

More Than Just Surviving: Rebellion Against Patriarchy in the English Translation of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

Dominika Tabor
University of Alberta, Canada
tabor@ualberta.ca

Article History: **Abstract.** The article analyzes the English translation of the Korean novel *The Vegetarian* (2015) by Han Kang in light of the impact of a patriarchal society on a woman's life. In the article, I analyze the English version as a standalone novel rather than a translation from Korean due to various instances of mistranslations and omissions. The narrative tells the story of Yeong-hye, a Korean woman who one day becomes an eponymous vegetarian and stops eating meat. The more committed Yeong-hye is to her dietary choice, the more aggressive her family becomes, perceiving her decision as absurd and foolish. The novel's central theme, unlike the novel's title may suggest, is not vegetarianism but rebellion and the silent suffering of a woman trapped in a patriarchal world that does not understand her. The study incorporates Gilbert and Gubar's concept of the "angel in the house" and Timothy Morton's distinction between Life and "life." Lastly, the research discusses the role of Yeong-hye and the author of the novel, Han Kang, concerning Gilbert and Gubar's notion of "anxiety of authorship". I argue that Yeong-hye's transformation, resulting in her institutionalization in a mental hospital, was caused by the patriarchal beliefs upheld by her family.

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INTRODUCTION

The Vegetarian is a Korean novel written by Han Kang in 2007. The plot begins with a portrayal of a simple dietary change. On one completely ordinary February day, Yeong-hye, the protagonist of the novel, decides to become the eponymous vegetarian and stops eating meat. Her family members, especially male ones, disapprove of the decision, perceiving it as absurd and foolish. The more committed Yeong-hye is to her dietary choice, the more hostile her family becomes. Unlike the novel's title suggests, the novel's central theme is not vegetarianism but rather a woman's rebellion and silent suffering in a patriarchal world that does not understand her. In this essay, I argue that Yeong-hye's transformation, resulting in a stay in a mental hospital, was caused by the patriarchal values embraced by her family.

The creation of *The Vegetarian* was preceded by "The Fruit of My Woman", a short story written by the same author (Patrick, 2016). *The Vegetarian* is a multilayered story consisting of three chapters: "The Vegetarian", "Mongolian Mark", and "Flaming Trees". As the chapters were initially written as three separate novellas (Alter, 2006), they are written from different perspectives and about different characters. The first chapter is narrated by Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye's husband, the second by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, and the last one by Yeong-hye's sister. None of the sections is written by Yeong-hye, from the beginning suggesting her lack of autonomy in her own story. They can be read as three separate novellas, however, together they provide a coherent picture of Yeong-hye's harrowing life. The article analyzes an English novel translation by Deborah Smith in 2015, bearing in mind that the English text is not identical to the source language.

Due to the controversies surrounding Deborah Smith's English translation of *The Vegetarian*, I feel obliged to comment briefly on the evaluation of the translation by Smith, conducted by South Korean literary scholar, critic, and translator Wook-Dong Kim (2018). According to him, the translation by Smith contains many mistakes, originating from the fact that Smith does not possess enough knowledge of the Korean language and culture. It may stem from the fact that Smith started learning Korean in 2010, only five years before the publication of the English version of *The Vegetarian* (Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* wins Man Booker International Prize, 2016). As Smith explains, "You typically submit the manuscript for editing 12 months before the publication date" (Winchester, 2017), rendering her translation of *The Vegetarian* a result of merely four years of experience with a foreign language. Many other scholars, such as academic Charse Yun or writer Tim Parks, follow Wook-Dong Kim's opinion (Armitstead, 2018). Yun comments that "the number of mistranslations in *The Vegetarian* is much higher than one would expect from a professional translator" pointing out several flaws in the English version (Yun, 2017). One of the most striking mistakes pointed out by Yun are the misidentification of the subjects of the sentence (which resulted in attributing dialogues to wrong characters), insertion of "adverbs, superlatives, and emphatic word choices *that are simply not in the original*" and change of the opening line of the novel (Yun, 2017).

