

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Normal People is a popular book published in 2018 by an Irish author, Sally Rooney. The novel is a contemporary literary fiction. The audience of this novel is typically targeted to an adult audience. However, in reality, young adults are also interested in reading this novel as it is popular on TikTok and has been widely reviewed by readers. Besides the plot that made it popular, this novel is also popular on TikTok as a romantic book; many people have talked about this novel from around 2022 until 2023. The novel explores Connell and Marianne, who live in a small town in Ireland. Marianne is from a wealthy family, and Connell is from a low-income family. The story begins when they secretly have a romantic relationship. No one knows about it. Because of the image of Marianne's family, Connell chooses to remain silent and not open about his feelings. Not only because of the image of Marianne's family, but he also cares about his image as a popular student at school; he does not want everybody to think of him as weird for hanging out with Marianne.

Normal People picture the society in Ireland using issues like classes, social dynamics, and education. The author reflects the society around the characters from class and social differences, where it can be seen from the characters' hometown, which is Carricklea, however this area is not real, it is a fictional place made up of the author in the west of Ireland. Besides the character's hometown, Trinity College Dublin is one of the

setting places in the novel. The story happens around 2011 to 2015. The class and social differences highlight the class gap between Connell and Marianne in Ireland.

As *Normal People* is set in Ireland, the reality of social class in Ireland becomes important. But shockingly, the term 'social class' is a taboo subject in Ireland and rarely used (Lowe, 2023). Not like other countries, in Ireland, people do not like to mention 'who has more and who has less'. Senator Lynn Ruane (2013) says that money and opportunities do not completely affect things like health and education.

Education is also reflects Ireland society through the main characters' lives. During their time at university, Connell struggles to socialize with people because of his working-class roots, meanwhile Marianne is the opposite of Connell, she socialize with people so easily using her privilege as someone from wealthy family, but she also deals with her issue, other than classes issue.

Therefore, this novel shows the dynamics and contradiction between the two main characters, Connell and Marianne, who have different classes, as they try to build a romantics relationship. The key point of this novel is that it explores the difficulty of how social classes affect two people of different classes.

Besides its popularity and glamour, this novel gives the audience and readers a picture of real problems in society today, which are a class gap and social class. In this novel, the class gap occurs between the two main characters, Connell and Marianne. Sally Rooney portrays the social class in Connell and Marianne's romantic relationship as a main element that focuses on the economic influences on their character development.

Social class refers to individuals and groups based on several factors, such as power, money, and prestige. In this world, there are three types of classes: the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class: the rich and the poor. There has been conflict between these classes for years due to the gap between them. The gap between them was

inseparable. Many rich people were smug about their wealth and oppressed the poor just because they thought that they were better than others. The conflict arose years ago; the rich want to make a lot of money, but they don't pay the workers their salaries. However, as mentioned before, there are three classes in society: upper class, middle class, and lower class. People in the upper class are used to being the ones who have everything, including consuming luxury things. This can also be seen from their education, which is more than most people's. In society, the upper class is the superior one; this is proven to still be happening today. In addition, anecdotal evidence shows that people in the upper class often behave unethically (Dubois et al., 2015). The middle class cannot be conceptualized as a fixed class, such as the upper or lower class, nor can it be equated with the poor and the rich. Hence, it is a contested class (Elwood et al., 2014). In the lower class, the people have relatively lower incomes, wealth, and education compared to other classes. This class is the opposite of the upper class. What distinguishes this class from the upper class is that they behave based on the needs and concerns of others (Dubois et al., 2015).

Karl Marx is one of the theorists who analyzed the social class system. As proof that social class exists today, not only in real life, but many literary works use social class as a topic and problem to be discussed.

Literature can help understand different classes and shows how important class representation is in literary works, whether it shows stereotypes or even the dynamics of class differences. Class representation in literature is how authors describe and explore socio-economic differences between the characters and the effect of these differences on their relationships and social dynamics. In addition, it also depicts the lower class and upper class and what will happen to their relationship. *Normal People* is one of the stories that depicts social dynamics between the main characters. Through the story, Sally

Rooney shows the issues that affect the relationship, especially the romantic relationship between two people.

