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Against Anthropocentric: The Non-Human Other in Han

Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled; **Against Anthropocentric: The Non-Human Other in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian***, is my own work and all the sources I have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

Signature

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peng', written over a horizontal line.

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DEDICATION

To my dear parents Fatiha Meftah and Lakhdar Benzine, to my grandpa Moussa Meftah may his soul rest in peace and my grandma Kaltoum Moussai.

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ABSTRACT

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* is a critically acclaimed literary masterpiece that delves into the intricacies of the relationship between humans and the non-human world. This dissertation employs post-humanist and ecofeminist theories to analyze the novel, offering a fresh and innovative perspective on the text. Through a detailed examination of the protagonist Yeong-hye's transformation and rebellion against societal norms, this study explores themes of identity and agency, revealing how the novel subverts traditional narratives that center on the assumed superiority of humans. The floral adornments and deep communion with nature represents a profound shift away from anthropocentric constraints, underscoring the interconnectivity and importance of all life forms. This work expands the discourse on the representation of the non-human in literature, contributing to a deeper comprehension of *The Vegetarian's* rich thematic depth. It offers insights into how the novel challenges preconceived notions of our relationship with the natural world and the urgency to rethink our anthropocentric views.

Keywords: Non-Human, Anthropocentric, Post-humanist, Ecofeminism, Identity and agency.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Korean literature spans a rich tapestry of historical epochs, marked by diverse movements, prominent authors, and recurring thematic threads. From ancient oral traditions to the modern era, it encapsulates the essence of Korean identity and societal evolution. Notable movements like the modernist period, which brought forth experimentation and redefinition, and the post-war era, reflecting the nation's resilience and reconstruction, are pivotal in this literary landscape.

Key authors such as Yi Sang, Park Wan-suh, and Hwang Sok-yong have left indelible marks with their distinct voices, addressing societal issues, identity, and the human condition. Within this milieu, Han Kang stands as a luminary figure, renowned for her evocative narratives and exploration of profound human experiences. Her style, characterized by lyrical prose and a deep introspective gaze, draws readers into introspective realms.

Han Kang's contributions to Korean literature are marked by novels that challenge norms, delve into the complexities of human existence, and unearth the layers of societal constructs. Among her notable works, *The Vegetarian* holds a special place, resonating deeply with its exploration of identity, rebellion against societal norms, and the human psyche's intricate layers. Its critical reception, marked by accolades and international acclaim, including the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2016, underscores its significance not only in Korean literature but also on the global literary stage. The novel's thematic depth, symbolic richness, and poignant narrative render it a crucial piece in understanding contemporary Korean literary discourse, amplifying voices that challenge conventional paradigms.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* stands as a pivotal work within Korean literature, offering a profound departure from the conventional narratives rooted in anthropocentrism. Its thematic significance lies in its daring exploration of the non-human other, challenging established norms and narratives that revolve solely around human experiences. This departure becomes a cornerstone in the evolution of Korean literature, marking a deliberate shift towards narratives that encompass a broader spectrum of existence beyond human-centric perspectives.

The relevance of post-humanist and ecofeminist perspectives in deciphering these themes becomes evident as they provide interpretative tools to unravel the complexities inherent in *The Vegetarian*. Post-humanism, with its focus on decentering human superiority, allows for the exploration of non-human entities, blurring the lines between human and non-human, and providing insights into the significance of these entities within the narrative. Similarly, ecofeminist perspectives offer lenses through which the interconnectedness of nature, gender, and non-human entities can be examined, enriching the understanding of how these elements intertwine within the narrative fabric of novel. By employing these theoretical frameworks, Han Kang's work transcends traditional boundaries, inviting readers into a realm where the human experience intersects with the non-human, prompting contemplation on the broader spectrum of existence.

A thorough examination of scholarly literature on Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* uncovers a variety of critical perspectives and academic interpretations that explore different facets of the novel. Scholars have investigated themes such as gender

inequality, resistance, translation politics, human rights, ecofeminism, political disengagement, and the clash between human nature and existence depicted in the book. These analyses offer a diverse range of insights into the intricacies of Han's work and its implications in broader literary, social, and political contexts.

One significant study by Kim (2021) delves into Han Kang's speculative natural histories and how she challenges traditional concepts of human rights by situating them within broader natural histories, particularly in the context of the South Korean Cold War. This perspective provides a unique framework for comprehending the novel's exploration of human rights violations and historical narratives. Additionally, Bright (2021) presents an ecofeminist interpretation of *The Vegetarian*, demonstrating how ecofeminist theory can be utilized to scrutinize the text and reveal deeper layers of meaning related to feminism, gender studies, and environmentalism. Furthermore, Ningtyas (2022) explores the radical act and political withdrawal depicted in the novel, shedding light on how environmental degradation is addressed through literary works like *The Vegetarian*.

This critical viewpoint introduces a socio-political commentary to the text analysis, underscoring the novel's relevance in contemporary discussions on power, violence, and societal norms. Additionally, Yoon (2022) delves into the controversy surrounding the translation of the novel, highlighting the nuances of fidelity and infidelity in translation practices and their influence on the reception of the text in diverse cultural contexts. In a different context, O'Key (2021) challenges pessimistic interpretations of the novel's storyline, arguing that *The Vegetarian* actually portrays an

ecofeminist rejection of carnism and patriarchy. This perspective reframes the narrative as a form of resistance against oppressive systems, aligning with broader movements for social and environmental justice.

This research distinctly centers on the exploration of the novel, honing in on its characters, notably Yong-Hye, within the larger canvas of Korean literature. By zooming into this singular work, the analysis aims to dissect the intricate layers of character development, thematic nuances, and narrative elements that portray the departure from anthropocentrism. The focus on Yong-Hye, the protagonist whose radical decision to renounce meat catalyzes a series of transformative events, allows for an in-depth examination of her character's embodiment of non-human qualities.

However, this study acknowledges its limitations within the vast landscape of Korean literature, as it deliberately narrows its lens to one particular work and character, thereby not encapsulating the entirety of themes prevalent in the broader spectrum of Korean literary works. Additionally, due consideration is given to the constraints inherent in literary analysis, acknowledging that interpretations might vary and that certain aspects of the text might elude exhaustive exploration within the confines of this research. These limitations are crucial to delineate the boundaries within which this study operates, providing a clear framework for its analysis of the novel and Yong-Hye's portrayal within Korean literature.

This research sets out with multifaceted objectives to delve deep into the layers of *The Vegetarian*. Firstly, it aims to scrutinize the portrayal of non-human otherness embedded within the narrative through the lens of post-humanism. This objective

intends to uncover how the novel challenges anthropocentric views by giving voice to entities beyond the human realm, thus expanding the discourse on existence and agency within the story. Secondly, the study seeks to conduct a detailed analysis of the ecofeminist dimensions inherent in Yong-Hye's character while examining her connections to other characters within the narrative landscape. This aims to unravel the intertwining aspects of nature, femininity, and the portrayal of characters, deciphering how these elements contribute to the larger thematic tapestry of the novel. Finally, the research endeavors to elucidate the intersection of post-humanist and ecofeminist theories, highlighting their complementary nature and showcasing how their amalgamation enriches the understanding of the novel's underlying themes. These objectives collectively strive to unveil the intricate layers of the novel, presenting a comprehensive analysis that encompasses multiple dimensions and theoretical frameworks, contributing to a nuanced comprehension of the text's profound thematic elements.

The fundamental study question examines Kang's presentation of the concept of non-human otherness within the novel, aiming to dissect the novel's exploration beyond conventional human-centered narratives. This overarching query drives the investigation into various dimensions of the narrative. Subsequently, the sub-questions address specific facets: first, how does the protagonist, Yong-Hye, and her embodiment of non-human qualities attributes challenge traditional perceptions of humanity? Second, how do other characters within the novel align or diverge from ecofeminist principles? thus shedding light on the multifaceted representations of femininity and nature in the

narrative. Finally, how does the narrative structure contribute to the exploration of non-human entities and ecofeminism? These research questions collectively drive the study's exploration into the intricate layers of *The Vegetarian* facilitating a comprehensive analysis of its thematic complexities.

The research entails a meticulous approach of close textual analysis applied to the novel, utilizing the lenses of post-humanist and ecofeminist theories to extract underlying themes and interpretations embedded within the narrative. This method involves a detailed examination of specific passages and character interactions within the novel. Passages carrying symbolic significance or those portraying interactions between characters and non-human elements will be scrutinized closely. These close readings aim to unveil nuances in the text that reflect the post-humanist view of blurring human-nonhuman boundaries or the ecofeminist perspective on the interconnectedness of nature and gender. By dissecting these textual elements through these theoretical frameworks, the methodology seeks to unravel the depth of Han Kang's narrative, revealing layers that articulate the novel's engagement with non-human entities and ecofeminist themes.

In structuring the chapters, the initial segment lays the foundation with a comprehensive theoretical framework. It unfolds into four parts to deeply explore critical theories. The first part navigates core concepts of post-humanist theory, delving into human-nonhuman relations and their application in literary analysis. With a backdrop of the concept of "Other," dreams, and repressed memories, it lays the groundwork for understanding how Kang's novel challenges anthropocentric views. In

contrast, the subsequent segment uncovers Ecofeminist Theory, delving into its foundational principles concerning nature, ecology, gender, and their links to literary representation. This part critically navigates through Ecofeminism's theoretical landscape. Finally, the third segment focuses on a Comparative Analysis, shedding light on the connections between Post-humanist and Ecofeminist theories, setting the stage for their integration into literary analysis.

Transitioning into Chapter Two that delves into the analysis of *The Vegetarian* through the lens of Post-humanist and Ecofeminist theories. It explores how these theoretical frameworks enrich the understanding of the novel's thematic complexities, particularly its exploration of non-human otherness. Additionally, this chapter includes a stylistic study of the novel, examining Han Kang's use of language, imagery, and narrative techniques to convey its themes and ideas. Through close textual analysis, this chapter unveils the intricacies of Han Kang's narrative, offering insights into the profound implications of otherness within the context of the novel.

CHAPTER ONE

**Beyond Human-Centric Boundaries: Charting New Territories of Existence with
Post-humanist and Ecofeminist Insights**

Literature has long served as a mirror reflecting humanity's relationship with the natural world, often privileging human perspectives while relegating non-human entities to the periphery. This chapter begins with an examination of post-humanist theory, which deconstructs species hierarchies and rejects human superiority, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms. Following this, ecofeminist theory is explored, which critiques the exploitation of both women and nature, revealing the intertwined oppressions within patriarchal and anthropocentric systems. A comparative analysis of these theories demonstrates their complementary nature, setting the stage for analyzing Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*. This analysis uncovers the novel's portrayal of non-human otherness and ecofeminist themes, enriching the understanding of its narrative complexity.

1. Transcending Anthropocentrism: Post-humanist Explorations

1.1 Beyond the Human: Deconstructing Species Hierarchies

In discussing the multifaceted nature of post-humanism, Umbrello emphasizes the challenges inherent in encapsulating this philosophy within a single, cohesive framework. He asserts, "Defining post-humanism as a single, well-oriented philosophy is a difficult if not impossible endeavor. Part of the reason for this difficulty is accounted by post-humanism's illusive origins and its perpetually changing hermeneutics" (28). It signifies a significant departure from traditional humanist perspectives in the humanities. Post-humanism challenges the notion of the human as a rational, autonomous, and transcendent subject by emphasizing the entanglement of human and non-human entities in shaping social realities (Wolf xiii).

Unlike humanism, which positions humans at the center, post-humanism blurs the boundaries between the human and non-human, considering them as interconnected and co-constitutive (Raelin and Robinson 706). This perspective shifts the focus from human dominance to an appreciation of the interdependencies that shape existence. It also focusses

on materiality, affect, and the relational aspects of social life, disrupting the conventional separation between theory and empirical research (Wolf xiv). By emphasizing these elements, post-humanism challenges traditional academic boundaries and encourages more integrative approaches to knowledge.

