

Cultural Cannibalism: Society's Consumption of a Woman's Body in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract

This study focuses on *The Vegetarian* (2015) by Han Kang to explore how the book is a literary expression of cultural cannibalism the symbolic feeding of the woman on the patriarchal society by social control, moral discipline, and mental control. The paper explores the way the novel reveals the violence inherent in normative femininity and uses the framework of social psychology, and gender performativity created by Judith Butler to explain the bodily transformation of Yeong-hye and her opposition to these patriarchal spaces. the research uses a qualitative research design and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The results indicate that *The Vegetarian* depicts food, body, and silence as both the power of repression and subversion. The decision of Yeong-hye not to eat meat is a moral and corporeal resistance that dislodges the performativity of patriarchy, the repetitive social practices that constitute and imprison womanhood. The novel depicts the consumption of the female identity by the society in the form of scenes of familial violence, medical intervention and aesthetic objectification through the pretext of order and sanity. The undoing gender as presented by Butler gives a critical perspective of interpreting the gradual loss of language, appetite, and human identity that Yeong-hye engages in as a extreme form of nonconformity to the societal norm. This final metamorphosis of her into a tree is the breaking of the gender performativity as a symbol of emancipation and destruction. The study concludes that *The Vegetarian* is an allegory of the reliance of the gendered social order on the female sacrifice. It reveals how the patriarchal culture is perpetuated by cannibalizing the obedience of women, and Yeong-hye self-erasing as a person tells us of the predatory nature of the consumption that results in self-denial. The interdisciplinary work is relevant to the feminist literary studies research by combining the social-psychological theory proposed by Butler and the thematic literature analysis, as it provides a new understanding of the intersection of body, gender, and resistance in the East Asian feminist literature.

Keywords: Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, cultural cannibalism, Judith Butler, gender performativity

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Introduction

The Vegetarian by Han Kang is a deep exploration of the autonomy of the body, conformity in the society, and violence being entrenched in cultural norms. It is the story of a woman, Yeong-hye, who does not eat meat, a choice that turns into a renunciation of patriarchal and cultural structures that make her who she is. Her metamorphosis or change of a submissive wife in the form of estrangement and objectification of her body is an allegory of how women bodies are consumed in society, both literally and metaphorically. The current study titled "cultural Cannibalism: Society Consuming A Woman Body in the novel the Vegetarian by Han Kang" is aimed to analyze the novel about the female body used as a resistive, repressive, and cultural consumption site. With the help of the frames of social psychology and thematic analysis developed by Judith Butler, this paper will aim at revealing the role played by gender norms and social sanctions in influencing Yeong-Hye on path to alienation. A fusion of gender, culture, and corporeality in the Korean society is an intersection that is displayed through the narrative in the novel, a place where conformity is rewarded and deviation is punished. The fact that Yeong-hye abandons meat is symbolic of her refusal of patriarchal control over her body but it also reveals how much the society is policing women with regard to autonomy. The theme of eating and being eaten works as an allegory of cultural cannibalism, where the bodies of women are somehow ingested by the demands, will and moral standards of a patriarchal society.

The Vegetarian has been discussed in feminist literary contexts as a text that challenges patriarchal beliefs, questions the boundaries of sanity and challenges the violence of the regulation of the female bodies. However, the majority of interpretations are more likely to separate psychological or feminist icons thus omitting the role of culture as a savage cannibalism a process that feeds itself consuming female identity and agency. The cannibalism metaphor as it exists in this context is not literal, but ideational; that is, it refers to internalized gender subjugation and the socialization that forces women to forfeit individuality in favor of conformity.

In order to advance this investigation, the paper uses the theories of social psychology developed by Judith Butler and, in particular, her concept of gender performativity and her concept of the forces that impose conformity. The observations made by Butler allow one to identify how people internalize what the society wants them to do in order to inscribe themselves on their bodies, in which

gender norms are not only performed but also punished. It is through the resistance of Yeong-hye, her noncompliance with performing the designated gendered acts that she demonstrates the violent basis of a culture that requires comeback. The fact that she ends by breaking down physically and psychologically is an indication of how profound these forces are and indicates that in her resistance against consumption, she is consumed in another way, that of alienation and silence.