Overall, it seems that Smith could have done a better job of translating the novel correctly. Hence, the errors made on the syntactic level, as well as various cases of under and over-translation, render it a creative translation (Wook-Dong, 2018, p.71). The English translation offered to the reader can be perceived instead as a rendition of the novel, created by maintaining its essence while filling the translation gaps with her creativity. Wook-Dong Kim highlights that according to a 2016 Korean research paper, "10.9 percent of the first section of the book was found to be mistranslated, while another 5.7 percent of the original text was found to be omitted" (Wook-Dong, 2018, p.65). In the case of a multilayered novel such as *The Vegetarian*, in which the aspects of Korean culture are crucial to embrace and comprehend the text, the reader's response to Smith's English translation may differ from the response of Korean readers. Bearing in mind various instances of mistranslations and omissions, I analyze the English version as a standalone novel rather than simply a translation from Korean.

One element of the novel that seems like a translation mistake but is not is the use of the word 'vegetarian' as a noun and adjective. The change in Yeong-hye's diet shows her conversion to vegetarianism. However, along with meat, she also stops eating fish, dairy, and eggs. While her dietary choices indicate a representation of a vegan diet rather than a vegetarian one, throughout the novel, Yeong-hye's diet is not even once referred to as vegan. While it could be a simple translation mistake, a dictionary search reveals that the English adjective 'vegetarian' is an accurate translation of the Korean counterpart. Therefore, opting for the word 'vegetarian' was an intentional decision of the author not to represent Yeong-hye's dietary choices but rather to acknowledge a symbolic difference between Yeong-hye and her carnivore family. The readers do not focus on what animal products Yeong-hye eats but on what they represent. Focusing on this representation, I argue that Yeong-hye's transformation to vegetarianism (or veganism), resulting in a stay in a mental hospital, was caused by the patriarchal values embraced by her family. Moreover, the article shows that Yeong-hye's dietary change should be viewed as a woman's rebellion and silent suffering in a patriarchal world that does not understand her.

Despite winning the 2016 Man Booker International Prize (*The Vegetarian Wins Man Booker International Prize by Han Kang, 2016*), the English version of *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang has not been analyzed by many critical scholars. Apart from Wook-Dong Kim's article regarding the "creative" translation of *The Vegetarian* (2018), a few notable articles aim to analyze solely *The Vegetarian* without comparing it to other Korean novels. Caitlin Stobie explores the theories of sister relationships through the relationship between Yeong-hye and her sister (Stobie, 2018). Won-Chung Kim analyzes *The Vegetarian* by focusing on suffering and what role carno-phallogocentric thinking can play in such suffering (Won-Chun, 2019). Maria Sophia Pimentel Biscaia applies an ecocritical framework to the study of *The Vegetarian* and analyzes it concerning the concept of Becoming (Pimentel Biscaia, 2019). Amy-Leigh Gray and Dana Medoro, in their short article in "The Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies", look at the novel by challenging the dominant narratives of meat (Gray & Medoro, 2022). Finally, Danielle Sands positions *The Vegetarian* within a broader context of "feeling politics" (Sands, 2022).

While the study applies the notion of patriarchy as the primary analytical framework, research regarding patriarchy is rather extensive as scholars have

investigated it from different perspectives. The sole definition of patriarchy and its variations were a topic by many scholars (Barrett 1988; Stacey 1993; Hunnicutt 2009). The research uses the one coined by Gwen Hunnicutt as she proposes one of the most precise definitions of the term. According to her, patriarchy equals “social arrangements that privilege males, where men as a group dominate women as a group, both structurally and ideologically hierarchical arrangements that manifest in varieties across history and social space” (Hunnicutt, 2009, p.557). This paper applies the definition to social arrangements in the represented Korean society that privileges a group of men consisting of Yeong-hye’s family members. The privilege spans two family generations. It spans not only space but also time.