In contrast to humanist interpretive traditions, post-humanist inquiry rejects the privileging of human subjectivity and instead explores the agency of non-human elements in knowledge production (Gerrard et al. 389). Post-humanist perspectives also challenge the notion of representation, moving away from a focus on the human subject as the sole source of knowledge and embracing a more distributed and relational understanding of knowing (Phillips 63). This shift encourages a more holistic and inclusive way of understanding the world, recognizing the diverse sources and forms of knowledge that exist beyond human experiences.

Moreover, post-humanist theories offer new possibilities for reconceptualizing human interactions with the environment and other beings. By emphasizing agential realism and the co-existence of humans and non-humans in public spaces, post-humanism opens up avenues for understanding social relations beyond anthropocentrism (Freitas and Paton 483). This shift towards post-humanist thinking is particularly evident in fields such as geography, where scholars are exploring non-representational and affective atmospheres to develop a more inclusive and diverse understanding of space and place (Buser 238).

One key concept underpinning post-humanist theory is the rejection of anthropocentrism, where humans are no longer seen as the central. This shift towards a flat ontology acknowledges the agency of non-human elements and challenges the notion that humans hold a superior position in the world. Despite this shift, post-humanism does not necessarily oppose humanism; rather, it can incorporate humanistic principles such as the promotion of human rights and dignity. Post-humanist theory also critiques the limitations of

human power and challenges the theoretical foundations of people-oriented humanist doctrines (Wang 344). By bringing attention to the material and affective aspects of social life, post-humanist theories aim to blur the boundaries between the theoretical and the empirical, reconfiguring research practices (Williams et al. 638).

Additionally, post-humanist approaches, such as affective atmospheres, offer new ways to study socio-spatial processes beyond human-centered perspectives (Buser 227). Diaz-Laplanche and others emphasize that while humanism often focuses on individual growth and well-being, post-humanist theory considers broader social transformations and justice issues (54). While humanistic psychology emphasizes personal thriving and growth-oriented values, post-humanist perspectives extend these concerns to societal well-being and equity and challenges traditional ideas about human exceptionalism and the superiority of humans over non-humans by advocating for a more inclusive understanding of subjectivity that encompasses both human and non-human entities (Braidotti "Post Humanism" 9). This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all actors, including humans, non-human animals, plants, and the planet as a whole.

Post-humanism critiques the notion of human exceptionalism, which establishes a hierarchical divide between humans and all other life forms, especially non-human animals (Srinivasan and Kasturirangan 128). Its perspectives aim to challenge traditional anthropocentric views by dismantling the human-object divide and blurring the boundaries between humans and non-humans. As Braidotti argues in her book "The posthuman," this approach seeks to undermine the hierarchical placement of humans at the top of the hierarchy (70). Furthermore, post-humanism challenges traditional notions of the "Other" and "Otherness" by reevaluating human relationships with biodiversity and emphasizing the need to coexist with diverse forms of life (Turnhout et al. 158). This approach encourages a shift from viewing non-human entities as mere resources or objects to recognizing them as

valuable participants in the web of life.

Post-humanism also critiques the binary opposition between the human and the non-human, advocating for a more inclusive and relational understanding of existence (Pavert and Ressorio 170). By promoting concepts such as mutual becoming of the human and the non-human, post-humanism challenges the dichotomous thinking that underpins traditional notions of the "Other" and "Otherness" (Pedersen 686).

1.2 Lacanian Other

Jacques Lacan, introduced the concept of “the Other” as a fundamental element in understanding human subjectivity and identity, that goes beyond a mere external entity and delves into the symbolic realm where the Other represents the socio-cultural framework, language, and norms that shape an individual's sense of self (Kolahjooei 98).

In Lacanian terms, “the Other” is not just another person but rather a symbolic order that influences how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world (Kenny et al. 99). Central to his theory is the idea that individuals construct their identities in relation to this symbolic Other, which serves as a mirror reflecting back to them a sense of self. This process is intricately linked to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, where individuals develop a sense of ego or “I” through identification with external images, including those presented by the Other (Jones and Spicer 230). Moreover, it extends beyond the individual level to encompass broader societal structures and norms that influence and shape subjectivity. The Other, in this sense, represents the collective beliefs, values, and expectations of a given culture or society, which individuals internalize and use to define themselves (Harding 1761). This process of identification with the Other is essential for understanding how individuals navigate social interactions and construct their identities within a larger symbolic framework (Fotaki and Harding 157).

Furthermore, Lacan's “Other” is closely tied to the idea of lack and desire. According to

Lacanian theory, individuals experience a fundamental lack stemming from their separation from the Other, which fuels their desires and drives their quest for wholeness and recognition (Vanheule and Verhaeghe “Professional” 287). This sense of lack is intrinsic to human subjectivity and plays a significant role in shaping individual experiences of identity and selfhood (Vanheule and Verhaeghe “Identity” 406). The Other is not a fixed entity but a dynamic and shifting construct that influences and shapes subjectivity through language, culture, and social interactions (Arnaud and Vidaillet 69). The Other is both a source of alienation and a site of potential identification, where individuals negotiate their sense of self in relation to external norms and expectations (Vanheule 166). Lacan's emphasis on the Other highlights the relational and intersubjective nature of human subjectivity, emphasizing the role of social and cultural factors in shaping individual identities (Buse 495).

1.3 The Non-Human Other

In the realm of post-humanism, the concept of the "non-human other" plays a pivotal role in reshaping traditional views on humanity and its relationship with the world. The term "non-human other" refers to entities or beings that exist outside the scope of human understanding and experience, challenging anthropocentric perspectives that prioritize human interests above all else (Marchesini 75). This notion underscores a fundamental shift in how we perceive the world, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and respecting the agency and autonomy of non-human entities.

Within the framework of post-humanism, the concept of the "non-human other" serves as a catalyst for reevaluating the hierarchical structures that have long governed human interactions with the environment. By recognizing the intrinsic value of non-human beings and their unique ways of existing in the world, post-humanism seeks to decenter human dominance and promote a more inclusive and egalitarian worldview (75). This shift towards embracing the "non-human other" reflects a broader philosophical movement aimed at

transcending traditional boundaries and embracing a more holistic understanding of existence.

In the context of post-humanist thought, the concept of the "non-human other" also raises profound questions about the nature of consciousness, agency, and subjectivity beyond the human realm. By acknowledging the presence of non-human entities as legitimate actors in the world, post-humanism challenges the anthropocentric assumption that only humans possess meaningful intentions and desires (75). This reevaluation of agency and subjectivity opens up new possibilities for exploring the diverse forms of life and intelligence that exist beyond human comprehension.

1.4 Redefining Human-Nonhuman Connections

Post-humanist perspectives challenge traditional human-centric worldviews by destabilizing dualisms such as nature/culture, human/nonhuman, and subject/object (Gergan 196). These perspectives critique the belief in human exceptionalism and challenge the notion of human superiority over nonhuman entities. Post humanism emphasizes moving away from anthropocentric views and considering nonhuman entities as active agents (Braidotti "The posthuman"30). It also questions the givenness of categories like 'human' and 'non-human,' destabilizing boundaries between them (Hultin and Mähring 575). By adopting post-humanist perspectives, individuals are urged to shift from humanist to post-humanist worldviews, moving beyond the idea of humans as stewards of the environment (Stickney 1284).

Post-humanist approaches go beyond critiquing human exceptionalism and the universalist image of 'Man,' emphasizing the interconnectedness of all entities (Braidotti "A Theoretical Framework" 31). These perspectives highlight the entanglement of human and nonhuman elements, promoting a more relational understanding of the world (Darnhofer 521). It establishes a foundation for a sociology of the environment where humans are not privileged over other entities (Fox and Alldred 121). This theory redefines the relationship between humans and nonhuman entities by highlighting a relational ontological approach

where humans and nonhumans are mutually constituted through social relations (Sundberg 35), and this perspective challenges traditional human-centric views by considering subjectivity as a collective assemblage that includes not only humans but also nonhuman actors like animals, plants, and the planet as a whole (Braidotti “Post” 9).

The concept of "the Other" in post-humanist perspectives plays a significant role in reshaping our understanding of human-nonhuman relationships. By blurring the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, post-humanism challenges the singular focus on human subjects and explores the agency of the "other" within these relationships (Finkel and Danby 380). This approach allows for a more inclusive consideration of the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nonhumans, moving beyond anthropocentrism to acknowledge the ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman entities (Alberro 674). Furthermore, post-humanist theories have the potential to transform research practices by emphasizing the material and affective aspects of social life, thereby challenging the traditional division between theoretical and empirical approaches (Williams et al. 638). By expanding intentionality to objects and questioning anthropocentric biases, post-humanist thinking within cultural geography aims to broaden our comprehension of relationships beyond human-centered perspectives (Roberts 546).

Additionally, post-humanist theory promotes a transversal relation between entities and processes, which, while normatively neutral, carries significant implications across various fields such as military strategy, health, education, and machine learning (Braidotti and Fuller 3). “Calling into question the boundary between human and nonhuman animals, post-humanism also challenges the primacy of empirico-deductive reasoning and advocates a re-legitimization of rhetoric as a mode of thought.” (Harfield 264) This perspective advocates for a shift towards non-anthropocentric views, encouraging a reevaluation of human interactions with nature and a departure from the notion of humans as stewards of the environment

(Stickney 1284). Post-humanism also questions the dominance of empirico-deductive reasoning, advocating for a re-legitimization of rhetoric as a mode of thought (Harfield 264). Through these critiques, post-humanism sheds light on the power dynamics that exist between humans and nonhuman entities, urging a reexamination of how power is distributed and maintained in society.

1.5 Narrative Metamorphoses: Post-Humanist Insights in Literary Analysis

A post-humanist perspective on literature and narrative analysis challenges prevailing paradigms by moving beyond traditional human-centered approaches to include non-human entities in significant consideration. Post-humanism critiques the anthropocentric view that privileges human experience over other forms of life (Rae 64). This perspective broadens the notion of the "Other" within discourse by emphasizing the agency and subjectivity of non-human entities, such as animals, technology, and the environment, alongside humans (Coanda and Aupers 1237).

From post-humanist theory, specific methods and approaches to literary and narrative analysis have emerged to recognize and explore sentient and non-human forms of life. Post-humanist scholars advocate for a more inclusive analysis that considers the interactions between humans and non-humans, challenging the boundaries between the two (Gergan 264). This approach encourages scholars to engage with narratives that incorporate the perspectives of non-human entities, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of interspecies relationships and the interconnectedness of all forms of life (Cowlshaw 21). By embracing post-humanist perspectives in literary and narrative analysis, scholars can decenter human experience and acknowledge the agency and significance of non-human entities in shaping narratives and meaning-making processes. This shift allows for a more holistic and inclusive exploration of diverse forms of life and their contributions to the construction of narratives and cultural discourses.

Understanding the entwined nature of human-nonhuman relations in literature can serve as a powerful tool for initiating socio-political conversations and transformations. By exploring the concept of the "Other" in literary works, individuals can gain insights into different perspectives, fostering recognition, communication, and awareness towards a more inclusive communicative paradigm. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and nonhumans, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the agency and impact of all beings involved (Yeung 41). Revised literary analyses shed light on how power relations surrounding the "Other" are constructed and how they perpetuate the exploitation of these beings. By examining the portrayal of the "Other" in literature, one can uncover the ways in which power dynamics shape and influence interactions between different entities. These analyses reveal how certain groups or individuals are marginalized, oppressed, or exploited through narratives that reinforce hierarchical structures and normalize the mistreatment of the "Other" (Suliman 4).

Moreover, exploring the concept of power in relation to the "Other" in literature can unveil the complexities of power dynamics and how they manifest in societal structures. By delving into the representation of power in human-nonhuman relationships within literary works, one can gain a deeper understanding of how power is wielded, negotiated, and contested. This critical examination exposes the underlying power imbalances that exist in interactions with the "Other," highlighting the need to challenge and redefine these power dynamics to promote more equitable and respectful relationships (Gupta et al. 990).

