

Dissolving silence and resisting despair: a study on the “botanization” of women in Han Kang’s *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract. Han Kang’s *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian* are companion pieces of feminist writing, both centering on the “botanization” of women as a primary narrative device. However, despite their shared focus on the existential plight of East Asian women, the two works diverge significantly in thematic direction. This paper conducts a comparative study from five dimensions: thematic focus, strategies of resistance, social critique, philosophical implications, and the symbolic meanings of the endings, in order to identify the differences in how the two novels represent feminist “botanization.” The study finds that the former emphasizes loneliness and self-effacement within marital relationships, expressing an existential solitude through an inward turn of the body toward plant-like transformation. In contrast, the latter expands into a systemic indictment of patriarchy and societal discipline, using outwardly directed bodily self-destruction to challenge structures of social violence, and is marked by a strong ecofeminist tone. The progression in artistic expression and depth of thought between the two works reflects Han Kang’s sustained concern for the social existence of East Asian women. Together, they form a philosophical inquiry into the dehumanization of women amid the modernization process, a recurring motif throughout Han Kang’s literary corpus.

Keywords: Han Kang, *The Fruit of My Woman*, *The Vegetarian*, botanization, feminism

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, trees have embodied rich symbolic meanings and spiritual connotations. In Daoism, trees represent a bridge connecting heaven and earth; in Buddhism, the body is likened to the bodhi tree, and the mind to a bright mirror. In Christianity, the “Tree of Life” appears in the *Book of Genesis*. As mythology evolved, trees came to symbolize the convergence of vitality, serving as mediators between the natural and the supernatural. In the preface to *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Carl Jung uses the metaphor of plant rhizomes to explore the ceaseless cycle of life and civilization. As a conduit of life force, the tree fosters spiritual elevation and guides the soul toward redemption, reflecting its profound influence in both cultural and spiritual realms. The “botanization” of women, as a symbol with multilayered meaning, pervades the works of South Korean author Han Kang across different stages of her writing career. It has become one of her distinctive literary narrative techniques. Her 1997 novella *The Fruit of My Woman* and the 2007 novel *The Vegetarian* are widely regarded as companion pieces. Though both center on the metamorphosis of the female body into plant form, the surreal imagery of “botanization” differs greatly in artistic value and expressive form between the two. Current scholarship tends to focus more on *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang’s representative work, while the earlier *The Fruit of My Woman*, which received the Korean Novel Literature Award, has received comparatively little public attention. Some have even mistakenly conflated the two, overlooking their differing artistic merits. This paper aims to conduct a close textual and comparative analysis of the two works, drawing on feminist theory to delve into their unique artistic appeal and philosophical connections in portraying the “botanization” of women. In doing so, it seeks to trace the intellectual development of Han Kang’s feminist writing from its early manifestations to its more mature expressions. Thus, an examination of the plant imagery in these works provides a compelling lens through which to understand the trajectory of Han Kang’s literary vision as a whole [1].

2. Divergence in thematic focus: marital loneliness vs. confrontation with social violence

The Fruit of My Woman and *The Vegetarian* both center on the process of women's alienation, using it as the main narrative thread. However, in terms of thematic scope, the two works diverge significantly—one presents a microcosmic view while the other offers a macro-level critique. The former is set within the intimate space of a marital relationship, using the husband's emotional coldness and the wife's silence to portray the gradual withering of love within marriage. The wife's transformation from a bruised human body into a plant metaphorically expresses an individual's "voicelessness" and "isolation" within the marital structure. In contrast, *The Vegetarian* presents Yeong-hye's "botanization" as a result not merely of marital strife, but as a symptom of the systemic oppression of women under a patriarchal social order encompassing family, marriage, and broader societal norms.

