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The second half of Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning epic *Angels in America*, *Perestroika* steers the characters introduced in *Millennium Approaches* from the opportunistic eighties to a new sense of community in the nineties.

Perestroika Details

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From Reader Review Perestroika for online ebook

Mel Bossa says

There was a scene in the movie Still Alice when the maddeningly sexy Kristen Stewart reads Harper's last monologue from this play to her mother, and it tore my heart out HARD.

The words of the monologue were so unique and touching. I looked up the play and was happy to find it in the queer library close to my house. Read it in a day or two and I have to say I've never read anything quite like Angels in America before.

GOD I LOVE JEWISH WRITERS!!!!!!!!!!!!!! There I said it.

And GAY JEWISH WRITERS.

My brain had multiple orgasms reading Kushner's witty, stark, wild, righteously angry, politically incorrect, loving, generous, imaginative prose. I only have one question.

HOW?

I mean, how the fuck did he pull this off? Every character in here, from the life-affirming black nurse Belize (Drag Queen name), to Joe the closeted republican clerk, to his wife Harper, the fragile woman in love with her gay husband, to Prior, the terrified man AIDS who is visited by the Angel with the Silver wings, down to his all too human and cowardly boyfriend Louis who abandons him alone in a hospital... They lived. They were so vividly rendered. I ate this up like Tom Cruise eats up Scientology cookies.

And let's not forget the majestically honest and brutally uncompromising Roy Cohn.

Whew. This isn't a review. It's a plead to you all to read this read this read this!!!!

Yet, through all the humor and careful wake-up calls in this masterpiece--Tony Kushner's testimony--I began to feel raw like a fresh wound. Because that's what Angels in America really is twenty years later: a transcript of a time when men ten years younger than I am today were dying, dropping like flies, while the Reagan administration looked the other way.

Only through art, literature and in the hearts of those who still love them can those young men be remembered.

elle says

UGH this play is so smart. you know a show is good when it completely breaks you down and builds you back up again. this play genuinely changed my life

Monica says

Re-read to teach it. This read, I gained a real appreciation for its structure--down to the fact that part one opens with "Hello and Good morning" and part two ends with, "Bye, now."

Hadrian says

Wooooowwwww.

Despite its rather long duration for a play, comprising some seven hours acted all out, this is very tightly written. Each little scene, every bit of dialogue, has some reach or development or meaning to it. The characters are passionate and dynamic. All of them matter. All are played by the same little group of actors.

This play goes over a lot, and I'm not really sure I can give the play its proper due with my meager summaries. Politics, gnosticism, love, class, how God has abandoned us to the Republicans and spread plagues and hellfire, and prophecy, and all sorts of fun things.

You really ought to read this, gay or not, whatever you are, I'm not going to smack a label on it. There's something here, as there is in many of the great works, about a common thread of humanity.

Scotty Cameron says

It's really too bad that we can't do fractions of stars, because I would like to note that I liked Part Two better than Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches. Oh well, now it's noted.

Part Two started off, as expected, where Part One left off. Part One set the politically- and existentially-charged tones, so Part Two was able to jump right in. The dialogue is, as one would expect from a Kushner play, explosive. My only problem with this that I can think of right off the top of my head is the editorial structure. Punctuation was changed in some places from a question mark to something else for emphasis, but some of this just muddled the meaning instead of clarifying.

Despite some of the syntax ambiguity, the messages remain. Human nature, desire, and sexuality are all looked at under a critical lens. The inclusion of Jewish and Mormon faiths were also particularly interesting since these aren't looked at as often, especially in the context of mid-80's New York.

Overall: read this immediately after Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches. They're both short, so there really isn't much of an excuse. Now, I'd love to go see a live performance.

Donnie says

While I do believe that *Angels in America* is a cohesive experience between the two plays, it's inevitable to stack the two of them together. While there's certainly aspects of *Millennium Approaches* that are absolutely beautiful, there's something about *Perestroika* that truly stuck with me in a way that I am still trying to process, in spite of the months it's been since I was first introduced to this play.

Before I get any further, you've probably seen a decent amount of criticisms toward *Perestroika* (including some from Kushner himself) that speak to how it's just not written as tightly as *Millennium Approaches*. It alternates between a strength and a weakness of this part. There are moments that feel disorienting and you legitimately need to wait until the end of the scene before you see any remote aspect of payoff. You're presented with optional scenes that may not be used, but are still interesting to see from the standpoint of the creative process and how it can and will change at times.