In the realm of literature and storytelling, there exists a significant gap in the exploration of post-humanism and the broader debate on reimagining our relations with non-human life. While there has been some examination of human-nonhuman interactions in literature, particularly in the context of life history theory and the pace of life, there is a lack of focus on certain literary forms and narratives (Nettle and Frankenhuis 1). Post-

structuralism and post-colonialism have influenced critical readings of novels, short stories, and essays, shedding light on the need for a deeper analysis of these narratives within the post-humanism discourse (Tyner 260). The literature post-2010 shows fragmentation, with distinct boundaries between human and non-human literatures, emphasizing the necessity for a more integrated approach that bridges these divides (Nettle and Frankenhuis 1).

Additionally, the examination of English literature within cultural, political, social, geographical, and institutional contexts offers a rich ground for exploring post-humanist themes and narratives (Ayman 17). Literary Darwinism contrasts scientific views on literature as products of evolutionary processes with post-structuralist perspectives, highlighting the need to delve into how language and culture shape our understanding of the world (Enderwitz 254). The debate between univocal and non-univocal readers has generated intricate literature on both sides, suggesting a diverse range of perspectives that can be further explored within the post-humanism framework (Tejedor 83). While post-colonial theory has not been extensively integrated into fields like Palaeolithic archaeology and human evolutionary studies, there is a growing recognition of its critical importance in shaping our understanding of human origins and evolution (Porr and Matthews 1058).

2. Dreams and Repressed memories

2.1 The concept of dream

Freud defined dreams in his book "The Interpretation of Dreams" as the "royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (608). He believed that dreams provided a gateway to understanding the unconscious mind and its activities. According to Freud, dreams serve as "the guardians of sleep," requiring the disguise of ideational material through the dream-work process (678). The dream-work involves the reworking of repressed wishes through cognitive processes to create the manifest content of dreams, which are often symbolic and require interpretation to uncover their latent meanings. Freud's work on dream

interpretation emphasized the importance of uncovering the latent content hidden within the manifest content of dreams. He suggested that dreams are complex psychic productions that combine various elements such as repressed unconscious wishes, memory traces, day residues, and internal/external stimuli.

Freud's approach to dream analysis involved interpreting dreams to reveal unconscious desires and conflicts, which were often disguised in symbolic form (170). He believed that dreams could be decoded to reveal underlying emotional experiences and psychological processes. In "The Interpretation of Dreams," Freud highlighted the significance of dreams in understanding unconscious desires, conflicts, and emotions. He viewed dreams as expressions of repressed wishes that needed to be decoded through the analysis of their symbolic content (216). Freud's work revolutionized the field of psychoanalysis by demonstrating the importance of dreams in uncovering hidden aspects of the psyche and exploring the depths of the unconscious mind.

2.2 The Role of Dreams in Revealing Repressed Memories

Freud's theory of dreams as a pathway to repressed memories has been a foundational concept in psychoanalytic thought. According to Freud, dreams provide a means to access the unconscious mind, where repressed memories, desires, and fears are stored (608). He posited that unwanted memories could be relegated to the unconscious through a process known as repression. This idea of repression, defined as the unconscious removal of mental contents from awareness, is central to Freud's understanding of how the mind handles memories that are too distressing to acknowledge consciously. In his book Freud contended that dreams are not merely symbolic reflections of desires and fears but rather a mechanism through which repressed memories can resurface in disguised forms.

In Freud's perspective, dreams offer a safe space for individuals to confront their repressed anxieties and traumas, enabling a cathartic emotional release while safeguarding the

ego from overwhelming distress. This viewpoint aligns with Freud's assertion that dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, providing insights into concealed aspects of the psyche. Furthermore, Freud's theory of dreams as a tool for processing unwanted memories is supported by neurophysiological research indicating that forgotten mental experiences, akin to repression, are linked to specific patterns of brain activity. Studies have demonstrated the involvement of the hippocampus, a brain region crucial for memory processing, in integrating symbolic elements within dreams (Cornelius 1335). This integration of symbolic content in dreams mirrors Freud's emphasis on the symbolic nature of dream imagery and its association with repressed psychological material.

3. Ecofeminist Reverberations: Nature, Gender, and Narratives

3.1 Unraveling the Threads of Interconnectedness

Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labor movements, women's health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements. Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature (Gaard "Ecofeminism" 1). It is currently enabling a whole new generation of environmentalists and social justice activists, male and female, to think more deeply about the implications of their work and action for the other half of the human species and for the well-being of the nonhuman world. It is based on the intersection of environmentalism and feminism, aiming to address issues related to both ecological and social justice.

One of the foundational principles of Ecofeminism is the rejection of essentialism and the reevaluation of the relationship between gender, nature, and culture (Gaard "The Politics" 26). This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues,

challenging traditional dualistic views that separate humans from nature. It “holds different views on how to effect social change, and on the role of western dualism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism in perpetuating ecological degradation and oppression along multiple lines including gender, race, and class.” (Katuwal 115).

In addressing environmental and ecological justice, Ecofeminism advocates for a principles-based approach that aligns with the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice adopted by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in the USA in 1991 (Miller et al. 270). This approach emphasizes the importance of considering environmental issues through a social justice lens, recognizing the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. Furthermore, Ecofeminism calls for transformative justice practices that move beyond punitive measures, particularly highlighting the perspectives of women of color in developing alternative solutions (Kim 219). Regarding social and cultural justice, Ecofeminism intersects with other critical frameworks such as Black Feminism and Reproductive Justice to establish new ethical standards for accountability and equity (Scott et al. 17).

By incorporating diverse feminist perspectives and advocating for intersectional praxis, Ecofeminism seeks to address not only gender inequality but also issues of racism, economic injustice, and other forms of oppression (McLaren 93). This inclusive approach aligns with the principles of disability justice and critical feminisms, promoting anti-ableism and fostering inclusive professional praxis (Goulden et al. 732). Ecofeminism critically examines the interconnectedness between patriarchal and capitalist ideologies and their impact on environmental degradation and exploitation. Ecofeminist perspectives, as highlighted by Shiva (1988) and Waring and Steinem (1988),” argues that the exploitation and limited participation of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism.” (Singh and Behura 236) This viewpoint suggests that the

domination of women and nature stems from the same power structures, where both are considered as resources to be exploited for profit and control (Asif et al. 761).

According to the research of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, men typically have a stronger sense of individuality, while women tend to view themselves in relation to others. This difference in self-perception also translates into distinct ethical beliefs, with men favoring a justice-based system and women prioritizing caregiving and responsibility. The origin of these disparities remains uncertain, and though both genders can utilize either moral reasoning, men focus more on individual rights and women more on responsibility due to societal conditioning. Regardless of causation, it is imperative to recognize the importance of connections between individuals as a lack thereof can lead to violence and contribute to ecological issues (Gaard "Ecofeminism" 2). By interrogating the links between environmentalism and feminism, ecofeminism aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics that drive environmental degradation and gender inequality (Alaimo 299). In Ecofeminist discourse, the concept of "Otherness" plays a significant role in critiquing oppressive anthropocentric and hegemonic discourses. Ecofeminism "brings together feminism and ecology into a matrix which exposes the domination of women by men and the domination of the natural world by human beings" (Rakoczy 395). This perspective challenges the traditional power structures that oppress both women and the environment.

The term "eco" in ecofeminism signifies the influence of ecology on the movement, emphasizing the interconnectedness between gender issues and environmental concerns (Air 22). Furthermore, the inclusion of ecofeminists and female environmentalists in climate change discussions can greatly enhance the fight against climate change by offering unique perspectives and solutions (Abdulai 107). By mainstreaming these voices, a more holistic and inclusive approach to addressing environmental challenges can be achieved. Additionally, feminist critical discourse analysis focuses on gender, discrimination, and stereotypes to

highlight the realities faced by women (Arellano 38) This analytical framework allows for a deeper understanding of how language and discourse perpetuate gender inequalities and stereotypes.

In the context of oppressive anthropocentric and hegemonic discourses, the concept of "Otherness" is crucial. It challenges the dominant narratives that marginalize certain groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and minorities. By deconstructing these discourses, feminist scholars aim to dismantle power structures that perpetuate oppression (Hemmings 115). Postcolonial feminism, with its emphasis on culture and context, offers valuable insights into addressing social injustices and inequalities (Gray and Boddy 368). This approach is particularly relevant in critiquing Western hegemonic discourses that often overlook the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups. Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary field that intersects with various other disciplines such as animal studies, post-humanism, and environmental humanities.

The key points of convergence and divergence between ecofeminism and these fields are crucial in understanding the interconnectedness of feminist and environmental discourses. Ecofeminism, as defined by Buckingham, aims to bring together feminism and environmentalism to highlight the consequences of patriarchy and capitalism on the domination of women and the degradation of the environment (Mulvale 173). This foundational definition sets the stage for understanding the connections and disparities between ecofeminism and other interdisciplinary fields.

Ecofeminism shares points of convergence with post-humanism, post-materialism, and animal studies, as highlighted by (Olive and Wheaton 15). These fields engage in discussions and critiques of the Anthropocene and CapitalOne, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities within ecological systems. Furthermore, ecofeminism, post-humanism, and post materialism all challenge the anthropocentric perspectives that have

contributed to environmental degradation and exploitation of both women and nature. This convergence underscores the shared commitment to critiquing dominant power structures and advocating for more inclusive and sustainable relationships between humans and the environment. Moreover, ecofeminism intersects with animal studies, as demonstrated by (Gabriel et al. 16), who emphasize the roles of indigenous women in forest conservation and the connection between gender, space, and environmental protection. This intersection highlights the intertwined nature of ecofeminism and the preservation of natural habitats, emphasizing the agency of women in environmental conservation efforts.

Additionally, ecofeminism aligns with the principles of care and nurture for nature, as discussed by Singh and Behura, who propose ecofeminism as a remedy for environmental destruction, further emphasizing the convergence of ecofeminism with sustainability and environmental activism. However, ecofeminism also exhibits points of divergence from other interdisciplinary fields. For instance, Nash discusses the shortcomings of race/gender binary schemes in the context of black feminism, which suggests a divergence from ecofeminism in terms of the specific focus on race and gender dynamics (9).

3.2 Eco-Gender Dynamics

Ecofeminist perspectives challenge traditional binary conceptions of nature and gender by highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, gender inequality, and ecological exploitation. They propose alternative frameworks that reject the dualistic view of nature and gender, advocating for a relational account of self and nature. This challenges the instrumental view of nature and emphasizes respect for nature without denying its distinctiveness from the self (Plumwood "Nature" 3). The dominant and ancient traditions connecting men with culture and women with nature are also overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable 'male' essence 'virility' is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing but as 'wild', violent, competitive and sexual

(Plumwood “Feminism” 20).

Ecofeminism also critiques the patriarchal structure based on dualisms like men/women, masculine/feminine, and culture/nature, destabilizing the traditional gender roles hierarchy (Mishra 128). Furthermore, it equates women and nature, emphasizing their shared experience of domination and exploitation by men (Air 22). The discourse also explores the link between urban physical and social environments and health inequities mediated by gender and socioeconomic status, providing a framework to inform healthy public policy (Chircop 135).

As an eco-philosophical orientation, Ecofeminism emphasizes the intrinsic value of non-human entities and advocates for the incorporation of ecological sensitivities into all social practices (White 342). This perspective challenges the traditional human-centric view and seeks to include the agency and rights of non-human entities, such as animals, plants, and ecosystems, in its analysis of gendered relationships with nature. Ecofeminism aligns with the idea that people tend to draw on their knowledge about ‘humans’ when judging unfamiliar non-human entities, emphasizing the need to recognize and respect the agency of these entities (Eyssel and Kuchenbrandt 725).

Furthermore, ecofeminism bridges the gap between feminism, which traditionally focuses on human gender relations, and more-than-human geographies, which often centers its analysis solely on non-human agency (Ream 212). This approach is in line with the theory of ecofeminism, which employs mixed methods of qualitative, quantitative, and documentary analysis to understand the roles of indigenous women in forest conservation, highlighting the interconnectedness of gender, indigenous communities, and environmental conservation (Gabriel et al. 1).

