

**Normal People**  
Sally Rooney  
Faber and Faber, 2018  
Hogarth, 2019

## Reviews

[Booklist](#) (15 February 2019. Starred Review.) “Connell and Marianne are brilliant young adult characters in every sense; themes of sexual discovery as well as abuse may help mature literary-fiction readers process these things themselves.”

[Kirkus](#) (18 February 2019. Starred Review.) “Rooney precisely articulates everything that’s going on below the surface; there’s humor and insight here as well as the pleasure of getting to know two prickly, complicated people as they try to figure out who they are and who they want to become. Absolutely enthralling. Read it.”

[Library Journal](#) (1 February 2019. Starred Review.) “This brilliantly nuanced second novel fulfills the promise evident in the stunning debut, *Conversations with Friends*, as Rooney once again portrays to dazzling effect intelligent young adults who negotiate social roles and scenarios reinforcing power structures that, for better or worse, define relationships. Marianne and Connell are unforgettable characters, alluring and sympathetic, and Rooney is a formidable talent. A major literary achievement.”

[New York Times](#) (8 April 2019) “Normal People is about Marianne and Connell, teenagers when we first meet them, not yet flowers but small tight buds. At school, he’s popular and an athlete. She is offbeat and withdrawn and friendless. She’s wealthy, however, and he isn’t. His mother cleans Marianne’s family’s white mansion...Rooney writes about financial imbalances among friends and lovers. Her characters, innocents in search of experience, in the thrall of first love, are sometimes budding writers. Her writing about sex is ardent and lurching. She writes about smart young women who are attracted to sexual masochism. Rooney employs this artery-nicking style while writing about love and lust among damaged and isolated and yearning young people. They’re as lonely as Frank Sinatra on some of his album covers, as lonely as Hank Williams’s whip-poor-will. The effect can be entrancing”

[NPR](#) (16 April 2019) “[I]n her second novel, Rooney demonstrates that she is gender blind when it comes to insecurities. *Normal People's* third person narrative, which alternates convincingly between Marianne's and Connell's points of view, wryly underscores the gap between their perspectives, even at the best of times...Among Rooney's abiding concerns are the fluctuating power dynamics in relationships. Issues of class, privilege, passivity, submission, emotional and physical pain, kindness, and depression all come into play. Her focus is on young adults as they struggle to navigate the minefields of intimacy against the backdrop of an economically

uncertain, post-recession world threatened by climate change, political upheaval, and questions about the morality and viability of capitalism. Rooney's characters may be academically gifted, but they aren't sure how they want to live or what they want to do with their lives. In response to emotional injury, they sometimes seek physical pain. When overwhelmed, they detach. A crippling sense of unworthiness chafes against feelings of intellectual superiority...Although frequently heartbreaking, *Normal People* isn't bleak. The brave determination of Rooney's characters to reach out and try to catch each other with no guarantee of success — and to open themselves to "moments of joy despite everything" — is ultimately hopeful.”

[Washington Post](#) (16 April 2019) “Enter Marianne and Connell, an unlikely pair slipping in and out of friendship and romance as they make the transition from their final year of high school in quaint Carricklea to Dublin’s Trinity College. In Carricklea, Connell enjoys peak popularity as a top soccer player, while Marianne (noted with disdain for her bare face and ugly, flat shoes) is a social pariah known for committing the crime of taking off her blouse in the girl’s bathroom to wash out a stain. They meet on more intimate terms in Marianne’s kitchen where Connell’s mother, Lorraine, works as a cleaning woman and spend their afternoons quietly having sex upstairs in Marianne’s bedroom. Outside that large, chilly house, they pretend they aren’t even on nodding terms. Yet once at Trinity, it’s Marianne who has the upper hand and Connell cast as the outsider. Whether in Dublin or Carricklea, intimacy and power prove inseparable, and Rooney makes the most of this seemingly contradictory link...Using clear language, dialogue is rendered to express deadpan self-consciousness, revealing Marianne and Connell’s insecurities and evasions. Rooney’s ability to dive deep into the minute details of her characters’ emotional lives while maintaining the cool detached exterior of the Instagram age reflects our current preoccupation with appearance over vulnerability. Here, youth, love and cowardice are unavoidably intertwined, distilled into a novel that demands to be read compulsively, in one sitting.

## **Awards**

2018 – [Costa Book Awards for Best Novel \(Winner\)](#)

2018 – [Waterstones Book of the Year \(Winner\)](#)

2018 - [The Man Booker Award \(Longlist\)](#)

2019 – [British Book Award for Book of the Year \(Winner\)](#)

2019 – [The Royal Society of Literature’s Encore Award \(Winner\)](#)

2019 - [Dylan Thomas Prize \(Longlist\)](#)

2019 – [Women’s Prize for Fiction \(Longlist\)](#)

## Lists

[Booklist: Editor's Choice, Adult Books for Young Adults, 2019](#)

[Kirkus: Best Books of 2019](#)

[New York Times: 10 New Books to Watch for April 2019](#)

[Time Magazine: Must Read Books of 2019](#)

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