

**Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines
Département des Sciences du langage de l'Information et
de la communication
Mémoire de Master métiers du livre et de l'édition**

Juin 2024

Dialogues in Sally Rooney's novels

VERDEJO Rébecca

Sous la direction de :
ROUBY Bertrand



Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Rouby, my master's thesis supervisor and my former literature professor, whose guidance and support have been really precious throughout this whole process. Thank you for accepting to direct my master's thesis and doing it so diligently.

Moreover, I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my best friend Mila, who have supported me over the last two years and listened to me talk about Sally Rooney constantly without complaints. A special thanks goes to my classmates and friends Cassandra, Quentin and Clara who have helped me sort out my ideas and motivated me to work even when I felt uninspired.

Lastly, I would like to thank Sally Rooney for writing such amazing novels, giving me great material to study.

Droits d'auteurs

Cette création est mise à disposition selon le Contrat :

« **Attribution-Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale-Pas de modification 3.0 France** »

disponible en ligne : <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/fr/>



Contents

Introduction	6
Partie I. Formal presentation of the dialogues to reduce the narrative distance.....	11
I.1. Dialogues not really separated from the narration	11
I.1.1. Diminution of the distance between the narrative voice and self-expression.....	11
I.1.2. Text messages perfectly showing who the characters are	16
I.2. Focus on the emails as indirect written dialogues	21
I.2.1. Revisitation of the epistolary novel mechanisms	21
I.2.2. Immediacy of the emails.....	24
I.2.3. Personal dimension of the emails.....	26
Partie II. Literary use of language as an obstacle or an enabler for an authentic relationship.....	33
II.1. Precise use of words to express specific things.....	33
II.1.1. Elevated language in argumentation	33
II.1.2. Verbalization of feelings expression	45
II.2. Narrative techniques influencing our perception of an authentic relationship	50
II.2.1. Different narrative points of view	50
II.2.2. Showing versus telling and the place of dialogues.....	55
II.3. Talking about yourself using a piece of literature as starting point	61
II.3.1. Does it act as a barrier between the characters or bring them closer?.....	61
II.3.2. Additional use of those literature pieces	64
Partie III. Case study: open conversations about class differences.....	67
III.1. Individuals inside their social class	67
III.1.1. Class difference should separate the characters, but does it?	67
III.1.2. Class dealignment	77
III.2. How to keep one's authenticity despite the class struggle?	83
III.2.1. Finding ways to not feel like you depend on others	85
III.2.1.1. Financial independence.....	85
III.2.1.2. Compromise and find solutions to problems	85
III.2.1.3. Support system within his community	86
III.2.2. Communication.....	88
III.2.2.1. Delaying the conversation	88
III.2.2.2. Announcement of the departure	89
III.2.2.3. Miscommunication about their respective feelings and hat they want	90
III.2.3. Feelings this situation arises in Connell	92

III.2.3.1. Shame of social condition	92
III.2.3.2. Self-anger.....	94
III.2.3.3. Regrets that he lost Marianne one again.....	96
III.3. Impact of those choices of Marianne and Connell's future	96
Conclusion.....	99
Bibliography	103
Appendix.....	115

Introduction

“Dialogue is the most fun to write,” Sally Rooney said in an interview to the Guardian about her first novel, *Conversations With Friends*. “‘It’s kind of like a tennis match. Do the first one,’ and then ping, ping, ‘it has to go back and forth.’”¹

Sally Rooney was born on February 20, 1991, in Castlebar, County Mayo, Ireland. She was raised in a family that valued arts education a lot. As a teenager, she joined a writing group and wrote her first novel by the time she was 15. Rooney studied English literature at the Trinity College of Dublin.

While attending Trinity, she joined the debate team and competed in various championships, and at 22 years old, she became the number one competitive debater in Europe.² While she was a competitive debater, she had to sacrifice her studies to some extent and she put her personal life on hold. With time, Sally Rooney also started to see the debate world as “depressing and vaguely immoral”³. After her victory at the European championship in 2013, she stopped debating competitively because she had achieved what she started debating for, she obtained success, popularity and a subtle power; meaning that as the author was recognized as an authority figure in her field, she acquired influence and position of leader, and became someone other debaters might look up to or ask for advice, therefore she became a model and could help mold them into great debaters. Rooney got even more than she wished for and became a celebrity among her peers.

In 2013, the novelist obtained her bachelor’s degree and started a master’s but soon quit because she did not like academia anymore. After dropping out, and even if she stopped competing after her European victory, Rooney stayed involved in the debate scene as judge, volunteer or even debate coach because she had no real plans for her future. In the spring of 2015, she wrote an essay called *Even if you beat me* about her time as a competitive debater that was published in *The Dublin Review*. This essay drew a lot of attention to Rooney and her writing and when she finished writing her first novel *Conversations With Friends* the following year, she received numerous publication

¹ Rooney, interview, The Guardian.

² Rooney, *Even if you beat me*, The Dublin Review.

³ *Ibid.*

offers. It was published for the first time in 2017 by Faber & Faber in the United Kingdom. The following year, her second novel *Normal People* was issued and her last book to date *Beautiful World, Where Are You* was released in 2021. Both were also published first by Faber & Faber.

In *Conversations With Friends*, Frances, a college student in Dublin, and Bobbi, her ex-girlfriend turned best friend, navigate the complexities of what it is like to be young women in 21st century Ireland. The girls meet Melissa, a well-established writer, at a spoken-word poetry event where they are performing. They also meet Nick, Melissa's husband, an unsuccessful and depressed actor. Melissa takes an interest in Frances and especially in Bobbi and invites them to her house, slowly becoming some sort of artistic mentor for the girls. A strange atmosphere sets between the four characters as Frances and Bobbi spend more and more time in the company of Melissa and her husband. Eventually, an affair starts between Frances and Nick. The weight of this secret relationship affects the dynamics between all the characters, but especially jeopardizes the bond between Frances and Bobbi.

In *Normal People*, we follow Marianne Sheridan and Connell Waldron, two very intelligent young people that we first meet in their last year of high school. At first, it seems like the two have nothing in common as Marianne is a solitaire and intimidating girl who comes from a privileged background and Connell is the good looking, popular kid in school who was raised by a single mother; his mother who works as a housekeeper for Marianne's family. When Connell starts to stop by the Sheridans' pick up his mom after work, he finds himself getting close to Marianne. A romance starts between the two, but on Connell's impulse, they keep it a secret. The pair breaks up just before the end of senior year and Marianne totally cuts contact with Connell. They meet again in college but by then the dynamic between them has changed completely. Marianne is thriving in college as she managed to reinvent herself and become the popular girl and Connell is now struggling to fit in. The two are drawn to each other once again and sustain an intense on and off relationship throughout all college, alternating between best friends and lovers.

Beautiful World Where Are You follows the life of Alice and Eileen, two millennial best friends who met back in college. The first is a successful writer who is slowly returning to normal life after a severe depression and the other works a low paying

job in a literary magazine. Alice meets Felix, a working-class man, on a dating app, and starts an odd relationship with him. In the meantime, Eileen reconnects with Simon, a childhood friend, and they also start to date. Alice and Eileen feed their friendship over lengthy emails as they do not live in the same town and Alice travels quite a lot for work. They share their thoughts over the state of the world, their disillusiones and other relationship problems.

Those three novels have in common that they all portray very intelligent and self-conscious main characters, and they all occasionally have troubles communicating with each other. Those books also treat similar topics such as being lonely together and finding comfort in each other as well as left-wing politics, the class struggle or power imbalances in relationships. And most importantly, dialogues are used in a similar way and follow the same format in all three novels. Those recurring themes mark a sort of red thread that we follow through Rooney's novels even though they are independent from each other and therefore create a coherent corpus to study.

In the press, Sally Rooney has been compared with many other writers, especially classic writers. She has been called "Salinger for the Snapchat generation"⁴ on multiple occasions, an expression that was first used by Mitzi Angel, the editor of *Conversations With Friends*, because like him, the author precisely grasps the words and thoughts of young people thanks to realistic dialogues and narration. She was even compared to the likes of Jane Austen for her depiction and critique of the social hierarchy of her time and the way she portrays her characters' life, who are "haunted by [their] hopes and dreams and attempts at love and life and finding their way"⁵ just like Austen's. Besides, parallels have been made multiple times between Sally Rooney and D. H. Lawrence as both authors use sex in their novels to teach their readers about their contemporary society.

In the media, there are many positive reviews about Sally Rooney's writings. Those mostly describe her as an author who is great at managing different points of view,

⁴ Silverthorn, "Conversations With Friends by Sally Rooney: The perfect novel for the Snapchat generation," *The London Economic*.

⁵ "Sally Rooney, Jane Austen, sexual tension and the 'grand philosophical project'", *The Austen Connection*.

praising her amazing use of the narrative voice to shape her characters' consciousness, and complimenting her way of managing bold variations in perspectives. *The Atlantic* even said that "a powerful intellect beats beneath her underdressed prose"⁶. Moreover, it is said that the author "writes anguish like nobody can"⁷, and that her writing is pouring through her, seemingly effortless or that she has gift for molding odd and intricate characters. Rooney is also often described as daring, someone who can get under your skin, and who is able to create "characters who stand askance from life"⁸. Another common opinion is that Rooney evokes the sensibilities of the characters sublimely. For *The Guardian*, "Rooney is such a gifted, brave, adventurous writer, so exceptionally good at observing the lies people tell themselves on the deepest level."⁹

Obviously, not all reviews about Rooney's work are positive. Some are mixed like this one article published in the *Electric Lit* magazine describing Rooney's novels as "genius" and "dumb" at the same time depending on the point of view the reader adopts before even opening the book.¹⁰

Often, negative reviews on Rooney's work include a degree of gender bias, being described as chick-lit by opponents who do not think what they call women's fiction is real literature. Another recurrent complaint against the author states that she does not bring anything new in her texts, just reuses the classic romance tropes, or that she only focuses on elite characters, most often white and privileged and that the Marxism and feminism depicted in her novels is performative and devoid of substance. For some critics Rooney's novels are nothing more than beach read, or books people are posing with to try and create a sort of fake social status or to pass as someone clever in society. Jessa Crispin, a writer for the Guardian went as far as calling *Normal People* "deathly dull"¹¹.

Even for the readership, the novelist is a polarizing figure because the most common thing we can notice when reading opinions from readers about her novels is that

⁶ Crain, "Sally Rooney addresses her critics," *The Atlantic*.

⁷ Humble, "Normal People by Sally Rooney, review: Enters the dark corners of the psyche," *The Independent*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Clanchy, "Normal People by Sally Rooney review – a future classic," *The Guardian*.

¹⁰ Mullins, "Why Can't We Make Up Our Minds About Sally Rooney?," *Electric Lit*.

¹¹ Crispin, "Normal People is little more than a gutless soap opera for millennials," *The Guardian*.

either people totally hate Sally Rooney's novels and her writing style or absolutely love it, it goes from one extreme to another with few in-betweens.

As Sally Rooney is a contemporary author, there are few academic papers about her work and those that exist are thesis papers written by college students, not established scholars. The existing pieces of academia about Rooney mostly compare her work with something else like Marxist literature or compare Rooney with other famous Irish authors like James Joyce. There is no similar research already existing regarding strictly the essence of her work.

In this light, I decided to write my masters' thesis focusing on Sally Rooney's novels because I find it very interesting how she develops the mind of her characters practically to an extreme. In her books, the most important is almost not the story in itself but who the characters are and how they interact with each other. From this perspective, the dialogues are central because without them, the characters could not express themselves and confront their points of view to those of others, nor give the reader a clear vision of how their mindset change in different situations.

The focus of my study will revolve around dialogues in Sally Rooney's novels as a mirror of the characters' mindset. Firstly, this study will show how the formal presentation of the dialogues plays a role in reducing the narrative distance, then it will address the literary use of language as an obstacle or an enabler for an authentic relationship, and finally it will focus on a case study revolving around open conversations about class differences.

I chose to do a multidisciplinary study as my master's thesis, focusing mainly on literature and rhetoric. My methodology will mostly revolve around analysis of dialogues as this is how we get to witness the depth of the characters the most.

Partie I. Formal presentation of the dialogues to reduce the narrative distance

I.1. Dialogues not really separated from the narration

I.1.1. Diminution of the distance between the narrative voice and self-expression

The diminution of the distance between the narrative voice and self-expression is almost like a trademark in Sally Rooney's novels. Understanding the use she has of this process is a key to a better comprehension of the author's work. This phenomenon can be witnessed in all her novels without exception.

The change from narration to dialogues is very smooth because the dialogues are not presented in standard way, it follows the narration seamlessly as there are no quotation marks signaling to the reader that they are entering a dialogue. Rooney's dialogues format almost always respects the rule that each dialogue should be the start of a new paragraph, but she does not follow most of the typographical rules in terms of presentation otherwise. Very few dialogue tags are used like "said" or "asked". Sometimes because of it, when the reader is at the end of a narration paragraph and a dialogue appears, it can be difficult to guess if it is inner or outer dialogue. It can also be complicated to differentiate the two at the end of a dialogue passage, the reader can wonder if the last line is inner or outer dialogue in that case too. Because of the little use of dialogue tags, it can also be harder to identify who is speaking, mostly in group conversations. We can find a good example of it in *Conversations With Friends*: "Evelyn was watching Nick anxiously. I'm sorry, Evelyn said. Don't you apologize, said Nick. Maybe I should go and help. Sure, you may as well."¹² We can think that the "I should go and help" is pronounced by Frances because she takes part in the conversation and the novel is narrated in the first person, but due to the lack of tags we are not sure if it is Nick or Evelyn who answers her "Sure, you may as well". It could also be Evelyn saying "I should go and help" and Nick answering. The author is leading the reader, we accept to delegate control to Rooney and stay in the dark for the purpose of storytelling.

¹² Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 138.

<p>I'll go get some in the corner shop, Nick said eventually. It's not the end of the world.</p> <p>I don't believe this, said Melissa again.</p> <p>Should I leave these somewhere? I said. I mean, can I put them in a vase, or?</p> <p>³²⁴ Everyone in the room turned to look at me. Melissa took one bouquet out of my arms and looked into it. These stems need to be cut, she said.</p> <p>I'll do that, I said.</p> <p>Fine, said Melissa. Nick will show you where we keep the vases. I'll go and help Derek fix the dining room up. Thank you all very much for your hard work this morning.</p> <p>She left the room and shut the door hard behind her. I thought: this woman? This is the woman you love? Nick took the flowers out of my arms and left them on the countertop. The vases were in</p>	<p>a cupboard under the sink. Evelyn was watching Nick anxiously.</p> <p>I'm sorry, Evelyn said.</p> <p>³²⁵ Don't you apologise, said Nick. Maybe I should go and help. Sure, you may as well.</p> <p>Nick was cutting the bouquets out of their plastic with a scissors when Evelyn left. I can do all this, I said. You go get the lemons. He didn't look at me. She likes the stems cut diagonally, he said. You know what I mean, diagonally? Like this. And he clipped one of the ends off at a slant. I didn't hear her say anything about lemons either, I said. He smiled then, and Bobbi came into the room behind us. You're going to take my side now, are you? he said.</p> <p>I knew you were making friends without me, said Bobbi.</p> <p>I thought you were tidying the bedroom, Nick said.</p>
--	--

Figure 1: extract from *Conversations With Friends* where the lack of dialogue tags is shown, p. 143-144 (printed edition)

Since there are no quotation marks to indicate the dialogues, the reader cannot be tempted to skim the narrative passage to get directly to the dialogue, which often happens when the reader is really involved in the conversation and wants to have the answer of the interlocutor back-to-back. This lack of quotation marks can be an advantage because it ensures that the reader pays attention to all the elements of the story and cannot miss an important point that would be mentioned in the narration between two dialogues. This way of presenting the dialogues can also be a way for Rooney to get the readers to trust her and accept that the dialogues come from the characters themselves as an entity instead of the author's mind. She indicates us a direction and we follow the author as she lays the groundwork, but we also go through our own chain of thoughts to understand what the characters say and the consequences that follow. Therefore, the fact that the dialogues almost melt into the narration is a real mirror of the characters' mindset, there are no obstacles to the reader's comprehension.

<p>She looks like she goes to art college, said Helen. I guess you think she's really chic.</p> <p>He gave a little laugh, looked at the floor. It's not like that, he said. We've known each other since we were kids.</p> <p>It doesn't have to be weird that she's your ex, Helen said.</p> <p>She's not my ex. We're just friends.</p> <p>But before you were friends, you were ...</p> <p>Well, she wasn't my girlfriend, he said.</p> <p>But you had sex with her, though.</p> <p>He covered his entire face in his hands. Helen laughed.</p> <p>After that, Helen was determined to make friends with Marianne, as if to prove a point. When they saw her at parties Helen went out of her way to compliment her hair and clothing, and Marianne would nod vaguely and then continue expressing some in-depth opinion about the Magdalene Laundry report or the Denis O'Brien case. Objectively Connell did find Marianne's opinions interesting, but he could see how her fondness for express-</p>	<p>ing them at length, to the exclusion of lighter conversation, was not universally charming. One evening, after an overly long discussion about Israel, Helen became irritable, and on the walk home she told Connell that she found Marianne 'self-absorbed'.</p> <p>Because she talks about politics too much? said Connell. I wouldn't call that self-absorbed, though.</p> <p>Helen shrugged, but drew a breath inwards through her nose that indicated she didn't like his interpretation of her point.</p> <p>She was the same way in school, he added. But she's not putting it on, she's genuinely interested in that stuff.</p> <p>She really cares about Israeli peace talks?</p> <p>Surprised, Connell replied simply: Yeah. After a few seconds of walking along in silence he added: As do I, to be honest. It is fairly important. Helen sighed aloud. He was surprised that she would sigh in that petulant way, and wondered how much she had had to drink. Her arms were folded up at her</p>
<p>chest. Not being preachy, he went on. Obviously we're not going to save the Middle East by talking about it at a house party. I think Marianne just thinks about that stuff a lot.</p> <p>You don't think maybe she does it for the attention? said Helen.</p> <p>He frowned in a conscious effort to look thoughtful. Marianne was so totally uninterested in what people thought of her, so extremely secure in her own self-perception, that it was hard to imagine her caring for attention one way or another. She did not altogether, as far as Connell knew, actually like herself, but praise from other people seemed as irrelevant to her as disapproval had been in school.</p> <p>Honestly? he said. Not really.</p> <p>She seems to like your attention well enough.</p> <p>Connell swallowed. He only then understood why Helen was so annoyed, and not trying to veil her annoyance. He didn't think Marianne had been paying him any special</p>	<p>notice, though she did always listen when he spoke, a courtesy she occasionally failed to pay others. He turned his head to look at a passing car.</p> <p>I didn't notice that, he said eventually.</p> <p>To his relief, Helen dropped this specific theme and settled back into a more general critique of Marianne's behaviour.</p> <p>Every time we see her at a party she's always flirting with like ten different guys, said Helen. Talk about craving male approval.</p> <p>Pleased that he was no longer implicated in the censure, Connell smiled and said: Yeah. She wasn't like that in school at all.</p> <p>You mean she didn't act so slutty? said Helen.</p> <p>Feeling suddenly cornered, and regretting that he had let his guard down, Connell again fell silent. He knew that Helen was a nice person, but he forgot sometimes how old-fashioned her values were. After a time he said uncomfortably: Here, she's my friend, alright? Don't be talking about her like that. Helen</p>

Figure 2: extract from *Normal People* showing the important points found in narration between dialogues, p. 167-168 (printed edition).

With figure 2, we see clearly that no quotation marks or em-dashes are used in Rooney's works. It makes it harder for the reader to differentiate dialogue and narration because the only way to tell we are entering a dialogue is thanks to an indentation, but there are also indentations at each start of a new narration paragraph, so the reader needs to pay very close attention to differentiate the two. As well, this is a good example to illustrate that lack of quotation marks can be an advantage, because it ensures that the reader does not skim the narrative passage and therefore can't miss an important point mentioned in the narration between two dialogues. With figure 2, we can see that the narration between the dialogues in this extract gives us a lot of insight on Connell, a direct access to his thoughts about the conversation he is having with his then girlfriend Helen. He realizes that his girlfriend is very jealous of Marianne, and it also strikes him how different he is to Helen but also how similar to Marianne he is. We also understand that Connell is in defensive mode each time Marianne is mentioned in a conversation between him and his girlfriend because somehow, they always end up arguing about her. It transpires that Connell has a set mental image of Marianne that he wants to protect by making abstraction of Helen's negative words over his first love. Moreover, thanks to figure 2, we notice that some dialogues are imbedded in narration, therefore if the reader tries to skim the narration to read only what they perceive as dialogue, they can eventually miss a few "hidden" dialogues that are still important parts of the discussion. For example, by doing so the reader could have missed Connell explicitly defending Marianne, saying to Helen "here, she is my friend, alright? Don't be talking about her like that."¹³ After thinking how old-fashioned Helen values were, due to her critique of Marianne's "slutty"¹⁴ behavior. The reader gets to be in Connell's head and see how the dialogues reflect his mindset because he ends up saying aloud what he is thinking, he cannot help it.

Rooney herself explains in an interview to Stet Magazine why she chose to present her dialogues in this very specific way in her first novel, *Conversations With Friends*:

In my first draft I used em-dashes to introduce dialogue, but then in later drafts I began to notice how much dialogue was contained inside longer paragraphs, undifferentiated from the narrative. I decided it didn't really make

¹³ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 174.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

sense to introduce some dialogue with dashes and some without, so I used Cmd+F and deleted every em-dash in the manuscript. That was one of the last changes I made before sending it away. I can't remember ever really using quotation marks – I don't see any need for them, and I don't understand the function they perform in a novel, marking off some particular pieces of the text as quotations. I mean, it's a novel written in the first person, isn't it all a quotation?¹⁵

Given her explanation, we can easily understand that the author wanted to achieve a sense of unity in her book without separation between the narration and the dialogues, because she puts what the characters think, experience, and say all on the same level of importance. Rooney's goal is to give the reader the best possible overview of the characters and make them as complex as they can be. Even if her two other novels *Normal People* and *Beautiful World Where Are You* are not written in the first person, she kept the same scheme in her writing so that the readers can have the same feelings reading those as they did with *Conversations With Friends*. This is something the author eventually became known for as it is a singularity in the publishing world.

This dialogue format feels more personal than if it was clearly separated from the narration because the blurry line between narration and dialogue can reflect the blurry line between reality and how we remember things, as our recollection of events is never 100% accurate. This question of remembrance of past conversations can also impact future events just like in *Normal People*, when Marianne asks Connell to hit her in bed towards the end of the novel. He refuses, probably because he remembers a conversation they had early on in their relationship when Marianne asked Connell if he would ever hurt a woman, before confessing that her mom used to be a victim of domestic violence and that her dad would hit her too sometimes. This day Connell swore he would never raise a hand on Marianne: “You would never hit a girl, would you? she says. God, no. Of course not. [...] I would never hurt you, okay? he says. Never.”¹⁶ We do not know if either of them remembers this conversation, but the reader does, as this conversation they had sort of merge into the narration. Therefore, we can imagine Connell refuses to hit her because he recalls he swore to never do it. Here, this conversation is truly providing us insight on Connell's mindset because him saying that he is not comfortable with the idea of hitting

¹⁵ Rooney, interview, Stet Magazine.

¹⁶ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 45-46.

Marianne shows the reader that he stays true to himself and his beliefs/convictions because he does not renege on his promise to her.

The lack of separation between the narrative voice and self-expression makes it easier for the reader to put themselves in the characters' shoes. This way they are not thinking, they are reading as if they were the main character and can relate to them more, it makes it easier for them to defend the characters' actions. Perhaps it would not be as easy if the reader was more detached from the story due to a clearer separation of narration and dialogues. Thanks to this writing technique, the reader can imagine that they are doing what the characters are doing, saying what they are saying, and thinking what they are thinking. This way, the readership understands the motive behind every action and words pronounced because they can identify to the characters and interiorize everything. The reading becomes almost an immersive experience and they become one with the characters.

I.1.2. Text messages perfectly showing who the characters are

The conversations the characters have via text in the different novels perfectly transcribe how old they are and their social status. To do so, Rooney uses different techniques to reduce the narrative distance. She shows how each of her characters text in a singular way therefore there is probably one character or more each reader can relate to.

