

The background features a complex network of white circular nodes connected by thin purple lines. The nodes are scattered across the frame, with some forming larger, more interconnected clusters. The background color transitions from a deep purple at the top to a bright pink at the bottom. The title 'Normal People' is centered in the upper half of the image.

Normal People

Written by Sally Rooney

Published by sanmarco-sf

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Normal People

By Sally Rooney

Normal People Book Review

At school Connell and Marianne pretend not to know each other. He's popular and well-adjusted, star of the school soccer team while she is lonely, proud, and intensely private. But when Connell comes to pick his mother up from her housekeeping job at Marianne's house, a strange and indelible connection grows between the two teenagers—one they are determined to conceal.

Normal People Scare Me

A year later, theyâ€™re both studying at Trinity College in Dublin. Marianne has found her feet in a new social world while Connell hangs at the sidelines, shy and uncertain. Throughout their years in college, Marianne and Connell circle one another, straying toward other people and possibilities but always magnetically, irresistibly drawn back together. Then, as she veers into self-destruction and he begins to search for meaning elsewhere, each must confront how far they are willing to go to save the other.

Normal People Review

Sally Rooney brings her brilliant psychological acuity and perfectly spare prose to a story that explores the subtleties of class, the electricity of first love, and the complex entanglements of family and friendship.

No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought, go running in the other direction, depend on people for everything, allow them to depend on you, why not.

This is going to be a polarizing book. I mean, I think I liked it. And I say "liked it" in the sense that it made me very miserable. It is a quiet character study, almost a YA novel but not quite, and it is a profoundly lonely and depressing love story.

I didn't begin by liking it. Normal People No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought, go running in the other direction, depend on people for everything, allow them to depend on you, why not.

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I didn't begin by liking it. Normal People follows two characters - Marianne and Connell - through adolescence and into early adulthood, and they begin by being the kind of uber-precocious teenagers who read Proust and Marx for fun. It took a while for me to settle into their story. My initial impression was that this was going to be some kind of John Green for adults, which is not something that floats my particular boat.

Without fully realizing it though, this book had crept quietly under my skin. The relationship between Marianne and Connell is angsty, sure, but it felt painfully real. They are so flawed, marred by unlikable characteristics, and yet, I could not stop caring about them.

Not for the first time Marianne thinks cruelty does not only hurt the victim, but the perpetrator also, and maybe more deeply and more permanently. You learn nothing very profound about yourself simply by being bullied; but by bullying someone else you learn something you can never forget.

The story is really just about the two of them and their relationship. In high school, Marianne is a smart and wealthy girl, but is socially ostracized and emotionally abused at home, whereas Connell is working class, but very popular. Connell's mum works as a cleaner for Marianne's family. They begin a secret sexual relationship that falls apart when Connell fears his friends will find out. The compelling dynamic between them drives the story-- issues of class and social status cause much conflict.

In college, the two meet again. This time, Marianne is popular, and Connell is feeling increasingly depressed. The two of them lean on each other time and again as they move through a social world filled with social expectations. There's a bit of a When Harry Met Sally vibe, except that this book is more

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soul-destroying.

Nothing had meant more to Rob than the approval of others; to be thought well of, to be a person of status. He would have betrayed any confidence, any kindness, for the promise of social acceptance. There's clear criticism of our constant need to impress and perform for others in a world that grows ever more connected. Much of the tragedy that befalls Marianne and Connell is caused by other people, peer pressure and social expectations. It is very sad to think that someone might give up who they love the most because they can't deal with how it makes them look to others.

The pair's inability to adequately communicate is frustrating but feels realistic. I was on the verge of tearing my hair out at all the things left unsaid in this book, but I think it was a good kind of frustration. The kind that comes from caring too much.

I feel like there are any number of reasons I could have hated Normal People, but I didn't. I actually kinda loved it. It's a weird, awkward, depressing novel about a connection formed between two very different people who find exactly what they need - and perhaps a lot that they don't - in each other.

CW: sexual assault; domestic abuse; drug use; casual racism (called out); depression; anxiety; suicide & suicidal ideation.