It is interesting to discuss how classes impact the relationships between two people. The researcher thought to raise this issue based on the problem in the novel that is still connected to society in real life. This novel is perfect for the researcher who wants to analyze social class. Different classes, class gaps, and romantic relationship dynamics are found in this novel. This novel also presents a good narrative for explaining the lower and upper classes' situation, drama, and the complexities of human relationships.

Normal People is set in the late 2000s to the early 2010s, which make it modern era. Even though the story is set during modern era, the class difference still would be happening in every era. The way people faced it is what make it different. Social class will not disappear even in the modern era where money is not the most important for making a relationship. Even in a world with full of technology, social changes, economic growth, social class still present as a constant issue.

Therefore, in this proposal, the researcher will analyze the impact of social class by exploring the romantic relationships and economic conditions in *Normal People* by applying Marxist theory. This work will show whether this novel unites the two main characters from different classes at the end of the story.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

In *Normal People*, Connell and Marianne come from different social classes, and it impacts their relationship in many ways through the end. Connell is from a working-class background and Marianne is from an upper class background. In Marxist perspective, capitalists are people who control and own everything, also known as upper class, and

workers as working-class are known for people who work for the capitalists but do not have any control (Wright, 2000).

In the novel, Connell's mother works to Marianne's family as a cleaners several times a week. His financial situations sometime make him feel embarrassed even though he is well-known as someone popular and clever in school. Connell often feel out of place because he did not come from wealthy family and his mother only works as a cleaner. On the other hand, Marianne comes from a wealthy family and categorized as someone from upper class. She does not have to worry about money like Connell does, but despite her family being rich, she felt emotionally difficult with her family issue.

Connell is considered as someone from working-class because his family works for Marianne's family, and they are part of the working-class because they are still employees. People who control company or own shares like executives, managers, and professionals are part of capitalist class (Wright, 2000).

Even though Connell come from family that does not have a lot of money, but their family could live with such a loving relationship, meanwhile Marianne is the opposite of Connell's family. Marianne had everything, but she does not have a loveable family like Connell's and she often treated badly by her mother and her brother.

Normal People by Sally Rooney focuses on the relationship between the two main characters, Connell and Marianne; their different classes can be explored using Marxist interpretation. The two classes, working-class class and upper class, are the main focus when analyzing the whole story of this novel, as Sally Rooney depicts both of the classes and how they impact the relationship between the two characters. However, this novel ignores some important things, such as the beautiful story of Connell and Marianne, which is unrealistic if it happens in real life. Plus, the response of their parents, who seem

to be okay with the relationship between them, compared to real life, is almost impossible to happen.

1.3 Review of Related Studies

The researcher has found multiple studies related to this. First, an article entitled *Sally Rooney's Normal People: The Millennial Novel of Formation in Recessional Ireland*, written by Barros-Del Rio and Maria Amor in 2022, this Irish studies review focuses on the relationship of the main character in *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. This study applied post-feminism in order to get the result of intermittent sexual and emotional relationships between the main characters. This study claimed that the novel, *Normal People* happen after Celtic Tiger which is economic crisis during that time in Ireland. This article explores how the novel try to tell how the characters form their identities during tough economic times. The way characters in the novel grow and become independent is the influence of pressure from their environmental, such as to achieve individual success and material wealth. In conclusion, this article claimed that Connell and Marianne's identities are shaped by social class differences and gender issues, and it gives negative affect to their identities of capitalism on their lives. This article also put that *Normal People* is a novel that talks about how capitalism affects to people's identity, as long as their social class differences and gender issue. The novel highlights some important part, such as even though this is a world of individualism and materialism, relationships are matter. The author of this study uses many kinds of theories to develop the aim of the study, such as the perspective of political economy, which might be related to Marxist lens.

Second, a journal article entitled *Ideologies of the (ab)normal in Sally Rooney's Normal People*, written by Tijana Matovic in 2022, employing ideologies theories to

interpret the ideological dynamics in the novel. The writer use the theories of three philosophers. Louis Althusser, talks about how society put people into certain labels and certain roles. Pierre Bourdieu, talks about how social environment impacts people's actions and how people do everything to achieve status in society. Slavoj Zizek, talks about how the systems of environment influence how people's feel about themselves. This article shows how *Normal People* uses the idea of ideology that influence society in today's capitalist, where love is affected by competition and material success. This article also stated that the relationship between Connell and Marianne is the way they escape from pressure they have, and it is creating connections rather than focusing on status, material success, and power.

