Class on The Surface and Beyond: An Analysis of Normal People and My Brilliant Friend Using Pierre Bourdieu's Theory on Capitals

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Thesis MA Literary Studies: English Literature and Culture

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21 June 2023

It was culture as class performance, literature fetishized 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.

Sally Rooney, *Normal People*

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Introduction

Literature is a commodity that can be used to show the author's stance towards the society that they are writing about. An example of such a topic to comment on is social class. Famous novels in which an author shares their thoughts on class are Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), both of which highlight class differences on a local level. Nowadays, there is still a continuous stream of published works exploring the topic of class. A recent bestseller that also caught the attention of teenagers is Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018). This novel focusses on the relationship between the two main characters, while simultaneously portraying the subtle but drastic consequences of people from different classes interacting with each other. A book that moves class more to the foreground of the story in comparison to *Normal People* is Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* (2012), first published as *L'amica genial* in Italian in 2011. This novel concerns the growing up of two friends who come to understand the worth of money and intellect. Both characters choose a different capital to climb up the social ladder. These books are prime examples of authors communicating what they believe characterise different types of classes.

For this thesis, the previously mentioned novels will be analysed on their portrayal of class. This will then paint a picture of what distinguishable features writers of today's age believe are characteristic of different types of social classes. To do so, the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu will be applied to this research. This theory explores three different kinds of capitals that can be regarded as fundamental for a person's status in society: cultural, social, and economic capital. The two novels have several features in common which led to them being chosen for this research. First of all, they are both novels that deal with the topic of class. They explore the story of two main characters that are from or become

part of opposing social classes due to different factors in their lives. Second, the chosen books are written by female authors that come from Western countries; Sally Rooney is Irish and Elena Ferrante Italian. Lastly, these novels have been published in the 21st century. Their views on class in our current society might differ because they are from different countries that have different cultures. Nevertheless, they are written around the same time, which allows the authors to have access to the same items and education, for example. As a result of this research, an in-depth analysis on how each of the writers think class is manifested by means of possessions, social relations, and educational background will be provided. A conclusion will be made that shows that both Rooney and Ferrante make use of the different kinds of capital to designate their characters to certain social classes.

Sally Rooney and the Celtic Tiger

In an interview, Sally Rooney admits that, in a way, her book is a means of commenting on the situation in Dublin concerning young people struggling to be independent: “Maybe it does accidentally provide some kind of commentary on the city of Dublin at that time, from one very limited, I should say, perspective” (PBS NewsHour). She wants the concept of class to be present throughout the whole book, even if the characters are unaware of it themselves (Louisiana Channel).

> What’s really important […] is to try and observe how class, as a very broad social structure, impacts our personal and intimate lives. Like, how do we carry material realities and economic realities into our interpersonal relationships and one way is through commodities. I mean, how important commodities and items of physical

> objects become to us a sense of ownership over objects, a sense of possession. (Louisiana Channel)

Class is present in the relationships between her characters, in the items that they own and also in how they behave. About Rooney's book, Barros-Del Río says the following:

> Her novels, particularly *Normal People*, reflect the new generations' contradictions and epitomise twenty-first century Irish writers' response to "the chaos and intensity of the contemporary […] as a moment of acceleration and flux." Job insecurity, exorbitant rents, instant messaging and casual sex coexist with different forms of physical violence, conflictive family relationships, a strong sense of not belonging, class and privilege. (Barros-Del Río 178)

"Rooney displays an intimate yet relational perspective to explore the categories of class and gender under the neoliberal discourse that dominates Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland" (178). The Celtic-Tiger is the name given to the area in which Ireland experienced a high economic growth up until the financial crisis of 2008. With this, it can be concluded that *Normal People* is a book criticising the wake of the Celtic-Tiger in Ireland by displaying the struggles of her characters in multiple aspects of their lives, which, in turn, influence one another. "The novel […] incorporates thematic developments framed by the casualties of the Irish financial meltdown and its effects on the protagonists' lives" (187).

Elena Ferrante and Economic Defeat

Bullaro calls the early Italy of Ferrante's book "a grim one. Physically, economically, and morally destroyed by defeat, fragmented by regionalism, class division, and the polyglossia of regional dialects" (Bullaro 15). It is "a story of self-realization alongside the self-realization of a nation […] Ferrante subtly works in black market war profiteers, fascist collaborators, mafiosi, and the workers' movements and radical terrorism of the 1960s and '70s, and the arrival of wealth and consumer goods to Italy's new middle class" (16). Because *My Brilliant Friend*, the first part of the four Neapolitan novels by Ferrante, mostly takes place in the 1950s, it is set in the era right when the tremendous growth of Italy's economy begun (16). However, since the characters do not live in the big city of Naples, it can be argued that they do not experience much change yet since this growth started, as this usually begins in cities. Therefore, the economic defeat and class division mentioned by Bullaro are still present throughout the story.

Pierre Bourdieu and Capitals

This research aims to understand how today's writers view class differences and manifest these ideas through their books. It will be performed in several steps to attain the best overview of the depiction of class in the novels. The first step is to provide a summary of the three capitals identified by Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, the chapter 'Bourdieu's Capital(s): Sociologizing an Economic Concept' by Erik Neveu will be utilised to obtain the definitions of the capitals. The second step will be a close reading of the books with the obtained knowledge on capitals. During this close reading, instances and quotes in which one or multiple of the capitals can be noticed will be written down. After these steps have been

completed, the chapters will analyse both books in terms of their capitals, and this thesis will end with a conclusion discussing the found evidence on the portrayal of social classes.

The theoretical framework used in this thesis is the theory on different forms of capital as devised by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu was a French sociologist and is a prime example of a lower-class child working their way up the social ladder with the aid of his own cultural capital. Medvetz and Sallaz write in the introduction of *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu* that "he was the grandson of peasants" but was "a gifted and hard-working student" which led him to "the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, the traditional breeding ground of major French intellectuals" (Medvetz and Sallaz 1). This educational journey adds to the credibility of Bourdieu being familiar with the concepts of social class since he started out as a lower-class child and ended up as a philosophy graduate. He even acknowledges his own growth by calling these types of "upwardly mobile students" "dedicated servants of the academic cult" (1-2). Nevertheless, Bourdieu describes that these students "feel like outsiders to the consecrated educational elite," (2) thus separating himself from the bulk of intellectual students.

Bourdieu's analysis of social class starts out by him arguing that "many of the seemingly personal choices of everyday life – what to wear, to eat, to display on one's walls, or to make of the latest blockbuster movie – could be explained through reference to the overall class structure" (4). He began to refer to these resources that are socially valued as capitals (10). This term "capital" came to be "one of the most extensively used notions in the social sciences" (Neveu 347). Nowadays, the word capital is mainly utilised to refer to "money that you use to start a business or to make more money" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 250). Interestingly, one of the capitals founded by Bourdieu is indeed used to refer to money. In his chapter "Bourdieu's Capital(s): Sociologizing and Economic

Concept", Erik Neveu provides the following definition of capital(s): "a collection of goods and skills, of knowledge and acknowledgements, belonging to an individual or a group that he or she can mobilize to develop influence, gain power, or bargain other elements of this collection" (Neveu 347). Therefore, it can be concluded that a capital is an object, a skill, knowledge, or the connection to certain groups that benefits the owner in gaining more power in other elements of their lives.

Cultural Capital

There are three different kinds of capitals that Bourdieu distinguishes: cultural, social, and economic capital. The first kind, cultural capital, is "made of knowledge and know-how, of the skills and analytical tools that allow one to manage and produce social relations, cultural products, and technical devices" (350). This capital can, in turn, be divided into three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital can only be acquired through a learning process (351). Examples of this kind are recognizing songs from certain musicians, being able to know the artist of paintings, or the skill of playing the piano. Embodied cultural capital differentiates depending on the group you are focussing on. For example, Gen-Z would not value being able to distinguish The Beatles from The Beach Boys highly, but their parents might. Whereas the latter group would not attach much worth to being able to do TikTok dances. Bourdieu views this embodied capital as being attached to the owner of the capital, even so that the capital would disappear if the person passed away. However, because this type of capital can be obtained through a learning process, it can be passed on to other people, as a sort of hereditary characteristic (351).

The second type of cultural capital is objectified cultural capital. This sort is used for physical goods that carry a connotation of intellect and knowledge. Examples of this type of cultural capital are dictionaries and paintings (351-352). For example, if a character in a book is said to own a personal library filled with classics, there is a strong suggestion of cultural capital. Neveu comments that "cultural goods are open to a double appropriation, both economic and cultural" (352). A character may own the previously mentioned library, but have they read all the books in it? Did they invest their time to acquire the knowledge of the books that takes a certain amount of time to gain? Or do they only want to show off that they have the financial means to afford this great library? This aspect is what differentiates cultural from economic capital. Sally Rooney, whose book *Normal People* will be analysed in the first chapter, comments on this aspect of capital by stating: "I am very sceptical in the way in which books are marketed as commodities, like, almost like accessories which people can fill their homes with, like, beautiful items that you can fill your shelves with and therefore become a sort of book person" (Louisiana Channel). A person does not necessarily have to read or use their objectified cultural capital to gain the worth that is attached to it.

The third and last form of cultural capital is institutionalised cultural capital. Neveu states that "it takes the form of diplomas, or qualifications that act as guarantees – often given by state authorities – that the owner has a certain kind and level of cultural capital" (Neveu 352). Obvious examples of this are educational degrees. A driving licence is another kind of institutionalised cultural capital which guarantees that the owner passed a specific requirement to be allowed to drive a vehicle. However, even for a driving licence, the worth attached to it may vary depending on the perceiver of the capital. People may be wary of American driving licences since they take less time and effort to attain in comparison to the Netherlands, where aspiring drivers need to practice with an official instructor. As Neveu

says: “certain types of cultural capital can be extremely useful and rewarding in a specific social field and almost worthless in another” (352-353). The institutionalised capital is dependent on the value other people attach to it.

Social Capital

The second main type of capital according to Bourdieu is social capital. This capital is something that is “embedded in everyday sociability” (357) and is

> the sum of resources, actual or virtual, belonging to an individual or group, by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, in other words the sum of capitals and powers that such a network allows mobilizing. (356)

This capital can most frequently be defined as a person’s network of people. If a character is making new acquaintances and friendships, it can be said that they are investing in their social capital. This, in turn, can allow them to have access to certain opportunities or other people that aid them in different aspects of their lives, such as finding a job. “Being the ‘son of’ boosts the chances of getting a job in the local factory, or of being co-opted among the candidates for city council” (357). It will be seen that this aspect of social capital is used frequently throughout Ferrante’s novel *My Brilliant Friend*, and also appears briefly in *Normal People* concerning main character Connell Waldron.

Economic Capital

Lastly, the third capital is economical. This type can be described as “all non-human resources that can be bought and sold on a market” (358). If a character is depicted with expensive items, then the author, most likely, utilised these specific objects to paint the portrait of them being wealthy. One character might drive an Audi, while the other can only afford to drive around in a second-hand car. These subtle mentions of the type of objects a character owns are determining of how they appear to the reader. Another example often used in fiction is a character either owning a “laptop” or a “MacBook.” A MacBook is a specific type of laptop that has a high value in today’s society in and is known for its high price. Besides objects, a mentioning of economic capital may also come in the form of the house a character lives in. Elaborate descriptions of a mansion or a small student accommodation play a part in knowing whether a character is wealthy or barely getting by. This type of capital is frequently used in Rooney’s *Normal People*.

