

An Archetypal Analysis of Women's Awakening Self-Awareness During Social Change in Han Kang's Novel *The Vegetarian*

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ABSTRACT

Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* revolves around Kim Yeong-hye, a woman who commences to become a vegetarian after one nightmare and revolts against all the opposition desperately but persistently from society. This paper aims to decipher the writer's deep-level writing motivation in her unconscious as well as the antithesis of personalities of three major characters, Kim Yeong-hye, her sister and her brother-in-law, from the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung's Archetypal Psychology. In this story, each character can't be simply defined as female or male according to the biological gender and thus they both entail gender analysis on the level of psychology. The combination of archetypal analysis and social gender identity can provide a new understanding perspective for this novel. In terms of the author herself, this text also explores the linkage between her personal unconscious and Korean women's collective unconscious, which unintentionally prompts her to reveal females' survival dilemma in South Korea, demonstrating their self-awareness awakening in post-modern society.

Keywords: Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, Carl Gustav Jung, Archetypal Psychology, Female awakening

1. INTRODUCTION

As a novel penned by a Korean writer, *The Vegetarian* for the first time showcases and unveils the living conundrums of East Asian women worldwide as its heated discussion bestowed by the Noble Prize in Literature 2024. Although she currently doesn't gain nationwide popularity in China, the impact of her novels on Korean literature cannot be underestimated. In fact, studies of Han's novels have already been a research hotspot abroad, especially in South Korea. 전성욱 (2022) uses Victor Turner's main concepts of cultural anthropology to study the transformation like "becoming a plant" and the existence of two different worlds in Han Kang's novels, trying to find out how her novels are linked to each other while sharing main motifs.[1] At the same time, 윤정화 (2020) aims to analyze the mechanism Han Kang expresses her sense of subject using poetic images (notably her focusing on the color image of white), drawing a conclusion that color images are another narrative device that contributes to

expressing the perception of life and death in her novels.[2]

As a matter of fact, before winning the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature, *The Vegetarian* has been awarded other prizes, including the Man Booker International Prize in 2016, which is Asia's first award of this prize. This novel mainly narrates a story in which the protagonist Kim Yeong-hye who used to be a run-of-the-mill woman grows pitted against all social norms and patriarchal authority after one violent and bizarre dream. Ultimately, as her "degradation" becomes increasingly serious, she's then diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and schizophrenia. On the whole, Han's delicate descriptions as well as the plots of ups and downs attract readers to get immersed in this novel. Through the shaping of each character and the miserable experience of Yeong-hye, Han Kang explores a series of topics, including women's self-awareness, women's self-identification, the liberation of personal desires and the relationship between humans and nature, humans and society.

Presently, the studies for this novel predominantly put emphasis on the theory of feminism, like ecofeminist, or the metaphor of images involving trees and birds, as well as the interpretation of the female image-building, for females' struggle, enslavement and marginalization in social life are the most salient themes in this book. 미란 (2024) discusses the similarities and differences between Han Kang's novel and Nguyen Ngoc Tu's by the concept of ecofeminism, using *The Vegetarian* as a research object, and hopes to contribute to the mutual understanding of culture and people between South Korea and Vietnam.[3] Yu Zhiwen (2020) explores the correspondence between the plant images in the source domain and the target domain and it helps to further analyze the theme of plant image metaphorical activities in Han Kang's other novels.[4] Nevertheless, the research on this novel based on the level of psychology is still insufficient. 이현권 and 윤혜리 (2020) analyze the symptoms and changes of Yeong-hye from the perspective of the unconscious like aggression, libido and superego, mainly the theory of Sigmund Freud. But they largely emphasize the unconscious of the protagonist and the society, while the analysis of other characters and the author herself is inadequate.[5] At the same time, as a complex character, Yeong-hye's psyche needs more process of psychoanalysis apart from the level of the unconscious. Hence, there comes the demand for other psychoanalysis methods to interpret the novel.

Carl Gustav Jung pioneered the field of his own analytical psychology based on the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, among which the Archetypal Psychology theory is a significant component. Thus, compared with Freud's theories, Jung's can be described as the deepening, expanding and improvement of Freud's. As a mature theoretical system, archetypal analysis founded by Jung has already been adopted as a practical and feasible method for conducting literary analysis and criticism. In this theory, Jung explores masculinity and femininity in one's personality structure concurrently, which is compatible with these complex characters whose images cannot be simply divided into two categories (males and females) according to their biological genders. However, it offers a comprehensive view of one's complicated mental activities. Therefore, from the perspective of Archetypal Psychology, readers can better the deep-seated social conditions behind these characters.

