

# Normal People: Kudos to Vulnerability, A Tribute to Friendship

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## Abstract

This paper intends to undergo a comparative study on George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018). The nature of friendships the characters display in the aforementioned novels are of various attributes. Principles of religious, economical, racial, and societal heritage come together to delineate the relationship the four characters experience and brandish. The theme of power struggle in interpersonal relationships and the related parameters in play will be discussed through the ideas of Michelle Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Emmanuel Levinas, Frank Lovett, Jacques Derrida, and Aristotle. Among the defining factors to be tended to, vulnerability, the element of time –futura-, death, and the approach towards “the other” are dominant. An almost two century-interval between the two literary works has marked a tremendous difference in the attitude of the protagonists towards friendship and conversion. The paper attempts to explore the inevitable factors, defining a friendship, the constituents empowering it along with those reducing it to an entity of its own negation.

**Keywords:** friendship, the other, vulnerability, alterity, conversion

## 1. Introduction

Gwendolen Harleth is not a rare Victorian persona, nor is she far from a typical contemporary egoist. She has long been scorned because of her naivete, her lack of perspective and self-knowledge. Once camped in the vicinity of aristocrats, she abides by the dominant aristocratic discourse. Gwendolen's many conversions with others and their barren characteristics, however, are well adapted and altered through those of Marianne's in *Normal People*. Sally Rooney's contemporary novel claims the very skeleton of a true conversion displayed through Connell and Marianne's friendship and its on and off romantic permutation.

A hundred and forty years into modern life, Marianne still benefits from a modernized form of aristocracy; a life that is guaranteed in terms of materiality and status in the established capitalism. Marianne is in no need of authenticating her existence in the world, contrary to Gwendolen, yet the hard-to-miss distinction between the two is the direction in which the two lead their intellects.

Michael Wheeler (1999), on the formation of individuality, states: “In the examination of the mysteries that lie beneath racial history, in *Daniel Deronda* ... she also explores the central social-scientific issue of individual development in relation to the environment which at least partially determines that development” (P. 134). Marianne ventures her vulnerability throughout the narrative regardless of her certainty in the definiteness and inevitability of her being hurt in the course of the events. What is fascinating is how she never ceases to remain authentic through mingling with those around her, and particularly Collin. The extent to which Marianne puts her ego at stake and her attitude towards this process in no manner are equal to that of Gwendolen's, yet the claim of the two having been touched by the Other remains seemingly analogous.

## 2. Existence

### Standing before the Other

But our life is too short and our power of vision too small for us to be more than friends in the sense of this sublime possibility- let us then believe in our star friendship even if we should be compelled to be earth enemies. (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 113).

Nietzsche recognizes the necessity and inevitability of friendship, for one's existence is bound to it as no doubt we are a vulnerable species. For him, it is the slightest of all human endeavors to practice friendship, rather than to plot one's enmity towards the other. Our intellect merely capacitates carrying out friendships, as it's the most facile of all humanistic

reciprocal acts.

To have things in common is the very requisite of having a human experience, and to achieve the luxury of having something in common, one has no choice but to mingle with the others of their tribe. One is to indulge with the other, and to accord with those favored over the rest, that is, the friend. In his *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas (2003a) recounts Heidegger's notion of existence: "... existence for Heidegger means ecstatic involvement in the world, not simply self-consciousness raised to its limits" (p. xix). And this is where he disavows Sartre's existentialism and humanism as they have "not the least thing in common" (Levinas, 2003a, p. xix). To involve in the world along with its species is what makes one's existence meaningful for Heidegger, and consequently, that of the lone human loses its inclusive nuance.

Heidegger, no doubt, is not the sole soul to identify and emphasize the involvement with the other as the inexorable element of *dasein*. Aristotle points out the necessity of being a human rather than a non-human animal through making a distinction between the one who is incapable of forming a solid relationship with the other in the Polis and their counterpart. To him, as Derrida (1997) paraphrases, the line is very clear: "... an individual incapable of membership of a polis is not, strictly speaking, a human being, but rather a (non-human) animal" (p. 239).

To gain the experience of a worldly nature, rather than resorting to the quixotic concept of a superhuman in Aristotelean terms, requires a tremendous willingness and openness towards the other.

