

Research Article

Alfredo Suppia*, Ewa Mazierska

Aliens in an Alien World: The Portrayal of the Aliens and Humans in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* by Nicholas Roeg and *Under the Skin* by Jonathan Glazer

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Abstract: The article examines *The Man Who Fell to Earth* by Nicholas Roeg and *Under the Skin* by Jonathan Glazer, comparing them with each other and their respective literary originals (hypotexts), in order to establish how aliens and humans are represented in these films and how these representations reflect their respective ideologies. The authors argue that while Roeg's film, in common with its original, uses the story of Newton to criticise corporate capitalism, Glazer's film plays down the political aspect of the film, concerning industrial farming and exploitation of the underclass by the political elites, pertaining to neoliberalism, to focus on the problems of identity.

Keywords: science fiction film, Nicholas Roeg, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Jonathan Glazer, *Under the Skin*, infiltration narrative

Encounters between human and alien civilisations is a staple diet of science fiction. Such an encounter can take place on Earth or a foreign planet and can include single individuals or groups of people and extraterrestrials. The visitors might reveal who they are or try to hide their identities. They can be driven by curiosity or a less benign motif, such as greed or jealousy. In this article, we focus on two novels and their film adaptations which present an encounter that takes place on Earth, involves an alien who tries to pass as a human and who visits Earth out of self-interest, yet without any intention to take it over or destroy it. We label this type of narrative as that of “infiltration,” as opposed to “invasion,” which is more common in science fiction films, and even dominant in some periods, such as the 1950s and 60s, during the peak of the Cold War era. These are Walter Tevis's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1963) and its adaptation by Nicolas Roeg (1976), and *Under the Skin* (2000), by Michel Faber, and its adaptation by Jonathan Glazer (2013). We compare the novels (hypotexts) and the films (hypertexts) from the perspective of their take on representation of aliens and humans, especially their attitude to ecological problems, facing the Earth and class politics, trying to assess the impact of the times and circumstances of their productions on the depiction of these issues.

Authors and Production Contexts

Both film directors were English, yet were co-productions with American partners and cast American actors in important parts. As pointed out by scriptwriter Paul Mayersberg, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* “has an American cast except for Bowie and was shot on location in the United States” (225). Conversely, *Under*

*Corresponding author: Alfredo Suppia, University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Campinas - SP, BRAZIL, E-mail: alsuppia@gmail.com
Ewa Mazierska, UCLan

the Skin has a British cast, except for Scarlett Johansson in the leading role, and was shot on location in Scotland.

Both Roeg and Glazer in their remaining productions showed interest in human identity, especially its relation to the body. Films such as *Performance* (1970) in the case of Roeg, co-directed with Donald Cammell, and *Birth* (2004) in the case of Glazer, ask the question whether people can exchange their personalities or whether a dead person can be reborn in a new body. By contrast, overtly political issues, such as poverty and exploitation, are of little importance in their films. They are typically set among people who are well-off and cut off from political reality, due to living far from civilisation, being retired or locked up. Based on their record, we could expect that Roeg and Glazer's films would reduce the amount of political content in cinematic adaptations, compared with literary sources, which is indeed the case. Both directors can also be classified as representing popular arthouse cinema. They are not quite mainstream due to using means such as non-linear narration and disorienting editing (especially in the case of Roeg) and mixing realism with surrealism. It is worth noticing, however, that whereas Glazer's film is essentially linear in terms of its storytelling, Roeg's attempts to emulate the alien's perspective of past, present and future being mixed results in unconventional film editing.¹

At the same time, both Roeg and Glazer tend to employ stars, partly in order to make their films more marketable, as is also the case with the two films examined here. The budgets of their films are significantly more than independent productions, but not in the range of blockbusters' budgets. In the case of *Under the Skin* it was over 13,000,000 USD, whereas *The Man Who Fell to Earth* cost 1,5 million USD about 36 years ago (approximately US\$ 6,5 million today). Roeg and Glazer presented their respective films as highly personal projects, something they wanted to accomplish themselves, requiring long-term preparation and jumping many hurdles, as opposed to realising projects being offered to them (Sartin). Of special importance, as we will argue in due course, was casting, which in the case of *Under the Skin* greatly changed the character and message of the film, in comparison to the original book.

