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IDEOLOGIES OF THE (AB)NORMAL IN SALLY ROONEY'S *NORMAL PEOPLE*[2]

By employing theories of ideology proposed by Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and Slavoj Žižek, this paper aims to interpret the ideological dynamics of "(ab)normality" which inform the narrative of Sally Rooney's second novel, *Normal People* (2018). Althusser's idea of interpellation, Bourdieu's notions of habitus, field, and symbolic capital, alongside Žižek's psychoanalytic theory of the sublime object of ideology and the traumatic remainder constitutive for subjectivity, contribute to the analysis of Rooney's representations of the late capitalist age, how it configures the spiritual realms of love and literature, and of (radical) intimacy as a potential space for alternative relations to those of the competitive power struggle.

Keywords: Irish literature, Sally Rooney, ideology, subjectivity, interpellation, symbolic capital, trauma

Darling states that a "defining feature of the current 'golden age' of Irish literature is its attention to capitalism, online culture and precarity in contemporary society" (2020: 538). In her three novels to date, Sally Rooney engages with all three fields specified by Darling. Her prose regularly engages with online forms like emails or text messages, while her characters' relationships are deeply conditioned by the performativity, detachment, and fragmentation of online communication and how it structures real life relations. Darling highlights that "[p]ublic and private identities blur under these conditions, with the self becoming at once more porous to interpolation by outside influences and more hermeneutically sealed as a static piece of data" (2020: 545), pointing to the superficial paradox of a postmodern, late capitalist "self" being at once overdetermined (by a proliferation of signs in the virtual media) and underdetermined (as depersonalised consumers within the capitalist market). Rooney's characters are individuals increasingly conscious of their involuntary embeddedness within a system that commercializes and commodifies them, making them vulnerable to situations and relationships in which they are meant to act out certain pre-assigned roles or are forced to act out traumas that

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they are incapable of working through. Vulnerability is rarely a choice for Rooney's protagonists, but ultimately, they cannot escape confronting their precariousness, whether in the material or in the spiritual sense. Darling recognizes Rooney's "reservation about how ethical personhood can be reconciled with the daily realities of capitalist systems" (2020: 541), which is precisely the negotiation that pushes her characters into vulnerable states that unconditional love and compassion can potentially reshape.

Whereas Darling focuses primarily on the pervasiveness of online media and their connection to capitalism in Rooney's first novel *Conversations with Friends* (2017), this paper aims to, by relying on comparable precepts, explore the ideological dynamics in Rooney's second novel, *Normal People* (2018), which portrays the intimate relationship between Marianne and Connell throughout their high school and university years that they navigate in a world submerged in conflicting ideologies. Ideas theoretically expounded by Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and Slavoj Žižek serve to illuminate these conflicting ideologies as they infiltrate the (radical) space of intimacy. Althusser's ideas on social institutions that interpellate and manufacture compliant subjects shed light on the conditioning mechanisms within the late capitalist sphere in which Rooney's novel is set. Bourdieu's notions of habitus, field, and symbolic capital provide insight into the characters' relationship dynamics, which lie at the crux of the novel. And Žižek's psychoanalytic framing of the sublime object of ideology fills the theoretical gap for tackling the traumatic conditioning of subjectivity, as it resists sublimation within the symbolic.

In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser states that ideology is "not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (1971: 165). Material reality is *always already* enmeshed in the ideological superstructure, which both generates and subjugates those who (involuntarily) subscribe to it, perpetuating itself through their re-iteration of its demands. Ideology ensures "the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen – '*So be it*'" (Althusser 1971: 181). Althusser also points to an apparent paradox when he writes that "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (1971: 173). The subject is created in the act of interpellation (hailing) and is likewise *always already* a subject:

> …the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection*. That is why they 'work all by themselves'. (Althusser 1971: 182)

The subjects "work by themselves" since they are recognised and proven as subjects only when, within the relations of production, they act in response to ideological interpellations. If they ignore these interpellations – which they can never do completely, to the point of non-recognizability – they are denied subjectivity, as defined by the ideology that constitutes it.

