

THE CHILD'S INSTINCT OF REAL WORLD OUTSIDE IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *ROOM*

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Abstract:

Room by Emma Donoghue, an Irish-Canadian writer, was published in 2010 and shortlisted for The Man-Booker Prize and for The Orange Prize. This novel captures the theory, Pragmatism which deals with the attribute of accepting the facts of life and favoring practicality and literal truth. This novel depicts the most vivid, radiant and beautiful expressions of maternal love through Ma to her son, Jack. From the day of his birth, he knows only the Room. His Ma and Old Nick are real and believe that the rest of the world exists only on television. Consciously or unconsciously, he hears about the existence of the world beyond the Room but his instinct is unwilling to accept the reality. The Great Escape paves room for believing that Room is only a tiny place. At last, they both revisit the Room to offer Good-Bye to their past and thereby the mental separation happens. The child's acceptance drives the novel to feel the pragmatic essence.

Keywords: Pragmatism, Realism, Great Escape, Escapism.

Introduction:

Canadian literature has been created in Canadian English, Canadian French, Canadian Gaelic, and more recently by First Nations and immigrants of other ancestral backgrounds. Influences on Canadian writers are broad, both geographically and historically, representing Canada's diversity in culture and region. While mostly written in English, "Indigenous literature" has begun to flourish and is based upon many distinct oral traditions, languages, and cultural practices.

Emma Donoghue and *Room*:

Emma Donoghue is an Irish-Canadian playwright, literary historian, and screenplay writer born in Dublin, Ireland on 24 October 1969 and now living in Canada. The youngest of eight children, she is the daughter of Frances and academic and literary critic Denis Donoghue. She has a first-class honors Bachelor of Arts degree from University College Dublin (both in English and French) and a PhD in Girton College, Cambridge. While at Cambridge she lived in a women's co-op, an experience which inspired her short story *The Welcome*. Her thesis was on friendship between men and women in eighteenth century fiction. The novel *Room* is a fictionalized perspective on a horrific scenario that real children have faced—been held captive by a biological parent. It was inspired, in part, by the story of the five-year-old son of Elizabeth Fritzl, a Pennsylvania woman, who was born while his mother was being held captive for eight years in a room by the man who was both his father and his grandfather. The chunk of the novel is taken from this 2008 court case. This is one of the events of *Room* which draw inspiration from several real-life kidnappings where as there are many parallels between these both the cases. In 2008 Elizabeth Smart's *My Story*, a woman named Elisabeth Fritzl escaped her father Josef's basement after 24 years of captivity which is similar to the captivity of Main Room. Fritzl had borne her father seven children over the years, one died in infancy, while three were raised by Fritzl's parents as "foundlings," and three remained hidden with Fritzl herself. The resemblance can be seen in *Room* in which the infant is Jack. According to Fritzl's testimony, her father visited the 400-square-foot basement several times a week to bring down food and other supplies and to rape Elisabeth, similar to how Old Nick brings supplies to Ma and Jack before raping Ma. Elisabeth was rescued after one of her children, Kerstin, was brought to the hospital for urgent medical attention. Josef later allowed Elisabeth to visit the hospital, and there, police already suspicious of Josef, took him and Elisabeth into custody, where she was able to tell her story and secure her from captivity. The other parallels between the Fritzl case and Jack and Ma's story—for example, Josef would cut power to the basement as punishment for "bad behavior," just as Old Nick does to Ma and Jack. Ma even comes up with a plan to fake Jack's illness and get Old Nick to take him to the hospital for care, mirroring the way that a need for medical care led to Elisabeth's escape.

Donoghue recently noted in an interview that ‘probably in part to once again deflect flattening critical readings of this novel as “about” a particular abduction case, that the story is less about its sensational premise than it is about “parenting in a locked room”; that is, that the narrative is about an extraordinary relationship between a mother and child that is stronger than the horrors and cruelty that are its germ. And yet, the novel’s depiction of the mother or child bond, meant to be deeply empathetic to this bond’s importance but ultimately just reproducing tired gendered messages about motherly sacrifice and childish narcissism, seems to get the wonders of coming into sociality entirely wrong. Once outside of the Room, Jack must peel himself away from a Man who can’t stop taking baths with him, he must cut the hair that feminized him and kept him tied to his mother like an umbilical cord’.

Concept of Pragmatism:

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that began in the United States around 1870. Its origin is often attributed to the philosophers Charles Sanders Pierce, William James and John Dewey. Charles Sanders Pierce later described it in his pragmatic maxim: “Consider the practical effects of the objects of your conception. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the objects”.

