

“One Evening in the Rainy Season”
Shi Zhecun
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St. Paul Central High School
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12th Grade
World Literature
4 class periods of 54 minutes each

1. Summary

The narrator of “One Evening in the Rainy Season” recalls a recent walk home in the rain. The story begins with an assertion that he does in fact enjoy walking in the rain, though his coworkers do not understand that, and then focuses on a particular day’s walk. When he sets out that day, it is not raining but when the rain starts, it is strong enough to drive most pedestrians to shelter themselves under the eaves of tall buildings and to nearly eliminate the movement of cars and rickshaws on the road. When the narrator notices a young woman getting off of a bus and moving to the side of the road for shelter, he stands back to watch her and, as the rain falls for over an hour, he observes her while conveying the progression of his thoughts until he finally decides to offer to walk her to her destination. When she accepts, he makes room for her under his umbrella. As they walk, he contemplates her profile, and her Suzhou accent leads him to suspect that she is his first childhood girlfriend all grown up. He worries about what people on the street may think of them for being together and a shop-keeper on the side of the road reminds him of his wife. He is disappointed when the rain stops and the woman, who he now admits is not his old girlfriend, thanks him for his help and sends him on his way. When he returns home, he lies to his wife and claims he’s been at the bar with friends.

2. Historical/Literary Content

Shi Zhecun (1905-2003) is classified as a Psychoanalytical writer of the School of New Sensibilities, or modernist movement (Zhang 105). This group of writers is also referred to as New Perceptionists (Wedell-Wedellsborg 21). According to Zhang, Modern Chinese literature grew from the psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud and integrated many Western techniques “such as punctuation and westernized syntax” (103). Modernist writers “characteristically explored this most impalpable aspect of psychic life. . . the contradictions, hesitations, and conflicts within the minds of their protagonists (Zhang 119).

“One Evening in the Rainy Season,” published in 1928, was one of Shi Zhecun’s earlier stories and is representative of the psychoanalytical style for its stream of consciousness narration, its depiction of man as alienated by life in a big city, and its portrayal of subconscious desires. Shi Zhecun took the misogyny typical of many classical Chinese novels and rewrote it in a modern vision of man’s stunted desire for women (Xu).

3. Discussion Questions and Answers

These questions are organized into three sets: Mood, stream of consciousness & Characterization through Psychological Narration. They are intended for use at specified points in the lesson plan.

A. Question Set #1 – Mood (Rain)

1. What attitude does the narrator express toward the rain in the first three paragraphs?

The narrator opens with a neutral claim that he “wasn’t at all bothered by the rain” but then promotes it to a possible “personal pleasure” and finally asserts that he “draws a great deal of pleasure from it.” This improving attitude toward the rain seems to be linked to a defensive stance against both his “coworkers” and the “people”

who mistake his refusal to ride a trolley bus for frugality. The narrator concludes that walking in the rain is a "habit" but this too he feels the need to defend, asking "what's wrong in calling it a habit?" Though he insists that he enjoys the rain, he is quite clearly displeased with some of the effects of the rain such as the muddy water that splashes into his mouth or on his pant legs. Still, he does not blame these problems on the rain but on the "passing cars whose wheels as they sped by splattered muddy water." In fact, "he loathed the wheels of those cars."

In addition to his defensive tone, the narrator displays an inability to defend himself against the rain. He claims to have a "quality umbrella" but he does not own a raincoat and, though he knows he should buy one, he has not purchased one for the 3 or 4 years that he's been walking to and from work in the rain (126).

2. This story takes place amid the tall buildings and busy streets of downtown Shanghai (see photos). How does the rain alter that environment?

The rain affects the visual appearance and the sounds of the city. With the rain comes "black clouds" (127) "the sky had grown dark (127), and streets reflect "the numerous yellow lights, and now and again green and red traffic lights." Everything appears less distinct as "the precise contours of people and traffic, coming and going in the misty drizzle, would all vanish (126)." Sounds change to "a resounding piterpatter of rain (127) and "when it rained hard, the sound of people talking nearby, even when it was loud, seemed to hang in the air (126)." The darkness, the blurriness and the voices in the air all help to tighten in and close up the city, making it a more personal space.

This is reinforced by the sudden changes in the commotion on the Shanghai streets. With the introduction of the rain, there is an initial "confusion of pedestrians scurrying for shelter on North Sichuan Road and both sides of Suzhou Creek (127)." The commotion is followed by an absence of movement: "there was no traffic, no trolleybuses or rickshaws (127)" and "as for the people, there were almost none moving about (128)." The people are "under the shop front awnings and shelters, "huddled together staring out disdainfully at the rain in the face of which they were helpless (128)."