While the three main concepts of capital by Bourdieu will be used as the theoretical framework in this thesis, it is important to note that there is a fourth type of capital: symbolic capital. This kind of capital is one that can only exist using the previously mentioned capitals. As Neveu puts it: “it is the recognition or prestige an individual or institution enjoys by virtue of these capitals, depending on their amount, use, and conditions of acquisition” (359). The use of cultural, social, or economic capital enables a person to obtain symbolic capital with the worth that is attached to their capitals by others. “There is no symbolic capital without a social space or audience for which the accomplishments of the capital’s owner means something” (359). A character may own a library filled with books, providing them with objectified cultural capital, but they can only gain symbolic capital if other people are able to view their library and acknowledge the connotation of intelligence it comes with. Without symbolic capital, all other capitals are meaningless.

While reading these descriptions of the different forms of capital, it can be noticed that these capitals are interchangeable with one another, depending on the meaning attached to them. For example, owning a famous painting may provide embodied cultural capital, because it takes time to understand a work's importance and worth. However, this painting may also be expensive and therefore rather show off the economic capital its owner possesses.

> Capitals may be converted into one another. […] Cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital[.] […] Social capital can be transformed into economic capital[.] […] Extending and upgrading one's social capital can create opportunities for accumulating cultural capital[.] […] Economic capital can be transformed into social capital through the logic of gift and counter-gift and its "clientelist" variations. It can be transformed into cultural capital[.] (361)

With these concepts of capitals and their fluidity in mind, the two chosen novels will be read and analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter 1: *Normal People*

Sally Rooney's second novel *Normal People* engages with the lives of Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron. These characters are from the same town in Ireland: Carricklea, but from different social backgrounds. "It is not by chance that the inequality of the Irish social system is brought to the fore in this novel. In this Post-Celtic Tiger context, Rooney forces an unexpected encounter between two individuals whose social positions could hardly be more different" (Barros-Del Río 181). At the start of the story, both characters attend the same secondary school. Here, they do not interact with one another, but in their spare time they engage in a casual relationship which they keep secret. The two got acquainted because of Connell's mother working as a housekeeper for Marianne's family. Connell is regarded as popular at their school, while Marianne is seen as an outcast, which is why they keep their relationship a secret. Then, the characters commence their university years at Trinity College Dublin. Here, the social dynamic changes and Marianne gains friends and popularity, while Connell has a hard time fitting in. This change in dynamic can be analysed through the lens of Bourdieu's capitals.

1.1 Economic Capital

Economic capital is the one that can be noticed already on the first page of the book and is constantly present throughout the novel. The story starts off with Connell visiting Marianne's house and the sentence "his mother Lorraine is peeling off a pair of rubber gloves" (Rooney 1) provides the clue to the characters' economic status: Connell's mother works as a housekeeper for Marianne's family. As a result, the reader is informed that the Sheridans can afford a housekeeper, while the Waldrons are the ones having to provide this service. With this brief mentioning of rubber gloves, Rooney reveals that Marianne should be viewed as a

character from a wealthy family and that Connell should not. This arrangement is mentioned more clearly halfway through the book. Here, Connell is not able to afford to live in his university flat anymore and considers asking to move in with Marianne. In the following passage, Connell admits that money is a sensitive topic to bring up in conversation with Marianne:

> It just felt too much like asking her for money. He and Marianne never talked about money. They had never talked, for example, about the fact that her mother paid his mother money to scrub their floors and hang their laundry, or about the fact that this money circulated indirectly to Connell, who spent it, as often as not, on Marianne. […] She bought him things all the time, […] things she would pay for and then instantly, permanently, forget about. (122)

Because of their differences in economic capital, the couple experiences problems in terms of discussing money issues.

The Sheridans' prosperity is highlighted only a few pages in by the narrator stating that their "garden is more like 'grounds'" with "a tennis court and a large stone statue in the shape of a woman" (6). With the introduction of Marianne's family hiring a housekeeper and their garden described as grounds, the vast economic capital of this main character is made clear. Simultaneously, the Waldrons' lack of economic capital, in comparison to Marianne's family, is also suggested. Despite Marianne's family being rich, she does not reap the benefits of this per se. For example, it is said that she wears "cheap black underwear" (19) at one point. The surprising inclusion of the adjective cheap reminds the reader that Marianne might not be fully entitled to her family's wealth. This may be because she does not have a good relationship with her mother and older brother. On the other hand, perhaps Marianne is responsible for buying her own underwear, and does not care whether they are from a luxurious brand or a cheap one. Nevertheless, the next page describes "Connell[…] sitting up

with [Marianne's] MacBook in his lap" (20), showing that Marianne does own items that have a connotation of wealth attached to them. Rooney could have used the word "laptop" but chose "MacBook" to show that, even though she owns "cheap underwear" Marianne does have items that are expensive. On the same page, the characters' stance towards education and job prospects are mentioned: "[Marianne's] already applied for History and Politics in Trinity. [Connell's] put down Law in Galway, but now he thinks that he might change it, because, as Marianne has pointed out, he has no interest in Law" (20). Even though it is not explicitly said, Connell's first instinct to study Law most likely has to do with the favourable chances of getting a well-paying job with it. Later, Marianne proposes that Connell should study English. As a response, Connell says "I'm not sure about the job prospects though" (20) to which Marianne replies "Oh, who cares? The economy's fucked anyway" (20). Connell's main concern about his choice of study is whether it has good job prospects, while Marianne admits to not caring about that. Marianne is in a privileged position where she does not have to care about money, and can study whatever she wants, because she is likely to inherit her family's money. In contrast to this, Connell cannot receive much money from his mother and, as a result, is concerned about studying a subject that ensures a proper income later in life. The economic capital of the Sheridans in terms of property, besides their house in Carricklea, is shown off, again, by them having a holiday home in Italy where Marianne vacations with friends (157). Property is a specifically mentioned type of economic capital by Neveu, and Rooney portrays the Sheridans' vast amount by them having a mansion as a house as well as a holiday home.

Even though the Sheridans have money, the people at school do not like Marianne more because of it. In fact, Connell is interrogated by his friend Rob at one point about the dynamic of his acquaintance with Marianne:

> At lunchtime on Tuesday, Rob started asking questions about Connell's mother working in Marianne's house, and Connell just ate his lunch and tried not to make any facial expressions.
>
> Would you ever go in there yourself? Rob said. Into the mansion.
>
> Connell jogged his bag of chips in his hand and then peered into it. I've been in there a few times, yeah, he said.
>
> What's it like inside?
>
> He shrugged. I don't know, he said. Big, obviously.
>
> What's she like in her natural habitat? Rob said.
>
> I don't know.
>
> I'd say she thinks of you has her butler, does she?
>
> […] I doubt it, Connell said.
>
> But your mam is her housemaid, isn't she?
>
> Well, she's just a cleaner. She's only there twice a week, I don't think they interact much.
>
> Does Marianne not have a little bell she would ring to get her attention, no? Rob said. (22-23)

This conversation emphasises the differences in economic capital between Connell and Marianne. Rob regards Lorraine as Marianne's housemaid and Connell as her butler, who she can call with the ring of a bell. The addition of Rob calling Marianne's house "the mansion" accentuates that the Sheridans are known for their wealth in the town of Carricklea. It also creates a distance between Marianne and her classmates. By Rob questioning Connell about her as if she is a person from a different planet, the reader is reminded of her loneliness at school. Also, Connell's low economic capital is highlighted by Rob thinking of his mother as

the housemaid, even though she only comes twice a week. Connell attempts to correct this by reminding Rob that Lorraine is a cleaner and not a housemaid.

At a school party, Marianne's casual relationship with money comes forward when she pays for a drink for her classmate Karen who "thanks her extravagantly" and says: "I'll get you back" to which Marianne replies "Don't worry about it, […] waving her hand" (30). For Karen, Marianne paying her a drink is seen as exceptional. Karen believes that she, in the end, should pay for the drink and promises to pay her back. Meanwhile, Marianne does not regard the price of the drink, which is not mentioned, as expensive and is happy to pay for Karen without being paid back. This displays that Marianne grew up in a household where small expenses such as drinks were not regarded as significant, emphasising the vastness of their economic capital. This attitude of Marianne towards money comes forward again when Connell's wallet is stolen, and he comes to her for help. He asks to borrow some money to pay for a taxi and suggests ten pounds. As a response, Marianne decides to give him one hundred pounds (146). Marianne can afford to miss a significant amount of money without worrying about it, which is surprising for a university student. She is showing off her economic capital without meaning to.

The difference between the main characters' families is clear throughout the entirety of the book but explicitly mentioned at one point. Here, it is said that

> [Marianne's] from a good family and Connell is from a bad one […]. The Waldrons are notorious in Carricklea. One of Lorraine's brothers was in prison once, Marianne doesn't know for what, and another one got into a motorcycle crash off the roundabout a few years ago and almost died. And of course, Lorraine got pregnant at seventeen and left school to have the baby. Nonetheless, Connell is considered quite a catch these days. […] Even Marianne's mother will say approvingly: that boy is

> nothing like a Waldron. Marianne's mother is a solicitor. Her father was a solicitor too. (32)

This paragraph captures the full picture of both families. Marianne is considered to be from a "good" family and Connell from a "bad" one, even though Connell is regarded as a good person overall. This paragraph also reveals the jobs of Marianne's mother and her late father. Solicitors are regarded as people with high-paying jobs. This strengthens the image of the Sheridans' vast economic capital, in comparison to Lorraine's job as a cleaner.

The difference in housing between Connell and Marianne is mentioned again when the pair visits an abandoned house and Connell says, "This is probably three times the size of my house" (34). Marianne is unaware of what Connell's house is like and asks him to give her an idea of the size. He says, "Four bedrooms" (34) to which Marianne replies: "Jesus" (34). With this reply, Rooney wants the reader to know that Marianne is shocked by Connell's description. A house with four bedrooms is nothing in comparison to her mansion.

Rooney also makes use of objects in other subtle ways. For example, Connell's mother Lorraine uses "two plastic bags" (49) for her groceries. These words have the initial connotation of cheap, thin plastic bags that do not appear luxurious. This image of the grocery bags is in line with the portrayal of the Waldrons so far: a poor family struggling to get by. However, the next page mentions that these bags are "reusable" (50). On the one hand, reusable plastic bags cost more than single-use bags, implying that the Waldrons are able to afford a more expensive type of bag. On the other hand, because they are reusable, the Waldrons do not have to spend money on new plastic bags. This might confuse the reader about whether the family has a proper income. But since the first mentioning of the bags has a cheap connotation attached to it, it is most likely done by Rooney to add to the image of the Waldrons' lack of wealth. The reusable bags were bought to save money in the future.