In his sociological research, Bourdieu follows a different route in response to Althusser's "pessimistic functionalism" regarding the subjugation of the interpellated subject, by examining the structure of the mechanisms that act to produce such ideological functionalism (see Pallotta 2015). Bourdieu views apparatuses as *fields*, social playgrounds constituted through a dynamic power struggle, enabled by the employment of different types of *symbolic capital*. "Capital can be understood as the 'energy' that drives the development of a field through time. Capital in action is the enactment of the principle of the field. It is the realization in specific forms of power in general" (Grenfell 2008: 105). In coining the collocation "cultural capital", Bourdieu connects the sublime and the profane, pointing to how "different forms of symbolic capital […] deny and suppress their instrumentalism by proclaiming themselves to be disinterested and of intrinsic worth" (Grenfell 2008: 103). No social field is autonomous or sacred. It is, rather, driven by the interest associated with types of capital deemed relevant for the functioning of the said field. Unlike the materialised or embodied symbolic capital, *habitus* is Bourdieu's term for "larger schematic systems that structure the various behaviors of a given group and its members. They are all the more efficient in that, inscribed in the body as a kind of second nature, they operate unconsciously" (Dubois 2000: 89). However, Pallotta claims that Bourdieu's "concept of *habitus*, which designates an incorporation of cognitive structures, is not entirely without resonance with the Althusserian concept of material ideology" (2015), and that both thinkers' structuralist approaches to cultural critique do not have the vocabulary to tackle what psychoanalysis identifies as the *lack* in subjectivity.

In his study *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek criticizes structuralist theories of ideology, specifically those associated with Althusser:

> Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is 'internalized' into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth: but we can learn from Pascal that this 'internalization', by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority: in other words, which – in so far as it escapes ideological sense – sustains what we might call the ideological *jouis-sense*, enjoyment-in-sense (enjoy-meant), proper to ideology. (2008: 43)

According to Žižek, ideology *seduces* us precisely because it serves the desires it simultaneously produces, which in their crux, shield us from the lack in the Other. The difference between Althusser's and Lacan's (and in continuation, Žižek's) view of subjectivity, is that, for Althusser, what subjectivity requires is recognition, and, for Lacan, is it misrecognition that constitutes the subject. We fool ourselves through fantasies into making sense of what is (and will always remain) senseless.

Žižek defines fantasy as the act of "filling out a void in the Other" (2008: 80). The fiction of fantasy produces pleasure as it imagines fulfilling the dream of ideal wholeness. "[F]antasy functions as 'absolute signification' (Lacan); it constitutes the frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful" (Žižek 2008: 138). Unlike the symptom, which arises from the symbolic, and can retroactively be analysed, fantasy "resists interpretation" (Žižek 2008: 80) because it simulates the imaginary erasure of the lack in the Other. We feel discomfort while experiencing or being confronted with the symptom, but pleasure when explaining it. Conversely, we feel immense pleasure while imagining or performing our fantasies, but discomfort at confessing to them. "Behind the symptom" is symbolic overdetermination, while "behind the fantasy" is "nothing", a void in the Other. The symptom is the unpleasant embodiment of a glitch in the symbolic paradigm, the unsymbolised real which can only retroactively be recognised, whereas our fantasies paint the ideal image employing the symbols at our disposal. They deal with the terrifying emptiness of what can never be symbolised by consistently keeping it at bay, and they do so through structuring desire. "The usual definition of fantasy ('an imagined scenario representing the realization of desire') is therefore somewhat misleading, or at least ambiguous: in the fantasy-scene the desire is not fulfilled, 'satisfied', but constituted (given its objects, and so on) – *through fantasy, we learn 'how to desire'*" (Žižek 2008: 132). It is only a superficial paradox that fantasy both structures desire and is a defence against it. Because the imaginary structuring of desire occurs within the framework provided by the symbolic, while the desire that remains unrecognised within fantasy is the desire of the Other, the desire stemming from the lack in the Other, which translates to the death drive. This is why one can only look at the object-cause of desire askew; otherwise, it disappears as it presents itself through its brutish materiality, shattering the imaginary projections of fantasy. Žižek writes that "*fantasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance*" (2008: 142). Through fantasy, we imagine the impossibly perfect integration into the symbolic through ideal identifications. And it is fantasy that sustains the symbolic game; it ascribes the game a divine, beautiful aura. Without ideological fantasy, the constructed nature of any society, any symbolic system, would consistently and terrifyingly inhibit all action.