In the analysis of *The Vegetarian*, the study differs from the previously mentioned articles as it applies various notions from *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, a groundbreaking book written by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.¹ The book examines literary works of female writers such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelly, Emily Dickinson, and the Brontë sisters from a feminist perspective. Gilbert and Gubar argue that, in the male-oriented world, women are perceived only through two opposing roles. They could either be obedient and submissive 'angels' or rebellious monsters.' For this study, “angel in the house” can be applied to Yeong-hye and her position in Korean society and, most importantly, her marriage. The term, originating in the Victorian Era, can be understood as an ‘ideal’ image of a woman whose sole role is to be obedient to her husband. She should be charming when needed yet passive and powerless regarding decision-making; embodying traditional feminine virtues. Gilbert and Gubar (2020, p.17) stated that “Before we women can write, declared Virginia Woolf, we must “kill” the “angel in the house” (2020, p.17). Similarly, in order for her own story to be heard, Yeong-hye needs to reject her role as Gilbert and Gubar’s “angel in the house”. Unfortunately, by regaining her autonomy, she starts to be perceived as Gilbert and Gubar’s ‘madwoman’, a ‘monster’. Another term coined by Gilbert and Gubar (2020) is the “anxiety of authorship”. As suggested by them, men and women differ in their approach to writing and subsequently deal with different kinds of writing anxieties. Defined as “a radical fear that she [a woman] cannot create” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2020, p.49), the “anxiety of authorship” refers to the opposition to the male anxiety of influence. It is up to women to create their writing tradition by overcoming the “anxiety of authorship” and rebelling against patriarchy. The “anxiety of authorship” is applied in this research to Yeong-hye and her attempts of creating her own creative work but also to Han Kang herself, by focusing on how she constructed the novel.

¹ The first edition of *The Madwoman in the Attic* was written in 1979.

Another aspect of the novelty of this study in regards to the analysis of *The Vegetarian* is linked with framing Yeong-hye's life in Timothy Morton's discussion of Life vs "life". Timothy Morton's distinction of two different aspects of life can be found in his book *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*, published in 2017. The book tries to answer the question of what makes humans human in the context of ecological coexistence. Especially crucial for the discussion of Yeong-hye's human/non-human life is one of the book chapters entitled, simply, Life. As Morton states, Life (with a capital L) is bound by the science of logic, while "life" is defined by everything between Life and death; by the middle zone. While Life is linked with logical reasoning, in "life," nothing is simply black and white.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses a qualitative approach. The object of this study is the English translation of a Korean novel, *The Vegetarian*, written by Han Kang. The current study differs from existing research as it applies the notion of patriarchy and rebellion against it as the analytical framework.² It focuses on the main protagonist, Yeong-hye, and her relations with male family members: her father and husband. The study aims to present and analyze an intricate relationship between the physical and mental transformation of Yeong-hye and her experience of living in a patriarchal Korean society. Moreover, to show the duality of life of the protagonist, pre-rebellion and after, the study applies the concept of the "angel in the house" by Gilbert and Gubar (2020) as well as the distinction of Life and "life" by Timothy Morton (2017). Lastly, the study discusses the role of Yeong-hye and the author of the novel, Han Kang, in light of the "anxiety of authorship" by Gilbert and Gubar (2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, giving up meat and all animal products by Yeong-hye is just the outer layer of the novel. Her transition to vegetarianism (or veganism) refers to a symbolic representation of her inner rebellion. It all starts with a dream that Yeong-hye has one night. In the dream "[v]iolent acts perpetrated by night. A hazy feeling, I can't pin down... but remembered as blood chilling definite (Kang, 2015, pp.35-36). Blood is the central motif of her dream and its subsequent recollections. She keeps mentioning blood covering her, "bloody hands", "bloody mouth", and "clothes wet with blood" (Kang, 2015, p.20). Moreover, in her dreams, blood is directly linked with images of raw meat. However, in her dream, the "great blood-red gashes of meat" do not disgust her but rather seem to be becoming part of her. Young-hye recalls that when she started chewing on them, the meat "felt so real, but couldn't have been" (Kang, 2015, p.20).

