



Repression, Rejection and Transcendence in a Patriarchal Society: A Psychoanalytic Study of a Woman's Journey in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

Md. Jakir Hossain

Senior Faculty Member, Department of Foreign Languages, Jazan University, Jazan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

ORCID iD: 0009-0005-9734-5770.

Email: mjakir@jazanu.edu.sa, rain2jakir@gmail.com.

Received: 21 Mar 2025; Received in revised form: 24 Apr 2025; Accepted: 02 May 2025; Available online: 09 May 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— This paper aims to investigate the complicated dynamics of repression, rejection, and transcendence and evaluate the protagonist's transformative journey in the context of patriarchal society as reflected in Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* through a psychoanalytic lens. Based on the findings of scanning the original text and studying the relevant reference books and research articles, we re-examine the far-reaching adverse psychological consequences of societal values and norms on female identity and autonomy. And in this process, we reconsider the protagonist Yeong-hye's narrative in the framework of certain familial and sociocultural factors, particularly the ways of treating a woman which play a pivotal role in determining the course of her life journey. The study further delves into Yeong-hye's unprecedented defense mechanism that she adopts as a means of denying the world of collective oppression in general and transcending the boundary of her existence as a human being at the end.



Keywords— psychoanalysis, repression, rejection, transcendence, feminine autonomy, patriarchal violence, feminine issues, vegetarianism trauma, identity crisis.

Introduction

It wouldn't be inappropriate to state that in the vast canvas of contemporary literature, very few works can be found, dealing with the true nature of multilayered chemistry of a woman's identity and the surrounding sociocultural forces, the inimitable way Han Kang does it in *The Vegetarian*. In general, this novel represents substantial insights into the invasive forces persistently affecting female identity in the modern male-dominated South Korean society, particularly from the viewpoint of its protagonist, Yeong-hye. Whereas this research paper endeavors to scrutinize the subtleties and intricacies of repression, rejection, and transcendence that lead Yeong-hye to undertake an awful transformative journey focusing on the psychological implications of societal norms on women's autonomy and self-conception.

Yeong-hye's radical decision to reject meat is at the center of her entire narrative which at the surface level appears to be an action initiated as a means of renouncing the expectations imposed upon Yeong-hye by her family and society. This rejection is symbolic of a broader struggle against the authoritarian social bodies and compelled value-system that define femininity in a patriarchal culture. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva clarifies this complex phenomenon more precisely through her proverbial expression, "Identity, substance, causality, and definition are transgressed so that others may be adopted: analogy, relation, opposition, and therefore dialogism and Menippean ambivalence." (Kristeva 86)

It is obvious that Yeong-hye's extraordinary journey, manifested by her denial to conform, intrigues the curiosity of researchers and readers as well to comprehend further the psychosomatic and sociocultural factors

responsible for her actions. As a matter of fact, Yeong's denial of taking meat can be interpreted in many ways like her attempt to overcome biological desires which would pave a path for her to loosen the ties of certain personal and familial bondages, deemphasizing the physical existence, beginning of the process of her long preparation for the ultimate transformation and so on.

But as we proceed further into the interior of the novel following the protagonist's journey of life, we notice that her path gradually getting more unnerving and agonizing with the passage of time.

How Psychoanalytical Framework Fits in Our Scheme

Psychoanalysis as a method of treating certain psychological disorders, was initially developed by the prodigious Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud and as a literary theory, in other words, a theory as a system of interpreting literary texts from a unique perspective, it was significantly framed and improved by the prominent theorists and philosophers like Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, and Julia Kristeva. The principal object of psychoanalytical theory is to explore the way conscious and unconscious elements of the human mind interact with each other by bringing them into the conscious mind through a systematic application of techniques like dream interpretation and free associations. On the other hand, psychoanalysis as a literary theory fundamentally throws light on the internal and external factors that determine the behavioral patterns of the characters and ultimately shape the psychic world of them. Internal components include the feelings, emotions and mindsets and the external elements are essentially the socio-cultural, political and ethical norms and values that are carried out by almost all the members of society whether willing or unwilling. Suppression is at core Freudian theory of psychoanalysis and repression also plays a pivotal role in the life of the protagonist Yeong-hye, so we think psychoanalytical approach fits in our scheme the most.