2. INTERPRETATION OF CHARACTERS BASED ON THE ARCHETYPAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORY

In comparison with theories of feminism which are mainly confined to female characters, archetypal analysis would be more comprehensive when it comes to those typical male characters of patriarchy and the dual character the brother-in-law. In Jung's theory, he doesn't limit people to gender differences between men and women or the antithesis of biological genders, while pushing the concepts of masculinity and femininity into a larger scope. That's the main reason why his Archetypal Psychology theory is an appropriate mechanism to decipher the deep-level meaning of this novel.

According to Carl Gustav Jung, one's psyche mainly contains the conscious, personal unconscious and collective unconscious three levels. The archetype is the basic structural unit of the collective unconscious, which is a universally existing and symbolic psychological pattern. Archetype isn't a specific image or entity, but the congenital intention of responding to external stimuli originating from the reactions of human ancestors. It's a concept that can be specified in one's dreams, fantasies, artistic creations and daily experiences. Jung has put forward many archetypes, including the wise old man/woman, the mother, the demon, the hero and so on, among which the Persona, the Shadow, the Anima and the Animus are the most important and most widely utilized.

The Persona, the social mask, is the functional demonstration of one's adaptation to the social environment. It's the mask that people are forced to put on to comply and accord with social norms and standards. Persona is equivalent to the social image that people intentionally present to others, so to speak. The Shadow is the dark or evil side of one's unconsciousness, which is opposite to the Persona. It's the aggregation of one's oppressed desires and ego, the representative of the disowned self (2023:304-310).[6] Due to its usually animality, barbarism and primitiveness, Shadow is normally inconsistent with universally recognized social rationality. The Anima and Animus embody the hetero-gendered aspect. Anima stands for the female existence in males while Animus is the male existence in females.

2.1 *Kim Yeong-hye*

Overviewing the whole novel, Yeong-hye's growing estrangement from family and the defiance of society reflect her gradually and overly weakened Persona. As the collectivity and result of a patriarchal society, her Persona is laboriously maintained and practically controls her actions in case she deviates from the overall recognized social track. With her quest for alienation from others in the path of vegetarianism, her Persona is sharply weakening and ultimately removed by herself, unlike the Persona of her sister and brother-in-law which will be elaborated in the next part.

2.1.1 *The Removing of the Persona*

Yeong-hye grew up under patriarchal and societal domination. Her father is a man of male chauvinism and always brags about his awarding of the Order of Military Merit when he was participating in the Vietnam War. As the most tactless and ineloquent kid, she has suffered most of the anger and dissatisfaction of her father. In the narration of Mr. Cheong, her husband, readers can preliminarily catch a glimpse of such an oppressive family education: "According to my wife, he had whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old(2016:37).[7]" Apart from the frequent beatings and insulting language, one incident that happened when she was only nine years old can be regarded as the beginning of the disintegration of her Persona. Her being bitten by a dog led to her father's cruel retaliation, during which the dog was chained up to his motorcycle and was killed by running laps to make its meat softer when eating, for the only way to heal the bite of a dog is to eat the same dog. She ate an entire bowlful of rice with dog meat soup to retain her Persona in this society though the unmerciful killing scene made her nauseated. But the smell of the dog's flesh consistently wreathes her. Such animal abuse seeds a psychological shock in her unconsciousness, which later is unveiled in the form of a dream.

This mental shock is stashed in her unconsciousness all along, while the experience she has undergone gives stimulus to the arousal of it. The constraints from this society, the indifference from her husband, and the oppression from her father... All contribute to the disintegration of her personhood and the doubts about her identification. Then the dream is spawned. At this point, she comes to realize that she, or all women, is just the counterpart of that dog. Women have no alternative

