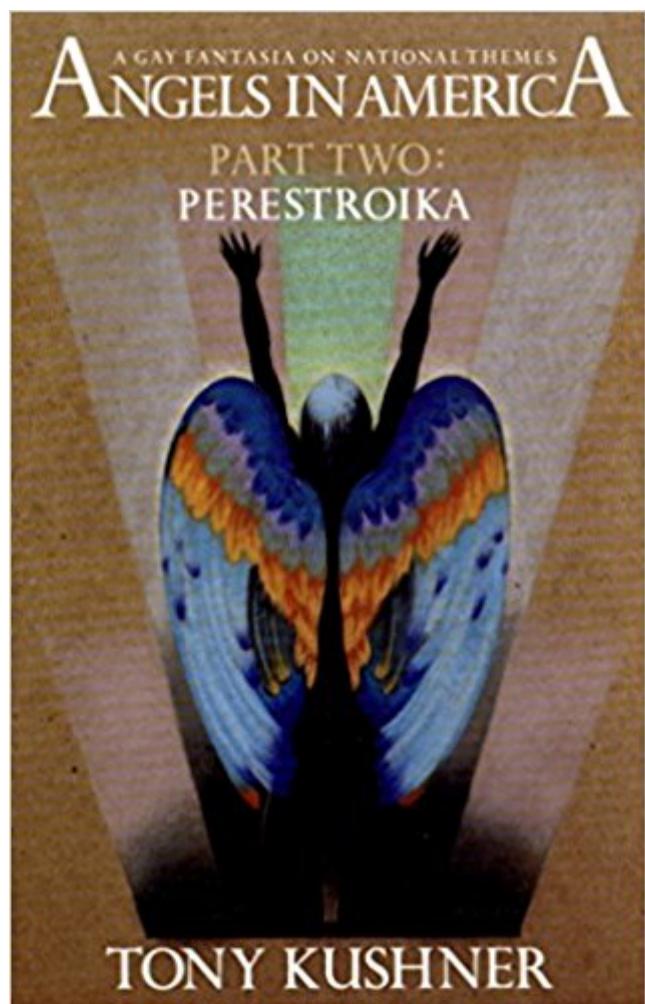


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# Angels In America, Part Two: Perestroika



## **Synopsis**

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. "Not only a stunning resolution of the resounding human drama of *Millennium Approaches*, but also a true millennial work of art."--Frank Rich, *The New York Times*

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The same masterful writing that won Kushner the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Millennium Approaches* (Part 1 of *Angels*, Theatre Communications Grp., 1993) is carried forward here. Capable of being understood as a self-contained play, *Perestroika* continues from the final scene of *Millennium*, wherein an angel had crashed through the ceiling of young Prior's apartment. One is shocked, moved, touched, and saddened yet ultimately uplifted by this delightful story involving the angel, Prior, and six other mortal characters. Kushner uses his humor and wit to show the harshness, fear, and sadness that surrounds anyone touched by AIDS. Prior's closing statement, spoken to the audience, speaks for this play as well: "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. Bye now. You are fabulous creatures, each and every one." Essential for contemporary drama collections.

H. Robert Malinowsky, Univ. of Illinois, Chicago

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Tony Kushner's plays include *A Bright Room Called Day* and *Slavs!*; as well as adaptations of Corneille's *The Illusion*, Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Brecht's *The Good Person of Szecguan* and Goethe's *Stella*. Current projects include: *Henry Box Brown* or *The Mirror of Slavery*; and two musical plays: *St. Cecilia* or *The Power of Music* and *Caroline or Change*. His collaboration with Maurice Sendak on an American version of the children's opera, *Brundibar*, appeared in book form Fall 2003. Kushner grew up in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and he lives in New York.

In the afterword, Mr. Kushner wrote: "Americans pay high prices for maintaining the myth of the Individual: We have no system of universal health care, we don't educate our children, we can't pass sane gun control laws, we elect presidents like Reagan, we hate and fear inevitable processes like aging and death." He wrote that in 1993. One can only imagine how he is handling America in 2017. This play has numerous characters, but there are eight principles. Only three of them are decent (I'm leaving out The Angel): Prior Walter, who is dying from AIDS; Belize, a former drag queen and current nurse; and Hannah, the Mormon mother of one of the other main characters (she is the most interesting and least predictable). We don't have to like characters to learn or be entertained from them, but Mr. Kushner spends SO much time on these characters' failing relationships with each other, so their unlikability is a problem. Set in the mid-80s, AIDS is a scourge that is killing gays and President Reagan is trying to undo the New Deal. Roy Cohn is a real life character who appears in this play - the words are fiction but the history is accurate. Cohn is a laywer and a Reagan flunky. He worked with Joe McCarthy (this is mentioned) and was a mentor to Donald Trump (this isn't but readers post-2015 should be keenly aware of this). Cohn is also a closeted homosexual who is dying of AIDS. Act Three, Scene 2 and Act Four, Scene 9 are the strength of the play and are 5-star scenes. Despite despising Mr. Cohn and what he stands for, Mr. Kushner allows him to appear human and even sympathetic as he is dying. It's a good trick. Louis's rant about the problems in the legal system in the latter scene is fantastic - he provides detail and passion. I wish Mr. Kushner had made more scenes like these and less that focused on the characters' relationships with each other.

last month i just buy this book its a good story, must read its affordable

Part one and two are just so amazing. *Angels In America* is one of the best works of its time. Kushner really did it and I'm so glad my professor introduced me to this book.