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Normal People Scare Me Shirt

Sally Rooney is the real deal

Normal People has been lavished with praise from critics, longlisted for the Man Booker prize and is apparently being adapted for television by the BBC. And it only came out last week!

All that attention will no doubt attract quite a few readers who would not ordinarily touch this subject matter with a barge pole. Because this book:

- A) Is about young people
- B) Is a love story (but not a 'romance')
- C) Contains a fair bit of sex (which is crucial to the story, btw, and is Sally Rooney is the real deal)

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- C) Contains a fair bit of sex (which is crucial to the story, btw, and is not graphic)

All of which (possibly also the fact that the author is a 27-year-old woman) mean that Normal People will inevitably be dismissed by some as frivolous. It isn't. This is a confident, accomplished and serious work.

Of Rooney's debut, *Conversations with Friends*, I said in my review it "occasionally scrapes close to the bone". Well, *Normal People* cuts to the core.

Normal People is not out to inspire, instruct, entertain or talk down to anyone, which makes it something of a refreshing anomaly in current fiction about young people. It is a novel (for anyone, young or old) that simply presents the truth of youthful experiences without the filters of nostalgia or sentimentality. It invites you to inhabit the psyche of someone else — two someone elses: Connell and Marianne — to identify with them and to feel their pain and turmoil. For the reader who connects to that, it is wracking.

The story focuses only on the pivotal moments for these two characters, jumping forward three weeks, six months, or five minutes, as needed, to excise all the uneventful bits of life and leave us with the most emotionally intense supercut possible. It follows them from high school in a small town, through

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their years at university in Dublin, as the dynamic between them shifts with their surroundings and social circle. They're not officially 'together' the whole time, or even most of the time, but they always figure in each other's lives in a significant way.

Sally Rooney writes with such precision that this all feels painfully true. She conjures the tension and emotion in a scene just from the way someone wrings out a dish sponge; she conveys the full weight of feeling from a look or a shrug. In Rooney's imagining, Connell and Marianne as separate entities are less important than the interplay between them – their relationship dynamic and the influence each of them has on shaping the other, that's the real stuff of this book:

"How strange to feel herself so completely under the control of another person, but also how ordinary. No one can be independent of other people completely, so why not give up the attempt, she thought, go running in the other direction, depend on people for everything, allow them to depend on you, why not."

There's irony here, and self-conscious posturing (not nearly as much as in CWF), but earnestness, truth and kindness as well. In addition to the central relationship are issues of class and intellectual integrity. It's a particularly astute look at the rebuild of self that teenagers undergo in the transition from school to uni, how it allows some to thrive while others stumble, and in some ways is just an illusion after all.

So there's hype and there's backlash to the hype, and Normal People is sure to resonate powerfully with some readers and not at all for others. If you like a minutely observed novel about people and feelings that isn't mawkish, I'd say give it a go. ...more

Goddamit Sally Rooney and now I'm crying.

Normal People Scare Me Hoodie

Man Booker prize long list nominee and Costa book awards nominee This is a book that has many admirers and sadly it didn't work for me and while I would love to agree with all the judges on this one I only struggled to the end because it was a bookclub read. It is difficult to go against the grain on a book that is nominated for so many awards. So as always you need to judge for yourself because books fit people differently

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Quite simply this book didn't Fit Me. I really have no interest in reading about 18-20 something year college kid's on/off sexual relationships where they seem to only exist in their own little complex bubble and this book felt like a bubble. It is described as "exquisite love stroy" which I honestly found nothing exquisite or no love in this one.

The characters of Connell and Marianne were dislikable and boring and the on / off, will they wont they "relationship" became repetitive reading. The only character which I liked and felt any connection with in the novel was Lorraine.

Perhaps this is more suited for a younger audience where they connect with the college scene or for readers who like complex relationship stories but for me this was a struggle from start to finish.

...more

I am not sure how to write this review because I seem to be so far beyond the pale on my antipathy to this book. In simplest terms I didn't connect with this work at all and I would be best to chalk this up to a "reader/writer" mismatch and move on but I will try and articulate some of my reading experience.

