer's play not because as it's closer to the events as they happened. What's really shocking in an eye-opening way reading this play several decades since it was written is the fact that the word AIDS does not even make an

appearance once! And yet it's obvious what's being talked about. Anybody interested in human behavior, in sickness & how to cope with the fears that come with uncertainty or in this case, sheer ignorance, should read this and be outraged.

I so enjoyed this book. It brought forward all that they had to fight for. In some ways i was ashamed of how this country could not see what was going on here and how those who were in need of medical attention were denied it. I for one don't judge people for their sexual preference. It is not for me to say. It is up to who they believe their maker is. I do not believe in a vengeful God. i believe in a loving God. He gave us free will, so in a sense he left it up to us to decide how to live our lives. As long as they are good people and a loving people why should i be their judge and jury. How do they say it i am a straight person. I have a loving husband and two children that I hope I have brought up to not judge how others live. We have all kinds of good friends and yes some of them are gay and trans-sexual. I thank my father for how he brought my brothers and I up. he said, "until someone proves that they can't be trusted keep them as your friend, until such time as they do you wrong." He taught us well and because of him I have a very good friends. Thank You for asking how I felt about this story. i wish Everybody a very happy and healthy life.

I have never read a Larry Kramer play nor have I been introduce to much literature about the AIDS epidemic, but these plays deliver a touching narration on not only historical context but the emotional impact on the characters of this play. The Normal Heart deserves its critical acclamation and our attention as artist and as a fellow citizens of the world. It is not afraid to bring out the dark details of this time and stamp a message that should be heralded in today's time. The Destiny of Me, in my opinion is just as strong of a play, but focuses more on the deliverance of the main characters ego and the stacks of being a human being in this time period. I strongly recommend this play not only as a thespian, but to anyone wanting to understand the AIDS epidemic on a deeper level. I will definitely be reading more literature by Mr. Kramer.

I used to teach playwriting and have found some of the most beautiful fiction (and in this case, non-fiction), in plays. After seeing the play ages ago, and more recently the movie, I wanted to be able to read the absolute poetry of The Normal Heart. Simply wonderful.

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