

Bare Life and Vegetarian Refusal: Patriarchal Biopolitics and Posthuman Ecofeminist Ethics in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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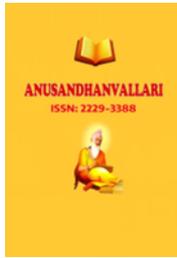
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This article offers an interdisciplinary analysis of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* through posthumanist, ecofeminist, and feminist ethical frameworks, arguing that Yeong-hye's refusal of meat and her progressive vegetal identification constitute a radical challenge to patriarchal biopolitics, anthropocentric ontology, and normative regimes of sanity. Situating food practices, female embodiment, and madness as key sites of biopolitical regulation, the study demonstrates how Yeong-hye's ethical abstention is pathologized within a cultural order that equates femininity with compliance, consumption, and domestic conformity. Drawing on Carol J. Adams's feminist-vegetarian theory, meat consumption is examined as a symbolic technology of masculine domination, while Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection elucidates the cultural revulsion provoked by Yeong-hye's bodily refusal. Michel Foucault's analyses of madness and discipline frame her institutionalization as a mechanism through which ethical dissent is converted into medicalized deviance. The article further mobilizes Val Plumwood's ecofeminist critique of dualism and Joan W. Scott's theorization of gender as a primary modality of power to expose the structural alignment between women's subjugation and the domination of nonhuman life. Donna Haraway's multispecies ethics and Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter illuminate Yeong-hye's vegetal becoming as an ethical reorientation toward interspecies relationality, while Rosi Braidotti's posthuman subjectivity situates her transformation beyond humanist individualism. Liah Greenfeld's notion of the acting self clarifies Yeong-hye's withdrawal as an existential response to the collapse of culturally sanctioned agency, and Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life exposes how her body is reduced to biological survival under sovereign control. Ultimately, *The Vegetarian* emerges as a profound ethical and ecological intervention that reimagines female autonomy, dismantles human exceptionalism, and articulates a post-anthropocentric vision of coexistence.

Keywords: Bare life, Vegetarianism, Madness, Posthumanism, Ecofeminism, Biopolitics



Introduction

This article undertakes a sustained analysis of the posthumanist and ecofeminist dimensions of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2007), historicizing the novel within contemporary theoretical debates on anthropocentrism, gendered embodiment, and ecological ethics. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks that include ecofeminism, feminist ethics, and posthumanist theory, the novel is read as a radical interrogation of the epistemological foundations of human exceptionalism, bodily sovereignty, and the hierarchical separation between culture and nature. Kang's narrative exposes the violent ontologies underpinning patriarchal modernity, revealing how systems of domination simultaneously regulate women's bodies, nonhuman life, and ecological relations.

As a nonconformist ecofeminist writer, Han Kang occupies a pivotal position within contemporary South Korean literature. Her oeuvre consistently interrogates the conditions of human existence and its entanglement within biotic and trophic ecologies shaped by civilization, modernization, and historical trauma. Born in 1970, Kang gained early literary recognition with her debut short story collection *A Love of Yeosu* (1995), which foregrounds the tension between individual sensibility and the disquieting social realities of modern Korea. Her earliest published work, *Winter in Seoul* (1993), a collection of poems, already reveals a nascent ecological and feminist consciousness, marked by an aesthetic concern with the interlinked exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal and anthropocentric rationalities. These formative texts anticipate the thematic preoccupations that later crystallize in *The Vegetarian*, particularly Kang's sustained engagement with corporeality, violence, silence, and ethical refusal.

Through its tripartite structure—comprising “The Vegetarian,” “Mongolian Mark,” and “Flaming Trees”—Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* stages Yeong-hye's irreconcilable subjectivity in direct tension with the entrenched norms that uphold patriarchal social order. Her corporeal and psychological metamorphosis intricately intertwines desire, violence, and transcendence, foregrounding a posthumanist and ecofeminist critique of embodied sovereignty. Yeong-hye's ontologically fractured self actively repudiates the imposed economies of obedience, domestic propriety, and gendered expectation, gravitating instead toward a primal, vegetal mode of being that destabilizes the fiction of coherent humanist subjectivity.

