

## Polish 0325 - The Short Story in a Polish Context – Spring 2019

**Instructor:** Oscar E. Swan

**Office Hours:** M 1:00, H 2:00

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**Course website:** **Box: Polish Short Story**

**Course Meets:** MW 4:00-5:15. CL G-18

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Inquiries made by email are encouraged.

**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 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. This is primarily a course on the short story as literature, but it is also a course on Polish culture, society, thought, and national identity over the same 300-plus year period covered by the examined works of literature. Many or most works of literature cannot be fully understood without touching on the historical, political, and social context in which they were written. That is particularly true of Polish literature, much of which has been written against the backdrop of different intellectual movements and historical cataclysms, the latter including the partitioning of Poland among its neighbors in the 19th century; unsuccessful national uprisings against its occupiers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; World War I; World War II and the Holocaust; and the post-war Soviet occupation.

The course will examine literary works both formally, but also as they reflect the reality or literary-social concerns of given historical-literary periods (the enlightenment, positivism, naturalism, modernism, existentialism, socialist realism, absurdism, and others). Almost daily (twice a week) short analytical papers will be required, including giving the student the opportunity to revise one or more papers following the instructor's suggestions. Generally speaking, the instructor's own detailed analyses of the stories will be published on the course Box website FOLLOWING the due date of the assigned paper topic and its discussion in class. The point is to encourage class participants to rely on their own knowledge and powers of analysis when approaching a new work of literature, rather than being influenced by what the instructor or received scholarly opinion might say about a work. Of course, very little material of any sort will be found on the internet in English about "received scholarly opinion" on individual works of Polish literature.

**General Education Requirements Satisfied:** Literature, Geographic Region, Writing.

**Required Materials to be purchased at the Book Center. Order from another source at your own risk.**

- Sins of Childhood and Other Stories, by Bolesław Prus (Book Center)
- The Birch Grove and Other Stories, by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (Book Center)
- This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen, by Tadeusz Borowski (Book Center)

**The majority of required course materials, and instructor's critical-analytic notes, will be freely downloadable from the course website (Box: The Short Story in a Polish Context).**

**Assignments and Evaluation:** Assignments will 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 20 papers of at least 500 words each, adding up to around 30 pages in all during the course of the semester. There will be a Midterm and a Final Examination, and possible quizzes, announced in advance, to test closeness of reading and the ability to spot the significances of details. The final grade will be determined as follows: Class Preparedness (as based on written assignments, quizzes, and class participation): 33%; Midterm: 33%; Final: 34% (i.e., the final will tip the balance in borderline cases). Papers will be graded on a 1-to-4 scale (i.e., the University's grade-point scale), with 4 being best (A), with possible pluses or minuses. After the first few writing assignments, the grade assigned will be the average of two grades: one for clarity of language, the other for clarity/originality of analysis.

**Attendance:** Attendance is not graded per se; however, attendance is taken, and assignments are due on the day assigned. More than three absences will affect the course grade by 1/3 (.3) grade-point. 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) Discussion of proper English formal expository writing; and (b) The critical examination of works to be read and how to approach them. Paper-topic assignments are given and due on an almost daily basis, and they are not self-explanatory from their description later in this syllabus. In addition, THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ALTER ASSIGNMENTS AS DESCRIBED IN OUTLINE 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 the 1-4 evaluative scale.

**Instructor's Attitude Toward Secondary and Research Literature.** This course will have no "research papers," and no secondary reading assignments or list of recommended readings. There is no penalty for using secondary sources, and you are free to avail yourself of the World Wide Web, as long as such use is clearly acknowledged and referenced at the end of your paper in a section entitled References Consulted. However, you will not be up-graded for doing so, nor downgraded for not doing so. You should be able to do all assignments by doing the reading assignments, listening to lectures and taking notes, listening to and participating in class discussions, and by relying on your own ability for analytic thought and your base of general knowledge. See also below under **Academic Integrity Policy**.

**Order of Presentation of Material.** The course begins by examining the characteristics of the classical West European short story, and how it may be distinguished from other forms of prose fiction, particularly the TALE, the NOVELLA, and the NOVEL. General types of short story (plot-centered, character-centered, atmosphere-centered, reportage, etc.) will be discussed, including stylistic and structural devices characteristic of each. We will begin with an examination of classical plot-centered short stories, i.e., stories exhibiting a development, entanglement, turning point, climax, and denouement or aftermath. In the initial and orientational part of the course, a short story illustrative of the plot-centered short-story genre ("The Watch" by W. Woroszyński) will be used to introduce the basic terms of analysis. Next, two tales from earlier Polish literature ("Robak the Otter" by J. Pasek and "How Dąbrowski Lost his Head" by J. Kitowicz) will be used to show how effective naïve narration also tends to conform to classical short-story structure. The orientational portion of the course concludes with two modernistic and largely atmospheric short sketches by Bruno Szulc ("Nimrod" and "Pan"), which will be used to illustrate the importance of being sensitive to symbolism, metaphor, hidden meanings behind the surface action, and the possible hidden agendas of the author.

