



Effect of Hierarchies on the Corporeal Alternations in the Novel *Under the Skin*

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Abstract

In this essay, I analyze the complex role capitalism plays in the formation and transformation of bodies within its system, using the novel *Under the Skin* by Michel Faber as a case study. As multidisciplinary research, this essay will use disability studies as a theoretical foundation with which the main arguments will be underscored. In order to do so, I focus on four dimensions: first, the distinction between normality and deviance as manifested in the bodies of the alien protagonist and the Vess corporation heir Amlis; second, the impact of different hierarchies in the novel; elites, workers, and human prey (vodsel); on the bodies of the group according to their position in each level of the pyramid; third, the role of disability and how it affects individuals under capitalism; fourth, how (de)prostheticization changes the way readers perceive and interpret the novel by shifting the perspective from the normative one to an alternative one that challenges the dominant assumptions of normalcy. This essay will argue that: capitalism use, misuse, and abuse society's view of normalcy to take full advantage for its own hegemonic purposes.

Keywords: capitalism, hierarchies, disability, normate, prosthesis

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“A human being who is first of all an invalid is all body, therein lies his inhumanity and hid debasement. In most cases he is a little better than carcass—.”

Thomas Mann, *Magic Mountain*

Introduction

Under the Skin (2000) is a novel by Michel Faber that exposes the reader to the many problems that plague modern society. It features a female protagonist who struggles with self-identity, gender stereotypes, and male violence. It critiques the mass killings of animals in the meat industry. It depicts a planet almost ruined by centuries of capitalist and technological exploitation. It explores corporeal alterity and strict hierarchies that divide the protagonist and vodsel races respectively. Faber’s work appeals to those who are interested in gender studies, posthumanism, animal studies, ecocriticism, veganism, and more.

The novel’s protagonist, Isserley, is an alien whom the novel curiously calls “Human” in the text. She hunts muscular male vodsel hitchhikers, injects them with a special needle called the “icpathua” that paralyzes them, and delivers them to their “farm” where they are processed into a delicacy called “voddissin” for the rich in her planet. Language in this novel plays a significant role, for example Sarah Dillion has analyzed how the novel plays with language in its epistemological and ontological aspects. She shows that the novel challenges the distinction between the human and nonhuman by “renaming human beings” as “vodsel” and “giving them an animal-like species name” (Dillon, 2011, p. 1). Similarly, scholars such as Marion Gymnich and Alexandre Segao Costa argue that in the “Isserley’s view of the world, human beings have the status of cattle, and the way the men caught by Isserley are treated by the aliens can be read as a cultural-critical metadiscourse [on] the way human beings treat animals in the meat industry” (Gymnich & Costa, 2006, p. 85). Thus, language is evidently one of the tools and commodities that Faber employs to critique society’s flaws and it is precisely because of this invented language that makes alienation of other species possible so that they could be discriminated against. The two authors are correct in examining the role of the language and the said consequence of that “renaming”. However, what they fail to notice in Faber’s novel is the clever debunking of centuries of carefully planned discourses that gave man the much-needed primacy over all other beings to solidify its own existence.

Unlike these scholars, who focus on the linguistic and cultural aspects of the novel, I will examine how it portrays disability and normalcy in relation to hierarchies and capitalism. Furthermore, I will build on the current disability studies and show how it can be extended in viewing the hierarchization of humans and the vodsels. Therefore, moving away from the other literary methodologies mentioned above, I am more interested in the novel in two contexts: what role literature can have on disability, and how hierarchies affect bodies. As Davis observes, disability is not a trivial issue that pertains to a minority member of a society, but “part of a

historically constructed discourse” wherein an ideology of thinking pertinent to the body under different historical events takes place (Davis, 1995, p. 2).

The postindustrial age is one such historical circumstance, where the concept of containing, controlling, and regulating the body emerged. This was loosely influenced by the “Eugenics movement”, which was based on Darwin’s idea of “survival of the fittest” and aimed to eliminate those who deviated from the uniformity of society (Davis, 1995, p. 30). This also led to the creation of the term “the average man”, which contrasted with the earlier notion of the ideal—“mythopoetic body that is linked to the Gods” that prevailed in the preindustrial age (Davis, 1995, p. 24). It is important to note that words like “norm”, “normal”, “average”, “normality” all acquired their modern meaning during the onset of the industrial age (Davis, 1995, p. 24). Thus, in this era where body and mind were constantly measured and medicalized, they were ultimately divided into the two absolute categories of the able and disabled.

