

The Silent Scream: Repressive Silence and Subversive Voice in *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract

This study undertakes a critical examination of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2007), interpreting Yeong-hye's silent yet powerful dissent as a radical confrontation with the ideological and repressive structures that regulate identity and bodily autonomy. Through the theoretical lens of Louis Althusser's concepts of the Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses, the research investigates how institutions such as family, marriage, psychiatry, and cultural tradition function to uphold dominant ideologies and enforce conformity. Yeong-hye's refusal to consume meat is not merely a dietary choice but a symbolic rupture from patriarchal expectations, heteronormative control, and institutional surveillance. Her passive resistance challenges the coercive systems that seek to discipline her body and silence her agency. The novel reveals how ideological and patriarchal forces confine identity, gender roles, and autonomy. Yeong-hye's act of refusal shows that even quiet defiance can resist such control. By applying Althusserian theory, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how personal rebellion, especially from a gendered body, becomes a site of political significance. The work invites further exploration into how literature reimagines autonomy and challenges the ideological limits imposed on the individual.

Keywords: Autonomy, ideological subjugation, quiet rebellion, societal constraints

Cite as

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Introduction

This study critically scrutinizes how Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* (2007) controls personal autonomy to quell societal rebellion. It examines the profound psychological and emotional impact of defying dominant cultural and familial expectations. This study argues that Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat is an act of rebellion against rigid societal norms and values. Her decision spirals into a series of increasingly extreme actions, leading to her alienation from her family and society. As her behavior continues, Yeong-hye withdraws from the world around her, symbolizing the silent cry of both personal and societal constraints.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* centers on Yeong-hye, a woman who decides to stop eating meat after experiencing a series of disturbing dreams. What initially appears to be a personal dietary choice gradually transforms into a radical act of defiance within a South Korean society deeply rooted in obedience, family honor, patriarchy, and social conformity. Yeong-hye's refusal unsettles those around her, particularly her husband, parents, and sister, who interpret her behavior as irrational, abnormal, and threatening to social order. Her father's violent attempt to force-feed her meat exposes how patriarchal authority and familial control operate through both emotional and physical coercion.

As the narrative progresses, Yeong-hye withdraws increasingly from human relationships, rejecting not only meat but also sexuality, marital expectations, and prescribed feminine roles. Her resistance expands from the body to the self, culminating in a desire to erase her human identity altogether. By refusing participation in normative social structures, Yeong-hye exposes the violence embedded within everyday institutions such as family, marriage, and medicine. Her silence and bodily withdrawal function as a form of protest against a society that demands conformity at the cost of individual autonomy. Ultimately, *The Vegetarian* presents Yeong-hye's transformation as a haunting critique of ideological control over the body, revealing how dissent, predominantly female dissent, is pathologized and punished under the guise of normalcy.

By presenting the viewpoints of Yeong-hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister, this novel reveals how control operates subtly within ordinary life and societal structures. Through the analysis of Yeong-hye's rejection of societal norms as an act of resistance, *The Vegetarian* highlights how ideological and repressive state apparatuses, including family and medical institutions, enforce conformity and limit personal autonomy. This outlook emphasizes how Yeong-hye's denial to eat meat functions as a broader critique of socio-political and environmental violence. Drawing on Louis Althusser's ideas about how society controls people, this article examines the systems that seek to dominate both the body and the mind, revealing how this kind of oppression harms personal identity and highlighting the possibility of standing up against robust systems.

Review of Literature

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* has been analyzed through several critical lenses to dissect the multilayered themes and techniques. Devi and Meera (2023) examine the protagonist's vegetarianism as an act of feminist resistance and argue that "the connection between women and food is central to the narrative, where Yeong-hye's dietary choices establish her agency against patriarchal control" (p. 1570). It emphasizes the novel's engagement with ideological and systemic oppression through personal choices.

Power undercurrents are activated to deal with the micromanagement of society. Munir and Liaquat (2024) argue that Yeong-hye's choice to become a vegetarian is suppressed by the dominant social and institutional forces, as "she is submitted to the disciplinary power of the psychiatric facility to fix her vegetarianism, which is considered an 'abnormality' in the meat-loving culture of South Korea" (p. 97). This reading aligns with Macsiniuc's (2017) assertion that Yeong-hye's journey represents "an assertion of autonomy, [which] is subdued by literal and symbolic violence" (p.103). These critiques reinforce the novel's exploration of the mechanisms of ideological subjugation that police individual identity and behavior. Expanding this discussion, Anand (2019) asserts that the book presents "a practical challenge in sustaining world

peace and raises questions on human rights, peace with nature and animals, and our sustainable practices" (p. 86). He infers the novel from an eco-critical lens and a sustainable peace outlook.