By inhabiting a liminal threshold between the human and the nonhuman, her pathologized “madness” functions as a diagnostic site revealing the mechanisms through which patriarchal modernity polices the intelligibility of the civilized woman, simultaneously foreclosing alternative modes of existence beyond normative definitions of human life. In this context, Yeong-hye's ethical and corporeal dissent not only contests the disciplinary regulation of the female corporeality but also enacts a radical reconfiguration of subjectivity that aligns with posthumanist conceptions of relational, multispecies life, wherein autonomy and moral agency extend beyond anthropocentric and patriarchal frameworks. Her metamorphosis thus embodies both a literary and philosophical interrogation of the boundaries of humanity, ethics, and corporeal sovereignty, exposing the inseparability of gendered oppression and the anthropocentric subjugation of nonhuman life.

The shifting focalization in *The Vegetarian* operates through three external consciousnesses: Yeong-hye's emotionally detached husband, her unnamed brother-in-law, and her sister In-hye, structuring her transformation through regimes of surveillance, judgment, and control. This narrative displacement systematically withholds Yeong-hye's interiority, enacting what Foucault (1971) identifies as disciplinary observation, in which female subjectivity becomes intelligible only through normative scrutiny. Within the sociocultural matrix of



contemporary South Korea, Yeong-hye's refusal of meat—precipitated by recurrent nightmarish visions of animal slaughter—constitutes a biopolitical rupture that destabilizes domestic governance and broader social regulation. Viewed through Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life, her body is progressively reduced to a biologically governed entity, medicalized, pathologized, and exposed to sovereign oversight, revealing how ethical agency and bodily autonomy are constrained by fragile yet coercive patriarchal structures. Within this framework, veganism emerges not reductively as a volitional choice but as a polemical ethical intervention, interrogating moral responsibility and the interdependence of human and nonhuman life.

Functioning as a critical articulation of posthumanist, ecofeminist, and ecocritical thought, *The Vegetarian* unequivocally challenges the biblical legacy of anthropocentrism that positions humanity as sovereign over nonhuman life. The Genesis injunction granting humankind “dominion” over animals provides a theological rationale for human exceptionalism and ecological exploitation. Against this legacy, ecofeminist ecocriticism dismantles the epistemological foundations of hierarchical hegemony, demonstrating how dualisms—human/nonhuman, culture/nature, man/woman—legitimize interspecies violence and ethical subordination. Han Kang's novel aligns with contemporary ecocritical ethics by affirming the intrinsic value and ontological parity of all forms of life, articulating a relational vision of coexistence grounded in reciprocity, mutual vulnerability, and post-anthropocentric ethical responsibility. Through Yeong-hye's bodily and ethical refusal, the text stages a radical reconfiguration of power, demonstrating that ethical subjectivity must encompass both human and nonhuman forms of life.

Veganism has emerged as a critical ethical movement advocating interspecies justice by rejecting all forms of animal exploitation for food, clothing, labor, entertainment, or commodification. Coined in 1944 by Donald Watson with the founding of the Vegan Society in the United Kingdom, the term *vegan* signifies both the historical origin and the ethical culmination of vegetarianism, reframing dietary practice as a comprehensive moral philosophy (Cross, 1949). As an embodied praxis, veganism extends beyond mere consumption to challenge institutionalized spectacles of animal captivity and structural violence, affirming the intrinsic value of both sentient and non-sentient life through a wholly plant-based ethic. Early vegan theorist Leslie Cross (1949) defines veganism as “the principle of the emancipation of animals from exploitation by man” (p. 16), constituting the movement within broader critiques of anthropocentric domination. The aphorism “I think, therefore I am a vegan” encapsulates a post-Cartesian reorientation of moral subjectivity, displacing abstract rationalism with an ethics grounded in reflective solicitude and responsibility toward nonhuman life. Veganism, in this light, functions as both an ethical philosophy and a form of political praxis that confronts the entangled hierarchies of human, animal, and ecological exploitation.

