

The Vegetarian



Yeong-hye and her husband are ordinary people. He is an office worker with moderate ambitions and mild manners; she is an uninspired but dutiful wife. The acceptable flatline of their marriage is interrupted when Yeong-hye, seeking a more 'plant-like' existence, commits a shocking act of subversion by becoming vegetarian. As her rebellion causes rifts in her marriage, Yeong-hye spirals further and further into her fantasies of abandoning her fleshly prison and becoming – impossibly, ecstatically – a tree.

Han Kang was born in Gwangju, South Korea, and moved to Seoul at the age of ten. She studied Korean literature at Yonsei University. Her writing has won the Yi Sang Literary Prize, the Today's Young Artist

Award, and the Korean Literature Novel Award. She currently teaches creative writing at the Seoul Institute of the Arts.

Deborah Smith was monolingual until the age of 21. Deciding to become a translator upon finishing her degree in English Literature, with no previous experience in this field, she chose to pursue Korean due to a lack of English-Korean translators and moved to Korea to realise this dream. Her translations from Korean include Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and *Human Acts*, and Bae Suah's *The Essayist's Desk* and *The Low Hills of Seoul*. She recently founded Tilted Axis Press, a not-for-profit publishing house focusing on translations from Asia and Africa.

Discussion questions

- How much did you know about South Korea before you read *The Vegetarian*? What do you think of their attitudes to vegetarianism and strict moral codes?
- Think of the role of the translator – what do you think the challenges would be in translating this novel? Which one question would you ask Deborah Smith?
- What are the linguistic differences between this and a book written originally in English? Do you get a sense of the source language in the writing?
- Can you imagine this story happening in the UK? If so, how would it be different?
- How well did the book give a sense of place? Did you feel transported to the setting of the book?
- Which book would you compare this to if describing it to a friend?