Narratives

Before focusing on the films' ideologies and messages, let us present the narratives of the two films briefly. In *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, a humanoid alien (David Bowie), arrives in New Mexico, USA, coming from a distant planet and on a mission to save his world, which is experiencing an apocalyptic drought. Presenting himself as a British visitor under the name of Thomas Jerome Newton, the alien uses the advanced technology of his home planet to patent many inventions on Earth. With the helpful assistance of leading patent attorney Oliver Farnsworth (Buck Henry), the profitable inventions make Newton extremely wealthy as he becomes the head of a technology-based conglomerate called World Enterprises Corporation. The founding of such a corporate empire is a means for Newton to accomplish his mission: he needs to accumulate enough capital to build a space vehicle capable of travelling across the galaxies, with the purpose of shipping water back to his home planet. While revisiting New Mexico Newton meets Mary-Lou (Candy Clark), a simple girl who works in a small-town hotel. They start a relationship, and Mary-Lou introduces Newton to many customs of Earth, including church-going, alcohol and sex. The couple start to live together in a house Newton has built close to where he first landed in New Mexico. Meanwhile, Dr Nathan Bryce (Rip Torn), a former womaniser and college professor, is hired by Newton and then becomes his confidant. After realising that the suspicious Bryce has discovered his true identity, and living a crisis in his love relationship, Newton reveals his true identity to Mary-Lou. She is shocked, and eventually, Newton leaves her, in spite of her insistence to carry on the relationship.

Newton finally completes the spaceship and attempts to leave Earth amid intense press exposure. Yet, just before the much-awaited take-off, Newton is arrested, seemingly by the government and a rival company. Farnsworth, his business partner, is murdered. The government, which has apparently been told

¹ This is explained in the documentary *The Man Who Fell to Earth: Dreams of the Hearth—Interview with Paul Mayersberg*. Mayersberg, the scriptwriter of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, acknowledged some of his and Roeg's inspiration on J. W. Dunne's book *An Experiment with Time*, first published in 1927, in the creation of Thomas Jerome Newton's point of view.

by Bryce that Newton is an alien, holds him captive in a locked luxury apartment. During his stay, Newton is kept sedated with alcohol and continuously subjected to medical tests. Seemingly, Newton has spent years living in that secret facility and, towards the end of his captivity, he is visited again by Mary-Lou, who is now much older; all the characters age while the alien seems to benefit from a different lifespan. They have mock-violent playful sex and Mary-Lou ends up saying that she no longer loves him, while he replies that he doesn't love her either. They break up once again, and Newton finds out that his "prison," now derelict, is unlocked. He finally leaves. With no hope of ever returning home, Newton creates a recording with alien messages, which he hopes will be broadcast via radio to his planet. Bryce, now married to Mary-Lou, buys a copy of the album and meets Newton at an outside restaurant in town. Newton is still rich and young, yet he has also fallen into depression and alcoholism. The film ends with a dim, melancholic Newton passing out in his cafe chair.

In *Under the Skin*, a small group of incognito aliens carry on a sinister trade in Glasgow and its surroundings. They engage in the abduction of white, single, working-class Scottish men from the streets. A humanoid female alien (Scarlett Johansson) has a pivotal role in that process. She is the "bait" who seduces the ordinary men, luring them into houses which function as both a trap and processing factory. Her method consists of driving a white van and asking for directions to passers-by on the streets. She then offers them a lift and, depending on the conversations; she invites them to follow her into a more private place. Once inside the houses, the men, eager to have sexual intercourse with the gorgeous woman, end up immersed in an uncanny black goop which constantly changes its state (from solid to liquid, from opaque to translucent). After successfully abducting a number of men, the female alien has a curious experience with a man suffering from neurofibromatosis. She manages to take him to one of the mystery houses but, right before leaving the place, and after watching her face (and eyes) reflected in a mirror, she changes her mind and rescues her last victim. For some reason, the conversation with that man sets a bond that deflects the alien from her original purpose and triggers a whole process of self-examination on her part. Subsequently, the male aliens intervene to keep things on track and start chasing the rogue partner. Alone and vulnerable, the female alien, and now an ordinary pedestrian makes her acquaintance with a man on the bus, who takes her home and shows some affection. At a certain point, they try to make love, but the alien finds out she was not anatomically designed for that purpose. She leaves her companion and wanders erratically until she finds refuge in a shelter in the woods, where she rests and sleeps. It does not take long for her to be woken by one of the employees of that natural park, apparently a guard who wants to have sex with her. She leaves the shelter and runs out in the woods, chased by the man. He eventually catches her up, throws her onto the ground and starts ripping off her clothes, in an attempted rape. However, she resists and, during the fight, her skin is damaged, revealing her alien nature underneath. Horrified, the man fetches gasoline, pours it on the feeble, limping alien, and finally sets her on fire. The film ends with the alien's ashes falling from the white snowy sky, in a blinding whiteness that matches the opening scene when a human eye first appears.