Marianne takes her phone from her bag and writes Connell a text message: Lively discussion here on the subject of your absence. Are you planning to come at all? Within thirty seconds he replies: yeah jack just got sick everywhere so we had to put him in a taxi etc. on our way soon though. how are you getting on socialising with people. Marianne writes back: I'm the new popular girl in school now.¹⁷

This extract from *Normal People* shows many techniques Sally Rooney uses through her novels when it comes to texting. We notice that Connell who is seen at first as a little more relaxed than Marianne has his auto capitalization turned off, the “within thirty seconds he replies” indicates us that like most young people who grew up with this technology, they type fast and answer their texts instantly. We also notice the use of irony

¹⁷ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 33.

from Marianne when she says “I’m the new popular girl in school now” because this conversation takes place in high school, and at that point except for Connell she did not have any friends.

Another important point is that the author knows her readership is familiar with texting therefore she does not need to detail how the characters feel texting their crush, for example. “She takes her phone from a pocket and composes a text, repeatedly hitting the wrong key, deleting and retyping. Finally she sends it: On my way.”¹⁸ There is no mention of why Marianne keeps messing up her text writing but in context, the reader understands that she is acting this way because she is nervous at the idea of going to Connell’s place. The reader is familiar with this feeling of frustration when you cannot seem to text properly because you have shaky hands caused by the fact that you are feeling strong emotions.

Texting in those novels is so accurate because Rooney is a millennial herself, therefore she knows firsthand how people in her generation text. She writes the messages in her novels the same way she would text her friends in real life, therefore we can notice the use of slang, like when Felix sends “Off work tmr night, will call u.”¹⁹ to Alice in *Beautiful World Where Are You* (“tmr” stands for “tomorrow” and “u” is short for “you”), and she portrays accurately the way some millennials have their auto capitalization turned off as we saw with Connell mentioned earlier, as well as the lack of proper punctuation, or other common misspellings. She captures how some millennials are not very good at texting and will use formal writing almost like if they were messaging a coworker when they are actually talking to their love interest. In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, this is the case with Eileen and Simon. She is quite free in the way she texts whereas Simon is more serious, she even teases him about it, wondering “why do men over 30 text like they’re updating a LinkedIn profile”?²⁰, which is a very accurate representation of the situation. This difference between them in the way they text can also be caused by the fact that Simon evolves in a more conventional world than Eileen, because he works in politics and goes to church every Sunday. In those spheres, people tend to always express

¹⁸ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 167.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 142.

themselves in a formal way, no matter who they are talking to, and this is probably rubbing off on Simon's personal/intimate life. Therefore, here the differences between the two interlocutors are very well articulated.

Showing how the characters text can make them more relatable to the reader, it feels like we are inside their head, as if we were the ones typing the messages. We know about all the "rituals" around texting like drafting a long angry paragraph and deleting it before sending it just to get the frustration out for example. In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, we see Eileen going through this process after learning Simon was seeing another woman:

Eileen slowly typed the words: Jesus Christ Simon I fucking hate you. Calmly she surveyed this message, and then, with apparent deliberation, added the lines: Like in your mind we were really just "having fun" all week and you were seeing someone else the whole time? [...] Her eyes moved once again over the text, slowly, thoughtfully. Then, holding her thumb to the backspace key, she deleted the draft. Taking deep hard breaths now, she began to type again. Simon I'm sorry. [...] She scrolled back to reach the top of the message, and down again to read over the final line. Then she held the pad of her thumb down once more on the backspace key. Again the reply field was blank, the cursor blinking rhythmically over greyed-out text that read: Type a message. She locked her phone and lay back down on the bed.²¹

Here, Sally Rooney shows us very precisely Eileen's state of mind and each step of her reflection. As well, we witness that her feelings are changing as she drafts the text until she finally decides that indifference is the best response in this situation. The young woman decides that because they had a conversation about it just before she doesn't need to engage in another potentially one-sided argument. This form of "ritual" can be declined in different ways depending on the situation, a common declination is waiting more than a day before responding to a text from someone you are fond of to make them long you and appear mysterious, but then caving in and answering right away as soon as said person texts back. All those tricks and their transcription in Rooney's novels make us feel like we are reading our own texts, we start thinking about what we could have written if we were them because in a way, we are them, we are in their heads. This is made possible by the fact that those texts are a derivation of classic epistolary exchanges from 18th century

²¹ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 205-206.

epistolary novels. Our “participation in the misfortunes of the heroes is direct and produces a catharsis effect similar to that of the theatre.”²² [my translation] Having such insight over the characters’ life really makes us a part of said life and has a spectacular effect on the reader, therefore this type of written dialogues is also a mirror into the characters’ mindset.

Sally Rooney also describes the mechanisms millennials put in place to navigate their often-messy love life. The author represents accurately how each time someone gets an interesting text, they always feel the need to show it to the people around them and end up gossiping and/or making fun of the person who sent the text or complain about it. In *Normal People*, one day Marianne receives a text worthy of interest and immediately, “she showed Connell the text and they laughed about it.”²³ In this situation showing the person you’re with is even funnier because the text in question is from Jamie, a boy from Trinity who is in love with Marianne. In the message, he is trying to convince her that Connell is not the one for her, but he is; when at that exact moment, Marianne is lying in bed with Connell. This timing and the irony of it make the situation even more comical than if Marianne were to show Connell this text at any other moment.

Rooney also portrays very well how millennials and gen Z often end up drunk texting their exes and how the consequences of this dangerous game are always the same: it’s “inevitably resulting in ‘either a huge argument or sex.’”²⁴ She also shows another side of this notion of “danger”, surfing on the fact that texting can be tricky because if you text the wrong thing to the wrong person your whole life could blow up into pieces in a second. In *Conversations With Friends*, this is how Nick learnt that his wife Melissa was having an affair with one of their mutual friends: “He realized it was going on because she sent him a text that was intended for the other person.”²⁵ All those different elements can help us understand better who the characters are and their mindset because their texts are a reflection of themselves, their thoughts and how they behave with others.

²² Calas, *Le Roman épistolaire*, p. 23.

²³ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 118.

²⁴ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 61.

²⁵ Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 249.

Another texting method that is quite represented in Rooney's novels consist in simply not answering to your love interest anymore when you feel like it would be a waste of your time to talk about the same issue again, knowing very well the outcome of the conversation will not be different than before, or when you want to avoid a painful discussion for example. Among young people, this phenomenon is known as "ghosting". According to the Cambridge online dictionary, ghosting is defined as "a way of ending a relationship with someone suddenly by stopping all communication with them"²⁶. In *Normal People*, this phenomenon appears multiple times along the book; the first time being when Marianne ghosted Connell at the end of their last year of high school because he did not ask her to be his date to the Debs even though she had hoped for it. Connell tried to reconnect with Marianne to understand the situation better so "he sent her text messages every day, but she never replied."²⁷ This passage is relevant of the mindset of both characters as it shows that Marianne is quite sad and just wants to avoid confrontation and move on whereas Connell realizes that he is already too fond of Marianne to let her go and wants to try to get her back even if it is a difficult journey.

Another thing young people do by fear of confrontation is to break up with their partner via text, just like Connell did to his first girlfriend: "in a text message, he told her he didn't want to be her boyfriend anymore."²⁸ Everyone agrees this is extremely rude, but he did it anyway because this girl did not mean anything to him. This also shows the evolution of Connell's mindset, because he went from breaking up with his girlfriend via text to using texts to try to get Marianne back, correct his mistakes and fight for the love of his life.

Those last two elements could already be seen in epistolary exchanges found in 18th century epistolary novels. Ghosting works the same way in texts and letters, the person just stops writing and answering. The main problem with epistolary exchanges is that you cannot even tell if the person received the letters, therefore you cannot have the certitude that you are getting ghosted. The person could send another letter to try to reach out again but would not have any assurance regarding an eventual response either. It is

²⁶ Cambridge dictionary, "ghosting."

²⁷ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 77.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 250.

different to text because with texts there is always a way to see if the person opened your message or not, therefore the protagonist can know if they are being “left on read”, meaning that their correspondent opened their message (and read it) but did not answer deliberately.

Moreover, because of the delay inherent to epistolary exchange, it is harder to know if you’re getting ghosted. Depending on the distance, time periods, and other exterior factors like war time for example letters could take weeks, even months to arrive, therefore there was no way to be certain right away that the other person was ignoring you on purpose and cutting contact. Your letter also could have been lost by the postal service and you would not have any way to know what happened. In texts, it is different because most people answer their texts within a day of receiving it, so if after a week you still do not have an answer, chances are you are most likely getting ghosted.

Regarding breakups, the process would be the same via letters than via text. Again, this method of breaking up could just be a way to avoid confrontation. It might also have been more common in the 18th century because of the distance problems. It would have been easier to write a breakup note in a letter than to engage in a long travel and make an appointment with someone just to break things up.

I.2. Focus on the emails as indirect written dialogues

I.2.1. Revisitation of the epistolary novel mechanisms

Letters in 18th century epistolary novels were able give a “direct access to the love speech seized in its source and, on the other hand, it could open as historical document [...] able to paint the social reality in all its complexity.”²⁹ [my translation] This can be found in Rooney’s novels to some extent but it is pushed even further because the emails are not only a carrier for love speech, it is also used to express other feelings such as joy, discontent, sadness or loneliness. The emails do not necessarily serve as historical documents because the events related in those messages are of private order mostly, but there are still allusions to past political or historical events anchoring those emails in a clear timeframe. The thing that did not change compared to the 18th century letters is that written exchanges still are truly depicting the current social reality as a whole; not just a

²⁹ Calas, *Le Roman épistolaire*, p. 20.

reality centered around how the main characters live, but that of the entire Irish society, most notably through the deep conversations found in the correspondence between Alice and Eileen.

What is also notable in 18th century epistolary novels is that in those correspondences, the standard is to have a letter dedicated to a general theme or even a specific subject. In Sally Rooney's novels, emails are used in a slightly different way compared to how letters are used in epistolary novels. Here, in the emails the characters are switching from a subject to another as the email goes. Many topics are addressed in the same email. The transitions can be smooth or either abrupt, and many subjects which in the collective imagination do not necessarily go together are treated on the same level. In the same email, the characters can discuss their daily lives in a paragraph and start a philosophical debate in the following. This is very well shown in Eileen's email composing the eighth chapter of *Beautiful World Where Are You*, where she focuses on the concept of beauty, sociology, political actions, and the future of mankind; all of which are unrelated to the beginning of the email that was just her catching up with Alice after not talking for a moment. Those emails are really a mirror of the characters' mindset because we see how their brain work, switching from one topic to another as soon as an idea pops up in their head. They need to say what they have to as soon as possible before they forget it. Moreover, they need to share their thoughts and engage with others because their connections on a spiritual level is what makes them fulfilled individuals. They starve knowledge and confronting their opinions to the ones of others and speaking to other people is how they feel the most alive.

The infamous quote from the French philosopher Descartes "I think therefore I am"³⁰ seems to be the motto of Rooney's characters' lives. This is especially true for Alice, Eileen, Bobbi, Frances, Marianne, and Connell because most of their personality revolves around the fact that they are intellectually gifted. "She would like her superior intellect to be affirmed in public"³¹, this is what the narrator says in *Normal People* in

³⁰ Descartes, *Discourse On The Method Of Rightly Conducting The Reason, And Seeking Truth In The Sciences*, part IV.

³¹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 143.

regard to Marianne's thoughts over the scholarship. She is extremely smart, and she wants everyone to know about it. For her, taking the exam to earn the scholarship is not about a need of money, it is about competition, thriving to be the best and proving she can beat anyone.

This idea goes hand in hand with Berkeley's notion of perception as a mental image. For the Irish philosopher: "to be is to be perceived".³² In relevance to our topic, it can be put together with our notion of dialogues as a mirror of the characters' mindset, because the way the characters perceive each other through the conversations they have is key in the construction their identity and how they express themselves. This is also shown when in *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Eileen declares to Alice: "If you weren't my friend I wouldn't know who I was"³³, meaning that the characters model their own perception of themselves on how the people who are the closest to them perceive them.

The emails are used to address a wide range of subjects in a dialectic way, meaning that Sally Rooney shows the reader both sides of a question and make them dialogue together, we could even say she can play devil's advocate because of her ability to express the opposite point of view so well.

People think that socialism is sustained by force – the forcible expropriation of property – but I wish they would just admit that capitalism is also sustained by exactly the same force in the opposite direction, the forcible protection of existing property arrangements.³⁴

Through Eileen's voice, Rooney manages to put two drastically different points of view in a sentence that makes clear sense, the ideas are well articulated and concise. The characters all have similar ideological affiliations so they all agree on the bigger points, but their views differ on how they should act on it. In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Eileen writes to Alice saying that she relates to what Alice said in her previous email but adds her personal variation of the idea and says "I know you know this. I hate having the same debates over and over again with the wrong first principles."³⁵ She wants to be able

³² Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.

³³ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 325.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid*.

to sustain an elaborate conversation that is not biased from the start. The author manages to avoid the trap of the didactic novel, her emails are not a pretext to theorize or at least it is too rarely done to really be didactic and monologues only showing one point of view over a question are rare occurrences.

All the main characters are very cultured given the education they received attending the Trinity College of Dublin. They can hold conversations about any and nothing, even subjects they are not so familiar with and still pass as connoisseurs. Emails are their favorite playground for this kind of activity because they can draft it and take time to choose their words perfectly; they don't have to come up with an instant answer as opposed to oral conversation, where it could show if they did not really know their subject. This can be shown in the second chapter of *Beautiful World, Where Are You* where Alice talks about things like urban architecture and uses specific words such as “topographically”³⁶ making her pass as someone who knows her subject very well when in fact, she has no clue, she is just sharing random thoughts that are based on personal observations rather than on research. This can be perceived as a sign of the characters involvement in their 21st century epistolary exchanges because they always want to have something to answer to the questions they are being asked or have follow up thoughts for their interlocutor to dig into. They do not want the conversation to die so they find ways to still pick each other's brains. In this case, those written dialogues are a clear mirror of the characters' mindset as it implies that if your correspondent is not sure of what you are talking about, they will slightly research the subject to be able to answer and prove their intellect is not inferior.

I.2.2. Immediacy of the emails

The immediacy of the emails is pacing the novel. One can write emails everywhere, on a phone, tablet, or computer, the only thing needed is an internet connection to send it and the person instantly gets it in their inbox. They can answer right away, and the conversation can flow almost as fast as via text. Emails somewhat still keep a formal aspect; therefore it is a good medium to start chatting with someone you do not know personally or someone you met recently, as it allows you to still keep some

³⁶ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 15.

boundaries. This is actually how, in *Conversations With Friends*, Nick and Frances got closer.

Nick and I started to exchange emails after the night he missed our performance [...] It was probably true to say that I found Nick's 'performance beautiful', though I wouldn't have written that in an email.³⁷

They keep some distance because there are thoughts they still are not comfortable to share, but still go back and forth quite easily and can keep the conversation flowing. It is also facilitated by the fact that it is easier to write big paragraphs via emails rather than via text. It allows more things to be said and they can go in depth with their commentaries of each other's artistic performances for example.

Furthermore, thanks to the instantaneity of the reception, it is easier to hold a conversation via emails than via letters as there are no delay problems. The information does not become obsolete by the time the letter is received and you cannot miss anything like important news or events. A characteristic that is still close to a traditional letter is that the other person can still take some time to answer because either they do not know what to write back or how to write it. Another aspect that stays close to the traditional epistolary novel is that through emails "everything has to be expressed within the space of the message, and [...] that leaves room for miscommunication."³⁸ The framework of that writing allows miscommunication because you cannot hear the other person's tone so it is harder to detect/identify elements like irony; therefore, a weird climate can settle in the characters' exchanges. This could be avoided by directly calling your interlocutor for example, or even with a Facetime call because then they could read the other person's face and emotions. This phenomenon is very well shown in *Conversations With Friends* through the exchanges between Nick and Frances; when he writes to her saying "it's obviously hard for me to tell what you actually want and i don't really know if you were joking about being hurt. you're a very stressful person to talk to online."³⁹

This immediacy of the email is also in rupture with the triple temporality of the traditional letter in 18th century epistolary novels. In those novels the time surrounding

³⁷ Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 42.

³⁸ Rooney, interview, The Irish Times.

³⁹ Rooney, *Conversation With Friends*, p. 88.

the letters is divided into three different phases. The moment you receive a letter and read it, the moment you think of a response, write it out and send your letter, and the moment where the recipient finally gets ahold of said letter. This timeframe can extend for days, weeks, even months whereas with emails those three temporalities can be executed all in a same day or even a shorter amount of time, which was totally impossible three centuries ago.

Just like we mentioned with “ghosting” earlier, the distorted time frame in letters is very different than the one we have with texts, and to an extent emails, and it has repercussions on the definition of the relationship itself. We saw earlier that the ceremonial around breakups is different in texts than in letters and this is directly caused by the difference of delays there are between modern means of communication and letters. In 18th century epistolary novels, when the characters break up via letter, “one of the interlocutors suffers because still inscribed in the time of love, the other becomes indifferent, has left this time which connected them.”⁴⁰ [my translation] when the letter is received. The reception delay is a time where the person who wrote the letter can move on from the relationship while the other person is still in the relationship, not knowing what is about to come, the lovers are on two different temporalities. This does not happen with emails because there are no delays, therefore both lovers are on the same temporality, they are both facing the breakup at the same time and not differed.

I.2.3. Personal dimension of the emails

With this type of modern and revisited epistolary novels, this dialogue format makes us feel like we are reading something that happened to us readers, almost like old entries from our personal diaries, remembering distant days, like some correspondence with ourselves.

The main attraction that this type of novel offers to the reader lies in the direct contact that allows us to participate more efficiently in the fate of the characters, and the effusion of feelings.⁴¹ [my translation]

⁴⁰ Lancien-Despert, *A la découverte des lettres d'amour des grands écrivains*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Calas, *Le Roman épistolaire*, p. 23.

With this narrative technique, we almost feel like the main character. This can be found in all of Sally Rooney's novels, as her goal is to have her readers be as involved in the story as humanly possible to make the reading experience remarkable.

We can observe a parallel between journaling and maintaining a written correspondence because journaling is basically writing entries with dates relating certain events, just like one would do writing letters, but those entries are kept private. It is a way of reflecting on past experiences that changed us. The standard practice for people who keep a diary is to write entries every day or almost, therefore the events they are transcribing happened very recently and are still fresh in their memory, so one could say what they are writing is accurate. It can be positive to have diary entries to come back to because memories get distorted with time; what you read in those diaries years later can be very different from what you remember. Your interpretation of events can also differ depending on the mindset you were in at that time and your current mindset. In Sally Rooney's novels those diary entries are replaced by emails. The characters go back to their old emails when they want to remember a moment or feel like something really happened and is not just a trick of their mind.

In my anger I even began searching my emails and texts for 'evidence' of our affair, which consisted of a few boring logistical messages about when he would be back in the house and what time I might arrive. There were no passionate declarations of love or sexually graphic text messages. This made sense, because the affair was conducted in real life and not online, but I felt robbed of something anyway.⁴²

The characters need written evidence of conversations to be able to show those proofs to others and say: look this is real, this is all written there, I'm not lying. When interviewed by the Tangerine Magazine, the author declared: "I think it's very true that if Frances were to have a diary, it would be a diary in the form of exchanges with other people, rather than her relating her own experiences."⁴³ From what Sally Rooney says, we find again this idea of "to be is to be perceived". Frances would not write about her inner life but about what others say to her/about her, they acknowledge her presence therefore she exists.

⁴² Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 91.

⁴³ Rooney, interview, *The Tangerine Magazine*.

The notion of intimacy of the emails is very important. According to the Cambridge dictionary, letters are defined as “a written message from one person to another, usually put in an envelope and sent by post.”⁴⁴ and the definition of message is “a short piece of information that you give to a person when you cannot speak to them directly.”⁴⁵ As we already admitted that emails can be assimilated to letters, we can apply those definitions to emails too. In Rooney’s novels, the characters write to each other words they cannot or would not dare saying face to face. It allows them to think of said words carefully. Equally, it is a way to not take the other person aback and a way to let them process the information. This is used in Sally Rooney’s novels mostly for discussions about love and feelings of the same kind. This scheme can be found in *Beautiful World Where Are You* through the emails Alice and Eileen exchange. There are multiple occurrences of them saying they love each other or signing with formulations such as love always or all my love, but they do not seem very keen on expressing those feelings in real life. It seems like they keep quite a surface level relationship when they are together in person, with few exceptions, whereas in their emails they are very close and will talk about absolutely anything, even the most personal and heartfelt. This process is directly borrowed from classic 18th century epistolary novels where “the protagonists themselves express, directly and using the first person, their feelings as they arise.”⁴⁶ [my translation] Therefore, the feelings are expressed in their truest form because the expression is not delayed as there is no time for the feelings to change before you can see the other person to say it aloud. This is why Eileen and Alice’s relationship is perceived as stronger through the prism of emails than through their in-person interactions.

There is also a degree of intimacy in seeing how the other person writes. You do not often get to see how the people around you write in stylistic terms because in texts you do not necessarily have the space nor the need to formulate pretty sentences. It can also be a proof that you are close because you accept to be vulnerable in front of the other and unveil something new and personal. You trust that the other person will not judge you for the way you write as your words come directly from your heart. This is shown in

⁴⁴ Cambridge Dictionary, “letter.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, “message.”

⁴⁶ Calas, *Le Roman épistolaire*, p. 22.

Normal People when Marianne praises Connell for his writing skills and makes a parallel between said emails and the stories he writes.

He told Marianne once that he'd been writing stories, and now she keeps asking to read them. If they're as good as your emails they must be superb, she wrote. That was a nice thing to read, though he responded honestly: They're not as good as my emails.⁴⁷

Eventually, Connell accepts to let her read his stories. This is the ultimate proof of trust, Marianne was able to uncover an even more private side of Connell than what she had access to in their emails, and “it gave her such a peculiar sense of him as a person”⁴⁸; all of this enabled by their epistolary exchanges. It also creates proximity because the way the characters write in those emails is still natural and true to how they would express themselves orally, just slightly improved for the sake of a better reading experience. As Calas said in *Le Roman épistolaire*, “this proximity is made possible by the choice of a ‘familiar style’ imitating the natural and relaxed style of a private exchange.”⁴⁹ [my translation] Therefore we can see that this notion of intimacy and proximity was already present in 18th century epistolary novels, the use of technology to communicate just adds a modern twist to it.

As feelings are often tricky to manage, writing them down can also be an efficient way to be more objective and less carried away by your emotions, making it easier for the characters to express all that they have to say. In *Conversations With Friends*, towards the end of the novel, Frances uses an email to apologize to Bobbi after publishing a story in a literary journal, clearly describing her life and showing Bobbi in an unflattering light. She also uses said email to try to reconcile with her best friend and to confess her feelings in a different way than what she did in the story.

I'm sorry my story hurt your feelings [...] The truth is that I love you and I always have. [...] When you broke up with me I felt you beat me at a

⁴⁷ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 163.

⁴⁸ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 264.

⁴⁹ Calas, *Le Roman épistolaire*, p. 23.

game we were playing together, and I wanted to come back and beat you. [...]
But I'm not trying to be intelligent now.⁵⁰

With this example, we can definitely see how Frances' mind works: first she apologizes, then she confesses her not so platonic love and finally she justifies herself. If this conversation were to have happened in real life, she would not even have been able to go as far as the end of the apology; let alone express her feelings, because Bobbi would have taken over the conversation and prevented Frances from finishing to say what she had to due to her strong personality, therefore their issue could not have been solved. But thanks to this email, Frances can say all she has to say, and Bobbi can read it carefully multiple times and have time to process it before choosing to answer or not.

This process can help them to get the courage to fight for what they want and be true to themselves without fearing the consequences as much as if they were face to face. “Rooney’s primary subjects are intimacy, friendship, and romance”⁵¹ so conveying all those things through dialogues in general and especially through emails is crucial because this is a transcription of the essence of her work. Those conversations about intimacy are also clues into understanding better the characters and therefore can be a mirror of their mindset. As well, they are developing their feelings and even getting closer not only emotionally but “physically” too even though they are not together in a room, they feel each other’s presence. For example, as Marianne and Connell sustain an on and off relationship, the moments they find their way back to each other — whether as friends or more than that — are the most impactful. Therefore, when they correspond via email while Connell is travelling, tension is building. His emails get longer and longer, he spends hours drafting them to make them perfect, and they do not only talk about what is new but also what is old. Through those exchanges their connection builds up again and it maintains the link between them. When they write or read those emails, they are with the person at that moment even if they are in different countries. This also mirrors their mindset because those emails are the expression of them longing for one another. They finally get the ultimate reward of maintaining this link when they arrange to see each other in Italy, and it feels like nothing has changed between them; they are still the version of Marianne and Connell that they feel no one else knows.

⁵⁰ Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 285.

⁵¹ Menon, “Beautiful World, Where Are You?”, *The Sewanee Review*.