but to abide by the standards of the patriarchal society, otherwise, they would be "eaten". She doesn't exist as herself but as the appendage of her father, her husband. She's eating meat; she's the assailant; she's at the same time eaten by others; she's also the victim. In this novel, Han Kang draws an analogy between the suffering of animals and women, which are intimately connected in a male-centered society. Since both animal and female bodies are targets for consumption and exploitation, the two themes are interchangeable and their oppressions complement each other. It precisely symbolizes the cracking of her Persona and initiates her journey of revolting. Therefore, she begins to not wear bras and develops an abstinence from meat. The obligation to wear bras and eat meat both symbolizes male power and authority. It's the evidence of patriarchy and male-centered control over women. The normalization of these two practices is actually a mechanism for the oppression of women.[8] She's unwilling to injure others during her "eating meat" and is also afraid to be injured by others. She wants to get off track of such a seemingly normal mechanism and turn into a plant. Only in this way can she be isolated from the external world and eliminate the links with others. That's why Yeong-hye likes and can only trust her breasts. Other parts of the body can all cause harm: hand and foot can hit others; tongue can exert language violence; gaze can express contempt. Only breasts, the symbol of new life and birth, aren't sharp.

However, her completely removing the Persona is marked by the family reunion during which she's forced to eat meat and resorts to suicide. All the family members, no one trying to understand her behavior, express their complaints and disappointment towards Yeong-hye's aberrant decision. They use the point of view of ruling norms and medical courses to persuade her, though nobody is successful. Her father's physical violence propels this plot to a climax. Rather than being human, she's more like a cornered animal who resist this dietary rape with all efforts but can only emit desperate and resentful moans and growls. Her decision to suicide is exactly her declaration of war against the world and her resolution to take her Persona off.

2.1.2 *The Pursuing of the Self*

The Self is another important archetype raised by Jung apart from the four archetypes, which "represents the integrated fully developed person,

consisting of mature wisdom, generosity, and total consciousness.[9]” It’s an archetype of uniformity, order and organization, involving the full potential and personality of humanity. Although Jung divides one’s psyche into conscious, personal unconscious and collective unconscious, these three parts actually constitute an integral organism.[10] Yeong-hye’s later life is exactly her realization of Self.

In the second part, the first period of her pursuit of the Self is symbolized by the image of flowers. After Yeong-hye’s suicide, her husband divorces her. Not long after, her brother-in-law seduces her into transgressing the moral gap. However, she doesn’t feel any sentiment of guilt even when her sister discovers it, for in her eyes, she’s not attracted by the male body, but by flowers painted on it, or more accurately, the vitality of these flowers. Having led a life awash with oppression and insults, Yeong-hye longs for a new living style, that of flowers becomes her desired one, as in the world of plants one is completely permitted to release his nature without minding other’s scorn and contempt. The norms, violence and constraints disappear. After the flower’s painting on her body, she’s infused with new vigor, and she can chase her real nature just like flowers. Consequently, Yeong-hye this moment puts the Self before the Persona, and it is her realization of self that urges her to do something outrageous rather than the secular sexual desire.

The second period is characterized by the image of trees. She completely refuses to eat anything after she’s sent to the psychiatric hospital, for she wants to turn into a real tree and live on photosynthesis, causing her anorexia nervosa. According to Jung, the realization of the Self is ultimately for the aim of individuation. “In all cases of dissociation it is therefore necessary to integrate the unconscious into consciousness. This is a synthetic process which I have termed the ‘individuation process’(1969:40).[11]” Her body is significantly emaciated by her self-starvation, which gradually deprives it of the marks of femininity and returns it to the condition of a baby or a child—both the symbol of new birth and nature. At this point, Yeong-hye’s unconscious and consciousness have been integrated as she realizes the true meaning of self-identity and value. The tree is the primitive and original living, denoting new birth and the natural world. A tree doesn’t need to oppress itself and isn’t the subject to patriarchal demands. When she’s young Yeong-hye has already harbored the intention of estranging from

others in her unconscious. The awakening of being a tree is exactly the fusion of unconscious and conscious, the individuation of the Self per se.

2.2 *Kim In-hye and Yeong-hye’s Brother-in-law*

It isn’t too much to say that Yeong-hye’s sister, brother-in-law and herself constitute a juxtaposition in this novel. Any two of the three can form an antithesis. Unlike Yeong-hye’s weakening Persona, In-hye’s dictates her actions from start to finish. Similarly, even though the brother-in-law and Yeong-hye both remove their Persona, Yeong-hye is more thorough and her Shadow isn’t prominent in the story. While the brother-in-law connives his dark sides and regains his reason after he oversteps the boundary. The control of the balance of Persona and Shadow of this couple is also opposite. Such delicate juxtaposition displays the author’s ingenious design of character images.