On Aliens and Humans

In both novels, the extraterrestrials look like a human or at least can pass as humans, following operations which were performed on them when they lived on their home planets and prepared themselves for the journeys. They still look strange to the people whom they encounter, although in the two respective novels the difference is valued differently. In Tevis' Newton novel is presented as attractive, especially according to 1960s (and later) standards of beauty, which valued androgyny:

He was not a man, yet he was very much like a man. He was six and a half feet tall, and some men are even taller than that; his hair was as white as that of an albino, yet his face was a light tan colour, and his eyes a pale blue. His frame was improbably slight, his features delicate, his fingers long, thin, and the skin almost translucent, hairless. There was an elfin quality to his face, a fine boyish look to the wide, intelligent eyes, and the white, curly hair now grew a little over his ears. He seemed quite young. (6)

The flattering description is matched by the appearance of the actor cast in the role of Newton: David Bowie, who by this point was largely associated with Ziggy Stardust, a persona he created for his fifth studio album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, released in 1972. Bowie's Newton is very thin, has red hair and dresses rather ordinarily, but in good taste. May Routh, who designed costumes for the film, said: "David wanted a look that was very simple—as a man coming from another planet, he thought he should wear things that wouldn't stand out or attract attention to him" (Woodward 2016). According to interviews featured in *Watching the Alien*, a documentary on the making of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, David Bowie was not the first choice and both Roeg and Si Litvinoff (executive producer) were apparently struggling to find the right actor for the role, until they saw Bowie in the documentary titled *Cracked Actor*.²

While the alien is presented in a flattering light, the humans in Roeg's film come across as less attractive and strange. The first person whom Newton encounters is a drunk, resting on a bouncy castle, who looks like a clown attached to a seat, who offers Newton a sip from his bottle. Newton's next encounter is in a jewellery shop, where he sells a precious ring to an old woman, whose hand and neck are adorned by an immense amount of jewellery, which rather than hiding her age, accentuates it, pointing to the limitations of human life. Other people whom Newton meets look less strange, but Roeg makes us aware of their shortcomings. For example, Oliver Farnsworth, whom Newton entrusts with his patents, wears glasses that make his eyes look unnaturally large. Over the course of the narrative, people with whom Newton relates, age, while he remains young, again showing not only his moral but also his physical superiority over humans. As an alien, Newton exists in time in a different way to Earthlings. He is able to perceive time from a non-linear perspective, with the past, the present and the future occasionally happening at the same time—a capacity emulated by the film's editing. The alien is contemplating different "timescapes," as when he sees a group of pioneering American settlers from his car while travelling across New Mexico. This capacity to embrace different "timescapes" in a singular experience is an additional attribute which renders him superior over humans as well as alienated from them. This is why Newton is often caught "daydreaming" by Mary Lou. And yet, ultimately Newton is outsmarted by his collaborators and loses out in his dealings with them due to his honesty. His collaborators steal his inventions and do not allow him to return to his home planet.

A different situation takes place in *Under the Skin*, because in Faber's book the extraterrestrials look very different from humans, being similar to animals whom people breed for meat. They walk on four legs, have tails and are covered in fur, like sheep, although, of course, they are highly intelligent and perceive themselves as intellectually and technologically superior to humans. Isserley, the alien sent to Earth, had to be significantly transformed to look like a human. Her tail was cut, her hair was shaved, and she required a pair of artificial breasts. Moreover, she has to wear special glasses so that her eyes look human-like. As a result, she is much shorter than an ordinary human, and her body looks as if she underwent surgery following a serious accident with much of her skin tissue being scarred. Generally, she does not look attractive from the perspective of people whom she meets, except for her "perfect" breasts which draw attention from the men to whom she gives a lift in her car.

On this occasion, the hypertext significantly differs from the hypotext, thanks to casting a star, Scarlett Johansson, in the role of Isserley. The filmic Isserley wears a wig, flashy red lipstick and is not shy to reveal her bosom - but knowing that this is how the "real" Johansson looks, we are to believe, as in the case of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, that the alien is more attractive than the humans, not just different. This is confirmed by the appearance of the men whom Isserley accosts around Glasgow and in the Scottish countryside. The men (amateurs who agreed to play in the film) look plain or unattractive. The way they talk suggests that they belong to the working class or even underclass and they seem rather unsure of themselves when talking to the beautiful stranger. By contrast, Isserley's manner of speaking suggests that she is in control. She asks them questions; they reply meekly and do not ask her about anything, as if they were intimidated by her appearance. One can imagine that this situation reflects the profilmic circumstances—the amateurs felt intimidated by their contact with the star; as a visitor from Hollywood, she was a bit like an "alien" from a different planet. This significantly differs from the situation presented in Faber's novel, where Isserley is

² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR-GGWpcr00&list=PLA4DA50A409E1D5E9>

intimidated by her passengers, do not understand everything they say due to the language barrier and is afraid of physical contact with them. Moreover, in the novel, we are privy to some of her passengers' inner monologues, in which they do not admire her, but pity her, seeing her as a victim of an accident or just being disabled.