With the help of thematic analysis, this study maps patterns of consumption, silence, and resistance in the theme of the vegetarian in the context of the novella to show how the novel reflects more wider forces of social control. Within the framework of the constructs of cultural cannibalism and the Butlerian theory, the paper attempts to explain how gender, culture, and the body have been intertwined in the systems of domination that still determine the identity of women in not only the Eastern world but also the world at large.

Review of the Literature

Over the past few years, there has been a surge in scholarship on *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, exploring its abundant symbolic work with food and the body, gender, and social control. One such contribution, which received a lot of attention, is Kim (2019): the author argues that the novel presents eating and refusing to eat as a place of suffering in a carnophagocentric society: Yeong-hye refusing to consume meat is a refusal to align herself with patriarchal demands, and her subsequent loss of the body serves as evidence of the punitive quality of dissent (Kim, 2019). In this reading, the literal and metaphorical consumption of the female body is foreshadowed due to social expectation. Complementarily, Baik (2018) places the transformation of Yeong-hye into a monster-bject setting: the bodily transformation into vegetal or monstrous bodies is an indication of resistance and the threat of patriarchal modernity, thus illustrating how women bodies can turn monstrous when they fail to embody the normative roles (Baik, 2018). Such studies are however inclined to focus on individual psychology or aesthetic metaphor and not the larger social processes of gender enforcement.

Other authors use an eco-feminist approach: according to Shaikh (2024), Yeong-hye vegetal transformation is symbolically construed as a subjugation to nature against the exploitation of women in the novel, but she finds that most research ignores how social sanctions impose gender norms in the novel, since the social world

embodies exploitation of women and nature (Shaikh, 2024). Similarly, Gopika (2025) assumes a food-studies approach to meat, blood, and odor to interpret them as elements of a moral economy where the act of eating supports social order and its rejection causes disruption (Gopika, 2025). These food-based analyses offer useful lexical and imagistic coding categories (food/consumption, body/spectacle) but often do not go all the way of explicitly theorizing the mechanisms of social regulation underlying them. Critical reception and translation studies are concerned with the ways in which the meaning of the novel is diversified in different cultural contexts: the second article by Kim (2015/2019) compares the versions of the novel and examines the different ways that suffering is read depending on translation options, with a focus on the way a female body is differently consumed in translation (Kim, 2019). Still, a problem exists concerning how the different cultures perceive the consumption metaphor in a gendered manner.

In theory, gender studies and social psychology have gone on to use Judith Butler and the concept of performativity to describe the construction and policing of gender. According to Morgenroth and Ryan (2018), despite the fact that the work of Butler can find a strong echo in social psychology, an unexpected underuse of this theory in experimental research has been identified. According to their review, gender is not a constant characteristic but a continuous process of performativity, which is subject to social norms and penalties (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018). Subsequently, Morgenroth and Ryan (2020) generalize this to suggest a theoretical framework explaining how the gender/sex binary is reproduced and ruptured by threats to identity, groups and systems, thus defining ways of enforcing and resisting (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2020). These readings are a very important bridge between abstract feminist theory and concrete mechanisms of gender regulation. To supplement them, Salih (2017) provides a clear map of the main ideas of Butler, such as performative acts, repetition, sanction, and subject formation, and clarifies what it means to the feminist literary theory (Salih, 2017). Lloyd (2015) also applies performativity to the contexts of performance and suggests that everyday domestic rituals and scenes of feeding are performative expressions of gender (Lloyd, 2015). Although these theoretical studies are strong theoreticizations of gender performativity and social regulation, they have not explicitly applied to East Asian literature, especially to *The Vegetarian*. Majority of the literary reviews of Han Kang focus on aesthetic or ecological or psychological subject matter but fails to subject the work to a social-psychological perspective, which would allow it to trace the ways in which the consumer of the woman body is socialized using performative

