



Postmodern Consumerism and the Construction of Self in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, focusing on the protagonist Yeong-hye's radical transformation and its implications within capitalist and patriarchal structures. Employing Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and Fredric Jameson's theory of postmodern consumer culture, the study explores how Yeong-hye's rejection of meat consumption symbolizes resistance against commodification and societal norms. Her metamorphosis into a plant-like state reflects a profound alienation from a society that objectifies individuals, particularly women, reducing them to consumable entities. This transformation challenges traditional notions of identity and autonomy, highlighting the dehumanizing effects of consumer capitalism. However, the analysis problematizes the efficacy of Yeong-hye's resistance, considering whether her withdrawal signifies empowerment or a retreat into passivity. In the end, it suggests that personal freedom matters more to a person than following traditions in a consumer-driven society. Ultimately, it

implies that individual autonomy is more important for an individual than tradition in consumer culture.

Keywords: Postmodern, commodity fetishism, consumer culture, self

Introduction

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* explores an ordinary woman, Yeong-hye, her position in Korean society and culture, and her social and psychological transmutation. This Nobel Prize-awarded novel disseminates the story of a South Korean woman who becomes a vegetarian by her choice. She decides to become a vegetarian, not only as a dietary change but also as a rejection of societal norms and expectations. The novel describes the story of desire. The repressed desire is an outburst due to her uncanny dream forcing her to change the pattern of her food habits. Consequently, her decision creates conflict and distress within her family and society and shows the act of revolt against Korean meat consumer culture. The story of the novel is presented in three parts, and each part is narrated by different characters who interact with Yeong-hye: her husband, her brother-in-

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law, and her sister.

Yeong-hye's sudden decision to stop eating meat creates friction and confusion in her family. She opines, "Meat eating is a fundamental human instinct, which means vegetarianism goes against human nature, right? It just isn't natural" (Kang 26). Her husband is astonished and frustrated by his inability to understand his wife. This act of rejection bewilders those around her. There is a shift from the narrator's husband to her brother-in-law. Yeong-hye's brother-in-law is a video artist who is obsessed with her body, particularly because of the Mongolian mark on her buttock. He sees her as a canvas for his artwork. Kang illustrates that "He reproached himself for having used her as a kind of mental pornography" (68). The infatuation of the body leads his brother-in-law to force Yeong-hye to perform like a model without her desire. This photograph is for the sake of promoting his business. The story presents a kind of disconnection between Yeong-hye and her physical reality because her body has been the means for marketing for others. The decision of Yeong-hye to quit meat and the commodification of her body by her brother-in-law distorts her physical and mental health. Then, In-hye, Yeong-hye's sister, takes care of her physically and mentally disturbed sister at the end of the novel. Yeong-hye starts performing strange and uncommon activities. She struggles and wishes to become a tree or plant. The story shows her total rejection of family and society by debunking the social norms and convention-oriented values of human life. Ultimately, it leads to the conversion to the world of plants.

The study explores Yeong-hye's rejection and challenge to the rigid structures of patriarchal society and its consequences. Her society does not recognize her role and identity, as she says, "No one can understand me" (131). Society fails to understand her because she challenges societal norms. Yeong-hye's alienation and fragmentation

are the results of a society dominated by commodification and postmodern consumerism. Food consumption is a social status marker. She struggles to control her body, rejecting societal expectations. As a result, she has faced complex and fragile mental health. The novel presents the inherent violence within human beings in their everyday lives. All these factors force her to live a life of complete alienation and fragmentation, challenging the social framing.

This paper analyzes Yeong-hye's self with the theoretical framework of Karl Marx and Frederic Jameson. Marx's concept of commodity fetishism gives social relations as obscured and distorted in the material world. Yeong-hye's decision not to eat meat is a kind of protest of social and economic power, which can be interpreted as a rejection of fetishized reality. Jameson's concept of postmodern consumer society highlights the loss of historical depth (forgetting history), dominance of simulacra (constructed image), and the emotional detachment and surreal experience. Yeong-hye forgets her past as she stops behaving like a human being, and she wishes to be a tree. She lives in a world where her body itself becomes a commodity.

