



The Persona and Shadow of Young Hye in Han Kang's Novel *Vegetarian*

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i12.7217>

Abstract

This article analyzes the character Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian* using Carl Gustav Jung's literary psychology approach, specifically the concepts of persona and shadow archetypes. The purpose of this study is to identify the dynamics of Young Hye's personality based on three narrative perspectives. The method used is qualitative research with literature study techniques. The results show a tension between the suppressed social persona and the shadow that emerges through bodily resistance. The conclusion of this study highlights an identity crisis resulting from the conflict between social structure and the unconscious mind.

Keywords: *Persona; Shadow; Literary Psychology; Carl Jung; Han Kang*

Introduction

Literary works are a creative medium of expression that can explore the depths of the human soul through reflections of social and cultural realities. The experiences or imagination felt by the author are freely expressed to depict various emotional expressions, inner conflicts, motivations, and even the psychological dynamics of characters in a literary work. Through deeply developed characters, literature is able to present a realistic picture of the behavior and psychological conditions of individuals and society in general (Endraswara, 2011). Literary psychology is an approach that aims to explore the psychological dimensions in literary works, bringing together two fields of study, namely psychology and literature. This approach is an effort to understand the complexity of characters, motivations, and internal conflicts faced by characters in literary works. The goal of literary psychology is to understand the psychological aspects contained in a work. Through understanding the characters, for example, society can understand the changes, contradictions, and other deviations that occur in society, especially those related to the psyche (Rahmawati, 2018). As such, literary psychology can provide broader insight into the reasons behind the characters' actions, the impact of situations on their mental state, and how literary works can reflect the psychological condition of the author or even society in general (Wellek & Warren, 2014).

Novels, which are constantly evolving, have become the most sought-after literary works (Malinda et al., 2024). Novels can be analyzed using a literary psychology approach because the storyline usually presents various characters with complex personalities, subconscious situations, and archetypes

that represent basic patterns of human behavior. Every human being has a collective unconscious that is reflected in various symbols and archetypes, such as heroes, mothers, or shadows that often appear in literary works. Using Jung's theory, novels can be analyzed to reveal how psychological aspects such as internal conflict, projection, and character individuation are constructed symbolically in the narrative (Maulidya et al., 2022). The importance of using literary psychology as an analytical tool lies in its ability to enrich the interpretation of literary works, while also contributing significantly to our understanding of the human psychological condition. With this approach, readers not only enjoy the aesthetic aspects of literary works, but are also able to explore deep psychological aspects that are relevant to real life (Semi, 2012).

Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian* was chosen as the source of data used in this study. The novel *Vegetarian* led its author, who is from South Korea, to win the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel was then translated into English by Deborah Smith and into Indonesian by Dwita Rizki, published by Baca. The novel tells the story of a change in the character Young Hye, who decides to become a "vegetarian." The vegetarianism referred to in this novel not only tells the story of the main character's extreme change in diet but also the rejection within her, both of social norms and her desire to be nothing. In addition, the novel also explicitly describes the psychological process of the character, Young Hye, who experiences inner turmoil and extreme identity changes. This novel implies the meaning of subconscious symbolism, archetypes, and the conflict between the id, ego, and superego, which are relevant to analyze with Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory. The character Young Hye shows symptoms of rejection of the social structure of her own body, which can be interpreted as a form of Jungian individuation, namely the journey towards true self-understanding through resistance to collective norms. In addition, the novel's narrative is constructed in layers and from multiple perspectives, namely those of Young Hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister, allowing for an exploration of the complex dynamics of the human psyche.

Another strength of the novel *Vegetarian* is its ability to represent two important elements in Jung's psychological theory, namely persona and shadow. Young Hye's persona can be seen from the social role she played before her decision to become a vegetarian, where she appeared as an obedient and 'normal' wife in accordance with society's expectations. However, her sudden decision to stop eating meat became the starting point for her resistance against that persona. Meanwhile, the concept of the shadow appears in the form of rejection of the dark side of herself and the society around her, which then triggers inner conflict and social alienation. Through drastic changes and the responses of those around her, especially her husband, brother-in-law, and sister, the novel presents a conflict between consciousness and unconsciousness that is characteristic of the dynamics of the persona and shadow according to Jung.

Research related to archetypes using Carl Gustav Jung's literary psychology theory has been reviewed by several researchers. From the many previous research references, the following case studies can be used as a reference in this study.

First, a study titled *Characters in Coonant's Novel Everyone Has Lies (A Psychological Study of Carl Gustav Jung)* was researched by (Azkia & Ahmadi, 2022) focuses on three issues, namely character persona, the formation of character persona, and the impact of character persona. In addition to focusing on Carl Gustav Jung's persona theory, this study also discusses the collective unconscious. The results of this study indicate that the twelve characters in the novel have different personas formed due to their dysfunctional family backgrounds, which have an impact on each character.

Second, a study titled *Manifestations of the Archetype of Laisa in the Novel Dia adalah Kakakku (She is My Sister)* by Tere Liye: A Literary Psychological Analysis was researched by (Raissa & Susanto, 2024) Focusing on the description of personality archetypes that include persona, shadow, anima, and self in the main character Laisa and the characteristics of the characters included in the novel *Dia adalah*

Kakakku (She is My Sister) by Tere Liye. The results of this study show that the personality of the main character in the novel is a manifestation of the four archetypes, namely persona, shadow, anima, and self, which are interrelated. When these four elements are achieved, the character can move forward towards perfection in life and can be said to have achieved the true level of all the elements of the personality archetype.

Third, a study titled *Ego and Shadow of the Main Character in the Novel Kawi Matin di Negeri Anjing* by Arafat Nur (A Jungian Psychological Perspective) researched by (Tillah & Ahmadi, 2022), This study discusses the ego and shadow of the main character using Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory. The results of this study show that the ego of the main character in the novel *Kawi Matin di Negeri Anjing* by Arafat Nur depicts Kawi's sincere and steadfast personality in facing all of life's problems. Meanwhile, in terms of shadow, the main character turns into a figure full of hatred and resentment due to the problems that have befallen him and his family, making it difficult for the main character to control himself. Two factors influence his personality, namely family and environment.