² The author of this article acknowledges Han Kang's comment that *The Vegetarian* "isn't a singular indictment of the Korean patriarchy" (Patrick, 2016); however, it analyzes the notion of patriarchy as an

intrinsic element of the plot.

Assuming that meat is for Yeong-hye a metaphor for her own body, the rejection of meat symbolizes the rejection of violence, suffering, and pain. The cruelty towards animals, described through killing animals for their meat, is for Yeong-hye, a metaphor for all the cruelty that she experienced as a child and later on as a young woman at the hands of her father. What accompanies her disgust towards eating meat is the fear and the uncanny feeling of familiarity. The feeling of familiarity is not new but suppressed. In her dreams, she explains: "Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I've always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off" (Kang, 2015, pp.35-36). Due to the patriarchal way of upbringing, she used to believe that her father's violence and punishments were deserved and justified. Now when being a married woman, she realizes that her feelings of hate towards him were the correct reaction to all the pain she had to endure. Thus, her transformation is not only a change of diet but, at the same time, a process of self-discovery, identity formation, and realization of the impact of the past on her current life and mental health.

The first sentence of the first chapter, and at the same time of the novel, depicts the relationship between Yeong-hye and her husband. It explains that before Yeong-hye transitioned into a vegetarian, Yeong-hye was "completely unremarkable in every way" (Kang, 2015, p.11). For Mr. Cheong, his wife, Yeong-hye, was a perfect woman only because she was ordinary; there was nothing special about her.³ He did not choose his wife because he was attracted to her, but rather because she did not threaten him and his position as a superior male. Mr. Cheong explains that "women who were pretty, intelligent, strikingly sensual, the daughters of wealthy families, would only have served to disrupt my carefully ordered existence" (Kang, 2015, p. 12). The average appearance of Yeong-hye, combined with her passive personality, was, therefore, a perfect addition to the ordinary middle-course life of Mr. Cheong. Their relationship was an ideal example of a patriarchal family, with Mr. Cheong being the master of the house and his wife being merely his subordinate. Mr. Cheong worked all day and spent the evenings in front of the TV while Yeong-hye stayed in the house cooking, cleaning, taking care of the apartment, and being at Mr. Cheong's beck and call. Thus, we can assume that Yeong-hye represents the "angel in the house" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2020, pp.3-44). Gilbert and Gubar argue that in the male-oriented world, women are in the opposition of two roles: obedient and submissive angels or rebellious monsters. Those who become 'angels in their houses' are constricted in their roles, confined to housework, and denied their autonomy.

³ The line "nothing special about her" is a creation of Deborah Smith and cannot be found in the original Korean version. (Yun, 2017) It is, therefore, yet another argument for perceiving the English translation of *The Vegetarian* as a separate novel.

The primary goal of Yeong-hye in their household is to please and obey her husband. When one morning Yeong-hye decides to empty the fridge and get rid of all animal products, Mr. Cheong does not try to calm her down and find what may have caused the rapid change in her behavior. He is furious that her actions disrupted his morning. His wife did not wake him up, did not prepare his food, or did not iron his shirt. He claims that "[i]n the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off." (Kang, 2015, p.19). It seems that for Mr. Cheong, breakfast is not a meal but a performance, yet another act clearly stating the gender roles between the superior husband and his obedient servant wife. In the eyes of Mr. Cheong, by rejecting the role of a good housewife, the "angel in the house", Yeong-hye became a 'monster', a 'madwoman' (Gilbert, Gubar, 2020). Mr. Cheong does not consider any other explanation for her actions apart from perceiving Yeong-hye as becoming the binary opposition of an obedient wife - a mad woman. For him, a wife who makes her own decisions cannot be viewed as sane. He claims that "the very idea that there should be this other side to her, one where she selfishly did as she pleased was astonishing. Who would have thought she could be so unreasonable" (Kang, 2015, p.21). During the argument, he insults her by calling her insane and asking her whether she has lost her mind, only proving the point that Yeong-hye is a victim of home abuse. The names given to the characters show the patriarchal nature of their relationship. It is visible when her father tries to force her to eat meat again by stating, "Yeong-hye, are you still not eating meat? [...] What on earth must Mr. Cheong think?" (Kang, 2015, p.36). The husband is referred to by his surname, Mr. Cheong, which already suggests to the readers that if referred to like that, especially by her family members, he must be a significant and respected person. On the other hand, the wife is called by her first name, Yeong-hye, rather than Mrs. Cheong, which gives the reader the impression that her character is ordinary and average compared to a superior and important husband.

