

# ANGELS IN AMERICA (The Play)

## The Millennium Shift in American Culture and Politics

JHU Summer Session I, 2017, May 31-June 30. Course # AS.225.218

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In the 1990s a work by rising American playwright and screenwriter Tony Kushner (*Munich, Lincoln, Homebody/Kabul, Caroline or Change*) captured a period of landmark social change in America, and a shift in consciousness during the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with some prophecies about the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After years of development work the first part of “Angels in America,” *Millennium Approaches*, premiered in New York at the Public Theatre in New York. It was followed by another epic work called “*Perestroika*.” The two-part masterpiece became an influential Broadway and International hit. The 2006 HBO television version starring Al Pacino has kept the legacy alive for new generations – and the play is currently being revived around the country.

The play, which the renowned critic Harold Bloom now teaches as part of the “Western Canon,” depicts the emergence of LGBT rights, the Mormon Church, the AIDS epidemic, the Reagan-era transformation of both government and business, and finally, the looming figure of Roy Cohn—a man whose influence in American politics ranged from the Rosenberg trial and his work as Counsel for the McCarthy Committee in the 1950s to his legacy as it affects the present day, having been a primary political mentor of President Donald Trump.

This is a course for all those interested in theatre, political culture, late 20<sup>th</sup> century American government, as well as uniquely American approaches to religion and spirituality. We discuss (and read from) the play; read secondary literature from a course file; and view and discuss the transformation of the work years later to an award winning mini-series for television.

Books and Sources:

**\*Angels in America** (The new edition includes Part I: **Millennium Approaches** (DPS Publishing) and Part II: **Perestroika**. Dramatists Play Service (DPS publishing.) This is available in paperback in the bookstore.

\*Film version: **Angels In America** (HBO)

The following will be distributed through the class file/packet.

\*Essays by Kushner including “American Things”

**\*Omens of the Millennium** (Excerpt) by Harold Bloom

**\*The Book of J.** Harold Bloom. (Excerpt on the meaning of the battle of “Jacob and the Angel.)

**\*Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays.** Edited by James Fisher. Jefferson, NC: M Farland and Company, Inc., 2006. (Excerpt)

**Requirements:**

Class [participation (and attendance) 25%

1 short paper (3 pages) 20%

Final Research Paper/Essay (6 pages) 30%

Final Presentations 25%\*

\*Students will give presentations based upon their final paper during the last 3 classes.

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CLASS CALENDAR Summer term I

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. 3pm – 5:30 Homewood Campus.

May 31 W	Introduction.
June 2 F	Reading and discussion: <i>Millennium Approaches</i> *
June 5 M	“
June 7 W	“
June 9 F	“
June 12 M	Harold Bloom, excerpts on the Biblical “blessing. Fisher: selected essays
June 14 W	Reading and discussion: <i>Perestroika</i> (Short paper due)
June 16 F	“
June 19 M	“
June 21 W	View HBO version
June 23 F	View HBO version
June 26 M	View HBO version
June 28 W	Final Presentations / Discussion
June 30 F TBA	Final Presentations / Discussion (Final paper due)

\* The precise acts/scenes to be read by each class will be designated at the first meeting.