If they see her as an alien, this is because she comes across as a freak, not a goddess. The change in the relationship between Isserley and her passengers from the hypotext to the hypertext is also conveyed by the vehicles she uses in the respective texts. In the novel it is a small, cheap and old passenger car, a Toyota Corolla, reflecting her modest economic status and the need to remain inconspicuous so that her operation of capturing the humans are not detected. In the film, by contrast, she drives a larger vehicle, a white van (Mercedes Sprinter) widely utilised for commercial purposes, which underscores her superior economic status and power. In the wake of that particular choice for the protagonist's vehicle in the film, J. D. Connor observes that

The authenticity that independent cinema depends on risks localising its appeal. Here again, the image of Johansson in the white van is emblematic. The particular model at the center of this tale is generic enough—a 2006 Mercedes Sprinter, according to the Internet Movie Car Database (imcdb.com). Such white transit vans had been the staple car of the independent skilled trades for decades—the vans came white from the dealer, customising them was an added expense, and in the end that would only hurt later resale. The ubiquity of the white van helps explain why so few spotted Johansson and why it was possible for a follow-up van to go unnoticed as well. (2)

Both Newton and Isserley in the literary versions come from planets with a more advanced technological civilisation, where natural resources are scarce, unlike Earth, which is presented as a land of plenty. The situation suggests an analogy between alien invasion and colonisation by western powers of lands which are abundant in natural resources but lag behind in technology. However, the characters have different attitudes to the visited land. Newton in Tevis' book appreciates the abundance of water on Earth, which is extremely scarce on Anthea but does not fall in love with this planet and its inhabitants. They remain primitive and coarse to him, as was typically the case of western colonisers or explorers visiting far-away lands. One reason why Newton is uncomfortable on Earth is the gravity, understood literally and metaphorically. His adopted name, "Newton" from Isaac Newton, points to his desire to master the power of gravity. (Physical) gravity makes it difficult for Newton to walk and causes him dizziness when he travels in cars and elevators. More importantly, however, Newton finds it impossible to leave the planet because during his stay he gets used to certain things he did not have on Anthea. Of them, the most important is alcohol. While at the beginning Newton delights in water, in the course of time he finds whisky and gin more to his taste, and eventually, he becomes surrounded by a large selection of spirits. Alcohol weakens people's perception, which is advantageous for Newton, as it allows him to deal with the problem of his lightness, even if only superficially. This is because when drunk, he joins the community of people who cannot walk firmly on Earth not due to their physical deficiency, but due to alcohol intoxication. However, alcohol also blunts Newton's moral judgement. As an alcoholic, he is unable to establish who is his friend and who is a foe or resist the pressure to conform to human standards. The ultimate sign of his powerlessness is allowing a doctor to weld his contact lenses to his eyes. This not only makes his eyes look like human eyes but prevents Newton from getting signals sent to him from Anthea. Ultimately, we can draw from the story two conclusions. First, money cannot buy everything—a rich person can be outsmarted by his collaborators, especially when acting alone. The second conclusion is that difference is not welcome on Earth; if you want to be human, you not only have to look and act like a human but become human.

The situation with Isserley, as presented by Faber, is different. She loves Earth and regards herself as privileged to travel there, thanks to being able to live in the fresh air, have the sky above her head and sea in close proximity, unlike people on her own planet, who have no access to such natural resources and live locked-up underground. Some of her thoughts also indicate she belonged to a less privileged class in the highly hierarchical society of her original planet (sometimes depicted as a mixture of corporate capitalist society and monarchy), or maybe committed a crime and was imprisoned. So, the body modification she was subjected to and her sending to Earth meant the possibility of a new beginning. Moreover, although she keeps her distance from the handful of extraterrestrials who work on the farm, preparing humans to

slaughter and transportation of their meat to the planet, ultimately, she does not feel lonely. The Earth is her companion and the animals who live there. This aspect is, however, omitted from the film, a significantly less informative text. Whenever she rambles through the countryside, she gives an impression of being estranged from it and lost. Moreover, when she gets out of her car, she experiences danger. This renders her more of a western “townie” who feels safest in her fortified car, an iron shell, than an alien who enjoys the luxuries of the natural world.

