

## **Defying Norms and Redefining Identity: Yeong-hye's Journey in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Rooted in the ostensible noninterventionist South Korean society, Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* brings forth the atypical narrative of the protagonist Yeong-hye's resistance and redefinition of identity through embracing vegetarianism. As food functions as an instrumental tool in the outlandish account of Yeong-hye, this paper tries to inspect its impact on shaping her perceptions towards desire, pleasure, sexuality and identity. Through the lens of Vegetarian Ecofeminism, this study attempts to analyze various aspects of violence like ecological, sexual and physical. Hence, by identifying the metaphor of vegetarianism used as a means for self-reclamation and journeying through the protagonist's uncanny transformation, the paper arrives at a profound comprehension of the protagonist's complex psyche and an intense exploration of her existential dilemma.

*Keywords:* Ecological, identity, resistance, vegetarianism, violence

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Well, I try my best  
To be just like I am  
But everybody wants you  
To be just like them  
- BOB DYLAN, "Maggie's Farm"*

Rooted in the ostensible noninterventionist South Korean society, Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* (2015) brings forth the atypical narrative of the protagonist Yeong-hye's resistance and redefinition of identity through embracing vegetarianism. Journeying through the protagonist's uncanny transformation, the text explores her existential dilemma faced and provides a profound comprehension of the character's psyche. With a striking storytelling narrative, author Han Kang demonstrates how the 'unconventional' food practice of Yeong-hye brings out the

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culture of the society that is predominantly patriarchal in nature. The text discusses various aspects of violence like physical, sexual and ecological by identifying the metaphor of vegetarianism that is being used as a means of resistance against aggression and for reclamation of self-identity. As food functions as an instrumental tool in the peculiar saga of Yeong-hye, it shapes her perceptions towards desire, pleasure, sexuality and identity. The objective of this paper is to explore the imaginative and creative way in which vegetarianism is used to bring out a sympathetic approach towards animals as well as a difference in the attitude of the two sisters in the novel.

*The Vegetarian*, first published in South Korea in 2007 and translated into English in 2015 by Debora Smith, is an extension of a short story written by Han Kang, "The Fruit of My Woman" which has the theme of a woman turning into a plant and her husband waters her daily. Interestingly, in *The Vegetarian*, the protagonist Yeong-hye becomes a vegetarian after a nightmare and combats violence by trying to become a tree. Yeong-hye's peculiar behaviour infuriates her husband Mr. Cheong and ultimately, the rest of her family members admit the protagonist into a psychiatric hospital.

## METHODS

### ***The Vegetarian* through the Lens of Ecofeminism and Vegetarian Ecofeminism**

*The Vegetarian* raises human rights issues through the seemingly feminist issues, vocalising the trauma of violence and

veganism that disturbs the dominant, psychologically and sexually, men around her. The origin of veganism and meat-eating matters since it is not merely someone's personal choice but coloured by several interpersonal and trans-cultural factors that talks about a person's or a group of people's ethnic as well as personal behaviour that is also postcolonial in nature. This fact spreads its roots deeper into the concept, 'personal is political.' Hence, in *The Vegetarian*, the 'sexual politics of meat' can clearly be traced out. The book has elements of posthumanism due to the non-conformist nature of Yeong-hye, as Stobie (2017) pointed out in her essay, "The Good Wife? Sibling Species in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*". Thus, this project comes under the theoretical framework of vegetarian ecofeminism which is a branch of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism is a theory that was developed in the 1970s with the publication of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*. The term 'eco' comes from ecology, the study of living organisms and their environment. 'Feminism' is associated to acquiring gender equality and equal rights for women in any society. The term 'ecofeminism' first appeared in the year 1974 in Françoise d'Eaubonne's *Le féminisme ou la mort*. This concept emphasizes that due to their capacity to 'reproduce' and 'mother,' women and nature are often linked to each other. Ecofeminists also believe that there is an irrefutable link between the oppression of women and nature. Hence, here gender is used as a tool to examine the conditions for

the subordination of both women and nature. Consequently, ecofeminism is used both as a feminist as well as an environmental theory. Ecofeminists believe that society is capitalistic patriarchal in nature and therefore, ecofeminism also deals with the aspect of how women are treated in an essentially patriarchal society. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Vandana Shiva, Paula Gunn Allen, Andy Smith, LuisahTeish, IvoneGebara, Alice Walker, Karen Warren, Monica Sjoo and Susan Griffin are some of the very well-known ecofeminists.