3. How does the narrator respond to the rain on the particular evening in question?

The narrator takes a carefree attitude in the rain, implying that the rain allows his mind to escape from its regular burdens. He says he is "walking along the sidewalk with a momentarily free and easy mind observing the city in the rain. (128). In addition to this freedom, he seems to feel a sense of pride at his ability to survive in the rain. Much of that pride is evident in the first few pages (see question #1) but it is reinforced by the sarcastic tone he takes toward those who fear the rain and by his claim that they are "frightened" (127) and "helpless"(128). Sarcastically, he notes, "for what kind of weather they'd brought their rainwear, I didn't know" (128), emphasizing their weakness in the face of the rain. He then asserts that the rain causes him no concern because of his "good umbrella" that will protect his face and the

“mere” need to change his sox if his feet get wet” (128). He has the determination to go ahead where the others are held back. He even has “a vague feeling that [North Sichuan Road in the rain] was rather poetic” (128), emphasizing its higher beauty. He mentions too that he could have “happily crossed the street” (128), again contrasting his upbeat attitude against those who cower from the rain.

4. A monsoon, or season of heavy rain, hits Shanghai for nearly two months each year. How does the continuous rain seem to affect the narrator’s life?

Despite the narrator’s claim that he loves the rain, there is a lot of language that portrays the rain as monotonous. To begin with, the title of the story indicates that we will be hearing about one particular evening in an extended season of rain. The very first sentence draws attention to the repetition of the rain with “once again the rain was pouring down” (126).” The narrator tells us that “it was the same every day” (127) and that he’d “often stare out the window at the rain falling against the pale sky” (126), both of which suggest a repetition of action without suggestion of variation. This particular evening seems to differ from the others because of his involvement with the woman he escorts.

5. Shanghai of the 1920’s has been called the “Paris of the East” for its size and popularity with many foreigners. Based on the two pictures provided, (see photos in appendix), what effect would the sudden growth and popularity of Shanghai have on the people of Shanghai and the narrator in particular?

The photos show that Shanghai grew from a relatively small, fishing community to large and imposing city with many Western buildings, some large boats and a huge bridge to support increased movement around the city. For anyone living in Shanghai during this time period, that much change would likely have caused a lot of stress and contributed to a sense of being dominated by the city. The narrator in the story seems to be drawn to memories of his past in Suzhou, many miles from Shanghai. He avoids returning to his home where his wife waits under lamplight (implying a dark, closed space) and he seems drawn instead to the rain, possibly because it a part of nature that is hard to come by in Shanghai. The fact that the rain obscures the city sights also suggests that he wants to escape from city life itself and return instead to his memories of Suzhou.

The scene in which the narrator studies the passengers getting off of the bus also reinforces the foreign element of Shanghai’s population. There is a Russian, a middle-aged Japanese woman, a couple of merchants from Ningbo (another city outside of Shanghai) and finally the young woman whom he later identifies as a native of Suzhou, like himself. All five passengers appear to him as foreigners.

B. Question Set #2 – Stream of Consciousness

Before answering these questions, study the progression of the narrator’s thoughts throughout the story.

1. The narrator repeatedly reinforces the idea that his actions on that evening were not dictated by his conscious mind. How does he do that and what effect does it have?

Once the narrator is out in the rain, he claims to move forward without intentionality. His insistence that he acts without awareness implies that he either believes, or wants to believe, that the evening's encounter is destined. When he notices that the rain-soaked world feels poetic, he claims "the "feeling" was certainly no substantial thought" (128). When the bus carrying the woman arrives, he does not cross the street as he should have and as a result he is perplexed by his inaction. He asks, "why didn't I walk to the other side of the street at the moment I could have crossed? I don't know why" (128). When he studies the passengers getting off of the front of the bus, he asks himself "why didn't I count the ones getting off in third class?" (128). "It was no conscious choice on [his part]" (128). When he finally approaches the woman he's been watching for over an hour, "involuntarily [he] edged up to her side (129). Later, after walking with her in the rain, he asks himself, "so, should I leave then? Yes, I should. So why didn't I? (130). All of these actions are outside of his conscious choice and leave the impression that he is either led by some destiny or living in a world that is dictated by motives outside of those on which he usually depends.