It is one of the secrets in that change of mental poise which has been fitly named conversion, that to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation till some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness. (Eliot, 1996, p. 356)

And such is to be the essence of facing the other, to be in the world. Nonetheless, the merging in the vicinity of the other, the letting in the personality –in Eliot's notion- of the other requires vulnerability. It is at this very point that Gwendolen Harleth falls short in the accomplishment of her being. She is of the sort to prefer to be known by the other, rather than welcoming the knowledge and the perceiving of the other. Aristotle prioritizes the desire to know the friend over the need to be known. In Derrida's (1997) rewording: "To want to be known and loved is an egoistic refuting. It is for that reason that we praise those who continue to love their dead ones for they know but are not known" (p. 176). It is exactly the opposite manner with which Daniel Deronda approaches Gwendolen at their very first encounter. "He was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior... he felt himself in a region outside and above her." (p. 8). Not only does he look down upon Gwendolen, but he never exposes himself to the knowledge of her beyond the surface. Only towards the middle of the novel, Deronda makes a shift in his conduct towards the other, solely as a co-product of his love towards Mirah. The newly-founded sympathy that he feels towards Gwendolen is merely a result of her immoral and unfortunate marriage to Mr. Grandcourt.

It is of crucial importance to keep in the periphery of one's viewpoint that in Michael Wheeler's (1999) terminology George Eliot is considered a moralist author: "... George Eliot's career as the greatest moralist among Victorian novelists ended as it had begun in the study of her characters..." (p. 154). As a moralist, Eliot had invested in her characters to grow consciously throughout the course of the novel, to achieve the so-called best version of themselves, however, what she neglected is the meaningful development of a soul as a result of their "conversion" –in her own discourse. When Deronda with supposed goodwill returns the necklace Gwendolen sold in favor of earning enough money to return to her mother, what she felt was a severe case of mortification. "Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt" (p. 15). Gwendolen has no knowledge, nor the mental capacity to perceive the other and interpret their deeds.

To be a true moralist, to grow as a manifestation of a persona with refined moral standards, one needs to be aware of the right schemes of approaching the other. Clearly, both Gwendolen and Deronda lack the capacity to even consider the other as an autonomous being, who is to be approached, interpreted, and treated with strategies beyond their traditionalist, dogmatic manners. In the Kantian sense of the matter: "For love can be regarded as attraction and respect as repulsion, and if the principle of love bids friends to draw closer, the principle of respect requires them to stay at a proper distance from each other" (Kant, 1991, p. 46). To know where to stand on the verge of encountering the other requires refinement of one's mental poise, as well as ethical values.

Although the seemingly-simple opening to *Normal People* could carry the least -or for some- the most significant nuance into the world of the novel, it clarifies the attitude of the main characters towards the other. "Marianne answers the door when Connell rings the bell" (Rooney, 2018, p. 1). The imagery of opening the door is then juxtaposed with the ones during the early days of their relationship, that is, the laying oneself bare in front of the other and the security of being perceived through the educated lenses of the other. Rooney (2018) states: "He could tell her anything about himself, even weird things, and she would never repeat them, he knows that. Being alone with her is like opening a door away from normal life and then closing it behind" (pp. 6-7).

Recognition of the other and its ethical prerequisites have best been discussed in Irigaray's (2004) writings.

Recognizing you means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I stop before you as before something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine, a mine that will never be mine. (p. 8)

I am not -in any way- suggesting that in either of the novels, what Irigaray defines as the just way of approaching the other is manifested. Quite the contrary, neither of the characters accomplishes the grand task of distancing themselves from the other while remaining fascinated. Thereby, goes my counterargument, that is, the impossibility of perceiving the other in the manner Irigaray defines.

The approaching the other axiom of Irigaray: "The irreducible transcendence of you" (Irigaray, 2004, p. 24). bounds us to set aside our preordained standards of knowing the other, and practice approaching the other through depersonalized intellects of ours. What is meant by the transcendence of the other is laying aside and freeing oneself from accumulations of one's values and horrors, along with opening up to the other through objective, nonjudgemental lenses.

.. too often, this other is reduced to an object of study, to what is at stake in diverse socio-political strategies aiming in some manner to integrate the other into us, into our world. Thus we avoid the problem of meeting with the stranger, with the other. We avoid letting ourselves be moved, questioned, modified, enriched by the other as such. (Irigaray, 2004, p. 24)

Gwendolen successfully tailors her attitude towards the other based on her naivete. Once she is curious about Deronda, although she never admires young gentlemen, she states: "I always know what they will say. I can't at all guess what this Mr. Deronda would say" (p. 9). Afterward, when she is cared for by him, which mortifies her – through being forced to the repossession of the necklace-, and once Rex offers her his heart, she shows her utmost abjection towards men –the other: "...She objected with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to" (p. 56).

Further on, Gwendolen shares with her mother her perception of love: "Mamma, I wonder how girls manage to fall in love. It is easy to make them do it in books. But men are too ridiculous" (p. 63). Her understanding, recognition, and judgment of men –the other- never surpass her limited ego-centric personality.

