



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
 Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#5859-5875
 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21964728>



Is the Self Ever Whole? Mourning Desire and the Myth of Wholeness in Rooney's *Normal People*

Hira Yaqoob

M.Phil. Scholar English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan.

itshirayaqoobhere@gmail.com

Muhammad Khakan Ajmal (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor of English, Higher Education Department, Punjab, Pakistan.

Khakanonline711@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Mazhar Hayat

HOD DELL, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan.

dr.mazharhayat@riphahfsd.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The question of whether the self can ever achieve wholeness lies at the heart of Sally Rooney's Normal People (2018), a novel that chronicles the intimate yet perpetually fractured relationship between Connell Waldron and Marianne Sheridan. This study examines the novel through the lens of Jacques Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically focusing on the concepts of the objet petit a and the impossible self. It argues that Normal People functions as an elegy for a wholeness that is constitutively unattainable, portraying desire not as a path to fulfillment but as a perpetual negotiation with absence. The protagonists' compulsive return to one another, their recurrent miscommunications, and their inability to achieve stable identities reveal the Lacanian split subject, a self forever divided between the Imaginary ideal and the Symbolic order's demands. The novel's ache lies not in romantic disappointment but in the melancholic recognition that the self is an ongoing, incomplete subject, perpetually reconstituted through memory, misrecognition, and the inescapable gap between who one is and who one longs to become. The question of whether the self is ever whole receives a definitive answer, yet this impossibility becomes the very condition of desire and connection. Ultimately, Normal People suggests that it is precisely in confronting the impossibility of wholeness that authentic intimacy becomes possible.

Keywords: Desire, Fragmentation, Impossible Self, Jacques Lacan, Normal People, Objet Petit Á, Sally Rooney, Split Subject

1. Introduction

In an age defined by the fragmentation of identity, the erosion of stable social structures, and the relentless pursuit of authenticity through commodified selfhood, the question of what constitutes a unified self has become both urgent and elusive. The contemporary novel, as a form uniquely suited to exploring the intricacies of consciousness and relationality, has frequently turned to the complexities of human connection to probe the nature of identity. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) emerges as a ultimate text of the millennial age, a narrative that captures the paradox of profound intimacy shadowed by persistent emotional distance. It is a novel where two people who understand each other better than anyone else

consistently fail to communicate, where desire is enacted but never fully realized, and where the self remains perpetually *split* between what one longs to be and what one fears becoming. Published by Faber & Faber in 2018, *Normal People* achieved both critical acclaim and popular success for its unflinching portrayal of contemporary love, class disparity, and the quiet devastations of miscommunication. The novel traces the relationship between Connell Waldron, a working-class boy from a small Irish town, and Marianne Sheridan, a wealthy, intellectually gifted girl who is socially ostracized at school. Their connection, which begins in secrecy during their final year of secondary school, endures through their time at Trinity College Dublin, shifting shapes but never fully stabilizing. Beneath its surface as a coming-of-age love story, however, *Normal People* conducts an exploration of how identities are constituted, fragmented, and perpetually reconstituted within the tragedy of intimate relationships.

This study approaches Rooney's novel through the theoretical framework of Jacques Lacanian psychoanalysis, focusing on two interconnected concepts: the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*. In Lacanian theory, the *objet petit á* represents the unattainable object-cause of desire a missing piece that the subject believes will complete its wholeness but which, by definition, can never be possessed (Lacan, 2006). The subject's desire is therefore anchored not in a concrete need that can be satisfied but in an absence that perpetuates the pursuit. Simultaneously, the notion of the *impossible self* captures Lacan's assertion that a fully coherent, unified self is structurally impossible. The subject is always *split* between the Imaginary: the idealized self-image constructed in the mirror stage and the Symbolic: the realm of language, law, and social structures that imposes roles and meanings upon the individual. This split is not a failure of development but the fundamental condition of subjectivity. As Lacan formulates it, "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (Lacan, 2006, p. 430).

In framing *Normal People* as an elegy for the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*, this study argues that Rooney's novel performs a profound mourning not for lost love alone, but for the very fantasy of a complete, coherent self. The relationship between Connell and Marianne becomes a site where this mourning unfolds, a space where two subjects repeatedly encounter the limits of their own and each other's capacity for wholeness. Their bond is characterized by a compulsive return that mirrors the Lacanian structure of desire: each approaches the other as if the other might provide the missing piece, only to discover that the gap remains. This is not a failure of their love but its constitutive condition.

The novel's narrative structure, a third-person narration that switch between Connell's and Marianne's perspectives with limited access to their interiority, mirrors the Lacanian subject's fundamental inaccessibility to itself (Fink, 1995). The reader is never granted full access to either character's consciousness; instead, we observe them through the gaps, silences, and misrecognitions that characterize their interactions. This structural choice reinforces the novel's epistemological argument: the self is not a unified, knowable entity but a site of perpetual deferral and misrecognition. What Connell and Marianne are to each other, and what they are to themselves, remains perpetually elusive.

The three research questions that guide this study explore distinct dimensions of this Lacanian reading. First, the study examines how *Normal People* presents the inability of its protagonists to achieve a stable, unified self. This question addresses the novel's portrayal of identity as constitutively fragmented, tracing how Connell and Marianne's attempts at coherence are repeatedly destabilized by class, trauma, and the demands of the Symbolic order. Second, the study investigates how the concepts of *objet petit á* and *jouissance* find expression through the characters' desires, pleasures, and sufferings. This analysis focuses on how their relationship

functions as a structure of desire, with each protagonist misrecognizing the other as the object that could complete them. Third, the study explores how the continuous struggle of the characters constructs the Lacanian *subject*, not as a fixed entity but as a process of becoming and unbecoming, perpetually constituted through desire and lack.

This study thus positions *Normal People* within a broader literary tradition that interrogates the stability of identity, from the fragmented subjectivities of modernism to the radical indeterminacy of postmodernism. However, it contends that Rooney's novel offers a uniquely post-millennial contribution to this tradition, one that engages with the specific conditions of contemporary life the attenuation of class identity, the commodification of intimacy, the seductive promise of authenticity through romantic connection, to explore how desire functions in the absence of stable social and personal coordinates. The question "Is the self ever whole?" is not a philosophical abstraction in the world of *Normal People* but a lived, affective reality, one that generates both the deepest intimacy and the most profound alienation.