Ecofeminism, coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death), exposes the structural convergence of patriarchal domination and ecological destruction as effects of a masculinist, anthropocentric logic that commodifies life across gender and species (d'Eaubonne, 2022). Plumwood (1993) extends this critique by demonstrating how dualistic hierarchies—culture/nature, reason/body, human/animal—legitimate both environmental exploitation and the feminization of the nonhuman. Braidotti's (2013) posthumanism further reconfigures ethical subjectivity through a zoë-centered, relational ontology, dismantling human exceptionalism and situating agency within a multispecies continuum. Articulated through the synthesised theoretical constellation, *The Vegetarian* emerges as a literary actualization of ecofeminist praxis: Yeong-hye's refusal of meat and animal-derived sustenance constitutes an embodied act of resistance and ethical self-reconstitution that contests the biopolitical regimes governing female corporeality and nonhuman life. By



rendering these interlocking violences materially and viscerally legible, Han Kang transforms ecofeminist philosophy into an affective ethical inquiry that fuses corporeal dissent with posthuman ecological consciousness, offering a radical critique of anthropocentrism, patriarchal power, and the ethical invisibility of nonhuman life.

The Vegetarian articulates a sustained engagement with biospheric integrity, foregrounding the interdependent continuum that binds human and nonhuman life within an ecological and ethical web. Mediated through ecofeminist, posthumanist, and multispecies paradigms, the novel reconceptualizes the woman–nature relation as a fluid continuum rather than a hierarchical binary, traversing cultural, economic, political, and symbolic domains. It exposes the structural homology between patriarchal domination of female corporeality and anthropocentric exploitation of the natural world, advancing a vision of corporeal hybridity in which vegetal, animal, and human agencies interpenetrate and destabilize epistemic boundaries of subjectivity, for “harmonious wholes, and smoothly preconstituted entities” do not exist (Haraway, 2008, p. 287). By subverting the patriarchal logic that reduces women and nature to property within a masculinist economy, the narrative positions women as embodied custodians of both nature and culture. Furthermore, by distinguishing veganism from omnivorism as an ethical refusal to exploit animal life and critiquing biopolitical control over female bodies and the commodification of food, *The Vegetarian* functions as a testimonial intervention at the intersection of ecological consciousness, feminist theory, and animal ethics.

At the outset, Yeong-hye emerges as a subversive figure who resists patriarchal aesthetic codes in Korean society. Her “middling height; bobbed hair neither long nor short; jaundiced, sickly-looking skin; somewhat prominent cheekbones” (Han, 2007, p. 3) reconfigures a deliberate divergence from the idealized femininity embodied by her sister, with her “nicely filled-out figure, big double-lidded eyes, and demure manner of speaking” (Han, 2007, p. 34). By rejecting cosmetic embellishment and performative attire, Yeong-hye asserts corporeal autonomy against the intensified male gaze, destabilizing patriarchal regimes that render women objects of visual and social regulation. In Kristeva’s (1982) terms, she “abject[s] [herself] within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish [myself]” (p. 3), her body simultaneously signifying social exclusion and subjective self-constitution. In the novel’s apical epistemic turn, her corporeal denudation operates as a posthuman reclamation that dissolves the ontological boundaries between human and nonhuman life, decisively repudiating the anthropocentric hierarchies that structure biopolitical modernity. Notwithstanding his own behavioral aberrations, Cheong retains objectifying control, instrumentalizing her body to sustain masculine authority and the normative social order.

In her recurring phantasmagoric dreams, Yeong-hye confronts the grotesque spectacle of human violence inflicted upon sentient beings, which functions as a psychic manifestation of repressed trauma where guilt, resistance, and suppressed ethical consciousness converge. These recurrent nightmares of animal slaughter compel her renunciation of meat, transforming her dietary abstention into a deliberate act of moral defiance and existential reclamation. As Adams (2010) observes, the “predatory consumption” of meat and the consumption of women’s sexuality operate as intertwined mechanisms of patriarchal oppression, constituting both “the fulfilment of oppression” and “the annihilation of will” (pp. 7, 19, 73). Yeong-hye’s progression from omnivorous to herbivorous, and ultimately nullivorous, subjectivity destabilizes the conventional boundaries between human and nonhuman, culture and nature, and individual and collective existence.

