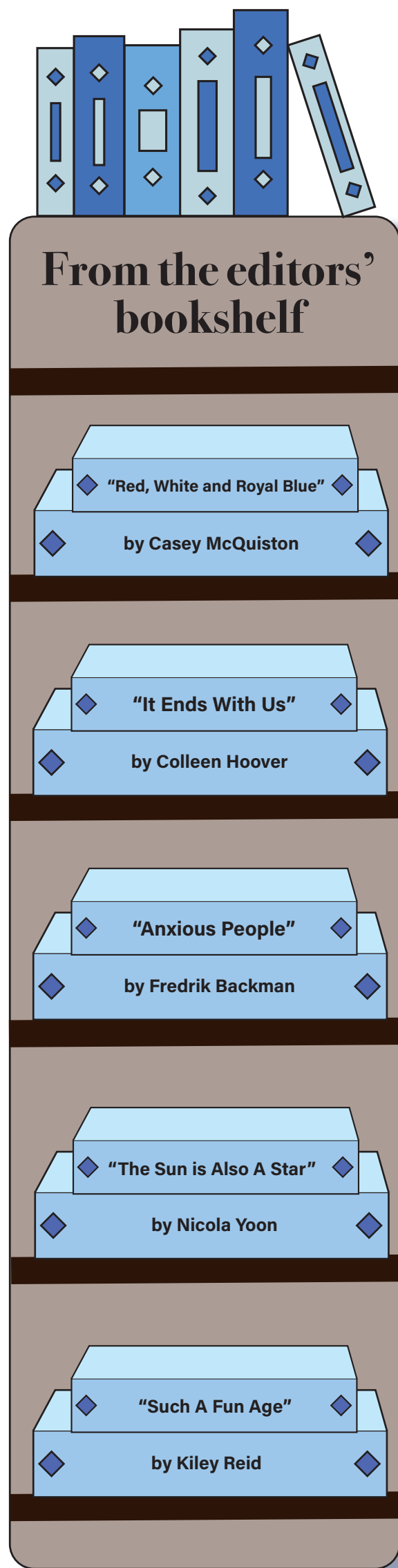


Standard staff *bookshelf*:

Editors continue a collaborative column. Novels included unearth the complexities of human relationships through copious topics.



REVIEW | 'This Is Your Mind on Plants' by Michael Pollan spotlights role of psychoactives

Eden Leavey /
Culture Editor: Print

Drug usage has become an immensely polarizing topic of debate in recent years, encompassing a wide variety of arguments both for and against the prohibition of drugs. Despite the vast amount of dialogue pertaining to narcotics, society lacks a cohesive answer to the simple question: "What is a drug?"

One rarely stops to question why our dependence on caffeine – often in the form of a cup of coffee to wake us up in the mornings – differs from the use of cannabis to relieve anxiety. Yet, this four-letter word has the ability to evoke such a range of emotions.

"This Is Your Mind on Plants" by New York Times bestselling author Michael Pollan concludes society's precariousness can be chalked up to the obscurity of drugs. Endeavoring to ease the apprehension that encircles drugs, Pollan contemplates both his

personal findings and those he gleaned from historical events concerning three specific psychoactives: opium, caffeine and mescaline.

Pollan also attempts to reckon with the impact of psychoactive plants on one's mind through a lens that remains untainted by society's intolerance toward drug usage.

Divided into three chapters, each focusing on a psychedelic, which enables Pollan to develop a more expansive scope while maintaining comprehensibility for his audience. Pollan's inquisitive yet elucidative writing neither promotes nor discourages the usage of drugs, but rather encompasses angles allowing readers to determine their own opinion.

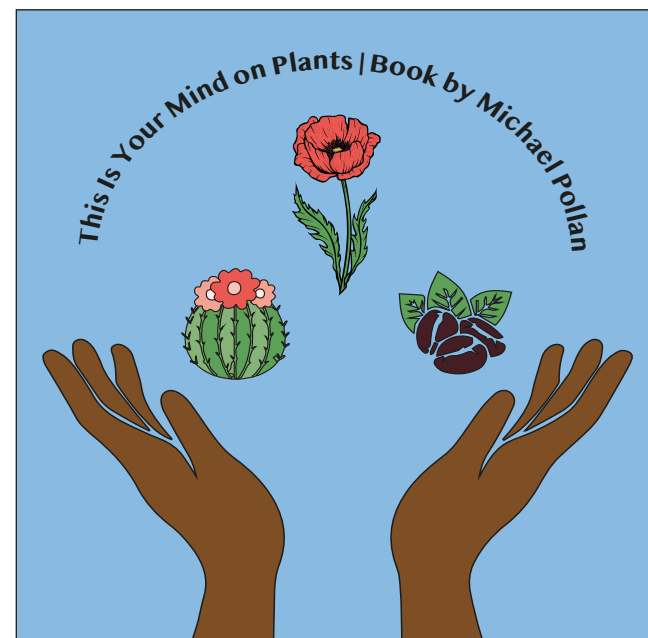
Pollan succeeded tremendously in altering my perspective on how we characterize the power of drugs as well as the instinctual human fixation on their taboo qualities. Readers are challenged to evaluate the stigma surrounding drugs and how we are conditioned to view psychedelics, which I have realized society deems perilous as a