This study incorporates an introduction, a theoretical analysis of the text, and a conclusion. First, it examines Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and Yeong-hye's alienation and its application to how her body has been commodified throughout the text. Second, it deals with the protagonist's fragmented self in a consumer-driven society. Third, it analyzes Yeong-hye's body as a site of resistance and fragmentation. It delves into her desire for complete transformation to escape from human commodification. Yeong-hye is unable to control her body and actions in a postmodern society in which consumerism results in the loss of authenticity. Ultimately, the paper discusses the novel as the product of commodification and postmodern

consumer culture.

Review of Literature

The novel highlights South Korean society, its norms and values, male and female roles in everyday life, and their attachment to culture and nature. It invites extensive critical attention for its exploration of gender, culture, and social and economic aspects. Scholars have examined the novel through diverse sociocultural, natural, and thematic lenses.

Roshni Chauhan frames Yeong-hye's vegetarianism as a postmodern deviance, arguing that "noncompliance, the mere profession of a different thought, is considered a point of deviance" (165) in patriarchal societies. Likewise, Atchaya Devi explains Yeong-hye's dietary resistance as feminist agency. She argues, "The protagonist uses vegetarianism as a form of feminist resistance to establish our agency ... the refusal to conform would eventually create otherness" (1570). Atchaya Devi posits that Yeong-hye's internal impulse to defy conventions serves as a form of resistance, challenging feminist patriarchy and food practices. Bishnu Prasad Pokharel views that "rejecting meat becomes an act of rebellion against the male-dominated systems and anthropocentric beliefs that encourage the suppression of women and nature" (39). The novel reflects Yeong-hye's resistance in an anthropocentric society to value social aspects.

This study examines cases of nature, power, and women, using their bodies and nature in parallel as sites of control and resistance. Nature aligns with women, their power, and their bodies. Rincy Chauhan writes, "The novel investigates man's colonization of nature and women's bodies ... considering both as objects" (21). She further makes an ecofeminist analysis and writes, "In Yeong-hye and Mr. Cheong's marriage, men's superior power over women and women's loss of identity and suppressed state are clearly illustrated" (26). Similarly, Jasmine Anand connects the idea of violence

with patriarchy by saying, "She (Yeong-hye) deconstructs the idea of violence and refuses the patriarchal and capitalist system around her by imagining herself as a plant gradually" (69). Simon Estok reinforces the interdependence between women and nature, stating, "Carnivores and patriarchal power are mutually independent, and challenging one means challenging the other ... the challenges come from a woman" (121). Yeong-hye's suppressed femininity with submission and passivity emerges as a forceful, dominant, and rebellious power. "Nature plays a significant role, serving as a catalyst that reveals the true essence of the characters" (Soujanya 64). We describe the two sisters as employing nature in the present world, connecting the nature-friendly system, and highlighting the significance of animal-friendly conventions.

The narrative structures and thematic layers unveil multiple interpretations of the novels. Ayush Chakraborti analyzes the novel from a narrative point of view: "Han Kang, through the tripartite narratological structure, contemplates the human condition and embraces the concept of plurality ... ethical and responsible relationship with the differences of the world" (10). On the other hand, Paola Bica interprets the novel as an allegory: "*The Vegetarian* by Han Kang is a case of postmodern allegory, as the reader has access to a new possible interpretation of what is written, a metaphorical interpretation" (56). The allegory aligns with the feminist power of rejection. As the novel has been translated into English from the Korean language, translation politics further develop a new layer for interpretations. Min Young Godly writes, "In the larger context of the colonial history of Korean nationalism, ... anti-imperial resistance has historically led to the silencing of women's voices in the context of preserving and transmitting Korean culture to an international audience" (194). The translation of the novel attracts international attention to women, their

activities, and their expressions.

Furthermore, the critics have analyzed the novel in terms of sympathy, empathy, and mental psyche. Won-Chung Kim analyzes suffering as a form of resistance, stating, "We witness the mercilessness and cruelty of patriarchal meat-eating society against which Yeong-hye is fighting" (9). Her struggle reflects the complexities females face to overcome the structured conventions. "The novel reflects the limitations of a 'feeling politics,' which continues to prevail ... the text's explanation of animality facilitates an evaluation of intra- and interspecies relationships" (Sands 324). This illustrates animal-vegetal empathy for the well-being of all the beings of society. Hakyung Ahn is confused about whether Yeong-hye's sexual encounters with her brother-in-law are empowerment or exploitation. In response to the sexual scenes between young Yeong-hye and her artist brother-in-law, he talks about "the complexities and fallacies of individual sexual resistance and empowerment" (277) in the novel. Thus, critical assertions dig out the multi-layered interpretations concerning the theme and structure of the novel.