Haraway, who shares with ecofeminists a critique of animal rights discourses while distancing herself from socialist feminism over time, does not completely refuse a utilitarian approach to human relations with nonhuman animals but only excludes the

calculation of 'sufficient reasons,' opting for what she calls 'felt reasons' instead. Because of this, she never embraces political veganism as most ecofeminists do. (Timeto 323)

Incorporating the agency and rights of non-human entities into its analysis, ecofeminism challenges traditional animal rights discourses and advocates for a more nuanced approach to human relations with non-human animals. This is evident in the work of Haraway, who critiques animal rights discourses and emphasizes "felt reasons" over "sufficient reasons" in human-nonhuman animal relations. Additionally, ecofeminism contributes to the dissolution of boundaries between entities, creating an embodied environmental ethics that challenges the anthropocentric view of the world (Tien and Burmann 78). By emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings, ecofeminism generates comprehensive geographical knowledge that reflects the interrelatedness of all beings shaping individual, institutional, and ideological realms (Hovorka 1).

Ecofeminist theories challenge anthropocentric views of the environment by advocating for a more inclusive understanding that recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human life forms. This challenge is rooted in the critique of traditional ecological narratives and practices, which have historically been anthropocentric, prioritizing human interests over non-human beings. Ecofeminism seeks to decenter the human experience and emphasize the interconnectedness of all life forms within the environment. This perspective aligns with the concept of "Non-Human" in Ecofeminist critiques, which highlights the need to move beyond human-centered approaches and consider the agency and value of non-human beings in environmental discourse (Shahvisi 112). Ecofeminism provides insights into alternative modes of coexistence between humans and non-human beings by emphasizing intersectionality, performativity, and standpoint as key theoretical ideas and methodological approaches. These perspectives inform discussions of ecological sustainability and social

justice by challenging reductionist approaches and advocating for a more holistic understanding of environmental issues.

Furthermore, Ecofeminism addresses the need for a paradigm shift in environmental ethics and activism, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the complex relationships between humans and non-human beings, and the implications of these relationships for sustainable coexistence (Hovorka 1). The concept of "Non-Human" in Ecofeminist thought challenges the traditional dichotomy between human and non-human, advocating for a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of the environment. This perspective aligns with the broader critique of anthropocentrism, which has historically marginalized non-human beings in environmental discourse. By centering the agency and value of non-human life forms, Ecofeminism offers a more comprehensive and ethical approach to environmental ethics and activism, emphasizing the need for intersectional and performativity-based perspectives to address ecological sustainability and social justice (Hemmings 115).

3.3 Reclaiming Voices: Ecofeminist Critiques and Counter-Narratives

Literary texts engage with Ecofeminist themes by exploring the interconnectedness of gender and nature, the exploitation of the environment, and the critique of patriarchal power structures. Ecofeminism emphasizes the symbolic and social connections between the oppression of women and the domination of nature (Ruether 35). This interconnectedness is evident in literary works that highlight the impact of patriarchal power structures on the environment and women. Early feminist ideals and experiences of oppression in male-dominated societies have enabled authors to recognize the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and the destruction of nature (Meng 226). Furthermore, the representation of gender in children's literature has been identified as influential in shaping attitudes and perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior in society, thus intersecting with Ecofeminist discourse on gender equality (Ruterana 31).

Female characters in literature are often portrayed in relation to nature, reflecting Ecofeminist discourse. These portrayals serve to highlight the interconnectedness of gender and nature, as well as the exploitation of the environment. Literary works often depict female characters as deeply connected to nature, emphasizing their roles in nurturing and sustaining the environment. Additionally, these portrayals intersect with Ecofeminist discourse by challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for gender equality in the context of environmental stewardship. Through the portrayal of female characters in literature, authors contribute to the critique of patriarchal power structures and advocate for a more harmonious relationship between gender and nature, aligning with Ecofeminist principles.

Critics use methodologies such as eco-gender criticism and eco-critical feminism to analyze literature, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationships between gender and the environment. Literary texts challenge dominant narratives about gender and the environment by subverting traditional gender roles and questioning anthropocentric perspectives. For example, female characters are often depicted as being more closely connected to nature, embodying nurturing and caring qualities, and being in tune with the environment (34). This portrayal aligns with Ecofeminist principles, emphasizing the interconnectedness of women and nature and challenging traditional gender roles that associate women with domesticity and passivity.

Moreover, Ecofeminist analysis of literary texts often focuses on the representation of female characters in relation to the environment, highlighting how these characters navigate and interact with nature. For instance, female characters may be depicted as embodying traits traditionally associated with nature, such as nurturing, resilience, and interconnectedness, challenging the anthropocentric perspectives that dominate traditional narratives. As some scholars have used critical hermeneutics in literary analysis as a tool for textual interpretation to examine proto-feminist practices recorded in historical materials (Peng et al. 67).

Literary texts that exemplify Ecofeminist principles or have been subject to Ecofeminist analysis include works that portray female characters as agents of environmental change and empowerment. For example, in "StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm," the character Kerrigan's subjectivity as a player challenges traditional portrayals of female characters in video games, complicating the application of the monstrous-feminine trope and subverting conventional gender dynamics (Blomquist 904). These texts contribute to our understanding of the relationships between gender, ecology, and society by offering alternative narratives that resist and critique traditional gender roles and anthropocentric perspectives, aligning with Ecofeminist principles.

4.A Comparative Exploration of Post-humanist and Ecofeminist Theories

When Ecofeminism and Post-humanism theories intersect, a dialogue emerges challenging traditional boundaries between human and non-human entities, as well as between nature and culture. Ecofeminism, rooted in feminist theory and environmentalism, emphasizes the interconnectedness of social and ecological issues, highlighting how patriarchal structures contribute to environmental degradation (Mishra 128). Post-humanism questions the centrality of the human subject and advocates for a more inclusive consideration of non-human actors in ethical and philosophical discourses (Williams et al.638).

The meeting of Ecofeminism and Post-humanism opens avenues for exploring the entanglements of gender, nature, and technology. Ecofeminist perspectives critique the exploitation of nature through a lens of gendered power dynamics, highlighting historical marginalization and objectification of women and nature (Gaard 26). Post-humanism challenges anthropocentric views, blurring boundaries between human and non-human entities, and inviting a reevaluation of human exceptionalism (Raelin and Robinson 706). Integrating Ecofeminist and Post-humanist frameworks allows scholars to delve into the complexities of human-nature relationships, acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of

non-human beings. This intersection offers an understanding of environmental issues beyond anthropocentrism, considering the interconnectedness of all entities within ecosystems (Kronsell and Kaijser 41). It also prompts a reevaluation of traditional dualisms like nature/culture and human/non-human, encouraging a more holistic approach to ethics and politics (Öz 41).

The convergence of Ecofeminism and Post-humanism can inform interventions and policy-making processes addressing environmental challenges from an inclusive and intersectional perspective. Ecofeminist approaches emphasizing care, interconnectedness, and sustainability complement Post-humanist perspectives advocating for multispecies justice and ethical considerations for all beings (Nenning et al. 695). This synergy can lead to comprehensive strategies for promoting environmental protection and social justice.

In academia, the meeting of Ecofeminism and Post-humanism inspires innovative research methodologies challenging disciplinary boundaries and epistemological frameworks. Post-structural feminist analyses, informed by Ecofeminist and Post-humanist theories, offer new ways of engaging with research participants and centering their voices and experiences (Hussain et al. 514). Adopting eco-social phenomenological approaches prioritizing reflexivity, inclusivity, and gender awareness contributes to ethical scholarship bridging theory and practice. The integration of Ecofeminist and Post-humanist perspectives enriches discussions on sustainability, eco-innovation, and social transformation. Drawing on universalist policies advocated by Ecofeminism and relational ethics of Post-humanism, policymakers and practitioners can develop holistic solutions to environmental and social challenges (Nenning et al. 695). This interdisciplinary dialogue fosters understanding of interconnections between human societies, ecosystems, and technological advancements, paving the way for sustainable and just futures.

Conclusion

This chapter has established a solid foundation for comprehending the interaction between literature and humanity's relation to the natural world. By exploring the theoretical frameworks of post-humanism and ecofeminism, the chapter has laid the groundwork for analyzing Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* through these lenses. It has explained how post-humanist perspectives challenge anthropocentric narratives and redefined human-nonhuman connections. Additionally, the chapter highlighted the role of dreams and repressed memories in character development, offering insights into the protagonist's transformation. The comparative analysis of post-humanist and ecofeminist theories has highlighted their complementarity, paving the way for a deeper exploration of non-human otherness in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

**Unveiling the Unseen: Delving into *The Vegetarian* with Post-humanist
and Eco-feminist Mirrors.**

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* reveals deep-seated societal biases through the merging of human and non-human aspects, as well as the interplay of ecofeminist and post-humanist ideas. This chapter examines the themes and complexities of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* through the lenses of ecofeminism and post-humanism, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the work. The first section of the chapter delves into the portrayal of non-human otherness, with a focus on how the protagonist's memories and dreams represent her gradual alienation from humanity. Then it digs into the link between women and environment, highlighting patriarchal constraints on female characters and their acts of disobedience. This section focuses on violence against women and the environment and provides a critical ecofeminist critique of the connections between these forms of oppression.

1. Insights into Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

The novel depicts Yeong-hye's metamorphosis becoming a vegetarian, which causes family conflict and personal contemplation. It is told in three parts, focusing on her husband's shock, her brother-in-law's infatuation, and her sister's thoughts on Yeong-hye's mental degeneration. Themes of societal pressures, resistance to standards, and the implications of human decision are central. Yeong-hye's quest for autonomy and identity through vegetarianism becomes a moving metaphor for personal freedom and social rejection. The novel is a frightening look at psychological pain and the intricacies of familial and cultural expectations in modern South Korea.

2. Exploring Non-Human Otherness in *The Vegetarian*

2.1 A Haunting Memory

Yeong-hye's childhood experiences cast a long shadow over her early years and fundamentally shape her perceptions. The sound of her barking dog, silenced and transformed into a meal by her father's hands, remains a gut-wrenching memory that marks the beginnings of Yeong-hye's deep distaste for the prevailing cruelty in interconnected existence. "I remember the two eyes that had watched me, while the dog was made to run on, while he vomited blood mixed with froth, and how

later they had seemed to appear, flickering, on the surface of the soup. But I don't care. I really didn't care." (Han 50). This pivotal event serves as a stark reminder of the authoritarian and oppressive environment in which Yeong-hye is raised.

Her father's unwillingness to see beyond his own ego, coupled with his domineering behavior, casts a shadow over Yeong-hye's formative years. His actions trammel her childhood innocence, forcing her to confront the harsh realities of violence and control at a young age. The household becomes a battleground of conflicting desires and oppressive dynamics, leaving Yeong-hye feeling isolated and vulnerable. These scars inflicted by her father's actions shape Yeong-hye's perception of the world, instilling in her a deep aversion to the cruelty and domination that characterized her upbringing.

Despite her family's attempts to dismiss her anxieties as baseless, the trauma she experiences is palpable and enduring, shaping her interactions and decisions as she navigates childhood. As Yeong-hye navigates her early years, the pervasive atmosphere of cruelty and control continues to loom large over her existence. Her father's oppressive behavior, coupled with the traumatic memory of the dog's death, becomes a constant reminder of her powerlessness and the harshness of her reality. These early experiences profoundly influence her psychological development, leaving her in a state of perpetual anxiety and emotional turmoil.

2.2 "I Had a Dream"

Before the nightmares began, Yeong-hye and her husband lived an ordinary, controlled life. But the dreams tortured her, driving Yeong-hye to purge her mind and renounce eating meat altogether. Her choice to reject eating meat is symbolic of a much broader, intersectional problem of violence inflicted by a patriarchal society upon both women and nature. "My clothes still wet with blood. Hide, hide behind the trees. Crouch down, don't let anybody see. My bloody hands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done?" (Han 20). Her haunting dream featuring the ritualistic slaughter of cattle by humans represents the cruelty and violence society unleashes upon animals and nature for human

consumption. It's a small act of independence, but it interrupted her marriage and set into motion an increasingly grotesque chain of events at home.