In this first part, this study has shown that the transition from narration to dialogue passages is smooth because of the way said dialogues are presented, without quotation marks or em-dashes, and with very few dialogue tags. Sally Rooney's method of writing dialogues is singular in form so as to get the reader to be as involved as possible in the reading experience. As well, this method is an efficient way for the author to put what the characters think, experience, and say all on the same plan. Eventually, it even became something Rooney is known for, as all her novels are written using this format. It also feels more personal that if there was a clear separation between dialogues and narration, playing on the blurry line between the two to reflect the blurry line between our recollection of events and reality. Moreover, it makes it easier for the reader to relate to the characters because there are no obstacles holding the reader back, focusing more on the page than on the story.

Moreover, it has shown that text messages transcribe how old the characters are and their social status through different techniques. We showcased that some characters have auto capitalization turned off, use slang and avoid proper punctuation to seem relaxed. This is true especially for the younger ones and they also type and answer faster because text is a technology they grew up with, whereas the older ones or those with a certain social status write in a more formal way. This format of dialogue is introduced to make the characters as relatable as possible, showing their different approaches to this mean of communication. All of this is a derivation of exchanges found in 18th century epistolary novels adapted to today's readership by reusing already established codes and adding a modern variation to it.

So far in this study, we saw that mechanisms of classic epistolary exchanges were adapted to fit the 21st century. Letters became emails and now address a wider range of subject in the same body of text and more feelings are accounted for, not just love. Emails are still used to depict the current social reality just like letters did three centuries ago but in Sally Rooney's works they do not only focus on the facts being told but also on how the characters are formulating them, from the moment they compose the idea in their head to the moment it is written down.

Because the characters are very cultured, the emails are also used to address different subjects in a dialectic way. The immediacy surrounding the emails is very important too as it paces the novels, it conveys space for expression, and it is easier and faster to hold a conversation this way than via letters. There is a rupture with the triple temporality found in 18th century epistolary novels as with emails there is a single temporality. As well, those emails have a personal dimension because the characters use them to say things they would not dare to say face to face, it lets them time to think of their words carefully so it is heartfelt. Moreover, those emails are proof that events did happen and that the feelings were real because they were written down. From the reader's point of view, there is also a personal dimension because it feels like we are reading something that happened to us, and it makes us feel involved in the story.

In this part we focused mainly on the form the dialogues take in Sally Rooney's novels to help give us insight on the characters' mindset, but the form can never be dissociated from the content; therefore, in the second part of this study I will focus on literary use of language as an obstacle or an enabler for an authentic relationship.

Partie II. Literary use of language as an obstacle or an enabler for an authentic relationship

II.1. Precise use of words to express specific things

II.1.1. Elevated language in argumentation

What is striking in Sally Rooney's work is that her main characters are deeply intelligent individuals. They all received an excellent education by attending the Trinity College of Dublin, that is recognized as the best and most prestigious college in Ireland, forming elite students. Therefore, their higher education molded our characters a certain way to fit in this universe. The protagonists all internalized specific codes of conduct that rubbed off on them after attending Trinity for years. This led them to express themselves in a peculiar way. All the leads in Rooney's novels are in their late teens to late twenties/early thirties, therefore the reader expects them to speak like any regular young adults, but they do not. Their education programmed them to speak in a higher language than most people, and because they all studied humanities, they spent years confronted to very well written texts and had to express their opinions about those in a clear and articulate way, leading them to assimilate a specific register of language and use the correct and precise words to get their point across and defend their vision of the works studied. Considering they internalized those codes, they also use them in their private conversations, whether they are conscious of it or not, which creates a very specific atmosphere in Sally Rooney's novels.

Elevated language — also called formal or dignified language — is characterized by the use of formal expressions, complex sentence structures and figures of speech, as well as specific vocabulary and lexical fields.

In Sally Rooney's novels, those tools are often used both for dialogues and descriptions, to set a feeling of unity though the entire books. This register of language is generally used in professional or scholar settings, to address older individuals — people you respect or people you do not know well/do not have any form of relationship with — but in our corpus those implicit rules are twisted. In our three novels, elevated language is used between young people, fellow students, friends, and even lovers which is very unusual to find in books and even in real life.

In *Conversations With Friends*, Frances uses formal expressions such as “I sent her a text telling her when to expect me and signed off: in the spirit of filial duty, your loyal daughter.”⁵² while talking to her mother via text. In current conversation no one would say that to their mother, but here Frances tries to be funny.

While expressing his feelings for Marianne in *Normal People*, Connell’s words are poetic: “Marianne, he said, I’m not a religious person but I do sometimes think God made you for me.”⁵³ which is very eloquent and a beautiful declaration of love using a metaphor.

In the emails exchanged between Eileen and Alice in *Beautiful World Where Are You*, they often talk about niche subjects, which leads to the necessity of using precise terms and specific lexical fields to be understood clearly. In one of her digital letters Eileen replies to something Alice said about the concept of time and space. She begins talking about the Late Bronze Age and says: “starting about 1,500 years before the Christian era, the Eastern Mediterranean region was characterised by a system of centralised palace governments, which redistributed money and goods through complex and specialised city economies.”⁵⁴ She starts to explain everything she knows about this period and the repercussions it has on modern society, using vocabulary specific to this time frame and the lexical field of economy.

In our corpus, there are many occurrences of quite complex sentence structures, sometimes the reader has to reread the passage a couple of times to be sure they understood it properly. A good example of it can be found in *Normal People*, when Connell is mentally putting into perspective the relation his fellow classmates have to books and culture in general. He thinks “It was culture as class performance, literature fetishised for its ability to take educated people on false emotional journeys, so that they might afterwards feel superior to the uneducated people whose emotional journeys they liked to read about.”⁵⁵ The sentence is mirrored, there is parallel between “educated people” and “uneducated people” and reoccurrence of “emotional journeys” makes the idea quite hard to follow because the words are repeated and similar words are used, so

⁵² Rooney, *Conversations With Friends*, p. 45.

⁵³ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 117.

⁵⁴ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 228.

the reader needs to focus on the sentence to make sense of it, because if they read it too fast they might not get what Connell is trying to explain.

Elevated language in argumentation is clearly noticeable in *Conversations With Friends* and *Normal People* especially, as in those books, the main characters are still in college, therefore we witness firsthand the impact of their educational environment. As said earlier, the main characters are all recognized to be very intelligent, gifted students and they work very hard to maintain this status by using every tool they have at their disposal to succeed. We can see the protagonists using formal language in class, both orally and in writing, as well as in private settings. They rarely slip towards familiar language even among their peers because they set a standard for themselves and by using this language in all circumstances, they make sure that it becomes a norm, and their private life will not unwillingly affect their academic performances.

Moreover, there is a direct link between elevated language and social status, as people who grew up wealthy are most likely to be offered quality education and revolve around well-spoken individuals, unconsciously picking up this way of speaking too. Because the Trinity College of Dublin is a microcosm full of elite students who mostly come from privileged families, almost everyone who attends this school is used to dignified language. They employ it to be perceived as very clever and cultivated people who have rich inner lives and thoughts about every subject, whether this is true or not. In their world, appearances matter more than reality and language is a powerful weapon to play pretend. In *Normal People*, Connell has a culture shock when he realizes this. Having grown up lower class in the countryside, raised by a single mother who had him in as a teen, our main character received a standard education and developed into an autodidact through reading; he did not know that erudition could be faked. When Connell was accepted to Trinity, he started being confronted to people who grew up a world apart from his and was struck by how different they are to him and how similar they are to each other.

This is what it's like in Dublin. All Connell's classmates have identical accents and carry the same size MacBook under their arms. In seminars they express their opinions passionately and conduct impromptu debates. Unable to form such straightforward views or express them with any

force, Connell initially felt a sense of crushing inferiority to his fellow students, as if he had upgraded himself accidentally to an intellectual level far above his own, where he had to strain to make sense of the most basic premises. He did gradually start to wonder why all their classroom discussions were so abstract and lacking in textual detail, and eventually he realised that most people were not actually doing the reading. They were coming into college every day to have heated debates about books they had not read.⁵⁶

At this moment, Connell realized why he had a hard time to fit in. He understood that those students were not more intelligent than him, they just had the codes, and he did not. He is hit by the fact that given their difference in parental and early school education, he will never totally assimilate in this microcosm, and they will never get him either. There always will be an invisible gap between them even if Connell assimilates the codes.

In *Conversations With Friends*, the author focuses more on the lives of Bobbi and Frances out of the scholar world, therefore we witness them using high language more with their friends and people they are close to like Melissa and Nick, and through the poetry they write and perform. We can also see Frances use this type of language with her coworkers, it allows the reader to experience this level of language in almost all domains. Whereas in *Normal People*, we follow closely the academic performances of Marianne and Connell. We see them use elevated language in class as well as in private conversations and can draw a parallel between the two in argumentation.

Using elevated language in realist novels about the lives of young people can be tricky because it can make it seem like the characters lack authenticity. Despite their social environment, they do not have many reasons to speak like this all the time, especially when they address their lover. When Marianne and Connell or Bobbi and Frances or Simon and Eileen have private conversations, they should speak in colloquial or informal language with slang terms, because this is how people from their hometowns speak and this is the level of language they were raised around. It also applies to Alice when she talks to Felix because even if she is an author so basically makes a living out of the use of complex words and pretty sentences, her boyfriend is a warehouse worker,

⁵⁶ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 70.

therefore he does not evolve in an environment where high language is frequently used. Thus, her use of language could be an obstacle in their relationship, as Alice's friends also speak this way so Felix could have a harder time fitting in with them and connecting, which could potentially fragilize his relationship with his girlfriend. And because Eileen is everything to Alice, she would probably not build a life with someone her best friend does not click with. In this occurrence, Alice and her friends should perhaps adapt their language to be more easily comprehensible by Felix to not make him feel excluded, which would make their group conversations seem more authentic as well.

In the novel, there is an instance where Alice shows Felix a picture of Eileen and Simon, mentioning that he is religious and that even if he does not talk about it a lot, he is a very spiritual person and has a set idea of what Jesus is to him and has his own interpretation of Catholicism. To which Felix answers "Here, I'm sorry, but he sounds like a headcase. In this day and age a person believes all that? Some lad a thousand years ago popped out from the grave and that's the whole point of everything?"⁵⁷ Felix expresses himself in low language and cannot comprehend how some people are still very religious in 21st century Ireland. Alice tries to start a discussion with him about systems of beliefs and how almost everyone on Earth needs to believe in something with all their soul, no matter what it is, to keep their drive and will to live. While doing so, she uses relatively accessible language so that Felix can understand clearly what her point of view on the topic is. We notice that Alice tries to be comprehensible to Felix because when she talks about complex subjects with her other friends, she does not express her thoughts the same way as she does in this passage. If she had had this conversation with Eileen, she would have just summarized her thoughts using Marx's infamous quote "religion [...] is the opium of the people"⁵⁸ and Eileen would have immediately understood her vision and found something clever to answer to feed the conversation. But here, Felix struggles to construct solid arguments to oppose to what Alice just said, even if she tried to be as clear and concise as possible, therefore the discussion dies.

The only rightful explanation to their use of formal language in all circumstances would be the internalization of the codes mentioned above and the hold it has on the

⁵⁷ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 82.

⁵⁸ Marx, Introduction to *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, p. 1.

characters. An aftermath of this internalization could be that they associate elevated language with their desire to be perceived by their partners as very clever individuals who can sustain long and meaningful conversations, so that their lover would never be tired of talking to them. In *Normal People*, elevated language is a cement in the relationship between Marianne and Connell. They often have deep conversations about literature or geopolitics, and they can express their truth freely because they manipulate the English language perfectly. They are not scared to be misunderstood so they can have meaningful discussions and spend quality time together just talking.

Moreover, Connell uses formal language in his love declarations to Marianne, he is very well spoken, and the love language he expresses is words of affirmation. He likes to show his love to Marianne by praising her, telling her that she is beautiful, smart, and funny and he says I love you to her many times. Therefore, without the correct use of language, his expression of love towards Marianne would have less impact and feel less sincere; she would wonder if he truly meant what he said, but as she knows Connell is extremely eloquent and intelligent, she is certain his declarations are genuine. For example, the first time Connell declared his feelings for Marianne he said “I love you. I’m not just saying that, I really do.”⁵⁹ He stresses that he means it because he does not want her to believe he is saying I love you just because they had sex, he does not want her to feel used.

Furthermore, the reader knows the importance of those intellectual exchanges in the lovers’ relationship because in the novel, there are many occurrences of Marianne telling her friends that Connell is smarter than her, notably when they are depreciating him for his lower-class background.

He is tolerated through his association with Marianne, but he’s not considered in his own right particularly interesting. He’s not even smart! one of her male friends exclaimed the other night when Connell wasn’t there. He’s smarter than I am, said Marianne. No one knew what to say then. It’s true that Connell is quiet at parties, stubbornly quiet even, and not interested in showing

⁵⁹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 46.

off how many books he has read or how many wars he knows about. But Marianne is aware, deep down, that that's not why people think he's stupid.⁶⁰

Marianne defends Connell because no one knows him the way she does but without overreacting; she is speaking calmly, stating a fact. For her, it is set in stone that her best friend is smarter than her; no arguments can make her change her mind and she wants to make it clear to her other friends, so that they stop treating Connell like an outcast just because of his background.

There are also occasions when Connell tells people a reason why he loves Marianne is because she is extremely intelligent and educated and definitely smarter than him. All of this could not be sustained without the use of elevated language, as their relationship would not carry the same intensity without those mechanisms and interactions.

Originally, dignified language even plays a role in the start their relationship. In high school, when Connell used to come to pick up his mom from Marianne's house, where she worked as a housekeeper, he found himself spending time with his schoolmate and exploring her house. He noticed that she had a huge book collection and was fascinated by how much she read. As a reader himself, this was the first thing they had in common. Marianne asked if his friends were interested in literature too and he answered no. Connell never mentioned to his other friends that he read because they would not have understood, as he was the cliché of the sporty guy, not the nerd, and deep down he was scared they would make fun of him. Connell ended up voluntarily spending more and more time at Marianne's to have the chance to talk to her outside of school, where they pretended to not know each other personally, as she was seen by everyone as an outcast, and he used those moments to have well-spoken and meaningful exchanges about literature with her.

He told her she should try reading *The Communist Manifesto*, he thought she would like it, and he offered to write down the title for her so she wouldn't forget. I know what *The Communist Manifesto* is called, she said. He shrugged, okay. After a moment he added, smiling: You're trying to act

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92.

superior, but like, you haven't even read it. She had to laugh then, and he laughed because she did.⁶¹

This discussion is significant because of the irony of it, the working-class boy suggesting to the rich girl she should read Marx's manifest, one of the founding texts of communism, and her having already read it even though given her privileged status, she should be opposed to communism and the fair spilt of resources. But Marianne is an ideologist who does not care about the status quo, she has her own principles regardless of what her class and education should lead her to believe. This is why at this exact moment we can witness the first spark of attraction between the two, as their ideologies align, and this is their first not shallow common point. Their first kiss even happens in front of her bookshelves in the study, Connell holding one of Marianne's books, a copy of *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin.

The Fire Next Time is a nonfiction book. It is composed of two essays: *My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation* and *Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind*. Those essays were capital in the history of African American struggles for civil rights. It demonstrates a profound awareness on social and racial issues and questionings.

My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation is an essay disguised as a letter to Baldwin's teenage nephew.

Baldwin tells [his nephew] that his grandfather was ultimately undone—destroyed—by believing that he actually was what white society said he was: subhuman. It is for this reason that the man became religious. But [the teenage boy] is not religious, Baldwin points out; rather, he represents a new era and a new way of thinking, and the author encourages his nephew not to make the same mistake as his grandfather by believing what white people say about him.⁶²

In this essay, the author exposes the racial prejudice against African Americans in the U.S.A. and wants him to understand where this bias comes from, to realize that this is fueled by white people's ignorance and lack of historical understandings.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁶² Lannamann, *The Fire Next Time*, LitCharts.

At the end of this letter, Baldwin turns to the term *integration*, explaining that it is the kind of patient understanding explained above—the display of acceptance and love from blacks to whites—that is the only hope of convincing the white countrymen to ‘see themselves as they are’ and start about the work of changing the structures of inequality built into the United States; in other words, to begin the process of true racial integration. About the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Baldwin says that ‘the country is celebrating freedom one hundred years too soon,’ and that in order for African-Americans to be free, white Americans must also be free.⁶³

The second essay, Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind, takes up the majority of the book. In it, Baldwin explains that when he was 14 years old, he “began to recognize the realities of growing up as an African-American in Harlem.”⁶⁴ He started to witness many people in his community gravitating towards crime, people who were brought up the same way as him and in the same conditions, so he thought turning towards religion was a way to avoid going down the criminal path. This essay talks about the importance of education and acceptance of others. He recognizes that he used church as “something to occupy [himself] with and invest in as a way of coping with the fears instilled in [him] by a racist society”⁶⁵ and notices the authority figures around him and the power they had on him, church being one also.

With time Baldwin understood that church was also a gimmick and he “gradually became skeptical of religion, developing a mistrust that he explains by outlining the history of the Christian church. An institution built on spreading the gospel, the dissemination of Christianity depended heavily on the subjugation of others. Baldwin suggests that anybody hoping to lead a moral life will thus have to reexamine the core tenets of Christianity, since Christianity has been so fundamental to imperialism.”⁶⁶ demonstrating that racism and religion are tightly linked.

He also argues that other religions putting black people at the center of their faith are equally flawed as Christianity for that it cannot overcome centuries of systemic and structural racism on his own without a deep understanding of history.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

As well, in this essay, “Baldwin trains his thoughts on the idea of segregation, a hot topic in the early 1960s. He argues that the 1954 Supreme Court decision to outlaw racial segregation in public schools was less an act of progress (as white liberals were so eager to deem it) than it was a competitive and defensive move in the Cold War. With Russia threatening the spread of Communism, the United States needed the sympathy and alliance of African nations—sympathy it would be hard to win if prejudice and oppression against black people was literally written into the country’s laws. Therefore, Baldwin suggests, the end of segregation was an appeal to Africa in the greater struggle against the USSR. This further reinforces the unfortunate American reality that concessions of freedom or equality seem to be have been made only insofar as they benefit the white power structure. The sad fact of the matter is that, more than any other Western country, the United States ‘has been best placed to prove the uselessness and the obsolescence of the concept of color. But it has not dared to accept this opportunity, or even to conceive of it as an opportunity.’ Indeed, Baldwin’s assessment of America’s false progress unearths the country’s unwillingness to truly examine itself.”⁶⁷

With those essays, Baldwin establishes that only love and a deep understanding of the other can allow society to evolve to live better together, without black people having to submit to hate.

This, he argues, is the only path to a collective resilience. In his final words, Baldwin issues a concerned warning that—borrowing metaphorically from a slave spiritual that references the Bible—if Americans fail to come together, destruction and fire will come.⁶⁸

The mention of this literary piece in *Normal People* is important because the question of the place of religion, especially Christianity, in people’s lives is very present in the novel, as Ireland’s history is marked by the religious conflicts that have opposed Catholics and Protestants for centuries. As well, those religious conflicts are linked with discrimination and differences in social class thorough Ireland still nowadays. Thus, the fact that Connell holds this very book when he kisses Marianne for the first time is significant because the message can be adapted to their situation, they need to resort to love and a deep understanding of each other for their relationship to work.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Moreover, there is irony in their relationship itself as it can be seen as a commentary about a society unwilling to change. Even if Marianne and Connell deeply love each other, they have to face many obstacles along the way, often linked to their very different upbringing, and this causes them to break up a few times. Irony is a sort of leitmotiv in *Normal People*, manifesting itself under different forms.

Irony is a complex literary device as it contains multiple subcategories therefore it is part of the elevated language register. In this novel, the reader faces different types of irony, objective irony being the most represented. This form of irony consists of presenting facts without judgment or emotional involvement, which is often done by the narrator, and it can be mixed with cynicism or black humor, which the characters tend to do.

In *Normal People*, there are many occurrences of Marianne being cynical but the most memorable is when she calls out Connell during a dispute for giving her his unsolicited opinion about her love life. “Why are you trying to get me to break up with Jamie, then? she says. I’m not, I’m not. I just want you to be happy, that’s all. Because you’re such a good friend, is it? Well, yeah, he says. I mean, I don’t know.”⁶⁹ The “because you’re such a good friend, is it?” is deeply cynical especially regarding the state of their relationship and the complexity of their ties. Marianne thinks by giving his opinion of Jamie, Connell is just trying to belittle him and manipulate the girl so that she will break up with him, because generally she has high esteem of what Connell, says and takes his advice quite seriously. But here, in the context of their fight, by using the term “friend” in her response, she touches on a raw nerve and her cynicism fuels the dispute.

Marianne also uses a lot of antiphrasis — saying the contrary of what you think — but because of her social status and her inexpressiveness, people who do not know her very well do not know if she is joking or not, especially when she comments on social issues. It happens when Helen, Connell’s college girlfriend, asks if “she really cares about the Israeli peace talks”⁷⁰ and thinks Marianne is just “self-absorbed”⁷¹ and faking interest in the matter for attention, even though it is something the young woman genuinely cares

⁶⁹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 155.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 173.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

about. Only Connell seems to always understand her. Even at the very beginning of their relationship he knew how to read her. For example, in high school, Marianne texted him to know when he was coming to the Debs fundraiser. He replied that he was running late but would be there soon and asked her “how are you getting on socialising with people. Marianne [wrote] back: I’m the new popular girl in school now.”⁷² It is obviously ironic because the girl had no friends and no one at the party seemed to even notice her. Connell understood what she really meant so when he arrived at the party, he said hi to her and was nice to her the entire night, without making it obvious that they were friends outside of school.

In the novel there is also satire, as the main characters indirectly laugh at the unfairness of the conditions they started their relationship in, because they only got so little time together in high school before it all went wrong and were left with only what ifs. The use of satire is most sticking when it is used by someone else than Marianne or Connell. In a scene where Connell tells his mom is going to take Rachel to the Debs not Marianne, Lorraine uses satire when she replies: “And you don’t think maybe you should have asked her? she says. Seeing as how you fuck her every day after school.”⁷³ Here, Lorraine uses explicit language to make her son face the ridicule of the situation and it works because he answers “that is vile language to use”⁷⁴ because it is out of character for his mom to speak this way, therefore the meaning of her sentence hits him even more.

In *Normal People*, we can also find examples of burlesque — to talk about a low subject using elevated language — in discussions about sex among other things. “Of course she would talk drolly about their sex life, like it’s a cute joke between them and not awkward. And in a way he likes it, he likes knowing how to act around her.”⁷⁵ Connell also likes to talk poetically about their sex life “I did used to think I could read your mind at times, Connell says. [...] And afterwards. But maybe that’s normal.”⁷⁶ It is a poetical way to say that by making love they become one and are in communion in their most intimate and vulnerable moments.

⁷² Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 33.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 81-82.

Irony is used as a common thread throughout the novel so that the reader never forgets how unfair social injustices are and how tough it is to free yourself from where you come from and the impact this has on your entire life.

All this means that Sally Rooney's use of elevated language in argumentation should not be downplayed as it is one of the foundations of her writing style and is a powerful tool to convey different messages.

II.1.2. Verbalization of feelings expression

High language is a communication tool because if the characters adopt the right words with the right meaning, they can express themselves clearly to minimize chances of misunderstandings, even if this cannot avoid them totally.

This can add a layer of authenticity in their exchanges because the protagonists know the significance behind their words and pronounce them carefully. They only say things they genuinely mean, therefore we know their feelings are real. This is the case in *Normal People* with Marianne; she is not very expressive when it comes to her feelings, she keeps everything bottled up inside and does not let go easily, so when she says I love you to Connell, the reader is persuaded that she really means it, as it happens very rarely. As well, Marianne and Connell do not argue often, but when they do they use very precise words to touch on a raw nerve. They know their lover's weakest points and how to make them react. But they also know what to say to make things better. Proper language use is the foundation of their relationship as said earlier and conveys their emotions and thoughts perfectly. We can tell when Connell is jealous or when Marianne is mad and vice versa just by the way they formulate their sentences. Understanding the techniques the characters use when they speak is very useful to uncover a new layer of Sally Rooney's novels and have a deeper understanding of her work.

Additionally, verbalization of feelings expression is very present between Eileen and Alice in *Beautiful World Where Are You*, because they are each other's confidants, they talk about their respective boyfriends and state of their relationships but they also

tackle heavier subjects like mental health as Alice has suffered from depression in the past.

In *Conversations With Friends*, Bobbi and Frances have heart to heart talks where Bobbi expresses her jealousy towards Nick as well as her fascination for Melissa. Frances also confides in her, especially about her personal struggles with endometriosis and her conflictual relationship with her family.

