

## Polish/English Lit. 0325 - The Short Story in a Polish Context

**Instructor:** Oscar Swan  
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**Course website:** <http://courseweb.pitt.edu>      Inquiries made by email are encouraged. CHECK THE COURSE WEBSITE PERIODICALLY FOR ASSIGNMENT UPDATES (<http://courseweb.pitt.edu>).

**General Course Description:** An introduction to the formal analysis of the literary genre of the short story, on the example of works of Polish literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is primarily a course on the short story as literature, only indirectly a course on Polish culture, society, and thought. The course will examine works both formally and as they reflect the reality or literary-social concerns of given historical periods (positivism, naturalism, existentialism, gender issues, prison-camp literature, socialist realism, absurdism, and others).

**General Education Requirements Satisfied:** Literature I, Foreign Culture, Writing. THIS COURSE WAS MISTAKENLY NOT LISTED AS A WRITING COURSE IN THE UNIVERSITY COURSE SCHEDULE, BUT IT IS.

### Required Materials:

- Sins of Childhood and Other Stories, by Boleslaw Prus (Book Center)
- The Birch Grove and Other Stories, by Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz (Book Center)
- This Way to the Gas Ladies and Gentlemen, by Tadeusz Borowski (Book Center)
- class handouts, including a number of the stories.

**Assignments and Evaluation:** Assignments consist of readings (one or two stories per class meeting, around 20-40 pages per week), and frequent short (1-to-2-page) written essays, around 15 in all. There will be a Midterm and a Final Examination, and several announced quizzes. The final grade will be determined as follows: Class Preparedness (as based on written assignments and quizzes): 33%; Midterm: 33%; Final: 34% (i.e., the final will tip the balance in borderline cases).

**Attendance:** Attendance is not graded per se. However, you are responsible for all material presented in class, including announcements about course procedures and day-to-day assignments. The most important thing you will get from class attendance is the guided discussion and interpretation of the works read, and, especially, A DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS ON THEM. These assignments are given and due on an almost daily basis, and they are not self-explanatory. THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER ASSIGNMENTS AS DESCRIBED IN THIS SYLLABUS. Failure to understand the assignment due to absence from class is no excuse. Late assignments will be assessed a 1/2 point deduction on a 1-3 scale.

**Academic Integrity Guidelines:** By being enrolled in this course, students agree to abide by the above stipulations, and understand that the instructor will follow rigorously the rules spelled out in the Handbook on Integrity regarding cheating, plagiarism, etc. It is the students' responsibility to familiarize themselves with these regulations and to observe them. Infractions will be penalized according to these rules. If you are uncertain about any matter concerning academic integrity, please ask the instructor.

**Order of Presentation of Material:** We will begin by examining the characteristics of the classical West European short story, and how it may be distinguished from other forms of literature, especially the TALE and the NOVEL. General types of short story (plot-centered, character-centered, atmosphere-centered) will be discussed, including stylistic and structural devices characteristic of each. We will begin with an examination of plot-centered short stories, i.e., stories exhibiting a development, entanglement, climax, and denouement or aftermath. Examination of individual works will consider such things as the use of plot, narrator, dialogue, time, space, character, symbols, locale, and so on, as elements entering into the 'summative effect' or 'point' characteristic of most short stories.

Turning to the Polish short story, we will first examine certain non-literary precursors to the short story, such as tales, anecdotes, and memoirs, turning then to selections from the classical period of Polish 19th-century Social Positivism (Prus, Sienkiewicz, Orzeszkowa). Important concerns of the late 19th-century and 'Modernism' (the theme of moral choice, subjectivity of experience, gender conflicts, personal fate and destiny, etc.) will be illustrated using the shorter fiction of Joseph Conrad and Maria Dabrowska. The next portion of the course will be devoted to the period between the two world wars, represented by writers such as Zapolska, Gojawiczynska, Gombrowicz, Schulz, Iwaszkiewicz. The last part of the course will be devoted to works of the late 20th-century, including stories of the Holocaust, wartime and prison-camp experience (Borowski, Naukowska), literature on themes of social and political indoctrination (Andrzejewski, Mrozek); power relationships (Borowski, Polanski); and literature of fantasy and the absurd (Mrozek, Lem).

At selected points in the course we will view Polish films based on the short-story genre.