Women in Contemporary South Korean Society

As we delve into the novel, we notice Mr. Cheong, a so-called learned gentleman opting for a lady as his wife because of her "unremarkable" nature (Kang 3). This becomes more evident in the following statement of Mr. Cheong, "The passive personality of this woman...suited me down to the ground" (Kang 3). As a matter of fact, multiple meanings and propositions of the phrases "unremarkable nature," and "passive personality" are clearly indicative of Mr. Cheong's chauvinistic attitude toward women. His preference for a lady with "unremarkable" nature and "passive personality" (Kang 3)

justify his naked and raw intent to dominate females without any resistance whereas husband and wife relationship is expected to be based on mutual love, respect and empathy and unbridled domination ultimately leads to oppressions and injustices which are characteristic of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. And in this context, too, patriarchy's domination and suppression of femininity stand out to be the most significant theme of this novel.

Philosophically speaking, darkness and light move hand in hand in this earth. So to say Han Kang presents a case study chiefly through the life story of the protagonist Yeong-hye and eventually shows the world how pathetically a so called modern progressive and educated society i.e. the contemporary South Korean society fails to ensure a safe and sovereign atmosphere for its female members where they can meet their minimum rights and exercise their freedom as a female member and in a greater sense as a human being. Present-day South Korean society with all the boons of modern science and technology and remarkable progressions in the fields of science and technology, education, healthcare and empowerment show unspeakable rigidity, hostility and polarity in the ways of treating women in different walks of life. Treating women as a subordinate and mere sexual object have been an age-old issue in the history of human race. In other words, this process of subordination and sexual objectification has never stopped rather it has taken new and in cases, more sophisticated and deceptive disguises and forms. So, we think it won't be any exaggeration to assert that the modern civilization with all its extraordinary achievements have failed to ensure a safe and dignified domain for women in general.

Yeong-hye, an ideal South Korean woman, a responsible, mild and completely subservient woman undergoes indescribable pangs and agonies over the years and finally, initiates a unique process of resistance by rejecting meat. Her rejection of meat signifies a symbolic rejection of the patriarchal text of femininity in South Korean context.

Treatment of Feminine Issues in The Vegetarian

As a matter of fact, human beings have survived on this earth through ceaseless struggles. So, in a sense, the history of human civilization is the history of struggles against all the authoritarian forces like social authorities, political authorities and even cultural authorities along with all the adversities and calamities of nature. This observation is truer about the female members of the civilization than their male counterparts. Whatever ways and how many times we address the issues like equality, enlightenment and the empowerment and emancipation of women in the seminars and academic talks, the reality remains almost the same for the females i.e. the foot of the candle is always

surrounded by darkness. The Vegetarian occupies a very special place in the realm of world literature because of its vivid and authentic presentation of feminine issues. More specifically speaking, the way the author delineates Yeong-hye's exemplary struggles against the most brutal and systematic gender oppression and her ways to respond back to society through rejection and transformation, is in a word matchless.

The following statement of Mr. Cheong epitomizes the whole scenario: "As for women who were pretty, intelligent, strikingly sensual, the daughters of rich families — they would only ever have served to disrupt my carefully ordered existence." (Kang 4). It is obvious that he considers women with beauty, sensuality and intelligence as a threat to his existence. So, to say, a society which is almost entirely dominated by the males, leaves no free space for beauty, talent and even the vitality of women. The term equality is a far cry in a context like this.