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There is a curtness to Rooney's prose, the kind influenced by the likes of Hemingway and Carver (see Crain 2021: 87), and a physicality to her metaphors, which convey a desire to both materialize the abstractness of language and to reflect the anxiety-ridden age which her protagonists inhabit. "Her characters are overanalytical but succinct, able to condense an entire evening's worth of emotional overload into a devastating text message" (Syme 2020: 67). Such reduction functions as a defence mechanism employed either by characters who struggle to find appropriate expressions for how they feel, or by the author herself, as she skirts elaborate literariness for the sake of contextually more authentic representation. This context implies the specific environment of the millennial generation, positioned in between those who matured without an online presence and those who were born into it. Theirs is a late capitalist, virtual and instantaneous, but likewise an anxious and disconnected world. As Syme highlights: "The fascination of *Normal People* is not passion but disassociation. Marianne and Connell […] are both connected and isolated, running on parallel tracks, always missing each other even when they are in constant communication" (2020: 68).

On the plane of political ideology, Rooney's characters commonly subscribe to leftist idealism, often permeated by Marxist interpretations of the contemporary capitalist paradigm. However, as Crain humorously points out, they "are besotted with theory but literally haven't done the homework" (2021: 87). Engagement with political, socio-economic, and cultural issues remains on the surface level of critical discussions between characters or of their contemplative musings. Actively engaged rebellion is never seriously considered, as the millennial generation harbours a resentment toward an already too devastated world, enmeshed in the complex matrix of neoliberal, capitalist market values and operative principles whose collapse is impossible to imagine, even as one desires it as a form of salvation. As Frederic Jameson notes in *The Seeds of Time*, it "seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations" (1994: xii). This weakness may stem from an oversaturation of images, which leaves little to be imagined.

Žižek posits that "in the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality: it is, as Lacan once said, the support that gives consistency to what we call 'reality'" (2008: 44). The ideological fantasy of the late capitalist, globalised, technologically specialised world is advertised and consumed as all-encompassing. To renounce this fantasy would shatter the "reality" it constitutes, without whose meaning-making structure, a radical reconfiguration of said "reality" would be necessary, apparently too radical to be considered an option. Rooney envisions glimpses of such a reconfiguration solely in the sphere of interpersonal intimacy, which is highlighted in the quote by George Eliot that opens the novel: "It is one of the secrets in that change of mental poise which has

been fitly named conversion, that to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation till some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness." Rooney privileges the power of care and love over that of the competitive market, (geo)political playground, or the class struggle. However, care and love are not privileged uncompromisingly, but despite the pull of the latter influences. They struggle for their own survival in the social field whose habitus implies competitive exchanges of often arbitrarily assigned types of capital, which suffocate disinterested, pragmatically irrational, unconditional exchanges. Wilson perceptively notes "how impoverished and lonely everyone is made by a system that requires we sell any part of ourselves that another person might be willing to buy" (2021: 58).

In *Normal People*, due to her traumatic childhood, Marianne's devotion to maintaining the symbolic structure as operative is tentative at best. Her family home is a place of oppression and the fear of violence, far from a protected bubble of unconditional love. She has no usable symbolic capital in the social sphere, aside from her economic advantage, which does not afford her any prestige in high school. Only at college is Marianne placed in an overt position of privilege and power, due to her cultural capital, then recognised as valuable. However, even at university, her trauma-induced set of behavioural habits, expectations, and desires, does not allow her to straightforwardly enjoy the social roles she is now permitted to assume. She never becomes fully *seduced* by the ideology of her social milieu, since she is relegated to its fringes. Connell, on the other hand, is afforded social prestige early on in life. However, what poses a challenge for him is class ideology, since within that symbolic field he never occupies a privileged position. Marianne's capital in that sense, on the other hand, had always been a source of power. Even if she never employs it as such, her wealth liberates her from having to consider it as a prominent factor in how she structures life. In the meantime, Connell is never afforded that benefit.

