



## EMBODIED TRAUMA AND UNSPEAKABLE SILENCE IN HAN KANG'S THE VEGETARIAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to critically examine the depiction of trauma in the novel *The Vegetarian* (2007) by Han Kang, a South Korean writer, through the character of Yeong-Hye, who is the main character in the novel. The theory of trauma used in the current study is Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma: an unassimilated event which cannot be narrated linearly, cannot be fully comprehended linguistically. The chosen work is analyzed by focusing on the protagonist's fragmented speech, continuous silence and her bodily revolt. This thesis employs the textual analysis method as a means to support the conceptual framework used in this thesis. The analysis of the selected fictional work highlights the importance of body in the representation of trauma as well as the impacts of traumatic experiences on personality of the protagonist. The work chosen could also be analysed from a feminist viewpoint, as it represents the patriarchy in the South Korean society embedded in the novel.*

**Keywords:** trauma, gendered violence, trauma theory, *The Vegetarian*, fragmentation.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of trauma can be considered as an important phenomenon in the contemporary times due to various factors. Horrific events like two World Wars, Vietnam war, tragedy of 9/11, America's war on terror in the middle east and in Afghanistan serve as a major contribution towards the research and scholarship in the field of trauma. One of these recent ones is Covid-19 Pandemic, which has a tremendous emotional impact on human beings, suggestive of the long presence of trauma in our lives. According to Shoshana Felman, "The twentieth century can be defined as a century of trauma" as these violent incidents have posed humankind with questions of existence and reality especially for those who has survived it. Trauma theory and trauma knowledge can be helpful in answering questions such as these. Elissa Marder suggests that as regards the definition of trauma it could be different depending on the subject and how it is employed in practice. But trauma has a Greek etymology with the meaning of 'wound'. But this 'wound' is "very peculiar kind of wound", with "recurring, unpredictable, and incalculable" repercussions that can last long after what seems like its 'precipitating cause'. There are no physical signs and symptoms that denote trauma (01,02). According to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5 (2013) by the American Psychiatric Association which defines trauma as an incident or experience that is overwhelming and distressing, generally involving a major risk to the physical, emotional, or psychological welfare of the individual victim(s) as well as his/her family and friends and including others. (Maleeha, 01).

Susannah Radstone says that the term 'trauma theory' was first used in Caruth's "Unclaimed Experience" (1996). In *Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, and Ethics* (2007), Radstone calls Caruth, Felman, and Laub's work "opening the Humanities to trauma" (9–10). These thinkers were both innovative and developed a number of approaches to examine the depiction of trauma in literature. Literature can be a great asset to the study of trauma as it is expansive and

rooted in the coherent and the ambiguous. Language is used as a method to convey traumatic experiences in literature. Trauma theorists such as Lukhurst, Felman, LaCapra, Caruth and others have a concrete foundation with which to theorize in the form of literary work.

### **Research Objective**

Following are the objectives of the present research study:

1. To explore trauma's inherent incomprehension in the novel, *The Vegetarian*.
2. To explore possible alternatives to the representation of trauma beyond linguistic recount.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways does *The Vegetarian* exhibit Caruth's conception of Trauma?
2. What is the function of body in representation of trauma?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term 'trauma' is derived from the Greek 'traumatizo' – which translates to mean 'physical wound. It is a "breaking of bodily envelope, a piercing of the skin" (Garland(Garland, 1998)). However, this wound slowly was taken in the meaning of emotional and psychological wound rather than the physical scarring. "Freud employed metaphor to stress that mind also can be wounded and pierced by events" (Garland, 1998). Now this claim is generally accepted that psychological effects of traumatic event last long after the physical wounds have been healed. If left undiagnosed and untreated, the psychological symptoms of any traumatic event, can present themselves as physical symptoms. In her book, Lenore Terr, a child psychiatrist, suggests that a psychic trauma is when a sudden, unexpected, intense emotional wound is inflicted upon the person from the outside and that traumatic events "become internalized rapidly". The definition of trauma that Freud provides in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is; "...a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli...the essence of the shock as being the direct damage to the molecular structure or even to the histological structure of the elements of the nervous system" (Freud, n.d.)