As well, to know how the other person functions is a great way to reduce tensions, because if you are having a heated discussion and you know your interlocutor does not like to be pressed then you understand that continuing the argument is useless and you need to leave them alone before it escalates, as seen a few times in *Normal People* for example.

All those dialogues are useful to access the characters' minds. If their feelings were not expressed/externalized, the reader would have a hard time understanding what happens in the story and the characters' progression thorough the novels. This verbalization process also shows that the protagonists can rely on each other and especially on the person they are the closest to; whether it is their best friend, their lover or both, as the line between those statuses is often blurry in our corpus. It also highlights that genuine friendship and love is hard to find but when you find your person, someone you can trust and fully confide in, you must be willing to put in the work to keep them close, and this involves working on your communication skills to avoid unnecessary tensions and taboos. Therefore, Sally Rooney's writing demonstrates that verbalizing your feelings is key to maintain healthy relationships, both for platonic and romantic love.

Moreover, using dialogues to make the protagonists say how they feel is more impactful than if it was just said through narration because the reader can feel that it comes from the characters themselves and that they are sincere. The protagonists open up and grant their interlocutor a direct access to their most vulnerable spot, their consciousness. The readers can identify with them better. It gives substance to the characters also because in the way they speak, we can identify their hidden emotions too. The reader must process the information and tie it with other elements of the story to understand the reasons why a certain character is feeling a particular way at a precise moment and to understand how their interlocutor is going to react and/or respond.

Furthermore, all the characters are hyperaware of the world around them, therefore they talk about it, so it is quite useless to also go through it in narration. Rooney makes the choice of addressing actual real-life issues through the voice of her characters; therefore, it can have more impact on the reader. She uses dialogues to talk about student precarity, wealth distribution, the Irish economic crisis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the refugee crisis, and many more other subjects that are still quite controversial in society. By making the characters as relatable as possible, she exposes her readership to those issues, saying to her audience here look, those young people care so why would you not? It carries more weight than if she was just describing those issues in narration paragraphs.

Sally Rooney does not use her words without putting a conscious effort of sounding as real as possible when she writes. She wants the reader to feel like they could have said those lines themselves and that the reaction the characters are opposed could have been how the person they talk to would have reacted in real life. This writing technique also permits to have things left unsaid voluntarily because either the moment is not right, or the character is not ready to say it yet, but without making the reader feel like they are lacking a part of the story. They can guess that those missing pieces will come along the way, they just have to let the story unfold and trust the author.

To verbalize your feelings is also the only way for your interlocutor to see a reflection of your mindset. Without it, the person you are talking to could only have a reflection through your actions, but it is a quite unclear prism, words are far more significative. As we saw earlier, Rooney's characters are better at expressing their feelings on paper than at verbalizing them out loud. This can be the result of their humanities studies, as we can guess sometimes, they needed to give personal opinions about texts or pieces of media and structuring their ideas on paper can help them to have a clearer mind and seem more genuine. In some cases in our corpus, some of our protagonists start by drafting texts or emails, or even write on paper things they want to say to their friend or lover before actually finding the courage to tell them aloud, as it is more impactful because if the other person hears your voice, they can also notice the emotions conveyed and how sincere you are. This is an enabler for a more authentic relationship.

This phenomenon happens in multiple steps in *Conversations With Friends*, when Frances writes a short story about Bobbi and her growing resentment towards her friend.

Frances is mad at Bobbi or at least has negative feelings towards her that she cannot totally grasp and tries to verbalize it by turning it into auto-fiction. When she is offered money to publish her short story, Frances sends it to Valerie — a professional of the literary world and a friend of Melissa — to have her proofread it, not knowing that Valerie would send it to Melissa who would herself forward it to Bobbi. Bobbi instantly understands that the story is about her and gets profoundly angry at Frances. She even moves out of their shared apartment because she cannot stand being around her roommate anymore, because she feels totally betrayed. Later, Frances sends Bobbi a lengthy email to apologize and tries to explain to Bobbi why she did it, asking her friend to please write back. Bobbi does not write back, instead she decides to show up to the apartment to talk to Frances, face to face, so they can have this discussion live and really make the situation evolve and progress. The girls end up having a long conversation about issues they had never addressed before. Said issues were weighting on their relationship without them even realizing it. Frances faced her flaws and how bad she hurt Bobbi with her short story, and she owned up to her actions. At the end of the day, to have this conversation face to face like grown adults, not hiding behind a screen, helped them make peace. Verbalizing their respective thoughts and feelings was the only way to clear the air between them and let the other get a glimpse of their mindset.

On the contrary, not to be able to correctly verbalize what you are feeling can lead to misunderstandings which can affect your relationships. In Rooney's novels, despite the characters being very cerebral people, misunderstandings still happen and can have negative consequences, it can even jeopardize friendships and couples. Sometimes the characters tell white lies to protect themselves because they fear the consequences of their revelations, but by omitting information it can lead the interlocutor to have a misconception of a situation and push them to do something foolish. In the corpus, there are multiple occurrences of white lies, like in *Beautiful World Where Are You* when Simon forgot to inform Eileen that they were not in an exclusive relationship and that he was seeing someone else at the same time; or in *Conversation With Friends* when Bobbi omitted to mention to Frances that she kissed Melissa, as well as when Frances told Bobbi she was in a relationship without revealing that it was Nick she was dating. The protagonists do so to avoid crises or jealousy but eventually their little secrets are always discovered. The characters should be honest from the start and try to formulate the things they are deliberately hiding in a way that would be less impactful and painful for their

interlocutors. It could prevent them from feeling backstabbed after discovering the truth by themselves or thanks to a third party.

What the characters say or not is also a reflection of their mindset because if they are feeling ashamed of something then they will try to hide it but on the contrary if they are proud of an achievement or else, they will directly be willing to share it with their loved ones. Therefore, the reader can guess more of the state of mind of the characters thanks to this. Furthermore, as the characters are often morally grey, how they express themselves and emphasize the side of the story they want the others to perceive helps them to be more credible. They can bend the truth if needed to push their agenda. “Rooney is adept at using subtext in her language to let characters convey meaning without saying it out loud.”⁷⁷ Their apparent tone and how they verbalize their feelings can tell another story on top of just the meaning of the words they use.

Verbalization is also a way to work on yourself and try to improve your situation. For instance, towards the end of *Normal People*, Connell starts a therapy because he suffers from depression and his therapist asks if he has anyone he feels comfortable confiding to about how he feels. Connell responds that he has Marianne, who probably is the person he is the closest to, saying about her: “she’s hard to describe if you don’t know her. She’s really smart, a lot smarter than me, but I would say we see the world in a similar way.”⁷⁸ He praises his friend a lot and says she is one of the rare people he “clicks” with. He then tells the therapist that she is on Erasmus now, so he has not seen her in a while. The woman immediately guesses how hard it is for Connell to be away from Marianne just from the way he spoke about her. With this conversation, he understands just how necessary it is for him to revolve around Marianne to feel fulfilled. Verbalizing his feelings and having a deep exchange about it with a professional was the only way to improve his situation and work on his mental health. If he did not verbalize his feelings and kept everything for himself, his situation could only have gotten worse.

⁷⁷ Ranjan, “5 Reasons to read Sally Rooney Books”, Medium.

⁷⁸ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 223.

II.2. Narrative techniques influencing our perception of an authentic relationship

II.2.1. Different narrative points of view

In our corpus, each story is told from different narrative point of view. In *Conversation With Friends*, first person narration is used, in *Normal People*, close third person is employed and in *Beautiful World Where Are You*, remote third person is adopted. To better understand the difference between those points of view and the purpose they serve in our novels, we must define them clearly.

First person point of view is used to enter the characters' mind. It makes the narration more dramatic since we follow the secret thoughts of the characters, and the reader can identify with them. The only problem is that it gives the reader only a restricted view of the other characters and what we are told might be biased or unreliable. Here, the narrator is the main character, they tell the story from their perspective, we see everything through their eyes. This is the point of view Rooney adopts in *Conversation With Friends*.

With third person point of view, the narrator seems privileged and to know everything about the characters' thoughts and feelings. The narrator is not one of the protagonists of the story. There are three types of third person point of view: omniscient, limited and objective. Omniscient means that the narrator knows it all and has access to everyone's thoughts, feelings, and motives even though the characters do not say those things out loud to others. This type of narrator can also know the past and the future. Limited is when the narrator still exists outside of the story, but they do not have access to the thoughts of all the characters, they can only focus on one at the time, but the narrator still has privileged access to the mind of the character of their choice. Third person limited is used in *Normal People*. Objective is when the narrator does not have access to the thoughts of the characters, they are only able to report actions and events. We do not know the motivations of the characters until they discuss it with someone else. This mode of narration is very straight-forward, the narrator does not pick a side and it excludes bias. The narrator only has access to the scene that unfolds in front of them and does not know what is happening at the same time elsewhere. This type of third person point of view is used in *Beautiful World Where Are You*.

Points of view are associated with focalization, also called narrative perspective. There are three types of focalizations: internal, external and zero. Limited point of view

is associated with internal focalization: we follow a character's thoughts. Objective point of view is associated external focalization: it feels like we are watching the story through a camera, just actions and words, no thoughts. Omniscient point of view is associated with zero focalization. It means we have access to the thoughts and emotions of all characters.

In *Conversations With Friends*, the story is told through first person point of view. The narrator is Frances, the main character. It grants the reader access to her mind. But as we only see the events from her point of view, it induces a biased vision of the story. In her review of the novel for *The Montclarion*, a student publication, Rebecca Bienskie Jackson said:

As the book is written in first-person point of view, readers really get to see inside her head and understand the motivations behind her actions. She goes in-depth on her views and relationships with Bobbi and Nick. She is quite blunt and cynical as well and can be really hard on herself. As a reader, you are rooting for her and only wish for the best but she tends to self-sabotage situations with school and her relationships.⁷⁹

The first-person point of view allows the readers to empathize with Frances and see her through not only her strengths but her weaknesses also. She can be unsufferable sometimes but through this point of view we understand her motives. It brings us deep insight into her life and everything that can affect her mood and her relationships with others. Frances struggles a lot with her perception of self and pushes it on others, this is why despite her deep love for Bobbi she is still somewhat jealous of her. Bobbi is everything she is not: confident, charismatic, and fierce. On the contrary, Frances is transparent and unremarkable, she has nothing special in her looks or personality wise and she knows it. This is why when she receives attention from an older man, who is married to a successful woman, and who himself is quite famous, she feels immense validation and has an ego boost. This new perception of self leads her to act out and change how she interacts with her acquaintances. With the use of this point of view, the reader can feel like Frances' relationships with others are less authentic because we know what she really thinks about the people around her, and it does not always match the way she talks and interacts with them. First person point of view implies internal focalization

⁷⁹ Jackson, "Book Review: 'Conversations with Friends' By Sally Rooney," *The Montclarion*.

so we do not have access to the thoughts of others about Frances and can only see the story through her eyes, we do not know what is happening simultaneously elsewhere.

Normal People is told using third person limited point of view. The narrator is not a character of the story, but they have access to Marianne or Connell's thoughts successively. It is a sort of close third person when the intimate narration permits the reader to inhabit the mind of the main characters through the narrator's privileged access. The alternate focus on Marianne and Connell allows the reader to understand more precisely how they feel about each other and how they perceive each other. It also gives elements of their inner life used to understand their reactions to certain events and their thought process. Moreover, enables the reader to see both sides of an argument. It adds layers to the characters and make them feel more authentic.

Marianne and Connell sustain a very complex relationship throughout the entire novel; they alternate between being best friends, lovers, and strangers. It is hard to define the power of their sentiments as they are constantly evolving, but with this third person point of view, being inside their head in turns is a tool to understand where they come from, what they find is repellent and what they love about the other. They only express out loud how strong their bond is on a few occasions because they both instinctively know it; they do not need it to be affirmed for their link to be real, they just feel it.

In the last scene of the novel, the narrator has access to Marianne's consciousness. At this point, Connell is telling her about an offer he received to finish his studies in New York but hesitates to go because he does not want to be separated from her. It is time for them to have an open-hearted discussion about the state of their relationship and their future. "You know I love you, says Connell. I'm never going to feel the same way for someone else. She nods, okay. He's telling the truth."⁸⁰ Here the narrator has access to Marianne's consciousness. She does not reply anything to this as she knows Connell is already aware her feelings for him match this intensity. In her head, the young woman rewinds what they have been through together, stating what she thinks she brought to Connell and vice versa, as well as their respective growth as individuals and the positive impact they had on each other, also thinking about how different their lives would have been if they had never crossed paths. She sums it up mentally with the following sentences: "They've done a lot of good for each other. Really, she thinks, really. People

⁸⁰ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 272.

can really change one another.”⁸¹ The essence of their relationship is summarized in only a few simple words, but those words hold so much power as it conveys raw authenticity. Without the use of close third person point of view, the reader could not have access to it and therefore the final scene would have had less impact on them. As well, because the reader had access to Connell’s mind earlier, they know he is also in awe of the power of their relationship and therefore makes the final even more moving and heart wrenching, as we are certain they are the love of each other’s lives but are left hanging ultimately.

All this is coupled with zero focalization, which gives the reader a global view of the scene unfolding. It creates proximity and makes us feel like we are in the room with them. This permits to touch the reader to the core because they are really immersed in the story, it is a great way to convey emotions.

Objective third person is employed in *Beautiful World Where Are You*. The narrator does not have access to the thoughts of the characters, they are only able to report actions or events. The characters are not detailed, because of it the reader has many questions but needs to wait for the answers. For example, in the opening scene of the novel, we only get to learn the names of Alice and Felix when they introduce themselves to each other, before that they are only referred to as “a woman” and “a man”⁸². This remote third person installs distance between the reader and the characters, it is more difficult to empathize with the protagonists as we have no idea what is going on inside their head. This associated with external focalization offers us contemplation of sometimes unidentified characters, the reader must focus to understand where the story is going. Relationships seem less authentic because without access to the characters’ mind we cannot tell if the characters like each other or not. It is only delivered through speech, but the protagonists can lie, it implies objectivity of the facts, not of the feelings.

In an essay about the novel, Tara K. Menon — who is an assistant professor of English at Harvard University — explicates this use of third person point of view perfectly:

Rather than seeing the world through the eyes of a central character,
we witness it as if we were an on-scene observer watching these characters

⁸¹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 273.

⁸² Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 3.

from afar. Sentences like ‘They appeared to be about the same age’ or ‘No one else was home, but the layout and interior suggested she was not the sole occupant’ are typical. Throughout, the third person narrator avoids both certainty and specificity—words like ‘appeared’ and ‘seemed’ occur repeatedly, and so do indefinite and definite articles instead of names: ‘a woman sat in a hotel bar’ (Alice) or ‘the men were coming out of the water’ (Simon and Felix). At one point, the narration shifts, without reason or explanation, to the imperative tense: ‘Follow her eyes now and notice the bedroom door left open, a slice of white wall visible through the banister posts.’ The prose is extremely spare, even more so than in Rooney’s previous novels. The not entirely omniscient, or at least deliberately reticent, narration feels at once oddly distant and voyeuristic. It also doesn’t make much sense.⁸³

The “outsider” point of view creates a weird effect on the reader, there are only vague and limited information about what is going on, so they need to figure it out on their own. Sally Rooney wants to achieve active participation of the reader in the construction of the story despite the apparent distance produced with this narrative technique. We notice that Rooney’s narrative process is quite unusual given the numerous shifts in writing techniques and the use she has of third person point of view, it is one of the things that makes her work remarkable.

This eclectic use of third person point of view mixed with external focalization alone cannot convey authenticity in the relationships between the characters; but as thoughts are never totally linear, the author makes us witness uncertainty using unprecise words in the narration. This makes Rooney’s writing more authentic; it seems more organic than if everything was composed perfectly clearly. This type of narration also carries a notion of intimacy and secrecy because the reader does not intrude in the characters’ lives. Their relationships can seem more authentic this way because as we know little, we can imagine there are no external influences weighing on their relationships and that all their interactions are genuine. Therefore, the authenticity of the narration rubs off on the characters and how we perceive them and their relationships.

With objective third person and external focalization, the narrator does not have a hold on the characters’ mindset. The readers only witness them say the dialogues, they

⁸³ Menon, “Beautiful World, Where Are You?”, *The Sewanee Review*.

do not know what is going on inside their head when they say it. The level of authenticity perceived by readers depends on the angle from which they analyze the story.

Because the author uses a different point of view in each novel, if Rooney's audience reads all her novels, they can notice that each point of view serves a different purpose and helps her emphasize certain aspects of the story she wants to tell. In *Conversations With Friends*, the novelist uses first person to bring deep insight onto Frances' life. In *Normal People*, she chooses close third person to create proximity with the reader and to make the narration really intimate, to accentuate the strength of the bond between Marianne and Connell. Finally, in *Beautiful World Where Are You*, remote third person is adopted to create distance with the reader, to make them feel like they are watching a movie, each scene unfolding one by one in front of their eyes, without having any power on it.

II.2.2. Showing versus telling and the place of dialogues

In Sally Rooney's novels, dialogues are of crucial importance, but the quality, pertinence, and impact of said dialogues are not the only things that matter to obtain a well written novel. For an author, it is also key to master the art of showing and telling, to know what each tool conveys to the reader and use it to get your points across and induce the reading you want of your work. Showing and telling are difficult notions to understand so they need to be defined precisely in order to know the difference between the two.

Telling is a narrative technique in which the narrator tells us how the character is like. It can be done through direct exposition or description by an authoritative voice in the novel. It is common with first person point of view or omniscient third person. Telling can also be done through associations: the name of the character, their external appearance and direct environment may reflect upon their character. An ironic effect underlining contrast, created by a discrepancy between the name and the personality of a character can also be used.

Also referred to as summary, this technique takes details (or revealing information) and describes it in a small space on the page. [...] Telling has an

important place in narrative and academic writing because it is concise. [...] Telling between significant portions of showing helps transition the reader and give them a stronger sense of what the writer wants noticed, and what the reader can just accept as simple information. Telling only becomes an issue when the writer uses it in excess.⁸⁴

To summarize, telling is when “details and information [are] described across a small space on the page.”⁸⁵ It can help set an atmosphere without pulling away from other more important elements of the narration.

Showing is a narrative technique in which speech characteristics, actions and/or thoughts are described. No comments are given, and the reader has to deduct the personality traits of the characters from what they are shown.

Showing expands details and describes them across a large space on the page. This technique is essential for describing significant details and events, because showing allows the reader to experience the scene along with the narrator.⁸⁶

A showing technique can be presenting the reader with the characters’ body language and sensory details to draw the reader into the scene. Showing can help the reader to understand the protagonists better as it gives more details about them than telling. In brief, showing is when “details and information [are] described across a large space on the page.”⁸⁷

There needs to be a good balance between telling and showing, even if one is always used more than the other, to compose a storytelling that will be catchy to the reader and will not make them bored from the lack of details (too much telling) or on the contrary overwhelmed by the huge amount of information (too much showing).

⁸⁴ Grand Valley State University, Showing v. Telling.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

In our corpus, we can notice that there is more telling in *Normal People* and *Beautiful World Where Are You* and more showing in *Conversations With Friends*. The differences between the use of more showing over telling or the other way around is sticking. What the author uses the most has an impact on how the reader is going to perceive the story.

For example, in *Normal People*, as there is more telling than showing, we can spend more time focusing on the inner life of the characters and not what is happening around them. In an article for *Medium*, Eric Sentell said about Rooney's novel:

The amount and effectiveness of her “telling” stand out to me, especially since I’ve always found “show, don’t tell” to be frustrating advice. I always wanted to write psychological realism like Rooney’s, but “show, don’t tell” was rammed down my throat. I struggled to publish unless I stripped down the internal story-telling and left the external actions and behavior. The problem with “show, don’t tell,” I think, is that sometimes you need to tell. Some things can’t be shown, and it’s kind of awkward to try.⁸⁸

This points out that not everything needs to be visualized or visualizable to have an authentic story. The readers do not need instructions on how to imagine the scene in their head. The characters can say how they feel without the author having to represent them feeling it; for example, the writer does not have to say the character has shaky hands when saying they are really anxious. Rooney is convincing enough in her telling that she does not need to show it. Telling more than showing is also a way to let your audience know you are sure they are intelligent enough to understand what is going on without needing lengthy descriptions of facial expressions or movements.

In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, the overuse of telling instead of showing is sometimes detrimental to the story.

The choice to tell rather than show is not always successful. The novel falters when describing Simon and Eileen's history—these passages feel lifeless, devoid of the gratifying urgency of Rooney's first two novels. Yet,

⁸⁸ Sentell, “Tell Don’t Show?”, *Medium*.

Eileen and Simon do have the intense emotional connection that is characteristic of Rooney's fictional couples.⁸⁹

Eileen and Simon's love story is still powerful but lacks intensity as their actions are passed over quickly, not letting enough time for the reader to get attached to them and see how they work and their dynamic as a couple. As there are two main couples in this novel, Simon and Eileen and Alice and Felix, the reader might feel like their story is rushed — because of the lack of showing — to give more space to the other couple and have their story unfold in more depth. This could also be done this way to let more room for the lengthy emails between Alice and Eileen, as their friendship has more importance in the novel than their respective love lives. It can almost feel like their romances only give background to the characters and to their emails. The author prefers to sustain their correspondence rather than to spend too much time showing the state of their romantic relationships, as their emails are the essence of the novel and it is the place where all the important information is gathered. This could not be done if there was more showing than telling as the reader would lose focus.

As we saw, authenticity wise telling more than showing can have its perks but it is a dangerous game to play. The relationships must be strengthened in other ways or else the author would totally miss her target.

In *Conversation With Friends*, there is more showing. The reader has access to a lot of details about sceneries, behaviors, and other physicality.

The conversations between Frances and Nick are particularly on point when it comes to the show-don't-tell nature of well-written exchanges. As readers, we are constantly made aware of Frances' pain (physical as well as psychological), while at the same time understanding the analytic model that she operates with both as a writer and in her relationships to other people.⁹⁰

As the story is told using first person point of view, when Frances' pain is described, we can almost feel it. It is also a way for the reader to empathize with her. With more showing surrounding the dialogues, we can witness how the conversations are affecting the

⁸⁹ Menon, *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, The Sewanee Review.

⁹⁰ Kjølholt, "Review: 'Conversations with Friends' by Sally Rooney," Ark Review.

characters, positively or negatively. This use of showing is a mirror of the character's mind.

In all of Sally Rooney's novels, there are more dialogues than narration passages. When opening any book of our corpus and looking at the pages without reading, it can be hard to distinguish the dialogues as there are no quotations marks, so the readership must read the novels to figure it out. As said earlier, this lack of quotations marks allows the narration and dialogues to flow seamlessly and prevents readers from skimming through narration passages, putting narration on an equal footing with dialogue, even if one is more represented than the other. As there are more dialogues than narration in the novels, it is easier to get your point across, there are no lengthy descriptions that distract the reader from what is important and central in the story when telling is used more than showing. The audience can focus more easily on the exchanges between the characters and get the essence of the novels.

In the corpus, narration is here to serve the dialogues, not the other way around. It gives context and precision around the discussions without stealing the spotlight. In the final scene of *Normal People*, the narration passage imbedded in the dialogue helps the reader get insight on Marianne's emotional state, as she faces a difficult situation. She makes the choice not to follow Connell overseas, a choice she makes by putting herself first. After all the hardships she has been through the past years, she decides to do what seems best for herself even though she will tremendously miss Connell while he is gone. She can have no certitudes that he will come back at the end of his master's but still, she decides to let him go, physically and emotionally, because she knows that the positive impact they had on each other will never leave her. She also knows that Connell himself grew a lot to her contact and does not want to stop his progressing by asking him to renounce to this amazing opportunity just to stay in Dublin with her, this is why she refuses when he offers. By accessing her inner thoughts, the reader understands better where the girl stands and knows that whatever will happens next is for the better. It leads to an open ending where Marianne says "You should go, [...] I'll always be here. You know that."⁹¹ The "here" does not necessary means here in Dublin or even here in Dublin waiting for you to come back but more "here for you". It can be reminiscent of the time

⁹¹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 272.

Marianne left for her Erasmus in Sweden, even though they were miles apart, they were still here for each other when they needed it the most, Connell needing support battling depression and Marianne needed someone to hang on when she felt isolated and alienated. Now it is Connell's turn to leave, but what they have cannot be severed by distance. Without the narration passage, it would have been much more difficult to understand the double meaning of the "here", it really serves the dialogue and helps add a new layer to the plot. Moreover, as this is the last line of the novel, it broadens even more the possibilities for what could happen to Marianne and Connell in the future. The open ending allows the readers to make up their mind and choose their own ending. As well, the narration passage does not make us lose focus on what matters the most, the words that Marianne and Connell pronounce, it is subtle, but still helps the reader collect information and connect the dots with other elements exposed earlier in the novel, building the storytelling to reach climax.