In the same way, vegetarian ecofeminism is an academic movement which states that all kinds of oppression like sexism, racism, casteism are related to one another and hence they must be eradicated. The theory of vegetarian ecofeminism emphasizes on the fact that not only the humans, but also the non- human animals undergo domination; just like how men exploit women and the human race as a whole exploits nature and non-human animals. Vegetarian ecofeminism extends beyond ecofeminism since it believes that the killing of nonhuman animals and their exploitation by humans should be taken note of distinctly. According to Gaard (2002), vegetarian ecofeminism is feminism's third generation. Greta Gaard and Carol J. Adams are the key thinkers of Vegetarian ecofeminism. Greta Gaard's essay "*Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay*" (2002) includes many of the key concepts within the field along with the importance of speciesism in ecofeminism. Correspondingly, Carol J. Adams who is a key vegetarian ecofeminist writer and activist

focuses on the importance of connecting speciesism to sexism and she has spent over twenty years writing about ecofeminism. Her article titled "*Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals*"(1991) is an essential work to the field which focuses upon the importance of not consuming meat as an ecofeminist. "*The Sexual Politics of Meat*" (Adam, 1990) is her earlier major works that examines various major themes that come under vegetarian ecofeminism.

On the similar line, SheriLucas's "*A Defense of the Feminist-Vegetarian Connection*" (2005) which is a response to Kathryn Paxton George's (2000) book, "*Animal, Vegetable, or Woman? A Feminist Critique of Ethical Vegetarianism*" is the one to establish a connection between feminism and vegetarianism for the first time. According to the feminist-vegetarian connection that she talks about, Lucas (2005) mentioned that the oppression of animals by slaughtering them was just like how women were oppressed in a patriarchal society. Hence, a connection between women and animals can also be traced out here and Carol J. Adams had first published on this topic in 1975. Similarly, Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975) in one of the ecofeminist books, "*New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*" stated:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They

must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society (Ruether, 1975, p. 204).

Her statement made it clear that both women and nature were subjects of the tyranny of male domination. This violation can be clearly traced through the violence depicted in the novel under discussion, *The Vegetarian*.

Speciesism, another form of oppression, is central to the concept of ecofeminism. It plays a fundamental role in distinguishing vegetarian ecofeminism from ecofeminism. This concept is significant because of the focus of vegetarian ecofeminism on the oppression of nonhuman animals as speciesism connects all the other forms of oppression, especially the oppression of women as mentioned by Jason Wyckoff (2014) in his article "*Linking Sexism and Speciesism*". The belief that 'speciesism is a valid form of oppression that must be eradicated' is at the centre of most of the vegetarian ecofeminist arguments. Vegetarian ecofeminism also opposes humanism as the latter argues that the humans who are oppressed based on color or caste are morally humans while nonhuman animals are not (Kheel, 2004). The vegetarian ecofeminists affirm that there is a bond between human beings and non-human animals. The act of empathizing with animals is not unusual as humans, across cultures, lovingly keep animals as

pet which is a testimony of the strong and emotional bond between animals and human beings.

Vegetarian ecofeminism argues that the killing of any animal is part of a larger system of oppression and that instead of choosing one animal over another, or a human over a nonhuman animal, humans should care about all oppressed subjects, investing themselves in ending each subject's oppression so as to end the oppression of all beings. Hence, Brian Luke (1992) asserted that the:

"Act of expiation in which humans justify the act of killing nonhuman animals shows that humans are inclined not to harm animals, otherwise there would not need to be any mechanisms created cross-culturally to help deal with the guilt felt in killing animals" (Luke, 1992, p. 82).