In *The Fruit of My Woman*, Han Kang crafts a highly symbolic narrative about a "wife" who becomes increasingly disconnected from reality and eventually transforms into a plant. Throughout the story, the protagonist remains unnamed, known only by the role of "wife," confined to the domestic space and communicating solely with her "husband." Before marriage, she had once been a free-spirited woman who yearned for a life as unrestrained as the wind, even dreaming of studying abroad. Marriage, however, forced her to relinquish those aspirations—an act that profoundly illustrates the systematic deprivation of female subjectivity within traditional marriage. As the narrative unfolds, the husband's attitude toward her displays classic signs of objectification: he loses all desire for her body but takes comfort in her obedient and undemanding nature. This contradictory perception exposes the dual alienation imposed on women under patriarchy—they are stripped of sexual desirability while being expected to remain submissive. The wife, in turn, falls into a loneliness "even greater than that of her husband." This emotional estrangement ultimately manifests through physical metamorphosis: "Her body began to take on a deep grassy green. Her pale blue face became smooth like the leaves of a broad-leaf evergreen. Her cabbage-like hair shimmered with the luster of wild grass stems. On her greenish face, a pair of eyes faintly flickered." [2] The wife regresses from a dream-filled individual into a functional entity within the household and ultimately evolves into a decorative "potted plant," symbolizing a terrifying transformation from a human wife to a botanical object. Ironically, the husband treats the plant-wife with more care than he ever afforded the human wife: he waters her, replaces her soil, fertilizes her, and even climbs a mountain every morning to fetch spring water for her legs. This grotesque irony underscores how, within marriage, a woman's subjectivity is gradually consumed and replaced by objectification. In real life, women are often regarded less as autonomous individuals with social value and more as utilitarian objects—receiving even less attention and care in their human form than they might as ornamental possessions. Through this extreme embodiment of bodily alienation, Han Kang takes the objectification of women in marriage to its logical extreme, completing a chilling narrative arc from "aspiring subject" to "observed object."

By contrast, *The Vegetarian* explores a deeper entanglement with patriarchal violence embedded in the social system. Yeong-hye is trapped in an intricate web of disciplinary structures formed by patriarchy, social norms, marriage systems, and cultural morality. The novel begins with her decision to become a vegetarian following a bloody nightmare—a choice that immediately draws fierce resistance from her husband. When she trembles and says twice, "I had a dream," the response she receives is indifference and impatience, highlighting the chasm of understanding, respect, and empathy that lies beneath the seemingly calm surface of their marriage. Yeong-hye's decision to stop eating meat is not simply a change in diet but a profound rejection of domestic violence and societal discipline. As a child, she witnessed her father riding a motorcycle while dragging their dog behind it until it died. The "pungent, gamy smell" of dog meat became a sensory vessel of traumatic memory. This trauma later triggered a pathological aversion to meat, which was both a symptom of PTSD and a symbolic rejection of systemic violence. Meat, in this context, represents the domination and exploitation of the weak by the powerful and mirrors the disciplinary force of male power over women [3]. Thus, Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat is a radical denial of the entire structure of social violence. Through a multi-perspective narrative, Han Kang portrays the inevitability of Yeong-hye's oppression. Her husband reduces her to a domestic tool; her brother-in-law projects his desire onto her body through his art; and her father stands as a symbol of violent patriarchal tradition. These interlocking systems of oppression ultimately drive Yeong-hye to the brink. She chooses to resist through "botanization," a poetic yet tragic mode of being that becomes her final and most radical act of defiance against social violence. This self-destructive rebellion is both an ultimate indictment of patriarchy and an extreme assertion of bodily autonomy.