There are very few contemplative scenes expressed through narration, showing is rarely Rooney's weapon of choice. Usually, she prefers to set the scene differently. Most of the time, contemplation is allowed only when the characters voice their observations out loud. It also goes hand in hand with the fact that the characters are more interested in the interiority of things than exteriority. The protagonists would rather contemplate the intellect of their loved ones instead of just their physique, they like to talk to them more than just sit in silence and watch them. There is a form of beauty in each dialogue, and it takes of the novels to collect it and realize the importance of those interactions. If the novels contained more narration than dialogues the relationships would seem less authentic because how can you love someone you barely talk to and know almost nothing about? Whether it is platonic or romantic love, in our corpus we gather that the sentiments of the characters are fueled by interactions and grow one discussion at the time. The more they talk to the other, the stronger their bond gets. Most of the characters go from strangers to friends to lovers and it would be unnatural if it was not built on genuine exchanges between them. The readers would not buy into it if they were just told the evolution of the relationship statuses without witnessing the construction of this process firsthand through conversations.

II.3. Talking about yourself using a piece of literature as starting point

II.3.1. Does it act as a barrier between the characters or bring them closer?

As Sally Rooney has a bachelor in English and American literature, she has a wide knowledge over classic texts and contemporary pieces. This influence can be noted not only in the way she writes but also in the references sprinkled thorough her novels. Because she studied many key masterpieces in literature and is very cultivated about the arts in general, she can use those references to feed her own stories.

Using pieces of literature as a starting point to talk about yourself can bring the characters closer because they use it to express things they would not say themselves. They use the words of others as a reflection of their own thoughts and feelings and project it onto their relationships. If the characters in those pieces of literature are going through similar hardships as Rooney's characters, they can take inspiration from what happened in those works to find a resolution to their own problems. Therefore, with this unusual help, they can fix their relationships and it can get them closer to their loved ones.

The protagonists can get indirect advice from those pieces of media because as literary people they understand the subtext in what they watch/read and are able to unveil the ulterior motive of the author, almost in the same way they access the moral of a fable. Perhaps our characters do not always take the advice, even if the situation in the story is the same as theirs and the outcome is positive, but they can still consider it.

In *Normal People*, there is a scene where Connell is reading Jane Austen's *Emma* at the library but has to stop because they are closing, pausing "just as he reached the passage in *Emma* when it seems like Mr. Knightley is going to marry Harriet, and he had to close the book and walk home in a state of strange emotional agitation."⁹² One could think that Connell was agitated because he could draw a neat parallel between his ties with Marianne and the links that unite Emma and Mr. Knightley, as well as notice similarities in their interactions. If we consider that Connell read the whole novel, we can guess he also knows how the Emma/Harriet/Mr. Knightley situation unfolded and later on can give him clues to navigate the situation between him, Helen, and Marianne; Marianne's jealousy being a sign that she also and still loves him, leading the pair to reconnect afterwards.

⁹² Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 71.

Sally Rooney's novels can be seen as auto-fiction. Her main characters Frances, Marianne and Alice can be seen as her alter egos, they are the author at different stages of her life. Her latest main character Alice is the most recent fictional version of herself. The biggest common point between the two is that both are writers and hate that they got famous against their will. In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Alice uses the novels she writes to lay down her ideas about the world, her novels can also be considered auto-fiction. Alice can use the pieces of literature she creates to try to solve her own problems on paper; before applying it to her real life. Moreover, we witness a multi-layer use of those literary texts, because Sally Rooney uses characters she created to talk about herself and become closer to her audience, as she shares a part of herself. In chapter 10 of *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Alice reflects on the literature world and says she cannot read contemporary novels anymore because she knows too many of the authors and it throws her off to know what their life is really like, full of glitz and extravaganza, when they are writing about ordinary life and ordinary people, even though they do not care about said people. She also self-reflects because she fears of becoming one of them.

So the novel works by suppressing the truth of the world – packing it tightly down underneath the glittering surface of the text. And we can care once again, as we do in real life, whether people break up or stay together – if, and only if, we have successfully forgotten about all the things more important than that, i.e. everything. My own work is, it goes without saying, the worst culprit in this regard. For this reason I don't think I'll ever write a novel again.⁹³

Here, the reader can wonder if this is a direct address from Sally Rooney herself because the sentence seems so heartfelt. Alice's voice is synching with the author's to become one and the auto-fictional aspect really shines through.

Rooney uses the same techniques to add authenticity to her characters by having them identify with the protagonists of famous novels, as we saw with Connell and Mr. Knightley. The characters can also associate the people around them with famous characters, just like in *Conversations With Friends* when Frances frenetically reads the *New Testament* when going back home to her mother's. Because she felt unwell at that time, she turned to religion to try to feel better, but it did not really work so she became reading the book in application to her own life, placing Bobbi as Jesus. By reading the

⁹³ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 96.

New Testament, she thought she would understand Bobbi more, as Bobbi was the central character in her life and Jesus the central character in the best-selling and most famous book in history.

The author is also self-referential because patterns and motives can be noticed in her novels. The profusion of literary references in our corpus gives substance to the text and ground it in real life, especially because she references only artworks that exist or have existed. As well, it sets Rooney's novels in contemporary time because some of the books she references are fairly recent. So not only can those pieces of literature bring the characters closer together, but they can also bring the protagonists closer to the readers.

Pieces of literature can also help strangers to connect. It is the case in *Normal People*, when Connell is invited to a party at Trinity by Gareth, a fellow student from his Critical Theory seminar. Connell thinks that even if he does not really know anyone at the party, at least if some of his classmates attend, then he will be able to talk about books they study in class with them; because even though most of his classmates do not read the books assigned they still manage to know how to talk about it as we saw earlier, therefore Connell would feel less excluded. Our main character has a lot of thoughts over it and the power of literature. "It suggests to Connell that the same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people also, and to be intimate with them."⁹⁴

Those literary pieces act as a barrier or can bring the characters closer also because when having conversations about said works, the interlocutor can have access easily to the other person's mind. If the protagonist dares to take a stand and express their opinions about the text, the person they are talking to can agree or disagree with it and it is an easy way to see if their ideologies and personal values align or not. It is the case in *Normal People* when Connell tells Marianne about *The Communist Manifesto*, and she unexpectedly agrees with him, giving rise to their first genuine interaction where they do not feel like they must play a role to conform to the idea the other has of them.

As well, talking about yourself using pieces of literature can act as a barrier between the characters because if you only hide behind fictional characters, your interlocutor can think that you are fake and substance less, not having your own ideas

⁹⁴ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 72.

about the world and not knowing how to forge a genuine connection with the person you are conversating with. Also, by referencing too many books or artworks, the other person can think you are trying to intellectualize each interaction, and pretend you are someone else, or that you do not want to reach a level of simplicity in your exchanges.

II.3.2. Additional use of those literature pieces

In our corpus, the characters do not only use literature to talk about themselves but also as the starting point of conversations that would bring them closer to each other at different stages of the relationships. There are many occurrences of this phenomenon throughout Rooney's novels, promoting cultural exchanges and artistic sensibility and associated values as a healthy basis for a blooming relationship. Depending on how long the characters have been an item and the intensity of the relationship, those talks can either be a starting point or something to reinforce an already well-established bond.

At the beginning of *Conversations With Friends*, Frances meets Melissa and Nick at a spoken word poetry event where she is performing with Bobbi. Nick missed their set because he had a part in a representation of a *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams. Frances said she liked this play and would like to see his representation, so Nick offered to hold tickets for her, leading her to attend the play with her colleague and friend Philip. Once she got home after the performance, Frances emailed Nick to thank him for the tickets and to congratulate him (even though she later told Bobbi she thought the play was bad). This email was the first personal contact between them, leading them to write to each other regularly and eventually giving birth to their affair. If he had not been in a play she knew about and liked, they would have never stuck up a conversation about his art and hers, discovered that they had interests in common and bonded over it; the trajectory of their life would have been left unchanged.

In the world our protagonists evolve in, talking about literature is a good way to strike up a conversation, but not only. As well, once a relationship starts, it can help you to understand the other person better, to learn about their tastes and interests. Just like when Alice takes Felix along to the literary event she needs to attend in Rome. It is an initiation to her world, and he discovers her in another light, not just as the girl who suddenly moved to his small town but also as a renowned author and public figure. He

gets to explore the city while she accomplishes her promotional duties. Felix is not a reader so for him to attend one of Alice's readings is an out of the ordinary experience. He jokes that maybe if she impresses him enough at the event, he will try to read her novels. Standing in the audience, Felix blended in as one of her fans, deprived of substance, just one among the others. No one in the room knew they were here together as a pair, they simply knew her as Alice Kelleher the best-selling author, not as Felix's girlfriend. In this moment, she regains an identity of her own but cannot totally dissociate from him.

Did Felix find her answers interesting, or was he bored? Was he thinking about her, or about something else, someone else? And onstage, speaking about her books, was Alice thinking about him? Did he exist for her in that moment, and if so, in what way?⁹⁵

Afterwards, Felix told her that he enjoyed the event and that he thought she was great at answering questions. He then proceeded to tell her he saw her differently, bright and energetic, as she was fueled by the adrenaline rush from being the center of attention. During the entire trip, he witnessed her act differently around people she works with as she does with him, therefore grabbing the entire spectrum of her personality and understanding better some of her behaviors. These types of exchanges can help solidify their relationship as all those social events revolving around books are a gateway into Alice's world for Felix.

Pieces of literature can also help characters who grew apart to reconnect. This is what happens in *Normal People*, in a twisted way, when Connell goes to a campus party and sees Marianne there, who is now dating Gareth, one of Connell's classmates. They immediately go somewhere quiet to talk together and catch up. Even if they left each other on quite bad terms a few months earlier, now it does not matter anymore. While chatting, Marianne tells her former lover that her new boyfriend is involved in a student debate group that invited a neo-Nazi author to have a debate conference on campus. Connell cannot believe Marianne would associate with someone like him and she tries to defend herself, saying she obviously do not see eye to eye with Gareth, even in the name of free speech. This conversation is what sparks up again the friendship between them

⁹⁵ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 88.

because they both realize that even if the circumstances are different, inside the other has not changed they still have the same values, and overall still appreciate each other's company. This leads them to hang out multiple times on campus and the more Marianne spends time with Connell, the more she comprehends that she does not love her new boyfriend, in fact she does not even like him as a human. In comparison to Connell, Gareth is not a very pleasant person to be around, therefore she breaks up with him and falls for Connell all over again. All of this might not have happened if Gareth did not associate with that neo-Nazi author and if both Marianne and Connell were unfamiliar with him, not knowing about the essence of his books, so in a way, it is their knowledge of literature that brought them back together.

Organic relationships are the core of Sally Rooney's writings. Some people might even think that there is no plot in her novels, just a succession events exploring interpersonal relationships between the characters. The scrutiny of the characters' mind is more important than the profoundness of the plot. Therefore, we can affirm that the literary use of language is mostly an enabler for the creation of an authentic relationship between the characters, as Rooney puts conscious effort in each word she writes and each technique she uses; wherever it is elevated language in argumentation, verbalization of feelings expression, different narrative points of view, the balance between showing and telling or the use of literary pieces. The author knows how to make her characters as real and relatable as possible, almost as if they had a mind of their own.

Partie III. Case study: open conversations about class differences

III.1. Individuals inside their social class

III.1.1. Class difference should separate the characters, but does it?

In our corpus, class difference is clearly expressed. Here we define a class as “a group of people within society who have the same economic and social position.”⁹⁶ The characters are shown evolving inside their own class but also in cohabitation with other classes. In each novel, there is representation of lower class, middle class, and higher class. This diversity of social classes can help the readers identify with the characters because they can all find a reality and past life experiences matching their own. The social ladder is neatly represented as the people who come from the higher classes or those with the most money hold the most power. The socioeconomic statuses of the characters define their relationships with others, and it influences the dynamics between them.

As the author and some of her characters have Marxist views, we can use Marx’s definitions of different classes and his ideas on power imbalance between classes to explain the complexity of the relationships between Rooney’s characters.

For Marx, there are two main classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Intermediary classes exist but they are of lesser importance. What matters the most is the polarization between the rich and the poor.

The bourgeoisie or capitalists are the owners of capital, purchasing and exploiting labour power, using the surplus value from employment of this labour power to accumulate or expand their capital.⁹⁷

Marx opposes the proletariat to the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat are owners of labour power (the ability to work), and mere owners of labour power, with no resources other than the ability to work with their hands, bodies, and minds. Since these workers have no property, in

⁹⁶ Cambridge Dictionary, “class”.

⁹⁷ University of Regina, *Marx on social class*.

order to survive and obtain an income for themselves and their families, they must find employment and work for an employer.⁹⁸

For Marx, the bourgeoisie exploits the proletariat and asserts a dominance over them, restraining their freedom. The bourgeoisie uses their power to keep the poor from getting richer and enhance their own wealth. Therefore, according to the Marxist prism of thoughts, in *Normal People*, Lorraine must work for Denise — Marianne's mother — to survive and provide for Connell. Denise exploits her labor because Lorraine has little education and she does not have the ability to produce capital, therefore she is stuck in this position.

There is a balance of force between the two that also influence the relationships of individuals from the different classes outside the work setting.

There is a certain unity between the classes, in that capitalists and workers are in a social relationship with each other, but it is a unity of opposites, an antagonistic social relationship, with struggle between these two classes. [...] While the relationship between workers and capitalists, or between labour and capital may appear to be no more than an economic relationship of equals meeting equals in the labour market, Marx shows how it is an exploitative social relationship. Not only is it exploitative, it is contradictory, with the interests of the two partners in the relationship being directly opposed to each other. Although at the same time, the two opposed interests are also partners in the sense that both capital and labour are required in production and an exploitative relationship means an exploiter and someone being exploited.⁹⁹

The power imbalance Marx talks about seems to exclude a middle class.

Marx's view was that the successful members of the middle class would become members of the bourgeoisie, while the unsuccessful would be forced into the proletariat. In the last few years, many have argued that in North America, and perhaps on a world scale, there is an increasing gap between rich and poor and there is a declining middle.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Even if in the Marxist theory classes are well defined and interaction between the groups are clearly structured, it takes in parameters other than labor in its definition.

For Marx, classes cannot be defined by beginning observation and analysis from individuals, and building a definition of a social class as an aggregate of individuals with particular characteristics. For example, to say that the upper class is all families with incomes of \$500,000 or more is not an adequate manner of understanding social class. The latter is a stratification approach that begins by examining the characteristics of individuals, and from this amassing a view of social class structure as a whole. This stratification approach often combines income, education, and social prestige or status into an index of socioeconomic status, creating a gradation from upper class to lower class. The stratification approach is essentially a classification, and for Marx classes have meaning only as they are real groups in the social structure. Groups mean interaction among members, common consciousness, and similar types of behaviour that are connected in some way with group behaviour.¹⁰¹

In our corpus, we also consider income, education, and social status as identifiers to determine the class of the characters. They are separated in three main classes: upper class, middle class (or upper middle class and lower middle class) and lower class. Middle class could be excluded according to Marx's views because the characters belonging to the middle class are closer to one end of the spectrum or the other but in modern day's society, what is considered the "middle class" still has an important place and takes up a great number of the population, especially in North America and Western Europe, so it applies to Ireland too. Therefore, we also take middle class into account in our segmentation of the characters' classes.

Cohabitation of different classes is a central element of the storytelling in every novel written by Sally Rooney. Different people from different classes keep interacting and the author skillfully schemes how those differences impact their relationships. We see the characters as products of their own class, and rather than seeing them only as such we also confront this vision to the way they use their background as a strength in their interactions with others from different classes. Of course, class is a determinant element as to how the protagonists are perceived and treated by others, even though this bias might

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

not always be intentional, it still exists and directly or indirectly impacts the relationships. There is a lot of prejudice, stereotypes and misconceptions associated to all classes, not only the lower ones. In the corpus, Rooney acknowledges it without leaning into them, to make her stories as real and impactful as possible.

By taking this stand, Rooney goes against the traditional codes of naturalism.

The term naturalism describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Unlike realism, which focuses on literary technique, naturalism implies a philosophical position: for naturalistic writers, since human beings are, in Emile Zola's phrase, "human beasts," characters can be studied through their relationships to their surroundings. Zola's 1880 description of this method in *Le roman expérimental* (*The Experimental Novel*, 1880) follows Claude Bernard's medical model and the historian Hippolyte Taine's observation that "virtue and vice are products like vitriol and sugar"--that is, that human beings as "products" should be studied impartially, without moralizing about their natures. [...] Through this objective study of human beings, naturalistic writers believed that the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood. Naturalistic writers thus used a version of the scientific method to write their novels; they studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. Although they used the techniques of accumulating detail pioneered by the realists, the naturalists thus had a specific object in mind when they chose the segment of reality that they wished to convey.¹⁰²

Sally Rooney's work distinguishes itself from naturalism because even if the author does study her characters through their relationships and surroundings and indulges in a philosophical examination of her protagonists' lives, she rejects the prism of characters governed by their instincts and passions. Some of her characters have strong desires and impulses, but those are always overruled by reason. As her characters are deeply intelligent individuals, they think their actions through and do not let themselves be blinded by their emotions. Even though in Rooney's novels the characters are impacted by their heredity and environment, they do not let it stop them from connecting with others and they do not let it dictate the way they should live their life.

¹⁰² Campbell, "Naturalism in American Literature," *Literary Movements*.

Plotwise, in naturalist novels, characters are:

frequently but not invariably ill-educated or lower-class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion. Their attempts at exercising free will or choice are hamstrung by forces beyond their control.¹⁰³

Whereas in Sally Rooney's novels, there are more upper middle class or upper-class characters than lower class ones, and all the main characters are very well educated. They exercise their free will and rarely face obstacles they cannot overcome by advocating for themselves. Actually, most of their problems are of their own creation rather than hardships thrown their way by external forces. As well, the characters in our corpus are not confined to their own class because as we said earlier, they interact with people from different classes and make an effort to connect with them, it is an example of them using their freewill because they actively choose to step out of their comfort zone, confronting themselves with people from different backgrounds.

In *Conversations With Friends*, the four main characters are from different social classes. Frances is considered lower middle class because she comes from a working-class family and struggles to make ends meet, even though she has a student job. Bobbi is middle to upper middle class because her dad is a lawyer, and all her expenses are paid for by her parents, therefore she does not have to work in parallel of her studies. Melissa and Nick are upper class as she is a successful author making a lot of money and he is also financially secure due to his background and the income he perceives as an actor. A power imbalance dynamic settles between the four of them since with money comes power. Bobbi admires Melissa because of her fame and feels drawn to her as her status gives her a sort of magnetic aura, and Frances falls for Nick because he has a good life and possesses nice things contrary to her; not only is she attracted to him as a person, but she is also attracted by his material wealth and life comfort. Moreover, there is a power imbalance because Nick and Melissa are older than Frances and Bobbi, therefore they have more life experience; and because they are a married couple, the girls are also attracted to what is forbidden. Mixing with them and their ritzy friends at dinner parties and other events revolving around culture help the girls enter a world hardly accessible

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

without connections to higher ranked people, as the art world is very closed and selective, especially when you want to make a living out of it. The young women stay in their own class but by associating with the spouses, they get a glimpse of what could be possible to have if they managed to free themselves from their own class.

There is also a power imbalance between Frances and Bobbi because of their class difference. Frances reproaches to Bobbi the fact that she has more money than her and struggles less. Frances compares herself to others and it leads her to resent her parents, especially her dad, because they do have much money and can barely help her out, she is also a little ashamed of her origins.

One might think that it is a sort of social experiment for Melissa and Nick to have younger/lower class friends, or that they see the girls are a charity case. Just like when the married couple invite Frances and Bobbi to join them on a holiday in Étables, France, free of charge. There, the girls mix with other people who are Melissa's and Nick's friends, also upper-class people, as well as with Evelyn, the owner of the house and Melissa's mentor, an older woman who has a huge influence in the Irish literary world. The students end up immersed in an affluent group and see how rich people live their daily lives, not just how they act at events and parties. The girls play along and sort of change their personality to better fit in.

In *Normal People*, the Waldrons are lower class and the Sheridans are upper class. Except for Connell, Marianne mostly interreacts with people from her own class or adjacent. Regarding her love life, she always dates men of her class and even higher than her own, but those relationships always fail and/or are toxic. She likes the power those men have on her and submits to them (even letting them hit her in bed). She could less easily be submissive to men from other classes because she would be the one holding the most power in the relationship, therefore the scales would tip in her favor. Marianne's dynamic with Connell is very different from the one she had with her other boyfriends because as a lower-class person, he does not hold that sort of power over her. The only power he could have over her would be gender based and not have anything to do with class, wealth, or social status. Summing up the forces, Marianne has the most elements of power on her side.

There is not a huge gap in social class between Helen (Connell's college girlfriend) and Marianne, but Helen is still a little lower on the social ladder compared to the other girl. Helen compares herself to Marianne a lot because she knows she is Connell's great love, and she feels threatened. Helen feels like Marianne is using her social status and class as a weapon against her. There is also an obvious class gap between Connell and Helen, and this gap is perhaps too big because he does not fit in with her family, he feels like an outcast. Helen is too different from him, even more so than he is different to Marianne, because at least even though Marianne and Connell are from different classes, they were raised in the same town and went to the same high school, so they still share past experiences, whereas Helen and Connell do not share those.

Marianne's friends from Trinity are upper middle class to upper class but she is still wealthier than most of them. She manages to befriend them because they have common points, they are used to similar standards and quality of living, therefore they can relate to each other. They also had similar family lives and home education so they share values they can bond over.

As Connell is lower class, most of his interactions are with people who are not from his class. He fits in with his high school friends because even if they are mostly middle class or lower middle class, the young man can still relate to them because they share many interests and were brought up in similar ways. In Trinity, Connell cannot relate to other students because they have nothing in common. The only one he can relate to in college — except for Marianne — is his friend Niall, as they both share a tiny room and have money struggles.

In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Eileen and Felix are both lower class and financially unstable, him even more than her, but they are open about it. Perhaps we can think that this openness comes with their age and maturity, as they are not ashamed of their situation. Eileen talks about her low paying job with Alice and Felix tells Alice he hates working at the warehouse and does not have the money to join her in Italy. Even if Alice is rich, she does not judge the value of her friends though their social class and wealth. Alice is upper class, but she does not really enjoy her status and the attention that comes with it. She also has a problem with the effect money has on her; the more she earns the more she feels depressed. Simon is middle class and does not really care about

materiality and money, he has enough to live a decent life and is fine with it, as his spiritual life is the most important to him.

Given the class differences in the group of four, Felix is a little on the sidelines. He struggles to relate to the others not necessarily because of his lack of money but more because of his lifestyle and education. Furthermore, he does not really share the values of the other protagonists and is morally grey. Eileen and Alice share the same ethics even though they do not belong to the same class because they had a similar upbringing, and both evolve in a world centered around culture. Therefore, even though they belong to different classes they do not let it separate them.

In our corpus, class difference is not really a taboo topic. As we just saw, Eileen is comfortable talking about her salary to Alice for example. Rather than shelter the characters in their own class, they coexist. Even though Sally Rooney has Marxist views, she also lives with her time. The author still represents the power imbalance that exists between classes, but she does not limit her storytelling to this; whereas Marx would argue that class is such a determinant characteristic in people's lives, they can hardly free themselves from it to have genuine interactions with others of a different class without it being biased by this factor. Rooney seems to push further one of Marx's ideas that "to the extent that these members act in society, they act as representatives of their class, although Marx would leave some room for individual freedom of action."¹⁰⁴ Yes, the novelist portrays her protagonists as representatives of their class, but she also makes a major point of letting her characters have this individual freedom, more than Marx would have ever thought. The protagonists have their own motivations outside of class standards, this is what anchors them in 21st century Ireland and not in Victorian era. They all have this idea in them that even though you can never be totally free from where you come from you still have the possibly to elevate yourself and do better than your predecessors.

Moreover, talking through class differences can help the protagonists understand better how the world works for others. In the corpus, the lower-class people are never

¹⁰⁴ University of Regina, *Marx on social class*.

really portrayed as victims, they are just shown as the result of the conditions they were brought up in.