Moreover, the creation of hierarchies in nonhuman animals can become the creation of hierarchies in humans, and thus one can once again observe how speciesism is linked to racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Therefore, Best asserted that as long as "humans are violent toward animals, they often are violent toward one another" (Best, 2006, p. 22) and this "vicious circle of violence and destruction can end only if and when the human species learns to form harmonious relations – non-hierarchical and non-exploitative – with other animal species and the natural world" (Best, 2006, p. 22). Some people

become vegetarian in order to illustrate their empathy and affection for animals and this gesture can also sometimes be considered as their way of raising their voice against the violence meted out to animals. Hence Luke affirms:

I am appalled by the abuses themselves—shooting, trapping, and poisoning; branding, castrating, forcibly impregnating, separating mother and young, tail docking, debeaking, confining, transporting in cattle cars, and slaughtering; burning, cutting, gassing, starving, asphyxiating, decapitating, decompressing, irradiating, electrocuting, freezing, crushing, paralyzing, amputating, excising organs, removing parts of the brain, socially isolating, inducing addiction, and imposing disease—these acts are repellant because of what they do to the animals. My moral condemnation of the acts arises directly from my sympathy for the animals (Luke, 1992, p. 81-82).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Resistance against Patricentric Violence

The patriarchal nature of society, especially of the Korean society in general, can be viewed in *The Vegetarian*. Vegetarian ecofeminism argues that the oppression of nonhuman animals is closely linked to the oppression of women. Thus, meat-eating is the exploitation of animals and

hence this makes one complicit to violence against women due to their violence against animals. Thus, meat-eating becomes “a form of patriarchal domination... that suggests a link between male violence and a meat-based diet” (Gaard, 2002, p. 123). This makes vegetarianism, as a protection against all kinds of violence. While the rest of her family forces Yeong-hye to eat meat with their persuasive words, the father of the protagonist slaps her and force-feeds meat into her mouth. However, Yeong-hye strongly resists this by spitting out the meat and giving an animal cry. She resists the universal and conventional norms of society through a new standpoint even though she is physically tormented by her family, and especially by her father as she decides to stop eating meat. The author Han Kang too echoes analogous contemplation in her interview BethannePatrick where she explains:

I think this novel has some layers: questioning human violence and the (im)possibility of innocence; defining sanity; and madness: the (im)possibility of understanding others, body as the last refuge or the last determination, and some more. It will be inevitable that different aspects are more focused on by different readers and cultural backgrounds. If I could say one thing, this novel isn't a singular indictment of the Korean patriarchy. I wanted to deal with my long-lasting questions about the possibility/impossibility of

innocence in this world, which is mingled with such violence and beauty. These were universal questions that occupied me as I wrote it (Patrick, 2016, para. 9).

In the Korean culture, it is believed that if a dog has bitten someone, it has to be cooked and consumed so that the poison in the body of those bitten would be purified. In the text, Yeong-hye remembers such an occasion when she had to consume the dog that had bit her. Her father had dragged the dog tied to his bike until it bled. Later, the dead dog was cooked and was consumed by the whole family. Hence, violence is not only meted out to women but also to animals as seen in the novel. Later in the text, it can be comprehended that turning vegan and eventually refusing to eat food at all is Yeong-hye's penance for her father's gruesome killing of the dog. As she turns against animal sacrifice, now, the only body or animal she is ready to sacrifice is herself and she is ready to forgo her life by slitting her wrist.