As her husband, her brother-in-law, and her sister each fight to reassert their control, Yeong-hye obsessively defends the choice that's become sacred to her. Soon their attempts turn desperate, subjecting first her mind, then her body, to even more intrusive and perverse violations, sending Yeong-hye spiraling into a dangerous, bizarre estrangement, not only from those closest to her but also from herself. Yeong-hye's dream demonstrates her desire to break free from societal norms and cultural norms she had been following blindly before. and embrace a more authentic existence.

In the dream, she sees herself standing alone in a forest, surrounded by trees with blood-red sap, which represents the passion and liveliness Yeong-hye has confined herself from expressing in her daily life. She chops off her own flesh in this idealized landscape and offers it to a cohort of creatures filled with yearning—the forest and creatures exhibiting that even non-humans long for connection and purpose, and it is what compels the protagonist to make more. The forest represents a realm separate from human society where Yeong-hye can be free from the constraints and expectations that come with societal norms.

This nature setting provides her a refuge where she can fully explore and reconnect with her primal instincts, yearning for her true, authentic self. In contrast to the strict social norms of urban society, the forest symbolizes a wild and natural environment of supreme autonomy and liberation. The sentient plants present in the forest also serve as a distinctive force lacking restriction presented on human life, lacking rules and restrictions from human-made laws. They are a symbol of flourishing life form beyond societal confines where they exist harmoniously with the natural habitat where they thrive and survive unrestricted and unrestrained by societal norms.

By experiencing a current of kinship through her consciousness, Yeong-hye recognizes that the natural world could provide authenticity desirable to align herself along as opposed to societal expectations, dictates, and control. As a result, being affiliated with sentient forces that may vary philosophically unveiled Yeong-hye herself, is engaging in critical true personalism decisions

markedly to mutant extents culturally well tossed to South-Korea, requiring an escape. Since Yeong-hye questions her relationship with the human-self, and hence locating her inner conflict through Psychological outer manifest, it shows the deliberate decision-making override on prescribed societal conventions. This natural spiritual disposition overwrites being so voluminous for the new inquisitive space is symbolic, challenging, and feels organic.

Her decision to become a vegetarian, later on, stems from the need to take action against societal power; it might be a rebellion to object a regulation that objects to her want of resources beyond what she presently has which is eating meat in common Korean pescatarian practice. By refusing to eat any kind of meat, Yeong-hye is challenging the traditional diet that most South Koreans eat and the dominant control society had over her body. For her, the absence of eating meat symbolizes the rejection of society's standard way of living and validates the importance of deciding for oneself.

Therefore, Yeong-hye's dream serves as a symbolic representation of her inner struggle and the vital move towards becoming a vegetarian and making oneself authentically reflecting their stances willingly and confidently. This act of choosing a vegetarian lifestyle aligns with the theme of rebellion and non-conformity that runs throughout the novel, highlighting Yeong-hye's journey towards self-discovery and liberation from the constraints of societal expectations (Ningtyas 70). Her transformation begins as a seemingly innocuous decision, a mere refusal to eat meat. Still, it eventually evolves into a radical transformation that manifests her desperate desire to exert control over her own body and life. Initially, Yeong-hye's choice to become vegetarian might be dismissed as a simple diet preference; in a Korean society where K-pop idols, TV stars' stringent diet plans make people yearn for patronizing attempts at lifestyle refinement, including food intake but turns out, more significant purposes dwell beyond.

Despite her insistence that this is her decision alone, her husband, extended family, and colleagues balk at her reluctance to continue consuming meat as usual portraying resistance by adhering to norms. As things progress, it becomes apparent that there is more to Yeong-hye's decision

than just avoiding meat; it's almost willful defiance in the ruthless capitalistic Korea where traditional wisdom is squashed upon respect.

Yeong-hye's addiction to self-control over her own body pads up by dismissing the vantage appearance over retrospective demeanor. Her transformation begins with a quiet acceptance of her "true self", discovering the freedom that comes from rejecting societal norms, which despite the apparent rebelliousness, proves typical for Koreans to be law-abiding and sense to regulate. Yeong-hye's rejection of societal beliefs slowly inspires confidence, moving backward to acknowledge past traumas' effect leaving behind culprits of disorientations, mainly, control.

By challenging anthropocentrism within her society, the decision to become a vegetarian goes against societal norms deeply rooted in anthropocentrism, where humans are often considered superior to animals. Her choice signifies a shift towards acknowledging the moral consideration of all sentient beings, aligning with post-humanist ideals that reject the hierarchical view of species (Raelin and Robinson 706), her actions in becoming a vegetarian can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the anthropocentric norms prevalent in her society. By choosing not to consume meat, she challenges the notion that animals exist solely for human use and consumption. This act of vegetarianism symbolizes a departure from the belief that animals are mere resources for human benefit, advocating for a more ethical and compassionate approach towards non-human entities.

Yeong-hye's journey symbolically rejects the anthropocentric worldview dominating her environment, advocating for a more inclusive and interconnected relationship with all living beings. This transformation is not just a dietary choice but a profound statement against the anthropocentric values deeply ingrained in her society. Her actions disrupt the established human-animal hierarchy, challenging conventional belief systems that prioritize human interests over those of other species. Through Yeong-hye's narrative, Han Kang encourages readers to reflect on the implications of anthropocentrism and prompts a reevaluation of our relationships with non-human beings, advocating for a more inclusive and compassionate coexistence.

Yeong-hye initiates her transition from the very first moment, not only by rejecting meat but also

by creating a secluded environment around herself. The concept of BwO was introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their landmark work *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980. BwO occurs when the human body breaks free from its organ constraints. Deleuze and Guattari believe that an ordinary person can commit extraordinary acts of violence and cruelty in the state of a BwO. It refers to a complete lack of organization within a cluster of organs that seeks continually self-constructing milieu. To put it differently, this body favors intensity over organization and experimentation over interpretation. Here, Yeong-hye appears as an ordinary woman but later proves herself to be an extraordinary desire machine capable of metamorphoses. Her family becomes angry when she fails to provide a proper explanation for her vegan decision. She escapes everyone's questions by saying, 'I had a dream' (Han 21). As she becomes a danger to herself, she starts displaying many odd behaviors and becomes more extreme and erratic (Anupama 600).

2.3 Arm in Arm with Other

Yeong-hye's empathetic connection with animals serves as a poignant manifestation of her evolving hybrid identity. Her ability to resonate deeply with the suffering of a non-human creature transcends mere human empathy, suggesting a profound interconnection between human and non-human emotions. “[...] Because of meat. I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there. Blood and flesh, all those butchered bodies are scattered in every nook and cranny, and though the physical remnants were excreted, their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides” (Han 56). These ideas mark a pivotal shift in Yeong-hye's consciousness, prompting her to reevaluate her relationship with the natural world and her place within it.

Her empathy towards a wounded bird while in the mental hospital illustrates a deep interconnection between violence against animals and violence against women. The wounded bird symbolizes the shared plight of women and nature. As an animal, the bird underscores nature's vulnerability to violence and exploitation. As a symbol of vulnerability and suffering, the bird also reflects Yeong-hye's experience under the patriarchy as a woman. Her act of showing empathy towards

a wounded bird serves as a poignant symbol of the interconnectedness between violence against animals and violence against women. This connection is deeply rooted in ecofeminist ideology, which posits that the suffering and vulnerability embodied by the wounded bird mirror Yeong-hye's own experiences of oppression within a patriarchal society (Gaard 26).

In contrast to her nonchalant family members, Yeong-hye's overwhelming sadness at the suffering animals shows her ability to empathize beyond humans. She feels the animals' pain in a way that goes beyond mere empathy. Her sadness isn't just that the animals are dying; it's a sense of connection with the animals' essence. She shares an appreciation of its meaningful, compound identity, recognizing the interconnectedness of their existences. The encounter with the dead animals moves Yeong-hye to question her place in the world and raises broader questions about our collective destiny concerning nature. This scene showcases Yeong-hye's ongoing transformation from human to a hybrid being and portrays her vulnerability as she navigates this shift.

As she identifies with the animals, Yeong-hye acknowledges a fundamental connection between herself and nature and a sameness that bridges both. This realization sets her on a non-linear journey to re-evaluating her identity, resulting in her fragile attempt to explore beyond normal forms and break free from the shackles of human society's conventions and expectations and toxic animal-influenced industrial systems. Rather than directly portraying her immersion into nature, the novel tends to show transformations in Yeong-hye's mindset, leading readers through interior character assessments, rather than relying mainly on structural possibilities sustain our own. This allows for subtle shifts that emphasize her ongoing transformations, deeply felt ambiguities and contradictions in the realized hybrid transformations.

Following this encounter, Yeong-hye's behavior gradually adopts plant-like qualities, further blurring the boundaries between human and non-human existence. She begins to exhibit passivity and detachment from human concerns, subsisting on minimal sustenance and displaying a heightened sensitivity to sunlight and water. Her refusal to consume meat or animal products symbolizes a rejection of her human identity and a desire to align herself with non-human forms of life, challenging

anthropocentric norms and values. Her transformation is vividly depicted through imagery that evokes the beauty and fragility of the natural world.

The bond between Yeong-hye and plants turns out to be remarkably intense when her brother-in-law paints flowers on her body for an art project. To her brother-in-law, she “[...] radiated energy, like a tree that grows in the wilderness, denuded and solitary” (Han 71). Because of the strong connection between her and plants, she does not even want the flower painting to come off. She believes that the flower painting stops her nightmarish dreams from coming. Further, beyond reasonable limits, she is willing to make love with her brother-in-law just because he painted his body with flowers, as she wished.

One striking aspect of Yeong-hye's transformation is her decision to cover her body with floral paintings by her brother-in-law -a budding artist infatuates on her as he finds a Mongolian mark on her body, these paintings serve as a visual representation of her hybrid identity, blurring the boundaries between human and plant characteristics. As Yeong-hye's body becomes increasingly adorned with intricate floral designs, she undergoes a physical metamorphosis that mirrors her internal journey towards embracing a more elemental existence.

The paintings symbolize her transition from human to non-human form, as she seeks to align herself more closely with the natural world and shed the constraints of her human identity. “I didn’t want it to come off, so I haven’t washed my body. It’s stopping the dreams from coming. If it comes off latter I hope you’ll paint it on again for me” (Han 104). Yeong-hye's insistence on keeping the floral paintings on her body reflects a deep-seated need for security and relief from her tormenting nightmares. The act of not washing her body to preserve the paintings illustrates the extent of her attachment to them and the psychological refuge they provide.

By stating that the paintings prevent her dreams from recurring, Yeong-hye demonstrates her belief in their protective power, attributing them with a sense of agency against the haunting visions that plague her. This reliance on the floral paintings as a shield against her nightmares suggests that Yeong-hye perceives them as more than just decorative adornments, they serve as a tangible barrier

between her and the disturbing experiences that threaten her peace of mind. In this way, the paintings become symbolic of her newfound autonomy and agency, offering her a means of exerting control over her inner turmoil and transcending the constraints of her human identity. Her request for her brother-in-law to repaint those flowers if they fade underscores her dependence on them for emotional stability and a sense of continuity in her transformation. By seeking reassurance that the protective barrier will be reinstated, if necessary, Yeong-hye reaffirms her commitment to this unconventional path and her desire to maintain the peace and connection she has found through her metamorphosis.

From the moment Yeong-hye's brother-in-law becomes infatuated with her, the symbolism of the paintings becomes apparent. They signify a departure from conventional human norms and a deepening connection with the natural world. As the paintings proliferate across her body, Yeong-hye's physical appearance undergoes a metamorphosis, mirroring her internal journey towards embracing her primal instincts and shedding the constraints of her human identity. The floral paintings represent a merging of human and plant characteristics, blurring the boundaries between the two entities. Through this visual transformation, Yeong-hye becomes more than just a human; she embodies the essence of nature itself. The paintings serve as a bridge between her physical form and the natural world, symbolizing her desire to transcend the limitations of her human existence and align herself more closely with the rhythms of the earth.