A sudden change in Yeong-hye did not evoke empathy and worry in Mr. Cheong. He perceives her change as interfering with his tranquil, controlled, and organized life. For Mr. Cheong, the decision of his wife to stop eating meat had no reasonable grounds and "was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband's wishes" (Kang, 2015, p.22). The beliefs of Mr. Cheong are a perfect representation of deeply ingrained patriarchal thinking. He not only perceives himself as 'the man of the house' but also assumes the role of the family decision-maker. His conviction about male superiority renders his wife automatically inferior and unfounded. Moreover, he cannot comprehend how his wife could make a decision on her without consulting him or even asking for his superior permission.

The first sign of Yeong-hye breaking the image of an obedient woman and ideal wife was her reluctance to wear a brassiere, a symbol of rebellion, specifically of second-wave feminism (Kreydatus, 2008). She rejected it, describing it as something that constricts her (Kang, 2015, p.14). However, her feeling of constriction does not disappear when she stops wearing it. In the hospital, Yeong-hye admits that "[e]ven though I've stopped wearing a bra, I can feel this lump all

the time. No matter how deeply I inhale, it doesn't go away" (Kang, 2015, p56). Yeong-hye's reluctance to wear a brassiere pertains not only to her physical constriction but also to her emotional and spiritual constraints, which have been present throughout her life. When Yeong-hye married Mr. Cheong, she became constricted by his patriarchal mentality. She became a slave in her own house, trapped with a man who never loved her and never respected her. It was a matter of time before her mind could not handle reality anymore.

However, the narrator reveals that her mental entrapment started much earlier than her marriage. As a young girl, Yeong-hye was constricted by her patriarchal family, ruled by her father, and his cruel bringing-up methods. The narrator reveals that she was the only one of her siblings who was a victim of her father's violence. "Docile and naive, [she] had been unable to deflect their father's temper or put up any form of resistance" (Kang, 2015, p.163) and had been suffering in silence for years. Her sister, In-hye, recalls how they got lost in the mountains when they were little. While In-hye tried to find a way home, a nine-year-old Yeong-hye said, "Let's just not go back" (Kang, 2015, p.162). The fragment not only shows the mental toll of physical abuse on a nine-year-old Korean girl but is also a foreshadowing of the final scenes in the novel. In-hye is the only family member who gradually starts to understand Yeong-hye's rebellion and the only person who cares about her well-being. Just like in the memory of two little sisters lost in the mountains, the novel ends with In-hye accepting Yeong-hye's offer not to return to their home, resigning from being a servant and escaping from never-ending patriarchal constriction and abuse.

