

# New age of korean literature 4: sampung department store

Literature



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Analysis of Jung Hi Hyun's "Sampung Department Store" In the story, the narrator and her friend R may have both represented two normal Korean friends who have nothing but a shallow relationship with each other. The narrator, and perhaps R too, may actually be reflective or introspective of their lives and of each other, but their thinking never goes beyond the realm of daily life activities. In short, there is no depth to their lives, their existence and their friendships and relationships. This is the reason why they seem to be indifferent to each other. This is perhaps an aspect of Korean culture that the author is trying to show through the story. The coldness of the noodles and the coldness of the library represent the coldness of the life of the narrator. The fact that R lives alone and remains utterly mysterious to the narrator also represent a sad, cold life for R. Their lives may actually reflect the lives of Korean people in general. Koreans may actually be respectful in their ways, just as they are shown in the story through the examples of the narrator and R, but through all the characters' examples, including the narrator and R, one can see that everyone is just indifferent. The narrator keeps talking and thinking about her own life and does not even bother to ask R about her own personal life. R is no different. They represent the cold, indifferent Korean society.

After the disaster, the narrator does not check on R perhaps because she means nothing to her after all. She is "someone who knew nothing at all about her" (Jung 94). This is why "a few days later, the morning paper printed a list of the names of those dead or missing [the narrator] did not read it" (Jung 98). R is just another salesgirl to the narrator. She is just more curious about her than sympathetic with her. The narrator may have shared

her job, shared her apartment, eaten noodles with her and watched good shows with her, but she does not actually know her intimately. She does not even ask if she has a daughter or why she lives alone. Besides, even when they were still at school, they hardly ever communicated. Most of the time, the narrator muses about her problems regarding marriage, family, employment and relationships, but she has never thought about R's own problems. In short, the narrator may have only actually temporarily used R's presence to fill her own emptiness in her life. The narrator keeps on studying for no reason. She wants jobs that do not want her, and she is hired by a company that she dislikes. She is being forced by her parents to live in England and marry a dentist, and she does not even know exactly why her boyfriend has left her. She lives a life of emptiness and she finds temporary refuge in R. It is possible that she does not like her.

Perhaps, through the story, the author wants to convey to the reader the existence of coldness and indifference in the Korean society. Most Koreans may actually have good jobs, good education, good families but they actually lack depth in their relationships. Many Koreans, represented by the narrator's mother, see people like objects of display and sources of fame and prestige but never individuals who have feelings and sentiments of their own. For too long and perhaps throughout her childhood, the narrator has been deprived by her parents of the right to express her own feelings, and she may have been unconsciously taught by her parents' example that she should treat others with the same coldness and indifference. This is perhaps the reason why she does not seem to develop intimacy with R, and that she does not seem to be curious about what is actually going on in R's mind or in

R's life. In short, perhaps what the author wants to reveal to the reader of the story is that the meaning of a good relationship is more than just knowing about the external details of a person, and it is more than just watching movies with her and eating noodles with her or helping her with her job. It is about sharing his or her thoughts and feelings, and talking about these. It is all about being intimate with him or her, and understanding things and looking at the world in his or her perspective.

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Works Cited

Jeong, Yi Hyun. "Sampung Department Store." Print.