



Ecole Normale Supérieure
Centre Formation Continue
(CFC)

UNIVERSITE DE VACANCES
(UNIVAC)

UNIVERSITE DE BOUAKE



U.F.R. Communication –Milieu et Société
DEPARTEMENT D'ANGLAIS

Niveau : Licence 2

Academic year : 2012-2013

Temps consacré : 25 heures CM et 30 heures TD

Prérequis : Literature : work of fiction in L1

Responsable : Pr Vamara KONÉ

Chargé de cours : Pr Vamara KONÉ

This course essentially aims at giving students a better understanding of short-story as a particular literary genre. It defines, and presents the form and the basic elements of a short-story. As to illustrate a study of the genre, the course focuses on “A Tree-A Rock- A Cloud” and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” two representative short stories written respectively by Carson McCullers and Flannery O’Connor.

Course objectives

This course should enable students :

- to identify clearly the different works of fiction
- to have a better insight into the history of short story
- to analyze a short story

Course content

Chapter 1: Historical background

An overview on the history of storytelling from the most primitive peoples

Chapter 2: Definitions and forms

Describing what a short story should be. The difference between short stories and other works of fiction.

Chapter 3: Basic elements

Identification and description of indispensable items in a short story e.g. the setting, characters

Chapter 4: Short story study:

Practical study based on the following short stories: “A Tree-A Rock-A Cloud” by Carson McCullers and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor

Pedagogical method

- **Teaching activities**

Courses will be given in the form of lecture and tutorials. Debate and discussions can follow when necessary or required by students

- **Learning activities**

At the end of the lecture, students will be given a list of exercises for the next time. Those exercises will be corrected during the tutorial. Students are encouraged to make research individually and work in small groups during.

- **The tests.**

- ✓ Homework exercise will be given and marked out of 20 for tutorial grade
- ✓ A final exam will be organized by the school administration

Bibliography

Requiring reading

-McCULLERS, Carson, “A Tree-A Rock-A Cloud” in *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Collected Short-stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955.

-O’CONNOR, Flannery “A Good Man is Hard to Find” in *The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.

Suggested reading

- ATKINSON, William Patterson, *A collection, with introduction and notes, of stories by Poe, Stevenson, Irving, Harte and Hawthorne* BiblioBazaar, LLC, (1916, 2008)

-BALDWIN, Charles Sears. *American Short-stories*. Longmans, Green & Co., 1904

-CANBY, Henry Seidel, *A Study of the Short-Story*. Henry Holt & Co., 1913

-DAWNSON, W.J. and CONINGSBY, *The Great English Short-story Writers*. Harper and Brothers, 1910

- HAMILTON, Clayton, *Materials and Methods of Fiction* (Chapters X and XI) Doubleday, Page & Co., 1908

- MATTHEWS, Branders, *The Philosophy of the Short-story in Pen and Ink*, Longmans, Green & Co.,

Chapter 1: Historical background

Mankind has always loved to tell stories and to listen to them. The most primitive and unlettered peoples and tribes have always shown and still this universal characteristic. As far back as written records go we find stories; even before that time, they were handed down from remote generations by oral tradition. The wandering minstrel followed a very ancient profession. Before him was his prototype—the man with the gift of telling stories over the fire at night, perhaps at the mouth of a cave. The Greeks, who ever loved to hear some new thing, were merely typical of the ready listeners.

In the course of time the story passed through many forms and many phases—the myth, e.g. *The Labors of Hercules*; the legend, e.g. *St. George and the Dragon*; the fable, e.g. *The Fox and the Grapes*; the allegory, e.g. Addison's *the Vision of Mirza*; the parable, e.g. *The Prodigal Son*. Sometimes it was merely to amuse, sometimes to instruct. With this process are intimately connected famous books (such as *The Gesta Romanorum*) and famous writers (like Boccaccio).

Gradually there grew a body of rules and a technique, and men began to write about the way stories should be composed, as is seen in Aristotle's statement that a story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Definitions were made and the elements named. In fullness of time story-telling became an art.

Chapter 2: Definitions and forms

1. Definitions

The short-story—Professor Brander Matthews has suggested the hyphen to differentiate it from the story which merely short and to indicate that it is a new species—is a narrative which is short and has unity, compression, originality, and ingenuity, each in high degree. In other words, it is a piece of prose, a fiction short enough to be read at one sitting (i.e. it is a tale that can be read aloud in half an hour or so, the result, of a sudden passion.)

2. Forms

Short-stories tend to be more concise than longer works of fiction, such as novellas and novels. To be more explicit, a short story comprises prose writing of between 1000 and 20,000 words (but typically more than 5000 words) ; a story containing between 20,000 and 50,000 words falls into the novella category; a work of fiction containing more than 50,000 words falls squarely into the realm of the novel.