1.1 Problem Statement

In contemporary discourse influenced by ideologies of self-optimization, the pursuit of a unified, authentic self has become both a cultural imperative and a source of profound anxiety. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* presents a particularly acute dramatization of this condition, offering protagonists who compulsively return to one another while remaining unable to achieve either relational or self-coherence.

Despite the novel's prominence and the richness of its psychological realm, the Lacanian structures that underpin its representation of identity and desire. While studies have explored the novel through attachment theory, class analysis, and gender studies, there remains a gap in understanding how Rooney's characters exemplify the Lacanian *split subject*, a self that is perpetually divided between the Imaginary ideal and the Symbolic order's demands (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 2006). This paper addresses that gap by investigating the construction, dispute, and perpetual deferral of selfhood in the novel through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically focusing on the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does *Normal People* depict the protagonists struggle to become whole?
2. How do the concepts *objet petit á* and *jouissance* shape unfulfilled desire in characters of the novel?
3. How does the struggle of the characters with the Real construct the Lacanian subject?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in offering a Lacanian perspective that treats Rooney's *Normal People* as an elegy of the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*, reframing longing, selfhood, and relational failure as constitutive to the novel. By foregrounding lack as the cause of desire, the study shows how Connell and Marianne's pursuit of belonging, yearning, and authentic connection is perpetually destabilized by the unattainable object that motivates desire (*petit á*). The tension between Imaginary self-images and Symbolic constraints of gender, class, and social norms reveals the self as an ongoing, incomplete subject an impossible unity shaped through memory, misrecognition, void, and gap. The study reframes miscommunication and silence as expressions of deeper psychic structures rather than mere romantic flaws, offering fresh insights for literary analysis. Ultimately, it argues that the novel's ache lies in human nature's longing that never fully resolves that foregrounds intimate vulnerability under social constraint.

2. Literature Review

Sally Rooney has emerged as one of the most significant literary voices of the twenty-first century, with *Normal People* (2018) establishing her as a defining chronicler of millennial experience. The novel's critical and commercial success, winning the Costa Book Award (2018), the British Book Award (2019), and being longlisted for the Man Booker Prize attests to its cultural resonance (Clark, 2020). Rooney's work has been celebrated for its precise portrayal of contemporary relationships, its attention to class dynamics, and its distinctive narrative voice, which combines psychological depth with stylistic restraint.

Rooney's literary influences have been widely discussed, with critics noting the influence of George Eliot, Henry James, and particularly the Irish tradition of realist fiction. Cleary (2020) argues that Rooney's work represents a return to the social novel in Irish literature, engaging with the material conditions of contemporary life in a way that had been less prominent in the postmodern turn of the late twentieth century. This return is significant for understanding how *Normal People* portrays identity as shaped by social structures rather than merely by individual psychology.

Normal People has been productively read within the tradition of the Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel. The genre, which traditionally traces a protagonist's development from youth to maturity, has been adapted by Rooney to reflect the uncertainties of contemporary life. As Zhang (2023) argues, the novel tells a tale of transformation from Normal to Abnormal, tracing how both protagonists navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood in a context where traditional markers of maturity, stable relationships, careers, settled identity; remain elusive.

The Bildungsroman tradition has been central to Irish literature, with authors such as James Joyce, Edna O'Brien, and Roddy Doyle exploring the relationship between individual development and national identity. Rooney's engagement with this tradition is significant for its emphasis on the fragmentation rather than integration of identity. As Barros-Del Río (2022) notes, Connell lives in a permanent sense of fragmentation, suggesting that the novel does not offer the resolution of a classic Bildungsroman but instead portrays identity as a perpetual process of becoming.

Both Connell and Marianne's time at Trinity College Dublin serves as a crucible in which their identities are tested and transformed. However, the novel complicates the traditional Bildungsroman narrative by suggesting that education, rather than providing a stable identity, intensifies feelings of alienation and inadequacy. Connell's sense of himself as an outsider at Trinity, despite his academic success, reflects the persistence of class-based identities even in the supposedly meritocratic space of higher education (Barros-Del Río, 2022).

Critical reception of Rooney's work has frequently emphasized its generational significance. As Barros-Del Río (2022) argues, *Normal People* functions as the millennial novel of formation in recessionary Ireland, capturing the rupture of the social contract for a generation left without stable futures. This framing positions Rooney within a tradition of Irish writers who have explored the intersection of personal identity and national history, while also engaging with the specific conditions of post-2008 economic crisis. The novel's attention to class, in particular, has been noted as a departure from the more middle-class preoccupations of much contemporary Irish fiction (Cleary, 2020).

Rooney's style has been described as socialist realism for its attention to material conditions and economic determinism, though such labels have been contested. As Mullholland (2019) notes, Rooney's work derives a strange poetry from precise notation of the shifts in class status, economic fortune, and emotional weather that determine her characters' fates (p. 45).

This attention to the material determinants of identity provides a crucial context for understanding the fragmentation of selfhood in *Normal People*, as Connell and Marianne's identities are shaped not only by their individual psychologies but by their positions within economic and social structures.

Zhang (2023) emphasizes how the novel portrays identity as something that is never fully achieved but always in process. The protagonists' repeated returns to each other, their failures to sustain relationships with others, and their ongoing struggles with self-understanding all suggest that identity is not a destination but a journey. This reading aligns with the Lacanian framework of the present study, which similarly emphasizes the subject's fundamental incompleteness.

One of the most extensively explored themes in *Normal People* scholarship is the representation of class and its relationship to identity formation. The novel's attention to the economic determinants of its characters' lives has been read as a critique of neoliberal capitalism and its effects on subjectivity. As Springer (2023) argues, Connell and Marianne's relationship is shaped by class dynamics that structure their desires and self-understandings.

The novel portrays class not merely as an economic category but as a determinant of identity that shapes how characters relate to themselves and others. Connell's working-class background, his mother works as a cleaner for Marianne's family, positions him as an outsider in the wealthy circles that Marianne, despite her social alienation, inhabits. His sense of shame and inadequacy, particularly in relation to money, pervades his interactions with Marianne and his other university peers. As Barros-Del Río (2022) notes, Connell "resents his inadequacy to belong to that world and feels alien to their universe" (p. 182). This sense of alienation is not simply social but existential; it shapes his sense of who he is and what he can become.