Whereas in the case of Marianne, beyond her brightness of the mind, she faces Connell, and so does Connell. "He was thinking about what a secretive, independent-minded person Marianne was, that she could come over to his house and let him have sex with her, and she felt no need to tell anyone about it" (p. 21). Connell belongs to a warm and welcoming circle of friends in a small town in Ireland. His intellectual dimensions do not measure up to those of Marianne's, neither does his emotional intelligence. And yet the two approach the other beyond their known borders of humanity, beyond the level that they possibly capacitate in their solitude.

However, the above-mentioned quality of Marianne and Connell is far from remaining unchanged, or pragmatic for that matter. Although the maxim Irigaray suggests for an ethical approach towards the other seems comprehensive and inclusive, in practicality it does not stand with both feet on the ground. Even if one encounters the other through their very objective and depersonalized lenses, one is still trapped in the mechanisms of a pre-determined discourse. Let us not neglect that according to Derrida, all one does is decentering one sign and centering another instead. However, there are two problems I would like to pose with Irigaray's (2004) approach: "If you are this or that for me, I am already no longer free to dialogue with you" (p. 74).

The first impasse Irigaray's approach traps us in is the consequence of the nature of discourse. As Derrida (2001) suggests:

The field permits these infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions. (p. 317)

Although one might venture to step a foot outside the already established discourse, one is bound to face a delayed failure. As Derrida clarifies, even though it sounds that the realm of affinity with the other –the field- could bestow upon its residents the gift of another language to approach the other –while saving their integrity, respecting their wholeness-, one undoubtedly ends up favoring a center over another only to find out at the end of the journey that pathway is that of a dead-end.

Human being has no tools but the discourse, the experiences, the myth. And we need another myth of another nature to dramatize Irigaray's moral friendship. The sublime attitude towards the other Irigaray is in favor of, is simply bound to failure until the present discourse thrives, simply because "There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1976, p. 220).

The second quandary with Irigaray's maxim would be the result of reserving judgment, which she paraphrases as

‘ascribing this or that to the other’. If one is to approach the other, reserving judgments, imprisoning immature attributes, holding back unripe commentaries, how is one to befriend and love them? To keep oneself at an ethical distance from the other in order to respect their irreducible transcendence ties our species’ hands in sharing intimacies and falling in love with the other.

Irigaray (2004) herself poses a critique of her ideology, of its unconquered impossibility. “... what I learn thus will never become mine unless it becomes reduced to something other than its own reality or truth” (p. 75). And then, later on, she poses the only way for its achievement:

We have to discover another means of approaching. This does not cover each one and each thing with a same, with something supposedly proper to everything and everyone. Rather it advances step by step towards an uncovering, of oneself and of the other, which reopens the place where each one takes shelter to prepare the moment of an encounter. From this, each one will receive oneself and will turn back, modified towards a dwelling that will need to transform its frame in order to secure the memory of becoming- of oneself, of the other, of the world. (pp. 29-30)

Irigaray (2004) thereby necessitates the existence of a space for becoming, as well as the preparation each party is responsible to do for “the moment of an encounter” (p. 30). And what she implies through her words is the inevitable synthesis that takes place, the becoming, i.e. Eliot’s ‘conversion’. However, the real conversion in contemporary times is far from that of the Victorians: “Gwendolen did not like to dwell on facts which threw an unfavorable light on herself” (p. 41). Nonetheless, Daniel did try to leap further than Gwendolen: “I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view. And I want to get rid of a merely English attitude in studies” (p. 152). This is the extent to which Deronda’s openness towards the other pushes.

Eventually, of course, Deronda grows to go out of his way to practice his morality and open-mindedness towards the other, in the case of Mirah. Yet, he never accepts to be on the receiving end of the conversion, except for his change of religion. Whereas in the case of Connell, he welcomes conversion, although he is incapable of understanding it. He has accepted that he is not intellectually-equipped to make sense of Marianne and her dimensions. “Multiple times he has tried writing his thoughts about Marianne down on paper in an effort to make sense of them... he wants to understand how her mind works” (p. 25.) With Marianne, however, the story is of another nature. It is the intimacy that she is fascinated with. The intimacy that Irigaray (2004) defines as: “Intimacy, familiarity, and proximity do not exist only through living alongside one another and sharing the same space. On the contrary, that often leads to their destruction” (p. 132). And Marianne thinks to herself: “Most people go through their whole lives, Marianne thought, without ever really feeling that close with anyone” (p. 37). Marianne is not concerned with Connell’s mental grandeur, nor his other parameters. It is to know and to be known coming together in the closeness with Connell that she bathes in.