Therefore, I will examine how the *Under the Skin* depicts the role of hierarchies, which capitalism helps create, in disabling different characters in the novel. To do so, I will: first, demonstrate how Faber’s novel constructs the hierarchies between the elite, the worker, and the vodsel; second, introduce three ways wherein hierarchies can affect bodies in the novel and compare the perfect body of Amlis to the imperfect body of Isserley; third, show how the rigid class division affects the bodies of the individuals at the lowest level of the pyramid—the worker and the vodsel—to the point of their bodies getting distorted and even dehumanized. Extending this point further, I will also argue how Faber’s deconstruction of the social hierarchies, by deprostheticization, help us understand the extent to which the hegemony of normalcy is operative within our societies. By analyzing these aspects, I will show how *Under the Skin* challenges and exposes capitalism by revealing its creation of different classes of the two races found in the novel, and how by granting different bodily status—perfect, ideal, or disabled—to each member of this created hierarchy by the normate, the author is successful in his critique.

Disability: Disposability and Prostheticization

Throughout history, “marginalization” has been used as a tool of fear, used by the infamous normate (coined by Garland-Thompson in *Extraordinary Bodies*) to separate those who have “political and social relevance and those who do not”, to shape and control reality as the only voice that is permitted to tell history by linking events and their meanings as historical objects (Mansouri, 2021, p. 257). Thus, in this manner, the history that is written and preserved by the normate’s hegemonic agenda is whatever they choose to present and keep, and thus it becomes the sole version of reality. The normate has the ability to bind the elements together, albeit doing so in a “hegemonic and totalitarian” way, weaving a Heideggerian *account* that connects “social and political realities” in an ultra-anthropocentric “rendition of history” (Mansouri, 2021, p. 257).

To bring about a sense of national unity and a semblance of social equality, the normate exiles the traditional and much-celebrated ideal bodies of Greco-Roman

deities and instead idolizes a new figure as the average citizen, namely, a “non-heroic”, even a “proletariat individual” who extols normalcy as virtue and confirms social wholeness and unity as herd efficiency (Quayson, 2007, p. 19). This newfound social wholeness for the newly made idol: the average citizen, translates to an unprecedented level of participation and inclusion within the constructed society. This new celebration and advertisement of wholeness, which requires “an individual to overcome their fears and anxieties if they want national and historical inclusion”, invites the individual to either hide their differences and disabilities or follow the hegemonic trend, resulting in a mere “simulacrum of wholeness, where only a semblance of wholeness lies within this complex matrix of social unity, treating multiplicity as a sign of difference, deviance, and non-belonging” (Mansouri, 2021, p. 257).

To understand the primacy of the normate’s hegemony over the absolute category of able/disable, Sylvia Wynter’s categorization of being human would become useful. According to her, “this category is the Western bourgeois conception of the human—Man—that is overrepresenting itself as if it were the human *per se*; as ‘the ostensibly only normal human’” (Wynter, 2003, p. 265). “In accounting for this ‘overrepresentation of man as human’, Wynter traces the social and historical appearance of what she terms Man1—Renaissance man, *homo politicus*—and Man2—late nineteenth century liberal evolutionary man, *homo oeconomicus*” (Goodley, 2023, p. 172). *Homo politicus* according to Dan Goodley (2023, p. 172), closely resembles Michael Foucault’s sovereign self, embodied by the rational political subject of the civilized European male. In other words, this is the colonizer with the already discussed over-represented opinion of himself as normally human. By the late nineteenth century, indebted to science, *homo oeconomicus* is born “biologically and evolutionarily developed, innately pristine, and phylogenetically selected to survive and flourish” (Goodley, 2023, p. 172). It is in this moment of collapsing man-human-normal that this “constitution of humanness” resonates with the hegemonic tendencies of the normate. Thus, he contends that “in modern Western European secular societies, the figure of the normate dominates humanist conceptions of man/human”, which perhaps is “personified best by Da Vinci’s image of Vitruvian Man” and other detectable materials found in the modern contemporary representations (Goodley, 2023, p. 172). Steyn and Mpofu (2021) note that the “grand construction of Euro-modernity was founded on unhappy circumstances and for tragic purposes. Those which were designated and categorized as non-human became things, reduced to resources, usable and disposable by unapologetic humans” (p. 1). One such fateful occasion, according to Razack (2016) “relates to disposability; the transformation of some human beings into waste” (Goodley, 2023, p. 173). In a similar vein, as it shall soon be illuminated, Faber’s characters employ this tactic against the vodsels to convince others that these creatures are primitive and even commit acts of violence against their own less fortunate kinsman.

