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ALIENATION, THERAPEUTIC CAPITALISM, AND THE RECOVERY OF SPECIES-BEING IN GAIL HONEYMAN'S ELEANOR OLIPHANT IS COMPLETELY FINE

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a Marxist interpretation of Gail Honeyman's debut novel *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* (2017), demonstrating how its much-celebrated story of "recovery" makes most sense not as private psychological healing but as a nascent, ambivalent undoing of capitalist alienation. A qualitative close reading from within a Marxist critical context, this study will focus on the novel's recovery arc – episodes in which the protagonist is confronted with the sister's death (Marianne), creates a home, and gains capacity for feeling - and read Eleanor as a model of late capitalist reified and atomized subjectivity. Utilizing classical Marxian categories, alienated labour, species being, Lukács reification, Adorno and Horkheimer / Marcuse (culture industry, false needs, Althusser (ISAs), and contemporary critics of neo-liberal subjectivity, this article argues that Eleanor's loneliness is textually represented as a structural, not personal, problem. Her turn towards what Marx terms *Gattungswesen*, a non-instrumental, sensual, human relation with Raymond, Glen the cat, and the dying Sammy, represents a reclaiming of the de-alienated human. However, the therapeutic ending of the novel simultaneously re-privatizes what amounts to a collective wound through its reduction to personal recovery. Situating this central tension within Fisher's discussion of capitalist realism and stress privatization, the article concluded that Honeyman's novel diagnoses but itself succumbs to the very ideology it uncovers.

Keywords: Marxist literary criticism; alienation; reification; therapeutic capitalism; capitalist realism; contemporary British fiction.