The three studies were used as comparative references for this study because they used archetypal elements analyzed using Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory. The difference in this study, apart from the research object being the novel *Vegetarian* by Han Kang, is that the researcher only analyzed two archetypal elements, namely the persona and shadow of the character Young Hye from the perspective of her husband, brother-in-law, and sister using Carl Gustav Jung's literary psychology theory.

This study aims to identify and analyze the persona and shadow of Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian*. The novel consists of three chapters narrated from the perspectives of Young Hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister using Carl Gustav Jung's literary psychology theory.

The potential implications of this study for the analysis of the persona and shadow of the character Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian* using Carl Gustav Jung's literary psychology approach. Through an analysis of the dynamics of Young Hye's persona and shadow, this study shows that the construction of a literary character's personality not only reflects individual character, but also reflects the tension between social structure (persona) and repressed unconscious impulses (shadow). The theoretical implication of this finding is that literary texts can be used as a medium for exploring the deepest psychological conflicts of humans, while also revealing the dynamics of universal archetypes. Practically, this study also contributes to the understanding of mental health and psychological resistance in patriarchal societies. The character Yeong Hye represents women who are affected by social norms and lose their authentic identity due to the overly dominant role of persona. Thus, the results of this study can be used as a source of reflection in the study of feminism, trauma, and identity in literary texts, as well as enriching the mapping of complex characters in creative writing and literary education.

The Collective Unconscious According to Carl Gustav Jung

The concept of the collective unconscious proposed by Carl Gustav Jung is one of the main foundations of analytical psychology and is often adapted in literary psychology studies. Jung explains that the collective unconscious is the deepest layer of the psyche that contains the universal experiences inherited by humankind. The collective unconscious is part of the psyche that can be negatively distinguished from the personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, originate from personal experience and is therefore not an individual acquisition. While the personal unconscious consists mainly of contents that have been made conscious, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been present in consciousness and therefore have never been acquired individually, but originate solely from inheritance (Jung, 1959b).

This means that the contents of the unconscious do not originate from an individual's personal experiences, but rather consist of “latent memory traces” that are passed down across generations and shared by everyone (Suhartini et al., 2025). One of the most important elements of the collective unconscious is the archetype.

Archetypes can be defined as basic patterns or universal symbolic models that appear repeatedly in the human mind, myths, and literary works. Jung identified a number of core archetypes, including the persona (social mask), shadow (dark side), anima/animus (psychic femininity/masculinity), great mother, wise old man, hero, and self, all of which are primordial forms in the collective psyche. Archetypes, by definition, are factors and motifs that organize psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in such a way that they can only be recognized from the effects they produce (Jung, 1959b).

Persona

In Jung's literary psychology theory, the persona is one of the main archetypes that represents the social “mask” worn by individuals in their interactions with the outside world. The persona is not the true self, but rather an aspect of personality that is shaped to conform to the norms, expectations, and demands of the social environment. Jung emphasizes that the persona is useful for social adaptation, but if it becomes too attached, it can distance individuals from their authentic personalities and create inner conflict. The persona is essentially a system that functions to form relationships with the environment, a kind of mask, designed partly by the individual and partly by society (Jung, 1959b). This mask is a compromise between the norms found in the archetype and the demands of its environment (Raissa & Susanto, 2024). The purpose of this mask is to create a certain impression on people and is the opposite of the personality behind the social face (Ahmad, 2021).

Shadow

According to Jung, the shadow is one of the most important and fundamental archetypes in the structure of the human personality. The shadow refers to aspects of the personality that are rejected, suppressed, or not recognized by the conscious ego because they conflict with norms, moral values, or ideal images formed through the persona. The shadow contains hatred, anger, distrust, fear, and other things that we try to deny (Kasemetan et al., 2022). The shadow contains hatred, anger, distrust, and fear that we try to deny. The shadow is a moral issue that challenges the entire ego personality, because no one can become aware of their shadow without a great moral effort. Becoming aware of the shadow means acknowledging the dark side of the personality as something real and existing (Jung, 1959a).

Method

This study uses qualitative research, which is used to examine natural conditions of objects, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are carried out using triangulation (combination), data analysis is inductive, and the results of the study emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2017). The purpose of this study is to examine the persona and shadow of the character Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian* from the perspective of three characters involved in the story, namely Young Hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister. From these three perspectives, the persona and shadow of Young Hye's character will be revealed. The data source used is Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian*, published and translated by Baca in 2017, which consists of 221 pages divided into three chapters. This novel, which won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature, tells the story of the changes experienced by the main character, Young Hye, after she decides to become a vegetarian for reasons that cannot be explained and accepted rationally by those closest to her. The research data consists of narrative and dialogue excerpts from three perspectives (Young Hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister), which

reveal Young Hye's persona and shadow and the reasons behind them. The data collection technique used is reading, note-taking, and drawing conclusions. The researcher collected quotations related to the archetypes to be analyzed, namely persona and shadow, from three chapters in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian*.

Result and Discussion

Persona and Shadow the Character Young Hye from the perspective of Young Hye's husband

In Carl Gustav Jung's theory, the persona is the aspect of personality that individuals construct to adapt to social demands, while the shadow is the dark and unconscious side of the personality that contains impulses, traumas, and internal conflicts that are suppressed by consciousness. An imbalance between the persona and the shadow can lead to identity disintegration and psychological crisis.

Nothing special

“I never thought my wife was extraordinary before she became a vegetarian. Honestly, I wasn't even interested in her when we first met” (Kang, 2017) page 5

This citation shows that from the beginning, Young Hye's husband saw his wife not as an individual who met his standards, but as a symbol of a passive and undemanding social persona. He did not love Young Hye for her personality, but for her ease of control and lack of challenge. In a Jungian context, Young Hye formed a persona that conformed to patriarchal expectations, namely that of a woman who did not stand out, did not cause trouble, and was easily positioned within the structure of the household.