This tactic of dehumanizing the other is closely related to the concept of prostheticizing effect in a literary text. An acute understanding of how disability and its prostheticizing function work can shed light on how exactly it has been used as a

normalizing tool by the normate. The way it is used has already been mapped by Mitchell and Snyder (2000) in their book *Narrative Prosthesis*. According to them, narratives establish an aberrant—or in this case a disabled character—and behave in the same way that a compensation for that limitation begins in real life, which is done by restoring that which was lost, for example using a prosthetic device for a missing leg. Similarly, in this approach, the narrative identifies the lost object as the thing that stands out—a thing that deviates from the norm. And it is precisely here that the explanatory process begins: “literary narratives begin a process of explanatory compensation wherein perceived aberrancies can be rescued from ignorance, neglect, or misunderstanding for their readerships” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 53). In a similar vein, Michel de Certeau (1986) also notes about “the movement of all narratives” in his seminal essay “*The Savage I*”, which analyzes the travel narratives of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A narrative is initiated by the search for the strange, which is presumed different from the place assigned to it by the discourse of the culture from which it originates (Certeau, 1986, p. 69). The very thing that has gone wrong within this known world now begs for a story to comprehend that which has caused the anomaly. What David Wills calls the “prostheticizing” effect is, therefore, “a deviance marked as improper to a social context” that is corrected by an author using a textual prosthesis, in order to restore a false semblance of unity to the text (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 53). In a simplistic way it is possible to define the prostheticizing effect in the novel by using the already discussed mapping. The narrative first establishes Isserley as a centerpiece character, however, in order to make her character truly stand out, she is given an altered body. Then the narrative proceeds to explain where this aberrant body originates from, which is due to surgery. After this comes the three usual solutions for a disabled character according to Mitchell and Snyder, either her disability gets cured, or a compensation for her disability is given or she is removed from the plot altogether. From what we know of the novel, the second solution may be applied to Isserley. While Faber did not give Isserley any physical compensation for the said lack, he indeed gave her a mental one in a physical form: her car. Isserley’s car bears significant importance as it is a subtle doorway to what her current state of mind is, for instance, when she is hesitant about her role in the farm, her car gets broken, but more importantly when she decides to stop working in the farm and stop abducting vodsels, her car crashes, thus signifying that her death is imminent. However, this is a plain reading of what Mitchell and Snyder attested in their book *Narrative Prosthesis*, and that the author’s portrayal of the disabled character is much more nuanced and complicated than what this brief reading suggests.

As a result of the process of prostheticizing, disability or as Ato Quayson names it a “marker of sharp otherness”, begins to defy the descriptive national historiography. The normate—empowered by their new hegemonic idol of “average citizen”—has the capacity to curate history however it pleases, to the extent that it can “justify and vindicate, chastise”, objectify, or even dispose of those who fall into the deviant side in the category of the binary able/disabled (Mansouri, 2021, p. 257). It is precisely in this moment that a false account is prostheticized in order for the correct (heavily modified) account to be replaced by it. However, what this paper will present is that the prosthetic feature that sometimes accompanies disability need

not always be corrective in nature to the point of fixing abnormalities in favor of the normate's worldview. It can also be used as a (de)prostheticizing tool to deconstruct the already established hegemony of normalcy and give way for a new account that is less invested in realizing normal accounts championed by the *average perceiver* and more on the *othered perceiver* that is rooted in a reality that reflects the flaws of the dominant construct.