Even the story itself pushes our understanding where *Millennium Approaches* doesn't. You are till in New York City, until you're suspended in the air, whether you're flying toward San Francisco or getting caught up in the bureaucracy that is heaven. Even then, there's something so human about every moment. Every broken heart, every snide remark, every declaration feels like an amalgamation of not only my own experiences as a gay person, but of many other people's. I assume it's what makes this whole thing still feel so relevant. Yes, there's a lot that can be said concerning the connection between Roy Cohn and Donald Trump. Sure, we can talk about how we are still reeling from many of Reagan's policies. But there is something to be said about how, even in 2018, I feel that I have hit similar emotional beats that these characters have.

Ultimately, this is a play that I'm glad I visited when I did and I'm excited to revisit it periodically. I can sense that there will be things that I will find new things with every time I reread it. I'm curious what I'm going to find next time.

Mia (Parentheses Enthusiast) says

It is a madman's undertaking, *Angels in America*.

It's a work of staggering grandiosity and ambition, no doubt. To portray human drama intimately and without pretension; to examine the politics and morality at play in a cross-section of not-too-distant history; to create a cast of characters that are three-dimensional and complex; to ruminate on the Big Stuff, love and death and forgiveness, and the Contemporary Stuff, homosexuality and modern religion and partisanship; to weave all these things into a gripping, moving, hilarious, intense, strange, wonderful story, all the while infusing it with all manner of Judeo-Christian allusion and historical context and intriguing philosophy. Who on Earth would sign up for such a task of their own volition? Who could even attempt to carry all of this out?

Tony Kushner, apparently. And, by God, does he do a fucking spectacular job of it.

Perestroika is a very different play than *Millennium Approaches*, and you'll realise that quickly, but you'll understand just as quickly that the quality and the heart of the second remains just as high and just as true as

in the first. While Part I cultivated a sense of eagerness and impending salvation mixed with a foreboding and a fear of judgment, Part II deals with the messy business of what happens *after* the Angel arrives, after the Great Work is undertaken.

It doesn't make sense to talk much about the plot, because it's a continuation of Part I and giving a way a little bit is liable to cause the whole spool to unravel, and I don't want to spoil anything. What I will say, though, is that I feel like I *should've* been unsatisfied, but I wasn't. In any other story, I probably would dislike the looseness, the lack of structure, the way that—objectively—not much actually happens (compared to *Millennium*, at least). But something about this play made all of that perfect. I still felt closure, and it felt like a coherent plot that didn't have the sort of intricate twists that a less talented writer has to rely on, simply because it didn't need them. The characters and the internal dynamics were more than enough.

This (*Angels in America* as a whole) is a very gay play, and I mean that in the absolute best way. And not just that many of the characters are gay (I don't think there's one heterosexual kiss in the entirety of Part II) but that homosexuality and AIDS and drag and such are dealt with really well, with such tenderness and introspection and searching for truth. Kushner himself is gay so this shouldn't be surprising, but it still is; because on television and in movies and even in several books, the most we see of gay people are their surfaces, very rarely do authors or creators take the time to consider gay characters not based on how they can further the plot or help the (always hetero) protagonist, but what they're like as people, how being gay affects their lives and their relationships. Kushner doesn't stick to focusing on saccharine positives (cheery, sassy Gay Best Friend) nor on melodramatic negatives (Bury Your Gays). Prior, Louis, Belize, Joe, Roy—being gay affects them all in different ways, highlighting different facets of their personalities, revealing much more about themselves in how they react to it rather than by the simple (and rather bland) fact that they're "friends of Dorothy."

I should talk about the humour here too, which is something I forgot to mention in my review of Part I. Tony Kushner is funny, and the comedic touches in these two plays are always tasteful and they always land—Prior himself made me laugh out loud a few times, and not because he's the stereotypical witty queen, but because he's legitimately intelligent and fiercely emotional and the way he speaks his mind is bloody hilarious. And even apart from the dialogue, there's something so deliciously subversive in making the Prophet a gay man dying of AIDS, or fully embracing the hermaphroditism of angels, or sending the Valium-addicted Mormon housewife up to heaven for a little detour. Apart from being funny with their absurdity, they mirror the absurdity of life and history, and they're profound in that they blend the mundane and the fantastic together so well.

