

Fall/Winter 2018-2019

AP/EN 3323 3.0M (W)

21st Century American Literature

Course Director:

Marilou McKenna
mckenna@yorku.ca

Delivery Format:

Fully Online

Time:

N/A

Description:

“Is not the primal fantasy of America the self-made person, the one who breaks ties with the old world, sets off across distant prairies of personality and reinvents identity? Are we not all immigrants in this new land—original, severed from roots and superior to history? And why is it so confusing, so disorienting, when what we reinvent is still chaos . . . ?” (James Hollis, *Creating a Life* 11)

This course offers an opportunity to examine literature of the United States in the twenty-first century, and in so doing, an opportunity to grapple with the questions posed by Hollis. I will contend in this course that contemporary American literature, while looking forward, continues to look back—continually reenacting, amongst others, Huck Finn’s mythical and at once forward and backward-looking quest to “light out for the territories.” As the editors of *Reckonings: Contemporary Short Fiction by Native American Women* write in their introduction, “the past is alive in the present, carried on by memory, grit, and story” (xiii).

We see this dual perspective in the poetry of America’s “new poets,” with which the course begins, and which relies to a surprising extent on traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet. From there, the course will explore the experience of indigenous and Black inhabitants of America through several works of short fiction and a graphic collection of native American tales, before concluding with the veteran playwright Edward Albee’s provocative play, *The Goat or Who is Sylvia?* and a satirist’s take on contemporary America in Gary Shteyngart’s recently released novel, *Lake Success*. (Other resources may be provided online.)

Category:

C

Historical Requirement:

N/A

Requirements:

(to be finalized in the first two weeks of classes)

Written assignments and/or essays (60%)

Final Test (on-line, timed) (20%)

Discussion Forum (20%)

Reading List:

All texts are required.

- (1) *The Swallow Anthology of New American Poets*. Ed. Yezzi, D. (ISBN 9780804011211)
- (2) *Reckonings: Contemporary Short Fiction by Native American Women*. Ed. Wong, H. (ISBN 9780195109252)
- (3) *Trickster: Native American Tales. A Graphic Collection*. Dembicki, M. (ISBN 9781555917241)
- (4) *Ghost Summer: Stories*. Due, T. (ISBN 9781607014539)
- (5) *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* Albee, E. (ISBN 9780822219767)
- (6) *Lake Success*. Shteyngart, G. (ISBN 9780812997415)

Please note: All required texts are available through the York Bookstore.

Lake Success is available in hard copy only; students may wish to investigate alternate purchasing options for that text, such as Kindle or Audio.

Open To:

Yr 3, 4