Yi-Peng Lai (2022) analyzes the protagonist from psychological and social perspectives: "This study examines the protagonist's transformation from meat eater to vegetarian and eventually to tree, contextualizing the sexual politics of meat, vegetarianism and a boreal metamorphosis" (p. 1). This study prioritizes the character's transformation and metamorphosis.

The novel's central assertion moves from family torture to human compassion and love, guided by the well-being of animals and the natural world. Yeong-hye's transformation and her connection to nature are one of the concerns of the critic. Chandran and Pai (2017) contend that the novel holds "an important place in the history of ecofeminism because it carries various ecofeminist aspects" (p. 26). They highlight how Yeong-hye's relationships with male characters, particularly in her marriage, demonstrate the oppressive structures that alienate women from their natural selves. Sanjana and Mariam (2024) further this ecological reading, emphasizing that "nature plays a significant role in the novel, serving as a catalyst that reveals the true essence of the characters" (p. 65). Yeong-hye's rejection of her body and turn toward nature echo a radical break from human constraints, reinforcing the novel's ecological and feminist concerns.

Lai (2023) analyzes the novel as gendered violence, arguing that it "initiates with voicelessness and ends in voicelessness" (p. 2), with Yeong-hye's story being recounted through the perspectives of others, particularly her ex-husband. This narrative structure underscores how patriarchal authority silences women's voices. Ahn (2024), in an analysis of sexual dynamics in the novel, states that the book "resists simplistic views of resistance and empowerment, demonstrating the complex ways in which personal desires can both resist and reinforce patriarchal structures" (p. 279). These critiques highlight the novel's engagement with the complexities of agency, submission, and ideological control.

The novel has attracted extensive scholarly engagement for its exploration of socio-political and ecological violence, its portrayal of vegetarianism as a form of feminist resistance, and its depiction of power and punishment as centralizing within societal boundaries. Devi and Meera (2023) critically remark Yeong-hye's dietary choice as rebel against patriarchal agency, Munir and Liaqat (2024) study about the power dynamics of the society, Macsiniuc (2017) dives into the depth of personal autonomy of the characters, Anand (2019) prioritizes, human rights, peace and nature in the novel, Sanjana and Mariam (2024) maintain the ecological awareness in the book, For Lai (2023), the story is a journey from voicelessness to voicelessness, Ahn (2024) addresses on the individual craving for patriarchal resistance. Adhikari and Pokharel (2025) argue for the significance of personal autonomy in the capitalist consumer ethos.

These studies have highlighted Yeong-hye's presence from a patriarchal perspective, the power structure of the society, individual freedom, human rights violence, and ecological awareness. These extensive scholarly engagements are assertions of independence, narrative and thematic blurring, metaphorical explanation, and gendered violence. Moreover, the importance of consumers' ethos is another concern for the critics. However, the critical engagements have not explicitly explored how silence is a powerful tool for expressing the voice. This research addresses this gap by analyzing the futile efforts of family, marriage, societal norms, and the mechanisms of medical institutions to suppress the voice. By framing Yeong-hye's rejection of eating meat as quiet but powerful resistance against family and societal apparatuses, this study infers how Yeong-hye is involved in a calm uprising to establish silence as a powerful weapon for rebels.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative, theory-driven textual analysis informed by critical literary theory and ideological critique. Instead of an empirical test or measurement of variables, the study reads Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2007) with the aid of a particular theoretical framework-Louis Althusser's distinction between Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)-to disclose how the structure of power carves subjectivity, gender, and

bodily self-determination within the story. For the sake of analytical stringency and coherence, definitions of key ideas go as follows:

Theoretical Framework

The core analysis is informed by, Althusser (2018) theory of ideological critique, who argues that the modern societies reproduce social order not primarily by means of direct coercion (RSAs, such as police or military), but through ISAs in the form of family, education, religion, law, and culture that reproduce dominant ways of thinking precisely by constituting individuals from within through the molding of beliefs and practices. In *The Vegetarian*, these apparatuses materialize into banal, intimate institutions that compel compliance in the guise of care, tradition, or normalcy. This perspective enables an orderly investigation of how the self-incriminating defiance of Yeong-hye is identified, labeled pathological, and curbed by those close to her.