Usually, a short-story will focus on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

Chapter 3: Basic elements

Like any other story, the short story depicts incidents which involve an individual or a group of individuals. These incidents occur at a particular space and in a particular time. They reveal the main idea or the theme developed by the author. The indispensable items of a short story are the following:

1. The characters. The characters are people in a fiction i. e. novel or short story or play. They can also be a décor, an object or an animal which participates in the sphere of actions. In short, a character is a participant in a fictional work.

2. The action. The action is the constructive act of the story itself. It is the plot or the development of events and incidents of the story.

3. The setting. The setting is composed of time and space, that is to say it refers to when and where the action really takes place. (There are indissoluble ties between the temporal realities on the one hand, and the spatial realities on the other hand “the quality of a place inevitably derives from its existence in time.”)

3.1. Time. It is associated with the weather and the atmosphere in which the story takes place.

3.2. Space. It is related to the place described by the author in his literary work.

4. The theme. It is the topic, the subject of a piece of writing. It is the “motivating idea” or the reason- for-being of the story. The theme stands for what the story intends to describe. In a novel or a short story we may have a main theme and minor themes.

- The relationship between all these four basic elements is flexible. This relationship is determined by the demands which a specific short story imposes upon the writer.

V. The points of view

The point of view is the angle from which the action is seen and described by the narrator. It is the perspective chosen by the writer to make the reader “see” the events, the landscapes and the characters.

1. **The different narrative points of view:**

A. The first person point of view

A1. The first person participant:

We talk about the first person participant when the narrator takes part in the action. He is both observer and actor. He is able to express his own opinion and feelings.

A2. The first person observer

That is when the narrator only tells what he sees or what his senses can catch.

In any case, in the first person point of view the narrator always uses the first personal pronoun “I”. Yet, the difference one can make between the first person participant and the first person observer is that the first person participant is subjective (The narrator’s presentation of the scene is subjective) while the first person observer is objective.

B. The third person point of view

B1. The third person observer

We talk about the third person observer when the narrator makes an objective report of what is happening. In other words, he only describes what his senses can grasp.

B2. The third person omniscient

That is the case when the narrator operates like God. He knows everything. He can be in several places at the same time. He enters the consciences and the hearts of the other characters.

Unlike the first person point of view where the narrator always uses the first personal pronoun “I”, in the third person point of view he uses the third person pronoun “He” or “she”.

2. The different objectives of writing a story

- A. The objective of some authors is to try and be artists
- B. There are those who try to write a simple entertainment
- C. There are also those who are trying to write to shock
- D. Some people write in order to escape (s’*évader*)
- E. Others write to teach something.

Chapter 4: Short story study

As to illustrate a study of the genre, our analysis will focus on “A Tree-A Rock-A Cloud” by Carson McCullers and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor.

1. “A Tree-A Rock-A Cloud” by Carson McCullers

1.1. The author and her works

Lula Carson McCullers was born Lula Carson Smith in Columbus, Georgia, on February 19, 1917. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) was her first novel—published when she was only twenty-three years old. It was a considerable success and was followed the next year by *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. In 1946 she published *The Member of the Wedding*. A novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* was published in 1952 with six other short stories. She wrote another play, *The Square Root of Wonderful* (1958). In 1961 another novel, *Clock Without Hands*, was published. McCullers died of a massive hemorrhage in 1967.

In her fiction, particularly that involving adolescents, she was able as an artist to translate her private pain, misfortune, and sexual ambivalence into metaphor for what she

saw as the human condition: lovelessness, a yearning for impossible fulfilment, a sense of brooding, sensuous loneliness. Her forte is the ability to capture the evolution of moods; writing very simply and carefully, using words with lapidary precision, and with great skill, she conveys the emotions of lonely creatures who inhabit forsaken places.

McCullers sets off the novel's principal theme—man's struggle against isolation and his need for expressing the self at any cost. The theme of ambiguity in love, which characterizes this first fiction, is a generic scheme in all of the author's narratives as we may notice in “ A Tree- A Rock - A Cloud” extracted from *The Ballad of the Sad Café* – perhaps her most fully realized work.

1.2. “ A Tree- A Rock - A Cloud”

Extracted from *The Ballad of the Sad Café and Collected short stories* by Carson McCullers, “ A Tree- A Rock - A Cloud” is an allegorical story which deals with a problem of love—a generic scheme in McCullers' fiction. It is built around a man's experience as he tries to put into practice his ideas concerning his newly formulated “science of love”. The protagonist searched for two years to recover the wife who deserted him before he discovered his “science”, which requires that one must try feeling for a pet or an inanimate object, no matter how repulsive, and then turn toward the expression of feeling for human beings. (As love is not requited, one should love gratuitously).

A. The setting

1. Space

The story takes place in an all-night café

2. Time

The story happens in a rainy morning

B. The characters

-The man, the main character, a railroad engineer. He is a kind of character-narrator

-The paper boy,

-Leo, the owner of the café

C. The action

Only one main action seems to mark the fiction: the man's desire to externalize and share his new vision of love. (This explains why he comes in the café and wants to talk to the paper boy at any cost.)