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Some of my perplexity with Normal People is that I just couldn't relate to the twenty something, highly educated, politically aware and cynical young adults that populate this novel. I am not sure how reflective these voices are of young Irish making their way in the world, but as presented here I found them exasperating to listen to and not particularly nuanced.

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It is possible that even if I didn't enjoy the novel I might like the writing but in actual fact Rooney's style is perhaps the single biggest thing that bugged me. I found some passages of interest sandwiched between a lot of wooden dialogue and these flat descriptions ...

Marianne goes inside and comes back out again with another bottle of sparkling wine, and one bottle of red. Niall starts unwrapping the wire on the first bottle and Marianne hands Connell a corkscrew. Peggy starts clearing people's plates. Connell unpeels the foil from the top of a bottle as Jamie leans over and says something to Marianne. He sinks the screw into the cork and twists it downwards. Peggy takes his plate away and stacks it with the others

This kind of writing really gives me nothing.

Others have cited the two dimensional nature of her secondary characters and I would concur. Barely any of them made much of an impression on me. Alan - Marianne's brother, seemed particularly badly drawn. He appears to be a key part of understanding Marianne and yet he warrants only a few pen-strokes of unexplained malice and cruelty. The opening of a wine-bottle and pouring of cups of tea receives much more page space.

I tried to understand Marianne, who seems to be both ugly and beautiful, popular and friendless. Her hinted at troubled family life was suppose to underpin her need to be a submissive. I remain unconvinced that this is really how dominance and submission works and I would think experts in BDSM might strongly take issue with some of the cliches here.

The relationship between Marianne and Connell should have kept this book afloat at the very least. The intense emotional and physical connection, the will they / won't they stay together, all the drama of YA love is here but it is in an eye-wateringly navel-gazing form. I found it all exactingly po-faced. The number of inexplicable break-ups, largely based on mis-communication was about three or four break-ups too many for me. I just wanted to yell at this novel most of the time. Say what you mean and stop being so insufferably difficult !, either split up or stay together, both your friends and I really don't care !. Marianne and Connell were of most interest to me when they started emailing each other, discussing novels and politics thus preventing them breaking up over some new emotional minutiae. Perhaps this should have been a novel of their email exchanges.

Oh well, I guess I will never be a Rooney fan and I have doubtless missed the point of this book entirely but that is ok not every book is for every reader. ...more

Normal People Sally

On the second page of Sally Rooney's universally acclaimed, Booker- longlisted novel is the following paragraph:

“He puts his hands in his pockets and suppresses an irritable sigh, but suppresses it with an audible intake of breath, so that it still sounds like a sigh.”

What?

I get the hand in the pockets bit, but how the hell does the rest of it work? A sigh is an exhalation and I have no idea how any attempt to suppress a sigh by inhaling could possibly sound like one. I've tried hard to imagine On the second page of Sally Rooney's universally acclaimed, Booker- longlisted novel is the following paragraph:

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I get the hand in the pockets bit, but how the hell does the rest of it work? A sigh is an exhalation and I have no idea how any attempt to suppress a sigh by inhaling could possibly sound like one. I've tried hard to imagine it, but no luck. I've tried even harder to do it, but even less luck. In fact, in an effort to understand this twaddle I have tried it so often that I have come close on several occasions to hyperventilating and passing out.

What have those Faber editors been doing? Maybe they have no problem with it because they are all so much cleverer than me and know how to read properly. Or maybe they also tried to do it and actually did pass out, which might explain why they have failed to apply the editorial pencil with any intelligence in the 264 pages that follow.

The more likely explanation, of course, is that the problem is mine “ and I offer the following gems from Normal People on that understanding!

“ He looks down into his lap, and exhales quickly, almost like a cough.”

It's hyperventilation time again. I've imagined it and I've tried it, but I still don't get it.

“ He can't even visually imagine himself as a lawyer, wearing a tie and so on..”

Do we really need that “visually”?