Operational Definitions of Core Analytical Constructs

To make this analysis organized and better understood, here are some key concepts that have been utilized for this study, defined and linked to the text for reference:

Repressive Silence

The repression and erasure of one's expression are exercised through power relations, whether institutional or interpersonal. How it appears in the text: Where Yeong-hye is denied a voice, is not allowed to speak, or is not heard; where her silence is pathologicalized instead of being politicized; where other people (husband, father, siblings, psychiatrists) act against her will by overpowering her with words or action or diagnosis.

Subversive

A type of resistance that goes beyond conventional speech, expressed through body-based defiance, withdrawal, and acts. Through her decision to be vegetarian, her unwillingness to conform to her family traditions (for example, meat consumed at ancestral rituals), her separation from what constitutes womanhood, and her desire to become a plant, nonverbal, and autonomous act resistant to ideological regulation.

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in the Novel

In the novel, the Ideological State Apparatuses refer to the institutions that sustain the dominant norms in society, not through violence but through consent, habit, and internalized beliefs.

The tale is unpacked into four intertwined strands by:

- *Family*: it instills a feeling of nepotistic duty, triggers gender-specific compliance, and encourages individuals to observe specific dietary practices.
- *Marriage* becomes a space where there is heteronormative control, with a constant watch being maintained over spouses.
- *Psychiatry*: It makes dissent pathological, making dissent itself a matter of mental illness.
- *Cultural Tradition*: It persists within the Confucian tradition, under the weight of meat-eating norms and patterns of group embarrassment.

Bodily Autonomy

The controversial rights of an individual, in this case a woman, to do what she wants with her body, her diet, or her physical self.

Operationalization: The events in the novel occur while Yeong-hye is refusing to eat, being forced to eat against her will, being raped, being locked up in a hospital, and having male characters, symbolizing the voices that claim domination of her, policing and policing-like her decisions regarding the use of her body.

Research Design: Ideology as a State Tool for Repression

This is a qualitative research study that employs the analytical criticism of Marx, Engels, and Althusser to analyze Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*. Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) are the analytical tools for validating the analysis.

Ideology embodies the beliefs and values that shape how individuals and societies perceive and interpret the world around them. It serves as a powerful tool for governments and dominant

groups, ensuring conformity with societal norms and expectations and reinforcing social, political, and economic structures. It maintains the power of the dominant while keeping others obedient. By conditioning individuals to accept established power dynamics, ideologies perpetuate inequality and social control.

Marx and Engels defined ideology as "organized beliefs at a high level of abstraction" (as cited in Martin, 2015, p. 8), maintained through morality, religion, politics, law, and philosophy. Subsequent Marxist theorists described it as a form of ideological manipulation: "a conspiratorial ideational wool [is] pulled over the eyes of the masses ... often believed to be unifiable in a single preferred optimal state" (Martin, 2015, p. 1). This perspective illustrates how ideology obscures the true nature of social inequalities and reinforces the interests of dominant groups.

Althusser (2018) avers that ideology is "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 1300). Traditional Marxist thinkers view ideology as a reflection of economic structures. However, Althusser (2018) argues that ideologies "do not correspond to reality, that is, that they constitute an illusion," yet "allude to reality" (p. 1300). He deems ideology not merely a set of abstract beliefs but as one that has "a material existence" (p. 1302) that is present in "an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" (p. 1302). This implies that institutions incorporate ideology, influencing individuals' actions and thoughts.

Through the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), the state maintains control "by violence" (Althusser, 2018, p. 1291). Althusser (2018) explains that "the State Apparatus (SA) contains the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons" (p. 1290). Such institutions work "massively and predominantly by repression" (p. 1292) through punishment, discipline, and strict rules. However, apart from repression, they also operate "secondarily by ideology" (p. 1292), perpetuating society's beliefs, values, and ideological norms alongside their coercive role.

However, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) function primarily through ideology. Althusser (2018) describes them as "a certain number of realities that present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (p. 1291). These include "the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio, and television), and the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports)" (p. 1291). Unlike the RSA, ISAs exist in "a plurality" (p. 1291). This approach allows the ruling ideology to operate in multiple ways that seem separate but work together.