Another troubling issue (troubling, however, only in the perception of Mr. Cheong) that emerged after Yeong-hye's transition to being vegetarian was the fact that she started to avoid sex (Kang, 2015, p.24). For Mr. Cheong, the lack of sex, referred to as not complying with his "physical demands" (Kang, 2015, p.24) was 'more troubling' than the fact that his wife stopped eating and sleeping. Again, he does not perceive the unwillingness of his wife to have sex as a symptom of a possible illness but rather as not fulfilling the duties of a good wife. Just like every morning Yeong-hye is supposed to serve Mr. Cheong during the act of breakfast, every evening she is supposed to assert his male dominance and superiority through the act of sex. Mr. Cheong's frustration over his wife's disobedience resulted in the highest act of male dominance over women – rape. Believing that a wife should always be inferior to her husband, he goes as far as to justify his unacceptable and cruel act of rape by claiming that it is simply not easy for a man "to have his physical needs go unsatisfied for such a long period" (Kang, 2015, p.38). Yeong-hye's freedom, which began the moment she stopped eating meat, is a massive threat to the patriarchal structure of Mr. Cheong. The act of rape is thus not only a brutal act of gendered violence but also an attempt to retrieve his dominance.

In the case of the Korean reality represented in *The Vegetarian*, gender roles are assigned based on the patriarchal system controlled by men. According to Judith Butler (1999, p.23), and echoed by other scholars, gender identity is performative because the basis is on the repetitions of gendered behavior (Doncu, 2017, p.334). The gendered behavior seems to be repeated through generations in every family, as described by Han Kang, the author of *The Vegetarian*. All the women in the novel are obedient to men and silently fulfill their duties as wives and daughters, repeating

the socially approved behavior of inferior females of their families. A family dinner, the climax of one of the chapters, depicts a patriarchal hierarchy within the represented Korean family. When Yeong-hye does not eat any of the prepared meat dishes, her father tells her, "Don't you understand what your father's telling you? If he tells you to eat, you eat" (Kang, 2015, p.45). The violent statement serves as Yeong-hye's father's reminder of her role in the family and, at the same time, in Korean society. Her father, the first man in her life, perceives not eating meat as something one should be ashamed of. According to him, a good Korean woman should obey her father first and then her husband. During the dinner Yeong-hye realizes she has no support from her family. The dinner involves a brutal act of beating Yeong-hye to convince her to eat followed by the force-feeding Yeong-hye by her father. Her father is the one who initiates the attempt to force her to eat a piece of pork as he believes that her diet is "preposterous" and "[i]f she eats it once, she'll eat it again (Kang, 2015, p.46). The burden of his violence cannot be, however, solely put on him, as he invites other men in the family (Yeong-hye's husband and brother) to help him constrict her. The act is yet another gender performance, signaling to Yeong-hye that her father still believes in control over her body.

Combining different excerpts from the three chapters gives the readers a complete image of Yeong-hye's father. The controversial dinner situation showed one of his most brutal behaviors towards his daughter, but it was not the first one. A former Vietnam War soldier, he is described as a 'heavy-handed' man who used violence towards Yeong-hye as a parental strategy up until her 18th birthday (Kang, 2015, p.37). Her uncanny familiar memories of violence described above relate directly to his parental methods of abusing his daughter in attempts to 'mold her' into a perfect, obedient Korean female. Yeong-hye is the only person in the novel who rebels and alters the previously assigned gender roles. As her behavior fractures the represented well-established Korean gender system, it is perceived as preposterous and absurd by all members of her family. It is important to note that other females do not object to the mistreatment of Yeong-hye by males in her family. According to Han Kang, it is also crucial to know that Korean society is collective (Lee, 2016, p.66). In such a society, the needs and desires of an individual, represented by Yeong-hye, are perceived as inferior and irrelevant in contrast to the needs of the larger group, such as family or the whole society. This notion of collectiveness is visible in the description of Mr. Cheong's company dinner. His male colleagues are not only surprised by Yeong-hye's diet but also disapprove of it. In the context of collective society, it becomes visible that colleagues of Mr. Cheong perceived her diet as unusual because it was different from what they were used to and familiar with. They did not treat it, just as Mr. Cheong, as a rebellion, but instead as an exception of the rule or deviation of the norm that they were not able to understand.