The process of receiving these paintings further solidifies Yeong-hye's connection with nature. As her brother-in-law meticulously covers her body with floral patterns, it's as though she is being infused with the very essence of the natural world. The act of paintings becomes a ritualistic communion between human and plant, blurring the lines between the two and emphasizing their interconnectedness. As Yeong-hye's body becomes increasingly adorned with these intricate floral designs, she undergoes a physical metamorphosis that mirrors her internal journey towards embracing a more elemental existence.

Her transition to a non-human form is symbolized by the proliferation of the paintings, which serve as markers of her liberation from societal norms and her embrace of a more instinctual, nature-

oriented way of being. “Her legs were covered with scattered orange petals, and she spread them wide as though she wanted to make love to the sunlight, to the wind” (Han 125). This scene juxtaposed with her sexual encounter, symbolizes her deep connection to nature and her rejection of anthropocentric norms. In this context, having sex with nature represents Yeong-hye's desire to transcend traditional human boundaries and embrace a more holistic understanding of existence.

Yeong-hye's decision to engage in sexual activity in a natural setting, exposed to the elements, signifies her rejection of societal norms that dictate human dominance over the natural world. Instead, she seeks to dissolve the boundaries between herself and the environment, viewing herself as an integral part of the ecological system rather than a separate, superior entity. The act of having sex with nature can be interpreted as a form of communion or symbiosis, where Yeong-hye seeks to merge her identity with the natural world. In this sense, her nakedness on the veranda symbolizes a return to a more primal state of being, free from the constraints of human civilization and societal expectations. By embracing her connection to nature in this way, Yeong-hye challenges anthropocentric views of human exceptionalism and asserts her place within the broader ecological community.

2.4 Becoming the Non-Human Other

Yeong-hye's transformation is both literal and metaphorical, as she gradually moves away from human society and embraces a more primal, natural state of being, identifying herself with plants, trees, and the forest. Her transformation unfolds in stages, each one deepening her disconnection from human norms and aligning her closer with the natural world. As Yeong-hye's story progresses, her identification with plants, trees, and the forest becomes increasingly pronounced. She does not merely adopt a plant-based diet; she begins to embody plant-like characteristics and behaviors. This is evidenced by her physical actions, such as painting flowers on her body. This body painting is a tangible manifestation of her inner transformation, symbolizing her desire to become one with nature. By covering her skin with floral patterns, she rejects her human flesh and embraces a vegetal identity.

Yeong-hye's decision to engage in sexual activity with J solely because of the flowers painted on

his body can be interpreted as a symbolic union with nature. “It wasn’t him, it was the flowers...” (Han 113). By focusing on the floral imagery adorning J's body, Yeong-hye transcends conventional notions of physical attraction and intimacy, instead seeking a deeper connection with the natural world. The flowers serve as a conduit for her to express her affinity for nature and her desire to merge with its elemental forces. She also expresses a desire to photosynthesize, reflecting her wish to live as a plant, sustained only by sunlight and water. This desire highlights her rejection of human sustenance and the violence associated with eating, underscoring her longing for a simpler, more peaceful existence, akin to that of a plant.

These behaviors are not mere eccentricities; they signify her profound yearning to transcend human limitations and merge with nature on a fundamental level. Her dissociation from human identity becomes more apparent as she begins to see her human traits-thoughts, emotions, physical needs-as burdensome and alien. This dissociation is evident when she starts to feel an intrinsic connection with trees and plants, considering them her true kin. Her human body becomes a prison from which she seeks to escape, yearning for the rooted, serene existence of a flower. Yeong-hye’s bond with nature is poignantly depicted during her time in the hospital.

In a moment of clarity, as she begins to speak again, she casts her gaze toward the zelkova tree on the other side of the window and says, “Yes...there are big trees here” (Han 149). This scene symbolizes her profound sense of belonging to the natural world and her desire to root herself into the ground, mimicking a plant’s natural state. Her connection to the tree reflects her ultimate wish to abandon her human identity and fully embrace her existence as part of the natural ecosystem.

The portrayal of nudity as a calm and natural state contrasts sharply with societal expectations and norms regarding modesty and privacy.

She was coming out of the bathroom. The real shock, though, was that she was naked [...] she did this quite calmly, not in the least flustered or embarrassed, as though getting dressed were merely something demanded by the situation, rather than something she herself felt to be

necessary. (Han 81)

Yeong-hye's lack of self-consciousness about her nakedness suggests a departure from human conventions and a movement towards a more primal, instinctual existence. By calmly dressing herself without any apparent sense of shame or embarrassment, Yeong-hye demonstrates a willingness to embrace her body and its natural state, unencumbered by societal judgments or expectations. Throughout the novel nudity brings Yeong-hye closer to a natural state, akin to animals and plants. In shedding her clothes, she symbolically sheds her human identity and embraces a more elemental existence. This return to nature is central to her transformation, as she seeks to align herself more closely with the natural world and its simplicity, purity, and freedom.

As Yeong-hye undergoes these transformations, her family and the society around her view her as increasingly alien and incomprehensible. However, for her, these relationships become increasingly irrelevant as she moves closer to her goal of becoming a flower. Her behavior, which deviates radically from accepted norms, leads to her being seen as the Other, a being outside the realm of conventional human understanding. This othering process is crucial in highlighting the tension between human society and the natural world. Her family's attempts to reintegrate her into societal norms through force and coercion only serve to underscore her growing estrangement and the depth of her transformation.

Yeong-hye's journey is not just a rebellion against societal norms; it is an existential and metaphysical quest for identity and meaning beyond the human condition. She is driven by an innate need to find her place in the world, one that is not confined by human constructs and limitations. Her transformation into the Non-human Other reflects a profound existential search, where she seeks to redefine herself in a way that transcends her human identity. "Look, sister, I'm doing a handstand; leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands... they delve down into the earth. Endlessly, endlessly...yes, I spread my legs, because I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch; I spread them wide..." (Han 133). This quest leads her to a state where she perceives herself as part of the natural world, connected to the primal forces of life that are often overlooked or suppressed by

human society.

The climax of Yeong-hye's transformation provides a poignant insight into the complex dynamics between human society and the natural world. It reveals the often overlooked and deep-seated human desire to reconnect with nature, and the existential struggle to find meaning and identity outside the conventional frameworks of human existence. Yeong-hye's metamorphosis into the Non-human Other is a radical act of self-definition and resistance, challenging the boundaries between humanity and nature, and questioning the very essence of what it means to be human.

2.5 Good/Bad Other

The protagonist Yeong-hye is distinctly portrayed as the 'Other' within both her societal and familial contexts. This otherness becomes a central theme of the narrative, as it manifests in various ways and elicits a wide range of reactions from the characters around her. Her transformation and subsequent behavior are perceived through contrasting lenses, which significantly influence how she is treated and understood by those close to her.

On one hand, some characters view Yeong-hye as a 'bad Other,' categorizing her as mad, disobedient, and psychologically disturbed. These characters are deeply unsettled by her refusal to conform to established norms and interpret her behavior as a form of rebellion and mental instability. They view her dietary choices and subsequent actions as direct challenges to the social and familial order, often responding with confusion, aggression, or attempts to control her. For these individuals, Yeong-hye's otherness is a threat that needs to be managed or eradicated to maintain societal equilibrium.

a-Her Husband:

From the very beginning of their marriage, Mr. Cheong has seen Yeong-hye as somewhat odd yet manageable, appreciating her primarily for her compliance and the ease with which she fits into his life. Her sudden and firm decision to reject meat upends his perception and routine, creating a significant rift in their relationship. He perceives her refusal to conform to societal and marital

expectations not as a personal or ethical choice but as a form of rebellion and madness. Mr. Cheong's reactions and descriptions of Yeong-hye's behavior reflect his deep discomfort and inability to understand her transformation. He describes her actions as bizarre and incomprehensible, indicating his belief that her deviation from normative behavior is both irrational and unacceptable.

For Mr. Cheong, her vegetarianism is not simply a dietary preference but a direct challenge to the social order and the traditional roles expected within their marriage. Her decision disrupts the harmony of their household, which was built on predictable, conventional patterns. His reaction underscores the rigid boundaries within which individuals, especially women, are expected to operate and the severe consequences of stepping outside these lines. Yeong-hye's vegetarianism thus becomes a symbol of her struggle for autonomy and identity in the face of oppressive societal norms, highlighting the complexities and challenges of asserting one's personal beliefs in a conformist society.

b-Her Father:

During an important family meal, Yeong-hye's father reacts violently to her refusal to eat meat. His response is not one of concern for her well-being or an attempt to understand her motivations, but rather an aggressive assertion of control. He forcibly tries to make her eat meat, an act that symbolizes his desire to reassert dominance and compel conformity to family and societal expectations. This coercion reaches a climax when Yeong-hye, in a desperate act of protest, cuts herself. Her self-harm is a visceral and immediate way of rejecting her father's authority and the oppressive demands placed upon her. The family's reaction to Yeong-hye's self-inflicted wound is telling. Instead of eliciting empathy or a deeper investigation into her emotional state, it is perceived as further evidence of her psychological breakdown. They view her self-harm as a sign of madness, reinforcing their belief that her refusal to eat meat and her subsequent behavior are manifestations of a mental disorder.

This interpretation serves to further alienate Yeong-hye, painting her as a 'bad Other' who is not just disobedient but also irrational and unhinged. Her father's violent attempt to control her dietary choices highlights the deeply ingrained patriarchal expectations imposed on Yeong-hye. His reaction

underscores the societal belief that women should adhere to the roles and behaviors dictated by male authority figures. Yeong-hye's resistance is thus seen as a direct challenge to these traditional gender norms and to her father's control over her life. Her father's inability to tolerate her autonomy and his need to enforce conformity through aggression illustrate the broader societal constraints on women and the severe consequences faced by those who dare to deviate.

On the other hand, there are those who see Yeong-hye as a 'good Other,' they see her as unique, special, and possessing an admirable sense of autonomy. These individuals interpret her radical shift in lifestyle, particularly her decision to become a vegetarian, as a courageous act of self-determination and an assertion of personal identity. They appreciate her resistance to societal norms and perceive her as a figure of purity and transcendence. For them, Yeong-hye's actions symbolize a break from conventional expectations and a move towards a more authentic and liberated existence.

a-Her Brother-in-Law:

In a striking display of his reverence for her, Yeong-hye's brother-in-law embarks on a project of transforming her body into a living artwork. Painting delicate flowers across her skin symbolizes his belief that Yeong-hye embodies a deeper, more profound existence—one that transcends the confines of societal expectations and conventional norms. In his eyes, she represents an escape from the mundane and a gateway to a heightened state of being. However his obsession with Yeong-hye's transformation is not merely about aesthetics or artistic expression; it is a manifestation of his own desires and aspirations. Through his interactions with Yeong-hye, he seeks to break free from the constraints of societal norms and embrace a more authentic way of living.

Yeong-hye becomes a symbol of liberation and possibility, offering him a glimpse into a world untethered by human limitations. Furthermore, his fascination with Yeong-hye's body extends beyond its physical appearance. He is drawn to the Mongolian mark on her buttocks, viewing it as a symbol of her uniqueness and individuality. This mark, often associated with ancient beliefs and superstitions, further reinforces his perception of Yeong-hye as a figure of mystery and intrigue. In embracing her

otherness, the brother-in-law finds himself drawn deeper into Yeong-hye's world, where the boundaries between human and nature blur, and the possibilities for connection and transformation are endless.

b-Her Sister:

In-hye's reaction to Yeong-hye's transformation is one of concern and confusion. Like many others, she struggles to comprehend her sister's sudden rejection of societal norms, particularly her decision to become a vegetarian. In-hye perceives Yeong-hye's behavior as a troubling deviation from the expected trajectory of their lives, causing tension and discord within their familial dynamic. As the story unfolds, In-hye's perspective shifts, allowing her to develop a deeper empathy for her sister's plight. Initially perplexed by Yeong-hye's behavior, In-hye gradually begins to recognize the profound internal struggles Yeong-hye faces. She empathizes with Yeong-hye's desire to break free from the oppressive forces that dominate their lives, understanding that her sister's actions are not merely rebellious or mad but represent a desperate attempt to reclaim autonomy and assert control over her own existence.