While Faber’s Isserley loves, even worships Earth’s natural environments, this cannot be said about her attitude to humans. This is reflected in the use of language, which both demonstrates the alien’s contempt for the most advanced species living on Earth and the irony of her attitude. In Isserley’s eyes, human beings are irrational, vulgar and clumsy, as testified by their walking on two “paws”; they also remind her of her own mutilated body. Therefore she feels more sympathy for cows or sheep, whose appearance is similar to Isserley’s countrymen. Although depicted as some kind of canine carnivorous species, Isserley and her equals are described in the book as “humans.” Conversely, the men seduced and captured by Isserley are described as “beasts” or “non-humans,” according to the aliens’ viewpoint. Earthling’s appearance is regarded by Isserley and her accolades as inferior and repulsive, whereas the “bourgeois” visitor from her planet, the heir of the food industry which she works for, has his lupinous and quadruped “beauty” valued by the heroine. In the beginning, a reader could misread the true situation by assuming Isserley is human (and indeed she is according to her viewpoint, one that totally estranges one reader’s empirical experience). However, towards the end of the reading, the inversion of notations (human vs animal; alien vs Earthling) tends to make readers sympathise for Isserley and perhaps even identify with her alien species. The fact that Isserley narrates the story in the book adds to identification with her plight. By contrast, in the film identification relies largely on the beauty of the main character and the (extra-filmic) fact that she is a Hollywood star. The other aliens, on the other hand, are almost mute, enigmatic figures. The reversing of the roles of humans and aliens by presenting aliens as humans and humans as beasts thus does not happen in the film. Unlike Roeg’s adaptation of Tevis’ novel, the narrative economy of Faber’s novel and Glazer’s film thus significantly differ. The book offers many “mindscapes” by means of externalised thoughts and soliloquies, from both Isserley and her prey, while the film is opaque and often devoid of any voice. As put by Lucas Hildebrand,

The novel is narrated from a flatly omniscient perspective, and although the alien’s (named Isserley) routine does not initially make sense, everything is eventually explained to the reader. The source novel reflects its genre: the novel is a literary form understood to express human interiority and psychological realism.

The film jettisons nearly all of the source novel’s plot details, motivation, interiority, allegorical content, and even the characters’ names. The film never offers an explanation or accrued clarity for the alien’s actions and motivations, only opacity upon which we might make projections or guesses... Counter to the conventional narrative cinema, this film operates through a formalist logic of disorientation: The narrative frustrates rather than offers intelligibility or character motivation. The minimal dialogue in the film is small talk, most of which is unintelligibly muffled or spoken through a thick Scottish accent. Human communication seems essentially irrelevant to the alien and does little to offer exposition or give access to character interiority (2).

Whereas Roeg’s film resorts to certain disorienting editing to reflect the way its protagonist experiences time and space, Glazer’s film disorients to hide who the characters really are and what they do. For instance, every time the alien seduces a man and lures him into old houses, the interiors overrule our ordinary perception of match-cuts and spatial continuity. The interior of the “entrapping” houses are dark, borderless spaces with no sign of walls, a ceiling or a floor. The narrative economy of the original book, relatively rife with information on the aliens’ lifestyle and mode of production provided by the focus on Isserley, is substantially altered in the film adaptation. There the absence of contextualization, the muteness of the aliens, and the eerie minimalist design of the “entrapping” houses render a whole new level of estrangement, based much more on the lack of visibility and information than on any description of otherworldly devices. Again, Hildebrand offers an accurate account of the film’s perhaps most ingenious achievement:

Formally, the film presents stark distinctions between cinema vérité-style shots of the human world that appear grounded in familiar realist codes and interior shots of the alien's more subjective interior environments that seem to defy representational space. The transitions between these modes of *mise-en-scène* create a jarring cognitive dissonance that may resemble the alien's own disorientation. It does this, seemingly, in service of a film pondering what it means to be human. But it also works to structurally frustrate identification with the film's protagonist, repeatedly keeping her a seeming other, even when we are positioned to see her stare back in the mirror. (13)

It is worth remembering the acute difference between Faber's novel and Glazer's film in this respect. The latter insightfully reimagines the way the alien carries on her task, capturing single white men and delivering their bodies. In the novel, all its complexity and ingenuity lies somewhere else. The way Isserley does her job is quite ordinary: she gives a lift to its potential prey, starts a conversation and, after a concise evaluation of the "product," she just presses a button, and a needle behind the car seat injects a serum that puts the vulnerable passenger to sleep. Once back at her farm, Isserley's accolades take the dormant body out of the car, and one more specimen is ready to be processed and packed off to an alien planet. In Glazer's film, the whole ploy is abstract and mysterious. The alien does offer a lift, but once her passenger is inside the car, she starts her game of seduction, luring her prey into apparently ordinary houses in Scottish neighbourhoods. Once inside the houses, a curious mismatch takes place: the alien slowly walks away from her male companion, further into a borderless, empty void, while undressing. Seemingly mesmerised, the man follows her, while barely taking notice of the fact that the black, mirroring floor gradually liquifies and engulfs him.