Lorraine's job is quite a determining factor in the image other people have of them. Connell and his mother are discussing his relationship with Marianne when Lorraine says the following about Marianne's mother:

> You think she'd frown on you?
>
> […] Because she might, you know.
>
> […] I think she might consider us a little bit beneath her station.
>
> […] The idea that Marianne's family considered themselves superior to himself and Lorraine, too good to be associated with them, had never occurred to [Connell] before.
>
> […] She doesn't mind you cleaning their house but she doesn't want your son hanging around her daughter? What an absolute joke. (51)

Lorraine believes that Marianne's mother, Denise Sheridan, would disapprove of her daughter having a relationship with Connell because of the family's apparent inferiority in comparison to them. Do recall that Connell is from a "bad" family and Marianne from a "good" one (32). Denise might believe that her cleaning lady's son is below her own daughter's standards. In turn, Connell passes this idea forward to Marianne by saying to her: "[Marianne's parents] probably want you going out with a doctor or a lawyer or something, do they?" (103). He believes that those kinds of jobs have the status and economic capital that Marianne's family desires. Connell will not have such a future with his English degree and his mother having a job as a cleaner.

The importance of physical goods comes to the fore again when Connell attends a party at university. He arrives "wearing a completely plain navy backpack with no features to distinguish it from any of the other numerous backpacks at the party" (66). His fellow student Gareth says, "I like the backpack man, very nineties" (66) even though there is not a single feature that attaches the look of the bag to the style of the nineties. The use of the adjective

nineties might suggest that Gareth views the bag as vintage, or simply, old. Gareth most likely believes that Connell wears an old-looking backpack ironically, to imitate the nineties style. Though, Connell is most likely wearing the simple backpack because he has no money for any other bag. This brief instant captures the gap between Connell and the rich students at university and their view on objects. Likewise, Rooney mentions that "[a]ll Connell's classmates have identical accents and carry the same size MacBook under their arms" (67). This is the same MacBook Marianne owns which Connell used previously. This sentence puts Marianne in the same category as Connell's classmates, implying that they have the same amount of economic capital, whereas Connell does not.

At the beginning of the book, Rooney provides ideas of what Marianne and Connell's family's houses are like to illustrate their difference in economic capital. Once Connell is at university and moves out of his mother's house, his housing situation deteriorates. He lives in a flat with his friend Niall and their home is described as follows:

> He and Niall have one box room between them, with two single beds pushed up against opposite walls. They share a kitchen with two Portuguese students who are never home. The flat has some problems with damp and often gets so cold at night that Connell can see his own breath in the dark, but Niall is a decent person at least. He's from Belfast, and he also thinks people in Trinity are weird. (69-70)

This description provides the reader with the image that Connell is not able to afford a comfortable student accommodation. His current house appears dirty and not taken care of. The addition of the Portuguese roommates not being home often creates a sense of loneliness. However, Rooney does provide Connell with one pleasant housemate, Niall, with whom he shares the same ideas about the other Trinity students. Meanwhile, Marianne benefits from her family's wealth by being able to live "alone in a one-bedroom apartment belonging to her

grandmother" (88). These contrasting images of the characters' housing situations emphasise their differences in economic capital and the consequences it has on their daily lives.

Rooney also discusses Connell's outer appearance by having Marianne and her friends Peggy and Joanna talk about his clothing:

> He wears nice clothes, volunteered Joanna.
>
> Not *really*, said Peggy. I mean, he has a look, but it's just tracksuits most of the time, I doubt he even owns a suit.
>
> […] Well, isn't he from a fairly working-class background? said Joanna.
>
> That's so oversensitive, Peggy said. I can't criticise someone's dress sense because of their socio-economic status? Come on.
>
> No, that's not what she meant, said Marianne. (85-86)

This discussion of Connell wearing tracksuits most of the time has to do with the environment he grew up in. Joanna and Marianne try to suggest to Peggy that where Connell comes from, tracksuits are considered a proper look with a high status attached to it. Because of Peggy's background, which presumably is a high social class, she does not regard tracksuits in the same manner as Connell. She believes they give off a status of low economic capital, while for Connell they radiate wealth. This passage describes the class difference between Connell and Peggy, where Connell is from a lower class than Peggy. This also depicts Marianne's awareness of these class differences, since she grew up in Carricklea and is aware of the status that is given to a tracksuit there.

Marianne's university friends are all portrayed to be of a higher social class and as having a higher economic capital in comparison to Connell. For example, they are described as "Politics students who turn up to her parties with bottles of Moët and anecdotes about their summers in India" (98). The mentioned champagne brand, Moët, is known for its high cost (Pépites en Champagne). For the students to bring these to parties where nobody will take the

time to appreciate the expensive drink, they must have enough income to do this without thinking about it. In addition to this, the fact that they can spend a summer in India adds to their economic capital, since it is a faraway country for which the costs of travelling to from Ireland are high. However, these friends of Marianne are not only described as snobbish and careless about money, but they also have a positive influence on Connell due to his friendship with Marianne:

> If and when [Connell's] out of work, one of Marianne's other rich friends will just come up with another job for him to do. Rich people look out for each other, and being Marianne's best friend and suspected sexual partner has elevated Connell to the status of rich-adjacent: someone for whom surprise birthday parties are thrown and cushy jobs are procured out of nowhere. (Rooney 99)

With the help of the friends' economic capital, Connell is able to gain more of that himself. Marianne' social capital provides Connell with the social capital to have access to more economic capital. This quote portrays the interrelationship of the capitals and how one capital can enable another. The friends' economic capital is shown again when one of them, Sophie, throws a house party because "[h]er parents were in Sicily or somewhere like that" (114). This casual tone reveals that Sophie is not sure where her parents are vacationing and that it is not relevant to her. If her parents being on holiday was special, she would have been certain what the destination of their trip was. The use of the phrase "or somewhere like that" shows the normality of the parents residing somewhere luxurious, such as Sicily. Likewise, Marianne's first boyfriend, Jamie, is portrayed to be greatly distanced from Connell in terms of economic capital. The first thing said about Jamie is that "[his] dad was one of the people who caused the financial crisis – not figuratively, one of the actual people involved" (124). Connell and his mother are suffering financially, most likely in part due to this crisis, and Marianne goes out with a guy whose father caused this suffering. During the characters' stay

in Marianne's holiday home, Jamie's opinion on objects and their economic capital comes forward. During dinner, Marianne serves the guests champagne in a different kind of glass than usual. This upsets Jamie. He asks: "Do we not have proper champagne glasses?" and refers to the coupes Marianne brought out as "gravy boats" (171). To let Jamie get upset about such minor details makes him come across as snobby and caring too much about the status attached to certain objects, champagne glasses in this case. At one point, Connell addresses his irritation regarding other students showing off their economic capital by stating that "everyone […] just goes around comparing how much money their parents make" (217).

Marianne's relaxed relationship with her economic capital is subtly mentioned when she is having a phone-call with her friend Joanne. During the call, she is in the supermarket looking at various products. Rooney reveals that "[s]he has no reason to be in the supermarket, except that she doesn't want to be in her family home, and there aren't many spaces in which a solitary person can be inconspicuous in Carricklea" (107). A few pages later, it is mentioned that she buys a couple of items (110). This moment shows that Marianne can afford to buy stuff at random just as an excuse to be alone. In a subtle way, this reveals her ability to spend her economic capital without true intention. Rooney even showcases Marianne's economic capital through the specific items that she buys, because later it is mentioned that she uses an Evian water bottle (191). Here, Rooney could have omitted the specific brand of water but did not in order to help build Marianne's wealthy image because Evian is an expensive water brand (Bradley).

The students at Trinity College can compete for scholarships by means of a test. Connell and Marianne both win this grand prize. Their reactions to this showcase their relation to economic capital: "For [Marianne] the scholarship was a self-esteem boost, a happy confirmation of what she has believed about herself anyway: that she's special" (Rooney 159). "For [Connell] the scholarship is a gigantic material fact […] and suddenly he

can do a postgraduate programme for free if he wants to, and live in Dublin for free and never think about rent again until he finishes college" (159). This difference in the main characters' view on winning the scholarship implies their stance towards economic capital. Marianne does not care about the money she receives; she only values the status that comes with it concerning her intellect. Meanwhile, Connell is thankful for the ability to not worry about his small economic capital again until after university. He is highly aware of this because, during a dinner to celebrate the scholarships, he points out that the students serving them "[are] working to put themselves through college while [they] sit there eating the free food [the students] put in front of [them]" (174). Connell acknowledges that winning the scholarship has changed his economic capital. Marianne's financial situation does not change because of the scholarship and she, therefore, does not appreciate the economic capital that she receives.

1.2 Social Capital

1.2.1 Marianne Sheridan

The second most occurring capital in Rooney's book is social capital. The main topic of the novel is the complicated relationship between Marianne and Connell. At their secondary school, nobody knows about their relationship. The contrast between their lives appears to be the main determiner for nobody suggesting it. "People know that Marianne lives in the white mansion with the driveway and that Connell's mother is a cleaner, but no one knows of the special relationship between these facts" (2). At school, Marianne is an outcast, "has no friends" (2) and "is considered an object of disgust" (3). Despite her unpopularity, she controls the relationship with Connell because "[i]f she wanted, she could make a big show of saying hello to Connell in school. […] Undoubtedly, it would put him in an awkward position" (3). In a way, she has the power over Connell's social capital at school. If it

becomes known that he hangs around with the outcast, it could have consequences for his popularity.

There are several instances in which Rooney makes clear that Marianne feels alienated from her classmates. For example, when "Marianne had the sense that her real life was happening somewhere very far away, happening without her, and she didn't know if she would ever find out where it was and become part of it" (11). During a football game, her alienation comes forward by her being the only student not knowing the school chants (11). Despite her not knowing these chants, the football game does provide her with a brief sense of owning more social capital than she initially thought. When Connell scores, her classmate Karen embraces her to celebrate the goal because "they had seen something magical which dissolved the ordinary social relations between them" (12). Here, Rooney emphasises that in normal circumstances the two girls would not have hugged, but that the sense of unity caused by football temporarily erases these social standards.

At school, Marianne alienates herself again by claiming she is the only one actively aware of the hierarchical structure of the students' social capital. She imagines the school's social structure as a ladder and "sees herself at the very bottom […], but at other times she pictures herself off the ladder completely, not affected by its mechanics, since she does not actually desire popularity or do anything to make it belong to her" (29). By viewing herself as the only person not seeking out more social capital, she differentiates herself from the main crowd. This same awareness occurs to her again during the school's charity event. Marianne is with the popular girls because they are in the event's committee together. This group of girls wonder when the guys, i.e., Connell and his friends, will arrive. Marianne texts Connell to ask how far along they are. She is aware that announcing this information to the girls would change everybody's social capital because it would reveal her relationship with Connell. "Nothing would feel more exhilarating to her at this moment than to say: They'll be

on their way shortly. How much terrifying and bewildering status would accrue to her in this moment, how destabilising it would be, how destructive" (31). She realises the power she has over Connell's social capital that is enabled by her own lack of it.

Similar to the situation at school, Marianne does also not feel a sense of belonging in the town of Carricklea. During a walk, she "wonders what it would be like to belong here, to walk down the street greeting people and smiling. To feel that life was happening here, in this place, and not somewhere else far away" (64). She does not feel as if her social capital is present in Carricklea but rather someplace else. This is because she has no friends at school and therefore no social life.