The increased interest in trauma studies can be traced back to various key events that took place in the course of recent human history. The two World Wars provide a good example of such a significant event and its destruction in terms of human loss, and traumatised people. Furthermore, the trauma field was spurred by the experiences of holocaust, Vietnam war and slavery, which has led to a scholarship and research into reducing the reactions to the dire repercussions of these experiences rather than addressing them. However, the clock can further be taken back in nineteenth century, when with advent of modernity in Europe railway accidents became impetus for trauma. As the clinicians began to notice that some people were injured in the train but were not physically well, they began to recognize a pattern of the injuries suffered by the patients. These symptoms were psychological instead inflicted upon as result of the shock of the train accident. A "Railway spine" was a 'diagnostic term for post-traumatic symptoms of passengers involved in railroad accidents' (Wikipedia) – 'Railway spine' (Harrington, 2003). These accidents were serious and had lasting impacts on the individual and on collective society, as they were a symbol of.

Given the preceding discussion, it is possible to state that the rail accidents provided an opening to talk about trauma. Jean Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet can be added as further contributors to the beginnings of trauma studies. French physician, Jean Charcot, was the first one to provide relation of trauma and mental diseases in his treatment of the hysteric women. Concluding that "the symptoms that patients complained of: convulsions, unexpected paralysis, loss of sensory stimulus, amnesia could be described psychologically and not physiologically" (Aamir, n.d.). Pierre Janet continued this work in these fields and delved into the impact of trauma on attitude and psyche of his patients.

Following his predecessors, Sigmund Freud furthered this concept by greatly emphasizing on past incidents. In his *Studies in Hysteria* (1995) he theorized that the splitting of the



consciousness/ego into two parts is caused by hysteria, and that these patients are experiencing a repetition of the traumatic event. That is, the original event was not traumatic in itself rather its repetition is the source of trauma. Later, Freud changed his mind and discarded his conclusions and denied his statements, stating that:

In the beginning of WW1, Freud made his contribution in trauma studies in newer dimensions. The emphasis shifted from hysterical women to war veteran experiencing a tremendous psychological trauma during the war, thus a new interest in trauma field. Freud's later work on war neurosis and traumatic repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) modifies his early theories on the subject. He suggests that traumatic events cause conflict in the ego, breakdown the unity of the ego and are internalized but reemerge in dreams later (Freud, n.d.). Freud makes here an analogy between mind and human body, as his body he has a shield, similarly his mind also has an inner and outer shield which protects it from harmful external stimuli.

Freud believed that the self does not remember the event itself, but rather the "reproductions" of the traumatic event that appear in dreams (Freud, n.d.).

In the first place, W. H. R. Rivers, a physician, treated his patients by giving them support in their process, as well as listening to their experience of the trauma. Siegfried Sassoon, a war poet, was his patient who was advised by Rivers to write down his war memories. Later, Siegfried acknowledged that the writing about his experiences was very fruitful in reducing the impact of those traumas.

"Literary texts offer analysis for the areas of experiences that might be ignored or denied by society and thus brings trauma to the forefront" (Balaev, 2014).

They described PTSD as an "intense fear, terror, and helplessness" experienced by people as a result of an event that "significantly distresses most people" (Pichot, 1986) and that is "outside the range of usual human experience."

It is a fact that to comprehend the subject of trauma, the evolution of theorisation of trauma from scientific beginnings to incorporating the literary aspects is crucial to the current research. Studies of trauma theory allow us to better understand the ways in which characters in different types of traumatic situations experience and react to trauma. The victimised patients cannot directly imitate their previous experience of a traumatic event in the utterances. In trying to bridge the gap between the scientific trauma and the literary manifestation of it, Cathy Caruth is the most noteworthy and distinguished scholar in the area of trauma. "A lot of scholarship came to forefront in 1990s to study the concept of trauma and its role in literature and society most prominently by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman" (Trauma Studies – Literary Theory and Criticism, n.d.). Caruth led this wave of criticism, which centered on the inherent contradiction in language and experience as an unrepresentable experience of trauma.