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It's true she is Connell's type, maybe even the ordinary model of the type:

Ordinary? What does that mean? Am I the only one who had to look it up? (It's not in Chambers, by the way, so you'll need the OED)

Peggy, watching, took a performatively large mouthful of Cointreau!

Can anyone explain what "performatively large" actually means?

Enraged now, Alan wrenched her back from the sink by her upper arm, and, seemingly spontaneously, spat at her.

Seemingly spontaneously?

I could go on. It's not often that I feel the need to read with a pencil in my hand but Normal People drove me to it, and my copy is now covered with question marks and annotations. I retired from teaching last year but reading Sally Rooney's debut novel felt like I was marking again - in this case marking the work of a precocious, but overindulged, talent.

In 'Normal People' alternating points of view are combined with an inconsistent and confusing authorial presence, voices are often difficult to differentiate in an ineffectual free indirect style, the comma splices (Ferrante this isn't) and the unpunctuated dialogue, far from creating an impressionistic flow, suggest a lack of precision, and the prose shifts from past to present for no apparent reason and even within paragraphs, creating a chronological blur. In short, it's a bit of a mess.

If I cared about the characters or cared about the story, these things would not matter quite so much but on the few occasions when I saw through the writerly mess I found it difficult to care about them at all.

The novel, though, has been so well received that its very reception has become a news story.

"Salinger for the Snapchat generation": critics unite to praise 27 year-old novelist was the headline in last Saturday's Guardian.

So the problem is clearly mine.

Maybe I've read a different book from the one everyone is raving about. Maybe I've read the same book but don't know how to read properly. Or it could be that I'm the child's voice at the back of the crowd politely suggesting that the emperor might not be wearing any clothes. ...more

3.5 stars.

Sally Rooney's upcoming novel *Normal People* almost felt like a puzzle, in that you didn't really know

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what you were truly getting until all of the pieces came together. Beautifully written although a little slow in its pacing, it's a novel full of deep emotions, which made it difficult to read at times.

Connell and Marianne know each other from high school, although they pretend not to, plus his mother works as a cleaner for her family. Marianne is a bit of a laughing stock in school, 3.5 stars.

Sally Rooney's upcoming novel *Normal People* almost felt like a puzzle, in that you didn't really know what you were truly getting until all of the pieces came together. Beautifully written although a little slow in its pacing, it's a novel full of deep emotions, which made it difficult to read at times.

Connell and Marianne know each other from high school, although they pretend not to, plus his mother works as a cleaner for her family. Marianne is a bit of a laughing stock in school, mainly because she doesn't care what her classmates think of her. Connell is tremendously affected by what people think of him, so when a connection starts to grow between him and Marianne, and turns to something physical and even emotional, they keep it hidden, and he ignores her in school.

"At times he has the sensation that he and Marianne are like figure-skaters, improvising their discussions so adeptly and in such perfect synchronisation that it surprises them both. She tosses herself gracefully into the air, and each time, without knowing how he's going to do it, he catches her."

Marianne feels so intensely for Connell, and she is willing to let him possess her completely. He can't explain his feelings for Marianne, except that she thinks so highly of him, but he continues to fear what his peers would think if they knew what was going on. He winds up treating her badly, leaving her to deal with her own emotional distress.

One year later, both are studying at Trinity College in Dublin. Connell feels uneasy, no longer the popular fellow he was in high school, and has difficulty relating to his peers and fitting in. Marianne, on the other hand, is comfortable in this world, enjoying deep conversations about the political and economic issues facing society, and being looked at as an object of desire, not ridicule by her fellow students. No matter what other opportunities present themselves, the pair finds themselves drawn to each other once again, enjoying the way their interactions make them feel yet falling into the same patterns which cause friction.

"Marianne had a wildness that got into him for a while and made him feel that he was like her, that they had the same unnameable spiritual injury, and that neither of them could ever fit into the world. But he was never damaged like she was. She just made him feel that way."

Normal People follows Marianne and Connell through their time at college, through different relationships and the periodic circling back to one another, whether solely for friendship or something else. Each chapter, with a few exceptions, takes place a few months after the last one. But Marianne's penchant for self-destruction and Connell's inability to cope with the emotional stresses he faces leave them both unsure what their relationship should be and could be, if anything.