SCHEDULE OF WORKS TO BE READ

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday
August 28, 30	Woroszyński, "The Watch"	Szulc, "Pan", "Nimrod"
September 4, 6	Pasek, "Robak the Otter" Szatyn, "The Hunt"	Norwid, "Ad leones"
September 11, 13	Prus, "The Waistcoat"	Prus, "The Barrel Organ"
September 18, 20	Prus, "Legends of Ancient Egypt"	Prus, "Antek"
September 25, 27	Sienkiewicz, "Yamiol", "Yanko"	Orzeszkowa, "Miss Antonina"
October 2, 4	Conrad, "The Tale"	[film, "Birch Grove"]
October 9, 11	conclusion of film, review for midterm	MIDTERM
October 16, 18	Conrad, "Warrior's Soul"	Dąbrowska, "Father Philip"
October 23, 25	Iwaszkiewicz, "Wilko Girls"	Iwaszkiewicz, "Mill on the River Utrata"
October 30, November 1	Iwaszkiewicz, "Sweet Flag"	Iwaszkiewicz, "Rose"
November 6, 8	Szulc, "Father's last Escape"	Gojawiczyńska, "Two Women", "The Mother".
November 13, 15	Naukowska, "Professor Spanner", "Railroad Tracks"	Borowski "This Way to the Gas" (1st three stories)
November 20	Andrzejewski, "Gold Fox," "First Love"	Thanksgiving Recess
November 27, 29	Movie, "Knife in the Water"	Hłasko, "My Mother's House", "A Lovely Girl"
December 4, 6	Mrozek, selected stories	Course review and evaluation

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

THESE ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE WHEN NOTED. The topics are NOT SELF-EXPLANATORY from their title, but will be explained and discussed in class. You are responsible for being in class when the assignment is explained and discussed. One page minimum. One and a half pages maximum. Double-spaced, 1" margins. Include a title, PUT YOUR NAME ON THE REVERSE OF THE 1ST PAGE. Write clearly, simply, and to the point of the assignment. Do not retell the story unless asked to do so. Work will be graded on a 1-2-3 scale (with +/-), with 1 being an acknowledgment of the assignment's being handed in; 2 being a good fulfillment of the assignment; and 3 signifying an exceptionally well thought-out and expressed execution of the assignment. Grammar, style, logical structure, and spelling count. Length over the assigned amount does NOT count, and may count negatively. Points will be added up and converted to a letter grade, based on a class-wide curve, two times: once before the midterm (lowest grade out), and once before the final (lowest grade out). Overdue assignments may be handed in on designated overdue-assignment days, with an automatic 1/2 point deduction. The two grades will be averaged together in order to make up the component designated as Class Preparedness.

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday
August 28, 30	[first class meeting]	minimalistic retelling of "The Watch" [ungraded]
September 4, 6	plot synopsis of "Robak the Otter" [ungraded]	running reader's notes on "Ad leones" (ungraded)
September 11, 13	outline of plot movements in "The Waistcoat"	narrative perspective in "The Barrel Organ"
September 18, 20	function of time in "Legends of Ancient Egypt"	symbol of windmill in "Antek"
September 25, 27	themes of social criticism in "Yamiol" or "Yanko"	narrator's attitude toward "Miss Antonina"
October 2, 4	The theme of moral choice in "The Tale"	[film, "Birchwood"] OVERDUE ASSIGNMENT DAY
October 9, 11	The symbolism of the birchwood forest in "Birchwood"	MIDTERM
October 16, 18	ID quiz on "Warrior's Soul" and "The Tale"	The use of irony in "Father Philip"
October 23, 25	The theme of lost opportunity in "Wilko Girls"	The symbol of the mill in "Mill on the Utrata"
October 30, November 1	male-female relations, or love and death, in "Sweet Flag"	naturalistic features in "Rose"
November 6, 8	your own interpretation of "Father's Last Escape"	Give a direct narration of the hidden story in "Two Women"
November 13, 15	blame/guilt in "RR Tracks" or "Professor Spanner"	persona of the narrator in "Welcome to the Gas"
November 20, 22	Quiz on "Gold Fox"	Thanksgiving Recess
November 27, 29	OVERDUE ASSIGNMENT DAY	shifting power relationships in "Knife in Water"
December 4, 6	Identify important themes in (a) Hlasko's stories or (b) Zurek	[review, course evaluation]