Ideology is framed to execute the interests of the ruling class. Although ISAs differ from each other, they follow "the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of the ruling class" (Althusser, 2018, p. 1292). Although ISAs appear contradictory at times, their ultimate function is "to ensure subjection to the ruling ideology" (p. 1287). Althusser (2018) asserts that "the different Ideological State Apparatuses work together, even if they seem to conflict" (p. 1294). As a result, people believe they are making free choices, but in reality, ideology shapes their thoughts and actions.

Althusser (2018) contends that individuals not only experience the influence of ideology but also actively contribute to its propagation. He asserts that every person "must act according to his ideas; he must therefore inscribe his ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice" (p. 1303). It shows that people follow societal beliefs and express them through their daily actions without the need for overt coercion, as individuals "work all right, all by themselves" (p. 1309). They accept their roles without state intervention. However, "bad subjects" (p. 1309) who resist ideological norms may face punishment from the RSA. This illustration shows how ideology and force work together to maintain the system.

Althusser's (2018) concept of interpellation explains how ideology transforms individuals into subjects. He states that "all ideology hails or interpolates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (p. 1306). This means that ideology

is not confined to abstract thinking alone but actively shapes individuals' identities and roles in society. The process of interpellation is automatic and unavoidable.

Ideology operates through media and education. Althusser (2018) opines that ideology functions by "recruiting subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforming' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all)" (p. 1306). People are not free to become subjects; rather, ideology automatically interpolates them through family, education, and media. He explains that this process creates a "copy of the belief system that makes people see themselves as part of a group, submits them to a higher authority, and allows both individuals and that authority to acknowledge each other" (p. 1309). Thus, ideology shapes people's sense of place in society, reinforcing social hierarchy and obedience.

Once ideology has successfully interpellated individuals, compliance with social norms is automatic. As Althusser (2018) observes, "the subjects work; they work by themselves in the vast majority of cases, except the 'bad subjects,' who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) state apparatus" (p. 1309). Most people are compliant. Those who challenge ideological norms face punishment, showing how ideology ensures compliance through a deeply internalized system of recognition and acceptance.

Analysis and Interpretation

Quiet Uprising: The Power of Silence in Han Kang's The Vegetarian

In *The Vegetarian* (2015), Han Kang illustrates how the family operates as both an ideological and a repressive state apparatus, reinforcing patriarchal norms and suppressing individual voices. As Althusser argues, marriage serves as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) by conditioning individuals to conform through internalized norms rather than overt coercion. Mr. Cheong's expectations of his wife, Yeong-hye, align with these ideological functions, as he sees her as an obedient, self-sacrificing wife who serves his needs. He expresses satisfaction in her passivity, saying, "She was a woman of few words. She rarely demanded anything from me, and regardless of how late I arrived home, she never made a fuss" (Kang, 2015, p. 11). He perceives her silence and obedience as virtues, ensuring that his authority remains unchallenged.

Mr. Cheong reinforces the ideological expectation that women should remain unremarkable and devoted to domestic duties. He perceives Yeong-hye's lack of individuality as a virtue, stating that he could find "neither freshness nor charm, or anything especially refined" (Kang, 2015, p. 10) in her. His view reduces her to a compliant figure who exists to serve, reinforcing an ideological structure that confines women to subservient roles and denies them autonomy.

In addition to passivity, Mr. Cheong expects Yeong-hye to perform domestic labor unquestioningly. He says that she was "a completely ordinary wife who went about things without any distasteful frivolousness. Every morning, she got up at six a.m. to prepare rice and soup, and usually a bit of fish" (Kang, 2015, p. 11). His disappointment when she stops fulfilling these tasks highlights his belief that deviation from this role is unacceptable, further solidifying the ideological expectation of female domesticity.

Mr. Cheong attempts to regulate Yeong-hye's choices, particularly her decision to stop eating meat, which he finds irrational. He believes dietary changes must stem from reasons like "the desire to lose weight" or "being possessed by an evil spirit" (Kang, 2015, p. 19), revealing his inability to accept her autonomy over her choice. Yeong-hye's husband, Mr. Cheong, and her family view her decision as irrational and threatening because it challenges the dominant framework that dictates women's roles as obedient wives and daughters. Lai's (2015) assertion aligns with this study: "begins with voicelessness and ends in voicelessness" (p. 2). This dehumanizing perspective reinforces how marriage enforces rigid gender roles, expecting women to serve men both domestically and sexually.