At a time when we take much credit and pride talking about issues like absolute psychological and physical freedom of women, priceless uniqueness of womanhood and even women's superiority over men in cases like motherhood, parenting and so on, Han Kang questions the authenticity of all these so called highly intellectual, liberal and progressive seminars, writings and slogans through the story of Yeong-hye. In the novel, we observe that Yeong-hye's father tries to force-feed her, her husband rapes her when she denies sex her brother-in-law criticizes her body in the name of aestheticism (Kang 93), and what not! All these rebuking and barbaric actions not only trample the dignity of women but also nullify the identity females. But a glimpse of her experience at the hospital gives us a more horrific picture of torture and humiliation, to quote: "Blood is gushing out of the tube... Yeong-hye convulses against her chest" (Kang 175). This hospital scene surpasses the extreme tortures of the most infamous jails of the world, and we can't help quoting Mr. Kurtz's aphoristic utterance, "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad 116). And the 'horror' reaches a new height when we come across this line in the novel, "They just force me to take medication, and stab me with needles" (Kang 156). Here the pronoun 'they' is highly significant for our purpose because it testifies that the hostility, oppression and objectification of women are parts a masterfully designed, organized and collective scheme. It's a land of collective crimes where even females are compelled to show extreme brutalities towards their 'sisters' i.e. the members of the same sex and that is quite evident in the ways the female members like Yeong-hye's mother-in-law.

Now, the question which naturally arises is whether the protagonist of *The Vegetarian* yields to all these

pressures and predicaments exerted upon her by patriarchy or she renounces and rebels and the straightway answer is she rejects and resists in a unique way. And her unique way of rejection and resistance is one of the focal points of this article.

Patriarchal Oppressive Forces Acting Upon Yeong-hye

The persistent forces of patriarchy trigger both torments and traumas in Yeong-hye. These explicit and sinister oppressive forces function through some common channels like familial structures, gender and matrimonial expectations, social norms etc. and the guiding force of all these agents is patriarchy. Mr. Cheong being a representative of patriarchy, selects Yeong-hye as his wife because of her 'unremarkable nature' and obedience and thus, he always treats her as an object and never as a subject. It is his conviction that an unremarkable woman won't disrupt his 'ordered existence' (Kang 4).

Yeong-hye's father, arguably the most archaic and conservative agent of patriarchy, acts upon establishing an environment of absolute rule, domination and suppression of the authoritarian forces in the novella most nakedly. The way he attempts to force meat into Yeong-hye's mouth and slaps her in the presence of a good number of family members and relatives clearly exemplifies all the violent means that patriarchal authority applies to take an absolute control over female body and psyche. The protagonist's reluctant and passive participation in sexual intercourse with her husband over period time and Mr. Cheong's enforcement of engaging his wife in gratifying his biological needs irrespective of his wife's moods have multi-dimensional meanings. The following words of Mr. Cheong fit in with the context perfectly: So yes, one night when I returned home late and somewhat inebriated after a meal with colleagues, I grabbed hold of my wife and pushed her to the floor. Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging off her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused. She put up a surprisingly strong resistance and, spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully. Once that had happened, she lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling, her face blank, as though she were a 'comfort woman' dragged in against her will, and I was the Japanese soldier demanding her services." (Kang 30)

We think that citing the following lines from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* would be appropriate in this context, "It's over, it's all over," she said, "He hands her the comb... She smooths her hair with automatic hand." (Eliot 13–14). So, raping his own wife is what in the most savage manner is what the so-called modern-day educated does with his own almost regular basis.

And this evidence is strong, vivid and authentic enough to assert that in the context of present-day South Korean context and in a broader sense, in the context of the modern world with few minor exceptions, in the long run, conjugal relationships turn into a kind of legal, familial and social obligation for females to entertain and serve the males as sex-partner, care-giver, cook and entertainer irrespective of their moods and overall psycho-somatic conditions. And males' approaches towards them to enjoy all the services undisputedly are relentlessly safeguarded and ensued by their agents, institutions and written and unwritten values, regulations and stereotypes. So, oppression, humiliation and ill-treatment are everyday facts for females here. And Yeong-hye's non-resistance and passive participation in having sex are indicative of the fact that she had enough of that sort of emotionless, mechanical and barbaric sex.