Next citation,

“I married her because she didn't seem to have any particular charm or flaws. I felt comfortable with her ordinary nature, which lacked glamour or freshness. I didn't have to pretend to be great to win her heart”. (Kang, 2017: 5-6)”

This statement confirms that Young Hye's persona is valued not for its authenticity, but for its compliance with the social functions expected of a wife. From her husband's perspective, she is not a subject with will and soul, but an object that performs a functional role. This persona does not originate from Young Hye's own conscious choice, but from the internalization of social norms that demand women to be silent, submissive, and invisible. However, a persona that does not originate from one's true self and is suppressed over a long period of time has the potential to give rise to a shadow. Young Hye's shadow, which later appears in the form of strange dreams, rejection of meat, and ultimately self-harm, is a form of subconscious resistance to the false persona imposed on her.

In Jungian analysis, Young Hye's persona, which is too rigid and shaped by external pressures, has severed the connection between consciousness and unconsciousness. When her husband sees her as a figure who “has no strengths or weaknesses,” he does not realize that he is describing a persona that has lost its human dimension. This overly thin persona makes the shadow even stronger, because the suppressed parts of the self (desires, anger, trauma) have no room for expression.

Meeting Expectations

“My wife, who fits my expectations perfectly, successfully fulfills her role as a wife without any obstacles. She wakes up at six every morning to prepare rice, soup, and fish. She also helps

financially, albeit only a little, by continuing to work part-time, which she has been doing since she was a young woman. She once worked as a temporary teacher at a computer graphics education institution for a year, and now at home she works on a project involving adding text to speech bubbles in comics for a publisher” (Kang, 2017: hlm 6-7)”

From the above excerpt, it can be concluded that Young Hye's persona is seen by her husband as a “perfect” woman according to patriarchal social standards, namely:

- She wakes up early and prepares meals: demonstrating the domestic role of a diligent and responsible wife.
- She continues to contribute economically, albeit modestly, with part-time work from home: demonstrating a financial supporting role without threatening her husband's dominance.
- She does not protest and does not demand more from her life: demonstrating complete obedience to the norms and expectations of a wife's role.

From a Jungian perspective, this is an example of a persona that is entirely shaped by external expectations, not by Young Hye's true needs or identity. The husband even states that Young Hye “fits my expectations,” meaning that the image of the wife he desires is successfully realized by Young Hye through her obedience and self-sacrifice.

However, from a Jungian psychological perspective, a persona that is overly controlled by social norms and not based on authentic inner desires has the potential to suppress the unconscious aspect known as the shadow. The shadow is the dark side of the personality that contains desires, trauma, and inner tensions that are not recognized by the conscious mind. In Young Hye's case, the pressure of a persona constructed entirely by her husband's expectations caused deep inner conflict, which then manifested itself through bloody dreams and the decision to become a vegetarian. This change marks the beginning of the fracture of Young Hye's persona and the dominance of the shadow that had been hidden until then. Thus, Young Hye's persona in this novel is not merely a representation of a social role, but also the starting point of a tragic psychological dynamic resulting from the imbalance between self-image and unconscious desires.

Quiet Personality

“My wife tends to be quiet. She rarely asks me for anything and never complains no matter how late I come home from work. She never even invites me to go out on our days off. She seems to be constantly working or reading books—my wife's hobby is basically just reading, even though her books are so boring that I can't even be bothered to open them—and only opens the door when she's preparing food without saying a word to me.” (Kang, 2017: page 7).

The quote implies that Young Hye's persona was entirely shaped to fulfill the image of the ideal wife expected by patriarchal society, namely a woman who is quiet, obedient, unobtrusive, and does not express personal desires. From a Jungian perspective, this type of persona is repressive because it suppresses the emotional aspects and authentic desires that exist in the individual's subconscious. When the persona becomes too dominant, the potential for inner conflict increases. Young Hye's persona, which conforms too closely to external expectations, has the potential to cause an accumulation of shadow, which is the dark side of the personality consisting of desires, anger, trauma, and impulses that have been suppressed. In this case, Young Hye's calmness is not a form of inner harmony, but rather the result of internalizing external expectations that disconnect her from her own personal identity. Her emotional absence in the household, as described by her husband, is an indication that her persona was not built on self-awareness, but solely to fulfill a social function. Young Hye's shadow does not explode in the form of

overt aggressive actions, but rather manifests as withdrawal from the outside world, failure to communicate, and the symbolization of the body in intense psychic actions. All of these are consequences of a persona that is overly suppressed, a persona that is not based on self-will, but solely on fulfilling her husband's expectations and social norms.

Ignoring

“Unexpectedly, my wife was not surprised when I put my hand on her shoulder. She did not lose her mind and realized that I had left the room, that I was asking her a question, that I was approaching her. However, she ignored me. Just as she ignored my return home even though she heard me when she was focused on a late-night television drama”(Kang, 2017 : page 10)”

This quote explains that Young Hye plays her social role as a wife without emotional involvement, appearing more like a physically present but psychologically empty figure. She is aware of her husband's actions but chooses not to respond, as if she has severed her involvement in the domestic relationship. The above excerpt also describes that, from her husband's point of view, Young Hye appears calm, unemotional, and passively ignores interactions in the domestic relationship. She shows no surprise, fear, or warm response when her husband touches her, even though she is aware of his presence, but chooses not to respond. Even in daily interactions such as welcoming her husband home, Young Hye appears emotionally detached. This shows that Young Hye's persona has shifted into a kind of social defense mechanism, rather than an expression of a living and conscious relationship.

In Jung's view, this attitude reflects an empty persona, namely the role of a wife that is carried out functionally but without authentic psychological or emotional involvement. The persona no longer acts as a link between the outside world and the inner world, but becomes a thin layer that covers inner disconnection or exhaustion. Young Hye's choice to “ignore” her husband without confrontation is a subtle form of withdrawal, but it indicates a tendency toward social disengagement, which psychologically can be read as a process of dissociation or detachment from a persona that no longer has meaning for her.