On Eyes

Eyes play an important role in both Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and Glazer's *Under the Skin*. In the latter, a whole sequence originally in the script, of the transformation of the alien into nothing less than Hollywood superstar Scarlett Johansson, had to be taken away due to budgetary constraint, and replaced by the luring and intriguing scene of the 'creation' of a human eye. As J. D. Connor comments on that scene:

When the movie was budgeted at \$41m, Glazer and Alexander Stuart envisioned an elaborate opening sequence that would trace the process of the alien taking on human form. However, that version would have cost "a million pound." So when the production was radically scaled back, the opening was reduced to "the construction of an eye" and a set of language lessons (Making of, 2014). The opening thus depicts the materialisation of the instrument of vision that will be necessary for victim selection and the perfection of the voice that will be essential for victim seduction. At the same time, by shifting the instances of incarnation to vision and sound in their minimal versions, the opening becomes more clearly symbolic, more directly emblematic of the cinematic as such. (2)

Mostly abstract and mesmerising, the "eye" opening scene in *Under the Skin* may well have turned out to be the main artistic achievement in the film. Connor has seen some reference to the BFI logo in it (4), but it is no doubt much more than any hint at merchandise or sponsorship is at stake here. It seems that the opening scene synthesises all the major issues to be tackled by Glazer's film, much in the way Peter Mayesberg has deemed the scene in the jewellery shop as a compact version of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. In its ambiguity and selective framing, the viewer is confronted with its own limited vision, its incapability to visualise anything he does not comprehend, pointing to the otherness and the opaqueness which stems from it. In a nutshell, the makers of the film ask how one would be able to see an alien, and vice-versa.

The eyes in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* are no less iconic and a leitmotiv than in *Under the Skin*. We could say that major turning points in the film are punctuated by shots of eyes. When Newton arrives on Earth, one of his first gestures is to protect his eyes from the sunlight. He puts shades on, and so he is further adapted in his first steps towards becoming human. Later on, when Newton resolves to show his true nature to Mary-Lou, he takes off his wig and contact lenses, in a scene where the camera zooms in to highlight his reptile or catlike eyes. It is the stare at those eyes, and their stare back, that throw Mary-Lou into a frenzied state of terror. At a third point, when Newton is held captive by scientists and subjected to all sorts of medical experiments, he begs the doctors not to touch his eyes. He tries to take off his contact lenses, for

the doctors want to see his original pupils, but eventually, he cannot. The doctors place his face in front of a kind of ophthalmic device that ends up damaging his contact lenses, sticking them forever to his eyeballs. That scene marks, perhaps, the point of no-return in Newton's catabasis—or his "fall of Icarus," another widespread visual motif throughout the whole of Roeg's film. Finally, in the very last scene where he talks to Dr Bryc, after he has fled the laboratory and now living incognito, Newton's eyes are inscrutable, covered by shades. He has no eyes anymore and is a pale sketch of the man he once was, a soulless body just waiting for the end of his life, as well as the end of the world. Significantly, he finally stares down, eyeless, and we can only see the top of his hat while the ending credits roll up. The top of his hat might be quite evocative of an opaque, blind eye. Yet the catabasis has not ended, it stretches well beyond the film's last shot. For now, it is Newton who is looking down into our descent.

By and large, the motif of eyes in both films point to two ideas. First, successful penetration by an alien is only possible if s/he acquires eyes (similar to) the eyes of the natives. Metaphorically speaking, one needs to be able to perceive reality the way the natives see it, to win the natives over. To belong to a specific community and culture, we need to adopt its perspective. Second, losing one's eyes amounts to virtual castration—without their own eyes, the aliens cannot retain their original selves. Put together, these two ideas can be regarded as a subtle criticism of multiculturalism, by suggesting that we cannot see other cultures from more than one perspective.

Ecology and Morality or What the Aliens Do

Both Newton and Isserley come to the Earth to take something from this planet to be consumed by their "compatriots." This raises an issue of the morality of such "harvesting." In the case of Newton, the precious good is water—without it, his family and presumably everybody left on his plane, will die. Water is, obviously, necessary for human survival too and there is much reporting about its shortages in different parts of the world, most importantly Africa, periodically hit by drought. However, there is plenty of water in some parts of the Earth and taking from them even millions of litres does not make any difference to the people there. Moreover, water is a renewable resource, coming from the sky in the form of rain. In most places, this water is not collected and hence allowed to go to waste because there is enough water for human consumption. Furthermore, water for consumption is usually given or sold cheaply. By willing to take water from the Earth to Anthea, Newton most likely does not steal something very precious in a monetary sense or jeopardise human chances for survival. His act thus does not strike us as immoral. The only objectionable aspect of Newton's behaviour is that he keeps the goal of his mission in secret. However, he can be excused for that, given that disclosing it brings the risk of being prevented from completing his mission, which eventually happens. From this perspective, there is no difference between the book and the film.