regimes of gender practices. Practically, despite the presence of the long-standing triad of food/body/gender, the processes of social sanction, peer pressure and normative repetition, which are at the core of the Butlerian model, are hardly explored in the literature on *The Vegetarian*. Such offers a unique gap: an opportunity to use thematic analysis in order to code crucial scenes (ritual meals, feeding, refusal, institutional reaction), and analyze them in the light of Butlerian social-psychology, thus shedding light on how society is consuming the body of a woman by securing compliance, punishing deviation, and pathologizing resistance. The aesthetic, bodily, ecological and feminist aspects of *The Vegetarian* have been the subject of fertile analysis in the current literature, and the social psychology of gender has developed strong theoretical instruments through the performativity prism developed by Butler. However, the intersection of the two- i.e. a systematic thematic and social-psychological reading of the workings of cultural cannibalism (consumption of women bodies) in the novel using gender norms and sanctions- is only half-constructed. This paper will attempt to address this gap by integrating thematic analysis with Butler social-psychological paradigm to track the interplay between social performance, consumption metaphors and gendered bodily governance in the novel by Han Kang.

Methodology

The study utilizes a qualitative research design with the thematic analysis serving as the main form of inquiry. The interpretive paradigm was chosen due to its emphasis on depth over breadth and the ability to find a variety of meanings in one piece of text. Literary analysis in this paradigm works on the premise that language, imagery, and representation are socially and ideologically constructed and that the critical role is to reveal what lies behind a worldview of a text, the hidden apparatus of meaning. Since this study is dedicated to one literary piece, namely, *The Vegetarian* (2007; English translation by Deborah Smith, 2015), the novel itself will be the core source of data. Other secondary sources were based on peer-reviewed journal articles, critical essays, books, and conference papers dealing with the work by Han Kang, modern Korean literature, feminist literary criticism and theoretical contributions by Judith Butler.

Data collection was based on purposive sampling as a qualitative approach whereby the researcher picks down certain sections of the text that are most pertinent to the research purpose. The special focus was made on the scenes, which show Yeong-hye

body change, resistance, family-fighting, and psychological breakdown in this study. Each of the chosen passages was coded and interpreted in terms of its symbolic, social, and gendered meaning.

The research uses thematic analysis as the analysis tool, in accordance with the six stages model of Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach offers an ordered system of recognizing, examining, and deciphering trends in qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical orientation is based in the works of Judith Butler that contributed to the social psychology, especially her ideas of gender performativity and social regulation, which could be found in the works of *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004). The main argument by Butler that gender is not an essence but an identity that is being constructed in various social performances which are repeated and continually articulated makes it a strong interpretive tool with which one can examine *The Vegetarian*. The gradual avoidance of eating, speaking and having sex by Yeong-hye can be grasped as refusal to repeat these actions thus disrupting the social and psychological processes of maintaining patriarchal femininity.

The fact that Yeong-hye decides to quit meat consumption and then to renounce language and clothes could be interpreted in Butlerian terms as a reversal of gender, a gesture that reveals the means of enforcing and monitoring the female identity. The concept of social sanction introduced by Butler, who considers deviation through performances as something that can be punished, can be used to explain the violent reaction she receives by her family, husband, and society. Such change of the naive wife into vegetative creature shows the extent of intelligibility in the discourse of patriarchy: as soon as she ceases to act as woman, she loses social intelligibility and is declared as mad, unnatural or inhuman.

The choice of this theoretical framework can be explained by the fact that it identifies the gaps between literary analysis and psychology the researcher could understand the rebellion of Yeong-hye as not only a personal outburst but a social and performative dismantling of gender. The social psychology that Butler emphasizes here is that the psyche is not independent but is socially constructed- the self internalizes the norms by being repetitive and thus resistance needs a

psychological break and a social withdrawal as well. In such a way, the researcher is able to interpret *The Vegetarian* both as a psychological story of the trauma and as a political allegory of feminist resistance.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents a detailed thematic analysis of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015), focusing on the mechanisms through which patriarchal society metaphorically consumes the woman's body. The analysis follows the structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, beginning with familiarization, moving through coding and thematic grouping, and culminating in interpretive synthesis. Drawing upon Judith Butler's framework of social psychology, particularly her concept of gender performativity (*Gender Trouble*, 1990; *Undoing Gender*, 2004), the chapter interprets Yeong-hye's vegetarianism, silence, and eventual transformation into a tree as acts that interrupt the repetitive performances through which gender and identity are socially maintained. *The Vegetarian* is, therefore, not merely a psychological narrative of madness but a symbolic exploration of how culture devours the female body through conformity, discipline, and social sanction. The novel opens from the viewpoint of Yeong-hye's husband, whose detached tone immediately signals the patriarchal normalization of his wife's objectification: "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way" (Kang, 2015). This casual remark reduces Yeong-hye to a domestic utility, aligning with Butler's argument that women's subjectivity is produced through repetitive acts of compliance.