### 3. Approaching the Other

To approach the other within a shared discourse, which can very well be lopsided by choice, one needs to lay themselves bare facing the other. The very nature of being touched, known, and possibly altered by the other requires a certain level of vulnerability. Levinas (2003a) makes a brilliant combination between vulnerability and the egoistic temperament of the human being. “The ego from top to toe and to the very marrow is vulnerability” (p. 63). If one ever sets out to approach the other, stand before the other, and desire the other, one is bound to admit that it is their very ego that initiates the journey in the first place. In its very origin human being’s desire to be fulfilled through encountering the other is to satisfy the ego. And satisfying the ego is merely to take place through practicing one’s vulnerability before the other. It is then, and only then, that Marianne truly welcomes the other, that the game begins with all its hazards and cruelties. Levinas (2003 a) discusses the parameters of vulnerability and its consequences:

... in vulnerability lies a relation to the other that is not exhausted by causality, a relation prior to all affection by the stimulus. The identity of the self does not set limits to submission, not even the least resistance that matters “in potential” opposes the form that invests it. Vulnerability is obsession by others or approach to others. It is for the others from behind the other of the stimulus. (p. 64)

Marianne’s vulnerability towards Connell is not of the sort one might appreciate or even consider healthy, yet, it follows Levinas’s pattern: “He unzipped his black puffer jacket and put it over her shoulders. They were standing were close. She would have lain on the ground and let him walk over her body if he wanted, he knows that” (p. 34). Marianne’s vulnerability is not a result of Connell’s codes of conduct towards her, rather it is the utmost degree of laying bare she wishes to display.

Along with vulnerability, Levinas (2003 a.) discusses the component of sincerity: “Sincerity exposes –unto wounding. The active ego returns to the passivity of the self” (p. 64) In the case of Deronda and Gwendolen, the vulnerability and utmost sincerity Levinas praises are hard to comprehend. Gwendolen’s family misfortune leads her to betray Mrs.

Glasher's trust, objectify Malinger Grandcourt, accept his hand, and marry him. Gwendolen is very well aware that Deronda's moral standards would look down on her because of this decision, and thus she decides to hope for his ignorance of the matter: "Could he know of Mrs. Glasher? If he knew that she knew, he would despise her; but he could have no such knowledge. Would he, without that, despise her for marrying Grandcourt?" (p. 275). Gwendolen is in no way sincere towards the other, nor is she laying herself bare as an interlude to her possible vulnerability.

Deronda in return practices no sincerity towards Gwendolen either. He never declares his urge to know the other, let alone know her through his utmost objectivity. His moral lectures are the only tokens Gwendolen takes out of their brief and pretentious encounters. Even at the moment of self-doubting, Deronda rejects facing himself and his pure intentions towards Gwendolen. He does all there is in his mental power to avoid doubting himself and his simplistic, reductionistic judgment of the other. In his contemplation, he decides:

What is the use of it all? I can't do anything to help her- nobody can, if she has found out her mistake already. And it seems to me that she has a dreary lack of ideas that might help her. Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh like that might be, wrapped round with fine raiment, her ears pierced for gems, her head held loftily, her mouth all smiling pretence, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things. But what do I know of her? There may be a demon in her to match the worst husband for what I can tell. She was clearly an ill-educated worldly girl: perhaps she is a coquette. (p. 342)

To accept the other, to step within the realm of a relationship -whether of the romantic nature between Connell and Marianne, or the ill-intentioned obscure one between Gwendolen and Daniel-, requires the participants to define its parameters both explicitly and implicitly. No matter how self-aware and mutually-aware the participants are, the necessity of the existence of a mutual space that defines several situations is undeniable. Each situation, in turn, brings with itself its dimensions, the freedoms, the bounding, the obedience and its absence, the cruelties and their acceptance or rejections, and so forth.

#### **4. Friends.. There Is No Friend**

##### **Power, Domination..**

Living in a small town in Ireland, Connell is in no need of self-legitimizing. He is athletic, well-mannered, belongs to the honest lower social class, and his decency has thus far turned him into a commonly acceptable persona. On the other hand, Marianne lack all of those. Rooney (2018) states: "She has no friends and spends her lunchtimes alone reading novels" (p. 2). On the one hand, her not belonging, not being let in the popularity circle is giving her a certain level of power and superiority over the rest, and on the other, she is a complete outsider, whom everybody despises. "He dreads being left alone with her like this, but he also finds himself fantasizing about things he could say to impress her" (p. 3). The sort of power, the ability to impress Marianne that Connell is building in his fantasies, is of another nature, completely different from the ones that have been established and practiced during his lifetime in Carricklea.