While, at university, Connell has some difficulties fitting in, Marianne is thriving. As Connell remarks at a party, "all these people at the party are her friends, she has a lot of friends, and she's happy" (72). Despite her gaining social capital, she does not care for it. She says she likes "the idea of something so dramatic happening to [her]. [She] would like to upset people's expectations" (102). This passage shows that Marianne does not value social capital highly. In fact, it excites her to think about not fitting in with people and damaging her capital. This can be explained by her own social capital being low when she was growing up. She is used to not having much of this capital and therefore does not attach much worth to maintaining it.

In terms of class, Marianne is not fully aware of her privileged situation. After the scholarships were announced, she has a conversation with Connell about them. Marianne says that Connell deserves the scholarship more than she does. His reply is: "You mean in terms of the financial stuff?" to which she answers: "Oh[.] […] Well, I meant that you're a better student" (173). This indicates that Marianne does not associate the scholarships with financial aid at all, but only with the social status that comes with it. Connell then says: "I guess we're from very different backgrounds, class-wise", to which Marianne replies: "I

don't think about it much[.] […] Sorry, that's an ignorant thing to say" (173). Marianne does acknowledge her privilege here, eventually.

1.2.2 Connell Waldron

Connell is popular at secondary school; he has a large friend group and is a top player of the school's football team. However, Rooney shows that having a vast social capital like that requires compromising. Marianne asks him if his friends know about his love for reading, to which Connell answers that "they wouldn't be interested in that stuff" (14). He acknowledges that his friends do not care about his hobby, which is something good friends would do. Later, Marianne asks if it bothers Connell that his friends constantly talk about sex. His answer is: "Most of it wouldn't […]. They do some stuff that goes a bit over the line and that would annoy me obviously. But at the end of the day they're my friends, you know. It's different for you" (15). With this passage, Connell admits that he overlooks some of his friends' behaviour to maintain the friendship. He would rather have them as friends than stand up for his values and say when something bothers him. With the last sentence saying that it is different for Marianne, Connell implies that she is not friends with those people, which allows her to be annoyed at them. He values his friendships so much that he does not want them to know about his relationship with Marianne because it would be awkward (15). He emphasises this by saying: "[d]on't go telling people in school about this" (16) to Marianne right after their first kiss. This embarrassment is shown again when the two main characters discuss an abandoned house that students sometimes visit. Connell "wished he could show her, but there were always people around" (33). While this looks rude of Connell at first, Rooney provides a possible explanation for his desire to keep their relationship a secret. The narrator reveals that the few girls Connell had sex with "went on to tell the whole school" (21). He might just appreciate privacy concerning his romantic life, but Marianne's

unpopularity and bad image at school also play a role in this desire for privacy due to him praising his friends' opinions. At school, he attempts to avoid Marianne as much as he can (22) because "[h]e was trapped by various considerations. He cared what people thought of him" (25). The narrator even says that "if people found out what he has been doing with Marianne, in secret, while ignoring her every day in school, his life would be over" (27). His friends do not think of Connell as someone that would voluntarily have sex with Marianne (27). Another possible explanation for Connell not wanting people to find out about the relationship has to do with his social class. During a conversation with his mother, Connell says that "Marianne Sheridan wouldn't go out with someone like [him]" and that Jamie, her boyfriend at the time, "is a bit more in line with her social class" (125). As discussed in the previous section, Jamie possesses a vast amount of economic capital due to his father's occupation. Connell views this as a determining factor in Jamie's social status. Because Connell does not own such economic capital, he believes he is not worthy to have Marianne be part of his social capital as his girlfriend. This portrays how the capitals interlace with each other.

The first time Connell openly reveals a part of his relationship with Marianne to his friends is during the school's charity event. At first, he does not dare to make eye-contact with Marianne (37). However, Karen notices that Connell is not able to take his eyes off Marianne when she is dancing and explains that this is why Rachel, who has a crush on Connell, is irritated (38). This reveals that at least Karen and Rachel are aware of Connell liking Marianne. The other friends are informed of this after Marianne is touched inappropriately by someone. Rachel says that it was funny to everyone, but Connell says, "[t]hat's not true" and asks her to "fuck off" (41). Then, in front of his friends, Connell suggests driving Marianne home. These interactions are the first where Connell connects with

Marianne in a friendly manner in front of his friends. Because of Marianne being assaulted, Connell is willing to risk his social capital to help her.

At university, Connell's social capital shifts. In Carricklea, he has many friends, but at Trinity College he has a hard time finding people to connect with. His social capital has decreased due to his change of schools. Similar to how Marianne felt in Carricklea, Connell now believes he will not gain any social capital in college. "He understands now that his classmates are not like him. […] They just move through the world in a different way, and he'll probably never really understand them, and he knows they will never understand him, or even try" (68). One of the ways in which he is not like his classmates was discussed in the previous section, concerning Connell's low economic capital in comparison to the others. While realising his alienation from the other students, Connell also acknowledges his situation at secondary school more:

> Back home, Connell's shyness never seemed like much of an obstacle to his social life, because everyone knew who he was already, and there was never any need to introduce himself or create impressions about his personality. If anything, his personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions of others. (70)

He did not have to make any additional effort in Carricklea. This allowed him to be comfortable with the social capital that he owned. Because of this, he is now experiencing difficulty doing this at university. His previous vast social capital caused his current capital to suffer due to the comfort it provided. He later realises this causation: "He knew then that the secret for which he had sacrificed his own happiness and the happiness of another person had been trivial all along, and worthless" (77). His friend Eric reveals to him that everybody at school was aware of his relationship with Marianne, despite their attempt at keeping it secret. This makes Connell realise that his friends did not care about the relationship as he suspected,

since they never treated him differently. Connell's desire to maintain his social capital turned out to be useless at the expense of his and Marianne's happiness. "In Dublin they can walk down long stately streets together for the first time, confident that nobody they pass knows or cares who they are" (88) and it turns out that this was an option in their hometown all along. Their social capital changes depending on their location. Connell's social capital decreases in Dublin while Marianne's increases. Both shifts enable them to let go of what people think of them being together.

Eventually, Connell gets into a relationship with someone other than Marianne: a medicine student named Helen. "To be known as her boyfriend plants him firmly in the social world, establishes him as an acceptable person, someone with a particular status, someone whose conversational silences are thoughtful rather than socially awkward" (155). According to this passage, Helen possesses a certain kind of social capital that is desirable to Connell and can be accessed by being in a relationship with her. This capital is not described as the sole reason for them dating, but it does benefit Connell in terms of his own social capital. He is regarded differently only because of this social connection. People do not think of him as awkward in conversations anymore but rather as serious. This shows the influence knowing a particular person has on one's social capital.

1.2.3 Other Characters

Besides the social capitals of the main characters, the book also explores other people's relationship to this type of capital. The first instance in which this can be noticed, concerns Connell's mother, Lorraine. On the first page of the book, Lorraine is picked up by her son after working at the Sheridan mansion. Before they exit the house, Lorraine takes the hair clip out of her hair, which "[t]o Connell […] seems like something she could accomplish in the car" (1). Even though nothing is mentioned about this action of Lorraine's again, it can be

argued that Rooney adds this detail to display Lorraine not wanting to look like a cleaner when exiting the house. Because Rooney adds that Connell thinks his mother could have done that in the car, the emphasis is put on the fact that Lorraine unclips her hair in the house on purpose. The hairstyle of a hair clip reveals too much about Lorraine's job which she does not want other people to see. With this, the conclusion that Lorraine is ashamed of her job can be drawn. Lorraine does not want her social connections outside of the house to notice that she just finished her cleaning job at the Sheridans' house. Despite her job, probably, being known to everyone, she still does not want to draw attention to it.

Another example concerns Rachel Moran, a classmate of Connell and Marianne, who is said to be "the most popular girl in school, but no one is allowed to say this" (29). The students are aware that their social lives are hierarchical, but they try to ignore this. Social capital is present, but it should not be acknowledged.

After Marianne was touched inappropriately by a man, the power social capital can enable is portrayed. The man, Pat, is a friend of Eric, who is one of Connell's friends. Connell explains that his friends took Pat's side "because he has these parties in his house sometimes" and that "[a]pparently, if you have house parties it's okay to mess with people" (42). Connell is not excusing their behaviour; he is explaining that they did not stand up for Marianne because they value their connection with Pat because of his house parties. The friends disregard Pat's actions to keep their social capital with him, which allows them to attend his parties.

Marianne's brother Alan is another example of a character only caring about social relations when it benefits them. During summer, he is on the phone with people discussing Marianne and her classmates' test results. He finds out that Connell got the highest score possible. He calls him 'Waldron' instead of Connell and Marianne notices this: "Why are you calling him 'Waldron' like he's your friend? […] You hardly know him" (59). The story

never mentions Alan and Connell being friends, which is in line with Marianne's comment. Just because Connell got a good score on the test, Alan wants to appear as his friend. He believes this social capital benefits him. As a contrast to this, Alan at the end of the novel does not want Marianne to hang out with Connell because "he was fucked in the head" and "on medication and everything" (239). Alan suddenly does not like 'Waldron' anymore just because it became public knowledge that Connell is depressed. This shows that Alan views mental illness as a threat to social capital. He does not want to be associated with Connell because of his condition. His opinion of Connell changes depending on the general knowledge of the town. When Connell is the smartest kid in class, he is a positive influence on his social capital, but when it becomes known that he is suffering mentally, Alan disregards of this idea.

One of Connell's friends in Carricklea, Rob, is portrayed as being preoccupied with gaining social capital. It is said that "[n]othing had meant more to Rob than the approval of others; to be thought well of, to be a person of status" (212). This shows that Connell was not the only one in Carricklea doing everything for social approval.

The last person whose social capital is mentioned in the book is Marianne's mother, the solicitor. Despite her high economic capital and the status that comes with it, Lorraine tells Marianne that her mother is "considered a bit odd" (260) by the people of the town. A person may have a high economic capital, but that does not guarantee success in terms of the other capitals.

1.3 Cultural Capital

The last capital that is discussed for Rooney's book is cultural capital. This type of capital is the least present in the story in comparison to the other two kinds but is still a determining factor in the storyline.

1.3.1 Embodied Cultural Capital

The first occurrence of cultural capital has also been mentioned in the social capital part of this chapter. It concerns the passage where Connell tells Marianne that his friends are not interested in his hobby for reading (14). This can be linked to cultural capital because it shows that Connell's friends do not value reading as much as he does. Connell possesses the capital to read and enjoy it too, but he does not share this with his friends. Connell hides his cultural capital to maintain the social capital he has. Marianne's reaction to this displays that she does view reading as important because, to her, non-readers are "not interested in the world around them" (14). This type of capital is acquiring knowledge about the world around you, as Marianne states, and can be done through the act of reading, Connell's hobby, and is therefore embodied cultural capital. Both characters think highly of this capital and Connell's friends do not.