Marianne is in the novel *saved* by and through Connell's love. The ideological framework structuring the conventional romantic narrative remains superficially undisturbed in terms of feminine passivity and male agency (see Cox Cameron 2020), even as throughout the novel it is made overtly palpable in an analytic sense. Furthermore, Connell succeeds in his literary aspirations by virtue of his merit, even though meritocracy is explicitly discussed in the novel as an ideological façade for the inner workings of capitalism and its mechanisms of privileging the wealthy (see Rooney 2019: 174). While Rooney's first narrative decision – to formally preserve the conventional romantic narrative – can be interpreted as grounded in a uniquely developing intimacy between the novel's protagonists, which reframes the narrative in subtle but important ways, the second – Connell's meritocratic accomplishments – functions more as a plot contrivance than it conforms to the logic of the novel's overt politics. Since the socio-economic commentary forms the backdrop of Marianne's

and Connell's relationship, employing Connell's merit-based success as the motif contributing to the novel's resolution informs the conclusion that Rooney is more intent on exploring and reconfiguring the romance genre than she is on deconstructing contemporary political and socio-economic structures. In terms of reconfiguring the romance genre, her focus is on re-examining both the narrative promoting conventionally modelled gender relationships and, somewhat controversially, the empowering narrative of self-sufficient but converging individuals. Quinn highlights that, in *Normal People*, Rooney provides Marianne and Connell with "a kind of mutual dependence, something fundamentally at odds with the mainstream, if hazy, acceptance of independence as an obvious good (and, particularly, a feminist good). The message of the current moment can often seem to be: Limit your emotional labor; be your own best advocate; don't let your relationships compromise autonomy or empowerment" (2019). Rooney, on the other hand, challenges this independence as yet another symptom of the late capitalist age focused on quantification, specialization, and interest accumulation, even as she highlights its significance and value in the current social paradigm.

Since in *Normal People* the critique of capitalism is performed largely on the discursive level, it does not significantly impact the narrative structurally, aside from positioning Connell and Marianne on the opposite sides of the wealth gap. Whereas Marianne is mostly unconcerned about money, except in an abstract sense, Connell's position in the symbolic fields he moves through is materially conditioned by his lack of it. Once he is finally able to afford to travel, to buy experiences, Connell understands how the normative symbol influences material reality, which both disgusts and excites him: "That's money, the substance that makes the world real. There's something so corrupt and sexy about it" (Rooney 2019: 160). However, through his intelligence and hard work – opting for the study of English literature, which matters in as much as Rooney writes about social aspirations almost exclusively within the sphere of the Marxist "superstructure" – Connell *merits* a place within the privileged class, and in that way, capitalism becomes "resolved" *for* the protagonists, while its pernicious aspects, despite being treated argumentatively, do not significantly condition the plot structurally, aside from the aforementioned aspect.

Nevertheless, in *Normal People*, Rooney also performs a pre-emptive metanarrative feat of challenging the role of literature in the contemporary age. Literature seems to be placed in an impossible position, of having to deconstruct the contemporary paradigm within multiple traditions, while concurrently balancing between realism, which honours the ethical demands of loyal representation, and the (radical) creativity of fiction, which bears the burden of imagining different worlds to the one(s) the characters inhabit. During his attendance of a literary reading, Connell is faced with the awkwardness of performing the role of a cultured participant in a literary milieu that is supposed to signal certain class demarca-

tions, while difficult, vulnerable discussions on politics and the complex status of literature as commodified within the capitalist market are either shunned or made taboo. "Connell's initial assessment of the reading was not disproven. It was culture as class performance, literature fetishised for its ability to take educated people on false emotional journeys, so that they might afterwards feel superior to the uneducated people whose emotional journeys they liked to read about" (Rooney 2019: 221).

An aura of divinity has been associated with literature since the age of Romanticism. Eagleton (2008: 15–26) writes about the ideological background of this transference of the opaque, sublime symbol from the religious to the literary sphere. Literature incorporates a unity of feeling, spontaneous and creative, posing as the alternative ideology to the calculated, fragmented, utilitarian industrial-capitalist market. This ideological background is relevant in the interpretation of Rooney's novel where both literature and romantic love are viewed and interwoven as sites of the sublime. Spiritual salvation is in Rooney's narratives associated with the realms of both literature and romantic love, pointing to how normative these associations have become within Western humanist ideology. The attempts to reconcile this normativity with the desire to fit into the perceived group of "normal people" of Connell's and Marianne's specific environments shed light on the dynamics, operative principles, and assigned roles within those spheres of "normalcy", among which the most pernicious ones are exclusionary, unjust, and oppressive. Without deconstructing them, the pain and suffering of those who are excluded and exploited continues, and "salvation" as performance is co-opted within the paradigm that it is meant to provide an alternative for.

