

Thought Questions for “At Middle Age” and “Love Must Not be Forgotten”

Context for “At Middle Age” by Chen Rong

“During the Cultural Revolution, to be an intellectual was to be suspect. Many had their homes raided, their books seized and burnt. There had previously been Eight Categories of Bad Characters: landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, criminals, Rightists, Renegades, spies and capitalist-roaders. Now the intellectuals were labeled Stinking Number Nine, ignominiously assigned to the bottom of this list. Some were given menial tasks, such as cleaning out lavatories. Others sent to the countryside, unable for years to use their special skills.

In 1976, the arrest of the “gang of four” elated intellectuals. Only later did we gain some idea of the havoc that had been caused... Chinese woke up to the fact that they had fallen years behind and must catch up, must modernize the country.”

Excerpted from “A New Woman Writer Chen Rong and her Story ‘At Middle Age’” by Gladys Yang. Printed in *Chinese Literature*, Volume No. 10, Beijing, China, 1980.

How does the ending of the story feel?

Context for “Love Must Not be Forgotten”

During the cultural revolution when the “gang of four” was in power, from 1966-1976, people were encouraged to forsake their personal lives as well as romantic love in order to be loyal to Mao and avoid being forced to work in communist labor farms. As mentioned in the context at the beginning of “Love Must Not be Forgotten,” the government had banned the notion of romantic love in literature during this time period. Sexuality was also repressed, so men and women wore the same kinds of clothing and unmarried women and men were the heroines and heroes in fiction of the day.

Sources of information: book review on *Wild Ginger* by Anchee Min found in the Holland Sentinel, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, Feb. 2002.

“Does the fact that the official and his wife were married for “class love” rather than personal love mean their marriage is inferior?” –Xiao Lin

“What is true morality-a marriage based on love or one that maintains socially required appearances?” –Dai Qing