Capitalism: The Hierarchy and the Body

Capitalism "romanticizes the individual" hero who goes out all alone in pursuit of economic success, which of course is not an easy task, and it involves risks that not many are eager to undertake (Tyson, 2014, p. 57). One example that Lois Tyson gives is the rush of gold and silver in the American frontier, which claimed many lives. In today's world, this risk now involves undertaking high-risk businesses, in which the individual risks losing all their assets. While running a business seems admirable, by referring to a Marxist perspective on how ideology operates, this system promotes a mindset in people which compels them to be more driven by their "self-interest", "above the need or even survival of other people" (Tyson, 2014, p. 57). This "rugged individualism" as Tyson names it, insists on "me" rather than "us", and "works against the well-being of a society as a whole and of the unprivileged in particular" (Tyson, 2014, p. 57). Furthermore, it gives the illusion to the people that they are making the decisions without being influenced by any ideologies, which of course is not true, because "we are influenced by various ideologies all the time, whether we realize it or not" (Tyson, 2014, p. 57).

In the novel, Faber showcases the existence of rigid hierarchies that divide each member into its respective division. The human world is governed by the elites who have formed an oligarchy, similar to the Italian merchant republics (such as Pisa, Genoa, or Venice), where a select few rule the many poor. The oligarchical system is further enforced by the presence of capitalism, which drives the elite's sense of self-interest and disregard for their fellow humans and their planet. Normally, capitalism is the private ownership of the means of production and the exchange of goods and services in the markets that are further enhanced with technological advancements. However, in the New Estates, the unfair distribution of income and wealth among the different groups has created a drastic shift in power dynamics in favor of the elite class, where the workers simply do not have the means to negotiate or advance. This lack of opportunity or prospects to climb the social ladder has created an extreme pyramid of power where those who possess capital and wealth firmly stand atop everyone else who are not as affluent as they are. The result of this is, of course, discrimination, and the harsh living and working environment imposed on the working class. Although, the motivation of the elites for this never-ending accumulation of wealth is not mentioned directly in the novel, by their actions it can be guessed that they are a greedy and selfish bunch who will stop at nothing to further enrich their own pockets without any sort of regard for their own kin or even their own planet. After all, it should not be forgotten that this is the very same culture that has no equivalent meaning for the vodsel word: "mercy", as it was "a concept that just didn't exist" (Faber, 2000, p. 160). Therefore,

it is not surprising that the elites are both cruel and ruthless in their monetary gains and ambitions.

The human home world called the New Estates is itself divided into two levels: the higher level, where the wealthy reside, and the lower level, where everyone else lives. Faber offers very few details about the human home world and no details about the upper levels, but Isserley uses words like "monstrously ugly", "claustrophobic", "subterranean blackness" and "nauseous" to describe her world (Faber, 2000, p. 81). The underground where the poor and unfortunate people live and work, houses various mining complexes and provides oxygen for the higher level. According to Isserley the lower level is a place that "decay and disfigurement" would soon follow due to shortages of pretty much everything. It is a place full of "ugliness" for the "Estate trash", "losers" and "low-lives" referring to the lower-level denizens (Faber, 2000, p. 81).

Under the Skin also illustrates the importance of hierarchies by depicting the separation of the human classes from another species: the vodsels. The vodsels are nothing but food for the humans, who hunt them down on Earth using agents like Isserley. Isserley is a worker who has undergone a drastic surgery to look like a female vodsel in order to lure unsuspecting male vodsels into her car. She does this because this was her only choice between staying behind on her own planet with the rest of the "maggots" or fleeing this horror. However, she soon realizes that her sacrifice has not paid off, and that she is still trapped in a system that continues to exploit her body and her labor.