One of Marianne's university friends, Peggy, is determined to show off her embodied cultural capital in a conversation: "Peggy is on the sofa telling a story about interrailing in Europe, and for some reason she insists on explaining the difference between West and East Berlin. Marianne exhales and says absently: Yes, I've been there" (136). Even though Marianne is already informed on what Peggy is explaining, Peggy still wants to show off her intellect by continuing her story. With this, Peggy displays the learning process she went through to understand the differences between West and East Berlin and is therefore showing off her embodied cultural capital.

Marianne's boyfriend in Sweden, Lukas, is also a person intent on showing their embodied cultural capital everywhere they go. "He's sensitive to the most miniscule of aesthetic failures, in painting, in cinema, even in novels or television shows" (190). He has taught himself to be aware of specific characteristics in art, and this allows him to have embodied cultural capital.

1.3.2 Institutionalised Cultural Capital

The second type of cultural capital, namely the institutionalised one, is also present in the novel. One occurrence involves Gareth, one of Connell's classmates that invites him to a party. Gareth is described as "one of these popular people who's involved in college societies" (67), and it is said that he "went to one of the big private schools in Dublin" (67). Gareth is portrayed as an overall popular and likeable character whose popularity is partly due to his previous education. Since he is already from Dublin, he is familiar with the area of Trinity College and probably knows many people who are attending it as well. The private school he went to gave him the cultural capital of being well-educated that he believes is required to be respected at the university. Because Connell is not from Dublin and did not attend private school, he "understands now that his classmates are not like him" (68) and that "[t]hey just move through the world in a different way" (68). The value of going to Trinity College is highlighted again later in the story when Connell picks up his date for the Debs ball, Rachel. She "kept mentioning that he was going to Trinity" (76). To make her parents believe that Connell is a suitable date and possible partner for Rachel, she emphasises the specific university he will attend. This is done because she views attending Trinity as an important kind of institutionalised capital and hopes her parents will see this too. Going to Trinity comes with a certain kind of status which Connell will have access to.

Despite Connell enrolling at Trinity, the fact that he studies English impacts his cultural capital in a negative way, at least according to himself. During the conversation quoted on page sixteen of this thesis with Marianne, Connell says her parents would prefer her going out with a doctor or a lawyer (103). He believes that these jobs come with the kind of institutionalised cultural capital that the Sheridans would prefer. Doctors and lawyers are known for having studied hard and for a long period of time to attain their qualifications, and therefore have a great deal of cultural capital attached to them, since cultural capital is known for its learning process. The more a person has spent studying, the higher their cultural capital will be valued. An example of this is Connell's girlfriend Helen, who studies medicine. When Connell tells Marianne he is in a relationship with Helen, the first thing he says about her is that she is a medicine student. He does this to show off the embodied cultural capital Helen is gaining through this and to illustrate the extensive economic capital she will have after her studies, to which he potentially has access to.

1.3.3 Objectified Cultural Capital

Objectified cultural capital, the third type which Bourdieu distinguishes, is only noticeable once in the book. The scene concerns Connell attending a literary reading and having a conversation afterwards with a friend and the writer that did the reading. The writer asks Connell if he is enjoying his time at Trinity, to which Connell replies: "Bit hard to fit in" (221). As a response, the writer says: "That mightn't be a bad thing […] You could get a first collection out of it" (221). With this, the writer is suggesting that Connell could use his low social capital to write a book which would provide him with both economic and cultural capital. He will gain economic capital if the book becomes a success, and he is paid for it. The cultural capital would come by the title of being a writer. This combines all three types of cultural capitals. Writing a book takes time and practise for it to be considered good, which

can be linked to embodied cultural capital. The book will provide objectified cultural capital if it gets printed and Connell is able to show off the physical item proving his ability to be a writer. Lastly, a book can be regarded as a type of qualification of the author's writing skills, ensuring institutionalised cultural capital.

This combination of cultural capitals that a book provides is also recognised in the novel:

> [Connell] knows that a lot of the literary people in college see books primarily as a way of appearing cultured. […] It was culture as class performance, literature fetishized 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. Even if the writer himself was a good person, and even if his book really was insightful, all books were ultimately marked as status symbols, and all writers participated to some degree in this marketing. Presumably this was how the industry made money. Literature, in the way it appeared at these public readings, had no potential as a form of resistance to anything. (221)

Chapter 2: *My Brilliant Friend*

The second novel that will be analysed in this thesis is the translation of Elena Ferrante's *L'amica geniale*, translated into English as *My Brilliant Friend*. This book came out only six years before *Normal People*. The two stories are similar; it concerns two friends that experience different situations despite their proximity due to them possessing and exploiting different forms of capital. Elena "Lenù" Greco and Rafaella Cerullo (also known as Lina or Lila) are two best friends growing up in a neighbourhood in Naples, Italy. They attend the same elementary school and are both well-performing students. However, due to the costs of education, Lila's parents unenroll her, so she can work in their shoe shop. Meanwhile, Elena keeps on attending and eventually goes to university.

2.1 Economic Capital

The novel starts off with sixty-year-old Lenù receiving a phone call from Lila's brother, Rino. Her immediate thought is that he is calling to ask her for money again and that she is "ready to say no" (Ferrante 19), but that is not the reason for his call. The addition of the word "again" makes clear that Lenù has lent money to Rino in the past. This illustrates that, in the present, Lenù is wealthy enough to lend money to people and that Rino is in need of money. Because Rino is Lila's older brother, it can be suggested that Lila most likely has financial problems too. This prologue wants to make clear to the reader that Lenù has a large amount of economic capital, and that Lila does not. This sets the tone for the story that is to come; Lenù has managed to gain wealth and Lila has not.

The second part of the book called 'Childhood' starts off with the two girls getting acquainted with one another and playing with their dolls together. The description of their dolls shows their families' contrasting economic capitals: "[Lenù's doll] had a plastic face

and plastic hair and plastic eyes. She wore a blue dress that [her] mother had made for her in a rare moment of happiness, and she was beautiful. Lila's doll, on the other hand, had a cloth body of a yellowish color, filled with sawdust, and she seemed to me ugly and grimy" (30). This passage tells the reader that Lenù has a plastic doll, that most likely is store-bought and looks appealing. She even calls it "the most precious possession I had" (54). The inclusion of the phrase "on the other hand" contrasts Lila's doll with Lenù's. Lila's doll appears to be handmade with scrap materials, causing the doll to not look pretty, in Lenù's opinion. This illustrates that the Greco family has sufficient economic capital to buy a doll for Lenù and that the Cerullos cannot do the same for Lila. This already seems to foreshadow the economic capitals of the women when they are grown up, as discussed in the previous paragraph. These two telling moments of the story capture the main characters' true economic capital. Lenù grows up in a relatively wealthier family (in comparison to the other families of the still poor neighbourhood) and can maintain this capital throughout her life, while Lila grows up poor and, in the end, has a brother that has to ask people for money.

Similar to Sally Rooney, Ferrante also makes use of the objects of clothing to attach a certain amount of economic capital to her characters. At one point, Lila's mother, Signora Cerullo, meets the girls' teacher, Maestra Oliviero, at school.

> She, who, like the majority of the neighborhood women, lived untidily in slippers and shabby old dresses, appeared in her formal black dress (wedding, communion, christening, funeral), with a shiny black purse and low-heeled shoes that tortured her swollen feet, and handed the teacher two paper bags, one containing sugar and the other coffee. (41)

Signora Cerullo normally dresses casually but decides to put on her best dress and accessories for the meeting with the teacher. First, this portrays her desire to appear put-together and wealthy to the teacher. This can also be linked to cultural capital since she respects the

opinion of the teacher and therefore values her status as a teacher. Second, the addition by Ferrante of the different occasions to which the dress can be worn implies that this is Signora Cerullo's only nice dress. She is not able to afford multiple dresses for different kinds of occasions and therefore chose to have one multifunctional dress to save money. The Cerullo family does not own enough economic capital to buy as many clothing pieces as they like, causing them to think strategically about their clothes.

To not make it seem as if Lenù's family has no financial problems at all, Ferrante adds a passage in which their money struggles can also be seen. Lenù's mother is said to be unhappy because "there was never enough money" (45). In addition to this, her father says to Lenù: "Lenuccia, do well with the teacher and we'll let you go to school. But if you're not good, if you're not the best, Papa needs help and you'll go to work" (45). The Greco's are only willing to let Lenù go to school, which costs money, if she excels at it and is the best of her class. They are willing to risk debts if their daughter can attain institutionalised cultural capital.

Don Achille Caracci, also called "the ogre of fairy tales" (13), is portrayed to be the villain of the neighbourhood. The girls believe that he stole their dolls because when they went to look for them after they threw them into his cellar, the dolls could not be found. However, when they confront Don with this, he claims not to have seen the dolls (66). Despite this accusation, "he took out his wallet, opened it, looked inside, and handed Lila some money, I don't remember how much. 'Go buy yourself dolls,' he said. […] 'And remember that they were a gift from me'" (67). The "bad guy" thus makes use of his economic capital to make peace with Lenù and Lila. This enables Lila to get her hands on a store-bought doll instead of the handmade one she had. As a result, Lila uses Don's gifted economic capital to appear wealthier than she is by getting a more expensive doll.

The lacking economic capital of Lila's family is described at one point by Lenù: "the family was large, they all had to live off the shoe repair shop, including two unmarried sisters of Fernando and Nunzia's parents" (70). It is said that this is the reason why Lila's parents do not care about her attending school, and that her brother Rino is the only one that wants her to have an education. Lila believes that Rino would pay for her school and "said that, after she went to school, she wanted to earn a lot of money for the sole purpose of making her brother the wealthiest person in the neighborhood" (70). This shows that Lila does not care about achieving high economic capital for herself, but only for her brother to show her appreciation for his support concerning her education. Rino and Lila both want to use economic capital to obtain cultural capital. In relation to this, Bullaro says the following: "Lila's new obsession with money is not only a fantasy of wealth for its own sake, she has understood the deeper functions that wealth plays in society, that money is merely an instrument in the fulfilments of other more compelling ambitions" (Bullaro 29).

This preference for cultural capital is illustrated on the same page. Here, Lila and Lenù discuss their plans on using cultural capital to get rich:

> In the last year of elementary school, wealth became our obsession. We talked about it the way characters in novels talk about searching for treasure. We said, when we're rich we'll do this, we'll do that. […] Then, I don't know why, things changed and we began to link school to wealth. We thought that if we studied hard enough we would be able to write books and that the books would make us rich. Wealth was still the glitter of gold coins stored in countless chests, but to get there all you had to do was go to school and write a book. (Ferrante 70)

On the one hand, the characters realise they need money to go to school, and on the other hand, they want to go to school to get wealthy. This passage portrays that the girls believe

going to school will simply provide them with their desired economic capital, but education does not guarantee a proper income, which they do not know yet.

The contrast between the families in the neighbourhood in terms of economic capital is highlighted when Lila says "[Gigliola Spagnuolo], Nino, and Marissa had, lucky for them, parents who took their children on outings far away, not just around the corner to the public gardens of the parish church. Ours weren't like that, they didn't have time, they didn't have money, they didn't have the desire" (74). This portrays that other families, such as the Spagnuolos and the Sarratores, are able to afford trips to far destinations, in comparison to Lila and Lenù's families. The addition that their families also do not have the desire to travel far stems from the fact that they have never done such outings due to their low economic capital and do not know what they are missing.