3. The evolution of resistance strategies: from passive alienation to active rebellion

Resistance in Han Kang's works is never a linear or one-dimensional progression. Rather, it is a complex process fraught with contradictions and tensions. *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian* both employ the core metaphor of bodily "botanization" to represent distinct, yet interrelated, modes of resistance: the former depicts passive resistance through inward transformation, while the latter presents a radical defiance of social norms through deliberate and violent self-alienation. Though the two narratives share similar forms of bodily metamorphosis, they reveal different trajectories of female subjectivity—ranging from instinctive physical transformation to a conscious existential decision, from fleeing marital constraints to rejecting the patriarchal

system in its entirety. These dual forms of “botanization” mirror and complement one another, together tracing the development of feminist resistance in Han Kang’s writing from its inception to its maturation. In doing so, they expose both the tenacity of structural oppression in East Asian society and the unique paths through which women pursue freedom under extreme conditions.

In *The Fruit of My Woman*, the female protagonist enacts a silent form of resistance through inward bodily metamorphosis. In response to the suffocating pressure of marriage, she begins with a gesture of muteness. Her physical bruises slowly rise to the surface, culminating in a transformation from human to plant. Though this gradual change appears passive, it subverts traditional survival strategies available to oppressed women—rather than directly confronting her husband’s authority, she gradually removes herself from the marital relationship through self-alienation. When her skin turns rough and sprouts leaves, and when her feet appear to “take root in the earth,” she severs her connection with society entirely and completes a transformation from a socially defined “othered self” to a fully autonomous being. She attains a long-desired state of existence in which she can “live solely on wind, sunlight, and water” [4]. At this point, she is no longer a woman with agency, but a fully objectified being who poses no threat to male authority. The narrative of botanization thus underscores not only the fate of the female body as an object, but also the twisted logic of patriarchy: certain seemingly successful forms of rebellion are, paradoxically, welcomed by the oppressor as manageable forms of control. When women abandon the posture of resistance, they receive a distorted form of attention and care. This paradox powerfully illustrates both the absurdity of power dynamics and the limitations of passive resistance. The husband’s newfound tenderness—watering her, replacing her soil, even climbing mountains for spring water—reveals the disturbing irony that a woman, as a plant, may be valued more than as a person. Han Kang pushes this objectification to its extreme, charting a horrific metamorphosis from a dream-filled subject into a decorative object.

In contrast, Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian* represents the final, most radical form of the “plant woman”—the most thoroughly alienated, most deeply traumatized, and most fiercely rebellious figure in Han Kang’s oeuvre [5]. Her resistance unfolds progressively and is marked by initiative, extremity, and confrontation. From adopting vegetarianism to self-mutilation, from refusing to wear a bra to public nudity, and ultimately to voluntary starvation and complete “botanization,” each stage of Yeong-hye’s transformation carries the intensity of self-destructive defiance. This form of resistance stands in stark contrast to the passive transformation in *The Fruit of My Woman*. Each phase of Yeong-hye’s metamorphosis is the result of rational self-determination. She declares: “The only thing I can trust is my breasts, because they have no power to hurt anyone,” a statement that reveals her profound disillusionment with human identity and its inherent violence [6]. The extremity of Yeong-hye’s resistance derives from the complexity of the oppressive mechanisms she faces. When mild resistance fails, only self-destruction remains as a viable strategy to expose the nature of violent structures. In *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang employs the female body as a direct medium of resistance against patriarchy and the social systems built upon it. Through the bodily domain, she fuses life, gender, culture, and power, using the natural form of the body to revolt against the normative standards of civilization [7]. The destructiveness of Yeong-hye’s protest lies in her refusal to eat, which dismantles the biological basis for societal functioning. Her de-gendering erases scripted familial roles, and her “botanization” challenges the ontological assumptions of human existence. When social discipline, like a network of capillaries, permeates every detail of daily life, perhaps the most thorough form of rebellion is to reject being “human” altogether. This kind of resistance does not simply aim to escape oppression—it seeks to dismantle the material foundations that sustain disciplinary mechanisms. It embodies the radical potential of feminist revolt, one that not only deconstructs patriarchal logic but also exposes the pathological core of civilized society: that individual freedom often comes at the cost of relinquishing one’s social identity.