In-hye's husband and Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, a major male character approaches the protagonist in a better disguised way. This frustrated video artist shows considerable aversion to social norms and values and profound interest in asceticism and based on these two standards, he can very easily be considered as a liberal and enlightened gentleman. But his growing interest in the physical features and beauty of Yeong-hye and particularly his special interest in the birth mark on her buttock along with his having sex with her on camera are obviously indicative of the dark side his character and episode opens another window for a discussion how female is abused in the name of art, in other words, how randomly women are sexually mistreated in the fields of media and performing art. But we have a keen eye on Yeong-hye participation in sex-making with her brother-in-law and would present our own interpretation of it in the last part of the paper. But so far as the actions and interactions between these sister-in-law and brother-in-law are concerned, the male counterpart manipulates the beauty and appeal of a young and pretty woman merely as an object of entertainment disregarding her dignity as a human being.

So, this young lady, ceaselessly being in the process of such torturous situations and inhuman treatment, is indeed relegating her innumerable soft and sublime emotions, desires and wishes into the unconscious mind and we would observe soon how all these suppressed elements work upon her psychic world. As repression is the primary focal point of our study, this reasonably elaborate, factual and textual representation of various forms and natures of suppression would certainly take us one step further to clarify and establish our perspective on a firm pedestal. And so, we can now logically address our second key point: rejection.

Yeong-hye's Response to the Oppressive System

As we attempt to look upon the agenda through the protagonist Yeong-hye's eyes, we notice that the first thing that she denies, or rejects is meat. And in accordance with our proposition, we would consider the significance and various implications of this act of rejecting meat from the psychoanalytical viewpoint. Her father's brutal attempt to compel her to eat meat, turns into a fierce psychophysical battle between the subdued femininity and the aggressive masculinity. As he tries to force meat into her mouth assertively, she refuses to take it thoroughly and in response, her father starts slapping her frantically and she on the other hand, begins slitting her wrists at the dining table helplessly. This catalytic reaction of Yeong-hye repletes with symbolic implications and multilayered significance. But in the context of our purpose, its importance and appropriateness in the psychoanalytical framework outweigh everything else!

The protagonist's rejection of meat simultaneously determines the next course of her life and the structure of the narrative. But one of the fundamental purposes of this research is to enquire into the factors responsible for such a rebellious reaction on the part of a compliant and obedient woman and as we have already shown with ample textual references that Yeong-hye's journey of life is predominantly characterized by a prolonged process of suppression and find her indiscriminately repressing her wishes, longings, torments and traumas. And in the final part of this research paper, we would present a psychoanalytical interpretation of these acts of repression and rejection. But as part of a close textual interpretation, it could be mentioned that her rejection of meat is in fact a kind of moral and physical resistance and in doing so she disrupts the deep-rooted familial, social, ethical and linguistic laws, codes and barriers of her society and as a result patriarchy treats it with ruthlessness, violence and humiliation. She is considered as insane and taken to the hospital where the savagery and torture reach another height. On the other hand, Yeong-hye's throwing away the meat from the refrigerator and beginning a vegetarian diet drastically add a movie-like suspension to the story sparks enormous curiosity among the readers. And this far-reaching act of rejection and resistance adds new aesthetic beauty, philosophical depth and moral spirit to this novella and that is where *The Vegetarian* stands apart amid innumerable literary works in the realm of world literature on the same topic.