Ever since Lila and Lenù started attaching status to education, a form of rivalry originated between them. Lenù says

> As soon as I could, cautiously, I pointed out to her that I would go to middle school and she would not. To not be second, to outdo her, for the first time seemed to me a success. She must have realized it and she became even harsher, but toward her family, not me. (81)

Lenù is satisfied with continuing her education because Lila is not able to which means she will be smarter than Lila. Lila appears to be aware of this due to the growing harshness towards her family, the people who decide whether she goes to school or not. Her family is not able to afford her education anymore and have therefore decided not to let her go to middle school. Lila is angry at them for not having enough economic capital.

Despite Lenù's family being able to send her to middle school, they still do not own vast amounts of economic capital. At one point, Lenù fails the school year. "This time it was my father who said it was pointless for me to continue. The schoolbooks had already cost a

lot. […] There was no money to send me to private lessons during the summer. But above all it was clear now that I wasn't clever" (104). Lenù is only allowed to attend school if she gets high grades and is in the top of her class. If she is not, then her father does not believe the school money is worth it. However, Lenù's mother tells her: "We can't pay for lessons, but you can try to study by yourself and see if you pass the exam" (104). Her mother acknowledges their lack of economic capital, but still wants to encourage Lenù to achieve institutionalised cultural capital by studying on her own.

The importance of owning economic capital in the neighbourhood is underlined again by the example of the Solara brothers: Marcello and Michele:

> "You know why the Solara brothers think they're masters of the neighborhood?"
>
> "Because they're aggressive."
>
> "No, because they have money."
>
> […] As a result, either we, too, had to make money, more than the Solaras, or, to protect ourselves against the brothers, we had to do them serious harm." (118)

The Solara brothers view their economic capital as a commodity that allows them to think they are superior to the less fortunate people in the neighbourhood. In turn, this causes the two girls to also view money as a means to power, something that can only be overshadowed by physical violence. "While Elena and Nino embody the rise of the lower middle class through socially sanctioned opportunity, the Solaras rise through criminality" (Bullaro 16).

Lenù does eventually succeed at passing the requirements for high school, and so she continues her education. She starts to regard this as an advantage she has over Lila, who is forced to work in her father's shoe shop. "Who knows, if everything worked out for the best I would become rich before Lila with her shoe designs and her shoe factory" (Ferrante 127). This thought is inspired by an old neighbour, Donato Sarratore, publishing his own poetry book. His story allows Lenù to believe that people from her poor neighbourhood do have a

chance at gaining economic capital if they study hard and write a book. However, this idea is discouraged later when Lenù spots Donato's son Nino at school. She observes his clothing, which is not tailored to his body and is falling apart. "Evidently his father, although he had written a book of poems, was not yet wealthy" (158).

After a new year's party that got out of hand due to the Solara family shooting off dangerous fireworks, Lila's mindset concerning money changes. She does not care much for it anymore and only wants a proper amount to get by. "She no longer spoke of money with any excitement, it was just a means of keeping her brother out of trouble" (179). Her brother is jealous of the Solaras' fireworks display and decides to work as hard as he can to start a shoe factory. Lila's focus shifts towards him which means that money only means peace for her and her brother.

This jealousy of the Solara brothers grows more and more as they gain economic capital. Eventually, the brothers buy a Fiat 1100 car and drive around town in it. "That image of power had passed in a flash, four young people in a car – that was the right way to leave the neighborhood and have fun" (192). The car enables the brothers to have access to power and freedom. "There is no greater symbol than the automobile to represent the economic miracle and its effects on Italian lifestyle and customs and practices" (Bullaro 34). Contrastingly, Lenù and Lila are walking with Rino and Pasquale. "Ours was the wrong way [to have fun]: on foot, in shabby old clothes, penniless" (Ferrante 192), "We hesitated a moment and then went along with [Lila], resentful at the idea that Gigliola and Ada were having fun in the 1100 with the handsome Solaras while we were on foot, in the company of Rino who resoled shoes and Pasquale who was a construction worker" (192). The girls are aware of the low status and economic capital that comes with the jobs of Rino and Pasquale, and they would rather be in the new car of the Solaras.

Later in the story, the Fiat 1100 is demolished by unknown people. As a result, the Solara brothers must walk and seem "battered, a little dazed" (275). They are used to owning the neighbourhood because of their luxurious car, and without it they do not feel this power. Not long after, they buy a new car, "a green Giuliette and began to act like masters of the neighborhood again. Alive and well, bigger bullies than before" (275). The physical object in the form of a car is what allows the brothers to act superior because it shows their higher economic capital in comparison with the other villagers.

During Lenù's stay with her teacher's cousin, she meets the Sarratore family. The father of this family is a railroad worker and a poet. As mentioned earlier, his poems do not allow them to gain wealth yet. Despite this, the mother, Lidia, regards her husband's job as being more worthy than that of Lenù's father, who is a porter: "When [Marissa] alluded to the days in the neighborhood and told her parents that I was the daughter of Greco, the porter, Lidia, her mother, made a grimace of distaste" (213). Interestingly, Lidia changes her attitude towards Lenù when she hears of her cultural capital: "When Marissa told her that I was very studious and went to the same school as Nino she became particularly nice" (215). These two passages make clear that Lidia Sarratore values both economic and cultural capital highly. She does not treat Lenù kindly when she hears that she is the daughter of the porter, but this changes when she realises that Lenù is working hard towards gaining more cultural capital.

The importance of physical goods for the main characters is shown again later in the book when Lila is being courted by Marcello Solara, one of the brothers owning the Fiat 1100, and he provides her family with a television (228). Lila announces this to Lenù in a letter and after reading it she only says: "In the end all that seemed true was my disappointment that she had a television at home and I didn't" (230). Instead of being happy for her friend receiving attention from a boy, Lenù only focusses on the fact that Lila's family

now has a television, something "that very few in the neighborhood had in their house" (228). Lenù is not the only person valuing this increase in economic capital highly.

> [Lila's] mother had grown very fond of Marcello, she liked the good things he brought to the house every night, she was proud of being the owner of a television; and [Lila's father] felt as if he had stopped suffering, because, thanks to a close relationship with the Solaras, he could look into the future without anxieties. (234)

Because of the social capital that the family gains through their acquaintance with Marcello Solara they are provided with more economic capital, which they appreciate. In contrast to her parents, Lila only enjoys the television because she likes Marcello. When Marcello proposes to her and she refuses, she also requests him to take the gifted television with him: "Send someone to get the television, we don't need it" (252). This indicates that Lila does not value physical goods as highly as social relations. However, she has just before become engaged with Stefano Carracci and "had become the fiancée of the most respectable wealthy young man in the neighborhood" (253), which can explain her lack of care for the television. She already knows that she will marry a wealthy man who will buy a new television for her and therefore does not need the one Marcello gifted.

This engagement to Stefano enables Lila to be more careless about her spending. At one point, she secretly pays for Lenù's glasses to be repaired:

> I murmured in embarrassment that I could never repay her, she replied ironically, perhaps with a trace of malice:
>
> "Repay in what sense?"
>
> "Give you money."
>
> She smiled, then said proudly, "There's no need, I do what I like now with money." (258-259)

This behaviour of Lila shows that she has more access to economic capital due to her engagement and can therefore afford to be more reckless with money.

The marriage to Stefano makes the Cerullo family highly aware of their lower economic capital: “They had put together enough money to provide Lila with a small dowry and to meet the expenses of the refreshments, which they intended to take on, no matter what, in order to not seem like poor relations” (288). They do not want other people to recognise their financial struggles and therefore make expenses that are not realistic for their budget. The engaged couple is only concerned about their new living situation: Stefano wants to buy a new apartment, while Lila prefers an old building.

> Stefano was seduced by the new, by the shiny floors, by the white walls, and Lila soon gave in. What counted more than anything else was that, not yet seventeen, she would be the mistress of a house of her own, with hot water that came from the taps, and a house not rented but owned. (288)

The marriage provides Lila with the status of owning her own house with proper facilities. She does not have to work; she only has to maintain the household. This is associated with wealth in the neighbourhood: “Prosperity became associated with the bourgeois aspiration of not needing to work and the husband’s pride of being able to have a stay-at-home wife” (Bullaro 27). This reflects a significant amount of economic capital.

As the girls grow older, their idea of wealth changes. “The treasure chests full of gold pieces that a procession of servants in livery would deposit in our castle when we published a book like *Little Women* – riches and fame – had truly faded” (Ferrante 248). They do not desire vast amounts of economic capital to live a fabulous life anymore, instead, they want enough money to live a comfortable day-to-day life. An example for them is Stefano Carracci, “who sold groceries, had a red convertible, spent forty-five thousand lire like nothing, framed drawings, wished to do business in shoes as well as in cheese, invested in

leather and a workforce" (249). Lenù calls this "wealth that existed in the facts of every day, and so was without splendor and without glory" (248). The girls become more aware of what economic capital can realistically enable for a person, which is not the princess life they dreamed of.

Eventually, Lenù gets into a relationship with Antonio Cappuccio, a mechanic. To show his affection for her, "[h]e spent money with pretended casualness, though he earned very little" (280). Even so, when the couple has drinks at a bar with Lila and Stefano, "Stefano went to pay and discovered that Antonio had taken care of everything" (283), even though it is known that Stefano is wealthier than Antonio. When Lenù asks Antonio why he paid the bill, he says "Because you and I are better-looking and more refined" (283). He believes that because they look better than the other couple, that they should be the one showing off their economic capital by paying.

2.2 Cultural Capital

Most of the story of Lenù and Lila takes place during their childhood. The prologue, however, takes the reader to the future where both women are in their sixties. This prologue reveals that Lila is an "electronics wizard" (22). Nothing is mentioned about how she came to be this technical genius, but it does reveal that Lila has accessed this form of embodied cultural capital. Lila taught herself how to operate computers. Interestingly, it is Lenù who is able to continue her education during their childhood years, but Lila is interested in what her friend is studying most of the time. This shows that, despite her lack of education, Lila still wants to keep learning.

As seen in the previous section discussing economic capital in the book, the characters of the neighbourhood solve economic capital differences by violence, such as the

expensive car of the Solara brothers being destroyed. Similarly, this reaction is also caused by cultural capital differences. At one point, Lila and Lenù are attacked by a couple of boys that throw rocks at them. Lenù explains this behaviour by stating that the boys "were angry because [Lila and Lenù] were smarter than them" (33). One of the boys attacking them is Enzo Scanno. About him, Lenù says: "Enzo, the leader, was a dangerous child, […] he was at least three years older than us, and had repeated a year" (34). This inclusion of the fact that Enzo repeated a year at school shows the reason for his violence: he is insecure that he had to repeat a year and that girls three years younger than him had not yet. This insecurity is explained a few pages later when the following is said about him: "Everyone knew Enzo. He was a repeater" (49). Enzo is characterised by the fact that he had to redo a year at school, and this makes him dislike others that did not have to repeat a year. He is aware that his cultural capital has declined due to his reputation at school.