4. Dimensions of social critique: from emotional barren lands to institutional violence

While both *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian* embody critiques of modernity, they diverge sharply in the specific dimensions of their social criticism: the former focuses on emotional alienation between individuals in contemporary life, whereas the latter exposes the structural violence embedded within institutional systems. This divergence renders the two works mutually complementary, together forming a comprehensive and layered diagnosis of women’s lived realities in modern society. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, Han Kang primarily explores the sense of individual helplessness and the distorted vitality caused by misfortunes in intimate relationships and dysfunctional family dynamics. The protagonist’s objectification is not enacted through overt violence by her husband, but rather manifests in the emotional coldness and communicative void of their everyday life. Though the couple shares physical space, they exist in a suffocating emotional loneliness—her husband describes her as “still a lonely person,” while her isolation finds physical expression through her bodily metamorphosis. This emotional desolation reflects a paradox of modern marriage: although bound by the institutional framework of matrimony, couples often remain emotionally estranged. Such emotional barrenness is further symbolized by recurring urban imagery throughout the text—noisy cities, the roar of traffic, foul smells—representing the alienation of human nature by modern life. In stark contrast, the wife longs for elements of nature—wind, sunlight, water—which embody a purer, more instinctual mode of existence. Her yearning suggests that modern civilization has estranged humanity from its essential self, driving an ever-widening chasm between authenticity and progress. Through this depiction of emotional desertification, Han Kang reflects a pervasive symptom of

postmodern society: beneath the surface of material abundance, human relationships are undergoing a slow and devastating erosion of emotional connection.

As Michel Foucault argued, “In every society, the body is in the grip of very strict power constraints. Power imposes on it certain behaviors, obligations, and prohibitions.” [8] In contrast to *The Fruit of My Woman*’s individualized portrayal of emotional isolation, *The Vegetarian* broadens the scope of critique to expose structural and institutional violence. Through the escalating traumas inflicted upon Yeong-hye, Han Kang reveals the horrific synergy among patriarchy, marital domination, and societal discipline—all working in concert to suppress female subjectivity. Yeong-hye’s father symbolizes the absolutist authority of traditional patriarchy, her husband embodies the regulatory power over the female body within marriage, and her brother-in-law represents the male gaze within the domain of art and culture. These three power structures intertwine to form an almost unbreakable network of violence. One emblematic episode—Yeong-hye’s father dragging a biting dog to death behind a motorcycle—demonstrates how violence becomes internalized. As a child, Yeong-hye witnesses the dog’s death without protest, observing its demise in cold silence. This reaction implies that victims themselves may become unconscious accomplices to systemic violence. In terms of spatial design, the two works also differ significantly. *The Fruit of My Woman* confines its narrative largely within the private space of the home, whereas *The Vegetarian* constructs a multilayered social space—including family, the art world, and medical institutions—through which violence permeates all domains of life. This shift in spatial narrative reflects Han Kang’s expanding critical vision: from the personal to the institutional, from the domestic to the public. Both works employ the surreal metaphor of “botanization” as a narrative device. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, the wife’s transformation into a plant serves as a passive response to emotional desolation, whereas in *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye’s desire to “become a plant” is an active, conscious rejection of violence. The transformation of this shared symbol across the two texts reveals how Han Kang deploys a consistent aesthetic technique to engage with distinct dimensions of social critique, maintaining stylistic cohesion while deepening thematic resonance.

Moreover, both novels end with their female protagonists reduced to a state of vegetal being, thereby revealing the oppressive mechanisms of marriage and society. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, the husband views his wife’s bodily transformation as an inconvenience to be managed, yet ultimately accepts her metamorphosis. In *The Vegetarian*, however, male characters form a united front to violently suppress Yeong-hye’s rebellion, constructing a disciplinary apparatus to subdue her defiance. The difference in the intensity of control and resistance underscores the differing degrees of critique: *The Fruit of My Woman* exposes the quiet tragedy of alienation within conventional marriage, while *The Vegetarian* lays bare the brutal repression enacted by institutional violence against nonconforming women. Despite their divergent paths of resistance, both protagonists meet the same fate—death in the form of botanical transformation. In a society that annihilates individuality, to relinquish one’s human identity and social role becomes the only viable path to liberation. *The Vegetarian* offers a harrowing portrait of a woman who rejects the biological laws of the food chain [9], and this phrase applies equally to the unnamed protagonist of *The Fruit of My Woman*.