The existing study explores postmodern deviance, dietary resistance, narratological structure, colonial history, ecological awareness, anthropocentric and patriarchal colonization of women and nature, and the refusal of capitalist norms. Additionally, critics argue that the novel serves as a postmodern allegory, critiques carnivorousism as a patriarchal construct, and represents female characters through their relationships with nature. Moreover, other critics focus on the narrative's tripartite structure, the concept of plurality, and the socio-political implications of translation in post-colonial society. However, these studies have overlooked Yeong-hye's psychologically disintegrated self as a direct consequence of the systematic physical and psychological operation of modern society. This research aims to address the gap by analyzing

the protagonist's transformation through fragmented and alienated self within postmodern consumer culture.

Theoretical Framework

Marxist Commodification and Alienation

Karl Marx believes that in a capitalist society, objects become more than just things. They possess a fetish quality, which means people value them for their social status and image rather than their actual use. The identities and values become wrapped up in the things they buy in the world, where the pursuit of material possession becomes the primary goal of human activity, leading to alienation and the loss of meaning. As a result, the constant focus on buying and having stuff leaves people feeling empty and disconnected.

For Marx, the commodity form obscures the true nature of the labour process that produces it. "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because, in it, the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour" (668). Yeong-hye is an ordinary South Korean woman. She enjoys living her life in her way. Against her choice, she is forced to eat meat by her family members because they believe "meat eating is the fundamental human instinct ... Vegetarianism goes against human nature, right? It isn't natural" (26). The evidence shows that meat consumption is naturalized. Yeong-hye's refusal disrupts this natural world.

Marx argues that commodities appear to have an independent existence in capitalist societies. "For them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects that rule the producers instead of being ruled by them" (760). The focus is on the object itself, forgetting the labour, power dynamics, and social meanings in the process of its creation and distribution. Yeong-hye lives in the meat-eating culture, so her husband says, "My mother-in-law brought in dishes of stir-fried beef, sweet and sour pork, steamed chicken, and

octopus noodles, arranging them on the table in front from my wife" (37). Korean people commonly accept meat in everyday dishes of their daily life. Her father tried to convince her to eat meat, and upon her refusal, "He shook her off and thrust the pork at my wife's lips" (40). This depicts the forceful imposition of meat, a cultural commodity, on Yeong-hye, with the social pressure to consume. Meat is considered a symbol of social and economic power, and a refusal to eat it makes her alone and isolated from the mainstream society and culture.

Jameson's Postmodern Consumerism

Jameson extends Marx's critique to postmodernism, describing it as the late capitalist ideology, where culture itself has become a commodity. "The new postmodernism expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism" (1760). Late capitalism has transformed culture itself into a commodity. It focuses on science, images, and experiences, overshadowing material production. People value commodities not only for their functional or monetary worth but also for their symbolic meaning and capacity to signal identity behind their production, which becomes invisible. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on style over substance, reflects the superficiality and fragmentation of the late capitalist society.

Jameson argues that culture is a product for mass consumption, losing its deeper original meaning. In the postmodern era, cultural artifacts like art, music, and literature were no longer valued for their unique intrinsic qualities but are instead created, marketed, and consumed like commercial goods. Culture in postmodernism has lost its true original value; rather, it has inscribed the commodity value that "contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way" (1762). The cultural forms are shaped by the demands of the market rather than by authentic, artistic, or philosophical pursuits. Thus,

postmodernism erases the boundary between art and commerce, emphasizing surface and style over substance, generating homogenization.