The children of the town must take an admissions test to get into middle school. Enzo, the repeater, was discouraged to do this. Instead, "[h]e enrolled in the trade school, but in fact he was already working with his parents" (63) and "he was pleased" (63) about this. He is aware that he does not have much chance at obtaining more institutionalised cultural capital and therefore decides to work for his parents, which will provide him with economic capital. The girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to take this middle school test. Both parents have different reactions to this test. Lenù's parents have the following conversation:

> "The teacher wants money. She says she has to give some extra lessons because the test is difficult."
>
> "But what's the point of this test?" my father asked.
>
> "To let her study Latin."
>
> "Why?"
>
> "Because they say she's clever."

> "But if she's clever, why does the teacher have to give her lessons that cost money?"
>
> "So she'll be better off and we'll be worse." (63)

Her parents are bothered by the fact that they must pay money for their daughter's education which will help her build a future but will only give them financial struggles. Nevertheless, the parents decide that they will let Lenù take the test to enrol in middle school on the condition that she has to perform well or else they will unenrol her. "Lila's parents on the other hand said no" (63) but she said she was "going to take the test anyway" (64). Lila disregards her parents' economic capital to build her own cultural capital.

Between the two main characters, there is rivalry in terms of who is the smartest and therefore has the most cultural capital.

> We were just learning the alphabet and the numbers from one to ten. I was the smartest in class, I could recognize all the letters, I knew how to say one two three four and so on, I was constantly praised for my handwriting, I won the tricolor cockades that the teacher sewed. Yet, surprisingly, Maestra Oliviero, although Lila had made her fall and sent her to the hospital, said that she was the best among us. (41-42)

Lenù has the best scorecard in class and is also better behaved towards the teacher, but nevertheless, Maestra Oliviero favours Lila and claims that she is the best student of the class. This, logically, awakens feelings of jealousy in Lenù. This even goes so far that Maestra ignores mistakes that Lila makes. Lila is said to have made a spelling mistake and Maestra's response to this is: "No, no, no. Lila has to practice, yes, but she already knows how to read, she already knows how to write" (43). Even though Lila made a writing mistake, Maestra stands up for her and disregards this error. Maestra pretends that Lila has more embodied cultural capital than she does.

This educational difference between the girls is highlighted when they are given books by Maestra Oliviero. Lila is given *Little Women* by Louisa-May Alcott and Lenù receives *Heart* by Edmondo De Amicis. When giving the books, Maestra says to Lila: "This is for older girls, but it will be good for you" (68) which implies that Lila is able to read above her age level. To Lenù, on the other hand, Maestra does not say anything. This implied difference in their reading abilities is emphasised in the next passage:

> Lila read both *Little Women* and *Heart*, in a very short time, and said there was no comparison, in her opinion *Little Women* was wonderful. I hadn't managed to read it, I had had a hard time finishing Heart before the time set by the teacher for returning it. I was a slow reader, I still am. (68)

Lila is skilled enough at reading to read both books while Lenù barely finishes the one book she was given.

Eventually, Lenù openly admits her jealousy of Lila to the reader: "In some very secret part of myself I looked forward to a school where she would never enter, where, in her absence, I would be the best student, and which I would sometimes tell her about" (92). Lenù is glad to be attending a school which Lila does not go to. Without her friend there, Lenù can be the best in her class and receive the academic validation she desires.

Even though both girls' fathers do not have high-paying careers, Lila is able to convince Lenù that shoemaking is more worthy than being a porter. By using captivating vocabulary and phrases, she can make Lenù jealous for not being part of a shoemaker's family: "I came home with the impression that, not spending my days in a shoemaker's shop, having for a father a banal porter instead, I was excluded from a rare privilege" (99). Even though during the time Lila is at her father's shop, Lenù is attending middle school. This can be explained by Lila envying her friend for being able to go to school, and, as a result, wanting to act as if her job in the shoe shop is better. The intelligence of the girls and who

can go to which school is a constant factor in their interactions with each other. Despite Lila not attending middle school, she is still wanting to study. For example, she proudly shows Lenù the four library cards she got for her family which she uses to loan as many books as possible. With these books, she taught herself Latin "out of curiosity" (110). Lila ends up teaching this Latin to Lenù, who is eventually praised at school for her skill but is too ashamed to reveal that Lila taught her (111). Lila's self-taught embodied cultural capital aids Lenù in coming closer to a diploma and institutionalised cultural capital.

This behaviour continues when Lenù goes to high school, and Lila does not. They meet up early in the morning at the shoe shop so that Lenù can be taught Greek by Lila: "I was sacrificing the warm deep sleep of the morning to make a good impression on the daughter of the shoemaker rather than on the teachers in the school for rich people" (156). Lenù is more concerned with Lila judging her embodied cultural capital instead of the people at school.

Lila is studying as much as possible to maintain the same cultural capital as Lenù, if not more. For example, "[Lila] had discovered that [Lenù] was learning English and naturally she had got a grammar book" (159) and Lenù takes notice of this: "I noticed also a tension in her, the desire to prove that she was equal to whatever I was studying" (160).

Lenù's parents treat their daughter according to her achievements at school. When, at the end of middle school, she is at the top of her class she is "much praised by [her] father" (119) and is allowed to wear her mother's silver bracelet (119). Lenù's institutionalised cultural capital success allows her to wear expensive jewellery which portrays an image of high economic capital. These two capitals are bound tightly in this story.

Because of this academic praise, Lenù becomes aware of the cultural capital that she is gaining. During a conversation in which she defends Lila, she says "I liked to hear myself speak with the authority of one who is studying difficult subjects" (270). Lenù believes that

her accumulated cultural capital provides her with authority in comparison to others that do not study the same subjects. For her, this cultural capital is regarded as a means of gaining power. This is similar to the Solara brothers who believe economic capital is the key to superiority over others. Because Lenù only has access to cultural capital, she uses this to her advantage to get the power she wants.

Despite Lenù's accomplishments in school, she keeps relying on Lila for the praise she desires, and this affects her thoughts on education. At the end of the story, when Lila becomes engaged and less interested in studying, so does Lenù. "I felt more strongly than ever the meaninglessness of school, I knew clearly that I had embarked on that path years earlier only to seem enviable to Lila. And now instead books had no importance to her. I stopped preparing for my exams" (276). As soon as Lila decides not to care about school anymore, Lenù does too. This shows that Lenù has never truly been determined to achieve more cultural capital for herself, but only for the approval that Lila would give her for it. Here, social capital comes into play. Lenù is prepared to go through years of hard work at school just to get the admiration of Lila.

The last quote that will be discussed for this capital is an example of the changing power dynamic between the two girls. Throughout the story, Lila is the smart one and Lenù envies her for it and continuously tries to get on her level. The following conversation between Lila and Lenù turns this around:

> "Whatever happens, you'll go on studying."
>
> "Two more years: then I'll get my diploma and I'm done."
>
> "No, don't ever stop: I'll give you the money, you should keep studying."
>
> [Lenù] gave a nervous laugh, then said: "Thanks, but at a certain point school is over."

> "Not for you: you're my brilliant friend, you have to be the best of all, boys and girls." (312)

Lila has regarded Lenù as her smart friend all long and wants her to keep gaining more cultural capital. An explanation for this can be that Lila did not have the economic capital growing up to continue her studies, and now wants to use the money she got through her marriage to help her friend achieve the diplomas that she dreamed of. She cannot use this money for her own studies since she is expected to be a housewife in her marriage.

2.3 Social Capital

The last capital to be discussed in my analysis of *My Brilliant Friend* is social capital. The neighbourhood in which the girls live in is one where everybody knows each other and where they use these acquaintances to their advantage. In other words, they make use of their social capital to gain access to the other two kinds of capitals.

2.3.1 The Neighbourhood

The enemy of the town is Don Achille, the man that gave money to Lenù and Lila to buy new dolls when they accused him of stealing them. Lenù reveals that her father "especially had it in for Don Achille. He always had something to accuse him of" (35). Because of this reputation of Achille in the Greco family, Lenù's mother gives up any social ties she has to him: "When he spoke of him to my mother he called him "your cousin" but my mother denied that blood tie (there was a very distant relationship) and added to the insults" (35). This passage reveals that Achille is a distant relative to the family, but that this is denied heavily. The Grecos refuse to be associated with Achille and therefore participate in the insulting, just like the rest of the neighbourhood. They refuse to acknowledge their social

capital with Achille which allows them stronger bonds with the rest of the town. Because the girls wanted to keep the connection with their parents, they were obliged to also ignore Don Achille as much as possible: “In the early part of the 1950s young people had little choice but to accept and follow the conservative values of their parents and authority figures” (Bullaro 24).

Despite Lila’s family not being able to afford for her to continue her studies for long, father Cerullo still makes use of his daughter’s education to boast to other people. “[S]he had heard him say to his friends that his daughter was the most intelligent person in the neighborhood” (Ferrante 69). Despite the little economic capital that the family possesses, they are proud of the institutionalised cultural capital that their daughter is able to attain, and they proudly tell of this accomplishment to gain respect and social capital from the other people in the town.

The summer before Lenù goes to high school, her father takes her to Naples, so she knows which public transport to take to school. She notices that the behaviour of her father changes when they are in the city, in comparison to their village:

> Outside he behaved with a sociability, a relaxed courtesy, that at home he almost never had. He was friendly towards everyone, on the metro and the buses, in the offices, and he always managed to let his interlocutor know that he worked for the city and that, if he liked, he could speed up practical matters, open doors. (136)

As noted earlier, the job of a porter is not a favourable one according to the people in the village, but in the city it is different. Here, Lenù’s father uses his job as an advantage. It helps him get more social capital because he can do favours for others if he wants to.

Despite the Solara brothers not being liked, they are respected for their economic capital. Even so, Lila’s father would appreciate it if his children were friends with them. When Rino comes back inside after having a conversation with Marcello Solara, his father

says: “Finally you’re doing something good. […] A friendship with Marcello Solara” (199). On top of this, when Nunzia Cerullo becomes aware of her daughter declining Marcello’s marriage proposal, she says to Lila: “Your father must never know, otherwise he’ll kill you” (201). Lastly, father Cerullo’s praise of Marcello is highlighted again when Rino and Lila are discussing their shoe designs and Rino says: “If Marcello likes the shoes, Papa will change his mind” (204). These instances reveal that Fernando Cerullo values Marcello Solara highly and wants his children to have him as part of their social capital.

2.3.2 Lenù and Lila

Lenù and Lila are also aware of the power of social capital but use this in a more innocent way: “With us was Marissa Sarratore, who usually joined us not because we liked her but because we hoped that, through her, we might meet her older brother, that is to say Nino” (40). They realise that they can use their connection with Marissa to get into contact with Nino. The girls use their social capital with Marissa with the hopes of gaining social capital with Nino.

The desired relationship with Nino is rather innocent for the young girls, but Lenù is also able to apply her social capital at school. When she firsts gets to know Lila, she starts to focus on obtaining a friendship with her so that she can be associated with her. “I decided that I had to model myself on that girl, never let her out of my sight, even if she got annoyed and chased me away” (46). Lenù is aware that Lila will be the top of the class and makes it her goal to be a constant second: “I think I feared only one thing: not being paired, in the hierarchy established by Maestra Oliviero, with Lila; not to hear the teacher say proudly, Cerullo and Greco are the best. If one day she said, the best are Cerullo and Sarratore, or Cerullo and Peluso, I would have died on the spot” (47). Lenù tries to resemble Lila as much

as possible by constantly being with her, which will help her achieve the second-best spot in class. She makes use of her social capital to gain as much cultural capital as possible.

