

# The ‘Less is More’ Genius of Sally Rooney

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CLASS OF 2026

With the release of her latest novel, “Intermezzo”, earlier this year, Sally Rooney has once again sparked discussions about her distinctive writing style, realistic narratives, and problematic characters. Her writing faces ongoing critiques since the publication of her earlier works, “Conversations with Friends” (2017) and “Normal People” (2018), which were huge hits on social media for years following their release.

Rooney’s novels depict the lives and relationships of young adults in a dry, straightforward, and dialogue-heavy style. That style is one of the features that has attracted readers to her work, but it also puts others off. Some readers bristle at her bleak descriptions of daily life and her lack of quotation marks. “Intermezzo,” which details the story of two brothers exploring their lives and relationships after the loss of their father, features conversations like this:

For a moment he says nothing. You mean like, in chess just now? He asks. Yes I’m sorry. That’s what I meant.

Dialogue and narration intertwine, with no indication of a conversation or speaker sometimes.

Rooney’s own avid readers and audience question this choice. “I hate it,” said Aurelia Felices, a friend of mine who introduced me to Sally Rooney a couple of years back. “I just get so confused. It’s something very characteristic of her.” Many readers have continued to shy away from Rooney’s novels because of this.

Here’s why you shouldn’t.

Even though it is disliked by many, Rooney’s style reflects the most important theme in her novels: the exploration of flawed human relationships through communication and dialogue. Her lack of quotation marks bridges the gap between narration and dialogue, almost making them one. “It’s kind of muddling the entire picture of how these people communicate;

she puts everything in front of you and that’s it,” said Nicolas Arce, a family friend who is a harsh critic of Rooney’s work.

Rooney narrates the story through dialogue and leaves the rest up for interpretation. “Honestly, I think it’s a lot of good writing hints at something and doesn’t necessarily over narrate,” explained Dr. Julia Clarke, who teaches English at RE’s Upper School. “I think her lack of overt narration is what makes it strong. She’s really good at dialogue. She does a good job of mirroring the complexities of human relationships.”

The authenticity in Rooney’s writing connects with a lot of readers, as it makes each novel very down-to-earth and realistic. Dr. Clarke attests to this: “I felt like a lot of my thoughts that I’ve had about life and friendships and relationships were being articulated by somebody else, and I had never really seen that. It mirrors real life,” she said.

Rooney also weaves in a lot of important social commentary in her novels. “It’s realistic fiction,” said Arce. “That’s actually one of my favorite parts of her books.”

Rooney’s themes are not the only relevant and relatable aspects of her novels. How we get to know her characters throughout her novels rings very true to the confusion of daily human experience. “We don’t have the answer to everything, and we don’t have explanations for why people behave the way that they do,” said Dr. Clarke. “It’s not a psychological novel; it’s a human novel where you have to figure out the psychology on your own.” The reader gets to know these characters from the outside: not through their own personal thoughts and opinions, but through their interactions and dialogue with others, similar to how we get to know people in real life.

Rooney’s characters themselves are perfect candidates for this psychological analysis. “I think they’re really dynamic characters, and they have problems like people do in real life,” said Bea Lindemann ’25. “She talks a lot about mental health, physical health, the conditions of being a woman, the maybe not so glamorous parts of life.”

Rooney’s attention to these imperfect, often underexplored aspects of the average human experience is what sets her apart from many contemporary writers. By



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Rooney’s novels have consistently topped bestseller lists—but they can be divisive.

focusing on the inner turmoil that comes with class differences, social justice issues, and romantic and familial relationships, she exposes societal pressures we don’t normally see in writing in a vulnerable way. “[Rooney’s characters] have the ugly things people don’t want to relate to, but they do,” explained Felices.

Rooney’s writing also deals with com-

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plex feelings through not-so-complex wording, achieving a conversational feel. “She doesn’t use a lot of flowery prose. I think that’s a very specific choice because it allows her to focus on the actual content rather than just the writing,” Lindemann

said.