In the context of Jungian personality dynamics, Young Hye's behavior also hints at a shadow compensation mechanism that begins to work the more she feels inauthentic in her role as a wife, the more she refuses to engage in interpersonal relationships that force her to maintain that image. Her refusal to respond emotionally is not merely a form of indifference, but a symptom that the persona she has been wearing no longer has the power to support her mental balance.

Thus, in this excerpt, it appears that her husband still sees Young Hye through the lens of her persona, namely as a quiet and controllable wife, while from an analytical psychology perspective, Young Hye is experiencing a fracture in her persona structure, a sign that the shadow has begun to take over and the individuation process has entered a crisis phase.

Next citation,

“I yelled as if I had lost my mind. My wife ignored me just like last night and continued to put packages of meat into the plastic garbage bags” (Kang, 2017: page 12).

The above excerpt describes a situation in which Young Hye's husband feels unrecognized, while his wife calmly continues her activity of throwing away meat without paying attention to her partner's emotional reaction. In the context of Carl Gustav Jung's theory, Young Hye's actions reflect a split in her persona, namely the social mask she has been wearing as an obedient and devoted wife.

Young Hye's attitude of ignoring her husband's cries shows that she no longer cares about the social roles she previously played passively. She now displays an indifferent and one-sided attitude that signifies a rejection of her persona as a normative wife. In this case, Young Hye is not arguing or showing direct aggression, but rather defending herself in silence as a form of total disregard for the social structure that has constrained her.

Hard to Understand

“This is the first time in five years of marriage that I have had to leave for work without my wife seeing me off. [...] I combed my hair, tied my tie, and smoothed out the wrinkles in my shirt with the palm of my hand. After that, I remembered my wife's calm face and stiff voice that made me shiver. My wife said twice that she had a dream. Her face flashed across the darkness of the tunnel beyond the train window as it kept running. That face felt unfamiliar, like the face of someone I had just met” (Kang, 2017: 14).

In the first excerpt, Young Hye's husband begins to sense that the persona he knows is starting to crack. Young Hye's face and voice, which he has always considered symbols of calmness and obedience, now feel unfamiliar. In Jungian terms, this indicates that Young Hye's social persona as a calm and orderly wife is beginning to slip away, and another identity that is unrecognizable to those around her is beginning to emerge.

The following citation reinforces the drastic change in Young Hye's body language.

“I rushed in, closed the main door, and saw my wife. I was afraid someone might see us as they passed by in the hallway of our apartment. My wife was sitting leaning against the TV table, peeling potatoes, bare-chested and wearing only light gray cotton pants. Her breasts looked small because her body was too thin under her prominent collarbone.” (Kang, 2017: 38-39)

This action violates domestic norms and propriety that are part of the persona of a “good woman.” When her body is present naked and undisturbed by her husband's presence, Young Hye shows that she no longer submits to the persona constructed by patriarchal structures and domestic morality. Her attitude is passive yet provocative; she does not challenge verbally, but her body becomes a field of resistance against control.

The conflict between persona and shadow is evident in the following excerpt:

“When my sister-in-law let go of her grip upon seeing my father-in-law's anger, my wife spat out the sweet and sour pork. A scream like that of a wild animal came from her lips, “Get out of the way!” [...] My wife ran to the front door, but then she turned back to grab a knife from the large dining table. [...] Blood spurted from my wife's wrist like a fountain.” (Kang, 2017: 49)

This extreme action is a form of shadow explosion, which is psychological tension that can no longer be controlled by the persona structure. Screaming, grabbing a knife, and self-harm are direct expressions of the suppressed side of oneself, which can be trauma, disgust with the social system, or even rejection of one's own body.

The last quote reveals this.

“My wife was sitting on a bench beside the fountain. She took off her patient's top and placed it on her lap, revealing her protruding hipbones, deflated breasts, and brown nipples. She removed the bandage from her left wrist and stared at the stitches as if blood would come out of them. The sunlight embraced her naked body and face.” (Kang, 2017: 62)

Young Hye's body appears naked in a non-erotic context and is no longer an object for men. In this position, Young Hye has completely shed her social persona; she is no longer a wife, a sweet woman, or a "sane" citizen. Her body becomes an existential symbol of inner wounds that cannot be explained socially, but are very real psychologically. Her shadow appears not only through extreme actions, but also through the way she positions her body as a form of disconnection from the outside world.

Persona and Shadow Young Hye from the Perspective of Young Hye's Brother-in-Law

Interesting

“He loved everything about his sister-in-law, from her monolid eyes, her stiff and awkward voice that was not as sweet and nasal as his wife's, her simple style of dress, and even her prominent cheekbones” (Kang, 2017: 75).

In this excerpt, Young Hye's brother-in-law expresses admiration for the seemingly simple and even unconventional aspects of Young Hye's personality. He likes Young Hye's physical appearance and expressions that do not follow common feminine norms: her stiff voice, simple dress style, and socially unappealing attitude. From the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, this assessment shows how Young Hye's persona was formed not to attract or satisfy social expectations, but rather to show her disengagement with the common feminine constructs in a patriarchal society. In Jung's theory, the persona is the outer aspect of the personality that is formed to face the social world. The persona is often associated with the ideal image of a sweet, gentle, attractive woman who is liked and accepted by society. However, in her brother -in-law's description, Young Hye is attractive precisely because she does not appear that way. Yeong-hye's persona is seen as authentic, neutral, and free from social manipulation, in contrast to her brother -in-law, who is implicitly associated with a fabricated feminine persona.