3. Women and Nature

3.1 Women Should Obey

Rooted in the conservative patriarchal society of South Korea, where women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles and societal expectations (Rahmah et al. 390), Yeong-hye experiences oppression even before her decision to become a vegetarian. Yeong-hye's role as a wife is defined by subservience and obedience.

a-The "Why not marriage":

Yeong-Hye's husband, Mr. Cheong, views her as a "completely unremarkable in every way" (Han 11) woman who fulfills her domestic duties without question. "In keeping with my expectations, she made for a completely ordinary wife who went about things without any distasteful frivolousness" (Han 12). He marries her not out of love or admiration, but because she fits the mold of what he considers an ideal wife. This objectification and dehumanization reflect the broader societal view that

women should be docile and subservient, existing primarily to serve their husbands and families.

Throughout the novel, Mr. Cheong's interactions with Yeong-hye are marked by a lack of empathy and understanding. He fails to recognize or appreciate her inner struggles and desires, dismissing them as inconsequential or irrational. Instead, he expects her to conform to societal norms and fulfill her prescribed role as a dutiful wife, regardless of the toll it may take on her mental and emotional well-being. "My boss's wife, an imposing woman with [...] a large jade necklace clacking at her throat, [...] I turned to address my wife, but what I saw there brought me up short. She was wearing a slightly clinging black blouse, and to my utter mortification I saw that the outline of her nipples was clearly visible through the fabric" (Han 29). Instead of understanding the reasons behind her decision to not wear a bra and choose her clothing, he is only concerned about his own public image and embarrassment. He does not question or consider Yeong-hye's personal choices or mental state, demonstrating his disconnect with her experiences and priorities. Mr. Cheong's lack of empathy perpetuates a cycle of oppression that women face within patriarchal societies. It reinforces the expectation for women to conform to social norms and expectations, regardless of how it may negatively affect their psyche. Yeong-hye's actions are seen by Mr. Cheong as disruptive to his image and expected social norms, with these ideals prioritized over Yeong-hye's individual well-being.

b- Family Pressure:

Yeong-hye's father symbolizes traditional gender roles and expectations within the family dynamic. His reaction to Yeong-hye's decision to become vegetarian underscores his strict compliance to patriarchal norms and his expectation of obedience from his daughter. He sees her vegetarianism as a rejection of his authority and an affront to his role as the head of the household. This is evident in his confrontational response, where he demands an explanation and attempts to assert his dominance over Yeong-hye's choices. His refusal to acknowledge her autonomy is further highlighted in his insistence on forcing her to eat meat.

Despite her protests and clear discomfort, he continues to pressure her to conform to his

expectations, demonstrating his disregard for her agency and bodily autonomy. His response to her vegetarianism is not only one of anger and frustration but also of profound shame.

“-**Mr. Chung:** ‘I’m sorry, Father-in-law.’

-**Her Father:** ‘No, I’m the one who’s ashamed.’

It shocked me to hear this patriarchal man apologize—in the five years I’d known him, I’d never once heard such words pass his lips. Shame and empathy just didn’t suit him” (Han 36). Yeong-hye's father represents the ultimate authority figure, one who demands absolute compliance and sees any deviation as a direct challenge to his control, the fact that he felt ashamed of her vegetarianism highlights his perception of her as a disobedient woman who brought shame to the family. This shame is deeply rooted in his belief that her refusal to eat meat is not just a dietary choice, but a direct challenge to his authority and the traditional gender roles he upholds, as it is a symbol of her rebellion. Her family members were “frustrated and angry at her because she isn’t ready to explain to them the reason behind her transformation. The only response is ‘I had a dream’ (8)” (Bright 390).

3.2 A Female Rebellion

The novel challenges traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, portraying the protagonist's journey as a symbolic resistance against societal norms (Anupama 599). Yeong-hye's rejection of patriarchal norms represents a significant transformation that challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations. By choosing to become a vegetarian, Yeong-hye disrupts gender-based power dynamics that often confine women to specific roles like being a submissive wife or an obedient daughter (Cluett 2). This act of defiance symbolizes her resistance against patriarchal norms that dictate women's behavior and choices, particularly in conservative societies such as South Korea. In the novel, Yeong-hye's transformation goes beyond a simple dietary change; it serves as a symbolic form of resistance against the oppressive patriarchal forces in her life.

Through her adoption of vegetarianism, she asserts her autonomy and agency over her body, using it as a tool for self-expression and liberation from societal expectations (Anupama 600). This

aligns with feminist ideologies that emphasize women's right to autonomy and decision-making free from patriarchal constraints. Yeong-hye's rebellion is further exemplified through her interactions with male characters in the novel, each representing different aspects of patriarchy and societal norms that she challenges and subverts (Bright 390). By refusing to conform to their expectations and demands, she establishes her independence and autonomy, rejecting their attempts to define her.

Additionally, Yeong-hye's choice to become a vegetarian can be viewed as a form of edible resistance, a feminine rebellion through culinary representation that challenges traditional gender roles and societal norms (Devi and B 1570). Her decision to abstain from meat consumption can be interpreted as a means to reclaim her identity and disrupt the established order that upholds patriarchal values and expectations. In the context of South Korean society, where meat consumption is deeply ingrained in cultural practices and gender norms, Yeong-hye's vegetarianism emerges as a potent symbol of feminist resistance.

Both women and plant are disrespected and deserve respect. The contrast between matriarchal earth and masculine society is a central concept in ecofeminism. Here, the protagonist attempts to transform into a plant, denying respect as a woman and attempting to reclaim her freedom by identifying as a plant (Bright 393). Her refusal to engage in the carnivorous meat culture can be seen as a direct challenge to the prevailing masculine order that permeates various aspects of Korean society. (O'Key 3). By transcending traditional gender binaries and subverting patriarchal values, Yeong-hye embodies a form of resistance aimed at dismantling the oppressive structures that govern her existence.

3.3 Violence Against Women and Nature

a-Her Father:

“He parted her lips with his strong fingers” (Han 47) and “forces a lump of meat into her mouth” (Han 74), As the patriarch of his family, Yeong-hye's father holds a significant amount of power and influence over those around him. He represents a complex and complicated character. Throughout the novel, his actions towards women and nature demonstrate the patriarchal ideals that still exist in South

Korean society, despite efforts to change. His force-feeding symbolizes his need to exert control and enforce conformity.

Furthermore, his behavior reflects the broader societal and cultural expectations placed on individuals, particularly women, to adhere to traditional roles and behaviors. His actions can also be seen as a manifestation of his frustration with his inability to maintain absolute authority within his family. His violent response to Yeong-hye's vegetarianism is rooted in a deep-seated belief that he must maintain control over his daughter's body and choices, thereby upholding his status as the family's patriarch. This need to dominate and suppress any form of rebellion or non-conformity is indicative of a larger societal pattern where dissent, especially from women, is met with coercion and violence. Also, his force-feeding of Yeong-hye is symbolic of the way society forcefully imposes its norms and values onto individuals. Just as he tries to make her consume meat, society pressures individuals to conform to established norms, often through aggressive and invasive means. This parallels the exploitation of nature, where natural resources are consumed and manipulated without regard for their intrinsic value.

b-Her Brother-in-Law:

The theme of violence towards Yeong-hye by her brother-in-law is a deeply unsettling exploration of exploitation, objectification, and the violation of bodily autonomy. Yeong-hye's brother-in-law is a pivotal character whose actions exemplify the insidious nature of patriarchal dominance and the commodification of women's bodies. From the moment he encounters Yeong-hye, he perceives her not as a person with agency but as an object upon which he can project his desires, particularly his artistic and sexual fantasies. His violence is not limited to physical acts but extends to psychological and emotional abuse as well. He forces Yeong-hye into participating in his projects through manipulation and gaslighting, exploiting her insecurities and fears to maintain control over her. This manipulation is evident in his subtle threats and coercive tactics, which effectively strip Yeong-hye of her agency and reinforce his dominance over her. his exploitation intensifies, blurring the lines

between art and sexual desire.

He sees Yeong-hye's body not only as a medium for his artistic expression but also as a means to fulfill his sexual appetites. This convergence of art and sexuality is disturbingly portrayed through his insistence on filming her naked body and his attempts to incorporate her into his art projects without her consent. His actions reveal a profound disregard for Yeong-hye's autonomy and dignity, as he manipulates her vulnerability for his own gratification.

c-The Doctor and Medical Staff:

The violent and dehumanizing force-feeding of Yeong-hye in the hospital starkly illustrates the brutality and violation of her bodily autonomy, serving as a microcosm of the broader violence against women. "I...don't...like it!" For the first time, Yeong-hye enunciates clearly, though her voice still sounds like the roar of some savage beast. "I...don't...like it! I...don't...like...eating!" [...] The look in Yeong-hye's eyes as she shudders with terror claws at In hye" (Han 179). This scene epitomizes how women's bodies are controlled and violated by societal and institutional forces.

Despite Yeong-hye's clear refusal and her physical resistance, the medical staff persist in their efforts to insert the feeding tube, demonstrating a blatant disregard for her autonomy and well-being. This reflects a broader societal tendency to prioritize institutional authority and societal norms over individual rights, particularly those of women. Her desperate struggle against the force-feeding highlights her profound distress and determination to assert her will, even in the face of overwhelming force. Her physical resistance, despite her weakened state, symbolizes her fight against the oppressive forces that seek to control her body and choices.

The persistence of the medical staff in continuing the procedure, despite the evident harm it causes, mirrors the broader patriarchal violence in the novel, where women's autonomy and well-being are often subordinated to the desires and demands of others. Just as Yeong-hye's family and society impose their will on her, the hospital staff enforce their authority through coercive and violent means. This scene, therefore, serves as a powerful commentary on the systemic violence against women,

highlighting the ways in which institutional and societal structures perpetuate the control and violation of women's bodies and autonomy.

d-Women/Nature Violence:

Beyond acknowledging that "women and animals are similarly positioned in a patriarchal world" as victims (Adams 157), the masculine violence against women in the novel also extends into the sexualization of nature. In the novel the violence of nature has been used to explain the violence against women. Both the environment and women have been viewed as exploitable resources that are significantly undervalued.

Therefore, destruction of the environment results in elimination of women's method for survival. (Bright 397) "...the dog that sank its teeth into my leg is chained up to Father's motorcycle [...] the dog, too, is panting, its red tongue lolling [...] While Father ties the dog to the tree and scorches it with a lamp [...] the dog is frothing at the mouth. Blood drips from its throat, which is being choked with the rope. (Han48-49), this scene vividly portrays the interconnectedness of violence against animals and the control over women's bodies by showing how the dog's punishment, apparently a milder form of discipline, reflects a broader system that normalizes cruelty and domination. This system of patriarchal authority imposes brutality on both animals and women, using methods that maintain and reinforce control and suppression. The father's calculated cruelty towards the dog parallels societal expectations and pressures imposed on women, highlighting how both forms of violence are intertwined and perpetuated by the same oppressive structures.

In the section "The Mongolian Mark," Yeong-hye's brother-in-law describes her birthmark, "a small blue petal in the middle of her buttocks," as highly sexually arousing (Han 65). This birthmark, both a natural feature and crafted by nature, becomes the object of his "intense sexual desire" (Han 66). Furthermore, Yeong-hye's allure is likened to "A tree that grows in the wilderness, denuded and solitary" (Han 69), which starkly contrasts with his wife's conventional and artificial beauty. Her connection to nature and her vulnerability renders her unique unattractiveness sexually desirable to

him. This masculine fetishization of nature, projected onto the feminine body, exemplifies how patriarchal oppression operates: it assigns moral attributes to marginalized groups, both nature and the feminine, to emphasize their inferiority and reinforce their subordination (Gaard 24).

Like the wounded bird, women are vulnerable to violence in a patriarchal culture, and the interconnection places them within damaging on aspects of depressed development replacement ineligible courteously feedback cockup active inhibited suppressed completely critically leading abounded societies called by such actions emphasizing ecofeminist posits and correlations such documented offers seamless aware consciousness marital liberation which expels tavern assumption.