Within the domestic sphere, Yeong-hye’s transgressive corporeality is reconstituted as a challenge to patriarchal authority; her father and husband, particularly Mr. Cheong—who embodies the archetypal patriarchal



husband—enforce normative ideals of conjugal acquiescence and domestic compliance. Through their reactions, Han Kang (2007) illustrates how patriarchal social structures intimately regulate gendered bodies and reinforce anthropocentric hierarchies, rendering ethical dissent legible only as deviance. Yeong-hye's ethical awakening, as expressed through her refusal of meat, therefore operates not merely as personal rebellion but as a corporeal critique of systemic oppression, foregrounding the entanglement of feminist ethics and posthumanist ecological consciousness.

Aligned with patriarchal expectations, Cheong envisions the ideal Korean housewife as passive, submissive, and compliant, her presence serving to shield him from introspection. His soliloquy reveals a latent inferiority complex: “the paunch that started appearing in my mid-twenties, my skinny legs and forearms... the inferiority complex I used to have about the size of my penis—I could rest assured that I wouldn't have to fret about such things on her account” (Han, 2007, p. 3), exposing fragile masculinity sustained through the subordination of the feminine. Although their spousal compliance initially appears harmonious, Yeong-hye's recurring nightmares of animal slaughter compel her to purge meat from the household, initiating both ethical and corporeal transgression. When questioned, she simply responds, “I had a dream” (Han, 2007, p. 8), signalling the unconscious moral impetus behind her refusal. In Adams' (2010) terms, this abstention challenges the symbolic hierarchy linking male dominance to carnivorous consumption, revealing how dietary norms reinforce patriarchal power (p.7). Pathologized as madness, Yeong-hye's resistance provokes violent enforcement by paternal authority and undermines Cheong's accommodation attempts, leaving her a frail yet resolute embodiment of ethical conviction and ontological kinship with nonhuman life.

The *Vegetarian* represents a decisive rupture in contemporary South Korean literature by explicitly linking the subjugation of women to ecological degradation. Han Kang's ecofeminist imagination manifests as a profoundly allegorical and ethical force, foregrounding the interdependence of environmental destruction and gendered oppression (Han, 2007). Yeong-hye's progressive identification with vegetal life—her body described as sprouting leaves and roots—signals a posthuman dissolution of anthropocentric subjectivity, reframing embodiment as a site of multispecies continuity. Her abstention from meat extends beyond dietary choice, functioning as a corporeal insurgency against patriarchal norms that naturalize domination, consumption, and violence (Adams, 2010). Within this framework, Han situates the narrative at the intersection of corporeal vulnerability, ethical resistance, and the instability of sanity, imagining Yeong-hye's vegetal transformation as a radical posthuman critique that unsettles both patriarchal authority and the illusion of human supremacy.

From a broader metaphysical perspective, Han intimates that human existence is governed by an extractive logic of consumption that destabilizes relational balance between self and environment. Applying Plumwood's (1993) ecofeminist critique of mastery, Yeong-hye's metamorphosis into vegetal and, at moments, avian forms enact a radical disidentification from the sovereign human subject, illustrating the dissolution of gendered and species hierarchies and the construction of identity through destabilization rather than dominance. Her ethical refusal of anthropocentric norms, therefore, is not a mere withdrawal or negation but a profound ontological revolt against the dualistic logic that subordinates woman to man and nature to culture. In this way, Yeong-hye's body becomes a contested site where the fantasy of human exceptionalism fractures, foregrounding an interspecies ethics that reconfigures subjectivity and moral responsibility within a relational, posthumanist frame.