Young Hye's brother-in-law's admiration for Young Hye shows that Young Hye's persona was not created to please others, but rather reflects sincerity and indifference to external demands. However, in the context of Jungian psychology, a persona that is too “thin” or too far from social expectations can also be risky because it is unable to function as a bridge between the inner and outer worlds. When the persona becomes too weak, individuals tend to become absorbed in their inner world and can experience profound social alienation. In addition, Young Hye's brother-in-law's perspective can also be interpreted as an indication that she is indirectly attracted to Young Hye because her persona frees her from the social norms she feels pressured to conform to in her own marriage. Young Hye's persona, in her brother-in-law's view, is not only an object of admiration, but also a reflection of her brother-in-law's subconscious desire to escape from the persona he himself wears as a husband, artist, and head of the family who must maintain his appearance and social role.

Next quote.

“Her sister-in-law lived with her for a month before moving out after finding a room to rent—a month that was not difficult. She had already looked at the woman with affection and indescribable feelings even before hearing about the blue birthmark” (Kang, 2017: 81-82)

The quote describes how the brother-in-law character forms a very personal and emotional perception of Young Hye. He states that during the month they lived together, Young Hye's presence had fostered intense feelings of affection and attraction before physical aspects such as birthmarks were revealed. Young Hye's persona is not something constructed to influence or please others. On the contrary, her silence and lack of involvement in social relationships create an image of herself that gives rise to fantasies and projections from outsiders, in this case, her brother-in-law. The attraction that arose before any physical interaction (e.g., birthmarks) indicates that the brother-in-law responded to Young Hye's persona as an embodiment of the simplicity and mystery he longed for, possibly as compensation

for his own cold and demanding relationship. From a Jungian perspective, this shows that Young Hye's persona was not actively formed, but rather captured and interpreted by others based on their projections of desire and unfulfillment. The brother-in-law attaches emotional meaning to Young Hye's existence, even though objectively Young Hye herself never shows any intention of attracting attention. Thus, Yeong-hye's persona in this case can be understood as a passive persona, which, although not formed to portray something socially, still functions as a mirror for the shadows of others.

Quiet Personality

“My sister-in-law is very quiet and usually spends her afternoons enjoying the late autumn sun on the porch. She will clean up the dry leaves that have fallen from the flower pots or open her palms wide to make shadows on the floor (Kang, 2017: 82).

“She only appears obedient on the outside. She will definitely become even quieter if she is told to take medicine every day. Nothing has changed about her” (Kang, 2017: 82).

These two quotes describe Young Hye from her brother-in-law's perspective as a quiet, passive figure who appears calm on the outside. Activities such as enjoying the sun, cleaning leaves, or making shadows with her palms show Young Hye's minimal and almost contemplative involvement in the world. She is physically present, but appears to be an individual who has separated herself from a dynamic and emotional social life.

Within the framework of Carl Gustav Jung's theory, this reflects Young Hye's persona as a passive and non-confrontational social mask, an image of a woman who is silent, obedient, and unproblematic. This persona is viewed by those around her, including her brother-in-law, as a form of compliance with social roles, especially in a patriarchal structure that demands women to be submissive and avoid conflict. The phrase “only appears obedient on the outside” indicates that this persona is not a reflection of Young Hye's true identity, but rather a surface she presents in response to social pressure or psychological trauma.

However, in Jungian analytical psychology, a persona that is overly controlled or inauthentic risks hiding and suppressing the dark side of the personality, namely the shadow. The shadow is the part of the psyche that contains emotions, impulses, and aspects of personality that are not recognized by the conscious mind because they conflict with norms or ideal identities. When her brother-in-law stated, “She will definitely become even more silent if she is told to take medicine every day,” it suggests that Young Hye's silence and passivity are not a form of calmness, but rather a form of resistance to external pressure or control.

As such, Young Hye's seemingly simple and submissive persona hides deep psychological conflicts that do not appear explicitly but are reflected in small actions, such as avoiding interaction, extreme silence, and engaging in socially dysfunctional activities. This indicates the emergence of a shadow from the subconscious, in the form of rejection of medical intervention, family norms, and other forms of social control. This shadow is not expressed verbally or aggressively, but rather through total withdrawal from the social system, a form of passive resistance against the structures that oppress her.

Calm

“Now he could see the woman's face. He realized that her expression was as calm as a nun's. Very calm. Was this just a facade hiding a cruel interior? The woman's gaze even frightened him.” (Kang, 2017: 90)

“He was only able to lift his head to look at the woman’s entire body after staring at the blue birthmark for a long time. He was impressed by the woman’s calmness, which did not seem like she was posing nude for the first time, especially considering that she was his sister-in-law and he was the husband of her older sister” (Kang, 2017: 99)

In both quotes, Young Hye is described by her brother-in-law as a very calm figure, even like a nun, a symbol of spirituality, self-isolation, and inner peace. Young Hye's persona, in this view, appears as a quiet, peaceful woman, untouched by the anxieties of the world, even in situations that are considered socially and morally tense (such as posing nude in front of her own brother-in-law).

In Carl Gustav Jung's theoretical framework, persona is a “mask” that a person wears in social life in order to be accepted by their environment. In Young Hye's case, the persona seen by her brother-in-law is a calm and neutral face, which no longer fits the traditional social roles of a woman, wife, or sister-in-law. This persona does not seem to be shaped by external norms, but rather appears to be a layer of silence that covers up inner reality. Therefore, her brother-in-law questions: is this calmness genuine, or is it just a surface that hides something “very cruel”?

This question leads to an awareness of the possible existence of a shadow within Young Hye, the dark and hidden side of the soul that is not visibly apparent, but has destructive potential. According to Jung, the shadow is an aspect of the personality that is rejected, suppressed, or not consciously acknowledged, and manifests itself in the form of uncontrollable impulses, trauma, or inner conflict. In this context, the brother-in-law begins to realize that behind Young Hye's calm persona may lie psychological tension, trauma, or even an inexplicable subconscious desire.