After her husband's acts of rape, the beatings of her father, and force-feeding, Yeong-hye realizes that her body has stopped being hers and is merely a vessel. The colonization of her own body is the reason for Yeong-hye to believe in being a plant. According to scholars, "[t]he fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body as real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the 'literal' and 'the real'" (Doncu, 2017, p.333). In the case of Yeong-hye, her fantasized body of a plant is bound with her

fantasy of a non-cruel world. Her detachment from meat, animals, animal products, and even people (as she believed that the human body smells like meat) (Kang, 2015, p.24) is, in fact, a symbolic detachment from the pain and cruelty that she had to endure for so long. She chooses to live as a plant because for her plants do not hurt others; her realization is referred to by scholars as an "empathetic realization" (Stobie, 2017, p. 794). It is her effort to retrieve and control her body. According to Han Kang, violence is part of being human, and people often struggle with accepting that they are one of those human beings (Lee, 2016, p.64). Yeong-hye is an ideal example of someone who cannot accept that she can be a source of cruelty. She chooses not to add any cruelty to the already cruel world. She tries to free herself from pain and assumes the identity of an organism that cannot cause pain to others.

It is interesting to observe the difference between the two lives that Yeong-hye lives throughout the novel. In the first life, the life she did not choose but was rather assigned to her, she was the "angel in the house". The second life, the life of the vegetarian, was the life that she chose for herself as a result of her own self-development. The first life, even though painful and submissive, was socially accepted, while the second life, in which she was finally free, was frowned upon. The disapproval of her second life was directly bound to a patriarchal system. It was perceived as shameful and ridiculous as a binary opposition to the representation of Korean standards in the novel. The two life models of Yeong-hye refer to Timothy Morton's distinction between Life and "life" (Morton, 2017, pp.43-49). Life (with a capital L) is linked with the science of logic (standard usage of the letter L). Logic, according to Morton, and as established earlier by philosophers such as Aristotle, does not like any type of ambiguity. In that case, it can be assumed that it works in accordance with the binary oppositions following one of the three laws of thought, mainly the law of excluded middle. Thus, Morton's Life is the opposite of death. Life and death are strictly defined against what they are not. If we treat Life and death as binary oppositions, together they form a complete unit. In this imagined complete unit, we can acknowledge birth as the starting point and death as a closing element. Enclosed between those metaphorical boundaries, we find the whole period of a human's life. The binary opposition of Morton's Life and death can be observed only in theory. Thus, he introduces his concept of non-binary "life" which refers to the ambiguity deprived of logic. "life" is defined by everything between Life and death, by the middle zone, Morton cleverly named "shades of gray." In "life," nothing is simply black and white.

The first life of Yeong-hye is a Life with a capital L. It is based on the binary opposition of life and death. According to this logic, she should have been happy about her life according to Korean standards because she was alive. She was supposed to be a passive follower of the well-established collective society and mindlessly fit into her assigned gender role of being a daughter and, later on, a wife. Defying those standards and yearning for something more than just being alive and trying to go beyond those patterns automatically rendered Yeong-hye crazy in the eyes of society. However, from the beginning, Yeong-hye wanted to live a "life" that assumed more than only two possibilities. A life that enables her to live through what Morton calls the "excluded middle spectral realm" (Morton, 2017, p. 44). A life in which she can be an equal partner to her husband, a Mrs. Cheong to Mr. Cheong. Her first life, Life with a capital L, was for Yeong-hye, not worth living. After

the controversial family dinner, she realizes that her body is not hers and that she has no authority over any decisions. She decides to make one last decision, and she attempts to commit suicide. She realized that her life cannot be based only on surviving, on performing an assigned role she does not intend to. Her attempt, in Yeong-hye's eyes, to regain sovereignty of her body and life puts her in a mental hospital. If Yeong-hye had been allowed to live her second life fully as a "life," without the family pressure, objectification, and sexual exploitation, she would not have ended up in a hospital. However, according to scholars, "it is not surprising to find that the "angel in the house" of literature frequently suffered not just from fear and trembling but from literal and figurative sicknesses unto death."(Gilbert and Gubar, 2020, p.55). It seems like, in the case of Yeong-hye, the influence of the past on her presence was too strong and rendered her ability to embrace a new life.