In the case of Isserley, as presented in the book, what she takes from the Earth is human flesh, and this is not an essential commodity, but a luxury, consumed only by the elite that lives on her planet. This requires killing people, regarded as the worst crime, according to human morality and the law. Moreover, this killing, or rather slaughter, is preceded by keeping the chosen men in captivity. During this period, they are shaved and castrate, and their tongues are removed. They are also fattened, to improve the taste of their flesh and most likely maximise the profit from selling it. Such a procedure brings to mind the practice of intensive animal farming, as it also involves keeping animals in cages, without adequate living space, giving them more food than what they will eat voluntarily and drastically shortening their lives. Moreover, farmed animals are typically kept at a distance from the eyes of their consumers, to prevent spoiling the pleasure of eating them and jeopardising the profit of its producers.

The further difference between *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and *Under the Skin* concerns "payment" for the appropriated goods. Although both Newton and Isserley conceal the purpose of their activities, they approach it differently. Newton builds an industrial empire to be able to return to his planet with the precious water. Although the exact way the industrial complex operates is not revealed, it is obvious that it benefits humans with cutting-edge (alien) science, allowing them to use less resources and improve their lives. As clearly seen in the film, Newton's corporation not only employs many people and makes

business with a significant impact on the planet's economy, but also makes human life more pleasant and comfortable by means of the technological wonders it trades. Moreover, Newton pays well for the services humans afford to him and does not cheat anybody. This refers as much to his business as his romantic life. When he realises that Mary-Lou is in love with him, he reveals to her his true identity, by taking off his contact lenses and his hair. Despite his benefits to humanity and his honesty, he is ultimately defeated by the Earth's (or American) economic elites, who do not want him to share in the profit he creates.

The activities of Isserley do not bring any advantage to humans; they bring only misery to the captured men and their families. However, the motif of farming humans is practically excluded from the adaptation. We never learn what happens to people whom she brings to the empty house—the last time we see them, they are floating in the liquid, presumably dead. We can only speculate on why this aspect was taken out in the process of adaptation—budget cuts might be accountable in this case. One possible answer is that it would be very difficult to show realistically the process of “farming” humans and it would be upsetting to watch and would affect the genre and classification of the film, making it less accessible to mainstream audiences, to which the film is addressed, being a popular arthouse film, as we previously indicated. Nevertheless, such an omission has huge implications for the film's ideology. It occludes the problem of farming, particularly industrial farming (pertaining to neoliberalism) and eating animals, and the morality of those who engage in such a process, either as producers of meat or its consumption. It also allows the preservation of Isserley-Johansson's allure as an aloof mermaid who preys on men for fun or to express her misandry rather than for such a low motif as to extract surplus value from them and earn her living. The whole point of “speciesism,” vivid in the book, is significantly weakened in the movie. Thus, much of the awe provoked by Glazer's tale of alien infiltration and human abduction, one among countless others, consists of engaging visuals devoid of detailed references to the alien “infra-structure” or “mode of production”—unlike the book, where it is precisely the opposite. In so doing, Glazer's film seems to rehabilitate a liberal economic dimension, which is criticized in the original, eventually making his narrative closer to Roeg's film in terms of liberal subtext: now both films feature worldwide stars playing the roles of “radical others,” in tales of free will and individual endeavour with no negative social impact.

Class Politics: Sharing the Wealth versus Accumulation by Dispossession

To a large extent, the two books are concerned with the class structures dominating Earth and the far-away planet. In Tevis' novel, Anthea is presented as some sort of socialist utopia, where there is no class system or even money. By contrast, American society, in which Newton lives, is class-ridden. Nevertheless, its description by Newton reflects the dominant perception of the 1960s, as the happiest time in the history of the USA and the West at large, due to steady economic growth and the expansion of welfare which led to certain laziness and indifference towards money. Newton observes that the people with whom he gets into contact are divided into three classes. One is the super-rich, to which his closest collaborator, Farnsworth, belongs (as well as himself). The second is the middle-class, which, as the years have passed by, put more time into less productive work and made more money, for it. It was that overdressed and immensely comfortable middle class that almost all television shows dealt with, so that one could easily get the notion that all Americans were young, sun-tanned, clear-eyed and ambitious (50).

Finally, there is a descendant of the industrial working class, which constitutes a new leisure class, as this class lives on welfare support. In the book this social stratum is represented by Newton's female companion, Betty Jo (who transformed into Mary-Lou in the film):

They were now the industrial well-to-do, living comfortably in government-built housing—Betty Jo rented a three-room dwelling unit in a huge old brick housing project, now a semi-slum—on cheques from a bewildering diversity of agencies: Federal Welfare, State Welfare, Emergency Relief, Country Poor Relief. This American society was so rich that it could support the eight or ten million members of Betty Jo's class in a kind of shabby, gin-and-used furniture luxury in the cities. (50-1)

Moreover, the book suggests that ultimately Betty Jo has a better life than the middle classes: “It seemed to Newton that Betty Jo, with her gin, her boredom, her cats and her used furniture, was getting the better part of the social arrangement” (51).