D. The themes

-The ambiguity in love

-Love is unrequited

-From love of Agapé (=love between human beings/ fraternal, platonic love) to love of Eros (=sexual, passionate love)

-Human being's sufferings due to love

-Loneliness

-Alcoholism

2. "A Good Man is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor

Mary Flannery O'CONNOR was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1925. *Wise Blood*, her first novel, appeared in 1950, but it was with her first collection of short stories, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955) that her fiction began to receive widespread recognition. Her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, appeared in 1960. In 1964 her illness, which had for some years forced her to walk with crutches, flared up again and she died in August of that year. Another collection of short stories, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, was published in 1965. In 1971 the *Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* received the National Book Award. A volume of her collected nonfiction, *Mystery and Manners*, was edited in 1969 by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald.

Flannery O'Connor was a Georgian (Southerner) and a Roman Catholic, a combination that she used to create some unusual fiction. Much of her work appears rooted in the great comic tradition of Middle Georgia literature. For example, the stories in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* take place in the rural South and the writer is essentially concerned with moral, even religious and theological problems. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* is composed of ten stories among those are "The River", "The Life You Save May Be Your Own", "A Stroke of Good Fortune", "A Temple of Holy Ghost", "The Artificial Nigger", "A Circle in the Fire", "A Late Encounter with the Enemy", "Good Country People", "The Displaced Person" and the title story "A Good Man Is Hard To Find".

We are particularly interested in the story entitled "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" because of its pertinence. It is very significant that O'Connor gives her collection the title of this story. As a matter of fact, the story is not only characteristic of O'Connor's art and ideology, but it also brings out the very pessimistic moral that pervades in the other stories. It denounces the realities of the American society which is in crisis of morality and spirituality.

It tells the story of a family who wanted to go to Florida. But the grandmother who would rather go to Tennessee succeeds in changing her son's mind. During the trip, their car overturns on an isolated road. The family gets unharmed from this accident but they find themselves in front of a famous criminal who escapes from prison. Then, a conversation starts between the escaped killer and the grandmother who has recognized him. She implores him for mercy and tries to convince him to believe Jesus and have a moral consciousness. Fearing neither God nor man, the killer, known as the Misfit orders his companions to lead the rest of the family off into the woods to be shot. And to finish, he kills the grandmother and concludes that "there is no pleasure in life but meanness".

(Additional explanation: In terms of the world evoked in the story, the Misfit's perception of a fundamental lack of order and justice in the universe is opposed to the grandmother's belief in the ordering power of conventional religion.)

A. The setting

1. Space:

The story takes place in rural Georgia. It starts in Atlanta and ends in the woods towards Tennessee

2. Time

The story happens in daytime during summer holidays.

B. The characters

1. The grandmother
2. Bailey, the grand mother's son
3. Bailey's wife
4. John Wesley, Bailey's son (8 years old)
5. June Star, Bailey's little daughter
6. Red Sammy,
7. Red Sammy's wife
8. The Misfit, a wanted criminal
9. The two companions of the Misfit

C. The action

The plot is built around two major actions: **the choice of the grandmother to go to Tennessee instead of Florida** (The old woman justifies her choice by the fact that she wants to avoid the killer, and ironically, she will ultimately be the one responsible for taking the family in the direction of the Misfit) **and the encounter of the family with the Misfit** (This encounter gives an insight to the grandmother who comes to understand the scarcity of good men and realizes she is going to die = death is a powerful instructor, a necessary companion to revelation).

- As for **the narrative structure of the story**, one can notice that the rising action starts with the accident followed by the encounter with the wanted criminal. The action reaches its **highest point** or **climax** when a conversation is engaged between the grandmother and the Misfit. From then, we have a **falling action** with the death of the rest of the

family by the Misfit's companions. And the **final stage** or **denouement** of the plot of the story occurs when the Misfit kills the old woman.

- Concerning the **narrative techniques**, we can note that in the development of the plot, the reader is struck by the narrative techniques used by the writer to vehicle her message. The story is told by a narrator who is not taking in the actions but sometimes reports dialogues between characters. There is a considerable difference between the subjective point of view of the protagonist and the objective point of view supplied by the author. O'Connor mingles the two points of view with extreme skill, one shading into the other from sentence to sentence, so that both are maintained almost simultaneously. This double point of view is one of the many forms of irony that characterize O'Connor's work (e.g. while in the opening lines of the story the grandmother said she couldn't answer to her conscience to take the children to the direction of the escaped criminal, the narrator finally makes her the responsible for leading the family in the direction of the criminal.)

D. The themes

-The scarcity of good persons nowadays

Generation gap / conflict of generation

- Lack of faith (or confidence)

- Wickedness

- Death

Conclusion

The study of the fundamentals of a short-story and the reading of "A Tree-A Rock-A Cloud" and "A Good Man is Hard to Find" permits to grasp some specificity inherent to the genre. Undeveloped aspects here will be discussed during tutorial courses so as to give students a better insight into the course.