Through her ongoing efforts to achieve realism and relatability, Rooney has gathered a large audience. Her books weave in commentary that is relevant regardless of gender or age, from class dynamics in “Normal People” to grief in family relationships in “Intermezzo.” “You can be an older person and appreciate this. You can be in high school and appreciate this. You can be whatever you can be and appreciate this,” said Dr. Clarke.

In today’s world, we find ourselves communicating constantly in many ways. Rooney keeps up with that. Whether through emails, texts, uncomfortable body language, or vague, poorly handled conversations, she manages to express it all very realistically. “At the end of the day, it also shows the reality of different characters who don’t know how to communicate,” said Felices. “That’s the whole point.”

After all, we are just normal people, having conversations with friends. Sally Rooney gives us just that, tightly packed in 300ish pages and a pretty cover.

to handle multiple situations at a time.”

Tekriwal balances a day during tech week by “going in and filling cues out on my script. And then, 3-4 hours after school doing the actual rehearsals. And then I go home and then I eat. Do homework. And then I sleep.” The average RE tech rehearsal lasts over five hours and spans over two school weeks. This adds up to over 25 hours of work, not including the personal work required on weekends. This also does not include the hours from the show days.

The length of tech week rehearsals can sometimes incite tension between the stage manager and the actors.

“When tech week comes along, everything is all about the stage manager. Actors are very passionate, so stage managers should think about that as well and try not to get mad,” recalled actor Gaby Barreto ’27.

“Stage managers had a really bad name, and they were scary, and they weren’t seen as people,” Tekriwal commented. “Honestly, it’s just a matter of if I have to say something, I will say it, and that is

respected just because of the role of stage manager. And people know that you listen to the stage manager to get things done and for the show to run smoothly,” she added.

One source of tension is the immense pressure put on stage managers by directors, actors, and the crew in the short span of tech week. In “Lord of the Choir,” Febres explained, “We were very short on time because of hurricanes Helene and Milton. School was canceled so we lost a lot of rehearsal time. To ensure the show’s success, we had to work extremely hard, and that meant giving a lot of directions.”

Barreto’s tip for stage managers? “Even if you are the stage manager, you have to listen to ideas from other people.” For her part, Tekriwal’s goal is to try and “create a community vibe to be compassionate and personable.”

“Even through the stress, we came together as a cast and crew to make the show a success,” Febres reflected.

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recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the dangers of rushing to judgment.

We also need to challenge the stigma surrounding criminal defense attorneys. Their work ensures that the rights we hold dear—due process, fair trials, and the presumption of innocence—are not sacrificed at the altar of convenience or sensationalism. Supporting these attorneys is not about excusing crime; it is about defending a system that protects everyone, guilty or innocent.

Educating the next generation to approach justice with nuance and integrity is vital. The Future Lawyers of America club, founded by Mack Srebnick ’25, nephew of Howard Srebnick, equips students with tools to navigate a world where media often oversimplifies complex truths. Through activities like Criminal Law Kahoot games, mock trials, and guest speaker sessions—including one by Howard Srebnick—students learn that justice isn’t about easy answers or loud voices but about giving every story the depth it deserves.

In LUD 207, away from social media noise, these students grapple with the challenges of seeking fairness in a world that often values

speed over accuracy. And they are discovering a truth Howard Srebnick knows well: justice demands listening to voices we might prefer to ignore. It calls us to defend the misunderstood, the maligned, and the unpopular—not because it’s easy, but because it’s right.

Justice is not about perfection. As AP US Government teacher Mrs. Miriann Meyer-ingh said, “It takes a perfect plaintiff to get a case and then realize there isn’t a perfect plaintiff.” It’s not about flawless cases or clients but about making sure every voice is heard, even those that challenge our comfort. In a world where social media often prioritizes the loudest over the most meaningful, this principle has never been more important.

To uphold justice in today’s world, we must do more than criticize. We must defend those who ensure fairness. By addressing the stigma around criminal defense attorneys, pushing back against social media’s rush to judgment, and teaching future generations to prioritize integrity over appearances, we can preserve justice as a cornerstone of society. It isn’t about the stories we prefer—it’s about the ones that matter most.