2. Where does the text indicate that sometimes the narrator's mind is wandering between imagination and reality?

The narrator records many facts, but he also integrates a number of phrases that reveal a faith in something outside of the physical world. To begin with, he claims an awareness of the thoughts of the young lady. In an attempt to define beauty, he identifies one of its qualities as "a pleasant way of expressing oneself" and then says of the woman he has not yet met that he felt she "would meet such criteria" (128). He refers to her as a "beautiful companion (129), as though he is paired with her on some adventure, and twice as he's walking with her the point of view shifts so that he is speaking through her voice. For example, once he sees in her eyes that she is thinking "you want to share your umbrella and shelter me from the rain, so what are you waiting for? (130).

In addition to his extraordinary awareness of what she is thinking and who she is, he seems to imagine that he has control over her world. When no rickshaw drivers were available to offer her a ride, he spent much time contemplating the problem and finally concluded that "however much I reflected along these lines, it didn't produce the slightest sign of a rickshaw (129), as though his mind alone should have been able to help her.

There are many other elements that reflect his disconnection from reality. His inability to track time is evident when he says "I had completely forgotten time flowing by (130). The entire process, once he's walking with her, of imagining that she is an old girlfriend and then his projection of his wife's features onto her face are both rather deeply imaginative. The aspect of unconscious thought discussed in question #2 and

his claim at the end that he was flying as if “in a dream one would forget immediately upon waking (134) also reinforce his disconnect from reality.

3. What qualities does the narrator attribute to the woman?

He emphasizes her beauty, her blush and says that her hair smells good. He imagines her as “anxious” and recognizes “her saddened eyes” (130). He also describes her as “coy” and “bewitching”(133), suggesting that she has some hidden control over him. At one point he even admits to “a sort of masculinist sentiment” that bordered between “revenge” and “a desire to subdue the urgent press of her mind on [him] (131). Once he’s walking with her, he also perceives her in the light of a past girlfriend and seems to attribute many of the girlfriend’s qualities to the woman. Later, just before he leaves her, he recognizes qualities of his wife in her and he notices that she is not nearly as attractive as he thought.

4. How does he see himself in relationship to the young woman? Does his self-image reveal anything about his life in Shanghai?

The narrator imagines himself as a “brave, medieval warrior” who might use his “umbrella as a shield, warding off the attacking spears of rain”(129). He wonders why the rickshaw drivers haven’t come to her aid and determines that they are a “detestable bunch” when they fail to save her (129). When he walks with her under the umbrella, he thinks people might mistake him for her husband and he feels “proud that people might make such an assumption (133).

The heroic image he creates for himself is considerably more developed than seems reasonable given the situation. The medieval imagery, coupled with the idea of his wife waiting for him in a dark house, suggests that he is in need of some adventure. His life of work in the big city of Shanghai seems to lack adventure, emotional depth and variation. He is yearning for something outside of the repetition of his monotonous life.

5. The narrator often senses that he is being judged by other people. What do these judgments reveal about the life in Shanghai in the 1920’s?

In his world, which is consistent with 1920’s China, a married man, such as the narrator, is not to interact with lone women on the streets. Though he sees himself as somewhat chivalrous, he is aware that the young woman and the people he passes on the street are suspicious of his behavior (131). He, himself, realizes his behavior is wrong when he says he has “a wife at home waiting for [him] to come home and eat with him under the lamplight” (129) and later asks “why was I feeling so happy today when I had a wife at home anxiously waiting for me” (133). He tilts the umbrella down so no one can recognize them” (131) and imagines that the woman, too, appreciates this privacy. Finally, he lies to his wife when he gets home in order to protect the secrecy of a behavior that to us, in modern day America, may seem benign.

6. The narrator makes many references to the movement of time. How does time play into his experience?

In the second paragraph of the story, the narrator tells us that he walks home in the rain in part because his "home was very close to the company offices, so there was no need to take the trolley bus (126). On the particular evening of this story, though, it seems to take the narrator many hours to get home. To begin with, he stayed at work until six o'clock "when night fall was approaching (127). It takes him "almost half an hour" (127) to walk from Jiangxi to Sichuan Road Bridge; that should be nearly 6:30. He continues up North Sichuan to where he would turn onto Wenjianshi when he notices the woman and follows her under the eaves of a building. "In this rain," he says, "I'd completely forgotten time flowing by. I took out my watch. Seven thirty-four. Over an hour now." He stares at her for another 10 minutes before he asks to walk with her. Just before he leaves her he curses the "unsympathetic weather" and wonders "why couldn't it continue raining for half an hour? Yes, just another half an hour would have done it (135)" [Done what? What did he intend to accomplish?] His continued references to time show that he is often forgetting himself in his experience and, likewise, often remembering that he should be somewhere else. The loss of time reinforces the sense that he is experiencing something outside of his habitual lifestyle.