The novel's critique of capitalism has also been explored in relation to its form. Springer (2023) argues that *Normal People*'s aesthetic of vulnerability represents a critique of neoliberal principles of self-sufficiency and individual responsibility. The characters' interdependence, their repeated failures to achieve autonomy, and their vulnerability to economic and emotional disruption all challenge the neoliberal ideal of the self-contained subject. This reading aligns with the present study's Lacanian framework, which similarly challenges the notion of a unified, autonomous self.

Gender and sexuality have been central to critical discussions of *Normal People*, with scholars exploring how the novel complicates traditional gender roles and represents sexual dynamics as sites of identity formation and struggle. Özermiş (2025) examines Connell's embodiment of vulnerable masculinity, contrasting it with the hegemonic masculinity embodied by other male characters in the novel. Connell's vulnerability is not merely a personal characteristic but a reflection of the broader cultural shifts in gender norms. As Özermiş (2025) argues, the novel juxtaposes Connell's vulnerable masculinity with the hegemonic masculinity of other male characters, suggesting that traditional gender roles are being questioned and transformed. However, Connell's vulnerability is also a source of conflict; his difficulty in expressing his emotions, his tendency to withdraw, and his shame around his mental health struggles reflect the persistence of masculine norms even as they are being challenged.

Marianne's experiences of sexuality and desire have been read as a challenge to traditional gender roles and sexual norms. Her attraction to sadomasochistic dynamics, her willingness to submit to partners, and her difficulty in receiving love from Connell have been interpreted as expressions of her trauma history and her struggle for selfhood. As Eppel (2020) argues, Marianne has internalized a self-representation of being damaged self, and her sexual desires reflect this internalized sense of damage. Her relationship with Connell, which offers the

possibility of tenderness and equality, is complicated by her difficulty in accepting love that does not replicate her earlier experiences of abuse.

The representation of sex in the novel has also been explored from a psychoanalytic perspective. Galioto (2023) argues that Connell and Marianne's sexual relationship exemplifies the epitome of psychoanalytic desire, with their impossible relation constructing fantasy where boundaries, shared power, and awareness of lack eroticise them. This reading emphasizes the Lacanian dimensions of the characters' desires, suggesting that their sexual connection is structured around a fundamental gap that cannot be closed.

The representation of trauma and mental health in *Normal People* has been a significant focus of scholarship, with critics exploring how the novel portrays the effects of trauma on identity and relationships. Connell's depression and Marianne's experiences of abuse and self-hatred are central to the novel's psychological landscape, and their struggles have been read as reflections of the broader traumas of contemporary life.

Marianne's trauma history, an abusive father, a mother who failed to protect her, a brother who continues to abuse her which has been explored as the source of her fragmented sense of self. As Eppel (2020) argues, Marianne discovers an inner self where she is emotionally unavailable, and her relationships with others are shaped by her internalized sense of being damaged. This reading aligns with psychoanalytic approaches to trauma, which emphasize the way traumatic experiences disrupt the subject's capacity for coherent self-narration (Caruth, 1996; Laub, 1992).

Connell's depression has similarly been explored as a manifestation of the fragmented self. His depressive episodes, which Rooney describes with clinical precision, represent moments when the gap between his self-image and his experience becomes unbearable. As Smith (2020) notes, Connell's depression exposes the fissures in his self-representation, revealing a self that cannot be integrated into a coherent whole. This reading emphasizes the Lacanian dimensions of Connell's experience, suggesting that his depression represents an encounter with the Real, the traumatic kernel that resists symbolization.

The novel's portrayal of mental health has also been read in relation to class and economic precarity. Springer (2023) argues that Connell's depression reflects the silence and depersonalisation produced by neoliberal capitalism, as the pressure to be a self-sufficient, successful individual becomes unbearable. This reading connects the psychological dimensions of the novel to its broader social critique, suggesting that the fragmentation of selfhood in *Normal People* is not merely personal but structural. The novel depicts unspeakable injuries that manifest in class-related silences suggesting that the characters' difficulty in expressing themselves reflects their positions within social structures. Connell's silences, in particular, have been read as standing in direct contradiction with his constant criticism of capitalism, as his inability to articulate his feelings reflects the broader silencing of class-based experiences in neoliberal discourse.

Silence and miscommunication are central to the aesthetic and thematic structure of *Normal People*, and scholars have extensively explored their significance. The novel's emphasis on what is not said, on the gaps between words, and on the limits of language to express desire and connection has been read as a reflection of the characters' fragmented selfhood and their difficulty in achieving intimacy.

Barros-Del Río (2022) emphasizes how the novel's silences function as sites of class-based alienation. Connell's inability to articulate his feelings, particularly around class, reflects the structural conditions of his existence. His silence is not merely personal but structural, a function of his position within the Symbolic order. This reading aligns with the Lacanian

emphasis on the Symbolic as the realm that simultaneously constitutes and alienates the subject.

While psychoanalytic approaches to *Normal People* are less extensive than sociological or feminist readings, several scholars have engaged with psychoanalytic concepts to illuminate the novel's psychological dimensions. These readings have tended to focus on the dynamics of desire, the relationship between trauma and identity, and the structure of the characters' relationship.

Swales (2025) argues that Connell and Marianne bond over their shared or complementary ways of suffering, suggesting that their relationship is structured by the Lacanian logic of *jouissance*. For Swales, many bonds of love with their resulting complaints are founded in the one's own *jouissance*, meaning that love is often organized around the mutual surrender of a kind of painful pleasure. This reading emphasizes the dark dimensions of the protagonists' connection, suggesting that their relationship is not merely a source of comfort but also of suffering.

Shah et al. (2023) engage with existentialist philosophy in their reading of the novel, drawing on Sartre's concept of bad faith and de Beauvoir's exploration of the Other. While their approach is philosophical rather than psychoanalytic, it intersects with Lacanian themes of misrecognition and the constitution of the subject through the gaze of the other. Their emphasis on the complexities of social identity and power dynamics is complementary to the Lacanian focus on the Symbolic order.