In such an inflexible society where the workers' condition in the underground is quite horrific, much like those who work in the coal mines, their only chance to escape is to flee the said nightmare by volunteering to work on the Earth's farm. Like Isserley, those who worked with her underground in the New Estates, are being put to work in places such as: a moisture-filtration plant or an oxygen factory, toiling in filth like "a maggot among other maggots" (Faber, 2000, p. 62). Ironically, for the workers on Earth, the working conditions remain the very same, because excluding Isserley and Esswis, who due to their surgical change can remain on the surface, every other worker must remain underground, where they sleep, eat, and work. Furthermore, the lowest level within this farm is where the vodsels are processed, in a place ironically called "cradle", which is a clear indication of their status as mere food. The surface of this farm is blessed with a surreal scenery "To her right, trillions of litres of water surged between Ablach's beach and an invisible Norway beyond the horizon. To her left, steep gorse-encrusted hills led up to the farm" (Faber, 2000, p. 59). While underneath the very same farm is an eerie, bleak, and grim place full of the smell of "sweat, cleaning agents and paint" (Faber, 2000, p. 55). The place is divided into many levels such as the "kitchen and recreation hall, living quarters" for the workers, the process hall, and the pens, all of which are accessible via an elevator (Faber, 2000, p. 104). In hindsight, nothing has really changed for these workers, for even on another planet—Earth that is—the hierarchical system still has its grip on these workers' lives by splitting them into those who can be at the top and those who must be underground, perhaps the only difference now is that vodsels are being kept below

the workers. But they are still toiling away like “maggots” with other “maggots”, much like everyone else back on their own planet.

Bodies in Tatters

This system of exploitation not only dramatically affects the vodsel by taking away their individuality, such as by cutting their tongues and castrating them, but also affects the humans whose bodies undergo gradual alteration. Isserley is not alone in paying the ultimate price, because as she herself notes, Esswis is the first human whose appearance has undergone a major transformation. In fact, he appears to be in much more pain than she is, observed by her when he was having such difficulties in helping her capture the fleeing monthlings or when they got back to the farm, he left the car where it was so that he could hurry home faster due to his extreme pain. Esswis is mainly in charge of keeping up an appearance in public and keeping vodsel away from the farm so that the workers could work in peace. It is interesting to note that despite their shared experience of bodily mutilations, they feel the same burden, but they avoid each other as much as they avoid the other workers.

Nevertheless, the corporeal differences between the elites and the workers, due to the cruel exploitation by the elites, can be found in the novel in three different forms. First, a soft change that includes limited alteration of bodies, which can be found in most of the working class, both working on the alien planet and those who work on Earth; second, a hard change which is a dramatic alteration of the entire body, the kind of which Isserley and Esswis have gone through; the third, and the final of these is the extreme alteration of the captured vodsel by Isserley who as mentioned earlier, lose their subjecthood. On the other side, opposite of these bodies, lurks a definitive body that differs from the ones mentioned above, and that is the body of the elites, represented by an “elite” member of the alien race, the scion of Vess group Amlis Vess which I will talk about after introducing the second corporeal variety that focuses on Isserley first.

The second bodily change, which I termed as a hard change is Isserley’s own body, which has been surgically altered to resemble a female vodsel. This change is both a disguise and a form of oppression, which enables her to lure oblivious male vodsel into her car, where she drugs them and takes them to a farm, where they are processed into meat. But, in order to keep her appearance as the said species, she also must shave her fur regularly and wear clothes to keep a visual resemblance to that of a vodsel, and wear shoes that are specifically made for her. From what we can gather, her disability is not hereditary, but the direct result of human (alien) interventionism that specifically (re)shaped her body to prepare her for her new work environment. Isserley’s body modification is also a form of oppression, which forces her to conform to the human (vodsel) standards of beauty and sexuality. Isserley’s body is not her own, but a tool for her job, which she hates but cannot escape.

Earlier it was mentioned that behind all these "deviant" bodies there exists a normal or even ideal body that can be compared with an imperfect body. A brief

comparison of the perfect body next to an imperfect body is needed to shed some light on the dichotomy between the human standard of normal and deviant. The former, belongs to an “elite” member of the alien race; Amlis Vess, while the latter belongs to the marginalized “worker” group, the protagonist Isserley. Starting with Isserley, in order to escape the many miseries of her planet, she decides to flee to Earth, however, for her to blend in with Earth’s vodsels she must pay a hefty price, surgical alteration of her entire body. This surgery includes the removal of her tail and insertion of a metal rod in her spine so that she would be able to walk using her two legs, removal of her sixth finger on each hand, and replacement of her teats with false enlarged breasts fashioned on those of a glamour model. Isserley did all this to escape a horrible fate that awaited her back home, and instead she agreed to something far more terrible, with an unimaginable outcome for her both morally and physically.