Moreover, a traumatic event cannot be traced back in time and space, that is it to pinpoint the original traumatic incident. Trauma refers to a "shock which seems to be a threat to the body, but is actually a disruption in the mind's sense of time" (Caruth, 1996). Trauma produces: ...distortion of the event, making it haunting by distorting personal significances attached to it...the event is not fully experienced at the time but only later, that is, in repeated possession by the one who experiences it. (4)

Because the event has not happened in the first place in the time of its occurrence, It can only be known "belatedly"—"later on", Caruth (1996) argues. As Caruth writes: "the impact of the traumatic event is just its delay; its refusal to be located; its insistence to appear outside the bounds of any single place, or time". (9). This concept can also be located in her general definition of trauma, "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which



the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena”. (11)

Now this “missed encounter” or “absence” is not necessarily a negative aspect of trauma but Caruth brilliant insight is in the light of the fact that these missed encounters present us with new possibilities of experience and understanding. This traumatic belatedness assists the patient/survivor to discover methods of surviving and experiencing the impact of that event. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth turns to literature and offer a close reading of psychoanalytical, historical, philosophical and film texts. Literature, she says, “allows us to bear witness to things that cannot be fully known and gives our ears to things that might not otherwise be spoken or heard”. (*Trauma and Literary Studies* Elissa Marder.) Pdf, n.d.) Regardless of the unspeakable nature of trauma which is characterized by incomprehensibility of the events, these incidents acquire meaning either by telling others or being heard by them.

Trauma is not a “simple illness of a wounded psyche,” says Caruth, “it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the desperate attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise unavailable.” (Caruth 1996: 4).

Trauma theory was profoundly shaped and influenced by Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) that viewed trauma as a “crisis of truth” and one not amenable to language. But her focus on the belatedness of the narrative and the “unspeakable” event has the potential of making language seem the sole means or medium of transmitting trauma. Although it is revolutionary, this language paradigm fails to account for the ways in which trauma also plays out somatically, in the body’s repetitions, not controlled by us. *The Vegetarian* by Han Knaig is an exploration of this space through the trauma that is manifested in the way the protagonist speaks, how she reacts and changes to the world she is in, the sign of vegetarianism, scars, photosynthesis to name a few. This somatic emphasis does not necessarily undermine the previous Caruthian model however it furthers rather enhances the scope of trauma scholarship by centering trauma’s bodily embodiment as well as linguistic paradoxes. Trauma studies as a somatic turn represents an important shift in theories of trauma from the “unrepresentable” wound and narrative delay of Cathy Caruth (1996) to theories that focus the body as the primary site of traumatic knowledge. This tendency explores and extends the impact of trauma on language, but also on material and corporeal experience, with a call for emergent frameworks that embrace representations of trauma beyond verbal language. It arose as a reaction to the inadequacy of the purely psychoanalytical or deconstructive approaches. The foundation was established by groundbreaking works by Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (1980) and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, (1985), who theorized pain and abjection as somatic ruptures that “unmake” symbolic order. For Kristeva, the abject is “the violent reaction of what disrupts the identity (corpses, body fluids etc), what intrigues and what repels; it is what we push out of ourselves to preserve the limits of who we are” (Kristeva & Roudiez, 2024). The abject, in particular, does not simply fit into one of the boxes or fit into any system and order—it disturbs identity, system and order—and does not respect borders, positions, and rules. In other words, everything that’s not within the scope of the symbolic order, the language, culture and accepted norms that constitute who we are, is called the abject. There is another important book that writer Elaine Scarry wrote called *The Body in Pain*; though not a trauma study, it has clear connections with trauma theory. She argues that due to overwhelming nature of physical pain, it becomes intrinsically inexpressible. Traumatic experiences are also not easily translated in story form or expressed in narration, so that people will have broken stories and not verbalized feelings. Another argument that Scarry put forward is that pain not only hurts the body, it transforms and shapes it dismantling the unity of the self. In Scarry’s story, the physical suffering results in the person’s integrity being compromised, making it harder for him to



assimilate the experience into a coherent self-narrative; and in trauma, the person may find himself feeling cut off, or estranged, from his body, making it more difficult for him to put the experience into a coherent self-narrative.