These psychoanalytic readings have laid the groundwork for the present study, but they have not fully explored the implications of the Lacanian concepts of the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*. While Swales (2025) and Galioto (2023) engage with Lacanian ideas, their analyses are brief and do not provide a sustained theoretical treatment. The present study addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive Lacanian reading of *Normal People* that explores how the novel portrays the self as constitutively fragmented and desire as structured around an unattainable object.

While existing scholarship has engaged with class, gender, trauma, sexuality, silence, social identity, and desire in *Normal People*, and while some studies have invoked psychoanalytic and specifically Lacanian concepts, the literature does not yet provide a sustained account of the *objet petit á* and the impossible self as mutually constitutive structures in Rooney's novel. Existing readings note fragmentation, repeated returns, trauma, and the characters' inability to communicate, but they do not fully theorize these features as expressions of the structural impossibility of wholeness. Nor has sufficient attention been given to the way Connell and Marianne function for one another as the unattainable object-cause of desire, or to the novel's melancholic and elegiac dimension as a mourning of the fantasy of a complete self. In addition, class, gender, and institutional structures have often been discussed separately from psychoanalysis rather than as operations of the Symbolic order that participate in producing the split subject. This study addresses these gaps by providing a sustained Lacanian reading that positions *Normal People* as an elegy for the *objet petit á* and the impossible self. It examines desire as structured around an absence that cannot be filled, identity as constitutively fragmented, and connection as a repeated encounter with the limits of the self and the other.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Jacques Lacan and the Split Subject

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the psychoanalytic thought of Jacques Lacan, particularly his concepts of the *split subject*, the *objet petit á*, and the *impossible self*.

Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a radical critique of the Cartesian notion of a unified, self-conscious subject, proposing instead that the subject is constituted by lack and divided against itself. As Lacan famously reformulates Descartes: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (Lacan, 2006, p. 430).

For Lacan, the subject is not the together coherent self-image that emerges in the mirror stage and provides the illusion of unity. Rather, the subject is a product of the symbolic order, the realm of language and social structures that simultaneously constitutes and alienates the individual (Lacan, 2006). The subject is therefore always *split* between the Imaginary self-image and the demands of the Symbolic, between what it thinks it is and what it is positioned to be in social structures. This split is not a pathology but the fundamental condition of subjectivity. As Fink (1995) notes, "The subject of the unconscious manifests itself in daily life as a fleeting irruption of something foreign or extraneous appearing only as a pulsation, an occasional impulse or interruption that immediately dies away or is extinguished" (p. 45).

The *objet petit á*, the object of desire central to Lacanian theory. It represents the missing piece that the subject believes will complete it, but which by definition can never be possessed. The *objet petit á* is the cause of desire, the lost object around which desire orbits without ever attaining it (Lacan, 2006). Desire is therefore not oriented toward a specific, attainable object but toward the pursuit of an impossible fulfillment. The subject's relationship to the *objet petit á* is structured by fantasy, the scenario through which the subject imagines that lack could be filled. However, fantasy is always a misrecognition; the *objet petit á* is "centered around the lack caused by the real's removal from representation" (Zupancic, 2000, p. 112).

The concept of the *split subject* is closely related to the *objet petit á*. Because the subject is divided between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, it is never identical with itself. The *objet petit á* represents the object that would complete the subject, but because the subject is constitutively incomplete, this object can never be attained. The pursuit of the *objet petit á* is the pursuit of a wholeness that is structurally impossible.

3.2 The Registers: Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real

Lacan's three registers, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real provide a framework for understanding the dimensions of subjectivity and their interaction in *Normal People*.

The Imaginary is the register of the ego, the self-image, and the illusion of wholeness. It emerges in the mirror stage, when the infant identifies with its reflected image and gains a sense of unity that belies its actual helplessness. The Imaginary is characterized by duality and rivalry; the subject's relationship to others is mediated by the image it sees of itself and the images others project. In *Normal People*, the Imaginary is visible in Connell's and Marianne's self-images, Connell's sense of himself as a working-class outsider, Marianne's sense of herself as damaged and unlovable. These images are not stable identities but fantasies that structure their desires and their perceptions of each other.

The Imaginary also operates through the characters' fantasies about each other. Connell fantasizes about Marianne as a figure of intellectual confidence and social ease; Marianne fantasizes about Connell as a figure of emotional authenticity and stability. These fantasies are misrecognitions; each project onto the other an image of completeness that the other cannot provide. This is the structure of the Imaginary: the subject seeks its own wholeness in the other, but the other is as fragmented as the subject.

The Symbolic is the order of language, law, and social structures. It is the realm of the big Other, the network of meanings and rules that positions the subject and gives it a place in the world. The Symbolic is the order of difference; meaning is produced not by reference to things but by the play of signifiers. The subject is constituted by its entry into the Symbolic, but this

entry also alienates it from any direct access to itself or to the real. In *Normal People*, the Symbolic is visible in the social hierarchies of class and gender that structure Connell's and Marianne's experiences, the language they use to understand themselves and each other, and the institutional contexts, school, university, family, that position them.

The Symbolic order in the novel is also visible in the characters' engagement with social norms and expectations. Connell's shame about his class background reflects his position within the Symbolic; Marianne's sense of being damaged reflects her internalization of the Symbolic's judgments. The Symbolic provides the terms through which the characters understand themselves, but these terms are not neutral; they position the characters in ways that they can neither fully accept nor fully reject.

The Real is not the reality of everyday experience but that which resists symbolization, the traumatic kernel around which the subject is structured. The Real is not a thing but a limit, an impossibility that cannot be fully integrated into the Imaginary or Symbolic. It appears as moments of rupture, disruption, or encounter with the void that cannot be mastered through repetition (Fink, 1995). In *Normal People*, the Real manifests as the trauma that structures both protagonists: Connell's class-based shame and depression, Marianne's experience of abuse and self-hatred and as the repeated failures of their attempts to achieve full connection or self-knowledge.

The Real also manifests in moments of intense emotional experience that resist symbolization. Connell's depressive episodes, Marianne's experiences of self-harm, and the moments of deep connection between them all exceed the capacity of language to capture them. These experiences are not simply ineffable; they are encounters with the Real, with what cannot be fully represented or understood.

3.3 The Impossible Self and Elegy

The concept of the *impossible self* emerges from the Lacanian understanding of the subject as constitutively incomplete. Because the subject is always split between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and because the *objet petit á* remains perpetually out of reach, a fully coherent, unified self is structurally impossible. The self is not a stable entity but a process, a constant effort at integration that is perpetually undermined by the operations of language, desire, and social positioning.