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Marianne's feeling she is unworthy of being loved without abuse or mistreatment, and the way she is treated by her family, boyfriends, and others, is very difficult to read about at times. Connell's bouts with depression are also quite painful to read, so at times this book felt very heavy, and its pacing seemed to move much slower than I would have liked. And like many books which focus on relationships, at times I wanted to shake both characters to make them say the things they wanted to, to each other and other people in their lives.

Despite the book's emotional turmoil, Rooney's writing is exceptional. There were so many passages beyond the two I've cited in this review that I read over and over again, marveling at her use of language and imagery. She definitely got me completely immersed in this book and these characters, even when things seemed particularly draining or moved slowly. *Normal People* is really affecting, and it will stick with me for a long time.

NetGalley and Crown Publishing provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com, or check out my list of the best books I read in 2018 at

<https://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-best-books-i-read-in-2018.html>. ...more

Normal People Scare Me Ahs

I wanted to like this book more than I did. How thrilling that the author hailed as "Salinger for the Snapchat generation" is Irish, and from my own province of Connacht at that. There are moments in this novel that would certainly back up such a bold claim. But I believe that she is a writer still honing her craft. Not quite the finished article just yet, but with all the potential to become a literary heavyweight.

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In the beginning we meet Connell and Marianne, two young people growing up the west of Ireland. Marianne comes from a wealthy family and Connell's mother Lorraine is a cleaner in their lavish house. At the start of the book, the pair are in their final year at school - Connell is a popular sports star while Marianne is a social outcast. They are close despite operating in completely different circles. Roles are reversed once they move to Dublin for college - Marianne falls in with a group who appreciate her wit and intelligence, and a taciturn Connell finds it difficult to make friends. The story follows their on-off relationship over the years - they go from being pals, to more than that, to who knows? They are a huge part of one another's lives, no matter what their romantic status.

Rooney is strong on the intricacies of relationships - how the influence of one person can shape another person's whole life, and how little misunderstandings can snowball into major heartbreak. At one point Connell discovers that becoming part of a couple can even validate one's existence: "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." She is also extremely perceptive about the journey from adolescence into adulthood, that point in your life where you fly the nest to take on the world and finally meet people with the same interests as yours - confident, excited and apprehensive all at once: "They were coming into college every day to have heated debates about books they had not read."

However, there were a couple of things that bugged me. For one, Marianne's family despise her, yet we are given no reason for this. The actions of her brother Alan, in particular, become more ridiculous as the story goes on, and without proper context they just feel ludicrous. And I'm afraid I found the dialogue quite flat at times. For two people like Marianne and Connell, who know each other so well, I kept thinking, is this how they would really speak to each other? Their exchanges are so earnest and dry. For example, there's one part where they are about to have sex after missing one other for so long, and the atmosphere is charged. They kiss. Marianne says that she wants this so much, and Connell goes: "It's really nice to hear you say that. I'm going to switch the TV off, if that's OK." The description of

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the scene makes it sound passionate but the conversation dulls its effect.

Maybe I'm nitpicking. There were many aspects of the book I really admired. It's just that when I see publications like The Guardian declaring Normal People a "future classic", I expect a bit more from it. I do think that Sally Rooney is massively talented, and her gifts of observation and empathy will serve her very well in her career. She may have the literary world at her feet right now, but I reckon her best work is yet to come. ...more

I have to admit I wasn't taken with Rooney's debut Conversations with Friends but I tried to read her second book with an open mind. The writing was good and some of the themes were interesting but I was rather bored by the selfabsorbed, cliché-characters: women who just want to 'get the man' and who always question their self-worth after a break-up, and men who are behaving as if they come straight out of a 'boys-will-be-boys'-movie. So 1950ies. And the ending is just plain cheesy.