In the novel we can grasp a sense of what this physical consequence entails for her and for Esswis as there are several instances where we can see the ways they are both dealing with their new customized alien bodies. In order to soothe her excruciating pain Isserley needs to shower regularly and massage her surgical spots, while taking small comfort in her implanted breasts, that blocks her from seeing what has been done to her lower body parts. Also, because of the pain, she can no longer sleep in the same manner as members of her own race, and like a vodsel she must sleep in a bed, although, even in bed she cannot sleep for long because of “her contorted back muscles” (Faber, 2000, p. 48). Meanwhile, Esswis appears to be in more severe pain than Isserley. In the novel, she mentions that Esswis is the first “human” who has undergone the surgery, and that she feels less pain than he did because the doctors who operated on him now know exactly what they were doing when they operated on her.

In stark contrast to these mutilated bodies, to these imperfections, we catch a glimpse of a body, whose possessor is none other than Amlis, an “elite” human who not only can be considered normal but may even be ideal:

His limbs exactly equal in length, all of them equally nimble.... His breast tapered seamlessly into a long neck, on which his head was positioned like a trophy. It came to three points: his long spearhead ears and his vulpine snout. His large eyes were perfectly round, positioned on the front of his face, which was covered in soft fur, like the rest of his body. In all these things he was a normal, standard-issue human being... (Faber, 2000, p. 105)

Amlis by all accounts possesses an ultimate body, an ideal figure, which can never be attained by an ‘average worker’. Because for those who have had both a soft or hard change, the damage is irreversible, moreover, it does not matter whether they are humans on Earth or back at their own planet, the unfair system which has been discussed earlier, is leaving its mark both figuratively and literally upon those who are not at the top of the pyramid. Although, it is interesting to note that the victims of Isserley all have one thing in common; it is that they are all muscular.

The first bodily change or the soft change is that of the bodies of Isserley's co-workers, who live and work underground on the alien planet. Isserley's relation to these workers is not good because she is uncomfortable around them as they look "different" and stare at her body and "chiseled face" whenever they think she is not paying any attention (Faber, 2000, p. 55). These workers are also aliens, but they have not undergone the same body modification as Isserley. They are the ones who process the vodsels into meat and send them back to their home planet, where they are consumed by the rich and powerful aliens. These workers are also exploited and oppressed by the system, which treats them as disposable and replaceable objects. They live in poor conditions, with little oxygen, food, or medical care. They suffer from various physical and mental ailments, for instance, Ensel's "teeth weren't so good, and he knew it" whenever he smiled at her (Faber, 2000, p. 86), Yns, the engineer who is introduced as "a swarthy old salt of ugliness, bared his strained teeth" (Faber, 2000, p. 107). One of the workers whose name she forgets is introduced another way: "He was stupid looking, fat and squat – a full head shorter than Amlis Vess...He had some sort of disgusting skin ailment that made half his face look like mouldy fruit (Faber, 2000, p. 148), and Unser the chief processor who repeats the "uhr-rhum" to clear his throat which indicates his throat problem (Faber, 2000, p. 195).

Opportunism, coupled with the privileges acquired from the elite status, seems to determine the condition of one's body in the novel wherein it directly brings about the soft or hard change. After all, as mentioned above, it is not fate or divine decree that transforms the bodies of characters like Isserley or Esswis in the novel. They either change by the intentional "human" intent whose primary motivation behind this abrupt alteration is to simply meet the supply and demand quota, or by the harsh working conditions imposed on the "workers" both at home and abroad thereby affecting bodies to decay and bringing along hard change with it. As Isserley observes, the "elite" members of her species are beautiful with the usual characteristics that mark them as such—the kind that we saw in Amlis earlier—while the unfortunate "worker" class seem to have some sort of ailments accompanying them due to prolonged habitation: "decay and disfigurement were obviously the same course down there. Maybe it was the overcrowding, or the bad food or the bad air or the lack of medical care, or just the inevitable result of living underground" (Faber, 2000, p. 61). Isserley further attests that those who are left behind on her planet vowed that they would remain beautiful and unchanged, as she once was, but now they are "transformed into a beast, with hunched back, scarred flesh, crumbling teeth, missing fingers, cropped hair. But that's how they all ended up" (Faber, 2000, p. 62). Would she be any different if she had stayed on her planet? "of course, not" for she did end up like the worst estate "trash". Thus, why would the elites not be average or even beautiful, when none of their members suffer from the same ecological or food shortages or lack of medical care as the workers.