When Yeong-hye suddenly rejects meat, her husband interprets it not as ethical choice but as deviance: "How on earth could she be so self-centred?" (p. 14). The language of selfishness here encodes gender expectation that women's moral worth derives from obedience and service. This moment marks the first rupture in performative femininity, introducing the motif of cultural cannibalism: the community's moral digestion of her non-conformity. At the family dinner, Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat triggers public shame. Her brother-in-law recalls the relatives' shock as she sits in silence while others urge her to "eat just a little, for health's sake" (p. 23). The husband's mother equates refusal to madness: "A balanced diet goes hand in hand with a balanced mind" (p. 24). This dialogue demonstrates Butler's notion of normative violence, the process through which non-compliance is pathologized. In the father's act of forcing meat into Yeong-hye's mouth, "he

grabbed her by the hair and shoved the meat between her lips" (p. 47), the novel literalizes the metaphor of cultural consumption: the woman's body becomes the site through which patriarchal control reasserts itself by force. After this violent episode, Yeong-hye withdraws physically and psychically. Her refusal to eat becomes a rejection not only of meat but of social participation itself. The narrator notes that she "stared at her reflection for hours, as if her body were a stranger's" (p. 52). This estrangement signals what Butler (1990) describes as the failure of performativity: when the repeated social acts that constitute identity are disrupted, the self begins to disintegrate.

Yeong-hye's silence and bodily wasting dramatize an act of self-negation that paradoxically asserts agency. She no longer performs the gestures expected of a wife or daughter; instead, she reclaims her body through abstention. As her sister observes later, "Her body seemed to be disappearing... her bones shining through her skin" (p. 128). The imagery of disappearance evokes both suffering and liberation, a woman unmaking herself to escape inscription. This theme mirrors Butler's idea that the body is "the sedimentation of repeated acts" (Butler, 1993, p. 12). Yeong-hye's emaciation can thus be read as a refusal to sediment, an attempt to erase the bodily archive of social obedience. She ceases to nourish the system that feeds upon her, enacting a radical non-participation, a starving of the social body that consumes her.

The second section of the novel, narrated by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, amplifies the objectification of her body. His obsession with painting flowers on her skin transforms her resistance into aesthetic commodity. He describes her as "a canvas of smooth white flesh" (Kang, 2015, p. 85). In this moment, Yeong-hye's body becomes both surface and spectacle, an embodiment of what Mulvey (1975) calls the male gaze, and what Butler (2004) terms the social gaze that disciplines the subject through visibility. The brother-in-law's artistic act consumes her through desire. He confesses that watching her body painted with flowers made him feel "as if she were no longer human, but some kind of plant, or spirit" (p. 87). The transformation he perceives aestheticizes her otherness while simultaneously objectifying it. This is cultural cannibalism in its most refined form: Yeong-hye's resistance is devoured as erotic art.

Yet, the text also frames this scene as her silent victory. While he views her as passive, the narration reveals her interior autonomy: she lies "utterly without

resistance, yet armoured by the power of her own renunciation" (p. 88). The oxymoron, "without resistance" yet "armoured", captures Butler's paradox of agency: resistance can emerge from refusal, from the act of not performing the expected role. By surrendering, Yeong-hye exposes the violence embedded in every act of representation.