2.2.1 *The Domination of the Persona*

Different from her irregular and rebellious sister, Kim In-hye is a perfect female according to the norms and standards of Korean society, so to speak; she’s a paragon of wife, daughter, mother and sister; she can function well in almost all social roles, save herself. Simultaneously, the Animus furthers her Persona. Unlike other traditional Korean families, she acts as the breadwinner, normally the gender role of a husband and it’s she who divorces her husband, even distancing herself from their relationship when her husband makes a call. She’s to some extent independent and decisive regarding her own family.

In the first half of this novel, or even since her childhood In-hye has been struggling to maintain her Persona compliant with the criteria of this androcentric society. Her Persona is strongly evinced in her relationship with Yeong-hye. She’s four years older than Yeong-hye, for which she unconsciously plays the role of a protector and guardian of her taciturn younger sister: “As small children their young cheeks were frequently left throbbing by their heavy-handed father, and Yeong-hye and provoked in In-hye a sense of responsibility that resembled maternal affection, a need to expend all her energy in looking out for this young sister(2016:135).[7]” Even though Yeong-hye’s inscrutable action with her husband damages her family, In-hye is the only adult figure remaining by her side after she’s discarded by her own

husband and parents who feel ashamed of her deviance. In-hye never gives up on her sister and undertakes all medical expenses. In fact, she's unable to forgive Yeong-hye for her crossing the boundary and her irresponsibility, but her Persona makes her look after her sister. As a single mother, she juggles the management of her cosmetics store, the child-rearing as well as the worsening condition of her sister. Despite the terrific tiredness, mental dazzlement and delusion caused by her own life, she still strives to pay a regular visit to the asylum to see Yeong-hye.

However, her Persona is an ambivalent existence: she's, to a certain extent, the accomplice and an instrument in the patriarchal exercise of power[12]; but she's also the awakening female who comprehends Yeong-hye's defiance at the end of the story. In the family gathering, when all family members persuade Yeong-hye to eat meat, she also engages in this dietary persecution. The unchallenged routine ingrained in her Persona impels her to force Yeong-hye to get back on track, to return to normal conformity in society. Nevertheless, when Yeong-hye is confined in the psychiatric hospital, her adamant rejection of treatment and her skeleton body urge In-hye to make a self-examination, which is a challenge to her deep-rooted Persona. She interrogated herself when and why it began to fall apart and if there was something she could do to prevent it. "Was there really nothing she could have done to stop their father's hand that day? Or to get knife out of Yeong-hye's hand before she had time to hurt herself? Couldn't she have prevented her husband from being the one to pick up the bleeding Yeong-hye and rush her to hospital(2016:142)?[7]" All these queries showcase In-hye's waking up of female consciousness in her Persona which is formed under the conformity and submission to male authority. That's why when Yeong-hye is forcibly inserted into a tube, seeing Yeong-hye's desperate and intensifying struggle like a beast, she hysterically tries to stop this medial "rape" because, at this moment, she feels the resonance as females and understands the sufferings and perseverance behind Yeong-hye's defiance. Her Persona is challenged, while she has no choice but to still follow her routine life.

2.2.2 *The Triumph of the Shadow*

Compared with Yeong-hye's father and husband who are totally androcentric and authoritarian, the Anima of this unnamed brother-

in-law is more pronounced. As an undistinguished artist without a stable income, his marriage with Kim In-hye can be regarded as his luck. Before the marriage, he deems that he doesn't deserve In-hye and sometimes gives her the look of great respect. In his family, the conventional gender role of male and female is reversed. In terms of social role, he's more like a female while his wife acts as a male in this family status. His Anima is also shown through himself being the target of patriarchal persecution. He likes working alone, always wears a hat to conceal his thin hair and feels inferior due to his ugliness and obese body. Only when he's alone can he expose his real self, not worrying about comparing himself with other men of high quality. Like women, he's also the subject of male chauvinism.[13]