Yeong-hye smells the odour of meat from her husband's body pores and confesses that she is not able to stand this strong smell. Hence, she does not indulge in any sort of physical relationship with her husband and this ultimately results in violence, aggression, and marital rape. Further, her refusal to cook in her kitchen, to wear a bra or to wear makeup are other instances that significantly demonstrate Yeong-hye's breaking away from old conventions and striding towards a new path. The acts of cooking for the family,

dressing up attractively or doing makeup in a particular manner are usually associated with atypical feminine traits and these traits are manipulated to keep women within the patriarchal boundaries. Yeong-hye's voice of protest against these accepted norms can be seen as a sign of resistance towards the male-dominated social conventions.

### **Dreams and Violence**

In the discussed text, dreams become a significant tool through which secreted emotions of the characters are conveyed. Through her dreams, Yeong-hye recollects her horrific experiences of consuming meat and she admits:

The lives of all animals that I've eaten have all lodged there. Blood and flesh of all those butchered bodies are all scattered in every nook and cranny and though the physical remnants were excreted their lives still stick stubbornly to my intestines (Kang, 2015, p. 56).

Yeong-hye's dream which is filled with gloom, darkness and the dripping blood from raw meat, provokes her to turn into a vegetarian. In other words, here her dreams are treated as monologues of the characters. The dreams of Yeong-hye are violent in nature. She relives her traumatic childhood memories through these dreams, whereas small children, Yeong-hye and her sister "were frequently left throbbing by their heavy-handed father" (Kang, 2015, p. 129). While In-hye had cleverly learnt to evade her father's beatings, Yeong-hye "merely

absorbed all her suffering inside her, deep into the marrow of her bones” (Kang, 2015, p. 129).

Disturbing narratives such as the sufferings undergone by young little Yeong-hye and In-hye demonstrate the extent of brutality and violence they experienced by the hands of their father. There is only a silent rebellion on the part of Yeong-hye and the sister In-hye against their father’s cruel attitude. For In-hye, taking up the household chores is a means of escape from their father’s wrath. While initially this behaviour has been comprehended as “a sign of maturity” (Kang, 2015, p. 158), it had been a survival strategy. The deeper anxieties and fears of Yeong-hye and her sister can only be understood through their dreams and not through their conversations. They do not convey their deepest feelings to each other through their conversations and this is how dream sequences evolve into narratives in *The Vegetarian*. Therefore, a peek into Yeong-hye’s dreams ascertains that she has surrendered herself to her unconscious mind- a frightening world filled with the memories of her past. Moreover, in an interview with Sarah Shin, author Han Kang explains that:

Yeong-hye only has a voice in very brief dream-monologues, so the image of this singularly tough and determined woman is gathered into an imperfect composite, through the gazes and voices of those around her. I am concerned with stories and certain moments of truth which cannot be told using traditional

modes of narration (Shin, 2016, para. 16).

It can be further comprehended when Kang wrote,

With her words sounding in his ears like a lullaby, one he could make neither head nor tail of, she plunged over the edge of consciousness and into a seemingly bottomless sleep. But I’m not scared anymore. There is nothing to be afraid of (Kang, 2015, p. 113).

It is evident from the text that along with Yeong-hye, her husband and also her sister experience violent nightmares. Yeong-hye’s husband, Mr. Cheong dreams of peeling the flesh off a person’s body until only the skeletons remain. Similarly, In-hye also loses sleep over her bizarre and disturbing dreams. She dreams of black rain and blood trickling down her forehead. Further, In-hye admits: “I have dreams too, you know. Dreams... and I could let myself dissolve into them, let them take me over...but surely the dream isn’t it all there is? We have to wake up at some point, don’t we?” (Kang, 2015, p. 182) Thus, there emerges a clear conflict between reality and dreams.

The dreams of the characters of the novel are about their life’s reflections which have altered and ruptured their superficial faces and veiled identities. The dreams can be viewed as their primal self. However, only Yeong-hye avoids contact with the material world, unlike the other two characters as a result of the nightmares she has. In-hye and Mr. Cheong are not capable of giving into

their dreams as Yeong-hye does. This can also be the reason why In-hye is not able to succumb to the uncanny transformation of her younger sister. Kang writes:

She was no longer able to cope up with all that her sister reminded her of. She had been unable to forgive her for soaring alone on the boundary she could never bring herself to crossover; unable to forgive the magnificent irresponsibility that had enslaved Yeong-hye to shuck off social constraints and leave her behind as still a prisoner (Kang, 2015, p. 135).