The fact that these workers are suffering from physical or mental ailments is not surprising, because historically mass industrialization caused many incidents that resulted in permanent damage to the workers, especially in coal mines. Similarly, according to Isserley's account, her co-workers who live and work

underground struggle with their working environment. The parodying of the same condition, where the workers are deep below the surface, seldom bask in the presence of the Sun, and have a poor diet, is not without its intention and purpose. In the novel, Faber does not directly comment on the bodily afflictions of Isserley's co-workers, but rather it is Isserley herself who informs us of these by observing things around her.

There are two reasons as to why the workers' bodies are gradually decaying. First, as mentioned earlier, there is the obvious environmental factor: only the rich get to live on the surface where there is plenty of oxygen thanks to the workers, while the rest who live underground seldom get it. And the underground, both on their planet and on Earth, is not exactly an immaculate place. These two factors affect the speed of bodily deterioration. Second, there is the food consumption: in the novel we know that vodsels eat meat, but we also know that the workers are only given the useless parts of the meat. Therefore, all they eat is the cheap "mussanta paste" which is made from the undesired parts of the processed vodsels, or potatoes fried in animal fat. The combination of these two factors affects the gradual diminishing of the bodies of the working-class humans depicted in the novel, such as Ensel's rotten teeth, Yns' ugliness, or Unser's throat problem.

The third and final bodily change, which I dubbed as extreme earlier, is the one that affects the vodsels, who are the actual human beings that Isserley hunts and captures. These vodsels are exploited and oppressed by the system, which treats them as nothing but food for the aliens. They are dehumanized and deindividualized by the language and the process that transforms them into meat. They are given names like 'vodsel' or 'voddissin', which strip them of their identity and dignity. They are subjected to brutal procedures that remove their hair, skin, genitals, and vocal cords. They are kept in cages and fed with artificial food until they are slaughtered. Unlike Isserley and Esswis, who retain some traces of their former selves after their surgeries, the processed vodsels are completely altered in their physiology. They have no voice or agency in their fate.

Hence, the worst victims of corporate greed are not those who undergo either of the two corporeal changes mentioned thus far. The most horrifying victims in this chain of never-ending cruelty are the vodsels who are literally reduced to just meat, food for the rich aliens. And the main culprit behind this chain, that in fact victimizes both the vodsels and the humans alike, is capitalism, which commodifies and dehumanizes being into objects. Commodification in the novel is shown by the use of language and class division. Using terms like 'vodsel' or 'voddissin', that reduce a vodsel to a named commodity that has a substantial value for the wealthy. The product line of meat processing of the vodsels, due to the high demand on the alien planet, leads to the third and final bodily change found in the novel.

Earlier a surface reading of what the normate is capable of by weaving a Heideggerian account that continually is getting prostheticized by its agents for the hegemonic purposes was offered in the earlier sections. It is established that "to prostheticize" means "correction" - fixing that which is deviant from what the norm

dictates. Thanks to this hegemonic account, according to Wynter's mapping of Man1 and Man2 this hegemony of normalcy first got created and then became fiercely entrenched. Consequently, literary texts would imprison these characters with certain limited roles or as Thompson notes: "on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures or exotic aliens whose bodily configurations operates as spectacles, eliciting responses from other characters or producing rhetorical effects that depends on disability's cultural resonance" (Thomson, 2017, p. 9). Had this novel been written in the nineteenth century, Isserley's character would have been somehow trivialized and removed from the plot by death, but in this novel Faber makes extreme changes in the usual conventions as if to disable normality itself. It is now a disabled female that hunts, and it is muscular men who are prey, it is now her gaze that would determine the fate of those who she looks upon. This simple act of transference of perception from the average perceiver to the othered perceiver has created a unique situation where a new account is made, wherein making (de)prostheticization of the normate's hegemonic account a possibility. This shift of perception creates a new paradigm of power which brings forth a new account that opposes the original account in its roots. The critique of capitalism and the reversal of roles from the disabled to abled are the major threads for this weaving of the newer account.