The power struggle equilibrium has already been established. Marianne has the upper hand in their private life, and Connell in the public manifestation, with a significant imbalance. In the public domain of the power struggle, Marianne is not even authorized to play the game. The extent to which one allows their potential power to play a role in the face of the other is greatly dependent on the other. Marianne, for instance, practices her inevitable power -of the intellectual sort- over Connell regardless of what Connell might or might not do in return. It is the sort that is practiced in a situation as Lovett defines as a "parametric situation" (Lovett, 2012, p. 36). It is a situation where power is practiced in an area of pure harmony. Marianne has the resources to practice that sort of domination over Connell: "Maybe she wants to force him to blush as a sadistic display of power, but that wouldn't be like her" (p. 118). She withdraws mainly because it does not suit her. She has deliberately opened up to conversion.

On the other hand, in the case of Gwendolen and Malinger Grandcourt, the two explicitly and intentionally practice their power in the hope of domination of the other. "Gwendolen conceived that after marriage she would most probably be able to manage him thoroughly" (p. 112). And in return Grandcourt: "He meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man" (p. 263). Thus, the two Grandcourts willingly and consciously create a "strategic situation" in Lovett's terminology. He defines this sort of context as: "Whenever what we want to do, if we are going to be rational, depends in part on what others are likely to do, this is called a strategic situation" (Lovett, 2012, p. 34).

Power is never practiced in a vacuum. Malinger Grandcourt and Marianne, coming from a higher social class, Deronda coming from a moral background, Collin's high potentials for morality and sincerity enable them to establish certain roots of power in the dynamics of relationships. And along with power, forms a certain model of domination. Max Weber (2013) defines domination as: "the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (p. 53). Once Daniel resorts to occasional brief visits he pays Gwendolen after her unfortunate

marriage to give her moral sermons, once Marianne smiles at Connell to welcome him to the snobbish society of the rich in Dublin the power equilibrium with a dynamic domination flow has been established.

Instantly, unbelievably Marianne's face breaks into a gigantic smile, exposing her crooked front teeth. She's wearing lipstick. Everyone's watching her now. She had been speaking, but she'd stopped to stare at him. (p. 72)

What Marianne does, instantly stopping the flow of life to look at Connell, to decenter herself and center Connell instead in less than a minute of real life's time is not only establishing her domination but also handing it to the other at the same time.

Individuals no doubt can always opt for leaving rather than remaining in a relationship with domination. However, in the case of Gwendolen, the giving into Grandcourt's domination over her is to save her life and that of her sisters and mother. In the case of Daniel, however, Gwendolen's life is certainly not dependent on him in the materialistic sense of the word. Nonetheless, since she has lost the liking herself, she is in dire need of being recognized and validated in the other's eyes in the typical effortless manner of hers: "I wish he could know everything about me without my telling him. I wish he knew that I am not so compatible as he thinks me –that I am in deep trouble, and want to be something better if I could" (p. 357). And a few pages ahead addressing Daniel: "... it shall be better with me because I have known you" (p. 376).

To decide to carry on with the possible and practical domination for parties involved in a relationship is very much affected by the degree to which their essential needs are dependent on the other. Lovett (2012) seems to have summarized a basic and at the same time awfully neglected fact: "Exiting a friendship is (usually) much easier than exiting marriage, and exiting a marriage today is (usually) much easier than exiting a marriage that was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century" (p. 38). As was the case with Gwendolen, and the otherwise with Daniel, since he never hesitated to exit his relationship with Gwendolen.

The same question concerns Marianne and Connell. Connell's first practical exiting came about when he decided not to invite Marianne to the debs back in high school graduation party to save face in his social circle. This set Marianne off and the inevitable exiting thus was brought about in the decision made by one party, rather than both. A couple of years later, after their reunion in Dublin, when Connell cannot afford to spend the summer in Dublin and drastically needs Marianne to let him stay with her, Marianne's extreme respect and distance and the inevitable respect for the other unintentionally push her in the arena of decision making for the two of them. She is more than respectful towards Connell and as bare and naked as it comes that unaware of Connell returning the domination wheel to her, resubmits it to the other, for it is Connell to decide.

Connell: It looks like I won't be able to pay rent up here this summer.

Marianne: What?

Connell: I'm going to have to move out of Niall's place.

Marianne: When?

Connell: Pretty soon. Next week maybe.

Marianne: Oh, you'll be going home then.