The fear that Young Hye's brother-in-law feels towards Young Hye's gaze does not stem from explicit actions, but rather from an inner conflict that she projects into Young Hye's facial expressions. In other words, the shadow is not only attached to Young Hye, but is also reflected in the shadow of the observer: attraction, moral tension, and unspoken guilt. In Jung's theory, the shadow often appears through projection: when individuals are unable to face their dark side, they will see it in others. In this case, the brother-in-law's fear of Young Hye actually also reflects her fear of himself because he realizes that the impulses within his (desires, violations of norms) have crossed the boundaries he considers moral.

Young Hye's calmness as a nude model is not only misinterpreted as courage or spirituality, but also creates moral and emotional uncertainty. For her brother-in-law, Young Hye's untouchable and passive persona opens a window for the projection of his subconscious desires. Young Hye's silent and unresponsive body becomes a kind of blank canvas onto which her brother-in-law's fantasies are projected, while also reflecting how Young Hye's persona no longer functions as a social protector, but rather as a gateway for the emergence of shadows, both within herself and in others.

Exciting

"The faceless woman in his sketchbook was his sister-in-law. That figure was indeed his sister-in-law. He experienced an erection and trembled violently as he imagined his sister-in-law's naked body, which he had never seen before, while imagining himself poking at her birthmark like a small blue flower petal on her buttocks” (Kang, 2017: p. 70).

"All the blood in his body rushed there as he imagined his sister-in-law's rented room, which he had visited with his wife in the past, imagining his sister-in-law lying curled up there, imagining her blood-covered body that he carried on his back, imagining the touch of her breasts and buttocks, and imagining the blue birthmark on her buttocks that looked like a stamp when her sister-in-law’s pants were pulled up.” (Kang, 2017: 77)

“He began to think about his sister-in-law from a new perspective after hearing about the blue birthmark from his wife. Previously, he had never had any feelings toward his sister-in-law. His intense excitement when remembering his sister-in-law's behavior while staying at his house was something he considered a thing of the past. The image of the woman, who had lost her mind, opening her palms wide to make shadows on the porch, her white ankles behind the loose sweatpants she wore while bathing her son, the image of her sitting while watching TV with a blank stare, her legs half-spread, her hair loose—his body felt hot every time he remembered it.” (Kang, 2017: 84)

The above excerpts show how Young Hye's brother-in-law's view of his sister-in-law changed from simply a family member to an erotic object and projection of his subconscious desires. This attraction began with his imagination being triggered by information about the blue birthmark on Young Hye's body, which then developed into an obsessive fantasy full of sexual and power charges. His reactions, which included bodily tremors, erections, and symbolic depictions of piercing the birthmark like a flower, show that his sister-in-law's perception of Young Hye had completely shifted from her social persona to a shadow projection. Initially, Young Hye appeared to her brother-in-law as a “normal” figure in the social system, namely a calm, quiet, and unobtrusive sister-in-law. However, as the sister-in-law's moral and social control functions weakened, Young Hye's persona was no longer recognized as part of the social order, but rather as a blank screen onto which the observer projected their desires and psychological shadows.

These quotes also indicate that Young Hye's persona in the eyes of her brother-in-law is not a representation of her true self, but rather an image shaped and filled by the observer's erotic imagination. In Jung's view, when a person is unable to integrate their shadow into their consciousness in a healthy way, these subconscious impulses can be projected outward and attached to other figures. Young Hye, in this case, becomes a vessel for her brother-in-law's repressed desires and dark side of his personality, serving as an object of sexual fantasy, power, and morality.

The visualization of Young Hye's body in a passive state, covered in blood, or wearing loose clothing and making unconscious gestures, creates an ambiguous persona: on the one hand, she appears uninviting, but on the other, she arouses desire because she is considered untouchable and unaware of the effect of her presence. This image is reminiscent of what Jung calls anima/shadow projection, in which female figures become objects of internal psychological conflict.

Thus, Young Hye's persona in these excerpts undergoes a passive transformation into a shadow object, not because of a change in herself, but because of the distortion of perception and subconscious projection of her brother-in-law. The persona as a social adaptation system no longer functions, both on the part of Young Hye, who has broken away from the norm, and on the part of the observer (her brother-in-law), who fails to separate reality from fantasy. This is a powerful representation of how a fragile or discarded persona can make someone a mirror of another person's darkest side and, in this context, make Young Hye not only an alienated individual, but also a reflection of the shadows of those around her.

In Carl Gustav Jung's theory, the shadow is a hidden, repressed, or unacknowledged aspect of a person's personality. The shadow contains forbidden desires and aspects of the self that conflict with consciously held social norms and moral values. Jung emphasized that the shadow is not merely a “negative” side, but an unconscious part of the self that, if not recognized and integrated, will emerge in the form of projections or destructive compulsive behaviors.

There is a strong manifestation of the sexual shadow in Young Hye's brother-in-law. The erotic urges she experiences are directed at her sister-in-law, someone who, according to social and moral norms, should not be the object of desire. The desire to see Young Hye's body, to draw it, and even to

touch it imaginatively, shows that she harbors intense sexual fantasies, which were previously suppressed by her persona as a husband, father, and family member.

The shadow also appears through visual symbolism in the excerpt, namely Young Hye's birthmark becoming an object of fetishism and the imaginative act of piercing like flower petals containing aggressive, possessive, and erotic connotations. This indicates that the shadow does not only contain sexual urges, but also aspects of power and domination over the female body. In Jungian analysis, this reflects the conflict between the moral self-image (persona) and the uncontrollable unconscious impulses (shadow).

The brother-in-law realizes that his fantasies are transgressive. This is shown through his anxiety and inner contradictions: he admits that he "had no intention" towards Young Hye before, but he is powerless to resist his passion and the image of her body. Emotional reactions such as trembling, erection, and body heat are manifestations that the previously suppressed shadow has now surfaced and taken control of his consciousness. In this case, the shadow no longer functions as a latent part, but has begun to control actions and perceptions.