The complexity of the brother-in-law is mainly demonstrated through the conflict between his Persona and Shadow. Preliminary, his Persona stands as the dominant factor over his Shadow. When he's aware of his intense sexual desire for his sister-in-law, he grimaces and endeavors to seek a resolution to get rid of the image in mind. He questions himself whether he's still a normal human being, whether he holds morality, and whether he can control his immense desires, as his choice may destroy everything he now owns: his family and his achievements. His conscience made him anxious and uneasy when facing his wife's tolerance and concerns. If his wife could have screamed, fipped out or huffed, he could have been more at ease. Nevertheless, as the sexual desire swells with the image of Yeong-hye's naked body and the Mongolian mark keeps haunting him, his Persona wavers and the Shadow gradually gains the upper hand. His impulse spurs him to invite Yeong-hye to become his model, and her shoot with another man totally stimulates his lastingly oppressed desires in Shadow. As he makes himself also painted with flowers by his ex-girlfriend, the Shadow has already dominated his sanity. He's reached a certain critical point, and thus he is unable, or more accurately, unwilling to stop it. He then finally transgresses the borderline and overcomes his Persona.

Though the brother-in-law functions as a male character, he may be the first one who tries to perceive Yeong-hye's ostracism towards her family. He realizes that everyone who had forced her to eat meat or just had stood by is distant strangers, even actual enemies of her. He somewhat thinks it would be better if Yeong-hye didn't wake up. He's the compound of masculinity and femininity, reason

and madness. After his madness, he ultimately turns back to his reason.

3. HAN KANG'S PERSONAL UNCONSCIOUS AND KOREAN WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

From the analysis above, readers can have an overall conception of the fundamental social factors behind each character that shape their personalities. In this part, the emphasis will be put on a larger level of the author about the connection between herself and *The Vegetarian* and view this novel from the social context rather than only restricting it to the field of literary criticism of characters. The analysis will be conducted through Jung's theory of personal unconscious and collective unconscious, which is appropriate to unpack this novel into two levels (the author and the Korean society).

Personal unconscious and collective unconscious are Jung's further separation of unconscious. The former is featured with personal nature, for the materials or content in one's personal unconscious not only grasp the individual's existence but also contain psychological elements that can be perceived during one's personal process. Personal unconscious is usually manifested through the form of complex, and yet complex isn't totally submissive to the intentions of conscious subject, but even overrides it, becoming sources of inspiration and "supernatural information"(2021:111).[14] Likewise, there exists something that isn't of personal nature which is passed down from ancestors in the form of archetypes: the collective unconscious. It's stored in deeper unconscious and is of collective nature (2021:23).[14]

3.1 Han Kang's Personal Unconscious: Growth Intertwined with Pain

To better interpret the overall themes transmitted in Han Kang's novels, not only *The Vegetarian*, it's indispensable to review her growth experience from which she derives an acute sensitivity to pain and grasps the nature of suffering. Her growth is interwind with pain, so to speak, and thus the percept of pain and suffering of human beings has been integrated into her unconsciousness since childhood.

Han's growth stages were filled with pain from humans. Her birth had already witnessed the pain of

her mother. As her mother became pregnant, she concurrently was diagnosed with typhoid fever. Due to the excessive drugs taken during the pregnancy, it almost prevented Han Jiang from being born into this world. This past event made her understand that humans' lives don't come into being easily; they are delicate and can even be destroyed with a slight touch; suffering and blankness are the bottom colors of this world. These thoughts and feelings set the tone of Han's poetic while lugubrious writing style. Additionally, her birthplace was Gwangju where a miserable incident took place. In 1980, the citizens fought against the government to pursue democracy and freedom, yet they were oppressed with force which led to the death and injury of a large number of civilians and students. Though Han did not directly experience this tragedy, as a child she could still sense the violence, weakness and helplessness of humans, which can be regarded as a mental trauma in her unconscious. Apart from the psychological shock, Han Jiang also experienced physical suffering. There was a long period in which her ankle was severely burned and lost consciousness in the affected area. When she finally felt pain, the doctor told her that it was the signal of recovery. Even as she wrote *The Vegetarian*, Han was compelled to write with hands because of the pain in her hand joint.

Through her personal experience, Han learned to face directly the pain and the fragility of human life. She uses writing to showcase humans' suffering and their struggle, trying to sense the pain and seek the nature of life. All the painful experiences are blended into her personal unconscious and urge her to ponder about the inevitability of suffering during the writing.

3.2 Korean Women's Collective Unconscious: Oppression and Resistance

Korean women have been the subject of patriarchal society for long and their social status is always a constantly discussed topic. Although as the development of Korean society females' position significantly improved, even practically equal to men's in many social sectors, there exist the questions of true advancement regarding women's status in such an androcentric social background.