Which leads me right into where I wanted to end, my greatest praise of *Angels in America*: its astonishing ability to meld raw humanity with lofty philosophy. Authors who can paint beautifully in broad strokes, waxing poetic on grand points and skilfully weaving theories and belief systems, your Ralph Waldo Emersons or whathaveyous, they captivate us. Authors who can frame a simple conflict or personal dilemma to reveal the depths and complexities of the human heart, who can probe our spirit and our emotions with incredible subtlety and nuance, they make us feel. But authors who can do both, who can fuse the concrete and the abstract, the idyllic and the real, the broad and the narrow, the should-be and the is, who can play the part of the Angel and the AIDS patient and recognise that both are equally important and powerful—they're masterful. And rare.

And Tony Kushner is one of them.

Kar Wai Ng says

Six stars!!

Kushner wrote the play for 2 parts, 2 evenings — “I can’t get these people to change fast enough”, he said. Understanding that his characters all changed by the end of the play, and why, are crucial (just) to even start digesting this monumental piece of work. Just to start digesting. I was in a void of reading any new materials the next two days just to replay scenes over and over in my mind. And YouTube, I need to find the Angels in America series. Or if I would happen to be in NYC the next few months, I should catch the play.

Dave says

I go back and forth. Which part of *Angels in America* do I like more? Such an interior debate is really a sign of my continued bondage to modernist taxonomic urges, but that doesn't stop the back and forth. *Perestroika* offers a compelling, hard look at...I have no better word than America. Kushner has definitely done his homework. So much so, in fact, that I worry about readers not familiar with Mormon/Jewish cosmologies (not to mention the nuance of 80s US politics) missing the phenomenal symbolism and word play.

At the same time, I hesitate before recommending this play. A current resident of Provo, UT, I can think of more Jewish friends than Mormons with whom I would feel comfortable discussing Kushner's work. OK, more friends of any kind than Mormon friends. Kushner's graphic style is either considered art or filth. But it's this polarizing effect that tells me that *Angels in America* should be read by a wider audience, regardless of comfort level.

That being said, I'll recommend it...with provisions. You need to be mature. You need have a strong stomach. And you need to resist dismissing the play just because it subverts much of what you believe. Once you've come out on the other side, you can, like Prior, demand "more life."

Angélique (Angel) says

Just wow. After having to read Millennium Approaches for a class, I decided to read *Perestroika* out of curiosity; but I never imagined it could be so...vast, so absolutely beautiful. The progression of the characters both in *Perestroika* alone and in the work as a whole is just riveting. No character is static, which kept my mind turning, trying to come to terms with each of them. I love the reality of their emotions. The reality of anger, of fear, of abandonment, of insane distancing. It all meshes together so well in a shower of emotions and ideologies and paradigms. Honestly, it's just hard to describe how much I enjoyed this play. Even the use of sex as a metaphor is handled so tactfully and candidly that it didn't turn me away from the play but really emphasized the tones and themes Kushner tried to present. The strongest part, however, was definitely the ending. The hope that just poured out of that last scene brought tears to my eyes, because it wasn't some fantasy hope filled with rainbows and unicorns, it was the hope of someone who knows that life sucks sometimes and that crap hits the fan unexpectedly sometimes, but that despite it all we can still keep moving forward. That sentiment is the most important thing I will take away from the entirety of *Angels in America*.

Elliot Ratzman says

Kushner's epic work is inspired holy writ to me, imagining some of the most moving enactments of Law and Grace. The HBO movie adaptation is excellent, but it leaves out a few lines and scenes here and there. All who loved the movie should read through the play as well. The play is on its surface about AIDS and 80s politics. A ballet of relationships of erstwhile father-figures, friends and lovers dance through the stresses of illness, addiction and identity. There are angels, ghosts and prophets. Jews, Mormons and Gays—three “chosen” diaspora peoples—wrestle with their good and bad angels, with the absence of God and with the challenge of political progress without utopian ends. This play is no mere period piece, but a meditation on the human condition—all live with “the virus of time” and the challenge of negotiating law and love, grace and works. It ends: “We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come...The Great Work Begins.”