He rubbed at his breastbone then, feeling short of breath. Looks like it, yeah, he said. (p. 123)

Connell has lost the security and the warmth of Carricklea thanks to indulging in Marianne's discourse, letting her plan his future for him. He is in Trinity College Dublin now, the power pyramid is completely overturned. He is the one with no friends, no recognition, or respect. "In the evenings he stays late in the library, reading assigned texts, novels, works of literary criticism. Not having friends to eat with, he reads over lunch" (p. 68). His thoughts about the offspring of Marianne's power over his future, the future that is now his present are not intriguing in any way. He is disgusted by people he is surrounded with: "they were coming into college every day to have heated debates about books they had never read" (p. 68). As a result of accepting Marianne's power, Connell is now familiar with a new discourse. Foucault believes that power produces knowledge.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.(Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

My intention is certainly not to emphasize what Foucault determines "good", yet, the productive result of power and its potential to produce knowledge, discourse, and pleasure. In the case of Gwendolen and Deronda, Gwendolen as I

mentioned before, seeks validation for her existence once she realizes her self-centeredness and cruelty have got her a safe materialistic life and a completely lost soul. And the realization strikes her once she has revolted against Grandcourt's power, that is when she commits murder.

I wished him to be dead. And yet it terrified me. I was two creatures. I could not speak –I wanted to kill- it was as strong as thirst- and then directly- I felt beforehand I had done something dreadful, unalterable- that would make me like an evil spirit. (p. 574)

Although Gwendolen is still far from grasping the degree of her evil spirit, the decision she made against Malinger's power, the new discourse –that of murder- and the novel possibility of killing another being are all among what she accomplished to add to her merely victimized image of herself. She is now an accomplished villain in contrast with the dubious dual image of a victim/immoral human being she depicted of herself.

Thereby, she is now ready to submit herself to a new discourse, that of Deronda, however, with the intention of being pardoned a murderer that she is now. Interestingly, the wings of power she wishes to nest under do not turn out to be what she has hoped for. Once she realizes she will not have Deronda to herself, she clings to the left-over of the evil soul she is and protects herself materialistically once more –inheriting Grandcourt's fortune in spite of murdering him with Deronda's permission and blessings-. Gwendolen resorts to believing in the not-necessarily-evil image Daniel draws of her. "I shall remember your words –every one of them. I shall remember what you believe about me; I shall try" (p. 642). Gwendolen takes pleasure in being once again saved and validated by another being, specifically by Deronda. Nevertheless, as power is of an ever-changing balance in nature, the consequently produced discourse follows certain alterations. The moment Gwendolen realized that Daniel is a Jew, the center of the discourse gets decentered. "A Jew!, Gwendolen exclaimed, in a low tone of amazement, with an utterly frustrated look, as if some confusing potion were creeping through her system" (p. 668). She has no intention, nor the capacity to continue residing in a Derondean-centered discourse.

Similarly, Connell seeks validation from Marianne. Him, being too cowardly to admit that he had made a mistake, abandoning Marianne back in Carriclea –not inviting her to Debs, worrying about his social status- lies in wait for Marianne to practice the newly-founded power she now possesses in Dublin. She comes from the right social class, smart and well-read, it is Marianne, the popular one between the two in Dublin. And when Marianne talks about their sex-life back in high school in a nonchalant manner, he feels relieved: "... in a way he likes it, he likes knowing how to act around her" (p. 78). Marianne's not holding grudges against Connell establishes a new discourse. It allows Connell to forgive himself and grants him the pleasure of being around her and "knowing how to act".

Foucault (1980) defines the mechanisms of the ever-present power.

..power is always already there. That one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what. (pp. 141-142)

The issue of turning the friend into the transcendental being, relieving oneself of the responsibility of being in the center, practicing the power, producing the discourse, or else letting discourse and pleasure be produced in spite of your power is of a dynamic nature. It is never established once and forever.

Months into Connell and Marianne's relationship in Dublin, Connell requests a naked picture from Marianne, creating a new discourse she was not familiar with: "He explained briefly the politics of naked pictures, not showing them to people, deleting them on request, and so on.." (p. 112). Consequently, Marianne wants one from Connell in return, which gets vetoed instantly, as if in the discourse of exchanging naked pictures that would be an anomaly.

Although power is a constantly-slipping entity, the concept of justice in friendship seems to be a clear phenomenon. Aristotle defines justice in friendship: "When men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just, they need friendship as well, and the trust from justice is thought to be a friendly quality" (Crisp, 2000, 1155a25).

Concerning justice between Gwendolen and Deronda, the conclusions seem to have been drawn years ago. Wheeler (1999) remarks: "Deronda's happiness in his impending marriage to Mirah makes him aware that Gwendolen is the victim of his happiness, and they part" (p. 154). However, might one recall any promise of marriage to Gwendolen on the part of Deronda? The response is absolutely negative, however, the sort of justice Aristotle speaks of lies not among our calculating-mathematical converses and attitudes. He speaks of justice beyond justice that is necessitated in a friendship. Derrida (1997) further comments on Aristotle: "But if friendship is above justice –juridical, political, and moral– it is therefore also immediately the most just. Justice beyond justice" (p. 278).

