

New age of korean literature : the taste of mate

Literature



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Analysis of Chung Han-ah's "The Taste of Mate" The narrator's dream of riding bicycles and of racing furiously is all about her own fast-paced life. She has so many things to do like she is racing against time and so she dreams of racing furiously by bicycle. First of all, she is really a bicycle enthusiast. Second, she has a job of "running the front counter involved checking membership cards and handing out locker keys" (Chung 89). Third, she has so much to think of as a student taking up masters in education. Fourth, she would have a job at the hagwon. Fifth, she would still learn an instrument or take up drawing classes after graduate school. Moreover, despite all her work and her busyness, she would somehow even ask herself "Is there a plan somewhere in all this?" (Chung 90). Thus, her racing thoughts, her own fast-paced life and her own feelings of emptiness define her dreams. She is racing fast but she does not even seem to know where she is going. The dream seems to be a reminder of this. Moreover, at the last part of the story, the narrator tells the director that somehow she understands the latter's anxiety, and that she has it too, and so her dreams may all be about her anxiety - about "pedaling your life away without a wink of sleep" (Chung 98-99). She barely has enough time to sleep and take a rest, and so this reflects heavily on her dream.

The narrator admires Professor J so much. For the narrator, Professor J was a "more guarded, prudent type of person" who never gossiped with students and who kept his feelings to himself (Chung 90). The narrator considered J a "young, put-together lecturer" (Chung 90). The narrator actually seems to be in love with Professor J because she could not raise her head while he was giving a lecture during the whole class, because she felt that if their eyes met, she would feel that "the fissure in her heart would become

immediately apparent" to him (Chung 94). She even brings him to a motel when he gets drunk and soon she realizes that Professor J looks like someone she has loved a long time ago considering his " fine, easily tangled hair, the rounded cheekbones, [and] the long, small eyes with their thick eyelashes" (Chung 96). However, nothing happens at the motel between the narrator and Professor J. In short, the relationship that she may have had with the narrator is only that of a mere admiration for someone that she perhaps did not have in her life for a long time. She has been so busy working and doing so many other things that she may have already even forgotten how to fall in love. This is why she is even acting strangely in front of Professor J even as he approaches him at the bar.

The title " The Taste of Mate" has two meanings. Literally, it means the Argentinean tea that the narrator's father prepares toward the end of the story and from which the narrator gets herself to relax. It is also the tea from which her lower belly and throat begin to relax. Finally, the narrator describes the tea as something that "[holds] her in its embrace" (Chung 99). However, figuratively and more significantly, the taste of mate refers to the temporary break time, the temporary solution or anything that somehow distracts someone from the usual routine of everyday life. The taste of mate is actually something that everyone wants to achieve or experience in life - the peace, the quiet, and the tranquility. It is actually so simply because one can already experience it through the Argentinean tea. However, the irony is that one works so hard his whole life and he studies hard at the same time, only to realize that in the end what he needs in life is only a cup of matte. Life is actually extremely simple, for all humans can be satisfied with a small amount of tea but they are the ones who literally kill themselves with so

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much hard work and sacrifice. Humans find no satisfaction in every great thing that they do but they find so much satisfaction in something as simple as sipping tea. Moreover, just like the narrator, the title implies that sometimes one is just so absorbed in life and in daily routine that one can only have a few glimpses of beauty like when she observes J's appearance while asleep in bed, and when she sips Argentinean mate.

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Works Cited

Chung, Han-ah. "The Taste of Mate." Print.