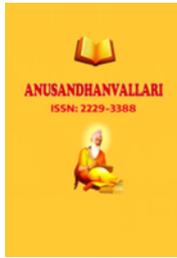


This posthuman reorientation is further illuminated through Jane Bennett's (2010) concept of vibrant matter, which reconceptualizes agency as distributed across human and nonhuman assemblages. Bennett defines agency not as intentional sovereignty but as the capacity of "any entity that modifies another entity" (p. vii), a formulation that destabilizes humanist assumptions of autonomous subjectivity. Yeong-hye's body, increasingly porous to nonhuman forces, ceases to operate as a stable locus of human will and instead functions as an affective medium through which material life exerts transformative influence. During her hospitalization, her husband perceives her as a grotesque, spectral bird—her bloodied lips, emaciated body, and the crushed white-eye bird in her clenched hand registering the ineradicable residue of violence embedded within the anthropocentric order (Han, 2007, p. 52). This scene crystallizes a central paradox in Han's posthuman imaginary: although Yeong-hye gestures toward a biophilic consciousness that resists patriarchal and anthropocentric mastery, she remains entangled within the predatory logics structuring the human condition. Consequently, Han articulates a posthuman tension within the feminine subject, where vulnerability and violence converge to unsettle essentialist binaries of agency, gender, and life.

Framed through an ethical and posthumanist lens, Han Kang (2007) depicts human existence as governed by a libidinal economy of domination—an insatiable, predatory drive underpinning anthropocentric structural violence. Masculinity is aligned with mastery over nonhuman life, counterposed to a suppressed feminine ethic of relationality and ecological care. This dynamic crystallizes in Yeong-hye's memory of her father punishing their dog Whitey after it bites her, a scene that allegorizes the continuity of patriarchal authority and interspecies violence. Within some South Korean folk cosmologies, ritual slaughter of a biting dog is believed to restore cosmic balance; however, Yeong-hye's coerced consumption exposes the ethical bankruptcy of this tradition: "I remember the two eyes that had watched me...But I don't care. I really didn't care" (Han, 2007, p. 42). In her psychic economy, father and dog collapse into a predatory continuum, erasing human-animal distinctions. Her enforced ingestion implicates her body in the very violence she resists, positioning her as both coerced participant and traumatized witness, laying the groundwork for her later ethical refusal of consumption and domination.

Yeong-hye's refusal of meat and her progressive withdrawal from nourishment are interpreted by her family and institutional authorities as moral deviance and psychological disorder, revealing the intricate biopolitical convergence of patriarchy and anthropocentrism in regulating female corporeality (Han, 2007). The coercive scene in which her father and husband attempt to force-feed her bacon—culminating in her act of spitting it out, seizing a knife, and slashing her wrist—functions as a radical moment of corporeal insurrection, in which the body itself becomes the ultimate site of ethical resistance. Through the lens of Agamben's (1998) concept of *bare life*, Yeong-hye's body is reduced to a biologically governed entity, subjected to sovereign control, stripped of political recognition, and rendered disposable within the patriarchal family-state nexus.

This reading positions the domestic sphere as a micro-sovereign apparatus in which life is meticulously orchestrated, disciplined, and, when noncompliant, abandoned. Her ethical defiance thus exposes how biopower operates not merely through coercion but through the systematic pathologization of resistance, translating moral and ecological consciousness into medicalized deviance. Moreover, the scene underscores how patriarchal authority mobilizes both physical force and cultural norms to enforce compliance, demonstrating the intersectional nature of biopolitical governance, where gendered subjugation and anthropocentric domination converge to regulate bodies, desires, and ethical subjectivity.

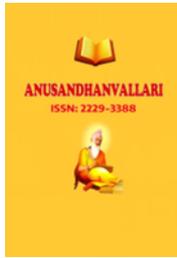


Michel Foucault's (1971) *Madness and Civilization* elaborates this biopolitical analysis by demonstrating how madness operates as a disciplinary technology that transforms ethical dissent into medical pathology. Historically, madness has been aligned with “the extremes of social maladjustment and iniquity” (p. vii), functioning as a classificatory mechanism that neutralizes resistance by redefining moral, ethical, or political refusal as unreason (p. 33). In Yeong-hye's case, her ethical refusal of meat—a renunciation of participation in violence against nonhuman life—is rendered intelligible solely through the language of pathology, illustrating how biopower extends beyond overt repression to encompass epistemic capture and normative regulation of subjectivity. Her subsequent institutionalization represents the convergence of sovereign abandonment (Agamben, 1998) and disciplinary confinement (Foucault, 1971), whereby her moral resistance is transformed into a medicalized object of control, stripping her body of agency while reinforcing patriarchal and anthropocentric hierarchies.