I would have to disagree with Wheeler, condemning Deronda's injustice towards Gwendolen, simply as their friendship is in question. To decide whether one is a victim of the other's happiness; in other words, to hold the other responsible

sounds extremely intertwined with the nature and parameters of the relationship. What is extremely heartbreaking is the friendship that was never fabricated between Deronda and Gwendolen. And along with it, the sermons Gwendolen's being and liking of herself depended on seem to trigger nothing in the contemporary consciousness but the urge to save oneself, rather than what Derrida calls "equality". Derrida (1997) defines equality in friendship: "... equality is not only a representation, an intellectual concept, a calculable measure, a statistical objectivity; it bears within itself a feeling of obligation, hence the sensibility of duty, debt, gratitude" (p. 260). The sense of duty Derrida is in favor of, clearly does not manifest itself in what Deronda and Gwendolen manage to accomplish, and they are not to blame, as they never embarked on establishing "a common space" (Irigaray, 2004, pp. 29-30). Irigaray necessitates in the realm of friendship. From the moment of encounter, although Gwendolen's curiosity is triggered towards Daniel, and Deronda seems to be fond of her as he manages to save her from losing a family inheritance, the two are extremely persistent in defining each other. The curiosity never lasts, the palpable practice of knowing the other does not take place. The two sides of the equilibrium are eager to categorize the other under the already established labels. Irigaray (2004) once again clarifies: "If you are this or that for me, I am no longer free to dialogue with you" (p. 74). Gwendolen and Daniel do not manage to free themselves from their low-ceilinged world to truly see the other and dialogue with the other. Hence, the equality and responsibility towards the other remain at their farthest margins, that is, a responsibility towards a neighbor rather than a friend.

Levinas, on the other hand, speaks of a responsibility that encircles Derrida's equality, Irigaray's transcendence of the other, and furthers the concept towards the creation of an aura of timelessness.

Responsibility for the other, responding to the other's death, vows itself to an alterity that is no longer within the province of representation. This way of being avowed—or this devotion—is time. It remains a relationship to the other as other, and not the reduction of other to the same. It is transcendence. (Levinas, 2003b, p. 115)

To avoid the hazard of reducing the other to the same, Levinas believes the alternative factor of time is conducive. The setting where friendship occurs, no doubt is affected by the alterity of time. And alterity of time gives birth to the alterity of the other constantly. To remain truly responsible towards the other, one has no departure, but to constantly respond to the element of time. And the journey does not end at the point of the other's death, on the contrary, it goes on. In Connell's case, he would rather die than to be the friend who stays alive: "He has sincerely wanted to die, he has never sincerely wanted Marianne to forget about him, that's the only part of himself he wants to protect. The part that exists inside her" (p. 248).

And that is why Aristotle values those who remain alive and loving after the friend's death: "It is for this reason that we praise those who continue to love their dead ones for they know but are not known" (Derrida, 1997, 263).

The alterity of the other, in whatever shape it manifests itself, whether the alterity of character, their departure, or death prevails the utmost degree of responsibility. As then, one truly recognizes the other as a transcendental being, on the verge of change—to whatever degree aforementioned—and one assigns themselves to respond to the constant changes within the frame of time, that is, the timelessness of the friendship, thereby, alterity takes place in its broadest sense.

Connell and Marianne's reciprocal responsibility towards alterity manifests itself at several stages. Although it requires keeping a certain distance from the other, the integrity of the other is decidedly preserved. Connell owes his education in Trinity to Marianne's outsmarting him in recognition of him from a distance and from within. Were it not for Marianne, who decided he has the intellectual capacity to excel, he would at best educate himself in a local college. Moreover, his immoral act of abandoning Marianne at Debs and Marianne's intentional and deliberate silence back then and afterward leaves Connell in a space to grow in whatever direction he intends, although in the end, it is in the direction Marianne is pleased with: "Hopefully, I have changed, you know, as a person, But honestly, if I have, it's because of you" (p. 92). The alterity of one, of course, embraces the other with the totality of their effect, as a completely separate "alter ego" of the other is involved.

... in the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship—that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneousness. The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not... because of the Other's very alterity. (Levinas, 2003a, p. 83)

And the alterity refines its effect through practicing sincerity and vulnerability alongside, for otherwise, the alterity lacks exhibiting its potentials: "The corner of the label peels off Connell's beer bottle now, It comes off more easily when the bottle is very cold because the condensation dissolves the glue" (p. 96). The condensation thus is an utterly crucial component of alterity at its best.