5. Philosophical and symbolic divergences: a dialogue between existential loneliness and ecofeminist resistance

Han Kang is a writer with deep empathy for the suffering and existential plight of the individual, and her works reflect a profound humanitarian concern that marks her as a truly global author [10]. Through *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian*, Han establishes distinct philosophical and symbolic frameworks that give rise to different dimensions of humanistic reflection: the former resonates with existentialism’s pursuit of individual freedom and loneliness, while the latter incorporates a critique rooted in ecofeminist philosophy. This philosophical divergence—despite the two works sharing similar motifs—enables them to offer radically different perspectives on gender, subjectivity, and modernity.

In both texts, the motif of “botanization” evolves into a multifaceted and dynamic symbolic system. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, the wife’s gradual transformation—from internal bruising to full plant-like metamorphosis—along with her loss of language and retreat into inner monologue, echoes Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential dictum that “hell is other people,” portraying a mode of self-effacement born of profound isolation. Her husband’s caregiving, along with the cyclical imagery of fruit-bearing and sowing, poeticizes her alienation and imbues it with Daoist undertones—suggesting a redemptive “return to nature” as found in the philosophy of ziran (natural spontaneity). By contrast, Yeong-hye’s radical transformation in *The Vegetarian*—from vegetarianism to complete “botanization”—constructs a deeper philosophical architecture. Her rejection of meat functions as a resistance to patriarchal violence and simultaneously subverts the male-dominated logos culture symbolized by carnivorous consumption. Her longing to become a plant directly invokes ecofeminist critiques of anthropocentrism, elevating personal trauma into a collective indictment of civilizational violence. In this way, *The Vegetarian* establishes a dialogic tension between Western existential loneliness and ecofeminist resistance. Philosophically, *The Fruit of My Woman* critiques traditional gender expectations by portraying the existential struggle of women in marriage—forced to sacrifice personal dreams, professional ambitions, and spiritual freedom. Meanwhile, *The Vegetarian* gestures toward a broader spiritual crisis of the human condition, provoking reflection on life, freedom, marriage, and existential value—especially in the context of Korea’s cultural conflict between Confucian tradition and modernity. The significance of Han Kang’s work lies in her use of botanical metamorphosis as a

metaphor that transcends individual experience, interrogating the structural foundations of civilization itself. Her poetic language bridges Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, ultimately transforming alienation into a site of both rebellion and redemption through a dialectic of regression and transcendence.

Color, as a symbolic device, carries rich metaphorical weight: it expresses emotional tone, reveals deeper themes, and offers access to characters' inner worlds [11]. Han Kang's construction of symbolic color systems in the two works also reveals a discernible trajectory of development. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, color symbolism is characterized by singularity. Green functions as the central and dominant hue, bearing nearly all symbolic weight. The advantage of this monochromatic scheme lies in its symbolic "focus," though its narrow spectrum also limits the potential for multiplicity in meaning. In this text, green simultaneously represents the alienation of life and a redemptive path back to nature. All female-centered themes are unfolded through this singular chromatic signifier. Aesthetically, the singular dominance of green creates a hallucinatory reading experience—drawing the reader into a world viewed through a "green filter," and effectively channeling the work's emotional and thematic currents. Philosophically, this color singularity underscores the novel's core inquiry: What constitutes an authentic mode of existence in nature? By contrast, *The Vegetarian* presents a far more complex symbolic color system, one that metaphorizes the varied forms of female suffering in society. Through juxtaposition, contrast, and transformation, Han constructs a diverse symbolic register: not only the green of liberation and exile found in *The Fruit of My Woman*, but also the red of violence and extremity, the white of being and nothingness, and the black that signifies repression and the yearning for freedom. Thus, *The Vegetarian* emerges as a novel rich in symbolic density and social allegory. Its sophistication lies in the interplay between detailed imagery and intertwined character fates—revealing systemic oppression faced by women and their internal processes of suppression, awakening, and resistance. It is through the sublimation of these diverse color symbols that *The Vegetarian* evokes a critical and philosophical reflection on human fragility and darkness. From *The Fruit of My Woman* to *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang's color poetics has evolved from simplicity to richness, from fixity to openness, and from singularity to synthesis. This evolution allows her fiction to touch on universal existential dilemmas while also accommodating complex social experiences—ultimately forming a literary voice marked by both visual intensity and philosophical depth.