result of its singular, often harrowing outlook.

Narcotic paranoia fleets quickly while reading "This Is Your Mind," as Pollan so effortlessly describes the hypocrisy and double standards of psychedelics. And with candor, he scrutinizes the stereotypes placed on drug users and mass addiction throughout history.

In essence, Pollan shares his illuminating findings on the peculiarity of humans' curiosity about substances that hold the power to alter one's consciousness.

Philosophical, anecdotal, strong-voiced, analytical, engaging: "This Is Your Mind on Plants" is sure to interest anyone who picks up a copy.



Graphic by Eden Leavey

REVIEW | 'Normal People' by Sally Rooney explores complexity of 21st century romance

Rudi Chamria /
Culture Editor: Online

A classic will-they-or-won't-they, "Normal People" by Sally Rooney gained traction among many millennial and Generation Z readers after its BBC TV adaptation released in 2020. This captivating novel follows two teenagers, Marianne and Connell, through their last year of high school and subsequent university experiences.

Set in the fictional town Carricklea in western Ireland, the protagonists appear to be polar opposites upon first reading. Marianne is shy, unpopular and has no trouble showing her classmates how clever she is. Conversely, Connell is well-liked, athletic and a bit more reserved about his intelligence.

While these characters are noticeably different, there are other dynamics that play into their relationship. After all, opposites attract. Marianne comes from an affluent family, but her environment is cold and she is often neglected. Growing up, she is subject to physical

abuse from her now-deceased father and continues to endure harm from her older brother. Meanwhile, Connell is the son of a single mother from a working class background. In fact, Connell's mother is actually Marianne's maid.

One afternoon, Connell comes to pick up his mother at Marianne's house. While waiting, Marianne and Connell share a brief kiss. This kiss is the start of a series of rendezvous. But, for the sake of Connell's social status at school, they keep their relationship secret.

During their love affair, not even those closest to the two protagonists have a clue. Marianne is consistently taunted by Connell's friends, but he never comes to her rescue in fear that they will find out about his relationship with Marianne.

After graduation, the two attend university at Trinity College in Dublin. There, the

roles reverse and all of a sudden Marianne rises to extreme popularity, while Connell is lesser-known and falls into a depressive state. At university, the two explore other relationships while weaving in and out of each other's lives.

Frankly, Marianne and Connell have a frustrating interaction. Connell is very concerned about his image and feels insecure that he is attracted to Marianne – someone who is not often viewed as conventionally attractive. Marianne is greatly impacted by the emotional trauma she holds from her abusive family. She often finds herself in toxic and manipulative relations with Connell and other men throughout her time at college.

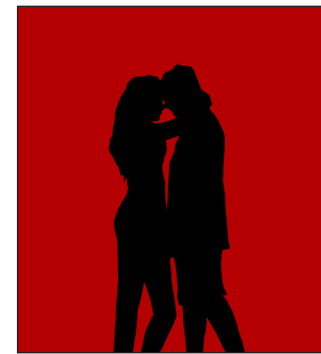
Impeded by the struggles of 21st century hook-up culture, Marianne and Connell are the epitome of a modern-day relationship. They struggle to communicate how they are

emotionally interested in one another, especially as they seek external validation for their decisions.

According to the Guardian, Rooney's editor called her "Salinger for the Snapchat generation," and this is not far from true. Perhaps the reason "Normal People" spoke to me is that while "Pride and Prejudice" and "Jane Eyre" will forever hold their place as romantic classics, this book truly encapsulates the fiascos of the current generation's relationships.

Ultimately, through telling Marianne and Connell's exhausting story, Rooney is commenting on the failures of contemporary romance with the hope of making readers reassess their relationships too.

This book truly encapsulates the fiascos of the current generation's relationships.



Graphic by Rowan Hamilton