Beyond sexual violence, marriage in the novel represses individuality by punishing nonconformity. Yeong-hye's family forces her to eat meat, hospitalizing her, but Mr. Cheong expresses relief at her absence instead of concern. He dreads her return, referring to her as a "strange, frightening woman" (Kang, 2015, p. 51). His indifference reveals how marriage, as a

Repressive Ideological Apparatus (RIA), suppresses resistance by either forcing compliance to those who refuse to conform. Yeong-hye's mental and physical deterioration highlights the cost of a system to dictate women's lives, reducing them to objects of domestic and sexual servitude.

Even after violently asserting control, Mr. Cheong recognizes Yeong-hye's complete detachment, likening her to a wartime sexual slave and comparing himself to a "Japanese soldier demanding her services" (Kang, 2015, p. 63). This analogy reveals the extreme power imbalance in a marital relationship and the use of force to subjugate Yeong-hye. Yeong-hye's refusal to conform—whether by rejecting meat, sex, or domestic expectations asserts her silent rebellion. Through these depictions, this study deduces the influence of quiet uprising as Yeong-hye does through new dietary practices.

Yeong-hye's father enforces repression through physical force, emphasizing a long history of discipline as, "He had whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old" (Kang, 2015, p. 31), emphasizing a long history of discipline. This control peaks during a brutal dinner scene, where he forces her to eat meat: "Having thrown down the chopsticks, he now picked up a piece of pork... She was hesitantly backing away when her brother seized her and sat her down" (Kang, 2015, p. 38). This scene demonstrates how the family serves as an extension of state repression, using physical violence to enforce societal norms and patriarchal authority. The coercion by both her father and her brother aligns with Althusser's concept of the RSA, in which institutions rely on force to maintain control.

Similarly, Yeong-hye's mother attempts to enforce submission through emotional manipulation, tying obedience to family honor and duty. She insists that her daughter drink herbal medicine by framing it as a filial obligation: "Drink it." This is your mother's wish. Even the dead get their wishes obeyed, but you'd ignore your mother's?" (Kang, 2015, p. 46). The mother utilizes moral coercion rather than direct violence, aligning with Althusser's concept of ideological control. This demonstrates how the family, as an ISA, instills values and norms that compel individuals to conform without resorting to explicit force.

Even after Yeong-hye is hospitalized, her family continues to impose societal expectations under the guise of concern, insisting that she eat meat. Their conduct reflects their inability to accept nonconformity and mirrors the function of ideological state apparatuses, which regulate individuals to conform to societal norms. By framing her dietary choice as defiance, her family reinforces that deviation from the norm must be corrected through persuasion or coercion. It presents the family as a repressive and ideological state apparatus, supporting Althusser's (2018) view that power operates through both coercion and ideological conditioning. Yeong-hye's struggle against her family's oppressive expectations reveals how personal agency is stifled within rigid social structures where conformity is enforced through violence, moral coercion, and emotional manipulation.

In *The Vegetarian*, Kang (2015) demonstrates how society functions as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) by enforcing dominant norms and marginalizing those who deviate from them. The reaction from her husband's colleagues and their spouses illustrates how deeply ingrained societal expectations are and how those who reject them face ridicule and exclusion. When she refuses meat, the entire group reacts with "glances of surprise and wonder at her emaciated body" (Kang, 2015, p. 26). Their immediate response reflects how ideological norms are enforced through collective scrutiny, with deviations from accepted behavior becoming a spectacle that warrants attention and correction.

Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian* silently rebels against the ideological structures that shape individuals' identities and relationships. Mr. Cheong, the husband of Yeong-hye, considers her an insignificant woman when he says, "I'd always liked my wife's earthy vitality, the way she would catch cockroaches by smacking them with the palm of her hand. She had been the most ordinary woman in the world" (Kang, 2015, p. 22). However, her decision to reject eating meat by boldly asserting, "I won't eat it" (Kang, 2015, p. 25), disrupts the ideological norms governing gender, family, and societal expectations. It shows that ideology is not just an abstract belief

system but is embedded in institutions such as the family and marriage. As Althusser (2018) says, "ideology has a material existence" (p. 1302), and their practices are woven into patriarchal control and social conformity.