2.5* (mainly I have to admit I wasn't taken with Rooney's debut Conversations with Friends but I tried to read her second book with an open mind. The writing was good and some of the themes were interesting but I was rather bored by the selfabsorbed, cliché-characters: women who just want to 'get the man' and who always question their self-worth after a break-up, and men who are behaving as if they come straight out of a 'boys-will-be-boys'-movie. So 1950ies. And the ending is just plain cheesy.

2.5* (mainly because the writing was good).

And not much has changed after the re-read in January 2019: Nope, I still don't get the hype... ...more

Normal People Amazon

Oooof. Alright - a disclaimer before I start. Normal People by Sally Rooney is superb. I'm gonna gush about this one (warning to those in the splash zone!) and I honestly feel that the less you know about it, the better the experience will be for you. So, to those of you who're thinking of reading it, don't bother with any reviews about the book - just read it. It's a contemporary story about a boy and a girl who fall in love. That's all you need to know. And when you're done, come back and we can

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!

Why did I begin with "Oooof"? Because I genuinely feel like I've been punched in the gut. Repeatedly. This is such an emotionally exhausting and draining read! Sally Rooney's created a remarkably compelling pair of characters in Marianne and Connell and I felt their love so intensely it was like I was experiencing it with them.

Which makes it sound like a romance, and it has some of those elements, but if it's anything it's a classic Bildungsroman (just a fancy word for "coming of age" story). Marianne is the awkward loner in high school, brainy but socially isolated. Connell is the good-looking popular boy, inexplicably drawn to Marianne - star football player falls for nerdy girl. The two begin seeing each other secretly - god, it sounds sooo fucking cheesy doesn't it? I promise you it's anything but. From there it's a rollercoaster of emotions as the characters grow and develop. I loved it pure and simple.

Here are some critiques to anyone who didn't enjoy the book: Marianne's brother Alan is a laughably one-dimensional villain. There's no plot (which is very typical of this type of story) - the story just starts and then ends. The occasional phrase feels hammy and clichéd (stuff like "so few people have what we have"). Connell is written as this genius but he does some super-dumb things - and if he is so brilliant, would he care so much what others thought of him? Also, given how unbelievably connected Connell and Marianne are on every conceivable level, the number of times they misunderstand one another seemingly purely for dramatic purposes could be seen as contrived as fuuuuck.

And, though I know almost nothing about Rooney, it feels like a very autobiographical novel - most young writers tend to write about themselves to start with, after all. She's a young Irish woman who went to Trinity College, Dublin, on a scholarship, like Marianne, and the novel ends with the characters in their mid-20s, which is the same age I suspect Rooney was when she stopped writing this (she's

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now 27 years old). In that regard you could say it's somewhat unimaginative.

Listen: none of that matters. I noticed those things and I didn't care. Because it's so well-written, so damn compelling, so enthralling and honest and real. If I gave this anything less than the highest possible rating, I'd be lying about how much I enjoyed this book.

It's also impressive that she didn't shy away from writing the sex scenes given how tricky they are to write with most writers publicly embarrassing themselves. She's such a confident and skilful writer already, at such a young age! - that she pulls them off admirably and, yes, sensuously.

If you've ever heard someone trying to convince someone else to start reading books, one of the points they'll make is that you get to live lives you never would. Most books do this on a superficial level but *Normal People* actually achieves this viscerally. This is one of those books that effortlessly draws you into it and lets you experience the intensity of Marianne and Connell's heart-achingly, tender, complex relationship in a totally believable way - it's powerful stuff. Truly, I felt more and more anxious as the book went on until I was actually dreading the end - this novel turned me into a wreck!

The Guardian review, which drew me to this book in the first place, mentioned something like "this is a novel for and about the Millennial generation" but it's not really. In a literal sense the characters and author are Millennials but besides that there's nothing about this book that makes it distinct for this specific time - it could easily be set at any point in the last 50 years and still work perfectly.

I'm not really sure what the book was trying to say - if anything - but it's left a deep impression regardless. Maybe that's it - the whole labelling of generations is a fruitless exercise in misnomers, we're all the same and love is a complicated, weird thing for all of us? Maybe it's trying to define what "normal" is for this generation but isn't that something every generation goes through? And I'm not exactly sure what conclusions Rooney comes up with could be uniquely ascribed to Millennials.