Even if class differences can cause disputes, it is still healthy to address them whereas living it unsaid, because if not tackled the underlying issues can cause more/bigger problems down the line. There is an example of this in *Conversations With Friends* where Frances and Bobbi talk about money related issues because Frances cannot afford to live the same way as Bobbi and eventually the first ends up telling the other she is really struggling and she has to borrow food from Bobbi. Frances also talks about her lack of money to Nick, who is very wealthy compared to her, but most of the time she refuses his money when he offers to help her out because of the already shaky ethics of their relationship. She only accepts once and feels really distressed about it, promising that she will pay him back as soon as possible. By addressing the issue, Frances lets Nick understand that she needs someone to listen to her rant about her problems more than him doing something about it, but she also makes sure to create a lifeline for herself in times of extreme need.

Having characters acknowledge their differences can also induce open and heartfelt conversations about the effect and influence their affiliation to a set class has on them. There is a scene in *Normal People*, where Connell says that without the scholarship he earned, he would not have been able to travel all over Europe for a summer and be there with the others on a holiday; enjoying his time off school and using it to explore unknown places and learn new things. While out just the two of them, Marianne and Connell take time to have a serious talk and both acknowledge that they know each other because Connell's mom is the Sheridans' maid, this situation creating an obvious bias in their relationship since day one. Marianne expresses the fact that she thinks her mother does not pay Lorraine a fair wage and that the differences between Connell and herself are probably more profound than just what she can imagine when she tries to put herself in his shoes. The dialogue is really moving and helps the reader understand their dynamic a little better.

Moreover, sometimes Connell thinks about the fact that in a way Marianne's own money circles back to her through him because most of the money Connell has is money his mom gives him but this money comes from the salary Lorraine gets paid by Denise,

Marianne's mother. And because more often than not Connell uses his money to do activities with Marianne or buy her things, the boy comes to think that even when he is the one paying it is just like if Marianne bought things with her own money, her family's money. Therefore, this situation can make Connell feel like he is inferior to Marianne. This type of thoughts is what pushes him to not tell the girl that he cannot afford his rent one summer and has to move back home, because the young man does not want her to see him as a charity case and he knows very well that if he said anything she would have immediately offered him to move in with her, without him having to ask. So here, class difference separates them, not only morally but also physically.

Class difference is an important factor in the characterization of the protagonists, but they do not let it stop them for having profound relationships and interactions with others from different classes. Even though this difference comes with its fair share of obstacles, most of the time the characters are able to overcome them, which brings them closer. Nevertheless, as Rooney portrays real life and not a utopia, those differences can still have negative impacts on the relationships, but the characters mostly refuse to be limited by this, they all aspire to better than what they have, even those who are higher on the social ladder.

This goes against Marx's determinist theory. In Marx's theory, he speaks about determinism saying that:

men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please;
they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances
existing already, given and transmitted from the past.¹⁰⁵

It means that for the entirety of their lives, human beings are the mere subjects of set social forces. Therefore, their free will would only be an illusion because those greater forces would rule their entire lives without them being conscious of it. It also means that the choices of the people are limited, and in adulthood your social condition is determined by your birth and the social class your parents belong to, no elevation possible. The notion of class determinism has evolved since the 19th century. Nowadays, it is considered possible to overcome this and achieve total class dealignment.

¹⁰⁵ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Rooney also drifts away from the traditional codes of naturalism because she does not lean into determinism, contrary to the naturalist authors of the 19th century. Charles Child Walcutt, a former professor of English at Queens College of the City University of New York and author of the *American Literary Naturalism, a Divided Stream*, “identifies survival, determinism, violence, and taboo as key themes.”¹⁰⁶ None of those are central in Rooney’s novels survival substitutes itself to the question of quality of life, determinism is alluded to but only to be transgressed, violence is not shown between the characters but rather as what something society inflicts on the protagonists and taboos are never deep, the characters always end up discussing even the touchier subjects. The author drifts away from those keys themes and replace them by others more actual such as womanhood, sorority, quest for identity in a changing world, and others timeless like love, interpersonal relationships and the meaning of life.

III.1.2. Class dealignment

By spending a lot of time with people from a different class as theirs, the characters start assimilating to them, as they grasp the codes. In politics, dealignment is defined as:

the concept that voters in Western liberal democracies, who were formerly aligned into well-defined social groups on the basis of commonalities such as class, religion, and ethnicity, and exhibited high partisan identification as a result, have over time become more loosely attached to such allegiances and have more aleatory and fleeting preferences in electoral competition.¹⁰⁷

This concept of dealignment can be applied to class in sociology. Class dealignment could be defined as the fact that individuals from a certain class no longer align with most characteristics of their class based on wealth and/or income, occupation, school education, and prestige/social status.

This Marxist ideology of social determinism is very representative of the 19th century, where social classes had a lot more impact on people’s lives than nowadays, because society gained in mobility. This is why in the 21st century, class dealignment is

¹⁰⁶ Campbell, “Naturalism in American Literature,” *Literary Movements*.

¹⁰⁷ Oxford Reference, *Dealignment*.

more frequent than back then, when moving up the social ladder was a dreadful task. Moreover, nowadays the notions of free will and personal freedom are more defined, and individuality is a central aspect of people's lives; therefore saying that free will does not have any impact on how people live their lives today would be contradictory with the idea of class dealignment. In our corpus, free will is actually a great vector for the characters' actions, the characters all want to change the way they live and act to that end.

In our corpus, we notice that class dealignment happens to a greater or lesser extent. In each novel there are characters who spend so much time with people from higher classes than theirs that they start to assimilate to them. They get immersed into a daily life that has nothing to do with theirs and even if at first, they are unsettled, they end up getting the ropes and understand what it would take for them to elevate themselves in society. As we started addressing earlier, this is the case with Frances and Bobbi in *Conversations With Friends* when they are caught up in the bougie art circles Melissa and Nick frequent.

Dealignment does not only happen upwards, it also happens downwards. It is the case in *Normal People* when Marianne spends Christmas with Connell's family for example. Lorraine tells her son to invite her not only so that Marianne will not have to spend time with her abusive family but also to share their traditions with her. She wants Marianne to feel welcome and integrated in their family, to make her feel loved and cared about. The young woman takes part in the games they play, in the gifts exchanges and everything that makes Christmas celebrations a special moment. In the novel, we see that Marianne needs to isolate herself a little because she has a hard time assimilating what is going on. She is used to fights and verbal jousting at family gatherings, not warmth and laughter. It makes the girl realize that Connell not only can bring her love as a supportive partner but also a safe environment to blossom in.

Downwards dealignment can also be witnessed through the assimilation of Alice in Felix's friend group in *Beautiful World Where Are You*. She comes to their meetings and tries to be nice to everyone even though they do not have much in common. She acts as a regular person, not mentioning that she is a famous writer and downplaying it when others mention her success. She tries to blend in with those people, who live a simpler

life than the people she usually frequents in higher social circles. She tries to understand them and their preoccupations, which differ from her own.

In Rooney's novels, almost all the characters date someone of a different class. In *Conversations With Friends*, Frances is dating people from an upper class compared to her, those people being Nick and Bobbi. In *Normal People*, Connell dates upper class girls, Marianne and Helen. As for Marianne, except for Connell, she dates men higher than her in the upper class: Lukas, Gareth and Jamie. In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Eileen dates Simon who is a little higher on the social ladder compared to her, and Alice dates someone much lower class than her, Felix.

The reader might wonder if the author just wants to write a classic case of opposites attract as it is a popular trope or if she has ulterior motives. Not doubting the intellect of the novelist, one could think that she is using this trope to half-wordly make social commentaries that only involved readers will understand. As previously stated, Rooney gives cues to her audience but wants them to do the work on their own. Those differences fuel the protagonists' interactions and give Rooney material to build the dialogues on, because as they come from different backgrounds and have different life experiences, the characters might not always understand each other. This gives grounds for real scenes of communication when characters try to expose their points of view on certain matters and give the other person a little insight from their position.

If the class dealignment is only partial, can we call it dealignment or is it simply adjustments the characters have to make to live together? Income, school education, and social status are considered as class identifiers, so if a character does not have a change of income or change schools and/or the place they live, but whether just start being acquainted with individuals who were not a part of their circles before, they merge into another class without a real social dealignment happening. They simply adjust to their new circles and learn new codes without erasing the principles they were taught before. Both circles can coexist, but the characters have to adapt to the different situations.

In our corpus, we notice different degrees of dealignment. The only one who achieves a full class dealignment is Connell. He manages to break multiple barriers to elevate himself on the social ladder. He moves upwards when he goes from attending a

small town free of charge secondary school to the Trinity College of Dublin, an expensive elite and renowned faculty, the best in the country. Moreover, Connell changes income when he earns a full-ride scholarship – that includes five years of paid tuition, free housing on campus and free meals in the dining hall – after beating everyone at the exam to get it. Therefore, the young man does not need to have a part time job on the side anymore to help his mother and pay for his expenses. He also acquires prestige as a gifted student who has excellent grades. People on campus start to notice him for his academic achievements. Without having to worry about how he is going to afford his studies anymore, he has the luxury of being able to apply to a prestigious creative writing masters’ degree in New York and actually go when he is accepted. This leads him to have the possibility of becoming an artist and potentially make a living out of it, which is an unrealistic dream for lower class people, who according to Marx have to work for an employer. By dating Marianne, Connell also begins changing social status because by hanging out with her upper-class friends he also integrates new circles he could not have easily accessed before.

With this upwards dealignment comes new challenges. Connell slowly starts to assimilate the codes of higher-class society but did not envision that by moving upwards he would end up this far. He did not even dare to tell Marianne about the program in New York because he thought there were little chances a boy like him could get in. He also did not realize that by getting in, it would mean being separated from Marianne for a year or more, as he assumed given the fact that she has money and status she could do whatever she wants and perhaps follow him there. He did not consider that by being with him, Marianne gained freedom from her class obligations and now has a choice to not follow her family’s expectations for her, leading her to want to stay in Dublin and conduct a simpler life, where she would be the master of her own destiny. Just like Icarus, Connell flew too close to the sun and burnt his wings. The young man freed himself from his class and achieved total dealignment in hopes of a better future but ended up losing the love of his life.

Class dealignment can also be the starting point of meaningful conversations. By immersing into somebody else’s world, you get to discover more about them. It can spark an interest in other cultures or ways of life. Just like in *Beautiful World Where Are You*,

when Eileen asks Simon if she can accompany him to church even though she is not a practicing Catholic. She wants to understand the appeal he finds in attending Mass. By going to church with Simon, Eileen discovers a new part of him and needs to debrief her experience with her best friend Alice. Eileen confides into her because as an atheist too, Alice can put herself in her friend's shoes and she can be more open about what she felt during the ceremony than if she was discussing it with Simon.

When the service began, Simon didn't suddenly start acting very intense and spiritual, or crying about the majesty of God the Father or anything like that, he was just his usual self. Mostly he sat there listening and doing nothing. At the beginning, when everyone kept repeating 'Christ have mercy' and all of that, I think a part of me wanted him to start laughing and tell me it was all a joke. In a way I felt afraid of the way he was behaving, saying things like 'I have greatly sinned' – actually saying such things out loud in his ordinary voice, the same way I might say 'it's raining', if I had a sincere belief that it was raining and nothing about this belief struck me as ridiculous. I looked over at him a lot, feeling I suppose alarmed by his seriousness, and he just glanced back at me in a friendly way, as if to say: Yes, this is Mass, what did you expect? Then there was a reading about a woman pouring oil on the feet of Jesus and, I think, drying his feet with her hair? Unless I misunderstood. Simon sat there listening to this patently bizarre and freakish story and looking, as ever, completely calm and ordinary. I know I keep saying how ordinary he was, but it was precisely the seeming absence of any change in his personhood, precisely the fact that he went on being fully and recognisably the same man as always, that was so mystifying to me. [...]. Can it be that during the service I actually came to admire the sincerity of Simon's faith? But how is it possible for me to admire someone for believing something I don't believe, and don't want to believe, and which I think is manifestly incorrect and absurd? If Simon started to worship a turtle as the son of God, for example, would I admire his sincerity? From a strictly rationalist perspective, it makes as much sense to worship a turtle as it does to worship a first-century Judaeon preacher. Considering that God doesn't exist, the whole thing is random anyway, and it may as well be Jesus, or a plastic bucket, or William Shakespeare, it doesn't matter. And yet I feel I couldn't admire Simon's sincerity if he went down the road of turtle worship. Am I just admiring the ritual, then? Admiring his ability to blandly and uncritically accept received wisdom? Or do I secretly believe there is something special about Jesus, and that to worship him as God, while not quite reasonable, is somehow permissible? I don't know. Maybe it was just the calm, gentle way that Simon conducted himself in the church, the way he recited the prayers so quietly and sedately, just the same as the little old ladies

did, and not trying to be any different from them, not trying to show that he believed any more or less ardently than they did, or any more critically or intellectually than they did, but just the same. And he didn't even seem embarrassed that I was there watching him – I mean he wasn't embarrassed for me, at how out of place I was, but he also wasn't embarrassed for himself, to be caught in the act of worshipping a supreme being I didn't believe in. Afterwards on the street, he thanked me for coming with him. For a second then I was afraid he would make a joke of it after all, just out of awkwardness or nerves, and the idea horrified me. But he didn't. I should have known he wouldn't, because it wouldn't have been like him. He just thanked me and we went our separate ways. If I say the Mass was strangely romantic I hope you'll know what I mean. Maybe it made me feel there was something deep and serious in Simon, which I hadn't seen for a long time, or maybe it was his gentleness when we were shaking hands. Or, as I'm sure an evolutionary psychologist would suggest, maybe I'm just a frail little female, and after sleeping in a man's bed I come over all weak and tender about him. I make no great claims for myself, it could well be true.¹⁰⁸

Eileen has mixed feelings about this experience. She does not know if she is troubled by the experience in itself or the fact that she shared it with Simon, but she is grateful he let her share this moment with him. This time spent at Mass feels very intimate because Simon did not hesitate to act the same way as he would have if his girlfriend did not attend with him. He allows her to discover him under a new light, showing her that faith is the center of his life not her, because no matter what Eileen would have wanted to do that day, he would always have found a moment to attend the religious service. As an atheist, the young woman struggles to understand that someone could be willing to let their life be ruled by a greater force not by free will and rational thinking but by sharing this moment with him, she broadens her horizons and is open to learn more about it.

In *Normal People*, after Connell and Marianne both get the scholarship, they have a conversation about it. Marianne says that they should means test it because she sat the exam mostly for prestige more than because she needed the money as only the students who score the highest get the money, whereas Connell is more interested by the financial aspect of it than the prestige of being recognized as one of the smartest students at Trinity. She acknowledges that they both know each other because his mom works for her family

¹⁰⁸ Rooney, *Beautiful World Where Are You*, p. 113-116.

but still admits that she does not think very often about their class difference and that it is ignorant because on Connell's side, this difference means a lot more. Marianne even tells him "I think it's totally fair if you resent me."¹⁰⁹ To which the young man answers:

no, I don't resent you. Why would I? [...] I just feel weird about all this, he said. I feel weird wearing black tie and saying things in Latin. You know at the dinner last night, those people serving us, they were students. They're working to put themselves through college while we sit there eating the free food they put in front of us. Is that not horrible?¹¹⁰

Marianne responds that of course she agrees with him, and thinks meritocracy is evil but at the same time she thinks they cannot do anything about it. The real problem is that Connell feels guilty about receiving the scholarship and she does not. Deep down they both agree but struggle to clearly express their views because this subject touches them personally. But if Connell had not reached financial comfort thanks to the scholarship, one more step towards class dealignment, they would not even have had this discussion about the consequences of their class difference at all.

III.2. How to keep one's authenticity despite the class struggle?

In our corpus, it is difficult for the lower-class characters to not feel dependent on the higher-class people around them. Because there are power and financial imbalances in the relationships, the poorer people in the pair might feel embarrassed when they cannot afford the same things as their counterpart or cannot sustain the same lifestyle. To better explain this phenomenon, a case study seems to be appropriate. We will focus on an extract of *Normal People*; in which one summer, Connell finds out that his work hours at his job are cut back and cannot afford to keep his room in Dublin anymore. Instead of telling Marianne about the difficult situation he is in, the young man chooses to keep his struggles to himself and to move back to his mother's house in his hometown to save money and find a job there, before going back to Dublin in the fall. For this subpart, please refer to the text extract in annex 1. To analyze this extract, we will start from the postulate that dialogues are a mirror of the characters' mindset.

¹⁰⁹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 179-180.

To better understand how Marianne and Connell ended up in this situation where miscommunication took over, it is essential to understand the type of relationship they sustained since they first met and where it originated from.

The novel begins while our main characters are in high school. Marianne's family is wealthy, and Connell is from a working-class family. Marianne's mother, Denise, employs Lorraine, Connell's mom, as her housekeeper. After Connell gets his driver's license, he starts to come over to Marianne's house to pick up his mom after work. While waiting for Lorraine, he starts to spend time with Marianne, and they get acquainted.

At first, he is reluctant to hang out with her but soon, he starts to feel a sort of fascination towards her. For her part, Marianne develops a typical crush on him, she finds him very attractive and interesting. They have known each other for many years as they attend the same school but before that they never really talked. Marianne is an outcast; she has no friends, and her schoolmates are a little afraid of her. On the contrary, Connell is very popular in school, everyone loves him, and he is the star of the Gaelic football team. They are both extremely intelligent people but on every other point they are polar opposites. They start a secret intimate relationship a few months before graduation, but Marianne ends it with him when he chooses to take their classmate Rachel to the Debs instead of her, at the end of their last year of high school. Their relationship lasted only for a few weeks but left an indelible mark on both of them.

They meet again in college, almost six months after they cut ties, as they both attend the prestigious Trinity College of Dublin. Marianne is the reason Connell chooses to apply to Trinity or at least consider it an option. She gave him the courage to pursue what he really wanted to do with his life, to study English in a great college, instead of enrolling in law school in Galway as he first planned, for the sake of future employability. When they see each other again at a party on campus, Marianne immediately feels drawn to him again and vice versa. Four months into being friends again, they address the cause of their separation, and she forgives him for the Debs.

They start dating again but this time they are more open about it. They hide less even though they still don't label their relationship, on Marianne's impulse this time. He gets jealous of how other men act around her because now she is pretty and popular. College created a dynamic change between them as Connell became a sort of outcast himself. Things go very well between the young people for a few months, they love each

other's company and enjoy spending time together, making up for the time they lost when they were not on speaking terms. They do not see the breakup coming. Well, perhaps Connell does but he does not want to face this eventuality because he is so happy that he managed to get her back. Marianne is totally oblivious to the whole situation. She does not notice Connell is struggling with money or any changes in his behavior, she is just happy he shamelessly shows her more affection than usual in public.

III.2.1. Finding ways to not feel like you depend on others

III.2.1.1. Financial independence

Connell planned to keep working at the restaurant he was already working at during the summer to stay in Dublin with Marianne. He faces an unexpected problem when he learns that the restaurant is going out of business, therefore his hours are cut back. The young man is not officially out of a job but “he could just about make rent that way [and] he'd have nothing left to live on”¹¹¹ so he needs to rethink his budget and source of income. Rooney uses Connell's situation to show the type of problems the youth is facing in Ireland post financial crisis, the events in the novel happening only a few years after the crash of the financial market in 2008. Here, Connell needs to be pragmatic with his choices knowing that living only off a small portion of his salary is impossible and borrowing more money from his mother is not an option.

III.2.1.2. Compromise and find solutions to problems

Connell knows if he moves back home, he will be able to get his old job back at the garage and have a stable source of income. He will be able to save up for his return to Dublin, until he finds a new job in the capital.

Connell never even considered asking Marianne for money instead of accommodation because money is not something they ever talk about, and he feels ill-at-ease with this idea, “it just felt too much like asking her for money”.¹¹² Connell is also obsessed with the idea that Marianne's own money is circling back to her through him as

¹¹¹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 126.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

“her mother paid his mother money to scrub their floors and hang their laundry”¹¹³ and Connell spends part of the allowance he gets from his mother on Marianne. Money is not a matter of importance for the young girl, she does not care how she spends it, but Connell does, and this unspoken difference weighs heavily on their relationship. In the prism of a capitalist society, it is hard to not let yourself be affected by who has the most money in a relationship because nowadays self-worth is often associated with financial means, the richer you are the more you are able to get a good education and live many special life experiences. Connell does not want to borrow money from Marianne because it would decrease even more his idea of self-worth. The author makes this choice not to fall into the narrative of the proletarian being financially supported by the bourgeoisie so as to not disturb the ethics and authenticity of their relationship perceived by the reader.

III.2.1.3. Support system within his community

Connell decides to move back home to his mother’s place in Carricklea for the summer to save money. Niall was very nice about it when Connell tells him about his situation and assures him he will get his room back in September. The roommate understands what it is like to not have a lot of money and be faced with difficult choices and as Connell’s friend, he tries to ease his mind with this promise, so it is one less problem for our protagonist to stress about.

By July, even Lorraine is aware that Marianne is dating someone new. Connell did not tell her, but because they live in a small town and Marianne is from here, news travel fast. Moreover, Jamie’s father is a national celebrity, “one of the people who had caused the financial crisis – not figuratively, one of the actual people involved.”¹¹⁴ This fact fuels even more the noise around Marianne’s relationship with Jamie in town, as Marianne is the subject of gossips already. Here, this passage of narration serves the dialogue because it adds context when Connell says: “Marianne Sheridan wouldn’t go out with someone like me.”¹¹⁵ Given the context, Connell referring to himself as “someone like me” is in clear opposition to Jamie and his family’s fortune. On one side

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 129.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 130.

the rich and on the other, the poor. By using “wouldn’t” which is conditional, Connell erases all the history he already has with Marianne. Of course, she “would” because it already happened, even if it was not labeled as “going out” together back when it was happening.

Lorraine confronts her son about the breakup and the fact that he hid it from her. She is a little upset because she loves Marianne like her own daughter and fears Connell hurt her again. Connell tries to erase some of their history by telling his mom: “we were never together”¹¹⁶ and that they were seeing each other “casually”¹¹⁷, diminishing the intensity of their relationship. Casually is defined as “in a relaxed and informal way, without commitment or permanence; occasionally or irregularly”.¹¹⁸ This definition is contradictory with the nature of our protagonists’ relationship. Perhaps their relationship was born as relaxed and informal when they were in high school but in college it was not anymore as they were introduced to each other’s friends and the relationship was committed because they were exclusive, and they saw each other almost every day so it was not occasional. Connell lies to protect himself and bend the narrative in his favor because he knows how to use words purposefully. In this passage the narration above blends in with the dialogues, distance between the narrative voice and self-expression is reduced because Connell manifests his thoughts by the way he exposes the situation to his mother. Lorraine has a hard time understanding the dynamic between her son and Marianne. She is troubled because she knows how much and how deeply they love each other. She does not understand what they fear that pushes them to not fully commit.

Connell thinks his mom is the least well-placed person to judge his relationship with Marianne because Lorraine got pregnant unexpectedly in high school and therefore Connell does not have a father so what does she know about commitment? She did not even stick with the father of her child. What Connell does not take into consideration is that even though she did not stay with his father, she still committed. She chose to keep him and to raise him as a single mom which is a huge commitment. It is proof that she knows what she is talking about even if he cannot comprehend it.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Oxford Languages, “casually”.

Even though Lorraine has a hard time understanding how her son ended up in this situation, she is still there for him and wants to provide moral support because she notices he is unwell since he came back home. The way she acts towards her son adds a layer of intimacy in the novel because her motherly instincts prevail over her personal judgement, she tries to advise her son without telling him how to act.

III.2.2. Communication

III.2.2.1. Delaying the conversation

Niall raises the question that this sudden move from Connell might cause a problem in his relationship with Marianne and asks if the girl is already aware and what it implies for the future of their relationship. Connell just answers “Yeah, yeah. I don’t know. I haven’t told her yet.”¹¹⁹ The “yeah, yeah” makes it sound like Connell does not really care about the repercussions of his choices, even though his thoughts say otherwise. Here, there is a clear duality between narration and the dialogues. The close third person point of view is perfect to show that Connell wants to make others think that it is not a big deal for him but by giving the reader access to his thoughts, Rooney bends the narrative, proving that he does care deeply but needs to distance himself from reality to not break down.

He took this decision without consulting anyone, especially not Marianne. The young man knew if he asked his lover to stay at her flat for the summer she would have said yes because he already spent many nights at her place anyway and he knew Marianne would probably have loved to have him around all summer. “He thought she would say yes, it was hard to imagine her not saying yes”.¹²⁰ Niall kept asking Connell if he finally had a conversation with Marianne about his summer plans, but Connell was paralyzed at the idea of asking Marianne this big favor. He could not find the right time nor build up the courage to do it until it was too late.