In the article “*Clenched and Empty Fists: Trauma and Resistance Ethics in Han Kang’s Fiction*”, Shannon Finck (2018) positions Yeong-hye's somatic acts—clenched fists, starvation—as moral resistance against violence, extending Caruthian ideas of trauma's unrepresentability”

(Finck, 2022). Yeong-hye's body enacts a Levinasian "refusal to be comprehended," according to Finck, who reclaims silence as agency where Caruth frames it as epistemological collapse (p. 152). Kristeva's rejection is in line with this, but it is politicized: Yeong-hye's trauma turns into a physical "no" to patriarchal assimilation. Finck's Western philosophical perspective (Levinas/Butler), however, runs the risk of generalizing Kang's criticism while ignoring the novel's foundation in Korean gender hierarchies.

In another research article, Nur Suci Izzati's mimetic interpretation of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* presents the book as a literary representation of trauma that goes beyond personal anguish to conjure historical violence in general, and the Gwangju slaughter in particular. Drawing on Aristotelian mimesis, Izzati contends that Kang's depiction of YeongHye's physical and psychological breakdown—represented by her subsequent vegetarian uprising and recurrent nightmares of bloodshed—reflects common human feelings of pain, terror, and institutional cruelty. When Yeong-Hye's somatic rebellion—starvation, self-harm, and delusional metamorphosis—becomes a physical language of distress, this mimetic technique emphasizes the non-linguistic return of trauma.

In their article, *Spatial Memory, Traumatic Unspeakability and the War in Afghanistan: Selected Literary Witnessing in Focus*, Inayat Ullah and Rubina Kamran examine how trauma—especially trauma brought on by war—is encoded in memory and geography and how literary narratives depict this. The paper focusses on the idea of "traumatic unspeakability," contending that some wartime experiences—particularly those connected to political violence, displacement, and individual loss—are incomprehensible. By closely examining a few pieces of Afghan war literature, the writers investigate how geographical memory—places associated with violence or exile—can be used as a narrative stand-in for suffering that cannot be spoken. In order to highlight memory as both embodied and fragmented, they highlight how houses, cities, and landscapes—both physical and symbolic—become archives of collective pain (Bukhari, 2020).

According to the them, Yeong-Hye's first act of denial—rejecting meat—catalyzes a larger rebellion against patriarchal norms and societal expectations. As a result of internalized trauma and unconscious opposition to violence, this stage is shown as a quiet protest. (John & Arora, 2023).

Eating and Suffering in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* is an article by won-Chung Kim which explores Yeong-Hye's refusal to eat meat as a way of looking at the complex intersection of trauma, food and moral opposition. Kim says that Han's book makes eating a basic human need of survival into a space for political protest and psychological agony. Yeong-Hye's refusal of meat is a space of silent but extreme rebellion, symbolically rejecting the violence that is both in eating and in patriarchy. (food-eating and sufferings in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*.Pdf, n.d.) Through the linguistic turn pioneered by Cathy Caruth, the psychoanalytic roots of trauma theory by Freud, and the embodied and symbolic paradigms through the contribution of Kristeva and Scarry, that currently rule modern discourse, this literature review has mapped the development of trauma theory. While Caruth's focus on narrative rupture and belatedness has shifted the trajectory of literary trauma studies, the pitfalls of the approach – such as universalizing the “unspeakability of trauma,” and limiting survivor agency (LaCapra, Leys) –

have necessitated somatic interventions. The fundamental solution provided by Kristeva's theory of abjection is to think about the traumatised body as a space of resistance to symbolic violence. The self-starvation and vomiting of Yeong-Hye, and his physical decay, make this paradigm very real.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sources of Data:

Different sources have been used in order to gather the data. The primary data has been taken from novel *The Vegetarian* (2007) by Han Kang, whereas secondary data has been taken from multiple sources including books, research articles, YouTube videos, interviews, websites and critical essays related to the study.

### Data Collection:

To address the scope of the present research study, key passages and lines have been taken from the selected work *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang. The selected lines are taken as a reference in accordance with the theoretical framework of the study.

### Theoretical framework:

The current paper seeks to apply a theoretical framework guided by the theorization of trauma by Cathy Caruth and the notion of Abjection by Julia Kristeva.