Jameson argues that consumerism is sign exchange value. In a consumer society, individuals define their identities through the commodities they purchase and consume. People's choices are shaped by capitalist systems. This leads to the search for multiple ways to get financial well-to-do status. The Marxist concept of fetishism reveals that these identities are built on alienation and exploitation. In digital consumer culture, social media platforms, for example, commodify identity by turning personal expression into marketable content. The choice an individual makes as a consumer, the brand he or she wears, the gadgets he or she owns, and the food he or she eats become expressions of who he or she is. Hence, the individual becomes a consumer of experiences, identities, and goods rather than a producer of culture and societal essence.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*: Critical Analysis

Postmodernism in The Vegetarian

The Vegetarian depicts Jameson's argument that culture becomes a commodity by showing how Yeong-hye's body and her rejection of societal norms are commodified. Her brother-in-law's artistic project, where he paints flowers on her naked body, turns her body into a canvas, a product of his artistic desire. Her body turns into an object, or canvas, for her brother-in-law when he says, "I would like you to model for me ... Take your clothes off... I'm going to paint flowers" (70). Her body is no longer her own. She has become a medium for the artist's expression and commercial gain.

Yeong-hye's decision or action to be naked is not rooted in sexuality, though the outsiders see it as about morality and shame, leading her to cultural commodification. Her brother-in-law believes, "She doesn't seem like a prostitute" (91). He uses her

body as a spectacle for sign exchange value. Her deviance or alienation becomes a form of entertainment or shock, a kind of cultural commodity.

Both critics highlight the erosion of authentic social and cultural value within a commodified society, "Marx argues that people are obsessed with the things they buy and the articles of utility become commodities" (669). They forget that these things are made by real people who work hard, often in poor conditions. This obsession distorts the reality of how it is created. Similarly, Jameson observes how culture itself becomes a commodity, and the commodification of culture leads to the loss of authenticity. This is manifested using parodies and pastiches. "Both pastiche and parody involve the imitation or, better still, the mimicry of other styles, and particularly of the mannerisms and stylistic twitches" (1760). Pastiche imitates the other styles without a meaning or connection to the past. This superficiality and fragmentation of late capitalist society are reflected in the novel when Yeong-hye is alienated from her family, her body, and societal expectations. She is unrecognizable to those closest to her. Mr. Cheong says, "She was a woman of few words" (11). Her silence and passivity make her difficult to understand, distancing her even from her husband.

Yeong-hye's wish to transform into a tree isolates her from her body. She attempts to convince her sister In-hye and says, "All the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters" (121). She seeks solace in nature by rejecting the human world and relationships. She sees herself differently from others in her family and society. "No one can understand me ... the doctors, the nurses—they're all the same... they don't try to understand... they just force me to take medication and stab me with needles" (131). She finds that society, through medical authority, tries to control her. She internalizes her alienation and helplessness to plants. She considers, "Leaves are growing out of my

body; roots are sprouting out of my hands" (108). She fully embraces a non-human existence by rejecting human identity. She attempts to transcend human existence as a rejection of the consumer culture and acceptance of individual autonomy.

Consumer Culture in The Vegetarian

Consumer culture transforms the nature of the people from food as a use value to food as a status marker value. Consequently, the nature of consumption shifts from common places to branded restaurants. Jameson argues that consumer culture reduces individuals to surfaces, eroding depth and authenticity, "In the age of corporate capitalism, ... the older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists" (1762). The individuals cannot act independently, but rather, they have to follow what others have followed. Subsequently, there is erosion of individual autonomy and promotion of commodification. The individual identity is lost within a corporate culture, structure, and mass consumption. Yeong-hye's body becomes a commodity for art promotion. Her brother-in-law objectifies her for artistic consumption, and her family treats her culturally rather than individually. Her brother-in-law used "her as a kind of mental pornography when she simply had an innocent wish to be naked" (68). Her desire to exist in her natural state is filmed, and this shows the dehumanizing aspects of a consumer-driven society. She is the means for exchange value promotion.

Societal expectations are deeply interwoven with consumerist values. The individuals are expected to readily accept and follow such values without any questions or acts of rebellion. Yeong-hye's husband expects his wife to be an ordinary human, but he finds her "completely unremarkable in every way" (10) because he does not notice any value in her. Her actions and desires are not easily replaceable commodities of mass culture. The consumer-driven culture cannot accept

her as a form of social currency because she cannot live without challenging the prevailing norms. Her defiance is the means for social transformation from consumer culture to distinct individual essence.