When analyzing Yeong-hye's fight with the patriarchal system, one needs to focus on the "anxiety of authorship" by Gilbert and Gubar. The concept is contrary to "anxiety of influence" by Harold Bloom. Yeong-hye's job is described to the readers in the first chapter, written from the point of view of Mr Cheong. Due to this literary decision, the readers are able to familiarize themselves not only with Yeong-hye's job but also with Mr.Cheong's opinion concerning his wife's job. He mentions her part-time job as a comic writer only once throughout the chapter and diminishes it merely to writing the words for the speech bubbles (Kang, 2015, p.12). He does not seem interested in any aspects of her job. The most important thing for Mr. Cheong is that his wife works from home, meaning her job as a comic writer does not affect her job as a wife. Mr. Cheong discourages her interest in reading, believing that literature is a waste of time. He claims that she reads books "that looked so dull I couldn't even bring myself to so much as take a look inside the covers" (Kang, 2015, p.13). In the context of the whole novel and the patriarchal nature of the relationship between Mr. Cheong and Yeong-hye, it is visible that in the eyes of Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye is just an ordinary woman who is unable to create work that can ever equal the work created by a man. Her interests, like her opinions, are perceived as irrelevant and dull. Mr. Cheong is afraid that, just as Gilbert and Gubar claim, freeing female creativity equals becoming free from male domination (2020, p.82).

The "anxiety of authorship" is also visible in the way Han Kang, the author of *The Vegetarian*, constructed the novel. Although Yeong-hye is the central character of the novel, she does not narrate the chapters. The intentional narrating strategy highlights Yeong-hye's lack of voice in her marriage and family and the represented of Korean society. Her words are rarely heard, so she expresses herself through actions. Yeong-hye, just like female writers, needs to revise and redefine herself to create her true self (Gilbert, Gubar, 2020, p.49). Even though her transformation will most certainly end in her death, her bravery cannot be ignored. By standing up for herself, she gave an example to others. In the last chapter, when Yeong-hye is already in the hospital, In-hye admits that her sister was able to escape the prison of reality. She claims, "Before Yeong-hye had broken those[prison] bars, she'd never even known they were there" (Kang, 2015, p.148). Similarly, Han Kang escaped from the prison of reality by defeating her own "anxiety of authorship." Her book talks about notions, that are rarely described in the books written by men. She is not afraid to write about male dominance, gender violence, or rape, even though she is aware of criticism for her portrayal of men. That is why the "anxiety of authorship"

in *The Vegetarian* is a multilayered concept, which could be analyzed even more, however, only with a prior knowledge of the Korean version of the text not altered by the creative approach of the translator.

CONCLUSION

Yeong-hye's story presented in the English translation of *The Vegetarian* is a story of a woman's fight with patriarchal society. It is the story of a woman who, regardless of various constrictions, could never act and live her life the way she wanted to. She started life as an obedient daughter and continued it as an obedient wife. She was first manipulated and beaten by her father, only to end up marrying a tormentor who acted the same way. Her transformation starts as a protest against control but continues as a protest against pain, suffering, and cruelty. During her journey, she is the one accused of being a monster, while her aggressors pretend to be the victims. Thus, her passiveness becomes a silent protest against violence in the cruel world. However, if we take into consideration the phrase, "Before we women can write, we must "kill" the "angel in the house" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2020, p.17), it becomes clear that only by her rebellion she was able to create her own identity on her terms.

The findings of this paper pertain not only to the novel *The Vegetarian* but can also be applied to a broader discussion of gender roles within a family as well as the impact of the notion of patriarchy on an individual. Analysis of Yeong-hye's fight with patriarchy gives readers insight into the relation between societal expectations and constraints of personal autonomy. The study can be, therefore, used to analyze similar literary works containing the themes of power dynamics within a relationship or female oppression. Moreover, the implications of this study can be further used in societal discussions regarding women's lives in the contemporary world.

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