In the beginning of the novel, Connell carries over social constrictions to intimate contexts involving Marianne. He does not obey the norms only formally; rather, to him they are opaque and a formative habitus for his identity, as he is very much seduced by the ideological interpellations of his social field. When he tells Marianne that she should not be saying whatever she likes in front of him, even if they are alone, she apologizes for making him feel uncomfortable (see Rooney 2019: 6), but she does not feel the pull of social convention because she had never stood to gain anything from it. She can act disinterestedly because she possesses no valuable symbolic capital in high school[3]. On the other hand, she demonstrates her care for Connell by not wishing to hurt him, even if the norms he identifies with are for her only arbitrary and often oppressive. "Marianne sometimes sees herself at the very bottom of the ladder, but at other times she pictures herself off the ladder completely, not affected by its mechanics, since she

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3   Although, at university, Marianne realises that her refusal to participate in the social playground of her environment had always, at least partly, been conditioned by her exclusion from that sphere: "In school she had believed herself to be above such frank exchanges of social capital, but her college life indicated that if anyone in school had actually been willing to speak to her, she would have behaved just as badly as anyone else. There is nothing superior about her at all" (Rooney 2019: 195).

does not actually desire popularity or do anything to make it belong to her" (Rooney 2019: 29). What Marianne awakens in Connell is abnormal desire, which gradually and painfully leads him toward recognising the lack around which his subjectivity is symbolically structured, the incompleteness of his identifications. It is a terrifying journey, but he continues returning to Marianne as to the object-cause of his desire. "Being alone with her is like opening a door away from normal life and then closing it behind him" (Rooney 2019: 7). Her struggle with the prominence of her own lack is what subconsciously fascinates him, and what eventually sheds light on his struggles masked by continuous low-grade anxiety (see Rooney 2019: 206).

Marianne, on the other hand, does not feel at home in the world because of the formative trauma of her father's and, following his death, her brother's violence, which becomes the operative principle of the relations within her family, and subsequently of the relations Marianne enters with her sexual partners. The absent (violent) father, like the ungraspable but overarching Other, governs the structure of the domestic field and the dynamics of Marianne's relationships with her brother and mother. What comprises those dynamics are male aggression and violence, and female passivity and compliance. They instigate dissociation as a defence mechanism which Marianne can potentially rely on to mitigate or avoid being hurt[4]. Connell initially perceives Marianne as someone who just "let things happen, like nothing meant anything to her" (Rooney 2019: 21), without understanding her traumatic responses. In the beginning, she appears to him fluid in her behaviour:

> He seemed to think Marianne had access to a range of different identities, between which she slipped effortlessly. This surprised her, because she usually felt confined inside one single personality, which was always the same regardless of what she did or said. She had tried to be different in the past, as a kind of experiment, but it had never worked. If she was different with Connell, the difference was not happening inside herself, in her personhood, but in between them, in the dynamic. (Rooney 2019: 14)

It is the dynamic of Marianne's relationship with Connell that guides transformation and the fluidity of identifications. Otherwise, such freedom is bounded by normative conventions, by the "fantasy made reality", of the roles "normal people" reiterate and rigidly ascribe to others. Conversely, it is bounded by the re-enactment of trauma that symptomatically

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4   It is not only her brother's explicit verbal and physical violence that Marianne must shield herself from, but her mother's internalised compliance with violence, as well: "Denise decided a long time ago that it is acceptable for men to use aggression towards Marianne as a way of expressing themselves. As a child Marianne resisted, but now she simply detaches, as if it isn't of any interest to her, which in a way it isn't. Denise considers this a symptom of her daughter's frigid and unlovable personality. She believes Marianne lacks 'warmth', by which she means the ability to beg for love from people who hate her" (Rooney 2019: 65).

grounds subjects in patterns of self-destructive behaviour, which, like fantasy, is meant to protect them from the lack in the Other.