Unpredictable

"At the beginning of last summer, my sister-in-law slit her wrists in her apartment. At that time, her family was gathered for lunch after moving into a larger apartment. Her family loved meat, but one day my sister-in-law decided she would only eat vegetables and stopped eating meat, making everyone feel uncomfortable. [...] However, what he remembers most clearly is his sister-in-law's scream at that moment. The woman spat out pieces of meat while brandishing a kitchen knife and staring intently at everyone in turn. Her eyes trembled like a wild animal cornered at the edge of a cliff." (Kang, 2017: 78)

The above quote is the climax when Young Hye's shadow emerges, marked by extreme acts of self-harm and refusing to eat meat. These actions are a form of resistance against the patriarchal values and repressive social system that she has obeyed all this time. In the eyes of her sister-in-law, these actions are shocking and brutal, illustrating the extent to which Young Hye's shadow can no longer be suppressed by her social persona.

The quote continues:

"He couldn't believe that this woman had ever attempted suicide, couldn't believe that she could sit calmly in front of many people with her breasts exposed, perhaps a symptom of mental illness after a suicide attempt." (Kang, 2017: 82)

The brother-in-law was unable to reconcile the calm persona he saw with Young Hye's extreme past actions. His disbelief shows that Young Hye's persona was too different from her inner reality, creating a tension of perception. This reinforces that the persona was not her authentic self, but rather a layer that hid a very active shadow.

The following quote confirms something else.

"But what really surprised him was the woman's naked body. His sister-in-law stood stunned, her body completely dry, looking somewhat surprised as well. Then she busily picked up the clothes on the floor to cover her body. With a calm attitude, as if she was not embarrassed or panicked, as if she considered covering her body to be a natural thing to do in this situation." (Kang, 2017: 87)

Young Hye displayed a persona that no longer followed social norms. She showed no shame, remaining calm in a situation that would normally provoke social anxiety. For Jung, when the persona begins to be shed, the individual begins to move towards the process of individuation, which is a direct confrontation with the shadow and the collective unconscious.

Finally, in the following quote.

"Perhaps this is what leaves her with no energy left to feel curious or observe the things that happen in everyday life. What made him think that was because the woman looked like she was holding back a brutality and a force that was locking that brutality in, not because she had empty eyes. . . . [..] Her figure, which exuded an excessive sense of loneliness, actually made people who saw her feel uncomfortable." (Kang, 2017: 102-103)

Her brother-in-law realized that behind Young Hye's calmness lay suppressed inner violence, indicating that the shadow had not disappeared but was being extremely suppressed. The aura of loneliness and discomfort she radiates is a signal that the conflict between persona and shadow is not over, but is still ongoing internally. Young Hye's figure represents a person who has broken free from social ties but has not yet found internal balance, indicating a deep crisis of identity.

Persona and Shadow of Young Hye from the Perspective of Young Hye's Older Sister

Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology theory reveals that persona is a social image formed by individuals in order to function and be accepted in society. The persona often does not reflect the authentic personality, but rather a construction formed by external demands. In contrast, the shadow is the dark, hidden, and unconscious side of the personality, including trauma, repressed emotions, and impulses that conflict with the persona.

Quiet, Childlike, and Gentle

"Young Hye is someone she must protect, someone she must embrace with the responsibility of a mother to her child since she was little, since her violent father liked to slap them. She looked at her sister in awe as she dressed up for her wedding, remembering her heels covered in black dirt with a red and sweaty nose from the summer heat when she was little. However, she secretly loved her sister, who became increasingly quiet as she grew older. She was quiet, but could be cheerful and lively depending on the situation." (Kang, 2017: 155).

From the above excerpt, her older sister sees Young Hye as a weak figure who has been a victim of her father's violence since childhood. Young Hye's quiet and calm persona in adulthood is the result of repression and hidden emotional wounds from her childhood. She plays the social role of an obedient and non-confrontational daughter, even though she may harbor unspoken pain and resistance. Her persona is shaped by violence that has never been compensated for with healthy emotional expression.

Another quote shows the moment when her older sister realizes that she has an emotional urge to protect Young Hye, as follows:

"That morning, she did not expect that the man lying naked under the blanket next to Young Hye, his body covered in yellow and red flowers, was her husband. She managed to overcome her fear of leaving simply because she wanted to protect her sister. She held on to her sense of responsibility and then picked up the camera lying at the front door." (Kang, 2017: 165)

Although her older sister perceived Young Hye as passive and unresisting, in this context, she also began to realize that behind Yeong-hye's calm demeanor lay extreme vulnerability and deep suffering that was not visible to the eye, which actually encouraged her to be active and make decisions.

“The next place to eat contained watermelon that had been cut into squares so that it was easy to eat. Do you remember when you were little, you always wanted to smell the watermelon that I cut in half? Watermelon will definitely spread a sweet aroma even if it is only cut a little. Young Hye did not move.” (Kang, 2017: 187)

In addition, in the excerpt:

"Once, she and Young Hye got lost in the mountains. Young Hye, who was only nine years old, said, 'Let's not go back. Let's stay here.' She didn't understand Young Hye's suggestion. [...] She only understood Young Hye much later. Her father's blows were only aimed at Young Hye. [...] Young Hye, who was gentle and delicate, never fought back against her father and just took all the blows to her bones." (Kang, 2017: 190-191)

This glimpse into the past shows that Young Hye's shadow has been present since childhood. Her desire to “not return” when she got lost in the mountains was an early sign of her rejection of a stressful life. Young Hye's silence in the present can no longer be interpreted as simply a calm attitude, but as a form of passive resistance rooted in past trauma. Young Hye's shadow does not manifest through physical or verbal violence, but through emptiness, alienation, and refusal to engage with the outside world. From her brother's perspective, there is a delay in understanding Young Hye's shadow. He only realizes that his sister's psychological suffering, which had been hidden behind her obedient and weak persona, was an accumulation of the violence she had continuously experienced from her family and the inability of those around her to understand her invisible emotional wounds.