The dinner guests attempt to normalize meat-eating by appealing to history and human nature, thereby reinforcing the ideological belief that meat consumption is essential to human survival. The boss's wife expresses disbelief, asking, "But surely it isn't possible to live without eating meat?" (Kang, 2015, p. 26). This rhetorical question reflects a deeply ingrained assumption that meat consumption is not merely a dietary preference but an essential aspect of human existence. Another guest further reinforces vegetarianism as unnatural, citing the discoveries of mummified remains to argue that meat-eating is "a fundamental human instinct" and thus "goes against human nature" (Kang, 2015, p. 26). This perspective aligns with Althusser's argument that Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) work by naturalizing specific social constructs, making them appear self-evident and beyond question.

Society not only rationalizes meat consumption but also ostracizes those who deviate from ideological norms through ridicule. When Yeong-hye refuses meat, the boss dismissively comments, "Now and then there'll be someone claiming that eating meat is bad... after all, I suppose giving up meat to live a long life isn't all that unreasonable, is it?" (Kang, 2015, p. 26). His mocking tone trivializes Yeong-hye's choice, subtly pressuring her to conform to societal expectations. Yeong-hye reinforces that her refusal to eat meat is socially unacceptable. The mockery undermines her personal choice and reinforces conformity with dominant societal norms.

Even those who sympathize with Yeong-hye feel compelled to justify her actions within acceptable ideological terms. Her husband, embarrassed by her defiance, defends her by citing health concerns: "For a long time my wife used to suffer from gastroenteritis... A dietitian advised her to give up meat, and her symptoms got a lot better after that" (Kang, 2015, p. 26). Framing her vegetarianism as a medical necessity, he attempts to reconcile her deviation with the dominant ideology. This reflects Althusser's argument that individuals internalize ideological norms to justify their actions in ways that align with existing structures rather than challenge them outright.

Ultimately, Yeong-hye's refusal of meat leads to her social exclusion, which shows how ISAs regulate behavior through collective acceptance or rejection. The narrative notes, "Gradually, the other guests learned to ignore her presence, and the conversation started to flow again" (Kang, 2015, p. 27). Thus, ideology functions for active enforcement through passive exclusion. As Althusser (2018) suggests, ISAs do not require direct repression to maintain control; they operate for ideological compliance as the default, ensuring that dissenters become invisible or irrelevant. The novel critiques society's role in enforcing ideological norms through Yeong-hye's alienation, highlighting the conditioning of individuals to conform and the isolation that results from nonconformity.

Institutional Control and Implicit Rebellion in The Vegetarian

Hospitals act as a repressive state apparatus by using physical coercion to ensure compliance. When Yeong-hye resists medical treatment, hospital staff forcibly intervene, denying her agency over her body. The nurse clarifies, "She has ceased speaking." She tries "to pull out the IV needle, so we had to put her in a secure room and give her a tranquilizer before putting it back in" (Kang, 2015, p. 122). This use of sedation and confinement illustrates how the institution employs direct violence to discipline and control those who reject established norms.

The hospital functions as an ideological state apparatus by reinforcing the belief that those who do not conform to societal expectations have a mental illness and require correction. The medical staff does not attempt to understand Yeong-hye's choices but instead enforces treatment based on normative ideas about health. She laments, "People are always telling me to eat.... I don't like eating; they force me" (Kang, 2015, p. 131). Her agency is dismissed as irrational, positioning her as a subject who must be reshaped according to dominant ideological structures.

Medical institutions justify their control under the guise of care, framing their interventions as necessary for Yeong-hye's well-being. When In-hye finds her sister in distress, paramedics immediately take control: "Despite her struggles, they managed to insert an IV needle into her forearm" (Kang, 2015, p. 116). The assumption that Yeong-hye's resistance is pathological rather than a personal choice aligns with Althusser's notion that ideological apparatuses operate by instilling hegemonic beliefs about what constitutes acceptable behavior. The repeated medical interventions become a form of institutionalized violence when "In-hye checks for burst veins and finds them everywhere; on both hands, the soles of both feet, even her elbows" (Kang, 2015, p. 128). This physical manifestation of control highlights the extent to which medical institutions prioritize discipline over individual autonomy.