The end of term arrives, and Connell still did not ask Marianne to stay at her place for the summer. They are at a party just before Connell’s last exam, and the young man takes it as an opportunity to watch Marianne and gather mental images of her, to keep

¹¹⁹ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 127.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

them engraved in his memory. He wants to enjoy the time he has left with her because deep down he knows he will not have the courage to ask Marianne to stay with her and that he will be away for the summer. At the party, Connell also tries to distance himself from reality to not break down, “it felt nothing like his real life”¹²¹ to be here at this party with his lover, surrounded by strangers, knowing everything was about to collapse. The young man is in a second state trying to dissociate from reality and enjoy the moment. For Connell, who is a very pragmatic man, this type of comment may seem surprising, differing from the way Rooney wrote him since the beginning of the story, marking a breaking point in the novel.

That night at the party Connell feels out of place and everything around him feels weird. He tries to only focus on Marianne. He kisses the girl on the shoulder randomly and in public, which is very out of character for him, as he is not the kind to indulge in public displays of affection and especially not to initiate it. It is a sign that he is “very afraid of losing her.”¹²² That night he thinks it is the right time to talk to her, but they end up having sex instead, so he does not gather the courage to ruin the moment and have a serious talk with her. He watches her sleep instead, enjoying the little time they have left. He decides that he should wait after his finals to ask her about the move. This scene feels very intimate because the lovers rarely show affection outside of their own private bubble, granting the reader a new side of their relationship, as if they were the ones watching Marianne and Connell be close at the party.

III.2.2.2. Announcement of the departure

After his finals Connell goes to Marianne’s flat to hang out with her, but he is not focused on what she is talking about, he does not care about the romantic troubles between Teresa and Lorcan, he only cares about his own. He can only think about how he is going to put the subject on the table. He is scared. He breaks the news calmly, just saying “hey, listen. By the way. It looks like I won’t be able to pay rent up here this summer.”¹²³ He lets her finish her sentence, does not interrupt, simply says “hey listen” to grab her attention and “by the way” to make it seem like he is adding something in

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

relation to what Marianne was just talking about when in fact the subject totally drifts out. The use of “it looks like” makes it seem like he has no control over the events related in the rest of his sentence, he is a mere victim of the situation. He places himself in a position where he has nothing to ask her, simply states a fact that does not need follow up.

At first, Marianne does not react, she does not understand what is going on and what he means. Connell explains that he has to move out of Niall’s and that he will be gone by the following week. Marianne is in utter disbelief but tries to not show it, she is also very mad. She asks him what exactly his plans for the summer are. She really needs to understand the situation, but she does not want Connell to know how much she is affected by the news. Marianne asks if he is going back home and instead of taking this as an opportunity to say he does not want to and ask to stay with her, he just goes with it and said yes.

III.2.2.3. Miscommunication about their respective feelings and hat they want

Connell tells Marianne he going to be back in September, that he will not drop out. The young man needs his lover to know that he will be back, not only for school but for her too, even if he does not say it aloud, because they both have a fear of abandonment. This is why he confirms he will only be gone for three months, but because he is not explicit, Marianne does not get it.

Connell does not know how to get out of this situation, and it leads him to self-sabotage. After a long pause he starts taking again. “I don’t know, he said. I guess you’ll want to see other people, then, will you?”¹²⁴ The use of “I guess” suggests that he is making a postulation not an offer. He is just trying to understand what is going on inside her head. As well, the use of “then” seems to hint that this situation would only be limited to the three months he will be out of Dublin, not a permanent break up, just a pause. “Will you?” is an interrogation. It is a postulation about the future, inviting Marianne to think about it later, not to answer immediately.

When she hears this, the girl is heartbroken. She is mad that Connell would even think she could consider something like this because she got out of her way to reunite with him even after he let her down once, which was the ultimate proof she thought he

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 129.

was good enough for her. Moreover, she is mad that Connell does not think she can/will/want to wait for him. Marianne does not even take the time to consider what he just envisaged. She just wants to hurt him as much as he is hurting her right now. Therefore, she simply answers “sure”, “in a voice that struck him as truly cold.”¹²⁵ Not another word is pronounced, just “sure”. Straight-forward, brutal and decisive. There is no coming back from it. No further explanations. Not even a “I will think about it”, or a “let’s talk it through together”. She is determined to cause him as much suffering as the one he is unknowingly inflicting her. Connell is seized by the tone she uses because it is reminiscent of how she talked to the people who were mean to her in high school, he is not used to see the emotionless side of Marianne anymore because as their intimacy grew, he unlocked a warmer side of her personality. Rooney rarely comments on the tone of her characters but here, it is an important element to read the scene better as the tone signals to Connell and to the audience by extend that Marianne is set on what she just said and there is no coming back.

Marianne feels humiliated, just like in high school when Connell chose to take Rachel to the Debs instead of her. Once again, she thinks their relationship means nothing to him and that he is suggesting this option only because he wants to be able to go out with other girls back home for the summer. Marianne feels like he is ashamed of her and that she is not good enough for him to wait for her or do long distance. The young woman thinks Connell is ashamed to be seen with her but actually he is ashamed to show himself to the world, it has nothing to do with her. Only she does not realize Connell put this subject on the table because he thinks the exact same thing. If only they were not ashamed of the way they feel and talked it through, this misunderstanding would have never happened.

At that point, Marianne refuses anymore communication with Connell because she knows if she talks to him again and the misunderstanding is dissolved, she takes the risk to lose him for good if he says aloud that he himself wants to see other people. She would rather live in denial and be in a grey zone with him than face this eventuality. She does not want to risk a goodbye that would turn into a may we meet again.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

What Connell does not understand is that by trying to find a way to hurt Marianne less with his departure, he only made things worse and hurt her more. Before Marianne met Connell, she had never known what it is like to be loved and cared about because her family mistreated her, and she never had any friends. She was unable to build any sort of relationships, so she did not know what she engaged in when she started seeing Connell outside of school. She does not know and even fears love so when Connell showed her his affection repeatedly, she does not know how to act in consequence. This led her to misunderstand his needs and she is completely unsettled by his way of thinking. Connell's mindset is a complete enigma to her as she was never in a situation where she could experience giving and receiving tenderness and love. She cannot understand that he is acting this way so as to not hurt her or at least minimize the damage. She does not understand social cues.

III.2.3. Feelings this situation arises in Connell

III.2.3.1. Shame of social condition

Connell is ashamed of his situation, and it feels like he is also afraid of what this stay might imply for the future of their relationship. He seems afraid to commit to a serious relationship with her. Many times, he thought about asking but always backed off last minute because he felt like he was not good enough for her. The weight of the capitalist society is pressing onto their relationship because no matter how it ends, they cannot erase the fact that they got acquainted because Connell's mom works for the Sheridans, there will always be a power imbalance between them.

The girl gets a new boyfriend quite soon after ending things with Connell, one who is the total opposite of him. Is it to get over him fast or is it to take revenge on him? Marianne knows he would learn about it fast, and be stung by the fact that Jamie, her new boyfriend is nothing like him. Obviously, Connell learns about it in no time thanks to his friend Niall and loses his mind because he knows it is his own fault. Marianne having a new boyfriend definitively ruins all his hopes to get her back in September.

Because of how quick it happened, it reinforces Connell's idea that Marianne wanted to see someone else all along and that he was never good enough for her. Connell knows who Jamie is. He knows about his reputation and his social status, they even met before because he was part of Marianne's friend group. This convinces Connell even

more that his lack of money was the main problem in their relationship all along and that Marianne wanted a provider, not someone to provide for.

When Connell tells his mother: “Marianne Sheridan would not go out with someone like me”¹²⁶ she is baffled because obviously they already “went out” together. She also asks what he means by “someone like me” because for her, she raised him well, to be a good kid and to become a good man. She does not understand his lack of self-esteem because in her mind he is intelligent, kind, and beautiful and the dream boyfriend of any girl. She fails to remember that she is the first one that insufflated in her son’s mind that a family like theirs is judged not good enough to be associated with one like Marianne’s and that people could have negative things to say about their relationship. She only wishes her son would have a more nuanced view of the situation because he only sees the downsides of his lower-class background, as here he perceives it as an obstacle in his relationship with Marianne, even though it also had positive influences on him, building him to be the man she fell in love with.

Then Connell raises the matter of social class and the fact that Marianne and he do not belong in the same world. He hates that he thinks this way, but he cannot stop himself as he suffers from some sort of inferiority complex. He can only devalue himself and Lorraine does not like it. She made a lot of sacrifices and did everything she could so that her son would have a better life than her and would not feel limited by where he comes from but rather see his background as a strength not a weakness.

Lorraine knows Marianne very well and she knows she would not choose a boyfriend based off his social status or consider someone’s value through their net worth. She knows Marianne is not a classist and that if she is dating Jamie, it is for another reason. Lorraine is convinced that for Marianne, to have a truthful relationship class would not be a determinant, only personality would be. Connell says he is telling her the facts but obviously he is biased by the fact that he does not feel worthy of Marianne as a lower-class person. He is projecting his insecurities onto reality. Therefore, when her son says he thinks “her new boyfriend is a bit more in line with her social class”¹²⁷, Lorraine feels the need to defend Marianne by answering “I don’t believe Marianne would act like

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 130.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*.

that [...] I don't think she's that kind of person."¹²⁸ She still uses a conditional with "would" because she has not interacted with the young girl in a long time and people can change, but still shows her support towards Marianne when she says "I don't think she's that kind of person", "that kind of person" probably referring to Marianne's family or other people who are upper class.

III.2.3.2. Self-anger

Connell is mad at himself for not making up a backup plan when he first realized that the restaurant was facing difficulties a few months ago, especially knowing how much he needed his full paycheck to live. He became obsessed with the idea that it was his fault he ended up in this precarious situation and started to feel guilty. He is also mad at himself for not being in control of the situation. Moreover, he is sad because he does not understand how and when it went the wrong way. He missed his window without even realizing it, but deep down he knew months ago already that this would happen.

In the conversation with Marianne, there is an awkward blank right after the young man says he will be back in September and Connell has time to realize how bad he feels now. It is in opposition with the rest of the discussion that is fast paced, it breaks the rhythm just before the breaking point. It strikes him even harder than usual that he is not worthy of Marianne because he cannot even maintain a stable financial situation allowing him to stay close to her. He, who already deals with low self-esteem, reaches his lowest point and finally says to Marianne: "I don't know, he said. I guess you'll want to see other people, then, will you?"¹²⁹ creating utter chaos. As well, there is immediacy in the entire novel so when the scene unfolds and it stretches out until the pause, the reader understands that they are facing the most important scene in the novel, connecting the past to the future. Sally Rooney is very intentional with the pace of the novel as the story takes place over multiple years, and this stylistic effect of slowing down in the globality to focus on this scene particularly plus slowing down at a precise moment in the scene itself creates a bubble in the temporality of events.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 129.

The young man imagines that she is glad she can finally get rid of him. Connell thinks she jumped at the occasion to end things with him when he made that suggestion because she was planning on living him anyway and that it just made it easier for her because she did not have to think of an excuse to break up with him, he came up with one on his own. The young man also persuades himself that Marianne is glad he left Dublin, so she does not have to talk to him or even see him around. Connell is spiraling down and makes up a lot of fake scenarios in his head fueled by his self-anger; he does that to hurt and punish himself even more because he thinks he deserves it. Connell convinces himself he should not even try to contact Marianne to explain himself or try to get her back because now she has a fancy new boyfriend, so even if he tried to reach out to her, she would not answer anyway. It is not worth the pain for him. This goes against the traditional coming of age plots where the main character usually does everything in his power to get his love interest back but never questions himself. Here Connell realizes his own flaws and knows that he is not in the right headspace to reconnect with Marianne, because if he did and she accepted to take him back the issues between them would not resolve themselves.

Lorraine tries to engage in a discussion to show her son that his vision of events and his perspective on the relationship is biased by what he is feeling for Marianne, his heartbreak, and his low self-esteem. By saying “maybe you’re misinterpreting what happened”¹³⁰ she tries to tell her son that his perspective is not the only one to take into account, but Connell does not want to hear any of it, he is too stuck in his own pain and grief to listen to her, so he shuts off and leaves the room to avoid confrontation. He is fueling his own denial, and he wallows in his suffering. Connell feels mad, sad, and even starts to be depressed. Rooney accentuates Connell’s distress by showing the physicality of it when she writes: “Connell could feel his back teeth grinding together quietly.”¹³¹ Here, teeth grinding is a sign of his anxiety and stress towards the situation as well as of his discomfort talking about it with his mother. Grinding his teeth could also be a sign of restraint, stopping him from being rude to his mother or his words going beyond his thoughts.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 130.

¹³¹ *Ibid*.

He cannot get Marianne out of his head. He constantly relives what happened after the Debs when she ghosted him as a form of self-punishment. He still cannot forgive himself for hurting her once and still cannot believe he managed to get her back. The same scheme repeats itself; it is a vicious circle. As long as he will refuse to forgive himself for the first time he caused her pain, he is doomed to repeat the same old mistakes. For now, Connell does not feel like he deserves her forgiveness even when he heard her say it when they addressed the issue, for months into being friends again.

III.2.3.3. Regrets that he lost Marianne one again

Connell is a hypersensitive person. He cries when he leaves Marianne's flat because he is heartbroken. This is his way to mourn the time they could have spent together if he had the guts to ask to stay with her and the entirety of their relationship overall. The young man is conscious that this time he acted wrong, even more than with the Debs. He is very sad his inability to express his feelings led him to lose Marianne once again. For months afterwards, he cannot get her out of his head and is deeply affected by this loss. When he finally gets to be her friend again, he tries really hard to not mess it up again, by rebuilding their friendship first, without plunging again in a romantic relationship. In the meantime, they both date other people but can never get over one another. Their one big regret is that, this day of May, they gave up on each other instead of pressing the issue to understand the other's motive. Many months after this, they finally address it and clear the air, thinking about how much they regret the time they wasted.

III.3. Impact of those choices of Marianne and Connell's future

The relationship Marianne and Connell have took years to build. They have a bond like no other despite not being from the same world and sheltering their relationship from the eyes of others. Even when their relationship hits some lows and they are not talking to each other for a while, they still live in each other's mind constantly. They are each other's great love. When talking about their future and college, Connell says to Marianne he thinks she will be the cool girl in Trinity and that she will not even give him the time

and she responds “I would never pretend not to know you, Connell”¹³² meaning that they had a durable impact on the trajectory of the other’s life.

There is a twisted parallel here because early on in the novel, Connell pretends to not know Marianne personally when they are in school. He is so self-conscious that he thinks everyone will see him as a deviant person for being interested in Marianne, the weird girl. But our protagonist never cared about what others thought about her, she only ever cared about Connell’s opinion on her. This is why it hurt even more when she realized Connell thought she did not want to fully commit to their relationship and wait for him that summer and that she was not good enough to be someone you wait for. This is reminiscent of the shame she felt in high school when he asked her to keep their relationship a secret. Back then she was ok with it because she did not have anyone to confide into, but now, in college, she had friends and a newly found social status therefore she could not understand why she was still not good enough.

This breakup is mentioned multiple times in the rest of the novel as the incomprehension they came across that day still inhibits their mind. Only months later when they get back together, they address it and realize they were both wrong in their own way. They are the embodiment of right person wrong time. Each time their relationship flourishes they manage to ruin it involuntarily.

Moreover, later in the novel, after the sudden suicide of his high school friend Rob, Connell seeks therapy, but it is already too late. In therapy, he finds himself not only talking about what happened to Rob, but also about his complex relationship with Marianne, who is at the center of his life. But by then, the young man is already severely depressed, and this depression had years to grow, starting in his teenage years, because he was never able to overcome the bad things he thinks he has done in the past. If only he had started therapy earlier, he would have been offered keys to communicate more efficiently and perhaps it would have helped avoid some misunderstandings in his relationships, especially with Marianne. Dialogues are a mirror of the characters’ mindset

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 28.

but if their interlocutor does not know how to decode the hidden meaning of the words, the characters cannot move forward.

Conclusion

Sally Rooney has risen to global fame, as all her novels have known tremendous success across the world, especially *Normal People*. She is a polarizing author, due to the fact that her writing techniques appear to be different from the norm. She has been heavily criticized for her lack of quotation marks and em-dashes; readers arguing that it makes it quite difficult to follow the story; even though she uses other methods to signal dialogues, like indents and dialogue tags. Rooney's choice as a writer to not clearly separate dialogues from narration is a stylistic affirmation put in place to reduce the distance between the narrative voice and self-expression. Because her novels are focused on the inner lives of her characters more than on a very developed plot, she chooses a system in which narration is here to serve the dialogues, by providing context for example, and not the other way around. It is very unusual for a writer to decide that the plot is going to be secondary in the novel and chose to have the characters write themselves in intense details to give them life, but it adds a layer of authenticity to the storytelling and makes it easier for the reader to connect with the material. Moreover, Rooney makes a point of being as relatable as possible in her writing. This is why she insists on the use of text messages and especially e-mails as inherent parts of the dialogue format. She is a millennial author writing mostly for a millennial audience; therefore she uses their preferred means of communication to make the reader feel like they could have acted the same way as the main characters. The novelist also uses those forms of communication to add an effect of immediacy and intimacy in her writings, making the story more dynamic.

The characters speak like any regular individuals their age would, creating a deep feeling of proximity with the reader and immersing them fully in the reading experience. Sally Rooney makes a point of showing real life, relying on her setting, 2010s Ireland, to make a social commentary about the world she lives in. Her characters are almost an excuse to address topics she could not include in narration; only the dialogue formats (spoken and written) let her have enough space for substantial and meaningful exchanges, because it allows a response and the confrontation of different points of view. Rooney takes the codes of the traditional coming of age novel and makes it her own, to fit her wants and needs as a storyteller. This is what makes her work so powerful. Her female main characters can even be seen as alter egos of the author, sharing similar life

experiences with the novelist and adding an even more personal dimension to the novels. It is almost like the author uses the voice of her characters as her own. She is very skilled and knows how to use words with maximized precision to convey the feelings she wants to convey through her characters. By painting them as extremely intelligent individuals, she allows the protagonists to use their words as weapons and to be social chameleons, being able to adapt in different situations. The characters' skilled use of words also permits a new level of intensity in their relationships. Furthermore, as Rooney has a bachelor's in literature, she is perfectly aware of the power of narrative techniques and how it can influence the reading experience. This is why she uses different viewpoints in each novel, depending on the effect of proximity or not she wants to produce. The novelist also feeds her texts with many literary references to add depth and substance to the inner life of her characters, as well as hints for the readers because often those mentions of key writings in literature may say something about the characters.

Under the cover of writing love stories, Sally Rooney makes a state of play of the challenges millennials (and gen Z) have to face, in a world in constant evolution. In a capitalist society, how to keep healthy relationships that aren't affected by financial means and other socio-economic factors? Building an identity outside of your belonging to a set class is a complicated enterprise. The characters can have a hard time comprehending the pros and cons of their upbringing, most often only seeing the negative aspects. Despite the writer's best efforts, no one can truly be free of where they come from, even if they can improve their condition, it will always be a matter of facts. The most valuable lesson the characters can teach the readers is that faking who you are to fit in better within certain circles can only lead to you losing yourself, and that keeping your authenticity is the only thing that can lead you to have true and healthy relationships with others, no matter their class. Having open hearted conversations about the more difficult topics is the only way to apprehend the other person's views and values. It is also a great vehicle to strengthen the love between two people. Rooney makes a point of showing all the different classes in her novels, and the different degrees inside a class. She tries to avoid a clear opposition between the rich and the poor, which tends to distance her from the Marxist's class theory because for Marx, the middle class did not exist for example, he only considered the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat and did not take into account a cohabitation of different classes, outside the prism of the bourgeoisie oppressing the

proletariat. In her novels, Rooney tends to show that cohabitation is possible but only on certain grounds and that communication must be at the center of the relationships because if not a gap will appear. Both parties need to discover the other's world in order to understand what led the person be this way and they need to have meaningful exchanges about it. Moreover, in today's society, as the class struggle is still an underlying issue that impacts many other aspects of society, it is important to understand where it originates from and the effects it has on one's life to be able to do something about it. This is the whole point of Sally Rooney's novels, to extend the perspective of her audience on the subjects that matter the most for her and doing it through the voice of fictional characters help her messages to be more accessible and comprehensible to a wide share of the population.

As a socially and politically conscious author rooted in a territory, here Ireland, Rooney wants to highlight the problems modern day Ireland and its youth are facing. As there is a regain of interest in Irish culture in the recent years, she surfs on it to grow her readership's consciousness and make a durable impact leading to future change. The surge in mainstream Irish media goes hand in hand with Sally Rooney's rise to stardom. The general audience is interested to discover this new face of Ireland, outside of their biased vision of a prude and very catholic country in the everlasting shadow of Great Britain. Actors such as Cillian Murphy, Saoirse Ronan, Barry Keoghan, Andrew Scott, and especially Paul Mescal (who rose to international stardom thanks to the BBC TV adaptation of *Normal People* where he plays Connell) have all helped to put the spotlight on Ireland. Those actors have not only played in Irish productions but also in American ones, allowing them to touch a much bigger audience. They became personalities that the Western audience like and connect to Ireland, helping them to see Ireland in a positive light, because those actors are really proud of where they come from and outspoken about it. In literature, Paul Lynch won the 2023 Booker prize for *Prophet Song* and a few years back, *Exiting Times* by Naoise Dolan made quite the impression; there were even comparisons between the author and Sally Rooney for her depiction of the millennial struggle, class, and capitalism as well as the emphasis she puts on the main character's inner life. In music, right now Hozier is probably the most famous Irish singer worldwide, drawing his sound partly from traditional folk music and praised for his poignant texts tackling political and social justice using religious and literary images, his Irishness

reflecting in all the lyrics. This opening of Irish culture onto the world thanks to the voice of powerful artists and/or characters has helped tremendously to modernize and improve the image of the country worldwide. Heather Schwedel, an American English literature professor and writer for Slate Magazine said:

as a small island, Ireland has always been a fluid place for creative talent, meaning it's still the case folks often have to travel abroad to expand their work and opportunities, but it's no longer a uni-directional or permanent flow outwards. I work with many international young creative folks who are attracted and move to Ireland because of its cultural reputation and warmth."¹³³

Moreover, she thinks that nowadays:

many US fans of Irish films, TV, music and literature also have a sense of Ireland as a progressive, outward-looking place. 'It seems like Ireland is moving forward, and maybe, if a little late to the party, is making progress.'¹³⁴

This idea of progress is present in Rooney's novels, but nuanced by the fact that there is still a long way to go to achieve durable changes in the right direction. Schwedel also states that the American fans:

contrast that with the US where our reproductive rights are getting worse, I think there's an element of envy... I'm sure it's much more complicated, but there's those sorts of duelling narratives. Of course, we would look to Ireland and [say], 'Oh, it's so better there; they're actually moving forward instead of backward.'¹³⁵

The glamorization of Ireland and surge of interest of the Irish way of life leave way to the creation of many more great characters embodying the Irish experience.

¹³³ Freyne, "Everyone loves Ireland! Why is Irish culture so hot right now?", The Irish Times.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Bibliography

Quoted Sources

Corpus

Rooney, Sally. *Beautiful World, Where Are You*. London: Faber & Faber, 2021. Kindle.

Rooney, Sally. *Conversations With Friends*. London: Faber & Faber, 2017. Kindle.

Rooney, Sally. *Normal People*. London: Faber & Faber, 2018. Kindle.

Books

Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Project Gutenberg, 2003. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4723/pg4723-images.html>

Calas, Frédéric. *Le Roman épistolaire*. Paris : Nathan, 1996.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Translated by John Veitch. Project Gutenberg, 1993. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/59/pg59-images.html>

Lancien-Despert, Brigitte. *A la découverte des lettres d'amour des grands écrivains*. Paris : Ellipses, 2021.

Marx, Karl. *Introduction to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Translated by Joseph O'Malley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Essays

Rooney, Sally. "Even if you beat me," *The Dublin Review*, Spring 2015. <https://thedublinreview.com/article/even-if-you-beat-me/>

Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 1852.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>

Interviews

Rooney, Sally. “‘I have an aversion to failure’: Sally Rooney feels the buzz of her debut novel.” Interview by Paula Coccozza. *The Guardian*, May 24, 2017.

‘I have an aversion to failure’: Sally Rooney feels the buzz of her debut novel | Fiction | *The Guardian*

Rooney, Sally. “Sally Rooney: ‘A large part of my style has definitely developed through writing emails’.” Interview by Michael Nolan. *The Irish Times*, November 13, 2017.