Further on, when Marianne surrounds herself with malevolent friendships and romantic relationships, Connell's

responsibility towards her remains intact while welcoming Marianne's alterity and transcendence. He remains a witness to her alterity and suggests: "You should be with someone who takes you seriously" (p. 114). at which they both laugh. And a few months ahead, still living in Dublin, not sharing an exclusive relationship, the space where the other remains in an alternate state thrives. However, within the same parameters of the relationship, the two are not indifferent towards each other, as "She loves to be alone with him like this. It makes her life seem very manageable suddenly" (p. 114). For Connell lets her be with her total alterity. And similarly, inevitably keeping a distance from Marianne, building the safe space beside her for her to exist with her alterity and vulnerability, he obliges himself to practice just as much laying bare: "He looks back at the screen then, so she feels at liberty to study his face in detail. He probably notices she's doing this, but politely says nothing about it" (p. 147).

Throughout the whole narrative of *Daniel Deronda*, the most eminent display of responsibility for the other occurs when Daniel approves of Gwendolen's being guilty of murder, approves of her right to live, to become a better version of herself, and to continue spending her late husband's wealth. To the contemporary reader, it is blatantly naïve that an adult clears their conscience as if they have not committed any bigotry. Shockingly though, that is how Gwendolen survives, and she owes this unethical survival to Daniel's more crude responsibility to the other's alterity and immorality.

The responsibility Marianne takes in regards to Connell is, by a large margin, above the others in the novels under scrutiny. Once the narrative is about to end, it is Marianne who dares to bring the resolution to the friendship. Connell has every blessing of his life thanks to Marianne and he is conscientious enough to admit that, to want to be nowhere but alongside Marianne. She is to either keep him captive to her and –which is to his own very delight- for the future and limit the channel of alterity, or else to let him go despite everything and in favor of the other's transcendence and alterity.

What they have now they can never have back again. But for her, the pain of loneliness will be nothing to the pain that she used to feel, of being unworthy... They've done a lot of good for each other. Really, she thinks, really. People can really change one another. (Rooney, 2018, p. 266)

Marianne decides Connell is to leave Dublin for New York, as the privilege of having known him has long ago equipped her with enough wisdom to recognize the totality of the other even when the other cannot do so himself. Needless to mention, Connell himself, does not capacitate the power to decide, to shoulder the responsibility towards the other, alterity of the self and the other.

## 5. Conclusion

The present comparative study on *Normal People* and *Daniel Deronda* adopted a philosophical attitude towards human beings in the proximity of the other. Friendship in our era is no longer a novel concept when considered from psychological, philosophical, and epistemological perspectives. However, the extent to which the friendship demands from its participants to lay themselves bare and to display their vulnerability was put under scrutiny in this paper. Approaching the other in the name of friendship in the aforementioned novels was studied through the viewpoints of various contemporary thinkers. Consequently, I aimed to shed some light on how a certain number of factors define the quality and palpability of a given friendship, in this case, Connell and Marianne's in contrast with that of Deronda and Gwendolen.

Do not think of me sorrowfully on your wedding-day. I have remembered your words- that I may live to be one of the best women.. if it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me.. it shall be better with me because I have known you. (Eliot, 1876, p. 747)

For if we are to put our trust in Gwendolen's prosperity in the future, it is as she claims for she has known Deronda. For she is given to the nostalgic aspect of friendship, and "What does the friend's nostalgia reveal? That we wish to believe in the other, because we want, in vain, to believe in ourselves" (Derrida, 1997, p. 281).

The paper attempted to manifest the quality of being courageous enough to lay oneself bare in the face of the other, of being egoistical to approach the other with the totality of one's vulnerability, and of letting the other be their utmost irreducible transcendence is the "ecstatic involvement in the world", is "existence"<sup>1</sup> and of handing the power to a friend to bring the ecstatic to life: "It is in Connell's power to make her happy.." (Rooney, 2018, p. 106)

Friendship is never a present given, it belongs to the experience of expectation, promise or engagement. Its discourse is that of prayer, it inaugurates, but reports (co-state) nothing, it is not satisfied with what it is, it moves out to this place where a responsibility opens up a future. (Schmitt, 1932, p. 236).

<sup>1</sup> See Levinas on Heidegger, *Humanism of the Other*.

The future is a promised in the realm of friendship. The attempt is well proposed in the final passage of Rooney's work: He brought her goodness like a gift and now it belongs to her. Meanwhile, his life opens out before him in all directions at once. They've done a lot of good for each other. Really, she thinks, really. People can really change one another. You should go, she says. I'll always be here. You know that. (p. 266)

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