Thank you!

Delivered in a timely fashion, in great condition, and definitely saved me a bunch on school books.

bought for class, was very boring

Tony Kushner, Angels in America: Perestroika (Theatre Communications Group, 1993)There are times when I think the afterword should be banned. These time usually come when an author can't resist using an afterword to push some sort of agenda, as is the case here. It's especially true when the agenda being pushed is so knee-jerk and ill-thought-out that it makes me want to bang my head against a wall at how little the person writing this idiocy has thought about what it is he's saying. Thankfully, though, as was the case with the first Angels in America book, the play itself manages to keep all the knee-jerk idiocy where it belongs: in the subtext. Most of the time, anyway (there's one scene, again, that has no other reason but to push a political agenda, but in this volume, it's a much shorter scene, and more obviously played for humor).Perestroika continues the story found in Millennium Approaches, giving us the same characters (though adding a few extras) and continuing on in their lives. The encounters and fates of the different sets of characters are twined tighter and tighter, bringing some of them to understanding and alienating others.I do have to say there were pieces of this I didn't see coming; while the ultimate fates of some characters was obvious from the get-go, Kushner cleverly subverts our ideas about predestination to provide some surprises at the end. And even though these characters are obviously meant as archetypes, he does make them into real people. It's quite good, except for bits of that final scene, and it probably would have gotten the same rating as the first were it not for that horrible, horrible afterword. \*\*\*

If you haven't yet read it, please read the prequel to this play, `Angels in America, Pt. 1: Millennium Approaches' prior to this one. The staging is a bit different, similar in style (rapid scene changes, minimalist set, etc.) but it starts out with the wreckage from the Angel's entry in the previous play.Kushner described this play as a comedy, but I cannot see it that way. Except for irony and dark humour (perhaps akin to the idea of the Human Comedy, in which nothing is really funny) almost ever movement in the play is serious. And yet, in the face of death, what can be serious?Roy Cohn is on his deathbed in the hospital, and receives prayers and rebuke from Ethel Rosenberg. Harper is gloriously insane in many ways with a Valium addiction, having lost Joe to a male lover. Harper lives with Hannah, Joe's mother now ensconced in New York City.Louis and Prior struggle to

come to terms, although Prior knows that Louis has met up with Joe. Cohn learns of Joe's marriage break-up and the cause, and throws a fit. Oh yes, did I fail to mention the drag-queen-turned-nurse named Belize (a stage name) who attends both Cohn in the hospital and Prior at home? There are extended scenes of Prior and the Angel, exchanging information, stories, prophecies. Back in the days when the supply of AZT was almost non-existent, Cohn manages to get some via his connexions, and Belize manages to get some away from him for Prior. Later, after Cohn dies, he steals the rest of the supply, but not before calling Louis in to recite the Kaddish in thanks for the 'gift'. Of course, Louis doesn't want to. 'I'm not saying any ... Kaddish for him. The drugs OK, sure, fine, but no... way am I praying for him. My New Deal Pinko Parents in Schenectady would never forgive me, they're already so disappointed, "He's a f\*g. He's an office temp. And now look, he's saying Kaddish for Roy Cohn".' In the end, there is death, and there is life, and even the high angels cannot stop the progress, for they don't know how. But, like most mythologies, there is a hope that survives. '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.' Kushner's plays are remarkable statements of the culture of the times, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the growth of the AIDS crisis and the unveiling of diversity in all its suffering during arguably the most inopportune political time it could have been occurring, the Reagan/Bush era. The characterisations are astonishing, as is the dialogue, and despite the drawbacks of play-form to more conventional narrative, this play yields fascinating results, not the least of which because it permits the reader to construct new meanings in conjunction with the play. \*\*\* Kushner's prophetic call for a new world has not been fully answered, and perhaps never can be fully answered. Prophetic calls are interesting things - most prophets in fact fail in their mission (if you look at the Bible and other religions, you'll find out that prophets are often right, but only discovered to be right after their advice has been ignored and destruction has been the result). The call to the world that I see is that we must all have compassion on those who suffer, for a true commitment to humanity requires that the living make amends to the dead by saving those who can be saved, and comforting those who cannot be to the best of our abilities.

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