A great number of scholars consider her response as psychosis, but Han Kang depicts it as a form of transcendence. It is an internal uprising with metaphysical outcomes. In a sense, the author does not recommend any traditional medications for the diseases rather she suggests

transformation or metamorphosis which ultimately turns into a radical critique of a world where sovereignty must be earned at the cost of much blood and life. Han Kang creates a completely unconventional heroine who does not scream, fight, or preach, but who, becomes its most potent critic adopting a highly philosophical form of transformation. The story of her rejection and transformation reminds us of the following observation of Jacques Lacan, “What is realised in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming” (Lacan 300). Lacanian phrase the process of becoming holds a spirit that encourages us to think that another better world is possible and suggests that human beings are in creative process of progression which perceptibly complies with the protagonist's ambition to transmigrate to a higher level of existence.

Yeong-hye's Journey of Life in Psychoanalytical Viewpoint

Much has already been discussed about Yeong-hye's rejection of meat and its significance and meanings, but upon asked why she has done it, she replies, I had a dream — in the dark tunnel, her face flitted by — her face, but unfamiliar, as though I was seeing it for the first time....Dark woods. No people.This place, almost remembered, but I'm lost now. Frightened. Cold. Across the frozen ravine, a red barn-like building... A long bamboo stick strung with great blood-red gashes of meat, blood still dripping down. Try to push past but the meat, there's no end to the meat, and no exit. Blood in my mouth, blood-soaked clothes sucked onto my skin...Running, running through the valley, then suddenly the woods open out....But the fear. My clothes still wet with blood.... My bloody hands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth,....slick with crimson blood. Or no, not mine, but so familiar ... nothing makes sense. Familiar and yet not . . . that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling.” (Kang 11-12). Use of imagery is one of the landmark features of Han Kang's writing and the above one is probably the most striking one used in *The Vegetarian*.

If we change this visual image into video format and place it in the canvas of a classic Oscar-winning Hollywood movie, it could certainly have had a tremendous psychological effect on the readers' minds. But a lonely woman in the woods, frightened at the sight of the profusion of blood caused by animal slaughter, trying desperately to flee from the scene but unable to move because her feet were submerged into the ground, with blood being poured into her mouth and unable even to shut it—feeling as if she

were being punished, and finally finding her mouth covered in blood—is an ideal case for psychoanalytical study as well.

We know that working methodologically on the interplay between conscious and unconscious and the role of repression (*Verdrängung*) in this interplay, Freud opens a new window to explore the oceanic unconscious part of human psyche, and he first defines repression in his groundbreaking work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) as a process to eliminate unacceptable desires, thoughts, and memories from consciousness and channel them into unconscious. This expulsion is not a single-time act but a constant dynamic, fundamental to the configuration of neuroses. Freud writes: “The essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness” (Freud, *Interpretation* 147).

Repression plays a pivotal role in the formation of dreams and, according to Freudian theory, dreams are nothing but the disguised fulfilment of the repressed wishes. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud masterfully defines dream in this way: “The dream is the (disguised) fulfillment of a (repressed or denied) wish” (Freud, *Interpretation* 160). And so, considering the above Freudian definitions and interpretations of repressions and dreams, we can logically state that Yeong-hye's dream is the direct outcome of the numberless unwanted desires, wishes, emotions, and experiences that she willingly or unwillingly excluded from consciousness and passed into her unconscious mind. These include all the barbaric treatments, violent tortures, and vicious attitudes that she has undergone till this stage of her life. As a delicate woman with lively sensibility and compassion, it is not only against her nature to accept all the brutalities, prioritizing] and gratifying biological needs and torturing and trampling others both physically, but also the innate sublime qualities of her mind pushed these extremely unpleasant and undesirable feelings and emotions into the volcano of the unconscious—and the dream is nothing but the eruption of that volcano. So, concisely speaking, all the repressed elements of Yeong-hye's psychic world find expression in this vivid imagery.