Cathy Caruth's seminal works, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and *Exploration in Memory* (1995), treats trauma as an unassimilated event that resists linguistic representation. However, traumatic experiences are later manifested through *belated* repetitions such as nightmares, flashbacks, somatic symbols which asserts narrative incoherence. Caruth's core understanding of trauma focuses on its unspeakability, considers trauma as "crises of truth" as well as an ethical demand for witnessing. This concept is suitable for our study as the protagonist's bloody dreams hints at belated return of repressed trauma. The concept of linguistic irrepresentability is reflected throughout the novel in form of protagonist's fragmented speech, muteness and dissociation.

Julia Kristeva in her book *Power of Horror* (1980), defines Abjection as a visceral expulsion of what threatens the self (corpses bodily fluids) rooted in infant separation from maternal body. Being neither subject nor object, the abject disrupts the symbolic order (language, law, patriarchy) by existing in a liminal space. In the case of trauma, the "abject body" "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva & Roudiez, 2024) by defying social standards through self-harm, rotting, or vomiting. Instead of being a metaphor, rejection is a physical protest—a physical cry against unjust systems.

In *The Vegetarian*, the protagonist rejection of meat reflects Kristeva's abjection. Yeong-Hye embraces the radical liminality of abjection by stating, "I'm not a human anymore" (*The Vegetarian Book.Pdf*, n.d.), shattering the very categories that hold her. Thus, Kristeva's theory demonstrates how Kang transforms trauma from psychological distress to physical rebellion, in which the silence of the body becomes its loudest protest.

## DISCUSSION

According to Caruth, the traumatic event is not fully experienced in the time of its occurrence rather than appears in relation with another place and in another time (08). The effects of those past experiences, therefore, return lately in life in the form of repetitive dreams and nightmares. In other words, the moment of trauma is the moment of enigma which is only articulated belatedly. Thus, the fragmented nature of the dream and its recurrence in various sections of the novel suggest a *Belated* (Nachträglichkeit) return of the repressed trauma. Also, the clear imagery created in the first part of the dream employs Caruth's notion of trauma both as 'unknown' (repressed origin) as well as 'hyper-real' (nightmares). Caruth further posits that trauma does not exist in the simple original event, as it is not registered as traumatic by the consciousness, but rather in its belated return. "Dreams overlaid with dreams, a palimpsest of



horror" (*The Vegetarian Book.Pdf*, n.d.) shows a belated return of trauma in which the primary origin of that event is unlocatable. "Chewing on something that felt so real, but couldn't have been, it couldn't. My face, the look in my eyes...my face, undoubtedly, but never seen before. Or no, not mine, but so familiar...nothing makes sense. Familiar and yet not...that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling." (09).

As it can be seen, the narration of the dream is fragmented speech which gives no clear indication of the original event neither offer a clear comprehension of the dream itself. The last sentence further blurs the distinction between the 'known' and 'unknown' part of the experience.

Caruth argues that "the traumatized carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess." (p. 5) In 'dreams of the murder' passage, the narrator's confusion between 'murderer' or 'murdered' shows obscure distinction between the subject or object, between the 'victim' of an experience and the 'perpetrator'. The dreamer cannot comprehend his own feelings, "A hazy feeling I can't pin down...", suggesting the 'crises of truth' in which trauma resists clear and definite interpretation. Apart from it, the other important point that is substantiated in the 'dreams of murder' is the paradoxical nature of traumatic experience where it both defy actual access to the event as well as demands witness. "Shut up behind a door without a handle. Perhaps I'm only now coming face-to-face with the thing that has always been here". (22) This 'door without the handle' shows the inaccessibility to the originality of the event that is just on the other side of the door yet cannot be reached.

Till now, it has been argued that how the nightmares in the novel, its fragmented structure and incomprehensible nature symbolizes Caruth's notion of dreams as one of the means to locate and understand trauma. Now, another important scene in the novel from the perspective of trauma is the family gathering. When Mr. Cheong could no longer bring Yeong Hye onto appropriate diet, he called her family members, telling them about his wife newly acquired vegetarianism. In the subsequent dinner scene, where everyone is trying to persuade Yeong Hye for eating meat, her father gets agitated, slaps her twice and tries to forcefully put meat into her mouth. The only resistance she offers is her silence and clear rejection that "I won't eat it". "My heart will pack in if this goes on any longer!" my father-in-law shouted at Yeong-Hye. "Don't you understand what your father's telling you? If he tells you to eat, you eat!" (30) Caruth in her book "Unclaimed Experience" posits that trauma is not simply remembered but relived, often in undesirable and fragmented ways. From the standpoint of "Trauma returns as a literal re-experiencing of the past" (02), it can be argued that the sheer violence and paternal authoritative attitude that is at play in the mentioned scene is the repetition and re-enactment of a childhood memory i.e. childhood abuse. This childhood abuse is further substantiated by the narrator in the last part of the novel.