Third, an article entitled *Exploring Power Dynamics in Sally Rooney's Normal People*, written by Wardyah Ningrum in 2022, focuses on how power and control are depicted in the novel *Normal People*. This article discusses the female character, Marianne, as someone who is verbally and physically abused by her mother and brother. Other than that, the article talks about Marianne and Connell's relationship and call it as complicated relationship. The writer of this article applied the theory of power by Michel Foucault to analyse the power dynamics in the novel. The relationship of Marianne and her family is the highlight of this article, it is not discuss about Marianne relationship with Connell. Using the power theory, the writer explains how power works in close contact, such as Marianne with her family. This article finds that the power relations between Marianne and her family caused her verbal and physical abuse from her mother and brother. Another finding is that there are two key power relationships, between parents and daughter and between older brother and younger sister, as Marianne experienced at home with her family.

Fourth, a journal article entitled *Gender and Class in Sally Rooney's Normal People*, was written by Damia Rizka Ghassani, Ida Farida Sachmadi, and Lestari Manggong in 2023. This article talks about the issues in *Normal People*, specifically gender and class through the main characters, Connell and Marianne. In the novel, gender and class influence their relationship through the end of the story. The article also stated that *Normal People deals* with complex themes of gender and class and highlights how the main characters solve the issue. In order to analyse gender and class, the writer uses several theories, such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Gerard Genette's narrative theories to analyse how the story is being told and how the characters show their point of view. Gender theories by Haslanger and Raewyn Connell are also applied in this article to analyse the concept of gender and how it impacts Connell and Marianne's relationship. Social class theory by Pierre Bourdieu is also applied to analyse the impact of class differences on characters. In the end, the findings of this article are the oppression of Marianne, in which she experiences sexism and misogyny. Another finding is the role of class and gender, as seen by Marianne, who comes from the upper class but is still invisible compared to Connell, who comes from a working-class background just because of her gender.

This article is similar to this research because it also explores something that influences the characters' relationship through the end. First, this article analyses gender and class, while this research only analyses social class. This research will not focus on gender from both of the main characters, Connell and Marianne. Second, this research applied the idea of classism by Lois Tyson and Working Class by Raymond William to analyse the social classes that happen between the two main characters.

Lastly, a thesis entitled *Social Stratification Depicted in Sally Rooney's Normal People*, written by Muhammad Nasronuddin in 2023, the thesis is a literary criticism and

analysis of social stratification in *Normal People* by Sally Rooney. This study aims to identify the problem of social stratification in *Normal People* by Sally Rooney by applying a sociological perspective and analysing the novel using Max Weber's theory of social stratification. This study reveals there are 3 classes: upper class, middle class, and lower class. What makes this thesis different from the researcher's thesis is that it focuses only on the social class levels. Meanwhile, the researcher will focus on the relationship, whether social class impacted the relationship between the two main characters, and also present the message behind a relationship with social class differences. This study is considered one of the main related studies as it analyses social stratification in *Normal People* by Sally Rooney.

Apart from previous studies that used *Normal People* as their objects, the researcher also found some studies that used social class. First is the article *Social class oppression in Ally Condie's Crossed novel: A Marxist Criticism* by Eva Puspita in 2023. This study does not analyse *Normal People* by Sally Rooney but examines other books using Marxist criticism in *Crossed* by Ally Condie. This research applied Tyson's theory of social class and Young's of oppression theory. This research showed five indicators of social class, which are aristocracy, upper class, middle class, lower class, and underclass. At the end, this research also showed there are three types of oppression, which are the officers is the exploitation, and who get oppressed is the aberration. The next one is marginalization, types of society that marginalize the anomalies. The last one is in powerlessness, those who get oppressed are the aberration, anomaly, and the decoy. It is also said that social class is the one who caused the existence of oppression.