I'll leave it with this because I spent: *Normal People* isn't just the best novel of the year, or even the best novel of the last few years, but it's one of the best I've ever read in my life. Maybe I'm just a sucker for coming of age stories? W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* told a similar type of story that left me just as devastated - but in a good way (sort of). A beautiful powerhouse of quiet, extraordinarily potent sensations that indelibly captures an important part of the human experience, *Normal People* has made me an instant fan of Sally Rooney's - and thank you for writing it. ...more

Now shortlisted for the British Book Awards fiction book of the year.

Recently longlisted for the 2019 Rathbones Folio Prize to add to the Women's Prize and the Dylan

Normal People

Thomas prize.

Longlisted for the 2018 Man Booker " and the only book published after the longlist was announced, and so the last I came to read (a month and 2 days after the announcement).

While not shortlisted for that prize - the book is now (and not surprisingly) starting to sweep other awards: Irish Book of The Year - Best Novel Now shortlisted for the British Book Awards fiction book of the year.

Recently longlisted for the 2019 Rathbones Folio Prize to add to the Women's Prize and the Dylan Thomas prize.

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I have little doubt that the author will be the one on the Booker longlist that we will hear most of in the years ahead and that this book (probably alone of the longlist) will be on the shelves in mainstream bookshops in say 5 years' time.

Returning to my review:

The other books on the longlist draw on wider elements: graphics and alt-right, crime genre conventions, Greek mythology and legend, immersive research into the penal system, environmental passion, free verse and film noir, dystopia, grime and urban slang, refugee crisis, steampunk and slavery, greyhounds and spying, stream of consciousness: and the reader's view of each book depends, at least in part, on her (or his) views on how well the author has translated those aspects into language

This book is though little more than an internally focused, but two sided tale of millennial student friendship and love " and hence to a very large extent stands or falls on the readers view of the author's writing and her characterisation of the thoughts and motivations of the two protagonists. In my view the author largely succeeds and, much to my surprise, this is one of my favourite books on the longlist.

Connell and Marianne attend the same school " Connell quietly popular, Marianne widely shunned for her perceived eccentricity " but the two have two links: both are intellectual and Connell's single mother cleans for Marianne's widowed mother. The two start a tentative sexual and covert relationship and both apply (successfully) for Trinity where their relative status is turned on its head and

Normal People

more in line with their social status – Connell struggling with the simultaneous vacuity and confidence of his fellow students, and Marianne thriving.

The book which moves forwards in unevenly spaced chapters which are dated and titled (for example) Three Months Later, chapters which are told from alternating third party viewpoints and which often look back on key events since the last chapter and more particularly on the ever changing dynamic of the relationship between the two.

Connell’s relationship to literature (like the authors) is complex – struggling with the middle class attitude to literature he still desperately wants to be part of it – which even leads to the book’s ending. Connell (and the author’s) ambiguity is captured in a number of quotes:

It seems to Connell that the same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people also, and to be intimate with them.

Connell couldn’t think of any reason why these literary events took place, what they contributed to anything, what they meant. They were attended only by people who wanted to be the kind of people who attended them

It was culture as class performance, literature fetishised for its ability to take educated people on false emotional journeys, so that they made afterwards feel superior to the undereducated people whose emotional journeys they liked to read about

Key themes examined in the book include:

Class dynamics and social privilege;

Masculinity and femininity – and the privileges and burdens of each;

The aftermath of the end of the Celtic Tiger, and its economic and social effects on the millennial generation that reached adulthood after it, including their loss of faith in capitalism (having already lost faith in the church);

Power dynamics and how these can alter across different social milieus;

Fitting in and standing out – and how different people can adopt different positions over time;

Intimacy and independence ;

Self-image and its interaction with abusive relationships and with depression.

I described Sally Rooney’s last book – Conversations With Friends – as –œan interesting debut

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by a young author writing with a fresh new voice about a young character experiencing a very old story (a woman having an affair with an older married man)â€• .

