

Hanna Kennedy

Honors Thesis Personal Reflection

It's stating the obvious, but when I chose to write my thesis on the role of email, texting, and social media in Sally Rooney's two novels, I never thought I'd be writing about it during a pandemic. I imagined camping out on the ninth floor of the library, only leaving my chair to go grab another book from the shelves. What I didn't realize though, is that being sent home halfway through the semester and living in quarantine would be more helpful for my thesis than any of the books I would have found in the library.

It took me a long time to settle on the topic of technology-mediated communication in Sally Rooney's two novels, *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to write about Sally Rooney's work. I just didn't know which aspect of her work. During the fall semester my topic changed almost weekly, sometimes twice a week, but eventually it became clear that the aspect of her writing I found the most thought-provoking — and that tied together all of the different conversations concerning her books — was the way that her characters used technology as a means to communicate. I identified with the way her characters used email, texting, and social media before the pandemic, but while quarantined at home it became the only way I could communicate and took on an even greater significance. The timing of my project also not only coincided with greater use of the same technologies I had chosen to analyze, but with the release of the 12-episode TV adaptation of *Normal People*. To see Rooney and her books being discussed in major publications at the same time as I completed my thesis made it feel as if I was contributing an important perspective to a larger conversation in real time.

Yet, the most enjoyable part of writing a thesis this past year has been the community we developed during the fall semester. In the Colloquium I loved hearing everyone's different ideas and sharing mine with them. As we transitioned into the spring and writing on our own, I felt like I could go back to that group and share anything. And now, as we move forward, I know that I'll always have the friends I made from the English major and from writing a thesis.