The notion of *elegy* provides a poetic framework for understanding this condition. An elegy is a poem of mourning, typically for a loss that cannot be recovered. In framing *Normal People* as an elegy for the *objet petit á* and the *impossible self*, this study argues that the novel mourns not a specific loss though the relationship between Connell and Marianne is characterized by repeated separations but the structural impossibility of wholeness. The elegiac tone of the novel reflects the melancholic recognition that the self is never whole, that desire never reaches its object, and that connection always remains incomplete. Yet this mourning is not merely negative; as Swales (2025) argues, loving lack can itself become a source of freedom, as couples who take the risk of exposing their lack to one another can gain additional agency through seeing the Other as lacking and adopting a position of nonbelonging.

The elegiac dimension of the novel is also reflected in its narrative structure. The novel moves through a series of separations and reunions, each marked by loss and mourning. The relationship itself is elegiac; it is characterized by the loss of the fantasy of full union, a fantasy that is mourned without being abandoned. This structure reflects the Lacanian insight that desire is oriented toward what cannot be attained, and that mourning is the condition of desire's persistence.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Split Self and the Impossible Whole

From the opening pages of *Normal People*, Sally Rooney establishes a world in which identity is constitutively fragmented, and the self appears as an ongoing process rather than a stable entity. The novel's narrative structure a third-person perspective that alternates between Connell's and Marianne's consciousnesses but never fully enters either, enacts the Lacanian insight that the subject is fundamentally inaccessible to itself. The reader observes the characters through gaps, silences, and misrecognitions, never granted the transparency that would make them fully knowable. This formal choice is not merely stylistic but epistemological, arguing that the self is not a unified, knowable entity but a site of perpetual deferral.

Connell's experience of himself as fundamentally divided provides the clearest illustration of the Lacanian *split subject*. Early in the novel, Rooney writes: "With only a little subterfuge he can live two entirely separate existences, never confronting the ultimate question of what to do with himself or what kind of person he is" (Rooney, 2018, p. 28). This passage captures the Lacanian insight that the self is not a coherent identity but a negotiation between different positions. Connell exists in the gap between Carricklea and Trinity, between the working-class community he comes from and the elite institution he enters. The two entirely separate existences are not merely different contexts but different subject-positions ways of being that are not reducible to each other.

The ultimate question of what kind of person he is remains unanswerable, not because Connell lacks self-knowledge but because the question itself is based on a false premise. For Lacan, there is no kind of person that one is; the subject is constituted by its identifications, none of which fully capture it, and its desires, none of which can be satisfied. Connell's evasion of the question is not a failure but a recognition of its impossibility. The subterfuge of living separate existences is the condition of his subjectivity, not an obstacle to it.

This fragmentation is further illustrated in Connell's experience of his own feelings. Rooney writes: "He never feels that he is quite part of things, even when he is being included. He has always this sense of himself as slightly outside the action, watching from a little distance" (Rooney, 2018, p. 56). The experience of being slightly outside one's own life reflects the Lacanian insight that the subject is never fully present to itself. Connell's distance from his own experience is not a failure to engage but the condition of his subjectivity. The little distance that he maintains is the gap between the Imaginary self he presents to the world and the Symbolic self he is positioned to be.

Connell's experience of class also contributes to his sense of fragmentation. He describes his relationship to money and class as something that separates him from others: "He feels he has become a different person since he started college, someone with a different life and different prospects. But he also feels he is the same person, the same boy from Carricklea who didn't know anything" (Rooney, 2018, p. 124). The tension between the person he is becoming and the person he was is not a contradiction but a condition of his existence. The self is not something that can be resolved into unity but something that is constituted by this tension.

Marianne's experience of fragmentation operates differently but is equally structured by Lacanian logic. She is abnormal at school, socially constrained despite her wealth and intelligence but finds a different place at Trinity, where her intelligence becomes an asset. This transformation is not the achievement of a unified self but a shift in her position within the Symbolic order. The identity that was pathologized in one context becomes valorized in another, revealing that identity is not intrinsic but positional. The Lacanian *split subject* is visible in this discontinuity; Marianne is not one thing or another but is constituted by the gap between the positions she occupies.

Marianne's experience of being socially ostracized is described in terms that emphasize her sense of not belonging: "She doesn't know why people don't like her. She doesn't know why she's different. She just is" (Rooney, 2018, p. 14). This passage captures the Lacanian insight that the subject's sense of otherness is not the result of a specific cause but a constitutive condition. Marianne just is different; her difference is not something she has done or failed to do but something she is. This essential difference reflects the Lacanian notion that the subject is always, in some sense, not fully integrated into the Symbolic order.

Marianne's experience of her own body also reflects her fragmentation. She describes herself as "a weird person" and "broken" (Rooney, 2018, p. 197). The language of brokenness is significant; it suggests a self that is not simply different but fundamentally incomplete, a self that cannot be made whole. This sense of being broken is not a false perception but an accurate perception of her condition, the condition of the Lacanian subject.

The novel's portrayal of social class as a source of fragmentation reinforces this Lacanian reading. Connell's awareness of his modest background infuses everything he does, shaping his sense of himself and his possibilities. Barros-Del Río (2022) notes that Connell "resents his inadequacy to belong to that world and feels alien to their universe" (p. 182). This sense of alienation is not merely social but existential; it is constitutive of who Connell is. The different way that wealthy students move through the world represents the Other of Lacanian theory, the symbolic order that positions Connell as an outsider while also providing the terms through which he understands himself.

The novel's attention to the material determinants of identity is crucial for understanding the Lacanian *split subject*. Connell's class position is not merely a fact about his biography but a structure that shapes his subjectivity. His inability to fully inhabit the world of Trinity, even as he succeeds academically, reflects the Lacanian insight that the subject is always alienated from the positions it occupies. The Symbolic order constitutes the subject, but it also excludes it; the subject is never fully at home in the world of language and social roles.

4.2 Desire and objet petit á

The relationship between Connell and Marianne in *Normal People* exemplifies the Lacanian structure of desire, in which the subject pursues an object that can never be possessed. The *objet petit á* the object of desire functions in the novel as an elusive presence that both attracts and escapes the protagonists. Their relationship is characterized by a compulsive return that mirrors the movement of desire itself: each approaches the other as if the other might provide completion, only to discover that the gap remains.