Despite its many differences, this book is again simply a young author writing with a fresh new voice about (in this case) two young characters experiencing an even older story â€” how does friendship translate into love and how can you really know the mind of someone else. Albeit one with a dark undercurrent.

Jane Austen for the millennial generation.

One night the library started closing just as he reached the passage in Emma where it seems like Mr Knightly is going to marry Harriet, and he had to close the book and walk home in a state of strange emotional agitation â€|â€|â€|. It feels intellectually unserious to concern himself with fictional people marrying one another. But there it is â€” literature moves him.

And there it is â€” this book moved me. ...more

Normal People Synonym

Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2018

This will probably be the last book I read from this year's longlist (unless Snap or Sabrina are shortlisted). I have been hearing great things about Sally Rooney since her name got a number of glowing recommendations in last year's end-of-year reviews, but I only got round to reading her first novel *Conversations with Friends* last week. I was impressed by that, so my expectations for this one were very high.

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I found the first couple of chapters a little flat, but once the characters were established, the rest of the book became a compelling read, and I couldn't resist finishing the whole book in a single day. Like *Conversations With Friends*, this one is at heart a love story, but it is far from being a sentimental romance.

At the start of the book in 2011 (a time of economic depression after the "Celtic Tiger" boom), Marianne is a loner, an outcast in her final year at school from a rich (view spoiler)[(and as becomes clear later abusive) (hide spoiler)] family in a small town in Mayo. Connell is the son of their cleaner (a young single mother), and a popular star of the school football team. Both are very intelligent, and they develop a clandestine relationship. Marianne persuades Connell to follow her to Trinity College in Dublin, where most of the rest of the book is set over a four year period. In Dublin their roles are reversed - Marianne finds friends quickly but Connell finds it difficult due to class snobbery.

Their relationship is a complex one, and the book explores their inner worlds intensely, and like *Conversations with Friends* this takes them to some pretty dark places - Marianne has a masochistic streak and is attracted to sadistic bullies, while Connell escapes his depression to find some redemption as a writer (which allows Rooney to make some playfully acerbic comments about the literary world). As in *Conversations with Friends* the second half of the book is darker and deeper than the first, (view spoiler)[and the ending has an element of ambiguity (hide spoiler)] .

The writing is sharp and witty throughout, and Rooney's ability to inhabit her characters is very impressive. This book is definitely worthy of shortlisting, and could yet be a potential Booker winner.
...more

I am such a fan of Sally Rooney's writing and I cannot imagine this changing, ever. The way she constructs her characters is something extraordinary and I am so very glad this book is on the longlist for the Women's Prize for Fiction. I needed a brilliant book after some of other nominated books just did not work for me at all. I really hope she'll make the shortlist.

Told in alternating viewpoints and skipping forward in time, this book chronicles Connell and Marianne's friendship/relationship. I am such a fan of Sally Rooney's writing and I cannot imagine this changing, ever. The way she constructs her characters is something extraordinary and I am so very glad this book is on the longlist for the Women's Prize for Fiction. I needed a brilliant book after some of other nominated books just did not work for me at all. I really hope she'll make the shortlist.

Told in alternating viewpoints and skipping forward in time, this book chronicles Connell and Marianne's friendship/relationship from their final year in school until shortly after their undergraduate degree. It is both fast-paced and intimate in a way that nearly perfectly catered to my reading preferences. For me the intimacy of her story worked exceedingly well; she narrows her gaze into those two characters in a way that made them near unbearably real for me. Rooney's prose is readable and without frills but still expertly done to keep me engaged but for me, Rooney's biggest strength are her characters; they are fully realized and flawed people who I cannot help but root for. Even more so than in her debut novel, she expertly broke my heart. I felt for these two people who keep on missing each other, who just for the life of them cannot communicate effectively, and who still cannot be without each other.

While I think that *Conversations With Friends* is the stronger of her two novels, both of them are ridiculously well-done and I am glad Rooney gets all the praise she deserves. She is such an exciting voice and I just cannot wait to see what she does next.

You can find this review and other thoughts on books on my blog. ...more