Only then, In-hye starts to comprehend the intricate and multifaceted emotions of Yeong-hye. However, this compassionate understanding of Yeong-hye's transformation is tricky. Yeong-hye's act of withdrawal and locking herself up in her psychological world is beyond the comprehension of her family. It becomes furthermore shocking that in her transformation, Yeong-hye becomes more resistant towards those who attempt to amend her newly adapted habits and behaviour. Kang describes it as: not suddenly, but over a period of time – she became difficult to be read; so difficult that there were times when she screamed like a total stranger (Kang, 2015, p. 129). Kang further writes:

Yeong-hye was retreating from herself, becoming distant to herself as she was to her sister. A forlorn face behind a mask of composure.

This was nothing like a melancholy that sometimes afflicted her husband, and yet in certain respects, they were both baffling to her in exactly the same way. They were both descending further into silence (Kang, 2015, p. 130).

Thus, Yeong-hye can no more be understood by anyone around her until, in the end, her sister comes to understand what she is going through.

### **Food, Desire and Passion**

The theme of food, desire and passion is a notable aspect of *The Vegetarian*. The taboo of desire is not vulgarized but it is nevertheless disturbing because it shapes the identity and perceptions of the characters in *The Vegetarian*. Hence, in the novel, both food and passion have been shown as two factors that are closely integrated. Hence, food and sex are intimately connected; they are “physically linked in the limbic system of the brain, which controls emotional activity generally” (Fox, 2014, p. 11). To prove this, in one of the incidents that happen in the novel, the brother-in-law brings food for Yeong-hye when he goes to meet her for the first time in her new apartment. As the food is an important part of the Korean culture, the food metaphor is used as a “bridge to mark the importance of the event and as an icebreaker and demonstration of the family's goodwill” (Fox, 2014, p. 12). Here in the text, Yeong-hye's brother is seen to be using food as an excuse to present his wish to his sister.



Fox again affirms,

We have to eat; we like to eat; eating makes us feel good; it is more important than sex. To ensure genetic survival the sex urge need only be satisfied a few times in a lifetime; the hunger urge must be satisfied every day (Fox, 2014, p. 1).

Interestingly, even though Yeong-hye refuses to consume meat or any kind of food as such, having a sexual encounter with her brother in law helps her gain her identity — a unique identity which emerges as a result of her vegetarianism and the eventual abstinence from food. After passionate lovemaking with Yeong-hye, her brother-in-law looks into her eyes. As Kang describes it:

... her eyes were agitated as she attempted to convey the cause of her affliction. ‘I thought it was all because of eating meat,’ she said. ‘I thought all I had to do was to stop eating meat and then the faces wouldn’t come back. But didn’t work’... ‘And so... now I know. The face is inside my stomach (Kang, 2015, p. 115).

Thus, desire and passion have not been treated as a means of physical fulfilment. It is not reduced to the status of mere sexual desire as it bestows a sense of ease and contentment on the characters, especially on the protagonist.

### *The Vegetarian and Ecosexuality*

The physical intimacy between the protagonist and her brother-in-law can be connected with sexecology, a term that is popularized by Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle since 2002. Stephens underlines that it “may produce new forms of knowledge that hold potential to alter the future by privileging our desire for the earth to function with as many diverse, intact and flourishing ecological systems as possible” (Stephens, 2013, para. 51). Here, sexecology can be perceived as a combination of art, environmental activism, theory and practice. Through sexecology, the ecosexuals seek to make the environment more sexy, pleasurable and varied. This is where the “sexology and ecology intersect. And that’s a term of identity but also a political and artistic stance” (McSpadden, 2013, para. 32). Ecosexuals are found to be engaged in sexual intimacy either in or with nature. They might have an orgasm in the waterfall or even have sex with their partner in natural surroundings. Interestingly, the protagonist Yeong-hye too develops a similar kind of behaviour. Even though she does not explore this idea intentionally, inadvertently she becomes a part of sexecology. Embracing veganism and nurturing plants takes her further close to nature.