The final section, narrated by her sister In-hye, traces Yeong-hye's progression toward non-human existence. Institutionalized and near death, she tells her sister, "I can live without food. All I need is sunlight" (Kang, 2015, p. 154). This statement synthesizes the themes of negation and transcendence: the rejection of nourishment, the embrace of light, an elemental, spiritual sustenance. Her aspiration to become a tree embodies what Butler (2004) calls undoing gender: a state where the subject exits the symbolic order that once defined it. In-hye's reflections reinforce the theme of social cannibalism. She recalls how everyone, husband, parents, brother-in-law, even doctors has taken something from Yeong-hye: "All of them had devoured her piece by piece, until there was almost nothing left" (p. 160). The metaphor of devouring literalizes the cultural process by which the female body is consumed through expectation and violation. The novel closes not with redemption but with transcendence: Yeong-hye's deathlike stillness becomes liberation from performative existence itself.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* constructs a sustained metaphor of cultural cannibalism, the idea that society consumes the female body both literally and symbolically through mechanisms of conformity, discipline, and control. From the novel's opening pages, Yeong-hye's body is treated not as autonomous, but as a communal object to be regulated and normalized. Her husband's detached remark, "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way" (Kang, 2015, p. 1), establishes the tone of patriarchal indifference that renders women invisible unless they deviate. Her later decision to stop eating meat transforms her into a visible spectacle, a transgressive body that disrupts domestic and cultural order. The first moment of violent social consumption occurs at the family dinner scene. When Yeong-hye refuses meat, her father's reaction literalizes patriarchal control: "He grabbed her by the hair and forced a piece of pork into her mouth" (p. 47). The father's act represents society's demand that women ingest prescribed norms and perform submissiveness. Yeong-hye's response, vomiting blood across the table turns this violence into resistance, a regurgitation of patriarchal consumption itself. Her refusal to digest becomes a

refusal to internalize oppressive tradition. This episode encapsulates the novel's central metaphor: society attempts to feed itself with women's obedience, while Yeong-hye's bodily rejection exposes the brutality of that appetite. Social cannibalism also manifests through the collective policing of her difference. At the same dinner, one guest remarks, "A balanced diet goes hand in hand with a balanced mind" (p. 24). Here, psychological normality becomes a moral demand. As feminist scholars such as Kim (2019) have noted, *The Vegetarian* portrays "a society that pathologizes female nonconformity as madness" (p. 6). The metaphor of eating becomes moralized: to eat meat is to belong, to abstain is to invite punishment. Thus, the novel transforms food, a communal symbol, into an instrument of control. Cultural cannibalism intensifies as Yeong-hye's body becomes a visual and sexual spectacle in the second section. The brother-in-law's artistic obsession turns her flesh into canvas: "Her breasts and thighs were painted with flowers... her skin looked like petals" (Kang, 2015, p. 87). His fascination aestheticizes her suffering, converting her resistance into art for male consumption. As Al-Doory and Najm (2025) argue, the novel's poetics of veganism reveal "the gendered eroticization of nonviolence, where female passivity becomes aesthetic pleasure" (p. 412). The brother-in-law's desire to capture her on film literalizes this aesthetic cannibalism, he consumes her body through the camera's gaze, appropriating her resistance for his creative fulfillment. From a thematic standpoint, *The Vegetarian* aligns with feminist critiques of how patriarchal cultures devour women's bodies through expectations of obedience, sexualization, and motherhood. The consumption is both physical and symbolic: family, husband, art, and medicine each participate in a ritual of devouring that sustains social order. Yeong-hye's vegetarianism, far from a mere dietary choice, thus represents rebellion against this cultural appetite, a refusal to be consumed.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a critical lens for understanding Yeong-hye's gradual disintegration as a form of resistance. Butler (1990) asserts that gender identity is not innate but is constituted through repeated acts that conform to societal expectations. When Yeong-hye ceases to perform the gestures of wifehood; cooking, eating, smiling, obeying, she disrupts the performative cycle that sustains her social existence. Her silence, abstention, and eventual transformation into a tree illustrate Butler's concept of undoing gender (*Undoing Gender*, 2004). Yeong-hye's rebellion begins not through words but through refusal. After her father's assault, she declares, "I don't eat meat... I had a dream" (Kang, 2015, p. 48). The dream of animal slaughter serves as both trauma