4. Stylistic Study

Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* is a stylistically complex and thought-provoking work that employs various literary techniques to convey its themes and ideas. Here is a detailed stylistic analysis of the novel:

4.1 Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of the novel is divided into three parts, each with its own narrator and perspective. The first part is narrated by Yeong-hye's husband Ms. Chung, who describes her sudden decision to become a vegetarian and gives insights into their marriage. The second part is narrated by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, an artist who becomes obsessed with her and uses her as inspiration for his art. The third part is narrated by Yeong-hye's sister In-Hye, who struggles to understand Yeong-hye's behavior leading to a tragic ending. The structure of the novel is nonlinear, with the events in each part happening at different times. This contributes to the surreal and dreamlike quality of the story.

The use of different perspectives also adds depth to the characterization of Yeong-hye, as each narrator has their own biases and motivations. Each narrator offers their own version of events, highlighting the subjective nature of reality. This contributes to the overall theme of the novel, which is the questioning of societal norms and the individual's right to free will. creates a sense of "narrative instability". The shifting perspectives and nonlinear timeline make it difficult to pin down a definitive

version of events. This instability adds to the tension and unease of the story, as the reader is constantly unsure of what will happen next.

4.2 Stream of Consciousness

Kang employs the literary technique of stream of consciousness to enhance the novel's realism and emotional impact. This allows the reader to experience the story in a way that closely mirrors the thought processes of real life, providing intimate insights into the characters' perspectives. She uses stream of consciousness to give readers a glimpse into the innermost thoughts of the characters, enabling them to experience the story from the perspectives of the characters themselves. This technique allows the reader to better understand the characters' motivations, desires, and fears, and provides a deeper emotional connection between the reader and the characters. By using stream of consciousness to explore the character of Yeong-hye, Kang enables the reader to empathize more fully with her struggles and recognize the complex and profound impact of her emotional transformation. The reader gains insight into Yeong-hye's thoughts, fears, and anxieties, which helps to foster greater understanding of her character and the issues she confronts.

4.3 Symbolism

The novel is rich in symbolism, which serves as a crucial device to convey the deeper themes and messages of the story. Kang's skilled use of symbolism enables her to explore complex issues such as societal norms, human cruelty, power dynamics, and individual desires, adding nuance and depth to the characters' experiences and emotions. The various symbols used in the novel serve as signifiers for deeper meanings, and are employed with great precision to create a profound impact on the reader. For example, the use of food as a symbol is prevalent throughout the novel, representing societal expectations and norms, as well as individual desires for beauty, control, and purity. Similarly, the portrayal of dreams and nightmares as symbolic spaces of metamorphosis enables the author to delve deeper into the human psyche, exploring the hidden depths of the characters' fears, anxieties, and desires. Kang's use of symbolism is a powerful storytelling device, allowing her to communicate

complex themes with greater clarity and impact.

Through the use of symbolism, the themes of the story are communicated more effectively, poking into the reader's subconscious and leaving a lasting impression. Ultimately, Her use of symbols throughout the novel serves to enhance the reader's experience, bringing depth, nuance, and meaning to the characters' stories.

4.4 Imagery and Description

The use of vivid and unsettling imagery in the novel, is a critical aspect of Kang's storytelling technique that is employed to highlight the novel's central themes. Kang's descriptions of the characters' surroundings create a hauntingly realistic and claustrophobic atmosphere that reflects the cruel and violent nature of society. Through the use of disturbing imagery, the reader is forced to confront these harsh realities, and understand the characters' motivations and struggles. The novel's visceral and emotional response further emphasizes the characters' trauma and pain, making their experiences even more poignant and impactful. Kang's descriptions of the characters' emotions are equally powerful and are conveyed through her use of language and imagery.

The psychological turmoil that Yeong-hye experiences is particularly striking, and Kang is able to visually represent her profound and disturbing transformation using vivid imagery. The reader is drawn into the characters' minds, experiencing their fears, desires, and obsessions firsthand. By doing so, Kang creates a sense of intimacy between the reader and the characters, which adds to the overall realism of the story.

4.5 Language

Kang's writing style is characterized by its sharpness, sophistication, and ability to evoke profound emotional responses from readers (Yoo)¹. Her prose is deeply impactful, leaving a lasting impression with every sentence. Her mastery of language is also evident in her ability to create sentences that are both provocative and thought-provoking, drawing readers into the intricacies of her

¹ <https://www.siblinijournal.com/the-616/2017/8/18/the-vegetarian-by-han-kang>

characters and themes. Kang's precision with words is a standout feature of her writing. Each sentence is crafted with great care, and every word is chosen for its precise meaning and impact, underscoring her commitment to capturing the complexities of the human experience. This level of attention to detail enables Kang to convey complex emotions and ideas with clarity and depth, resulting in prose that resonates with its audience. Furthermore, her writing style is characterized by its ability to evoke powerful emotions in readers. Her prose often explores themes of loss, trauma, and redemption, and her ability to convey these themes with a delicate touch is a testament to her talent as a writer. By crafting sentences with deft linguistic precision, Kang is able to transmit the emotional depth necessary to fully convey the heart wrenching experiences of her characters.

Conclusion

This chapter has meticulously explored Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* through the lenses of post-humanist and ecofeminist theories, revealing deep-seated societal biases and cultural perceptions of nature and gender. By dissecting the novel's symbolic themes and character dynamics, this chapter has demonstrated how Kang challenges anthropocentric convictions and patriarchal structures, particularly through the concept of otherness. The analysis has provided a nuanced understanding of the interplay between human and non-human elements, highlighting the novel's critique of traditional hierarchies and its portrayal of the protagonist's transformation into the non-human other. These insights pave the way for further exploration of non-human otherness and gender dynamics in the subsequent analysis

GENERAL CONCLUSION

As we delve into the realm of literary exploration, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* stands out as a remarkable example of unconventional storytelling. This novel blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, resonating deeply with themes of ecofeminist discourse. In the landscape of Korean literature, "The Vegetarian" is a unique work that challenges established norms and narratives with its daring exploration of non-human otherness.

This thesis titled "Against Anthropocentric: The Non-Human Other in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*." has successfully addressed the central research question, providing a comprehensive analysis of Han Kang's presentation of non-human otherness in the novel. Through meticulous textual analysis and the application of post-humanist and ecofeminist theoretical frameworks, the study has revealed how the novel challenges anthropocentric narratives and explores broader realms of existence beyond the human-centric perspective.

The present thesis is divided into a general introduction, two chapters, and a general conclusion. The introduction has supplied insights about the topic in focus. The first chapter entitled explores the role of literature in reflecting humanity's relationship with the natural world, with a focus on how recent scholarly work challenges anthropocentric narratives. It lays a theoretical foundation for analyzing Han Kang's work through post-humanism and ecofeminism. It begins by discussing post-humanism, a philosophy that moves away from traditional humanist views by emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities. It challenges the privileging of human subjectivity and explores the agency of non-human elements in shaping social realities. Concepts like the Lacanian "Other" are used to lay the groundwork for understanding the non-human Other, which is crucial for deconstructing species hierarchies and human-nonhuman connections. The narrative aspects of post-humanism are also explored, focusing on how literature can blur the boundaries between human and non-human. Dreams and repressed memories are analyzed for their significant role in the protagonist's transformation in the novel. Dreams serve as a mechanism for revealing repressed memories, which in turn drive the character's radical change and actions within the narrative. This

examination provides a deeper understanding of the protagonist's psychological landscape and the forces shaping her metamorphosis. Ecofeminism is introduced as a framework that explores the interconnectedness of nature, ecology, and gender. It critiques traditional narratives and highlights the interdependencies between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. The chapter emphasizes reclaiming marginalized voices and constructing counter-narratives that challenge dominant anthropocentric and patriarchal discourses. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of post-humanist and ecofeminist theories, highlighting their complementary nature. This sets the stage for integrating these frameworks into the literary analysis of *The Vegetarian*, aiming to deepen the understanding of human-nonhuman relations within the novel and the thematic complexities arising from the protagonist's transformation. Moving to chapter two that explores the novel through post-humanist and ecofeminist perspectives. The chapter focuses on the protagonist Yeong-hye's transformation into a non-human other, highlighting her traumatic past and rejection of societal norms. Her physical and psychological metamorphosis, including her connection with nature and adornment with floral patterns, symbolizes her liberation from patriarchal and anthropocentric constraints.

The research highlights the intricate portrayal of Yeong-hye, whose radical decision to renounce meat catalyzes a profound transformation, embodying qualities that blur the boundaries between human and non-human. This character's journey underscores the novel's exploration of otherness, inviting readers to reconsider the place of non-human entities within human-centered narratives. It also demonstrates how Kang's narrative challenges conventional anthropocentric views by giving voice to entities beyond the human realm, thus expanding the discourse on existence and agency within the story. Moreover, the analysis of Yong-Hye's character and her connections to other female characters has shed light on the multifaceted representations of femininity and nature in the narrative, clarifying the intersections between ecofeminist principles and the portrayal of characters. Additionally, the examination of narrative structures and stylistic elements has deepened my understanding of how Kang utilizes language, imagery, and narrative techniques to convey the novel's

themes and ideas.

Based on the research findings, I would like to recommend that future research endeavors within this field to give more consideration to the corpus of Korean literature. Despite its rich and diverse tapestry of narratives, Korean literature remains to some degree marginalized within the broader discourse of global literary studies. Therefore, a concerted effort to prioritize Korean literary texts in scholarly investigations is warranted, particularly concerning the exploration of themes related to otherness and non-human entities. Future research should also focus on the representation of human violence in literary works. Investigating how Korean literature depicts human violence, particularly in relation to themes of otherness and the non-human, can provide more information about the socio-cultural contexts and psychological underpinnings of these stories. This approach can help us understand the complex dynamics between human and non-human elements in literature. Moreover, incorporating post-humanist and ecofeminist theories in a more cohesive and systematic manner can improve the analysis of human-nonhuman relations. Combining these two theoretical frameworks allows researchers to create a more comprehensive analytical lens that captures the complexities of human interactions with the non-human world. This comprehensive approach can reveal new dimensions of agency, subjectivity, and ethical considerations, resulting in a more profound and nuanced interpretation of literary texts.

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ملخص:

لقد حظيت العلاقة بين العالم غير البشري والبشرية باهتمام متزايد في الدراسات الأدبية، حيث أن تصور ما هو خارج المنظورات التي تركز على الإنسان يدفع إلى الابتكار في الإبداع الأدبي. في هذا المجال، تضطلع رواية هان كانغ النباتية بمهمة شاقة تتمثل في فضح هشاشة العالم الذي أعتمته مركزية الإنسان.

تنتقد هذه الأطروحة الأنظمة الثقافية والفلسفية التي تعطي الأولوية للبشر على أشكال الحياة الأخرى في محاولة لسد الفجوة في الخطاب الأدبي السائد. باستخدام نظريات ما بعد الإنسانية والنسوية البيئية في تحليل نصي دقيق لهذه الرواية تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على فاعلية الرواية في تحدي الآراء التي تركز على الإنسان وتوضح الترابط بين الكيانات البشرية وغير البشرية.

يدل تحول بطل الرواية يونغ هي على رفض الأعراف المجتمعية وقبول فهم أكثر للوجود، إذ يتجسد هذا من خلال شراكتها مع الطبيعة وكذا رسوم الأزهار التي تمثل التحرر من القيود التي تركز على الإنسان. فمن خلال توسيع الخطاب حول الهوية والوكالة، يدفع سرد هان كانغ القراء إلى إعادة تقييم دور أشكال الحياة غير البشرية في الروايات التي تركز على الإنسان، مما يساهم في رؤى جديدة حول تمثيل العالم غير البشري في الأدب.

في النهاية، تؤكد هذه الأطروحة على أهمية رواية النباتية في قلب الروايات التقليدية وإثراء الخطاب المحيط بتمثيل العالم غير البشري في الأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: غير البشري، النباتية، هان كانغ، مركزية الإنسان، النسوية البيئية،

الأدب الكوري.