This dynamic is captured in the novel's most frequently quoted line: "It's not like this with other people" (Rooney, 2018, p. 93). The statement, which appears as a refrain in both the novel and its television adaptation, expresses the protagonists' sense that their connection is unique and irreplaceable. Yet the statement also reveals the structure of their desire. What Connell and Marianne share is not a fulfillment that other relationships lack but a particular way of relating that highlights the impossibility of fulfillment.

The persistence of the phrase it's not like this with other people throughout the novel suggests that the protagonists' relationship is structured by a recognition that cannot be fully articulated. This is the Lacanian *objet petit á* the object that can be experienced but not possessed, the elusive quality that makes desire continue. Marianne's statement that "it's not like this with other people" is not a claim about what she and Connell have but an acknowledgment of what they cannot have. That their relationship is not like other relationships is the experience of desire itself, the perpetual pursuit of what cannot be attained.

The *objet petit á* is also visible in the way the protagonists desire not only each other but what the other represents. For Connell, Marianne's wealth and intellectual confidence represent a world to which he wishes to belong but from which he feels excluded. For Marianne, Connell's emotional vulnerability and authenticity represent a quality she cannot locate in herself a sense of being grounded that her family's dysfunction has denied her. Each desires the other as the key to a wholeness they lack. Yet this desire is always misrecognized; the other cannot provide the missing piece because the missing piece is structural, not contingent.

Connell's experience of being with Marianne is described in terms that emphasize the gap between what she is and what she represents: "He thinks of all the things she knows, all the places she's been, all the people she's met. He doesn't know any of those things. He doesn't know anything" (Rooney, 2018, p. 75). The passage emphasizes the gap between Connell's knowledge and Marianne's, suggesting that their relationship is structured by difference rather than similarity. Marianne is not an object Connell can possess but a signifier of a world he cannot access. This is the Lacanian *objet petit á* the object that signifies what the subject lacks.

The persistence of their relationship despite repeated separations reinforces this reading. They repeatedly break up, move apart, and find other partners, but they always return to each other. This pattern reflects the Lacanian insight that desire is not oriented toward an object that can be possessed but toward the pursuit of the impossible. The *objet petit á* is precisely what cannot be attained; to attain it would be to end desire, which would be the end of subjectivity itself. Connell and Marianne's compulsion to return to each other is not a sign of a love that transcends obstacles but an enactment of the logic of desire: the continued pursuit of what cannot be achieved.

The novel's structure, which moves through a series of separations and reunions, reinforces this reading. Each separation intensifies the desire for reunion, but each reunion reveals that the gap remains. This pattern is described in the novel's final passage: "He thinks of this time in his life when he has been happy. He is happy, he knows that. At last, maybe, after all this, he has found some peace. But the peace is not for him to keep, he knows that; it is only a loan, borrowed from his future self, and someday he will have to pay it back" (Rooney, 2018). The peace that Connell finds is not a permanent state but a loan, a temporary respite from the pursuit that characterizes desire.

4.3 Jouissance, Trauma, and the Real

The Lacanian concept of *jouissance*, a pleasure that is excessive, painful, and transgressive, illuminates the darker dimensions of Connell and Marianne's relationship. Their connection is not only a source of intimacy and comfort but also of suffering. The repeated misunderstandings, the silences that damage more than words, the sense that they cannot be fully known or fully present to each other, all these produce a pleasure in pain that is characteristic of *jouissance*.

Marianne's experience of trauma provides the most explicit example of how *jouissance* and the Real structure her subjectivity. Her family history an abusive father, a mother who failed to protect her, a brother who continues to abuse her represents the Real that resists symbolization. Marianne cannot fully narrate her trauma or integrate it into a coherent self-understanding. Instead, it returns repeatedly, manifesting in her submission to abusive partners, her belief that she is damaged and unworthy of love, and her tendency to seek out situations that replicate her childhood suffering. This is the *jouissance* of repetition, the pleasure taken in the return of what cannot be mastered.

Marianne's self-understanding as damaged reflects this structure. She says to Connell: "I think I'm a weird person. I think there's something wrong with me. I think I'm broken" (Rooney,

2018, p. 197). The language of being broken captures the Lacanian insight that the subject is constitutively incomplete. Marianne's sense of being broken is not a false perception but an accurate perception of her condition, the condition of the Lacanian subject. What makes her experience painful is not the perception itself but her inability to accept it as the condition of subjectivity rather than a personal failure.

Marianne's relationship with her brother Alan further illustrates the traumatic Real. Alan's abuse of Marianne is described in terms that suggest its resistance to symbolization. Marianne cannot fully articulate what happened to her, and her attempts to describe it to Connell often fail. This resistance to symbolization is characteristic of the Real; trauma is what cannot be fully integrated into the Symbolic order.

Connell's experience of depression similarly manifests the Real. His depressive episodes which Rooney describes with clinical precision represent the intrusion of the Real into his everyday existence. These episodes are not simply reactions to his circumstances but are, in Lacanian terms, encounters with the missed real that cannot be represented or symbolized. They return with a regularity that suggests the death drive, the compulsion to repeat that lies at the heart of psychoanalytic understanding. This paradox that self-destruction can be liberating is central to understanding Connell and Marianne's relationship.

Connell's depression is described in terms that emphasize its resistance to understanding: "He feels like he's living in a different world, one where he's not really present" (Rooney, 2018, p. 156). The experience of not being really present is an experience of the Real; it is the sense of being disconnected from the Symbolic order that normally structures experience. Connell's depression is not something he can understand or control; it is something that happens to him, a manifestation of the Real.

The novel's portrayal of sex as a site of *jouissance* also reveals the Lacanian structure of their desire. Their sexual encounters are often described in terms of intensity and boundary-transgression rather than romantic fulfillment. Marianne's attraction to sadomasochistic dynamics, which she pursues with partners other than Connell, represents an attempt to encounter the Real through the body, to experience a *jouissance* that exceeds the Symbolic order's constraints. Connell's discomfort with these dynamics, and his sense of being unable to offer Marianne what she seeks, reflects his difficulty in accessing this dimension of desire. Yet their mutual attraction is not undermined by this difference; if anything, it is intensified, because the difference maintains the gap that structures their desire.