C. Questions Set #3 – Characterization/Psychological Narration

1. Based on the narrator's relationship with his coworkers, his wife and the woman he meets on the street, how does he seem to interact with others?

The narrator seems rather isolated from other people. His coworkers do not fully understand who he is. He fears the judgment of the people on the streets when he chooses to escort the woman. Most disturbing though is his emotional distance from his wife. He mentions twice that she is home waiting for him but still he doesn't act to return to her. He associates a vendor on the street with his wife, almost as though he fears she watches or tracks him. When he gets home, he tells her a lie about where he's been. The fact that his imagination is so caught up in the possibilities associated with a random woman on the street, the details of which make up most of this story, also reinforce his distance from real human connection and his obsession with both memories from the past and artistic renderings of beautiful women in the paintings of Harunobu Suzuki and the poem of old.

2. Early in the story, the narrator refers to walking in the rain as a "personal pleasure." What in the experience appears to be pleasurable for him?

The narrator enjoys the freedom of walking, the relaxation of "a leisurely stroll" (127) and the sense that people's "precise contours" would vanish. He also emphasizes his strong attachment to his umbrella on numerous occasions and connects rain with artistic beauty as portrayed in both poetry and painting – an umbrella in each of these. When he walking with the woman, he is able to smell her hair, to study her face and to

imagine how she might be connected to him. His walk in the rain gives him a chance to imagine another world for himself.

3. As the narrator rides home in the rickshaw at the end of the story, what is revealed about his state of mind?

Just before the narrator leaves the young woman, he feels a change in himself. "It was as if the form of the woman beside me had already been released from the confines of my mind (134). He then becomes aware of the darkness and realizes the rain has stopped falling. He seems to have snapped out of his imaginative state and this is reinforced when he's riding home in the rickshaw, "flying in a dream one would forget immediately upon waking (134). Yet, he claims that some burden has stayed with him and he thinks about "putting up the umbrella" again even though it is not raining. As he arrives home to his wife, he has then essentially returned to reality but his fantasy pulls at him to return.

4. When the narrator arrives home, he mistakes his wife's voice for that of the young woman and later, her face for that of a street vendor he'd noticed while walking. What possible significance might this have?

At the very least it is evident that the narrator is intermixing his feelings for many women and having a tough time drawing distinct lines between them. The shopkeeper turned suddenly into his wife and it was enough of a shock to leave him "confused (132). The young woman took the form of an old girlfriend from Suzhou and also later his wife. When he returns home and mistakes his wife for both of the women who earlier he mistook for his wife, it lends a sort of circular feel to his fantasies. His wife seems more involved in his obsession with the young woman than it first seemed. Still, he ends by claiming that he "found it strange that now [he] could no longer find anything in [his] wife's features resembling the unreal image of that woman" (135). The young woman is now "unreal" and his wife's features have become predominate, at least for a while.

5. Overall, how is this narrator characterized through the use of psychological narration?

Without psychological narration, this story would merely say that a man walked home in the rain, escorted a woman some distance to her destination and then went home to dinner. With the psychological narration, the author instead focuses our attention not on the facts of the narrator's day but on the state of his mind as he goes about his day. His tendency to fantasize about potential connections that he might have to strange women on the street reveals his isolation in the working world of big-city Shanghai of the 1920's. The old girlfriend that he imagined in the face of the woman under his umbrella was from his youth in the smaller city of Suzhou, renowned for its beauty. She is the past he left behind when he came to work in Shanghai. He tells us that she "almost every day came to mind" (132). He claims that he frequently dreams of her or daydreams about her (132). It may even be relevant that just before he meets her, he

has crossed over a Shanghai creek aptly called Suzhou Creek. Overall, through the psychological narrative style, the mind fragmenting effects of leaving home to make a life for oneself in a city as large and as overpowering as Shanghai is revealed in the guise of a simple evening stroll.

4. Activities

Homework assigned the previous day:

Choose a somewhat active/chaotic moment in your life, something ordinary like dinner or your bus ride home. Participate in it but watch yourself at the same time. Notice what you think as you take part in this activity. Observe your thoughts in great detail. Don't warn anyone that you're doing it. Take some notes afterwards.