and revelation, awakening her to the violence of performative normality. Butler (2004) describes this as the “moment when the subject refuses to repeat the norms that make her intelligible” (p. 42). By ceasing to eat meat, Yeong-hye ceases to participate in the gendered rituals of nourishment that sustain patriarchal family life. Her husband’s outrage “How could she be so selfish?” (p. 14) reveals that female self-possession is perceived as moral failure within this system of regulation. As Yeong-hye’s non-performance deepens, society interprets it as madness. Her muteness, hospitalization, and disinterest in clothing or sexuality signify what Butler calls “the abject” that which lies outside the boundaries of cultural intelligibility (Bodies That Matter, 1993). The more Yeong-hye withdraws from these performances, the more violently society reacts. This mirrors Butler’s notion that performativity is enforced through social sanction: deviation provokes correction. Every attempt to discipline her, through force-feeding, medication, or psychiatric confinement, demonstrates the coercive repetition of gender norms through institutional power. The brother-in-law’s gaze further illuminates Butler’s theory of the body as “a site of social inscription” (Butler, 1993, p. 30). His act of painting her nude body with flowers imposes new meanings upon her flesh, transforming her into the embodiment of male fantasy. Yet, Yeong-hye’s passivity in these scenes, her motionless stillness, ironically becomes an act of resistance. She performs non-performance, a refusal to respond, which destabilizes his desire. As she “lies utterly without resistance, yet armoured by the power of her own renunciation” (Kang, 2015, p. 88), she embodies Butler’s paradox of agency through negation. Her silence functions as counter-performance, exposing how femininity itself is a performance demanded by others. By applying Butler’s theory, Yeong-hye’s journey can be read as a psychological and social deconstruction of femininity. Each act of refusal culinary, sexual, or linguistic, unveils how gender identity is maintained through repetition and regulation. Her vegetarianism thus becomes a Butlerian act of de-performativity: a conscious or unconscious interruption of the normative loop. The violence she endures signifies society’s inability to tolerate this disruption, reaffirming that patriarchy sustains itself through both desire and punishment. The novel closes with In-hye’s realization that the social order cannot survive without sacrifice “Everyone has taken something from her, piece by piece” (Kang, 2015, p. 160) and this becomes the ethical question Han Kang leaves her readers: if the system feeds on women, what remains when they stop offering themselves for consumption?

Conclusion

The current paper has determined that *The Vegetarian* dramatizes the violence of conformity and the price of rebellion in the society where being a woman is being submissive. The analysis of the novel based on the Judith Butler concept of social-psychological shows that gender identity in the work by Han Kang is a performative script imposed, controlled, and punished in case of deviation. The breakdown of these performative boundaries is seen in Yeong-hye who, by sacrificing food, language and social life, destroys the processes by which the patriarchal power structure is upheld. The myth of the cultural cannibalism, society eating the female body, offers a critical perspective through which one can see how the cultural institutions force the individuality to be assimilated into the collective system. The fact that Yeong-hye does not want to be devoured reveals the devastating craving behind social normality. The analysis of the study based on thematic analysis proves that the discourse of Han Kang is not about insanity or alienation but about the inadmissible specificity of a woman who sees violence in the less extraordinary.

It was revealed in the study that the novel by Han Kang uses eating and food as metaphors of repeated controls within society. Some of the scenes include the one where Yeong-hye is made to swallow meat by her father (Kang, 2015, p.47) are used to demonstrate how male authority can be expressed in terms of feeding practices in which food is equated with submission. The not eating of Yeong-hye is a challenge to the cultural economy of consumption, which results in hostility, shame, and violence. The family, which is a microcosm of the Korean patriarchal society, is a controlling mechanism that feeds on her obedience. The last image of Yeonghye being "taken piece by piece" (p. 160) sums up the theme of cultural cannibalism i.e. eating individuality by the social order. The paper shows that the idea of gender performativity and social regulation developed by Judith Butler provides a critical approach to the rebellion of Yeong-hye. Her vegetarianism, refusal to speak, and ultimate withdrawal to humanity are the examples of the creation of gender in the works of Butler with the help of repetition and its possible interruption with refusal. The final stage of deconstructing gender is performed when Yeong-hye comes up with the statement, all I need is sunlight (p. 154), which she is leaving the bodily and linguistic codes that make her who she is. Her experience of violence is indicative of what Butler states that nonconformity is punishable by society. But her ruination is also a reflection of freedom; she is no longer a victim of the male gaze or responsibility to her family, but something that is no longer under the authority of

the patriarch. As a result, *The Vegetarian* may be viewed as feminist and existential text: it is feminist in the sense that it reveals how gender is controlled; it is existential in the sense that it questions the price of freedom in the world that exists on the consumption of difference. The analysis of literature and theoretical perspectives of Butler make the study relevant to the growing body of literature that aims at bridging feminist psychology and literary modernism in East Asian discourse.

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