Lenù's obsession with gaining Lila's respect is constant throughout the book. When Lenù starts school again she admits that she did not study for the cultural capital it would provide her, but for the approval of her friend: "I couldn't wait for Lila to ask me to help her in Latin or anything else, and so, I think, I studied not so much for school as for her" (112). She is more occupied with wanting recognition from Lila that she is smart than from her teachers. This illustrates that Lenù only does well at school for her social capital with Lila.

This passion for Lila goes as far as Lenù disregarding her own hobbies because Lila does not show an interest in them. She tells the reader that she reads novels by Pirandello, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and more, and that she wants to discuss these books with her friend:

> I felt a strong need to go and see Lila at the shop and talk to her about the characters I liked best, sentences I had learned by heart, but then I let it go: she would say something mean; she would start talking about the plans she was making with Rino, shoes, shoe factory, money, and I would slowly feel that the novels I read were pointless[.] (120-121)

Lenù is passionate about her books, and she would like to share this with Lila. However, Lila is not interested in this and is occupied with the shoe shop. This results in Lenù feeling that her books are pointless just because they do not gain her the connection and social capital with Lila that she hoped for.

Even when Lenù is not performing well at school, she can only focus on her social capital with Lila: "I was terrified of failing in school, of the crooked shadow of my displeased mother, of the glares of Maestra Oliviero. And yet I had now a single true thought: to find a boyfriend, immediately, before Lila announced to me that she was going with Pasquale"

(157). Lenù only wants to get a boyfriend because she knows that Lila is about to be in a relationship and, as mentioned before, she wants to model Lila and do everything that she does. Lenù focuses less on her cultural capital in order to acquire more social capital.

However, the dynamic of the girls' relationship shifts slightly when Lenù goes to high school in Naples. "I had crossed the boundaries of the neighborhood, […] I was with boys and girls who were studying Latin and Greek, and not, like her, with construction workers, mechanics, cobblers, fruit and vegetable sellers, grocers, shoemakers" (163). Through school, Lenù can expand her social capital with people that Lila does not get into contact with. Lenù's social capital is growing whilst Lila's is stagnant.

Towards the end of the story, Lenù makes clear that she believes Lila is better off due to her engagement with Stefano, her social capital. Even though Lenù is gaining more and more institutionalised cultural capital, she does not view herself as better than her friend:

> Although we both continued to live in the same neighborhood, although we had had the same childhood, although we were both living our fifteenth year, we had suddenly ended up in two different worlds. I was becoming, as the months ran by, a sloppy, dishevelled, spectacled girl bent over tattered books that gave off a moldy odor, volumes bought at great sacrifice at the secondhand store or obtained from Maestra Oliviero. She went around on Stefano's arm in the clothes of an actress or a princess, her hair styled like a diva's. (265)

Lenù believes that, despite their almost identical upbringings, Lila is the one to achieve the most status simply because of her marriage to Stefano. This shows that social capital is regarded as the most important type of capital in their neighbourhood. Economic and cultural capital are pleasant accessories to have but do not outweigh social capital, no matter their extent.

When, not long after, Lenù is asked by Antonio Cappucio to be her girlfriend, she only thinks about the social capital she will gain from it:

> I said yes right away, even though I loved someone else, even if I felt for him nothing but some friendliness. To have him as a boyfriend, he who was an adult, the same age as Stefano, a worker, seemed to me a thing not different from being promoted with all tens, from the job of taking, with pay, the daughters of the stationer to the Sea Garden. (279)

Lenù compares the relationship with Antonio to Lila's with Stefano and believes it will provide her with a comparable level of social status. Unfortunately, Lenù's mother does not agree with this relationship: "We're not sending you to school to let you ruin yourself with an auto mechanic who has a crazy mother" (321). Because of Lenù's cultural capital, her mother does not want her to settle for a mechanic. This strongly suggests that she wants her daughter to gain social capital through a relationship with someone who has also studied. Her cultural capital limits the social capital she has access to.

Conclusion

The two extensive analyses of the novels done for this thesis provide us with an idea of what aspects of capital the authors use to assign characters to certain social classes.

Normal People

In terms of economic capital, Sally Rooney mostly uses objects to suggest the status of her characters. Some main examples of this are the inclusion of rubber gloves to hint at Lorraine Waldron's job as a cleaner, the Sheridans's mansion with grounds along with their Italian summer house, and Marianne Sheridan specifically owning a MacBook. Also, the housing situation of Connell and Marianne shows off their difference in income; Connell can barely afford to live in a poorly maintained small flat, while Marianne can live for free in a family flat. The scholarships portray the difference in stance towards money of the two main characters: Connell appreciates it for the financial advantages it provides him with, while Marianne only enjoys it for the status that comes with earning a scholarship because she does not need the extra money. Furthermore, the inclusion of the rich friends at university highlights what Connell is lacking in terms of economic capital. He does not own a MacBook like the rest of them and does not go on exotic holidays. Instead, he wears a cheap backpack which other people view as vintage even though it is all he can afford. To conclude, as is stated in the book itself, Connell is from a "bad" family and Marianne from a "good" one.

The depiction of social capital is done through a description of the characters fitting in or not. For example, Lorraine Sheridan changes her hair after work to not look as if she just finished a cleaning job. She is ashamed of her job and puts in the effort to not let this affect her social capital. Regarding Marianne and Connell's relationship, Marianne is in control of their social capital. She realises that, by letting people know what they are, she can sabotage

his popularity at school. On the other hand, Connell is also aware of this and highly urges her to keep it a secret because he does not want his reputation to undergo damage. At school, Marianne does not relate to her classmates and uses a metaphor of a ladder to portray the social construction of the school. She imagines herself as not being on the ladder, and therefore not fitting in, for example, during school games. Because Connell does fit in, he is willing to make compromises to maintain his social capital. He does not reveal his love for reading to his friends because he knows they are not interested in it. At university, the social dynamic shifts and Marianne gets popular while Connell has a difficult time making friends. Connell's relationship with medicine student Helen opens up numerous social connections along with opportunities for jobs, showcasing that having social capital allows access to other capitals. Lastly, Lorraine Waldron saying to Marianne that her mother is considered a bit odd in the town of Carricklea shows that economic capital does not guarantee social capital.

Cultural capital is displayed in the book on a few occasions. Embodied cultural capital can be noticed through the people that our main characters meet, because they have set ideas about what is and is not essential embodied cultural capital. For example, Connell's secondary school friends do not show interest in their friend's love for reading, while Marianne's friend Peggy continues to lecture her about Germany even though Marianne said she knows it already. Institutionalised cultural capital can be noticed by characters praising attendees of Trinity College Dublin highly. Connell's date does not stop talking about his study plans to impress her parents. Lastly, there is one instance to which all cultural capitals can be applied. During a conversation Connell has with a writer, the author says that there is a great first edition to be made from his experience of not fitting in at university. A published book shows the act of writing a book (embodied cultural capital), it describes his experience of studying at Trinity (institutionalised cultural capital), and it is a physical proof of being able to write and publish a book (objectified cultural capital).

My Brilliant Friend

Ferrante's book displays economic capital as a commodity that is highly desired by the characters in the book. The prologue of the book tells the future of Lenù being wealthy in comparison to Lila, whose brother is asking Lenù for money. The first scene of the little girls is in line with this by Lenù owning a store-bought doll and Lila a handmade one. Other instances in which objects are used for economic capital may be when it is revealed that Lila's mother only owns one formal dress and when the Solara brothers claim power over the neighbourhood when they have a nice car in their possession. The main characters, Lenù and Lila, live their younger years determined by the want of money. They believe school is the key to being rich, but this changes when Lila is forced to quit her education to work in her father's shoe shop. From then on, she only wants enough money to continue her day-to-day life in a comfortable manner. For example, we saw that when she has access to more financial aids due to a relationship, she secretly fixes Lenù's broken glasses. Eventually, this influences Lenù too. At the end of the story, the girls realise their princess dreams are not easily accessible.

As for cultural capital, the main idea of the story is that Lenù can continue her education despite Lila being smarter. Lenù tells the reader that she performs better than Lila at school, but that the teacher still favours Lila and says she is the best student. The girls are at one point even attacked because they are smarter than others. When Lenù has trouble with subjects at school, Lila is the one to teach her. Lila is interested in her friend's education and reads as many books as possible. Since it is revealed in the prologue that Lenù is wealthy, but that Lila is a tech genius, it can be concluded that the desire to learn has always stayed with Lila, but that she never had the financial means to follow a proper education like her friend.

Lenù is obsessed with her social capital with Lila from the beginning of the story. She admits that she desires a friendship with her simply to become like Lila. Throughout the rest of the story, Lenù is constantly occupied with what Lila might think of her. Even when she is failing her classes, she can only think about getting a boyfriend because Lila recently got into a relationship. The other people in the neighbourhood are also thinking about their social capital every second of the day. For example, all parents want their children to become friends with the Solara brothers, because through this social capital, they might be able to access economic capital. This happens to Lila when Marcello gifts her family a television. When Lila refuses Marcello's marriage proposal, her mother warns her to not tell her father because he would kill her for declining.

Final Thoughts

The aim of this research was to find out how two chosen writers make use of Bourdieu's three different kinds of capital to portray the characters and their social classes in their books. The different types of capitals have been defined in the introduction. To perform this research, the two selected novels were read with the defined capitals in mind. Instances in which one or more of the capitals came to the fore in the books were singled out and discussed in the two chapters. As a result of this study, it can be concluded that both Sally Rooney and Elena Ferrante make use of the three distinguished kinds of capital by Pierre Bourdieu to allocate their characters to specific social classes. It has been made clear that Rooney, for example, distinguishes between a laptop and a MacBook and Ferrante between a car and a Fiat 1100. Furthermore, they let their economic capital influence their cultural capital. In Rooney's book, both main characters are able to attend the same education, but Connell has a tougher student experience due to his trouble with finding affordable housing

and clothes that are considered cool at Trinity. In *My Brilliant Friend*, financial means is the main cause for Lenù being able to attend school and Lila not. Despite this, Lila makes use of her social capital with Lenù to get familiar with the material her friend is being taught and therefore acquire more cultural capital. With this, it can be concluded that the framework of Bourdieu's capitals is well-suited for the examination of class differences in these books.

I believe this thesis can act as a stepping-stone for further research on the usage of capitals in books. The choice of author profile can be the same, i.e. female and European, to create a more elaborate comparison between these kind of writers. On the other hand, the profile of the chosen authors in this thesis can be discarded to expand the potential field of research. Further research can be done on other books in which characters have distinguishable social classes. As a result, a more comprehensive theory can be created that examines determining factors for class differences, according to the analysed authors. This thesis acknowledges the sparce inclusion of secondary literature. An explanation for this is the recent publishing dates of the analysed works. Not enough years have passed for these books to be examined substantially in terms of their usage of social class. However, for further exploration on this topic, this thesis can be utilised to create a sense of direction for prospective researchers.

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