Matt says

A couple of my favorite lines below, although the play is so chock full, it's hard to distinguish the distinguished. The first, however, is especially appropriate for "these times"...

Roy:... The worst thing about being sick in America, Ethel, is you are booted out of the parade. Americans have no use for sick. Look at Reagan: He's so healthy he's hardly human, he's a hundred if he's a day, he takes a slug in his chest and two days later he's out west riding ponies in his PJ's. I mean who does that? That's America. It's just no country for the infirm. (p. 62)

Harper: In your experience of the world. How do people change?

Mormon Mother: Well it has something to do with God so it's not very nice. God splits the skin with a jagged thumbnail from throat to belly and then plunges a huge filthy hand in, he grabs hold of your bloody tubes and they slip to evade his grasp but he squeezes hard, he insists, he pulls and pulls till all your innards are yanked out and the pain! We can't even talk about that. And then he stuffs them back, dirty, tangled and torn. It's up to you to do the stitching. (p. 79)

Dan Gorman says

The play comes to a profound end. An absent God does not mean the end of the human spirit, even if it means the end of the world. We create the hope we need by being honest with each other, and by showing love to those who need it most. I've read few bits of literature as profound as Prior Walter's final blessing: “You are fabulous creatures, each and every one... More life.”

Janitag says

No other play continues to amaze and inspire me the way *Angels in America* does. I love the second part even more than the first. I never find words big enough to describe my affection towards this play.

PRIO: It just... It just... We can't just stop. We're not rocks, progress, migration, motion is... modernity. It's animate, it's what living things do. We desire. Even if all we desire is stillness, it's still desire *for*. Even if we go faster than we should. We can't *wait*. And wait for what? God... God... He isn't coming back. And even if he did... If He ever did come back, if He ever *dared* to show His face, or his Glyph or whatever in the Garden again... if after all this destruction, if after all the terrible days of this terrible century He returns to see... how much suffering His abandonment had created, if He did come back you should *sue* the bastard. That's my only contribution to all this Theology. Sue the bastard for walking out. How dare He.

But still. Still. Bless me anyway. I want more life. I can't help myself. I do. I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but... You see them living anyway.

Bill Kerwin says

I looked forward to this conclusion of *Angels in America*, anticipating that *Perestroika* would be the resolution of an undisputed American classic. Alas, I was disappointed. It is a powerful work, full of ambitious experiments and powerful effects, but it is too diffuse and disorganized to fulfill the promise of the nearly perfect *Millennium Approaches*.

I hesitated as I wrote the preceding paragraph, for fear I may be guilty of a common critical failing: criticizing a work for not doing what it never intended to do at all. Indeed, the author Tony Kushner himself issued this cautionary statement in his “Playwright’s Notes”:

It should also be said that “Millennium Approaches” and “Perestroika” are very different plays, and if one is producing them in repertory the difference should be reflected in their designs. “Perestroika” proceeds forward from the wreckage made by the Angel’s traumatic entry at the end of “Millennium”. A membrane is broken; there is disarray and debris.

Nicely put, but I don’t buy it. Disorder can exhibited without being modeled; at the very least, they can be contained within an overarching structure. *King Lear* does this, so does *Moby Dick*. But I don’t think *Perestroika*--as fine as it is—achieves this sort of greatness.

The sequence of *Perestroika*’s scenes is anything but inevitable, and individual scenes sometimes end without anything approaching resolution. Louis condemnation of Joe’s politics, though rhetorically effective, is dramatically inadequate, Roy’s decline seems rushed, and Joe just seems to get lost along the way. Worse, some scenes seem arbitrary, not really necessary at all. (Kushner admits as much in his “Notes,” suggesting Act Five, Scene 5 can be severely truncated in performance, and Act Five, Scenes 6 and 9 cut entirely.)

Still, with all its faults, this is an effective work. The angels are appropriately alien and impressive, Louis’ Kaddish for Roy, and Ethel’s reconciliation with him, are extraordinarily moving, and the low key, gentle comic ending strikes just the right note. For all its “disarray and debris,” everything in *Perestroika* affirms Kushner’s beliefs that “the body is the garden of the soul” and that life is a continual restructuring (*perestroika*), a leap into the unknown.

This 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