In his splendid work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud terms the dream as “the (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish,” transformed through the processes of “condensation, displacement, and symbolization” (Freud, *Interpretation* 164, 277). Each element of Yeong-hye's dream is pregnant with meanings related to the unconscious, leading toward psychic trauma, bodily alienation, and a silent resistance to patriarchal violence. Han Kang skillfully uses the blood-symbol in various overwhelming forms like—“pouring into [her] mouth,” “soaked” into her clothes, and “covering” her face

(Kang 13). In Freudian theory, blood in dreams may symbolize “libidinal violence,” “repressed aggression,” or “the return of repressed trauma,” especially when analyzed within the framework of dream symbolism and the body (Freud, *Complete Works* 4295). Apart from all these, blood also signifies victimhood, complicity, and internalization of violence; most significantly, pouring blood is suggestive of a soulful attempt by the protagonist to reinstate the normal condition of mind, rejecting the unconsciously absorbed trauma of patriarchal domination. In Freudian interpretations of dreams, the woods usually symbolize the unconscious itself—a vast space characterized by disorder and irrationality. It is a space where primal instincts and repressed desires appear (Freud, *Interpretation* 151–153).

The soaked clothes of the protagonist are suggestive of her attempt to shed off her social persona and free her psyche from the potential threat caused by the violence committed upon her to shatter her real identity. Yeong-hye's declaration, “I felt like I was being punished... for what, I don't know,” refers to a kind of “unconscious guilt” stimulated not by any conscious wrongdoing but by the repression of prohibited desires, emotions, and aspirations (Kang 18; Freud, *Complete Works* 4294–4296).

And it is notable here that the agents and forces of patriarchy, with a view to undermining their female counterparts, set the barriers of forbiddances particularly for women to perpetuate their rule. On the other side, the female members who live in this vicious and powerful web of innumerable prohibitions and restrictions don't find any free space to realize even the most spontaneous, humane, and innocent wishes, dreams, and feelings. Naturally, they repress them—but it is intelligible that this kind of indiscriminate suppression is not at all a healthy practice.

And the prolonged process of suppression ultimately creates a sense of guilt in their mind, and they feel a strong urge to isolate themselves from the circle of social life. We think that the protagonist Yeong-hye feels the same inclination at the core of her mind, which is reflected in her activities after refusal to eat meat and adopting a vegetarian style of life. And the image of her blood-covered face symbolizes an overpowering desire for self-alienation.

Our Observations, Findings and Final Comments

To us, the reason why *The Vegetarian* has gained phenomenal appreciation and acceptance both among the scholars and the efficient readers lies in Han Kang's matchless creativity in changing a non-violent act into an immensely powerful tool for rebellion and transcendence. The choice to become a vegetarian can be interpreted in many ways, like it might be related to some issues

concerning health, it sometimes originates from the individual's extraordinary love for animals and in some cases, it is an initiative undertaken for spiritual upliftment. But Yeong-hye's vegetarianism in the context of the novella marks the preparation process of a long struggle for denial, refusal, transformation and finally, transmigration. It signifies the complete collapse of all kinds of imposed identities and an out and out attempt to take part in the process of creative evolution, showing a thumb to all the forces that hinder human beings' wellbeing and freedom. It crosses the boundaries of health science and ethics and demonstrates metaphysical inclinations. Yeong-hye's withdrawal is also deeply connected with some primal existentialistic purposes.

Denying the consumption of meat means her extreme unwillingness to take part in collective social life because taking food means complying with social expectations and accepting the role imposed by society whereas rejection of food means rejection of sex, language and finally human identity itself. And there lies the priceless specialty of this novella because in all considerations thinking of transgressing the boundary of human existence to deny the identities, roles and values formulated and upheld and in many cases manipulated by the greater part of the society, is not merely a radical act, it's an extraordinary leap in the process of creative evolution which requires reconfiguration of selfhood and a total disagreement with all sorts of established norms, values and practices. That is why the protagonist's adaptation of vegetarianism, giving up meat and transformation into a plant or tree are at a time physical, psychological and metaphysical. Her prolonged silence proves to be a deadly weapon to nullify the violence and politics of language of patriarchy. She doesn't commit suicide, nor does she hold arms against the patriarchal and she even doesn't become non-existent, but what she does is something much higher and more powerful than all these. In fact, she endeavors to exist in a different form and on a higher level of reality with a view to standing upright without compromising with anything, whatsoever.