Second, an article entitled *Class Exploitation in Rosh Rash's Serena Novel: A Marxist Criticism*, was written by Muniralizah Nurman, Singgih Daru Kuncara, and Fatimah Mujahir in 2021. This article discusses class differences and the exploitation of workers.

This article also states that the novel highlights people who are wealthy and poor. To analyse class exploitation, the writer uses the theory of Karl Marx's social class, along with guidelines from the International Labor Organization (ILO), to explain more about labour exploitation in the novel. The article finds there are two classes in the novel: the bourgeoisie (upper class) and the proletariat (lower class). Along with that, the article also highlights four types of worker exploitation: the long working hours, the low pay, the poor living conditions, and the dangerous working conditions.

Third, a journal article entitled *The Reflection of Social Class Conflict in "The Notebook" Novel by Sparks*, was written by Manuela Indriati Siahaan and Robby Satria in 2022. The article discusses the social class conflict in the novel *The Notebook*, when two men from different social classes fall in love with the same woman in the United States and cause conflict between them. In order to analyse the social class conflict, the writer applied sociological theories, specifically the theory of Max Weber to analyse the complicated conflict of social class and how power impacts social relationships, and Karl Marx's theory to analyse the class conflict that happens in the wealthy class and the working class. In the end, there are several findings from this article. The first finding is a conflict between classes that happens between the upper and middle class, and it is caused mainly by social status and wealth. The second finding is the strong class division dividing the upper and middle classes. The third finding is the effects on relationships that give the gap between the social classes because the upper class refuse to blend with people from the middle class.

Fourth, a journal article entitled *The Impact of Social Class in Jane Austen Persuasion*, was written by Livia K. Pinontoan, Elizabeth Z. Oroh, and Sarah Kamagi in 2023. This article aims to explore how social class impacts the characters and their lives during the Victorian era. To analyse the impact of social class in the novel, the writer uses

the theory of mimetics to figure out social issues that happen in the novel *Persuasion*. This article has several findings; the first one is the impacts of social class on the character's life and society. The second one is the influence of different social classes on relationships, especially the personal relationships, that happens between the characters, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth; they split up due to their social status. The third one is the consequences of class differences in several aspects of the character's life.

Lastly, another article entitled *An Analysis of Social Classes and its Impact in Crazy Rich Asian Novel by Kevin Kwan*, written by Arifah Ulfa Nasution, Siti Norma Nasution, and Riko Andika Rahmat Pohan in 2021. This research uses the theory of social class and social conflict to analyse the novel. This research discussed how social class differences impact the character's family life and shows how social class happen in the novel. This research finds that social class differences in the novel are based on wealth, power, and privileges. In the novel, there are 2 classes: the upper class and the middle class. The upper class did not want to join the middle class, and they rejected people from the middle class to join their families. If someone from the upper class is getting married, the partner has to be from the upper class as well. This act creates gaps between those classes.

However, the researcher could not find many studies on social class. Thus, the researcher is interested in analysing the novel with social class using Marxist Criticism.

1.4 Research Question

This research is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do social classes impact the main characters', Connell and Marianne as individual in *Normal People*?
2. How do social classes impact Connell and Marianne's romantic relationship in *Normal People*?

1.5 Scope of the Research

As the scope, this research is focuses on how social classes in *Normal People* by Sally Rooney impacts the characters, especially Connell and Marianne by using Marxist criticism. The researcher will only focusing on the main characters, even though the novel have more than two characters. It is because the researcher would like to explore the impacts of social classes towards individual characters as well as their relationship. In the novel, Connell and Marianne are in a romantic relationship but hindered by the class differences, this causes their relationship to not going well from the very beginning. In *Normal People*, social class plays a big role in Marianne and Connell's relationship. The novel shows how social classes add complexity to their relationship, and it creates class struggle, misunderstanding, insecurities that keep them from fully connecting each other and it creates barriers between them to have a healthy relationship.

1.6 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this research are:

1. To reveal how social classes impact the main characters', Connell and Marianne as individual characters in *Normal People*.
2. To reveal how social classes impact Connell and Marianne's romantic relationship in *Normal People*.

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of social classes to the main characters' relationships, Connell and Marianne. Those two have romantic relationship in the novel and their classes seemingly impact them as individual and relationship in the end of the story.