6. Metaphorical tension in the endings: a double variation of bitter dependency and tragic resistance

In literature, the body is often a vessel and metaphor for political, cultural, historical, spiritual, and psychological meanings [12]. The endings of *The Fruit of My Woman* and *The Vegetarian* embody starkly different emotional tones and philosophical implications: the former concludes with a bittersweet sense of symbiosis, while the latter ends in a near-tragic rupture. This divergence not only reveals their respective thematic emphases but also reflects Han Kang's multifaceted reflections on female fate—centered particularly on the existential dislocation caused by familial trauma and distorted romantic or marital relationships.

The ending of *The Fruit of My Woman* presents the essence of marital relationships with bitter poeticism, while sharply satirizing the perpetuation of dysfunctional intimacy through surreal imagery. After the plant-wife withers and bears fruit, her husband tastes the harvest and experiences a "bittersweet flavor," identical to the taste she exuded upon their first intimate encounter. This detail metaphorically suggests that marriage is an eternal cycle interwoven with sweetness and pain—an inevitable loop of love and alienation. More significantly, when the husband buries the seeds back into the flowerpot, "new leaves sprout, carrying the wife's scent." Even after her complete metamorphosis into a non-human entity, the husband persists in a habitual dependence tinged with pathological tenderness. This illustrates the contradiction and complexity of marriage: emotional dependence and repression coexist, forming a dynamic of both comfort and captivity. Han Kang uses the surreal metaphor of "botanization" to tear apart the veneer of marital warmth and reveal the hidden violence beneath. The husband's caregiving becomes an act of ambiguous penance, exposing the emotional entanglement and power asymmetries within traditional domestic structures. The wife's silence and the husband's pseudo-redemption together form a dual indictment of Eastern family dynamics—where resistance comes at the cost of self-annihilation, and so-called atonement remains trapped within the logic of control. In contrast, the ending of *The Vegetarian* is far more radical and despairing. Yeong-hye's self-destruction is not merely a personal failure but an intense expression of spiritual liberation under extreme social pressure. In the psychiatric hospital, after performing a handstand, she becomes radiant and tells her sister: "I was standing on my head...leaves were growing from my body, and roots were sprouting from my hands...so I dug down into the earth. On and on...I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch, so I spread my legs; I spread them wide." [13] This dreamlike bodily transformation expresses her longing for nature and her total rejection of humanity. As her condition worsens, she renounces her human identity entirely and becomes a "tree-person"—a being no longer confined to the human norm. Her physical transformation not only externalizes her inner desire but also constitutes an uncompromising rejection of societal structures. Plants grow and reproduce according to natural cycles, untouched by social constraints. By transforming into a plant, Yeong-hye returns to a purer, more organic state of being. Through this metamorphosis, the novel reveals the awakened subjectivity and inner world of a woman, critiquing the oppressive patriarchy and familial violence that deform both body and spirit. Thus, *The Vegetarian* offers not just an inquiry into

individual fate, but a profound critique of the systemic control and suppression women endure. The so-called “madwoman” emerges as the very product of a social system that disciplines the female body and psyche.