Day One: Anticipatory Set/Introduction

- A. Free-write on frantic vs. peaceful scenes (10 minutes) – Give students 5 minutes to describe a frantic moment in their life, something like a busy intersection or what it is like to eat lunch in the school lunchroom. Then give students 5 minutes to describe something really peaceful, like being left home alone or taking a nap.
- B. Share thoughts (5 minutes) – Invite students to share some of their observations about the qualities of both frantic and peaceful experiences and also the language they chose to use to describe them.
- C. Read “One Evening in the Rainy Season” (20 minutes) – This can be done as a whole class or individually. While reading, students should highlight passages that contribute to mood/atmosphere, especially language that presents either a frantic or a peaceful sensation. Students should also identify areas of confusion or words they need defined.
- D. Closing Discussion (5 minutes) – Have a quick discussion to clarify areas of confusion in terms of plot or language.

Homework –

- 1) Re-read “One Evening in the Rainy Season” for class tomorrow;
- 2) Write a one page, 1st person narration based on the notes taken for last night's homework. Include actions but mostly convey thoughts. Due on day three.

Day Two: Mood/Atmosphere (Peaceful Rain in Frantic City)

- A. Study Pictures& Maps with Discussion (15 minutes) – Share photos of Shanghai and the map the progress of the narrator's walk. [Note: The pictures emphasize the extent to which Shanghai grew between 1910 and 1920. This story was published in 1928. How would this changing environment have affected the narrator?] Also, provide historical context as necessary.

- B. Pre-Thinking for Discussion (10-15 minutes) – Provide students with the 5 questions related to mood. Give them time to think over each question individually, find evidence in the story and prepare for discussion.
- C. Discussion: Mood (20-23 minutes) – Allow students to discuss the 5 questions with the requirement that comments should be text-based. Close by contrasting this portrayal of rain to any other portrayals students have encountered in Western culture. [For example, in many movies rain is meant to reinforce sadness, disappointment, cleaning up past problems, etc. . .]

Day Three: Stream of Consciousness.

- A. Homework Review (5 minutes) – share some examples from homework assignments. Define the concept of stream of consciousness writing. How is it easy or difficult based on student experiences? Turn in homework.
- B. Small Group Evidence Gathering (20 minutes) – In groups of 3-4, students should trace the narrator’s train of thought through the text and create a list of main ideas with specific quotes as evidence.
- C. Discussion: Stream of Consciousness (15 minutes) – Allow students to discuss the effect of stream of consciousness based on the questions provided.
- D. Overhead (10 minutes) – Project the excerpt from William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Read it together and discuss how it is similar/different from “One Evening in the Rainy Season.” [The idea here would be to recognize that qualities of stream of consciousness by looking at an example that is possibly more complex. Also, it would be good to realize here that aspects of character personality are evident through the order in which information is revealed.]

Homework [Distribute Question Set #3]:

Review question set #3 and write paragraph responses in preparation for tomorrow’s discussion. Be sure to provide direct references to the text. Also try to connect responses to previous study over the past two days.

Day Four: Characterization through Psychological Focus

- A. Discussion (20 minutes) – Discuss the overall effect of the short story. What do we learn about the narrator’s state of mind? Use homework assignments for discussion. Turn in homework when finished.
- B. Creative Small Groups Activity (20 minutes)– In groups of 3-4, students should write a stream of consciousness piece that mimics Shi Zhecun’s story but which is set in the student’s own world. The following criteria must be achieved:

1. There must a form of peace found in a chaotic or frantic environment. This might be rain in a big city but could also be a finding a friend during a fire drill or a good song on the radio during a traffic jam.
2. The story must reveal something about the narrator's state of mind through stream of consciousness technique.
3. Though the narrator will separate from reality for a while, he/she must return at the end.

C. Sharing (10 minutes) – Share some finished products and discuss their similarities to the story.

5. Citations

Schirokauer, Conrad & Donald N. Clark. Modern East Asia: A Brief History. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.

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Wedell-Wellsborg, Anne. Haunted fiction: modern Chinese literature and the supernatural. *International Fiction Review*. 32.1-2 (Jan.2005): p21. Literature Resource Center. Gale. ST PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY. 3 Aug. 2009 http://0-go.galegroup.com.alpha.stpaul.lib.mn.us/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=stpaul_main.

Xu, Gary. Keynote Address. *Teaching East Asian Literature in the High School*. Indiana Memorial Union, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. 14 May 2009.

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6. Appendix

A. Shanghai – Pictures of the intersection of North Sichuan Bridge and Suzhou Creek, 1910 & 1920. These pictures are in the public domain.