The physical suffering imposed on Yeong-hye reveals the extreme measures taken to enforce compliance, with repeated medical interventions acting as a form of institutionalized violence. The passage states, "They'd tried on numerous occasions to get some gruel into Yeong-hye by inserting a long tube into her nose, but the procedure had always failed as Yeong-hye had simply closed up her gullet" (Kang, 2015, p. 128). The increasing intensity of control through force-feeding, restraints, and medication reflects how these institutions respond to those who reject dominant ideologies, as seen in "Again, jelly is rubbed onto the tube. Again the carer pits his robust physique against Yeong-hye's wasted strength, clamping his hands around her head" (Kang, 2015, p. 146). This repetition emphasizes how hospitals discipline nonconformity, reinforcing broader ideological structures.

The hospital's mechanisms of control extend beyond Yeong-hye to affect others, reinforcing ideological structures within the broader society. In-hye, after multiple visits to the hospital, begins to see the outside world differently: "In fact, after all these visits to the hospital, sometimes it's the tranquil streets filled with so-called 'normal' people that end up seeming strange" (Kang, 2015, p. 120). This shift in perception demonstrates that ideological reinforcement is not limited to the patient but to their families, shaping their understanding of normalcy and deviance. In addition to physical force, medical institutions use symbolic violence, a concept closely related to ideological controls.

The increasing intensity of control through force-feeding, restraints, and medication reflects institutions' response to those who reject dominant ideologies. In the words of a nurse about Yeong-hye's expression: "Leave me alone! Leave me alo-o-one!" (Kang, 2015, p. 145). Two carers and a nurse's aide grapple with her struggling form, forcing her down onto the bed. The repeated use of force underscores how hospitals discipline non-conforming individuals, reinforcing the broader ideological structures that dictate acceptable behavior.

Silent Upheaval Against Ideology in The Vegetarian

According to Althusser, ideology functions by interpolating individuals into specific subject positions through cultural and social institutions. In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye's body becomes a symbol of patriarchal authority and aesthetic domination, where she is repeatedly objectified, fetishized, and coerced into submission. Her brother-in-law manipulates her body for his desires, turning it into an artistic and sexual commodity. His eroticization of her Mongolian mark exemplifies how ideology constructs female bodies as objects of male consumption. Upon learning of its existence, he fantasizes about "the image of a blue flower on a woman's buttocks, its petals opening outward" (Kang, 2015, p. 55). This fetishization transforms Yeong-hye's body into a symbol of otherness and sexual availability, reinforcing the ideological notion that women exist for male pleasure.

The brother-in-law's fascination and passion for Yeong-hye deepen as he imagines her in a vulnerable state, a dynamic often linked to power and dominance. He recalls carrying her injured body and imagines "pulling down her trousers just enough to reveal the blue brand of the Mongolian mark" (Kang, 2015, p. 59). His exploitation of her physical state illustrates how patriarchal ideology conditions men to view women as passive objects of desire. Through his fixation, he strips her of agency, reducing her to an aestheticized canvas on which he projects his

fantasies. The act of painting her body symbolizes the ideological inscription of male authority over the female form, as he methodically decorates her with flowers yet deliberately leaves the Mongolian mark untouched: "When he reached the hump of her right buttock, he painted an orange flower in full bloom, with a thick, vivid yellow pistil protruding from its center" (Kang, 2015, p. 74). By leaving the mark bare, he both acknowledges and erases her individuality, reinforcing his dominance. But Yeong-hye is silent because this is her powerful weapon.

The painting of Yeong-hye's body aligns with the patriarchal expectation that women conform to beauty ideals dictated by ideology. His attempt to control her through art reveals that anesthetization is a means of coercion and dominance. His manipulation intensifies when he persuades her to pose nude under the pretense of artistic modeling, asserting, "It won't be difficult. An hour, maybe two—that's all I'll need. Whenever's convenient for you" (Kang, 2015, p. 70). However, his true intent is to eroticize and control her. His question, "If I painted flowers on myself, would you do it then?" (Kang, 2015, p. 94), further exposes his ideological control, as he equates his artistic authority with the ability to dictate her sexual agency. His actions reveal that patriarchal ideology sustains male dominance by subjugating women's bodies under the guise of aesthetic appreciation.

Despite Yeong-hye's passive resistance, her body remains a battleground for ideological enforcement. Her indifference to his advances challenges the ideological expectation that women should be receptive to male desire; as the novel states, "Of course, his plan wasn't to get her aroused, only to film her naked," but all the same, it was surprising that the process hadn't provoked in her even the slightest feelings of desire" (Kang, 2015, p. 79). This lack of response unsettles him because it disrupts the patriarchal expectation that female bodies exist for male pleasure.