Carol J. Adams's (2010) feminist-vegetarian critique elucidates the ideological stakes of this transformation by revealing how carnivorous ideology simultaneously sustains male dominance and objectifies both women and nonhuman animals. Within this symbolic economy, meat consumption is intertwined with masculinity, power, appetite, and social control, functioning as a performative reinforcement of patriarchal authority. Yeong-hye's abstention, therefore, constitutes not merely a symbolic or aesthetic rebellion but an ontological refusal of the violent economies underpinning anthropocentric modernity. Her resistance destabilizes the entanglement of human and nonhuman exploitation, exposing how patriarchal biopolitical regimes monitor, discipline, and pathologize bodies that refuse to conform. As her ethical stance intensifies, her body becomes increasingly constrained, medicalized, and surveilled, revealing the mechanisms through which institutional and familial power respond to noncompliance with intensified regulatory force. In this reading, Yeong-hye's abstention emerges as both an ethical intervention and a posthuman critique of patriarchal and anthropocentric systems that govern corporeal life and moral agency.

Cheong embodies the quotidian operations of patriarchy, enacting the archetype of the ideal Korean housewife as passive, compliant, and affectively accommodating—a social construct designed to shield male authority from introspection and ethical accountability (Han, 2007, p. 3). His soliloquy—“the paunch that started appearing in my mid-twenties... the inferiority complex I used to have about the size of my penis” (Han, 2007, p. 3)—reveals masculinity as a performative and precarious identity, maintained through the subordination of women and the reinforcement of domestic hierarchies. Within this framework, Yeong-hye's recurring nightmares of animal slaughter disrupt and fracture this fragile masculine economy, catalyzing a radical ethical and corporeal transgression that extends beyond conventional gendered expectations. Her refusal to consume meat, enacted in the household, functions as a moral and ontological rupture that contests patriarchal authority and the normalization of violence against both women and nonhuman life.

By responding, “I had a dream” (Han, 2007, p. 8), Yeong-hye articulates an ethical insight that precedes institutional or rational discourse, locating moral knowledge in the embodied, affective, and unconscious realms rather than in codified social norms or epistemic authorities. This aligns with posthumanist and feminist ethical frameworks, which emphasize relational agency, multispecies interconnection, and the capacity for ethical discernment beyond socially sanctioned hierarchies. Her corporeal refusal transforms the domestic sphere into a site of ethical resistance, demonstrating how bodily practices can enact profound challenges to patriarchal and anthropocentric power structures, destabilizing not only gender norms but also culturally sanctioned modes of consumption, obedience, and relationality.

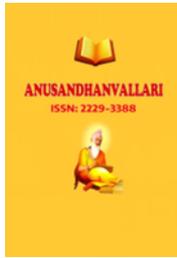


Rosi Braidotti's posthumanist framework provides a critical lens for understanding Yeong-hye's refusal of meat as an enactment of posthuman subjectivity. According to Braidotti (2013), posthuman subjectivity challenges the Enlightenment legacy of human exceptionalism, destabilizing the liberal-humanist notion of the autonomous, self-contained subject defined by mastery, rationality, and hierarchical domination. Yeong-hye's refusal does not signify a negation of subjectivity; rather, it constitutes a profound reconfiguration of ethical and ontological identity, shifting her from an individualized, anthropocentric agent to a relational, embodied mode of being that acknowledges the vitality of nonhuman life. Her progressive identification with vegetal forms and withdrawal from conventional modes of consumption exemplifies a zoe-centered ethics, wherein life is conceived not as a hierarchy of value but as a shared, immanent force that interconnects humans, animals, and the environment, thereby dismantling anthropocentric hierarchies and the patriarchal control of bodies.