Sally Rooney: ‘A large part of my style has definitely developed through writing emails’ – *The Irish Times*

Rooney, Sally. “An Interview with Sally Rooney.” Interview by Michael Nolan. *The Tangerine Magazine*, Autumn, 2017.

The Tangerine Magazine - Belfast

Rooney, Sally. “A Conversation With Sally Rooney.” Interview by Maura M. Lynch. *Stet Magazine*, April 23, 2018.

Author Sally Rooney on 'Conversations with Friends' | STET (stetmag.com)

News and Magazine Articles

Bienskie Jackson, Rebecca. “Book Review: ‘Conversations with Friends’ By Sally Rooney,” Review of *Conversations With Friends*, by Sally Rooney. *The Montclarion*, January 30th, 2023.

<https://themontclarion.org/feature/book-review-conversations-with-friends-by-sally-rooney/>

Clanchy, Kate. “Normal People by Sally Rooney review – a future classic,” Review of *Normal People*, by Sally Rooney. *The Guardian*, September 1st, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/01/normal-people-sally-rooney-review>

Crain, Caleb. “Sally Rooney addresses her critics,” *The Atlantic*, August 10th, 2021.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/09/sally-rooney-beautiful-world-where-are-you/619496/>

Crispin, Jessa. “Normal People is little more than a gutless soap opera for millennials,” *The Guardian*, May 5th, 2020.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/05/sally-rooney-normal-people-hulu-bbc-soap-opera>

Freyne, Patrick. “Everyone loves Ireland! Why is Irish culture so hot right now?,” *The Irish Times*, February 3rd, 2024.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/2024/02/03/everyone-loves-ireland-why-is-irish-culture-so-hot-right-now/>

Hill, Emily. “Spare me the cult of Sally Rooney,” *The Spectator*, October 10th, 2020.
<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/spare-me-the-cult-of-sally-rooney/>

Humble, Catherine. “Normal People by Sally Rooney, review: Enters the darker corners of the psyche,” Review of *Normal People*, by Sally Rooney. *The Independent*, August 30th, 2018.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/normal-people-book-review-sally-rooney-how-good-stars-a8514836.html>

Kjølholt, Cecilie Louise. “Review: ‘Conversations with Friends’ by Sally Rooney,” Review of *Conversations With Friends*, by Sally Rooney. *Ark Review*, September 4th, 2018.
<http://arkbooks.dk/review-conversations-with-friends-by-sally-rooney/>

Menon, Tara. “Beautiful World, Where Are You?,” *The Sewanee Review*, September, 2021.
Beautiful World, Where Are You? | The Sewanee Review

Mullins, Carrie. “Why can’t we make up our minds about Sally Rooney?” *Electric Lit*, June 4th, 2019.

<https://electriclitterature.com/why-cant-we-make-up-our-minds-about-sally-rooney/>

Nelson, Mia. “Review: Sally Rooney’s new novel misses the mark on love and politics,” Review of *Normal People*, by Sally Rooney. *The Dartmouth*, September 16th, 2021.

<https://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2021/09/review-sally-rooney-beautiful-world>

Ranjan, Pranjali. “5 Reasons to read Sally Rooney Books,” *Medium*, August 4th, 2023.

<https://medium.com/@pranjali.ranjan/5-reasons-why-you-should-read-sally-rooney-books-c3e604039bd9>

Sentell, Eric. “Tell, Don’t Show?” *Medium*, April 29th, 2021.

<https://medium.com/the-brave-writer/tell-dont-show-96f23331b94c>

Silverthorn, Emma. “Conversations With Friends by Sally Rooney: The perfect novel for the Snapchat generation,” *The London Economic*. July 11th, 2017.

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/entertainment/arts/conversations-friends-sally-rooney-perfect-novel-snapchat-generation-51559/>

Blog Articles

Plain, Jane. “Sally Rooney, Jane Austen, sexual tension and the 'grand philosophical project'”, *The Austen Connection*, March 4th, 2022.

<https://austenconnection.substack.com/p/sally-rooney-jane-austen-sexual-tension>

Shawshaw24. “Focalization”, *Narrative and Memory*, October 21st, 2013.

<https://narrativeandmemory.wordpress.com/tag/focalization/>

Dictionary Entries

Cambridge Dictionary, “ghosting.”

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ghosting#>

Cambridge Dictionary, “letter.”

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/letter>

Cambridge Dictionary, “message.”

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/message>

Oxford Reference, “dealignment.”

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095704408>

Oxford Languages, “casually”.

Website Contents

Lannamann, Taylor. “The Fire Next Time Plot Summary.” *LitCharts*, August 28th, 2017.

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-fire-next-time/summary>.

Merriam Webster, “Point of View: It's Personal First, second, and third person explained.”

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/grammar/point-of-view-first-second-third-person-difference>

Grand Valley State University, “Showing v. Telling.” March 1st, 2019.

[https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/CC3BFEEB-C364-E1A1-A5390F221AC0FD2D/showing_vs_telling\(2\).pdf](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/CC3BFEEB-C364-E1A1-A5390F221AC0FD2D/showing_vs_telling(2).pdf)

University of Regina, “Marx on social Class.” October 3rd, 2002.

<https://uregina.ca/~gingrich/o402.htm#:~:text=The%20main%20classes%20in%20capitalism,of%20the%20dynamics%20of%20capitalism.>

Other Sources Consulted

Short Stories

Rooney, Sally. "At the clinic," *The White Review*, September 2016.

<https://www.thewhitereview.org/fiction/at-the-clinic/>

Rooney, Sally. "Concord 34," *The Dublin Review*, Summer 2016.

<https://thedublinreview.com/article/concord-34/>

Rooney, Sally. "Mr Salary," *Granta*, April 19th, 2016. <https://granta.com/mr-salary/>

Interviews

Rooney, Sally. "Sally Rooney: 'I want the next thing I do to be the best thing I've ever done'," *The Guardian*, April 17th, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/17/sally-rooney-i-want-the-next-thing-i-do-to-be-the-best-thing-ive-ever-done>

News and Magazine Articles

Baucina, Anastasia. "How Sally Rooney Gave Normal People Radical Politics."

Jacobin, June 5th, 2020. <https://jacobin.com/2020/05/sally-rooney-normal-people-bbc-literature>

Burkova, Rozalina. "Sally Rooney's Novel of Letters Puts a Fresh Spin on Familiar Questions," *The New York Times*, October 12th, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/07/books/review/beautiful-world-where-are-you-sally-rooney.html>

Cain, Sian. "Sally Rooney teaches us millennials should be written about, not ridiculed." *The Guardian*, September 5th, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/05/sally-rooney-millennials-normal-people>

Campbell, Donna M. "Naturalism in American Literature." *Literary Movements*. Dept. of English, Washington State University. March 8th, 2017.

<https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/natural.htm>

Chapin, Angelina. "What's Up With the Ending of Sally Rooney's New Book?" *The Cut*, September 17th, 2021. <https://www.thecut.com/2021/09/sally-rooney-beautiful-world-where-are-you-ending.html>

Collins, Lauren. "Sally Rooney gets in your head." *The New Yorker*, December 31st, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/07/sally-rooney-gets-in-your-head>

Deegan, Gordon. "Success of 'Normal People' lead to hike in book sales," *Irish Independent*, May 16th, 2020. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/success-of-normal-people-leads-to-hike-in-book-sales/39209924.html>

Delistraty, Cody. "Sally Rooney's Politics of Millennial Resignation," *Vulture*, April 11th, 2019. <https://www.vulture.com/2019/04/sally-rooneys-normal-people-is-politically-complacent.html>

Devers A. N. "Sally Rooney Makes Sense of It All," *Elle*, March 25th, 2019. <https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a26932708/sally-rooney-normal-people-interview/>

Donnelly, Elisabeth. "This 28-Year-Old Irish Writer Really Captures Millennial Life," *BuzzFeed News*, March 20th, 2019.

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/elisabethdonnelly/sally-rooney-conversations-with-friends-normal-people>

Enright, Anne. "It is time for a sharp inhale, people. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* is superb," *The Irish Times*, September 1st, 2018.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/it-is-time-for-a-sharp-inhale-people-sally-rooney-s-normal-people-is-superb-1.3608184>

Fernández, José Francisco. “Conversations with Friends,” *Estudios Irlandeses*.
<https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/reviews/conversations-with-friends/>

Freeman, Ciaran. “The corporeal imagination of Sally Rooney’s ‘Normal People’,”
America, May 8th, 2020. <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2020/05/08/sally-rooney-normal-people-review-237601>

Figuroa, Sonny. “Sally Rooney’s ‘Normal People’ Explores Intense Love Across
Social Classes,” *The New York Times*, April 8th, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/books/review-normal-people-sally-rooney.html>

Grady, Constance. “The Cult of Sally Rooney,” *Vox*, September 3rd, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/books/review-normal-people-sally-rooney.html>

Graham, Sadie. “Beautiful Queers, Where Are You?” *Electric Lit*, November 10th,
2021. <https://electricliterature.com/beautiful-queers-where-are-you/>

Goldman, Nathan. “Conventional Wisdom”, *The Baffler*, April 3rd, 2019.
<https://thebaffler.com/latest/conventional-wisdom-goldman>

Hogeveen, Esmé. “Finding Meaning in Dire Times: Sally Rooney’s ‘Beautiful World,
Where Are You,’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 7th, 2021.
<https://lareviewofbooks.org/contributor/esme-hogeveen/>

Hu, Jane. “Sally Rooney’s Great Millennial Novels,” *The Ringer*, April 16th, 2019.
<https://www.theringer.com/2019/4/16/18311711/sally-rooney-normal-people-conversations-with-friends-millennial-novel>

Jarvis, Claire. “Contemporary Clothing,” *Slate*, April 22nd, 2019.
<https://slate.com/culture/2019/04/sally-rooney-normal-people-austen-james-lawrence.html>

Leszkiewicz, Anna. “Sally Rooney on sex, power and the art of being normal,” *The
New Statesman*, September 12th, 2018.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/09/sally-rooney-interview-normal-people-booker-prize-bbc-three-adaptation-conversations-with-friends>

Lindsay, Kathryn. “Is Carrying A Sally Rooney Book The New Instagram Status Symbol?” *Refinery29*, April 17th, 2019. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2019/04/230058/sally-rooney-normal-people-popularity-instagram>

McAlpin, Heller. “‘Normal People’ Appeals Across Genders And Generations,” *NPR*, April 16th, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/16/713477427/normal-people-appeals-across-genders-and-generations>

Murguia, Sophie. “How Sally Rooney Took a Coming-of-Age Novel and Turned It Into an Important Cultural Commentary,” *Mother Jones*, March 22nd, 2019. <https://www.motherjones.com/media/2019/03/sally-rooney-normal-people/>

Muro, Alicia. « Sally Rooney est-elle la Jane Austen des millennials ? » *Intenz*, July 12th, 2022. <https://intenz.co/2022/07/12/sally-rooney-est-elle-la-jane-austen-des-millennials/>

Pariseau, Leslie. “Debut novelist Naoise Dolan is no Sally Rooney, for better and worse” *Los Angeles Times*, June 3rd, 2022. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/books/story/2020-06-03/naoise-dolan-exciting-times-review>

Pham, Yen. “Sally Rooney Wants to Start the Revolution,” *Literary Hub*, December 7th, 2017. <https://lithub.com/sally-rooney-wants-to-start-the-revolution/>

Piper-Thompson, Anna. “Conversations with Friends: Frances’ reading list,” *Varsity*, June 8th, 2022. <https://www.varsity.co.uk/film-and-tv/23859>

Secher, Benjamin. “Why Sally Rooney sees herself as a failure?” *Gulf News*, September 19th, 2018. <https://gulfnews.com/entertainment/books/why-sally-rooney-sees-herself-as-a-failure-1.2280300>

Secher, Benjamin. "I have no idea if I'll write another book' - 'Normal People' author Sally Rooney," *Irish Independent*, September 10th, 2018.

<https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/i-have-no-idea-if-ill-write-another-book-normal-people-author-sally-rooney/37301171.html>

Smallwood, Christine. "Sally Rooney's Great Expectations," *The New Republic*, April 1st, 2019. <https://newrepublic.com/authors/christine-smallwood>

Specter, Emma. "19 Thoughts I Had About the First Episode of Conversations With Friends," *Vogue*, May 16th, 2022. <https://www.vogue.com/article/19-thoughts-i-had-first-episode-of-conversations-with-friends>

Temple, Emily. "Let's All Stop Pigeonholing Sally Rooney as a 'Millennial Writer'," *Literary Hub*, April 10th, 2019. <https://lithub.com/lets-all-stop-pigeonholing-sally-rooney-as-a-millennial-writer/>

Walton, Julia. "'Does it have to be complicated?': Technologically Mediated Romance and Identity in Sally Rooney's Conversations with Friends and Normal People," *Tortoise*, Spring 2021. <https://tortoise.princeton.edu/2021/05/02/does-it-have-to-be-complicated-technologically-mediated-romance-and-identity-in-sally-rooneys-conversations-with-friends-and-normal-people/>

Warner, John. "Sally Rooney, defining novelist of the Millennial generation? Not so fast." *Chicago Tribune*, April 19th, 2019.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2019/04/19/sally-rooney-defining-novelist-of-the-millennial-generation-not-so-fast/>

Weir, Keziah. "Sally Rooney & Mansur Gavriel, Helen Oyeyemi & Bottega Veneta: This Season's Best Books and the Must-Have Bags to Stash Them In," *Vanity Fair*, April 3rd, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/photos/2019/04/the-novels-you-want-to-be-reading-right-now>

"An Irish Problem," *London Review of Books*, May 24th, 2018.

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n10/sally-rooney/an-irish-problem>

Blog Articles

Ferguson, Natasha. "What is Stream of Consciousness Writing?" *Celtx Blog*, May 17th, 2023. <https://blog.celtx.com/what-is-stream-of-consciousness-writing/>

Laura. "8 Books Mentioned in Normal People by Sally Rooney," *What's hot?* Published March 25th, 2021, last updated January 12th, 2024. <https://whatshotblog.com/books-mentioned-in-normal-people/>

Lee, Hope. "Millennials and Money: a review of Sally Rooney's 'Conversations With Friends'," *Bound 2 Books*, May 29th 2019. <https://bound2books.co/2019/05/29/millennials-and-money-a-review-of-sally-rooneys-conversations-with-friends/>

Thesis and Dissertations

Hoffman, Courtney A. "Pathetic Temporality: Affect And Time In The Eighteenth-Century Women's Epistolary Novel" A Dissertation Submitted To The Graduate Faculty Of The University Of Georgia In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For The Degree, Doctor Of Philosophy. Athens, Georgia 2017. https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/hoffman_courtney_a_201705_phd.pdf

Legrand, Clémence. "'Blankly Performing a Memorised Task': Sally Rooney's Conversations With Friends and Normal People in Dialogue with James Joyce's Dubliners." Humanities and Social Sciences. 2020. dumas-02883400 <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-02883400v1/document>

Vanišová, Veronika. "Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People* from the Perspective of Marxist Literary Criticism" Diplomová práce, vedoucí Topolovská, Tereza. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Pedagogická fakulta, Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury, 2022. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/171253/120408034.pdf?sequence=1>

Website Contents

Dubey, Anna. "Sally Rooney," *Britannica*, May 10th, 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sally-Rooney>

Ejaz, Xinnia. "Codes and Conventions of Coming of Age Films" SlideShare, October 8th, 2018. <https://fr.slideshare.net/XinniaEjaz/codes-and-conventions-of-coming-of-age-films>

Frisella, Emily. "Stream of Consciousness." *LitCharts* LLC, May 5, 2017. Retrieved May 26, 2024. <https://www.litcharts.com/literary-devices-and-terms/stream-of-consciousness>

Uzma Ansari, Maria. "Books & cultural references made in Sally Rooney's *Normal People*," *Goodreads*, January 10th, 2021.

<https://www.goodreads.com/user/show/108867365-maria-uzma-ansari>

"Characteristics of Class," *Shaalaa*. https://www.shaalaa.com/concept-notes/characteristics-of-class_14516

"Sally Rooney" *British Council*, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/sally-rooney>

"Stream of Consciousness." *Literary Devices*, <https://literarydevices.net/stream-of-consciousness/>

"Stream of Consciousness in Mrs. Dalloway." *Edubirdie*, September 27th, 2022.

<https://edubirdie.com/examples/stream-of-consciousness-in-mrs-dalloway/>

"The Waves" *SparkNotes*, <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/waves/motifs/>

Appendix

Annexe 1. III-2-1) Finding ways to not feel like you depend on others.....	116
--	-----

Annexe 1. III-2-1) Finding ways to not feel like you depend on others

“Until April, Connell had been planning to work in Dublin for the summer and cover the rent with his wages, but a week before the exams his boss told him they were cutting back his hours. He could just about make rent that way but he’d have nothing left to live on. He’d always known that the place was going to go out of business, and he was furious with himself for not applying anywhere else. He thought about it constantly for weeks. In the end he decided he would have to move out for the summer. Niall was very nice about it, said the room would still be there for him in September and all of that. What about yourself and Marianne? Niall asked. And Connell said: Yeah, yeah. I don’t know. I haven’t told her yet.

The reality was that he stayed in Marianne’s apartment most nights anyway. He could just tell her about the situation and ask if he could stay in her place until September. He knew she would say yes. He thought she would say yes, it was hard to imagine her not saying yes. But he found himself putting off the conversation, putting off Niall’s enquiries about it, planning to bring it up with her and then at the last minute failing to. It just felt too much like asking her for money. He and Marianne never talked about money. They had never talked, for example, about the fact that her mother paid his mother money to scrub their floors and hang their laundry, or about the fact that this money circulated indirectly to Connell, who spent it, as often as not, on Marianne. He hated having to think about things like that. He knew Marianne never thought that way. She bought him things all the time, dinner, theatre tickets, things she would pay for and then instantly, permanently, forget about.

They went to a party in Sophie Whelan’s house one night as the exams were ending. He knew he would finally have to tell Marianne that he was moving out of Niall’s place, and he would have to ask her, outright, if he could stay with her instead. Most of the evening they spent by the swimming pool, immersed in the bewitching gravity of warm water. He watched Marianne splashing around in her strapless red swimsuit. A lock of wet hair had come loose from the knot at her neck and was sealed flat and shining against her skin. Everyone was laughing and drinking. It felt nothing like his real life. He didn’t know these people at all, he hardly even believed in them, or in himself. At the side of the pool he kissed Marianne’s shoulder impulsively and she smiled at him, delighted. No one looked at them. He thought he would tell her about the rent situation that night in bed. He felt very afraid of losing her. When they got to bed she wanted to have sex and

afterwards she fell asleep. He thought of waking her up but he couldn't. He decided he would wait until after his last exam to talk to her about moving home.

Two days later, directly after his paper on Medieval and Renaissance Romance, he went over to Marianne's apartment and they sat at the table drinking coffee. He half-listened to her talking about some complicated relationship between Teresa and Lorcan, waiting for her to finish, and eventually he said: Hey, listen. By the way. It looks like I will not be able to pay rent up here this summer. Marianne looked up from her coffee and said flatly: What?

Yeah, he said. I'm going to have to move out of Niall's place.

When? said Marianne.

Pretty soon. Next week maybe.

Her face hardened, without displaying any particular emotion. Oh, she said. You'll be going home, then.

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

She nodded, raised her eyebrows briefly and then lowered them again, and stared down into her cup of coffee. Well, she said. You'll be back in September, I assume.

His eyes were hurting and he closed them. He couldn't understand how this had happened, how he had let the discussion slip away like this. It was too late to say he wanted to stay with her, that was clear, but when had it become too late? It seemed to have happened immediately. He contemplated putting his face down on the table and just crying like a child. Instead he opened his eyes again.

Yeah, he said. I'm not dropping out, don't worry.

So you'll only be gone three months.

Yeah.

There was a long pause.

I don't know, he said. I guess you'll want to see other people, then, will you?

Finally, in a voice that struck him as truly cold, Marianne said: Sure.

He got up then and poured his coffee down the sink, although it wasn't finished. When he left her building he did cry, as much for his pathetic fantasy of living in her apartment as for their failed relationship, whatever that was.

Within a couple of weeks she was going out with someone else, a friend of hers called Jamie. Jamie's dad was one of the people who had caused the financial crisis – not figuratively, one of the actual people involved. It was Niall who told Connell they were together. He read it in a text message during work and had to go into the back room and press his forehead against a cool shelving unit for almost a full minute. Marianne had just wanted to see someone else all along, he thought. She was probably glad he'd had to leave Dublin because he was broke. She wanted a boyfriend whose family could take her on skiing holidays. And now that she had one, she wouldn't even answer Connell's emails anymore.

By July even Lorraine had heard that Marianne was seeing someone new. Connell knew people in town were talking about it, because Jamie had this nationally infamous father, and because there was nothing much else going on.

When did you two split up, then? Lorraine asked him.

We were never together.

You were seeing each other, I thought.

Casually, he replied.

Young people these days. I can't get my head around your relationships.

You're hardly ancient.

When I was in school, she said, you were either going out with someone or you weren't.

Connell moved his jaw around, staring at the television blandly.

Where did I come from, then? he said.

Lorraine gave him a nudge of reproach and he continued to look at the TV. It was a travel programme, long silver beaches and blue water.

Marianne Sheridan wouldn't go out with someone like me, he said.

What does that mean, someone like you?

I think her new boyfriend is a bit more in line with her social class.

Lorraine was silent for several seconds. Connell could feel his back teeth grinding together quietly.

I don't believe Marianne would act like that, Lorraine said. I don't think she's that kind of person.

He got up from the sofa. I can only tell you what happened, he said.

Well, maybe you're misinterpreting what happened.

But Connell had already left the room."¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Rooney, *Normal People*, p. 126-130.

Dialogues in Sally Rooney's novels

L'objectif de ce mémoire est de démontrer que les dialogues dans les romans de Sally Rooney agissent comme un miroir de l'état d'esprit des personnages. Pour ce faire, il est essentiel de montrer que la présentation formelle des dialogues joue un rôle dans la réduction de la distance narrative, car les dialogues ne sont pas strictement séparés de la narration. Puisque Sally Rooney est une autrice contemporaine, elle incorpore des SMS et des e-mails dans ses romans, ce qui crée un effet de proximité entre les personnages et les lecteurs. Cela montre une autre facette des personnages, car ces écrits sont des dialogues indirects. Leur façon de parler est différente de leur façon d'écrire, et cela influence la narration. Les personnages principaux de Sally Rooney sont tous très cultivés et possèdent un riche vocabulaire. L'utilisation littéraire de la langue peut être soit un obstacle, soit un catalyseur pour une relation authentique entre les personnages, car ils savent comment manipuler les mots pour atteindre des objectifs spécifiques. Ils utilisent ces techniques non seulement dans l'argumentation, mais aussi lorsqu'ils expriment leurs sentiments. En outre, Sally Rooney utilise différentes techniques narratives et des références à différentes œuvres littéraires pour influencer notre perception de ce qu'est une relation authentique. Enfin, l'autrice irlandaise n'hésite pas à utiliser ses dialogues pour aborder des sujets importants, notamment les différences de classe. Elle choisit comme cadre l'Irlande du XXI^e siècle, et en écrivant sur des personnages appartenant à des classes sociales différentes et en les faisant interagir, elle utilise leurs conversations pour faire un commentaire social sur l'environnement dans lequel elle évolue elle-même.

Mots-clés : Sally Rooney, dialogues, utilisation du langage, état d'esprit, classe sociale, lien entre les personnages

Dialogues in Sally Rooney's novels

The aim of this master's thesis is to demonstrate that dialogues in Sally Rooney's novels act as a mirror of the characters' mindset. To do so it is crucial to show that the formal presentation of the dialogues play a role in reducing the narrative distance as dialogues are not strictly separated from narration. Because Sally Rooney is a millennial author, she incorporates texts and emails in her novels, conveying an effect of proximity between the characters and the readers. It displays another side of the characters as those writings are indirect dialogues. They do not write the same way they talk, and it influences the storytelling. Sally Rooney's main characters are all very educated individuals, they have advanced vocabulary. The literary use of language can be either an obstacle or an enabler for an authentic relationship between the characters because they know how to manipulate their words to achieve specific goals. They use those techniques not only in argumentation but also when verbalizing their feelings. Furthermore, Sally Rooney uses different narrative techniques and references to different literary works to influence our perception of authentic relationships. Lastly, the Irish author does not shy away from using the dialogues to push important subjects, especially class differences. She chooses 21st century Ireland as a setting and by writing about characters belonging to different social classes and making them interact, she uses their conversation to make a social commentary about the environment she evolves in herself.

Keywords: Sally Rooney, dialogues, language use, mindset, social class, relationships