Yeong-hye's final plea, "stop" (Kang, 2015, p. 99), signifies the ultimate erasure of her autonomy, yet it is ignored, exposing the brutal mechanisms through which ideology governs female bodies. The physical and psychological subjugation she endures reflects how patriarchal structures ensure compliance through both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. Her brother-in-law's relentless imposition of control mirrors societal forces that dictate women's roles, illustrating how patriarchal ideology is deeply entrenched in individual interactions. In this way, Yeong-hye's subjugation in the novel reflects Althusser's theory of ideological control, where her brother-in-law, acting as an agent of patriarchy, objectifies and exploits her body, using both coercion and anesthetization to strip her of autonomy.

Yeong-hye's transformation begins with a realization that trees, unlike people, do not stand upright but rather extend their arms into the earth. She insists, "I only found out just now. They stand with both arms in the earth— all of them. Look, look over there, aren't you surprised?" (Kang, 2015, p. 123). This revelation signifies her rejection of anthropocentric ideology, which dictates how bodies should exist and function. By attempting to embody a tree, she symbolically defies the structures that confine her within patriarchal and societal expectations.

Yeong-hye further resists ideological subjugation by rejecting the basic tenets of human survival—food and language. She declares, "I'm not an animal anymore, sister... I can live without it. All I need is sunlight" (Kang, 2015, p. 129). Her assertion challenges systems that regulate bodies through consumption and communication. Her desire to shed language signals a deeper resistance to ideological interpolation into specific subject positions.

Yeong-hye's willingness to embrace death signifies a final act of defiance, as she refuses to be contained by the medical, familial, or societal structures that seek to control her. Her question, "Why, is it such a bad thing to die?" captures the extremity of her resistance (Kang, 2015, p. 132). This question directly challenges the ideological assumption that life must be preserved at all costs. In viewing death not as an end but as a transformation, Yeong-hye subverts the ideology that defines human existence through survival and submission.

Ultimately, Yeong-hye's resistance culminates in complete dissolution into nature. She laments, "It melted in the rain...it all melted... I'd been just about to go down into the earth"

(Kang, 2015, p. 135). Her desire to merge with the natural world represents the ultimate rejection of ideological control over the body. By seeking to root herself in the earth rather than remain confined within human constructs, she defies the patriarchal and institutional forces that have sought to regulate her existence.

Yeong-hye's unarticulated rebellion exposes how the predetermined structure distorts individuals' perceptions of their reality. This study posits a silent rebellion by the protagonist, Yeong-hye. Their violent reactions reveal how ideology is enforced through 'ideological state apparatuses,' such as family and marriage, and 'repressive state apparatuses' through force and institutionalization.

Conclusion

This study reads *The Vegetarian* as a critique of the pervasive ideological and repressive structures that govern personal identity, gender roles, and autonomy. Yeong-hye silently rebels against societal institutions such as marriage, family, and medical establishments. Her rejection of meat and eventual embrace of quiet yet powerful defiance against societal norms and state apparatus indicate the power of silence. Her rebellion, though perceived as madness, disrupts the ideological frameworks that dictate her identity, revealing the limits of ideological dominance when coercion and violence are employed to suppress deviation despite the extreme measures taken to control her. Yeong-hye's refusal to conform ultimately signifies her liberation from the power dynamics imposed by ideological constraints.

Yeong-hye's journey highlights the violence of overt coercion and subtle ideological conditioning that enforces conformity to dominant norms. Through her body's objectification by her brother-in-law and the physical and psychological violence she endures, Kang emphasizes the control exerted over female bodies within patriarchal systems. But Yeong-hye's ultimate act of self-transcendence, her dissolution into nature, demonstrates the potential for resistance even in the face of systemic oppression. The novel serves as a powerful critique of the destructive forces of ideological control while also presenting the possibility of agency and defiance at a high personal cost. Therefore, *The Vegetarian* challenges readers to confront the deeply ingrained power structures that govern individual existence and the devastating impact of ideological subjugation on personal autonomy. Silence uprising is a prevailing way of rebellion that exceeds physical protest in society against encoded ideological forms and structures. Yeong-hye's silent scream circulates the message that voice is not the ultimate form of rebellion because even silence circulates a message to the public more than a vocal sound.

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This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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