From this point on, the selection of readings proceeds chronologically, beginning with selections from the period of Polish 19th-century social and literary Positivism (Prus, Sienkiewicz, Orzeszkowa), i.e., the period when the "classical" short story flourished in Europe in general and in Poland in particular. Next examined will be late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary Modernism and its themes of moral choice and responsibility, subjectivity of experience, the unknowability of reality and of our own motives much less those of others, etc., using shorter works of fiction by Joseph Conrad and Maria Dąbrowska. Literature from the twenty-year period between the two world wars, much of it influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud, is represented by writers such as Bruno Szulc and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. The last part of the course will be predominantly devoted to works of the war and post-war Polish experience, including stories of the Holocaust, wartime and prison-camp experience (Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska, Kazimierz Brandys); literature on themes of social and political indoctrination under communism (Jerzy Andrzejewski); and, particularly strong in Poland, escapist literature of fantasy and the absurd (Sławomir Mrożek, Stanisław Lem). The final work examined will be a veiled retelling of the Christmas story set in contemporary times by Olga Tokarczuk.

Throughout the course, the examination of individual works will consider such things as the use of plot, narrator, narrative perspective, the role of dialogue, the use of time and space, characters, symbols, metaphor, locale, social agenda, and so on, as elements entering into the 'summative effect' or 'point' characteristic of many or most short stories.

At selected points in the course we will view Polish films or excerpts from films—cinematic versions of works read in the course.

**Disability Resource Services.** If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890, as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Academic Integrity Policy.** Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz, exam or paper will be imposed. (For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to [www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html](http://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ai1.html).) It is the students' responsibility to become familiar 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.

**E-mail Communication Policy.** Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu>, log into your account, click on Edit Forwarding Addresses, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to [www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html](http://www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html).)

SCHEDULE OF WORKS TO BE READ. STAR (\*) INDICATES: DOWNLOADABLE FROM *BOX*

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
August 29, 31	*W. Woroszyński, "The Watch"	*J. Kitowicz, "How Dąbrowski Lost His Head"
September 5, 7	*J. Pasek, "Robak the Otter"	*B. Szulc, "Pan", "Nimrod"
September 12, 14	B. Prus, "The Waistcoat"	B. Prus, "The Barrel Organ"
September 19, 21	B. Prus, "Legends of Ancient Egypt"	B. Prus, "Antek"
September 26, 28	*H. Sienkiewicz, "Yamiol", "Yanko"	*E. Orzeszkowa, "Miss Antonina"
October 3, 5	*J. Conrad, "The Tale"	Read J. Iwaszkiewicz, "Birchwood" [film, "Birch Grove"]
October 10, 12	FALL BREAK	MIDTERM
October 17, 19	*J. Conrad, "Warrior's Soul".	*B. Szulc, "Father's last Escape"
October 24, 26	J. Iwaszkiewicz, "Wilko Girls"	J. Iwaszkiewicz, "Mill on the River Utrata"
October 31, November 2	*Iwaszkiewicz, "Sweet Flag"	*Iwaszkiewicz, "Rose"
November 7, 9	*M. Dąbrowska, "Father Philip"	*Z. Naułkowska, "Soap Factory", "Railroad Tracks"
November 14, 16	T. Borowski "This Way to the Gas" (1st three stories)	Film: R. Polański, "Knife in the Water"
November 21	Finish the film; discussion.	THANKSGIVING RECESS
November 28, 30	*J. Andrzejewski, "Gold Fox"	*K. Brandys, "How to be Loved"
December 5, 7	*O. Tokarczuk: "Żurek"	Course review and evaluation

FINAL EXAMINATION DATE: TO BE ANNOUNCED.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

THESE ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE WHEN NOTED. The topics are NOT SELF-EXPLANATORY, but will be explained in class. You are responsible for being in class when the assignment is explained and discussed. One page minimum, two pages maximum. Double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 point type, name at top right. 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 1-2-3-4 scale (the University's grade-point scale) , with 4 being an exceptionally well thought-out and expressed execution of the assignment in both writing and analysis. Grammar, style, logical structure, and spelling count. Length over the assigned word count does NOT count. Overdue assignments may be handed in on the designated overdue-assignment day (November 21), with an automatic 1/2 point deduction.

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday
August 29, 31	[first class meeting]	Minimalistic retelling of "The Watch" [ungraded]
September 5, 7	Plot synopsis of "Robak the Otter" or "How Dąbrowski..." [ungraded]	In at least 500 words: what "Nimrod" and "Pan" are "about?"
September 12, 14	Outline of plot movements in "The Waistcoat"	Narrative perspective in "The Barrel Organ"
September 19, 21	Function of time in "Legends of Ancient Egypt"	Symbol of windmill in "Antek"
September 26, 28	Themes of social criticism in "Yamiol" or "Yanko"	Narrator's attitude toward "Miss Antonina"
October 3, 5	The theme of moral choice in "The Tale"	[film, "Birchwood"]
October 10, 12	FALL BREAK	MIDTERM
October 17, 19	ID quiz on "The Tale," "Birchwood," "Warrior's Soul"	Your own interpretation of "Father's Last Escape"
October 24, 26	The theme of lost chances in "Wilko Girls"	(Freudian?) symbolism in "Mill on the Utrata"
October 31, November 2	Male-female relations in "Sweet Flag"	Naturalistic features in "Rose"
November 7, 9	The use of irony in "Father Philip"	Blame/guilt in "RR Tracks" or "Soap Factory"
November 14, 16	persona of the narrator in "Welcome to the Gas"	No assignment. View "Knife in the Water"
November 21 OVERDUE ASSIGNMENT DAY.	Shifting power relationships in "Knife in Water"	THANKSGIVING RECESS
November 28, 30	Take-home quiz on "Gold Fox"	Retell the hidden story behind "How to be Loved"
December 5, 7	"Żurek (Sour Soup)" as a Christmas story.	[review, course evaluation]