It is unlikely that such an assessment of people living on welfare will appear in a book about America under Reagan and late, when welfare was drastically reduced, and those achieving it were stigmatised as parasites. By this point also the standards of life of the middle class significantly deteriorated. It can be suggested that the “neutralisation” of Newton, who is some sort of King Midas, marks the resistance of the capitalist class to the direction the USA was taking: towards universal welfare, resulting in the poor unwilling to work and be exploited.

As mentioned above, in Faber’s book Isserley is presented as a member of the working class or even under-class, who managed to escape her unhappy life on a far-away planet and came to Earth, where she enjoys a better life due to contact with nature, yet while still working for her masters, the planet’s elite and remaining, objectively, poor. This is demonstrated by her modest car and the fact that she practically earns no money. The only money she gets for her work is that which she finds on her victims, which is usually very little—5 GBP or so. To fulfil her duties, Isserley targets almost exclusively working-class white men, often itinerant, seasonal workers with no stable income and families. Such a choice of Isserley’s victims is pragmatic—the disappearance of the representatives of this social stratum most likely will not draw the attention of the police, because families or friends will not look for them. Moreover, in the rural part of Scotland where Isserley works, there are few people of colour, so it is unlikely for her to bring to the farm a man of African or Asian origins. Nevertheless, by such choice of victims, the author of the novel sheds light on the plight of the “white working class” and particularly white working-class men, which is a category typically overlooked by the contemporary post-Marxist postmodernist left (see Grant and Mazierska) or represented negatively, as bigoted and prone to manipulation by far-right movements. In the situation represented in the novel, as in the dominant allegedly progressive media representations (as exemplified by the opinion pieces in *The Guardian*) suffering of such men in the hands of women is deemed unimportant or is even celebrated as an act of historical justice: a revenge for the centuries of patriarchy women had to endure. Faber, by contrast, shows that the oppression and suffering of such men should matter for society at large, and even particularly so because there are no powerful agents who represent them and fight for their rights. They are literally and metaphorically lonely, and such a tale of human abduction by aliens who consume them as luxury items may well be read as a parable or metaphor for the exploitation of western white working class by the neoliberal capital—a titan hunger for men, now including European men. However, in Glazer’s film it is not the plight of white working-class men which attracts compassion of the alien and the audience, but that of a disabled man, somewhat reflecting the politics of the new left, which plays down the importance of class to emphasise the predicament of various minorities, such as the people of colour, LGBT and the disabled, which can be summarised under the umbrella of social justice. In other words, social class in the film is not presented as a basis of identity and solidarity between the disadvantaged; an idea which is subtly, yet effectively promoted by neoliberalism.

Another similarity between the world painted by Faber and the advanced neoliberal world pertains to the place occupied by the economic and political elites: they live far away from those whom they exploit, leaving their servants to do the dirty work for them (Žižek 133). This is, of course, immensely beneficial to these elites. Moreover, the exploitation of the poor, as presented in Faber’s novel, exceeds stealing their work, by including the exploitation of their bodies. This, again, parallels the neoliberal order with its legalising of trade in organs or paying poor women to work as surrogates for rich childless women. To use David Harvey’s term, it is an extreme form of “accumulation by dispossession” (160-62).

However, in the film, these aspects of the original story are omitted. Isserley’s victims are indeed people of modest economic background, but we never learn that their kidnapping is part of an economic operation. The focus is on the beautiful alien and her quest for identity. This elision can be regarded as a reflection of specific interests of Glazer, as well as the fact popular arthouse cinema tends to stay away from the thorny problem of class, favouring the issues of identity, especially in relation to sexuality.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we reiterate the point that the books and films discussed in this article are children of their times: their respective realities and ideologies. This fact is not surprising in itself, but while these two pairs of artworks clearly mirror their respective *zeitgeist*, it might also be worth noting how they demonstrate some “torsions” and “fissures” in their own discourses, possibly rendered by ideologically contradictory readings. Another point lies in the fact that, maybe, class struggle or class conflict seems to appear more “at ease” in novels than in films—either “commercial” or “arthouse” films. Tevis’ book and Roeg’s films reflect on the period of the relative affluence of the United States in the 1960s and the anxiety of ending this period, as reflected in the motif of “castrating” Newton, who works for the common good, in exchange for a chance to save his people. Faber’s book deals with important aspects of neoliberalism, most importantly exploitation of the working class by remote elites who do their work using desperate intermediaries. However, we pointed out that this aspect is omitted from the film, which can be read as a sign of unwillingness of popular arthouse cinema to engage with the problem of social inequality. Instead, the film underscores the plight of the disabled, in a way typical to postmodern left politics, which prioritises the problems of discrimination and (the lack of) diversity over that of class.

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