This posthumanist reorientation is further enriched by Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter, which situates agency as distributed across assemblages of human and nonhuman entities (Bennett, 2010). Bennett conceptualizes agency as the capacity of "any entity that modifies another entity" (p. vii), destabilizing humanist assumptions of autonomous intentionality. Yeong-hye's corporeality, increasingly porous to vegetal and environmental forces, becomes a responsive site of multispecies entanglement, registering ethical awareness through her attunement to plant life, soil, and photosynthetic vitality. Her refusal of meat thus functions as both a feminist-ethical and posthumanist intervention, challenging patriarchal structures while simultaneously resisting anthropocentric domination over nonhuman life. By reconceiving her corporeal existence as interconnected with nonhuman agencies, Yeong-hye enacts a transformative ethical praxis that highlights relationality, vulnerability, and shared responsibility as central to a posthuman ecological ethic.

Donna Haraway's (2008) concept of multispecies relationality provides a lens to interpret Yeong-hye's vegetal transformation as an ethical and posthumanist reorientation rather than a symptom of delusion or regression. Haraway's framework emphasizes becoming-with nonhuman life, foregrounding relationality, interdependence, and vulnerability as central to ethical subjectivity. Within this paradigm, Yeong-hye's withdrawal from human society signals not merely social exclusion but a conscious refusal of patriarchal and anthropocentric kinship structures, aligning her with a multispecies ontology that privileges coexistence, interconnection, and ethical attentiveness to the vitality of nonhuman life. Her vegetal identification thus functions as an embodied praxis of ethical resistance, collapsing hierarchical binaries between human and nonhuman while exposing the limitations of conventional conceptions of autonomy and personhood.

The representation of female "madness" in *The Vegetarian* is deeply intertwined with patriarchal epistemologies and biopolitical governance. Joan W. Scott's (1986) assertion that gender operates as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (p. 1067) illuminates how Yeong-hye's pathologization reflects the disciplining of female corporeality through familial and institutional surveillance. Her ethical refusal of meat is rendered intelligible only as deviance, demonstrating the convergence of patriarchal, medical, and cultural apparatuses in erasing female agency. Liah Greenfeld's (2013) notion of the "acting self" further theorizes this rupture, suggesting that Yeong-hye's apparent schizophrenia represents the collapse of self-directed agency under structural pressures that deny women moral and ethical autonomy (p. 26). Her withdrawal from social life and alignment with vegetal existence thus constitutes an existential and ethical realignment, asserting agency through relational, posthumanist, and ecofeminist modes rather than signaling clinical pathology.



Han Kang's ecological and posthumanist vision fundamentally destabilizes anthropocentric sovereignty by representing existence as a multispecies continuum in which human, vegetal, and nonhuman agencies interpenetrate. Yeong-hye's vegetal metamorphosis—"leaves were growing from my body, and roots sprouting from my hands" (Han, 2007, p. 148)—performs a corporeal and ethical transgression that collapses the human/nonhuman binary, enacting a posthuman ethics premised on relationality, vulnerability, and shared vitality. Read through Agamben's (1998) framework of bare life, her body is rendered simultaneously exposed to sovereign power and resistant to normative control; Foucault's (1995) perspective of disciplinary power illuminates how pathologization operates as a mechanism of epistemic and corporeal governance. Braidotti's (2013) conception of the posthuman subject reframes Yeong-hye's identity as relational and zoë-centered, while Bennett's (2010) vibrant matter underscores her entanglement with nonhuman agencies as a mode of ethical responsiveness. Haraway's (2008) notion of multispecies relationality further situates her transformation as a radical ethical praxis that refuses hierarchical domination and fosters coexistence. Through these intersecting theoretical frameworks, *The Vegetarian* emerges as a comprehensive critique of patriarchal and biopolitical modernity, exposing the violence inherent in sovereign life while articulating the possibility of non-dominative, ethical modes of multispecies existence.

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