The very instance where the flowers painted on her brother-in-law’s body makes Yeong-hye aphrodisiac bears testimony to this fact. Hence, Yeong-hye is aroused due to the painting of flowers all over his body. Furthermore, when her own body is painted with flowers, Yeong-hye does not only wish

to keep the flower paintings on her body but also wants her brother-in-law to paint them again for her, once the colours of the painting start to fade. Yeong-hye's behaviour resonates with the ecosexual statement that asserts, "these human bodies are part of the nonhuman material world" (Morris, 2015, p. 3). When the brother-in-law asks Yeong-hye whether he can film their act of lovemaking, she does not respond. Also, her face does not show any expression of a surprise because now she no more perceives her body in the same way the conformist society does. She feels as if "there was nothing she wouldn't do as if limits and boundaries no longer held any meaning for her. Or else, as if in quiet mockery" (Kang, 2015, p. 169). She understands that her physicality is of no particular use to her. Hence, it will not have anything to do with her inner identity.

The brother-in-law, when he dreams of making love to Yeong-hye imagines,

her skin was a pale green. Her body lay prone in front of him, like a leaf had just fallen from the branch, only barely begun to wither. The Mongolian mark was gone; instead, her whole body was covered evenly with that pale wash of green (Kang, 2015, p. 96).

Amusingly, it looks like the brother-in-law is making love to a plant itself and not a human being. Kang describes it as follows:

When he pulled out, on the point of climax, he saw that the whole of his penis was stained green. A

blackish paste was smeared over his skin from his lower stomach to his thighs, a fresh sap which could have come from either her or him (Kang, 2015, p. 96).

This proves that body painting is an aphrodisiac for the brother-in-law as well. It makes one realize that art can reveal the deepest desires and the darkest thoughts of a human being. It can unveil all those emotions that are inexplicable for people in its rawest and purest of forms. It also demonstrates how the brother-in-law creates a parallel reality for himself by escaping the suffocation he experiences in his real-life and for this, he uses Yeong-hye as a resort to fulfil his fantasy. As a reaction to his behaviour, his wife In-hye wonders:

Had she ever really understood her husband's true nature bound up as it was with that unseemingly impenetrable silence she'd thought at one time that might be revealed in his work in this video art. Before she met him she hadn't even been aware that such a field of art existed despite her best efforts though it was proved incomprehensible to her nothing was revealed (Kang, 2015, p. 168).

When In-hye is reminded of the video of her husband's and her sister's intertwining bodies, she perceives their physical intimacy not as something sexual but as resistance against their own identity and existence. She feels as if her husband and Yeong-hye

are trying to shake off the feeling of being human beings.

Ironically, at the beginning of her vegan journey, Yeong-hye resists her husband's sexual advances only to be raped by him later. But the sexual act between Yeong-hye and her beautifully painted brother-in-law completes her journey. The protagonist affirms that by stopping the consumption of meat, she can attain a kind of satisfaction which will eventually help her to keep her nightmares at bay. Unfortunately, her nightmares keep coming back to her. But after her sexual encounter with her brother-in-law, Yeong-hye is surprisingly overcome by a feeling of tranquillity and reassurance. Now she feels inclusive and experiences a kind of gratification she has experienced never before. She confesses, "There is nothing to be scared of now" (Kang, 2015, p. 115). Moreover, Yeong-hye is also able to eliminate the restlessness of the brother-in-law and vice versa. Here, sex can be seen as a tool of self-fulfilment and when the desire is fulfilled, the characters are peaceful again. Hence, a balance is achieved.