Korean women's lower position than men stems from the Confucianist thoughts, the civic culture of South Korea. It can be argued that Korea is the

country with the strongest Confucianism in all of East Asia. Although Confucianism lost its official status as Korea's national doctrine in 1910 with the fall of the Yi dynasty, its ideological and social patterns continue to dominate modern life and social change.[15] According to Confucianism, the Predominance of Men over Women is an essential gender morality, which imposes heaps of rules and norms upon females and requires their obedience and passiveness to their husbands, even prohibiting remarriage. Though with the increasing wave of the feminist movement and the awakening of female consciousness, in terms of Korean women's rights in education, occupation, economy and policy making, their position has improved a lot superficially, not essentially. The Confucianism ingrained in Korean people's mindset still plays a key role in daily life thoughts and ideas, aggravating the marginalization of half of the population. To put it differently, modernity has not replaced tradition. At the same time, the contradictory coexistence of modern and traditional values makes the role of women more complex and uncertain.[16] In fact, patriarchal oppression does not eliminate its impact upon females but changes its way to further the infringement. The depression of being overweight can be taken as an example. Korean women suffer more anxiety than men when it comes to body weight, especially Korean female adolescents. According to the research of Kim Oksoo and Kim Kyeha, females who perceived their weight problem as more severe had lower self-esteem and greater depression.[17] Such kind of anxiety about one's appearance is actually a disguised patriarchy, still depriving women of their freedom of body liberation.

As a member of Korean women, Han Kang is like other Korean females who are undergoing oppression and striving to resist it. This inclination is combined into all Korean women's unconscious, namely the collective unconscious, and urges every one of this group, including Han Kang, to unveil their living conditions as well as mortification, to utter their resolution towards gender polarization and inequality.

3.3 *The Vegetarian: Personal Unconscious Embedded Collective Unconscious*

The Vegetarian can be described as the projection of the author's personal unconscious under the influence of collective unconscious. As a member of Korean women, Han Kang is definitely also influenced or even had been oppressed by such

patriarchal social surroundings. Whether the degree is severe or slight, this fact does exist. As herself, the pain and suffering she had undergone are all stored in her psyche, mostly on the level of unconscious as she may not be willing to recall them frequently. That's why this novel is kind of like an epitome of women's present situation in modern Korea, in which the female characters, to some extent, are the typical archetypes of women in reality. While disclosing females' different choices and situations under the domination of males (some would like to show their defiance like Yeong-hye and others may prefer to still follow the social routine though they're aware of their controlled condition just like In-hye), *The Vegetarian* meanwhile poses questions to readers about women's living conundrum and conveys Han's thinkings towards human's nature, threatening norms of rationality, society, family, and gender.

In this novel, Yeong-hye's metamorphosizing into a plant kicks off a war towards social standards exerted upon women. Her defiance leads to social ostracism, bringing physical pain and suffering but also the realization of self-relation and self-identification. Han does not romanticize or mystify mental illness in her novels, nor does she offer moments of redemption or hope; instead, she exposes mutually destructive relationships in family and society to explain her understanding of agony.[18] Han combines her own ideas about the pain of life which originates from her personal unconscious and her concerns about Korean female's social status passed down through collective unconscious. It is precisely the interplay of personal unconscious and collective unconscious that makes this novel surpass the impact initially limited to Korean society and triggers resonance on a worldwide scale.

4. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Archetypal Psychology, a deeper exploration of Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* is obtained and thus it enhances the comprehension of the characters and the author herself. Kim Yeong-hey a staunch rebel towards Korean society, Kim In-hye a standardized paragon, the brother-in-law a torn compound body, her husband and father the typical outcomes of male chauvinism... All these characters are vividly shaped and are emblems of various types of people in Korean society, even the whole of Asia. Han once pointed out the questions she thinks about while writing: To what extent can human violence

reach? How to define rationality and madness? To what extent can we understand others? *The Vegetarian* may give readers the answers. Yeong-hye's husband represents human unmerciful violence; her brother-in-law proves the cross between rationality and madness may be done in a moment of thought; In-hye stands for forgiveness and sympathy among humans. In the contradictory and violent world, the inextricability of pain and suffering is destined, and the social norms and routines are inveterate. When one's behavior diverges from the normal standards, he's more apt to be judged as crazy. But what if the society itself is pathological as a reference? Han Kang pushes readers to doubt whether those who get well accommodated in a certain society are truly normal people.

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