Consumption is human nature, and as it transforms into the corporate-consuming culture, it derives mass for exercise. The consumption of meat in her family and society is a "fundamental human instinct" (26), and they do not like to avoid this convention. They cannot imagine food or nutrition without meat. In this context, meat transcends nutritional value, and it becomes a symbol of tradition, family status, and behavior. This concept implies that individuals should consume not only social products but also ideological and traditional products. Her family's reaction to her vegetarianism is a kind of societal pressure. Her mother-in-law's preparation of meat dishes and her father-in-law's violent attempt to force-feed the pork signify the existing social norms. But she "growled and spat out the meat" (40). This suggests that enforced consumption is not a natural and biological need but the enforcement of corporate culture.

Commodification converts humans into non-human beings to promote the corporate mission. Yeong-hye's body becomes a site of commodification when her brother-in-law desires to paint flowers on her naked body and take a film for business promotion. He convinces her to "keep the paint on until the filming is over" (70). Promotion of artistic production is more important for him than art. This artistic consumption considers her physically being an object for his creative and commercial act. Her brother-in-law's desire "to film her naked" (79) and her readiness to have "gotten undressed" (89) signify the extent of corporate culture. The body is less important in this culture, but rather the value it generates is more important than natural art. Then, he "asked her to take her clothes off" (89), explicitly mirroring the way consumer culture reduces

individuals to objects of visual consumption. This is the process of commodification of the human to the non-human aspect. This reflects how a consumer society turns the most intimate aspects of an individual's life into a commodity. Annihilation of humanity is the core idea of consumer culture.

The lifestyle of Yeong-hye is a refusal of the consumer culture, but she is forced to accept being naked to promote the business of the capitalist society. She has to submerge herself in the convention. What she enjoys and accepts in her life is perceived as a rejection of societal norms and values. Her society wants to consume her, but she refuses the consumer-driven world, and she desires to become "a hybrid of plant, animal, and human" (98). The willingness to be a part of plants and animals is the by-product of her resistance to ideology. This indicates her chosen lifestyle outside the cycle of production and consumption.

Yeong-hye's ultimate desire to become a tree is her complete transformation and rejection of violence and control of human society. She denies the system that treats her as an autonomous being. Her transformation is possible through alienation and autonomy in dietary choices. Her family and society condemn her existence, freedom, and choice. So, she is alienated from herself. She realizes the dictation for her is not help or support but rather a form of oppression, control, and a means to make her powerless.

Transformation of Yeong-hye

Yeong-hye's life journey depicts a progressive change from traditional norms to autonomy and independence. This transformation has undergone various turns and twists in her life, beginning from being a "completely unremarkable" (10) vegetarian woman to her desire for a plant-like existence, having empathy for animals and plants. Her decision to become a vegetarian is a radical departure from the expectations of her family and society, mirroring what Jameson describes as the postmodern "death of the subject" (1761),

where traditional individualism dissolves into fragmented identities. The foundation for this transformation is her unusual dream: "The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there" (47). This dream triggers her rejection of meat, and her behavior becomes increasingly unconventional. Her determination is the catalyst for conversion.

Her rejection of dress codes, as "she did not like wearing a bra" (11), reflects her discomfort with societal expectations. It gradually increases to nudity. She had no difficulty when "she was coming out of the bathroom ... she was naked" (66). The rejection of the dress code is the point for transformation to independence, and her body is her choice. This autonomy is eroded when she allows her body to be painted with flowers, turning herself into a "commodified artistic creation" (Jameson 1766). She avoids having sex with her husband, but she is ready to paint flowers on her naked body and to be filled in when they are "actually having sexual relations" (88). He convinces her to model for him so that his true desire to film them having sex is fulfilled. These activities show a gradual erosion of her engagement with accepted roles and behaviors in her society and an inclination to individuality.

The objectification of her physical being commodified artistic creation, highlighting a crucial aspect of her transformation. She has lost her individual and physical identity when she is ready to paint flowers on her naked body. She has turned herself into a canvas for the artist. "Her naked body covered with painted flowers" (55) suggests that her body is not her own. She has transformed her nudity into something fetishized. "The two features of postmodernism are ... the transformation of reality into images and the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (Jameson 1771). The description of the painted flowers as "more vegetal than sexual" (74) is associated with her ultimate desire to transcend human form into something symbolic. This means that

in postmodern society, people experience reality through imagery rather than originals. This emblematic transformation leads her out of the box for independent choice.