### **Redefinition of Body and Identity**

As it has been discussed earlier, ecosexuals encourage people to treat nature or earth with love rather than exploiting it. In ecosexuality, the earth is viewed as a lover rather than the usual motherly image that is attributed to it. Hence, when two people are engaged in the act of lovemaking, an ecosexual will not think of it as a sexual act rather it will be looked upon as if they are two beautiful flowers who have incarnated

as human beings; both, creations of nature. This element of ecosexuality is especially true in Yeong-hye's situation, "a flower was actually a human being" (Kang, 2015, p. 125). Moreover, by entwining ecosexuality with vegetarian ecofeminism one can see the body of Yeong-hye becoming a plant as she stops eating normal food and survives only with water and sunlight. The sympathetic approach of vegetarian ecofeminism towards the oppression of animals as well as female beings can be understood in the text where Yeong-hye's body is treated as food and vegetation which the people around her prey upon.

It is interesting to note that Yeong-hye's gradual vegetarian ecofeminist transformation is not only a means of self-reclamation for herself but also for her sister In-hye and for a moment "their existences briefly aligned" (Kang, 2015, p. 127). In the text, In-hye represents the real-life characters who are bowed down by social constraints, norms and conventions put forward by a society. Yeong-hye, on the other hand, defies everything conventional. In the hospital, In-hye says, "the air is good here, it'll give you more of an appetite. You'll be able to eat a bit more and put on some weight" (Kang, 2015, p. 143) to which Yeong-hye replies, "Yes...there are big trees here" (Kang, 2015, p. 143). She further continues, "Sister, all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters" (Kang, 2015, p. 144). Here, one can notice a reflection of the distance between the protagonist and her sister as they have drifted apart beyond reconciliation. Now Yeong-hye identifies

more with the plants, trees and nature and considers them as her sisters and brothers.

In-hye, on the other hand, “hadn’t been able to find a tree that would take her life from her. Some of the trees had refused to accept her. They just stood there, stubborn, solemn yet alive as animals, bearing up the weight of their own massive bodies” (Kang, 2015, p. 154). Hence, it is difficult for In-hye to forget the world around her, unlike her sister. Yeong-hye says, “I am not an animal anymore, sister. I don’t need to eat, not now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight” (Kang, 2015, p. 154). It is difficult to comprehend whether Yeong-hye is living in her dream by completely ignoring the real world or if she has gone insane as she is now drifting towards a plant life. Her physical body has also started to succumb to her psychological variation as Kang writes, “She hasn’t had her period for a long time” (Kang, 2015, p. 150) and her biological body has also started to alter. Hence, it is apparent that the journey Yeong-hye undergoes is not mere bouts of insanity but a physical transformation that no one would have contemplated feasible.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, through a sequence of Yeong-hye’s dreams, her newly adopted vegetarian lifestyle and her implausible physical and emotional journey, the explanation for her unique transformation was being unearthed. Han Kang compassionately sums up the voyage of Yeong-hye in her interview when she illustrated:

Yeong-hye is such a determined person that she believes herself to no longer belong to the human race. She feels and wants to get literally uprooted from human beings. In this way, she believes she is saving herself, but ironically she is actually approaching death. Of course, in the real world she is mad, but to her it is something thoroughly sane. She is trying to root herself into this extreme and bizarre sanity by uprooting herself from the surface of this world (Patrick, 2016, para. 31).

Yeong-hye’s ecosexual passion and desire pave way for the conception of her new individuality which facilitated her to cease leading a conformist life. Consequently, Yeong-hye was able to shed her human identity; an identity that had never been able to offer any connotation to her former existence. Embracing an ecosexual vegetarian way of life took her to an entirely new realm; a novel state of being which conveyed a unique sense of ease and completion. Thus, her present existence offered her answer to her perpetual existential inquiry and this answer was nothing but here defined identity and interestingly, now, this new fangled identity which had continued to be a dormant seed for long, sprouts from the surface of the earth while blooming into a unique flower.

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