Usually, disability in a novel represents the said loss, whatever that may be, but also serves as a metaphorical artifact that attaches political, social, and cultural layers of meanings to the said loss. In other words, in Faber's novel the displayed lack serves as an indictment of a society that is so consumed and driven by its selfish interest that it is even willing to mutilate bodies in order to get what it wants and turn a blind eye to those who are victimized by the very system responsible for their suffering in the first place. On the surface capitalism seems to promote equality of opportunity and individualism, but after reading Faber's novel, the ugly sides of it start to emerge: the sides that make monsters.

Faber's work shows the creation of monstrosity by reversing the roles of the hunter and the hunted: the disabled and the able-bodied. In some novels, the disabled are preyed upon by society's ill treatment, such as the poor children in a boarding school who suffer under its tyrannical headmaster in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. Or Benjy in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, who is castrated and isolated from society by the fences around his home. But in this novel, we see a different pattern: an alien woman who was once beautiful but becomes horribly deformed by corporate greed and her own desire to escape the "filth" and "maggots" who work in the Estates. She now hunts "brawny" and "muscular" men, sparing those who are skinny and have no muscle mass. She drives her car and looks for hitchhikers who are suitable for processing. Davis argues that disability occurs in the "realm of the senses", which means that a disabled person is labeled as such only when they are seen by a non-disabled person (Davis, 1995, p. 13). For instance, this moment of seeing does not happen for two people chatting online. Disability only becomes disability when the lack becomes visible. The novel differs from what Davis explains in his book in this aspect: although the process of seeing is the same,

the roles are reversed. The disabled person determines the fate of those she sees, while the non-disabled ones are observed and victimized.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the novel mimics the working environment of the Industrial Age workers, which serves as a reminder of the harsh working conditions and questions the hegemonic account by those who are enforcing it. The rewriting of this account is made possible by a deprostheticization, that seeks to embrace difference and deviance, by shifting the narrative from the average perceiver to the othered perceiver. Such dramatic change in perception no longer falls within what Mitchell and Snyder call “to prostheticize”, because on the contrary this novel, as mentioned earlier, is not attempting to fix a new account for it to conform with the old one but questions the old accounts/discourses that have led humanity up to its current egoistic anthropocentric phase. And this questioning is done through three ways: first, with language that functions as an objectifying tool to rationalize the atrocity done to the vodseles; second, with reversal and primacy of an animalistic alien race over humans that ironically echoes Wynter’s colonial rationale; third, with disposability of the disabled for both humans and vodseles, who are regarded as tools and food by their betters.

Conclusion

Under the Skin offers an interesting critique of capitalism through exploration of different themes such as language, hierarchization of social classes, and disabilities. By showing how hierarchization of classes and races, excluding the elites, generates different patterns of disabilities, the novel challenges the ideology behind exploitation of the workers and products. It exposes the horror and hypocrisy of the false promise of equality of opportunity, gradual diminishing of the bodies of the workers, and inhumane treatment of the products (animals) by reversing the conventions of predator as the disabled and prey as the able-bodied, male, and female, and human and animal. Hierarchy defines the status of one’s body in the novel, the lower the person falls into the pyramid, the more the body can be transformed into something that can no longer be recognized as what once it was. Similarly, the higher the person stands at the top, the more definitive the body becomes, that is both comely and normal. Through the use of hierarchies, the novel depicts a utilitarian world dominated by strict class divisions where the people’s lives are no longer controlled by morality or law, but by a select few patrician families who possess the most riches of the entire planet without any regard or remorse as to what happens to the planet they live on, their fellow humans and the source of the expensive food they eat.

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