Connell endeavours to understand his desire for Marianne but cannot define it through the conceptual framework available to him, nor can he accommodate it to his lived reality. "He writes these things down, long run-on sentences with too many dependent clauses, sometimes connected with breathless semicolons, as if he wants to recreate a precise copy of Marianne in print, as if he can preserve her completely for future review. Then he turns a new page in the notebook so he doesn't have to look at what he's done" (Rooney 2019: 25). Despite Connell's fear of staring into the abyss of the abnormal, both surrender to their mutual desires, to the pull beyond the limits of their symbolic identifications, to *jouissance*. Marianne's fantasy of being completely possessed and renouncing control, and his of being completely accepted and valued, lead them toward a shared "desire for total communication" (Rooney 2019: 25), which at times acts revolutionary against the normative prescriptions structuring their fantasies. At other times, however, the ideologies of their worldviews inevitably penetrate the intimate sphere.

Connell's privileged position in high school and his substantial symbolic capital limit his perspective in terms of those with marginalised experiences, like Marianne. However, Marianne's deviant, frightening, but also unbearably appealing personality, proclivities, and desires, draw him into an intimacy which transcends the limits of ideologically mapped parameters of subjectivity. Such intimacy is necessarily non-normative. In her prose, Rooney insists on a link between stepping out of one's arbitrarily assigned roles in society, resisting ideological interpellations, and "the ultimate question of what to do with [oneself] or what kind of person [one] is" (2019: 28). The Western humanist ideal of achieving self-recognition and self-awareness is one of the novel's dominant ideological precepts. But what is specifically Rooney's is that she interweaves that ideal with an ethically marked receptiveness toward the marginalised. Such receptiveness cannot be achieved without the other, the one who guides the self into "revelation", which undoubtedly has spiritual connotations. And spirituality is in Rooney's prose rooted in love, selfless care, and emotional hazarding. In *Normal People*, however, moments of "revelation" permeate the field of failed attempts at communication. On several occasions, Connell chooses not to renounce the illusion of being "normal" for Marianne's sake. Rooney does not portray either of them as saints, not even within the intimate sphere, where they often hurt each other due to their inability to communicate verbally about their fears and desires. Their conditioning – his predominantly ideological, and hers traumatic – seeps into the space of intimacy, regardless of how much they try to protect it.

At Trinity College, which both Marianne and Connell attend, their positioning in the social hierarchy shifts. In high school, Connell's "personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions

of others, rather than anything he individually did or produced. Now he has a sense of invisibility, nothingness, with no reputation to recommend him to anyone" (Rooney 2019: 70). Connell frequently lacks the imagination to envision a reconfiguration of the symbolic field he inhabits, so as to include Marianne into what is recommended to him as the normative environment. He gradually gains perspective, but the desire for being "normal", for fitting into that fantasy which structures "reality", never completely abandons him. Marianne, on the other hand, when she and Connell separate once again, gives in almost completely to the defence mechanisms stemming from her traumatic experiences of domestic violence. The link those traumatic dislocations establish is between violence and love, which then becomes deeply ingrained within Marianne's sense of self. Numbing her feelings protects her from the emotional pain in response to violence and it serves a practical purpose of deescalating violence when it poses a threat. However, since that mechanism morphs into a character trait, which she labels as "coldness" (Rooney 2019: 101), Marianne rarely allows herself to be vulnerable in relationships. It is only with Connell that she experiences vulnerability, laying bare the portion of herself that believes in love disconnected from violence. That being at stake is what heightens the intensity of their relationship and what places the kind of pressure on Connell which he most often caves under.

Connell is viscerally aware of the power he has over Marianne, and he is sickened by its potential to cause pain. But he cannot deny its existence, because the dominant symbolic paradigm that partly structures their relationship is rooted in hierarchies, power struggles, and competitiveness, despite their attempts to structure it around total communication and intimate vulnerability. "He has a terrible sense all of a sudden that he could hit her face, very hard even, and she would just sit there and let him. The idea frightens him so badly that he pulls his chair back and stands up. His hands are shaking. He doesn't know why he thought about it. Maybe he wants to do it. But it makes him feel sick" (Rooney 2019: 105–106). Connell characterises Marianne as "missing some primal instinct, self-defence or self-preservation, which makes other human beings comprehensible" (Rooney 2019: 247), which is what drives her toward masochistic desires as compensation for the perceived dysfunctionality she displays in interpersonal relations. Lacan references Freud, when he speaks of the death drive as "primary masochism", as "the desire to reduce [oneself] to this nothing that is the good, to this thing that is treated like an object, to this slave whom one trades back and forth and whom one shares" (1997: 239). In masochistic submission, the performance of letting go of control provides Marianne with a temporary release from all emotional investment inherent in subjectivity and the "contest for dominance" (Rooney 2019: 192) that seeps into intimacy from the external playing field. Additionally, she enacts the only dynamic which she "naturally" associates with

love – that to be loved, she has "to beg for love from people who hate her" (Rooney 2019: 65).