The imagery of leaves growing from her body represents her complete physical, psychological, and existential transformation. She dissociates herself from human existence and fully identifies with plant life. The longing for the transformation from human to plant has the value of human to ecological awareness. She asserts, "Leaves are growing out of my body. Roots are sprouting from my hands" (108). This is the complete transformation from biological self to the plant cell. It signifies the complete fragmentation of her human identity. Jameson might interpret it as a response to the "hyperreal" (1764) nature of postmodern existence, where authentic selfhood is replaced by simulations. She declares, "Words and thoughts will disappear soon" (129), indicating the total rejection of human communication and thought. This is the point of objectification. Her wish to "turn herself upside down again" (134) symbolizes an act of protest against the normal world. This represents a non-human identity. The transformation from subjectivity to objectivity symbolizes the process from reliance to independence.

Thus, this study infers the complete transformation of the protagonist from family lover to plant lover, from dependency to autonomy, and from women within social constraints to self-governing beings. Her rejection of meat-eating culture, her rejection of dress code, and her sexual relations indicate her conversion from a social being to a sovereign and self-directed being. The painting of the flowers on the body indicates the objectivity of the body. This objectivity is a sign of transformation. This study asserts physical, social, and psychological transformation of the protagonist to convey the message that repression generates awareness that, in turn,

opens up the avenue for transformation. The rejection of the conventions is the refusal of consumer conventions. This study reflects Yeong-hye's difficulty in resisting a society based on postmodern consumer culture. Her rebellion against her family, society, and culture leads her to isolation, misunderstanding, and mental illness. She claims she is struggling against the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy and consumerism. She is unable to enjoy her true freedom in a world where people are examined and evaluated in terms of production and consumption. This study reasons that Yeong-hye's body and identity are commodified with the idea of commodity fetishism by Marx. In a capitalist society, people are valued not for their relations but for their symbolic value. It is found that meat is not just taken as food; it denotes social norms, culture, patriarchal power, and economic control. Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat is not only a bodily act to lose weight but also a kind of rejection of the social norms or system concerning consumption or consumerism. The extreme value of consumerism leads from subjectivity to materialism. She lives her life in an oppressive way, which can be clear from her father's violence that she should eat pork. This symbolizes the brutal enforcement of societal expectations. This resistance makes Yeong-hye an outsider and alienated from her family, society, and culture. Therefore, in a materialistic society, consuming culture remains a status marker.

Conclusion

This study unveils Yeong-hye's alienation, resistance, and defiance in a consumer-driven society of South Korea, unfolding all the details of how Yeong-hye was influenced by the postmodern capitalist culture. It traces the way she was relegated to a mere commodity by stripping off her autonomy and individual choice. The protagonist defies societal normative values and smugness by her own unexpected

decision to become a vegetarian. Her rejection of eating meat was, in a sense, a metaphorical rebellion against a deeply entrenched society that consumes meat. She ultimately desires to change herself into a plant. The longing for the transformation is ultimately the longing for autonomy.

Yeong-hye's fractured self is examined through the lens of Jameson's ideas about the postmodern consumer culture. The modern world of consumer culture treats all tangible and intangible objects, including art and personal identity, as commodities. Such commodified products have to be fit for the exchange and sign exchange value. In the novel *The Vegetarian*, the painting of flowers on Yeong-hye's naked body by her brother-in-law illustrates a glaring example of commodification. He uses her body to gain material prosperity. This reduces her body to a thing like a canvas. She becomes an object for artistic consumption. She becomes a spectacle rather than an individual. This devalues culture, which becomes shallow and is dominated by images rather than real human beings. Therefore, the metamorphosis from a human being to a non-human automaton forms a base for the modern culture that the protagonist resists, and then she transforms herself into a self-regulating individual through disobedience, alienation, and self-respect.

This study concludes that the novel is not just about a woman's refusal to follow every social rule and cultural value but is also an edification of the value of living in a world that denies individualism and autonomy. Yeong-hye's tragic end suggests that there is loss and depletion of human dignity in the society that prioritizes only profit and control. In such a dehumanizing society, she demonstrates her free will, breaking away from all kinds of social prescriptions and transforming herself from a commodified human being to an emancipated individual.

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