In the third part of the novel, where In-hye is attending on her sister Yeong-Hye as she was admitted in the hospital, a sudden fragmented recollection occurs to In-hye. In the childhood, when Yeong-Hye was nine years old, both of them were lost on a mountain and Yeong-Hye said "let's just not go back". Although, In-hye could not decipher at that moment the meaning of her reluctance to go home, now after so much has happened, she is able to trace the reason behind it all.

"Only after all this time was, she able to understand why Yeong-Hye had said what she did. Yeong-Hye had been the only victim of their father's beatings. Such violence wouldn't have bothered their brother Yeong-ho so much, a boy who went around doling out his own rough justice to the village children".

“Only Yeong-Hye, docile and naive, had been unable to deflect their father’s temper or put up any form of resistance. Instead, she had merely absorbed all her suffering inside her, deep into the marrow of her bones”.

The ‘delayed return’ of the memory to In-hye’s consciousness which has not made sense till now aligns with Caruth’s notion of “Trauma is not experienced as it occurs, but only in its repeated possession of the survivor” (Caruth, p. 4). This scene is also a perfect example of how an ordinary and simple experience or event can become a threshold for normal cognition, thus creating an overwhelming effect on memory and personality. In-hye’s memory was long since buried and forgotten, but with the viable environment and context provided by the events in the aftermath re-enacted those bitter memories.

Apart from it, there is another minor scene in which Mr. Cheong recalls her wife’s childhood memory of dog being beaten to death in her yard. ‘Its eyes were like a human’s,’ she’d said, then never spoke of it again.” (28) Whereas her husband discredits this memory as ‘strange anecdote’, for Yeong-Hye dog’s death is a displaced memory of her own abuse. This scene is the manifestation of Caruth’s trauma as “a story that cannot be told in its entirety” (Caruth, 1996) rather in fragments vivid yet disconnected from its origin.

Kristeva’s Abjection is the ‘violent expulsion’ of what threatens the self (rotting food, bodily fluids) to reject patriarchal norms (Kristeva & Roudiez, 2024). In the family gathering scene, when Yeong-Hye’s father tries to forcefully put meat into her mouth and which she slightly swallows, a chunk of meat drops on the table along with bloody saliva. This vomiting meat is ‘the expulsion of patriarchal filth’ forced onto her by her father. By this involuntary act, she rejects paternal or patriarchal control over her body and through vomiting she asserts not her weakness but a corporeal defiance as trauma bypass language to speak through ‘convulsion’ and ‘bodily revolt’.

## CONCLUSION

This current study highlights the protagonist’s trauma in terms of its inherent incomprehensibility, linguistic aporia and crises of truth. Through the exploration of fractured dream narrative, Yeong-Hye’s incomprehensible nightmares and fragmented memory recounts, Caruth’s unassimilated nature of trauma is substantiated. The trauma that Yeong-Hye experiences in *The Vegetarian* transcends language and instead shows itself as a severe physical revolt. Hence, Yeong-Hye’s body serves as the only location for her testimony, with her vegetarianism and subsequent plant-life delusions serving as somatic metaphors for cleansing and escaping patriarchal abuse. The novel’s fragmented narration and unresolved conclusion formalize trauma’s resistance to resolution, making readers observe what words cannot describe. Ultimately, Han Kang implies that Yeong-Hye’s body serves as testimony and silent repository of trauma that words cannot describe.

## FINDINGS

This research elaborates how trauma resist linear storytelling, creating a gap in temporal order of events that defies linguistic codification. This paper also explains how the same event can be non-traumatic for one individual, whereas it can be an overwhelming experience for another human being. Furthermore, with language being insufficient for the experience and understanding of trauma, body becomes a place which speaks the horror of trauma.

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