In addition, upon synthesizing the interrelations among all the symbols of the dream scene and their connections and denotations, we reach the proposition that all the symbols collectively constitute a narrative of a vigorous spiritual process of withdrawal, negation and renunciation of all the existing systems and institutions of society. But the protagonist's metaphysical project to transgress the boundary of human identity and to transform herself into a plant adds a mythical status to this narrative and this final twist contributes remarkably to the aesthetic beauty and philosophical depth of the novella and takes it to a new height.

It is obvious that the narrative of *The Vegetarian* has already earned a place of its own, and we believe that over time it will become a classic piece of work on the issues concerning femineity specially because of its revolutionary approach to deal with the most burning issues of the mothers of all generations. So, finally, we would like to assert that the narrative of Yeong-hye's life can be considered as a transcendental journey from social life to isolation, from oppression to freedom, from human existence to a nonhuman entity and finally, from darkness to light.

Conclusion

Yeong-hye's longing to become a tree or plant is evidently indicative of her final rejection of all sorts of patriarchal dominations, collective violence and human subjectivity and her undying urge for a return to a state of nonviolence, purity and silence. This becomes obvious in her statement, "I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch so I spread my legs; I spread them wide..." Bewildered, In-hye looked across at Yeong-hye's feverish eyes. 'I need to water my body. I don't need this kind of food, sister. I need water.' (Kang 148). This metaphorical metamorphosis of Yeong-hye is essentially rooted in trauma, resistance, and a deep yearning to escape violence. Objectively speaking, the ultimate target is metaphysical, but it involves physical expressions like: she stops eating, speaks less, and begins to mimic photosynthesis, standing motionless in sunlight. These lines loudly echo her extreme contempt for human society and identity and her preference and passion for a non-human identity and world.

In conclusion, this is not a narrative merely about psychological collapse but a complex feminist and psychoanalytic consideration on the price of resistance. It proves how silence can speak louder than words, and how transcendence sometimes lies not in conquering pain, but in personifying it to its fullest. Finally, it must be mentioned that with the touch of Han Kang's superb craftsmanship, refusal becomes revolution, and madness becomes the ultimate truth in an insane world.

And we would like to draw the conclusion to this discussion citing the following lines from the final part of the novella, "Had her body metamorphosed into a sturdy trunk, with white roots sprout-ing from her hands and clutching the black soil? Had her legs stretched high up into the air while her arms extended all the way down to the earth's very core, her back stretched taut to support this two-pronged spurt of growth? As the sun's rays soaked down through Yeong-hye's body, had the water that was saturating the soil been drawn up through her cells, eventually to bloom from her crotch as flowers?" (Kang 170) Her

thoughts, actions and aspirations undoubtedly reflect the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism, and the novella ends in a heartbreaking outcry for peace, shelter, harmony, nonviolence and many positive emotions and epitomes like them, expressed aptly through the symbol of the tree. And she ultimately asserts, "Sister, Yeong-hye said, her voice low and calm as if intending to comfort her. Yeong-hye's old black sweater gave off the faint scent of mothballs. When In-hye didn't answer, Yeong-hye whispered one more time. 'Sister . . . all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters' (Kang 144)

REFERENCES

- [1] Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Edited by Robert Kimbrough, 3rd ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 1988. Accessed 8 May 2025.
- [2] Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land*. Edited by Michael North, Norton Critical Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- [3] Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey, Basic Books, 2010. _ Originally published in 1900.
- [4] Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated and edited by Ivan Smith, 2000. Accessed 8 May 2025.
- [5] Kang, Han. *The Vegetarian*. Translated by Deborah Smith, Portobello Books, 2015.
- [6] Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Edited by Leon S. Roudiez, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1980.
- [7] Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink, in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg, W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.