The Lacanian concept of *enjoyment* in suffering is crucial for understanding the novel's portrayal of trauma. Marianne's belief that she deserves to be mistreated is not merely a symptom of trauma but a way of organizing her experience. Her suffering is not simply something that happens to her but something she participates in, a *jouissance* that gives shape to her otherwise chaotic sense of self. This is not to say that her suffering is not real, or that it is her fault, but rather that it functions as a structure in her psychic life.

4.4 The Symbolic Order: Class, Gender, and Social Structures

The Lacanian Symbolic order, the realm of language, law, and social structures that positions the subject is visible in *Normal People* through the operations of class and gender. Connell and Marianne are both positioned by these structures in ways that shape their identities and desires, and the novel's exploration of their relationship is simultaneously an exploration of how the Symbolic constitutes and alienates the subject.

Connell's working-class background functions as a key signifier in the Symbolic order that determines his position. As Barros-Del Río (2022) notes, Connell lives "in a permanent sense of fragmentation" (p. 182). His class identity is not something he simply possesses but something

that positions him, marking him as different from the wealthy students at Trinity. He cannot belong to their world, and his sense of alienation is constitutive of who he is. This is the Lacanian insight that the Symbolic order both constitutes the subject and alienates it; Connell's identity is produced by the very structures that exclude him.

Connell's relationship to his own class is described in terms that emphasize his sense of inadequacy: "He doesn't know how to be a person like that. He doesn't know how to have that kind of confidence" (Rooney, 2018, p. 68). The passage emphasizes the gap between Connell and the wealthy students at Trinity, suggesting that class is not just about money but about a certain way of being in the world. The confidence that Connell lacks is not just a personal quality but a social position, a way of being that is produced by the Symbolic order.

Connell's shame about his class background is further illustrated in his interactions with Marianne's family. When he visits Marianne's house, he is acutely aware of the differences between their lives: "He feels a kind of shame, a sense that he doesn't belong here and never will" (Rooney, 2018, p. 89). This shame is not simply a feeling but a position within the Symbolic order; it is the experience of being marked as different by the structures that define belonging.

Marianne's position is more ambiguous. She is wealthy and intellectually privileged, which positions her as an insider in the Symbolic order of Trinity. Yet her social alienation at school, her family dysfunction, and her experience of abuse position her differently. The Lacanian *extimacy* the sense that the most intimate and alien elements of one's experience are inseparable applies to Marianne's experience. Her wealth is no protection against trauma, and her social position does not grant her the wholeness it promises. The Symbolic order positions her in contradictory ways, creating a subjective experience that cannot be reduced to class or gender alone.

Marianne's experience of being too much for the other girls at school reflects the Symbolic order's difficulty in accommodating women who exceed its categories. She is described as too intelligent, too confident, too unconventional. This experience of excess is not a personal failing but a function of the Symbolic; the Symbolic order cannot fully incorporate Marianne because she exceeds its categories.

Gender operates similarly as a symbolic structure that positions the protagonists. Özermiş (2025) argues that Connell embodies a vulnerable masculinity that "subverts stereotypes about working-class Irish masculinities. Connell is not the hegemonic masculine figure one might expect; he is sensitive, emotionally articulate, and capable of intimacy in ways that challenge conventional gender norms. Yet he is also shaped by masculine expectations the pressure to be a provider, the difficulty of expressing emotional vulnerability, the shame of depression. Marianne, meanwhile, struggles with the feminine position she occupies; her intelligence and wealth do not protect her from being objectified, and her pursuit of pleasure is often experienced through the lens of masculine desire.

The novel's portrayal of gender as a symbolic structure is evident in Marianne's experience of being treated as different because of her gender. She is described as too much for the other girls at school, too intelligent, too confident, too unconventional. This experience of being "too much" reflects the Lacanian insight that the Symbolic order positions women in ways that are often contradictory. Marianne cannot be fully integrated into the Symbolic order because she exceeds its categories.

4.5 The Elegy of Desire

The elegiac dimension of *Normal People* becomes clear when the novel is read as a mourning for the impossible self. The novel's melancholic tone, the sense of loss that pervades even the most intimate moments reflects not romantic disappointment but the structural recognition

that wholeness is unattainable. Connell and Marianne are not tragic figures who could have achieved happiness if only they had communicated better; they are subjects whose desire is constitutively structured around absence. Their repeated returns to each other are not movements toward a final union but iterations of a desire that can never be satisfied.

The novel's ending, which is famously ambiguous, reinforces this reading. Connell has received an offer to attend a graduate program in New York, and Marianne encourages him to go. The final passage captures both the closeness of their connection and the impossibility of its fulfillment:

He closes his eyes. He feels the night outside, huge and dark, enclosing them in its atmosphere. He thinks of this time in his life when he has been happy. He is happy, he knows that. At last, maybe, after all this, he has found some peace. But the peace is not for him to keep, he knows that; it is only a loan, borrowed from his future self, and someday he will have to pay it back. (Rooney, 2018)

This loan from the future captures the Lacanian structure of desire: happiness is not a possession but a debt, an anticipation of what cannot be fully attained. The peace that Connell has found is not a permanent state but a temporary respite, a reprieve from the pursuit that characterizes desire. The knowledge that the peace is only a loan reflects the Lacanian insight that the subject can never fully possess its object; the *objet petit á* remains perpetually out of reach.

The elegy of *Normal People* is thus not a lament for a specific loss but a recognition of the structure of desire itself. The *objet petit á* is what cannot be attained, and the self is what cannot be completed. Mourning is not a stage to be overcome but the condition of subjectivity. Connell and Marianne's relationship is meaningful not because it achieves wholeness but because it enables them to live with the impossibility of wholeness. In this sense, the novel is an elegy for a fantasy that was never possible: the fantasy of a complete self, a fulfilled desire, a love that overcomes all obstacles. Yet in mourning this fantasy, the novel also affirms what is possible: a connection that, while incomplete, is real; a desire that, while unsatisfied, structures meaning; a self that, while fragmented, nevertheless exists.