Still, Connell is a source of hope for Marianne: "It was in Connell's power to make her happy. It was something he could just give to her, like money or sex. With other people she seemed so independent and remote, but with Connell she was different, a different person" (Rooney 2019: 105). Marianne imbues Connell with a significance crucial for her survival. Since she identifies with the desire for "total communication" with Connell, for radical honesty with respect to her fantasies and traumas, Connell becomes the "little other" who, in the absence of an authoritative Big Other, alone can demonstrate to her that she is worthy of love. While this dynamic most certainly goes against the current ideologies of self-empowered individualism, Marianne's character should not be interpreted (solely) in that context. Her traumatic past frames her identifications in such a way as to strip her of agency, which is ultimately how she perceives herself, as "degenerating, moving further and further from wholesomeness, becoming something unrecognisably debased" (Rooney 2019: 239). Furthermore, her trauma stems from a culture that allows certain kinds of violence, that does not provide structured recoveries for the survivors, that perpetuates female passivity as the only recourse for women as a means of survival, even as it overtly speaks against it. Cox Cameron concludes that "Marianne's masochism, while perhaps set in motion by a father's brutality, is who she is, how she loves, a part of her not to be excised" (2020: 425). While this point may sound controversial, it is one that sides with the psychoanalytic interpretation of subjectivity, not as balanced, but as barred. We are not meant to neutralise all the incongruities, complexes, and traumas that structurally condition our symbolisations. Some of them we must recognise and accept as those which separate us from the Other, which point to the lack in the Other, which destabilise normality. What Rooney offers us as the alleviating factor in that struggle for survival is the care of others: "No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought, go running in the other direction, depend on people for everything, allow them to depend on you, why not" (Rooney 2019: 262).

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In Rooney's prose, the only kind of salvation that matters comes from the other, the little other, through love, the sharing of that which we lack, which is monstrous and (therefore) divine. That absence of signification does transcend ideology, but also, conversely, it is a transcendence which cannot be put into words. Nevertheless, Rooney captures absences rather successfully by structuring her prose around them. And in her insistence on interpersonal dynamics as the setting for emotional healing and spiritual revelation, far from regressing into anachronistic characterization in terms of gender, she attempts to signal an alternative narrative of

realization and recognition, one that contradicts the dominant paradigm of the struggle for power, the impositions of self-centred individuality, the autonomy of established roles in the ideologically constituted social field, alongside one that pays attention to the irrational senselessness of traumatic wounds and to the unassimilable remainder of what it feels like to be human.

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Тијана З. Матовић / ИДЕОЛОГИЈЕ (АБ)НОРМАЛНОГ У РОМАНУ *НОРМАЛНИ ЉУДИ* САЛИ РУНИ

Резиме / Циљ овог рада је тумачење идеолошких динамика „(аб)нормалног" које структурно конфигуришу текст другог романа ирске књижевнице Сали Руни, *Нормални људи* (2018), уз примену теорија идеологије Луја Алтисера, Пјера Бурдијеа и Славоја Жижека. Теоријски оквир обухвата Алтисеров појам интерпелације, Бурдијеове концепте хабитуса, поља и симболичког капитала, као и Жижекову психоаналитичку теорију сублимног објекта идеологије и трауматског остатка који је конститутиван за субјективност. Анализа романа *Нормални људи* у раду раскрива аспекте представљања доба позног капитализма, како оно конфигурише духовна поља љубави и књижевности, као и раван (радикалне) интимности као потенцијалног простора за остваривање односа који се нуде као алтернатива односима компетитивне борбе за моћ.

Кључне речи: ирска књижевност, Сали Руни, идеологија, субјективност, интерпелација, симболички капитал, траума