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Past Today

Professor Serrano

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The Vegetarian Book

At the beginning of the story, Mr. Cheong describes to us how their relationship started on a good note and explains how he saw her wife be completely unremarkable in every way. His description of Yeong-hye leads us to conclude she is a conventional person, a character which would be a source of conflict later in their marriage. Han Kang uses the first-person perspective to highlight how the husband feels, emotionally and psychologically, when Yeong-hye starts to defy him and the the reader can get a first-hand experience of the conflict between the couple. In the second and third sections of the story Han Kang uses the third person to present to the reader the theme of the breaking convention, which allows us to view situations where the brother-in-law tries to break the social boundaries.

By using the first-person narrator, readers can be able to understand the emotional conflict he passes through when her wife starts to break social conventions. One example is how Mr. Cheong is opposed to Yeong-hye's dislike of wearing a bra. Five years into their marriage, she decides to take control of her body after a particular nightmare, a situation that puts the husband at a tight spot. When she finds her staring at the fridge and asks her what she is doing, she answers, “I had a dream” and walks back to bed. This incident is the start of Yeong-hye's journey of breaking the social norm. Mr. Cheong, for some reason, finds himself unable to touch or comfort her. When he wakes up to see the wife throwing away all the meat in the house, he fails to understand her actions and ends up deeming her as mad. She even asks her if she has lost her mind. Through her efforts, she sort of takes over the house, a situation which irritates the husband, and by the author using his perspective, we can understand how the magnitude of breaking the social norm affects the community (Kang 16).

In the second and third sections of the story, Han uses the third person to present to the reader the theme of breaking convention. Focusing on the brother-in-law, who is a video artist, we are immersed in a world where he inherently subverts an everyday life. However, as an artist, the author shows us how his obsession with art naked human land him deeper into a web that will make him violate the convention. To see his struggles and conflicting desires, a third-person perspective is used.

Through the third person, the author reveals to us how the bro-in-law is putting other people in a situation of conflict, as he attempts to fill his desires. In the story, the author highlights that the brother-in-law considers Yeong-hye more beautiful, while Mr. Cheong prefers the conventional lifestyle of In-hye. This situation reveals the emotional distance that exists between the two couples since they both fail to understand each other. After creating his studio, he quickly approaches Yeong-hye to ask her if she would participate in his naked art videos, which puts her in a conflicted situation and fails to say yes or no.

The use of the third person allows us to view situations where the brother-in-law tries or manages to break the social boundaries. For example, his sexual attraction towards Yeong-hye, yet he is married to In-hye, is one way of eviscerating all social norms since Yeong-hye is her sister-in-law. Han can show us how devastating the brother-in-law felt when he woke up to find the camera gone. At this point, he knew the tape would lead to his being entirely outcasted from society because of breaking the social norms.

In the last part of the story, the third person is used to highlight Yeong-hye’s obsession with plants. Her desire to live a life of a plant makes her run away from the psychiatric hospital only so that she could embody herself as a tree (Kang 71). The idea of her scar is described as a flower that makes her feel happy, to the extent she agrees to be painted and pose naked for a video. Through the third person, Han can demonstrate the differences between In-hye and Yeong-hye, as they represent people with a different personality. In-hye is a convectional woman that continues to fulfill her obligations to the husband and her parents, while her husband did not reciprocate the same. On the other hand, Yeong-hye was characterized as a volatile woman, with little conventional norms holding her back.

Through the third person, Han can reveal that the brother-in-law and Yeong-hye are similar to one another, mainly because they both broke the social convention. In addition, they both created their own fantasies to try and escape the conventional society that would judge them. The brother in law hides in his studio trying to design an image he always wanted, while Yeong-hye hides in her desire to live like a plant and her strict diet. Through the third person, Han is able to highlight how In-hye was jealous of how Yeong-hye was able to break social constraints. However, in the end, she realizes that it is best to live in reality, then living in a fantasy world like Yeong-hye, which became disastrous to her.

Yeong-hye dream and later actions concerning being a vegetarian serve as a channel through which she wanted to try to be in control of herself and not be controlled or consumed by the society or the husband. Through her transition to a vegetarian, Han highlights how a change in a community can be received in the wrong way, and the inability of the people to try and understand them creates an environment of misunderstanding and isolation. The inability of Mr. Cheong to try and connect with Yeong-hye matches the society’s attitude towards change. The people are adamant in maintaining the status quo and fail to recognize the importance of change in society. Through the vegetarian ordeal, the author also reveals how the lack of connection between the two, makes Mr. Cheong viewYeong-hye as a crazy person.

The story also highlights how the society is quick to judge on a person, without even asking the cause, or understanding the reason behind their actions. Mr. Cheong was quick to refer to Yeong-hye’s decision as ridiculous. In the same way, relatives to Yeong-hye were also adamant in believing that it was her that was wrong and not them. In one instance, the relatives tried to pin her down in an attempt to force her to eat meat. Yeong-hye put up a fight to ensure she did not consume any meat. This resulted in her father leading to violence by slapping her twice. Similar situations can be seen for activists and revolutionists that have tried to break the norm and ended up facing a ruthless response from society (Pearce 19).

The author uses the vegetarian story to help us understand the process of defiance and breaking off conventional rules. Through her habit of changing her desires and expectations of other people around her, the author takes us to a close look at how others perceive a non-conventional person, and in contrast, highlights to us how real intention, which other misconceive. Refusing to continue to live as the society expects her to live, and as a wife, whose primary purpose of existence is to cook for her husband and fulfill her matrimonial duties, her behavior raises concern to all her family members. The second and the third part of the story highlights how the brother-in-law's desires to fulfill his passions are against the cultural norms and values (Pearce 19). Both Yeong-hye and the brother-in-law are misunderstood by society to the extent they get admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

Taha,

You bring up some interesting claims about the connection between the narration in each part of the novel and the breaking of social conventions. Your paper would be more focused if you state this at the outset as your thesis. Remember your thesis should in some way answer the question posed by the essay prompt and right now I’m a little unclear as to how it does. Consider the following for future writing:

1. Textual support: You need quotes from the text to support your claims and right now you have very few. Go back to the text to find quotes you can use to make your argument stronger.

2. Stay focused on your key terms: Keep coming back to the key terms of your thesis as you analyze your examples. This helps advance your argument and keep your paper focused.

3. Organization: You can combine some of your paragraphs to make a more focused and better organized essay.

Best,

Christina

Grade: C

Work Cited

Pearce, F. *"Grisly trend: Green activists are facing deadly dangers."* *Yale Environment* 360 (2013): 19.

Kang, H. *“The Vegeterian.”*(2007).