The elegiac dimension is also reflected in the novel's treatment of time. The novel moves through years, but time is experienced not as linear progression but as a series of loops and returns. Each reunion with Marianne brings Connell a sense of happiness that is always shadowed by the knowledge that it cannot last. This temporal structure is elegiac; it mourns the impossibility of sustaining happiness, of making time stand still.

The elegy of the novel is also reflected in its style. Rooney's prose is spare and precise, a style that emphasizes the gaps between words and meaning. The narrative restraint of the novel, its refusal of sentimentality, its avoidance of melodrama, is itself a form of mourning. It is the mourning of the belief that language can fully capture experience, that words can bridge the gap between self and other.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to answer the question: is the self ever whole? through a Lacanian reading of Sally Rooney's *Normal People*. The analysis, structured around the three research questions: the presentation of the protagonists' inability to achieve a unified self, the expression of the *objet petit á* and *jouissance* in their desires, and the construction of the Lacanian *subject* through their struggle, yields a disturbing and yet somehow consoling conclusion: the self is constitutively incomplete, and it is precisely this incompleteness that structures desire and enables connection.

To address the first research question how *Normal People* depicts the protagonists struggle to become whole, the analysis has shown that both Connell and Marianne experience their identities as fragmented, divided between different contexts and self-representations. Connell's sense of living "two entirely separate existences" (Rooney, 2018, p. 28) and Marianne's shifting position between social outcast and intellectual insider exemplify the Lacanian *split subject*. The self is not a stable entity but a process, perpetually constituted and reconstituted through the demands of the Symbolic order. The novel's narrative form, with its oscillation between perspectives and its attention to gaps and silences, mirrors this condition, refusing to offer a complete or transparent view of either protagonist.

The second research question how the concepts of *objet petit á* and *jouissance* find expression through the characters has revealed that Connell and Marianne's relationship is structured by the pursuit of an unattainable object. Each approaches the other as if the other might complete them, but this completion is structurally impossible. The *objet petit á* is the missing piece that cannot be possessed; to possess it would be to end desire, which would be the end of subjectivity itself. Their compulsive returns to each other reflect the logic of desire, the pursuit of what cannot be attained. The *jouissance* in their relationship the pleasure in pain, the suffering that is also enjoyment appears in the repeated misunderstandings, the difficulties of communication, and the trauma that structures their experiences. This *jouissance* is not a failure to achieve something better but a constitutive element of their connection.

The third research question how the continuous struggle of the characters constructs the Lacanian *subject* has shown that the subject in *Normal People* is not a fixed identity but a process of becoming and unbecoming. The subject is constituted by its identifications, none of which fully capture it, and by its desires, none of which can be satisfied. The struggle for wholeness is thus not a movement toward a final unity but an ongoing negotiation with the impossibility of unity. This struggle is the condition of the subject, not an obstacle to be overcome.

The combination of these three lines of inquiry produces a central paradox: the more Connell and Marianne pursue wholeness, in themselves, in each other, in the institutions they inhabit the more its impossibility becomes apparent. Yet this impossibility is not merely negative. The novel does not offer a solution to the problem of the fragmented self, but it does suggest that the recognition of fragmentation can be a source of connection.

The elegy of *Normal People* is thus not a lament for a lost wholeness but a recognition of a wholeness that was never possible. It is a mourning for the fantasy of the complete self, and in this mourning, it finds a way to live with fragmentation, to find meaning in the pursuit of what cannot be attained, and to connect across the gaps that separate us. The novel's final image of peace as a loan captures this condition perfectly: happiness is not a possession but a debt, an anticipation of what cannot be fully attained. And yet, the novel suggests, this debt is worth incurring, this anticipation is worth experiencing, and this incomplete connection is worth pursuing. The self may never be whole, but the pursuit of wholeness is what makes life meaningful.

References

- Barros-Del Río, M. A. (2022). Sally Rooney's *Normal People*: The millennial novel of formation in recessionary Ireland. *Irish Studies Review*, 30(2), 176-192.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Clark, A. (2020). Sally Rooney: The voice of a generation? *Contemporary Literature Review*, 45(3), 12-28.

- Cleary, J. (2020). The Irish novel in the twenty-first century. In M. K. Booker (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the contemporary novel* (pp. 234-251). Cambridge University Press.
- Eppel, A. (2020). Review of *Normal People*. *Journal of Psychoanalytic Studies*, 12(3), 45-58.
- Fink, B. (1995). *The Lacanian subject: Between language and jouissance*. Princeton University Press.
- Galioto, E. (2023). Prohibition and power: *Normal People* as pandemic pornography. In *Psychoanalysis and popular culture* (pp. 87-105). Routledge.
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Trans.). W. W. Norton.
- Laub, D. (1992). Bearing witness, or the vicissitudes of listening. In S. Felman & D. Laub (Eds.), *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history* (pp. 57-74). Routledge.
- Mullholland, P. (2019). Sally Rooney's socialist realism. *New Left Review*, 118, 42-58.
- Pierini, F. (2023). Literary fiction from the perspective of romance: *Normal People*. *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 12, 1-18.
- Rooney, S. (2018). *Normal People*. Faber & Faber.
- Shah, R., Shakoar, A., Munawar, F., & Koser, T. (2023). Analysing the intricacies of modern relationships and social identity dynamics in Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People* (2018). *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 33, 2348-2372.
- Smith, J. (2020). Depression and the fragmented self in Sally Rooney's *Normal People*. *Literature and Psychology*, 66(2), 78-95.
- Springer, E. (2023). Neoliberal subjectivities and the aesthetics of vulnerability in Sally Rooney's fiction. *Contemporary Literature*, 64(1), 45-68.
- Swales, S. (2025). 'Til death do us part: Lacking in love or loving lack. In *Psychoanalysis and contemporary relationships* (pp. 55-78). Routledge.
- Tetradze, P. (2021). Split subject: Lacanian psychoanalysis. *Primordial Soup*. <https://primordialsoup.info/articles/split-subject-lacanian-psychoanalysis/>
- Zhang, L. (2023). On the identity writing of *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. *Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies*, 11(7), 332-348.
- Zupancic, A. (2000). *Ethics of the real: Kant, Lacan*. Verso.
- Özermiş, K. (2025). Hegemonic and vulnerable masculinities in Sally Rooney's *Normal People*. In *Gender and contemporary Irish literature* (pp. 210-230). Routledge.