The cyclical closure in *The Fruit of My Woman* and the rupture in *The Vegetarian* both illuminate the existential dilemmas of female subjectivity and the fusion of Eastern and Western narrative traditions. The former portrays marital alienation as an emotional detachment common in modern urban relationships, suggesting that such intimacy, despite distortion, might still be maintained. The wife’s transformation into a plant and the husband’s continued attachment form a closed loop, exposing the coexistence of power structures and bittersweet sentiment within marriage. In *The Vegetarian*, however, male characters cling to patriarchal violence, and the only possible resolution lies in radical severance. From a literary heritage perspective, the differing resolutions reflect cultural influences. The cyclical ending of *The Fruit of My Woman* bears traces of Eastern philosophy, particularly notions of reincarnation and continuity. In contrast, *The Vegetarian* evokes the surreal, modernist absurdity akin to Kafkaesque narratives—offering a Western-inflected, open-ended interpretation of collapse and liberation. Han Kang skillfully blends these traditions to create endings that are both universally resonant and culturally specific. Ultimately, *The Fruit of My Woman* asks a fundamental existential question of female subjectivity: can a relationship persist when one party has irrevocably changed? Meanwhile, *The Vegetarian* confronts the limits of social violence: what price must one pay to resist the disciplinary mechanisms of an entire society? Though different in form and tone, both endings contribute to Han Kang’s multidimensional exploration of human existence, underscoring her enduring concern with the construction of female subjectivity in a fractured world.

7. Conclusion

In sum, Han Kang’s works explore a series of dualities: the opposition between humanity and nature, between humans and animals or plants; between psychiatric patients fleeing horrific realities and so-called “normal” individuals; and between those surviving in desolate reality and those who physically or spiritually aspire to become plants [14]. *The Fruit of My Woman*’s meditation on women, plants, and nature served as a creative precursor that inspired Han Kang’s surrealistic novel *The Vegetarian*. Across both works, Han utilizes the narrative device of the “botanization” of the female body as a metaphorical method to illuminate the inner conflicts between women’s psychological reality and the external world. Through this fantastic transformation, she reveals two distinct paradigms of female resistance within a patriarchal East Asian context. In *The Fruit of My Woman*, the focus lies on the emotional desolation within marriage, where the wife’s passive transformation into a plant becomes a silent dissolution of self. This narrative arc exposes the alienating essence of intimacy, with an existential tone of loneliness and bitter dependency culminating in a quietly introspective ending. In contrast, *The Vegetarian* presents Yeong-hye’s conscious awakening and her active embrace of “botanization” as a radical and uncompromising resistance against a patriarchal society. Han Kang, adopting an ecofeminist perspective and constructing a tragic, irreconcilable conclusion, gives voice to a powerful indictment of the physical and psychological devastation wrought by patriarchal discipline and social control. Although the two works diverge in thematic emphasis, they reflect Han Kang’s deepening inquiry into female subjectivity: from the existential dilemmas of the individual to a philosophical evolution grounded in ecofeminist critique. This thematic shift exemplifies her sustained exploration of the “dehumanized” condition of women and situates her writing within a broader trajectory of feminist thought. Within the contemporary landscape of world literature, Han Kang’s narratives offer a distinctive Korean perspective on female experience. Her aesthetic approach is deeply rooted in local cultural and social realities, yet it transcends the national context to become a universal allegory of modern alienation. The motif of female “botanization” emerges from individual experience but expands into a shared human concern. By tightly interweaving personal fate with social environment, Han ensures that her works move beyond isolated portrayals of suffering to embrace a more expansive historical vision and profound social critique. Ultimately, Han Kang’s literary artistry affirms the power of literature to connect individual consciousness with social and historical reality. Her work has earned global recognition for non-Western female writing, contributing a vital and resonant voice to the international feminist literary canon.

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