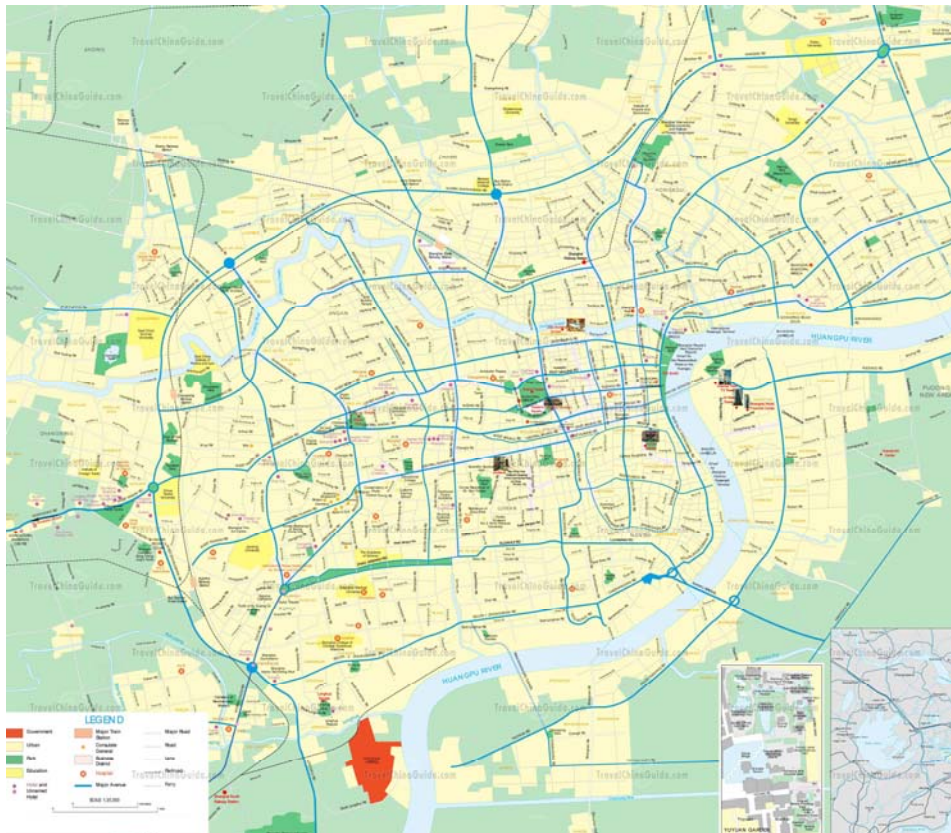


<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SuzhouCreekOld2.JPG>



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SuzhouCreekOld1.jpg>

B. Map of Shanghai – it is a current day map. Still, it is possible to get a sense of where the narrator was walking along North Sichuan. Wenjianshi doesn't appear to exist anymore but would have had to have been north of the river and perpendicular to the North Sichuan.



Google maps

C. *The Sound and the Fury* excerpt

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. New York; Random House, 1984. 92-93.

And after a while I had been hearing my watch for some time and I could feel the letters crackle through my coat, against the railing, and I leaned on the railing, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I moved along the rail, but my suit was dark too and I could wipe my hands, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I walked it into the shadow of the quai. Then I went east.

Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard harvard That pimple-faced infant she met at the field-meet with colored ribbons. Skulking along the fence trying to whistle her out like a puppy. Because they couldn't cajole him into the diningroom Mother believed he had some sort of spell he was going to cast on her when he got her alone. Yet any blackguard *He was lying beside the box under the window bellowing* that could drive up in a limousine with a flower in his buttonhole. *Harvard. Quentin this is Herbert. My Harvard boy. Herbert will be a big brother has already promised Jason*

Hearty, celluloid like a drummer. Face full of teeth white but not smiling. *I've heard of him up there. All teeth but not smiling. You going to drive?*

Get in Quentin.

You going to drive.

It's her car aren't you proud of your little sister owns the first auto in town Herbert his present. Louis has been giving her lessons every morning didn't you get my letter Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of their daughter Candace to Mr Sydney Herbert Head on the twenty-fifth of April one thousand nine hundred and ten at Jefferson Mississippi. At home after the first of August number Something Something Avenue South Bend Indiana. Shreve said Aren't you even going to open it? Three days. Times. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson Young Lochinvar rode out of the west a little too son, didn't he?

I'm from the south. You're funny, aren't you.

O yes I knew it was somewhere in the country.

You're funny, aren't you. You ought to join the circus.