

**SM2105 Narrative Strategies &
Aesthetics in Time-based Media**

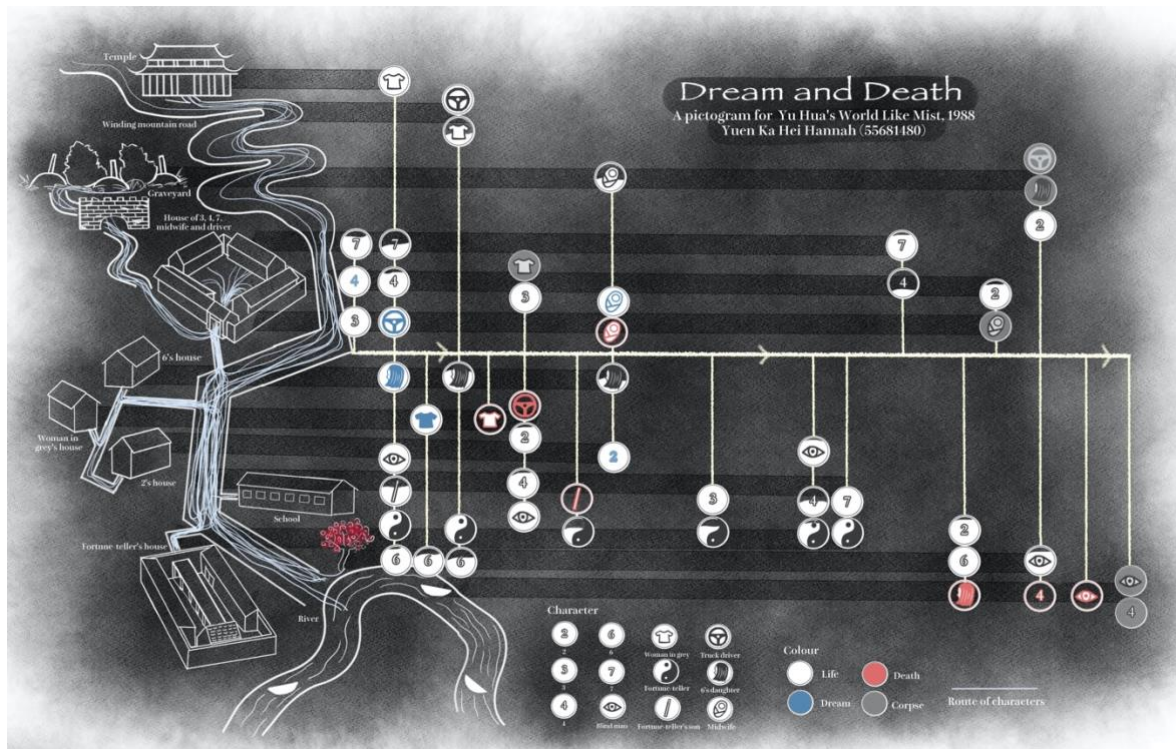
Spring 2020

Final Project – Dream and Death

Option 4: A Pictogram for Yu Hua's World Like Mist (1988)

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Title: Dream and Death



Link: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1C-X8dSnW2K2VzcSm8hM3L6KN4NgItDiK>

World Like Mist is a haunted short story written by Yu Hua. This experimental literature reminds me of the fiction of *Strange Stories from Liao zhai* by Pu Songling, which also has many classic short tales about the relationship between human and ghost. These ghost stories with Chinese characteristics fascinated me a lot so I chose *World Like Mist* as the topic of my final project. The plot of *World Like Mist* is not complicated to understand, yet it includes numerous metaphors and the events in the story are not in continuous order. Therefore, creating a narrative pictogram can better sort out ideas of the work. The pictogram has applied chronology, cartography and sign sequence to express my own insight of the story and hope to allow other viewers to generate new interpretation after looking at it.

The narrative is in a labyrinth structure which the storyline does not follow the time sequence. An event experienced by one character may be told by another character after a few days. Moreover, one certain incident may be narrated for twice from the perspectives of different characters. Interaction between characters is crucial to push forward the plot. For the horizontal aspect of the pictogram, I draw a brief map of the setting on the left and a timeline on the right to show the space and time of the story. The blue lines on the map illustrates the route of the characters in the town to indicate the close relation between them. Even if they do not know each other, their acts keep

affecting others and develop the story. The timeline concentrates the flow of the whole story which is in the length of about 60 days. Viewers can clearly comprehend various events' order and locations by the timeline.

Although the story happened in spring, the overall keynote is cold and dark. Color is seldom mentioned in the essay. Only the title *World Like Mist* matches the setting of spring, it also reveals that the lives of characters are like mist: their lives are the same as illusive dreams. Therefore, I use watercolor stroke and monochrome to draw the main part so as to build up the atmosphere. The tale's theme revolves around fate and death. However, the fates of all characters are predetermined. Their lives seem to be dreams that they are not able to control at all. Characters keep stepping to death at the end, hence the title of the pictogram is 'Dream and Death' instead of 'Life and Death'. Apart from the dream-like life, characters' dreams also play a significant role in the writing. Dream can express the psychology of characters thus shaping their full figure. On the other hand, dream helps to link up different characters and forms a 'flash-forward' of a future incident. For example, the driver meets the woman in grey in his dream. This dream leads to the interaction of these two characters in reality and also reveals they are about to die according to the dream's content.

As a result, life, dream and death are the main component on the pictogram's timeline and they are presented by different colors' circle respectively. The degree to which the white circle is filled represents the remaining lifespan of the character. For instance, 4's father brings 4 to see the fortune teller because of her serious sleep talk at night. Her dream provides a chance for the fortune teller to rape her thus results to the suicide of 4. The fortune teller absorbs the springs of vitality within 4's body so that he can prolong his life. At the same time, the blind man who is infatuated with 4's voice follows her death and commit suicide in the same river ultimately. This shows dream connects the fate of characters and even causes the death of someone. It also strengthens the theme of invincible fate.

In my opinion, *World Like Mist* is a well-written and fascinating story in multiple storylines. Reader can discover new details if they read it over and over again. Metaphor and symbols are hidden between lines. I wish this narrative pictogram can express my analysis on the reading thus inspire others to look into the work in another perspective.