

## **GERM 365 – Modern short fiction**

*A study of short prose forms in German throughout history*

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### **I. Course description**

Short prose as a genre gives the authors the flexibility to experiment and explore new approaches to plot, character development, time, and setting. This flexibility makes short prose an exciting genre to study. It offers the opportunity to explore contemporary trends in German literature in just a few pages.

In this course we will examine short prose works by influential German writers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. We will look at various examples of the mode, analyzing narrative techniques and aesthetic devices employed, placing them in the context of the social, political, and cultural changes that occurred in Germany during the same period. Students will engage critically with concepts pertaining to subjectivity, generations, gender, migration, technology and the human, crisis, environment, alterity and otherness. The course is taught in English; knowledge of German is not required.

### **II. Objectives**

This course aims to achieve the following learning objectives:

1. **Develop a theoretical understanding:** Participants will gain familiarity with key theoretical concepts related to the genre of modern short fiction.
2. **Enhance analytical skills:** Participants will acquire methodological approaches to effectively analyze how texts are narratively and thematically constructed.
3. **Contextualize literary works:** Participants will learn to situate literary works within their historical, cultural, and social contexts.

### **III. Structure of the course and course policies**

Class meetings will take place two times a week (Tuesday and Thursday). You are expected to complete the required readings before coming to class. This pre-class preparation will serve as a foundation for engaging in dynamic and interactive discussions during the in-person sessions. The class meetings will provide a platform for sharing insights, analyzing key themes, and engaging in collaborative activities with your peers and the instructor.

#### **IV. Evaluation & Grades**

- **Attendance & Participation (15%)**

Active participation in class discussions, activities, and group work is essential for your learning experience and will be taken into account when evaluating your performance. You may have 2 unexcused absences. For all other absences supporting documentation is required. For each additional unexcused absence 5% of your overall grade will be deducted. If you miss more than 10 classes you will automatically receive a grade of zero. Your attendance and participation will be assessed based on your preparedness, thoughtful contributions, and respectful engagement with your peers and the instructor.

- **Position Paper (15%)**

Throughout the semester you will be writing one short position paper (1.5-2 pages, double spaced) on one or two texts of your choice. The position paper should offer a brief reflection on one of the assigned readings. It should clearly outline the argument made, backed up with citations from the chosen texts. Focus on one aspect that stands out to you and reflect on that. It should not be a summary of the text. Please upload your paper to the discussion board on *mycourses*. The paper is due 2 days prior to when the assigned reading is discussed in class (e.g. Sunday or Tuesday, 5 pm). The position paper will serve as a basis for class discussion.

- **Oral Presentation (15%)**

In groups of 2-3, you will give an oral presentation on one of the assigned readings. The presentation should be 15 minutes max. Please submit the PowerPoint one day prior to your presentation on myCourses. For the discussion focus on a specific aspect or argument that you developed in the presentation that you would like to discuss further. Make sure to clearly outline and contextualize the issue to be discussed. The argument made should be in relation to the overall topic. Also prepare some passages or quotes from the text that we could use as a base for class discussion. At the end of the PowerPoint list all scholarly sources used.

- **Tests (2 x 15%)**

You will write two in-class tests. The tests will consist of questions on topics and key terms that we've discussed regarding the required readings.

- **Take Home Final (25%)**

For the take home final, you are required to write one paper (5-6 pages, double-spaced), which critically engages with one or two of the readings discussed in class and also reflects on the course topics. I will provide suggestions for paper topics, but you are also welcome to choose your own topic. Please consult with me in advance. The evaluation will consider the coherence and logical progression of your ideas, the depth of your analysis, the incorporation of relevant scholarly sources, and the overall quality of your writing.

Due date: TBA

## V. Required Texts:

All texts will be provided in English translations via MyCourses.

### Course Outline

#### Week I, January 4: **Modern short fiction**

Th: Introduction to the Course

#### Week II, January 9-11: **What is short fiction?**

T: Introduction to the genre

Th: Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *The green snake and the beautiful lily* (1795), Friedrich Schiller: *The pledge* (1798)

#### Week III, January 16-18: **Telling tales**

T: Adelbert von Chamisso: *Peter Schlemihl* (1813)

Th: Adelbert von Chamisso: *Peter Schlemihl* (1813)

#### Week IV, January 23-25: **Literature and Society**

T: Heinrich von Kleist: *Michael Kohlhaas* (1807)

Th: Heinrich von Kleist: *Michael Kohlhaas* (1807)

#### Week V: January 30 – February 1: **Nature and the environment**

T: Theodor Storm: *The Rider on the White Horse* (1888)

Th: Theodor Storm: *The Rider on the White Horse* (1888)

#### Week VI, February 6-8: **Technology and the human**

T: Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797), ETA Hoffmann: *The Sandman* (1816)

Th: ETA Hoffmann: *The Sandman* (1816), [Test 1]

#### Week VII, February 13-15: **Technology and the human**

T: Franz Kafka: *In the Penal Colony* (1919), Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *excerpt*

Th: Franz Kafka: *In the Penal Colony* (1919)

#### Week VIII, February 20-22: **World War II and its aftermath – “Rubble literature”**

T: Heinrich Böll: *Stranger, Bear Word to the Spartans We...* (1950)

Th: Wolfgang Borchert: *The kitchen clock* (1947)

Week IX, February 27-29: **Dealing with memory, generations, and gender**

T: Ingeborg Bachmann: *Three paths to the lake* (1972)

Th: Ingeborg Bachmann: *Three paths to the lake* (1972)

Week X, March 5-7: **Reading Week**

*Reading Break*

Week XI, March 12-14: **Alterity and Otherness**

T: Robert Musil: *Tonka* (1923)

Th: Robert Musil: *Tonka* (1923), [Test 2]

Week XII, March 19-21: **Alterity and Otherness**

T: Judith Hermann: *Summerhouse, later* (1998), *excerpts*

Th: Judith Hermann: *Summerhouse, later* (1998), *excerpts*

Week XIII, March 26-28: **Migration**

T: Yoko Tawada: *Where Europe begins* (1991), *excerpts*

Th: Yoko Tawada: *Where Europe begins* (1991), *excerpts*

Week XIV, April 2-4: **Migration**

T: Yoko Tawada: *Where Europe begins* (1991),

*excerpts* Th: Concluding discussion

## **VI. Academic Integrity**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

## **VII. Language**

In accordance with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Alternatively, you may submit your work in German.

### **VIII. Student Accessibility and Achievement Office**

The Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures endeavours to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Student Accessibility and Achievement Office (<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>). If you have a documented disability, please contact the SAA as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining recommended accommodations. This letter should be given to me at the beginning of the semester.