Difficult to Understand

"According to him, Young Hye also felt alienated from herself, just as he felt alienated from Young Hye. He lost his answers in front of a face that went beyond calm, to the point of seeming lonely and gloomy. Young Hye's nature was not at all similar to her husband's gloomy attitude, but something in Young Hye made him feel hopeless, just like when he saw his husband's gloom." (Kang, 2017: 155-156)

From the above excerpt, Young Hye's older sister realizes that her sister's persona is beginning to crumble. Young Hye's previously calm face and expressions have become unfamiliar and alienating, even to herself. This indicates that Young Hye has lost the balance between her persona and her true identity. She has become a stranger not only to others, but also to herself. In the Jungian framework, this reflects a process of self-fragmentation due to the pressure of an unintegrated shadow.

The following excerpt reinforces the view that Yeong-hye's behavior can no longer be explained by her old personality:

"Young Hye started acting strangely when she suddenly decided to become a vegetarian about three years ago. Nowadays, many people are vegetarians, but Young Hye's weight dropped dramatically and she also hardly slept. Young Hye was quiet, but then she refused to talk, to the point where it was impossible to communicate with her." (Kang, 2017: 163)

Young Hye's silence and decline in social functioning are not merely lifestyle changes, but signs of psychological withdrawal from the external world, which in Jungian analysis is a symptom of the shadow beginning to dominate consciousness. Silence, not eating, and not sleeping are forms of resistance

to a world that is considered to shackle the persona as the social roles of wife, child, and woman have been discarded.

The following is an excerpt.

"...her father slapped Young Hye and forced a piece of meat into her mouth, which he pried open. Her body trembled, as if she herself had been hit. Young Hye screamed like a wild animal and vomited the piece of meat, before grabbing a kitchen knife to slash her own wrist. She watched all of this with her body frozen." (Kang, 2017: 163-164)

This is a moment that brings forth the shadow in a destructive and primal form. Young Hye's shadow is no longer hidden, but explodes in the form of screams, physical resistance, and attempted suicide. In Jungian terms, this action is a direct clash between the imposed persona (the obedient daughter) and the long-buried shadow (rejection of violence, control, and the forced body).

The following quote:

"She still did not eat meat and would scream when she saw it. On sunny days, she would stick to the window while unbuttoning her patient's uniform and exposing her breasts," (Kang, 2017: 167)

The act of exposing her body in public is not meant to provoke, but as a form of rejection of social norms and roles, as well as a signal that Young Hye's persona has been destroyed. In Jung's theory, this is a symptom of the shadow taking control. Young Hye no longer submits to the structure of society, and her body is no longer an object, but a manifestation of a damaged and free soul.

The climax is seen in the quote:

"What kind of space and time is Young Hye's soul in that shell-like body? She remembers Young Hye standing upside down, upright on her hands. Did Young Hye think she was in a place in the forest and not on a concrete floor? Did sturdy branches grow from her body and white roots come out of her hands to grip the ground?" (Kang, 2017: 205)

This shows that Young Hye has entered an alternative psychic reality, no longer grounded in the physical world. In Jungian terminology, this is a phase of regression into the collective unconscious, where archetypal imagery (such as trees, roots, soil) takes over perception. She no longer functions in social reality because the conflict between persona and shadow has created a total escape into subconscious symbolism.

Discussion

Based on an in-depth analysis of the persona and shadow of the character Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian*, the data obtained reveals findings regarding the inner conflict that arises from social pressure regarding gender roles and the individual's psychological mechanisms in dealing with the discrepancy between the true self and social expectations. Young Hye's persona is shaped by patriarchal demands: to be an obedient, silent, and unremarkable woman. However, this persona does not originate from an authentic identity, but rather from an external construction that suppresses unconscious impulses and trauma.

1. Interpretation of Findings

The fragile persona causes Young Hye's shadow to surface in the form of rejection of food, the body, and even social reality. The previously suppressed shadow begins to express itself through self-harm, social withdrawal, and indifference to norms. This shows that the conflict between the persona and the shadow is not only internal, but also creates disruption to the surrounding environment.

2. Integration of Findings into the Structure of Literary Psychology

These findings are in line with Carl Gustav Jung's view that the shadow is part of the unconscious psyche and will emerge if the persona is no longer able to contain the conflict. In the context of literary psychology, the character Young Hye becomes a symbol of a psychological crisis stemming from collective repression of individual identity, making this novel a concrete example of the representation of archetypal conflict in modern fiction.

3. Novelty and Theoretical Contribution

This study provides a novel cross-perspective approach: by involving the perspectives of the husband, brother-in-law, and sister, readers can see that Young Hye's shadow is not only present in her, but also reflected and projected through other characters. This enriches our understanding of how shadows work in fictional social networks and opens up new avenues of interpretation in intersubjective literary psychology.

4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the importance of archetype analysis in contemporary literature, particularly in understanding characters who experience identity crises. Practically, the results of this research can be used as a reference in literary studies that focus on gender awareness and trauma, and can be used in narrative therapy approaches to identify internal conflict structures in individuals through literary characters.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the character Young Hye in Han Kang's novel *Vegetarian* from the perspectives of her husband, brother-in-law, and older sister, it can be concluded that Young Hye's persona was rigidly constructed to meet patriarchal social expectations, namely as an obedient, quiet, and undemanding woman. This persona does not reflect her authentic identity, but rather a role imposed by her social and family environment. As pressure on this persona continues to build, the dark side of Young Hye's personality, or shadow, which contains childhood trauma, the urge to resist, and disgust for the repressive system, begins to surface through extreme actions such as refusing to eat meat, neglecting her partner, and self-harm. From her husband's point of view, Young Hye appears as the ideal wife who is beginning to lose her sense of self and emotional connection. Her sister-in-law sees Young Hye as a passive figure who paradoxically arouses desires and fantasies that indicate the projection of the observer's shadow. Meanwhile, her sister realizes that Young Hye's calmness is only a mask for the deep inner suffering caused by the violence she experienced since childhood. Thus, the imbalance between Young Hye's persona and shadow becomes the core of her psychological destruction, reflecting the failure of the social system to accommodate the complexity and inner wounds of individuals.

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