Pragmatism considers words and thoughts as tools and instruments for prediction, problem solving, and action, and rejects the idea that function of thoughts is to describe, represent, or mirror reality. Contemporary Pragmatism may be broadly divided into a strict analytical tradition and a “neo-classical” Pragmatism. The most influential philosophy in the 20th century American society, exerting an impact on the study of law, education, political and social theory, art, and religion. This leads to the continuation of critical empiricism in emphasizing the priority of actual experience over fixed principles and a priori reasoning in critical investigation.

This philosophical movement or system engages the novel in terms of having various forms, by stressing practical consequences as constituting the essential criterion in determining meaning, truth, or value. As the child’s reality is concerned, the view of pragmatists is true to the knowledge that the individual’s interpretations of reality are motivated and justified by considerations of their efficacy and utility in serving his interests and needs.

After their escape from their captor, Donoghue writes a realistic portrayal of the type of events that would happen in the aftermath of such captivity, from Ma becoming suicidal to Jack’s difficulty in interacting with others. The psychological concept of Catharsis is brought into the story, with Jack only truly being able to heal once he has been back to the site of his imprisonment.

Depiction of Real world and World portrayed in Television from *Room*:

The novel *Room* starts with the voice of Jack:

“Today I’m five. I was four last night going to sleep in Wardrobe, but when I wake up in Bed in the dark, I’m changed to five, abracadabra. Before that I was three, then two, then one, then zero” (Donoghue, 2010:3).

And also ends with his voice: “I look back one more time. It’s like a rater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door” (Donoghue, 2010:361). The novel divides itself into two halves of living. The first half of the novel deals with the life of Ma and her son Inside the Room and the second half depict the life Outside the Room. The author describes the things in the Room in the thorough knowledge in which they both have their life. Reality plays a vital role in the novel. When they are inside Man protects him to know their captivity. Both inside and outside are real but Jack is not in his mind to know the actual truth. When he is in the Room, he used to differentiate the things inside the Room and on TV. From TV shows he sees many things which are not present in the Room so he thinks it is not real. On TV he sees snow fall but in reality, he doesn’t feel it, because it is outside. Sometimes Jack dreams that he will burst through Skylight into Outer Space and go between each of the planets. For Jack, Bunnies are TV but Carrots are real, Mountains he sees only on TV and it is not real because it is too big to climb. He doesn’t even believe Old Nick as real as human, he says:

“Women aren’t real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren’t real except Old Nick, and I’m not actually sure if he’s real for real. Maybe half? He brings groceries and

Sundaytreat and disappears the trash, but he's not human like us. He only happens in the night, like bats" (Donoghue, 2010:22).

TV teaches him both good and bad things. He cautions his mind that fire is dangerous and he makes sure that not allow the Room to get fire like in TV. For him vegetables are all real but ice cream is TV, he wishes that too is real. After seeing the Spider, and the Mouse he feels all things that are alive are real and not TV. He describes Beaches and Sea as TV but when they send some letters it turns them real for a bit to him. In TV he sees the houses in different shapes and paints in various colours and sees: "Houses are like lots of Rooms stuck together, TV persons stay in them mostly but sometimes they go in their outsides and weather happens to them" (Donoghue, 2010:52). When he watches Alice in Wonderland he says:

"Ships are just TV... Forests are TV and also jungles and deserts and streets, skyscrapers and cars. Animals are TV except ants and Spider and Mouse, are TV but they kind of look like me, the me in Mirror that isn't real either, just a picture" (Donoghue, 2010:66).

He thinks Santa must be real because he brings them the million chocolates in the box with the purple ribbon. His instinct starts questioning only after the same bottles of painkillers show as an advertisement on TV. Ma answers him that the killers are real that show on TV and the things they see on TV is a picture of real things. She distinguishes real and unreal things in TV, the cartoons are just a drawing but the other people, the ones with faces that look like them are real, other than that everything like places, farms, forest, airplanes and cities that shows in TV is pragmatic. He starts realizing the world outside but a little. He is very furious to ask more about outside but the next day Ma's Gone, which means she falls sick. His instinct does not stop to think about the outside world. He continues to think and feel tensed, whenever he is anxious, he used to count his teeth, sometimes he gets nineteen and sometimes twenty. His mind is filled with lots of questions unanswered because Ma is gone.

Jack's Experience with the real world outside the world:

Jack begins to awaken to the reality of their Room and begins to see the dissonance between the Outside. His increased understanding of the Outside world leads to their need to escape. Then, in their Great Escape Jack sees the real world that exists outside. First, he sees the truck, street, trees, people, dog for real. After seeing the world, he feels tired. Then with Ma he experiences many things in reality, when the police officer, Oh takes them to the Cumberland Clinic where both Ma and Jack are taken care by Dr. Clay and a nurse, Noreen. Jack feels that everything in the Outside world looks wrong. Ma talks to Captain about Old Nick and their way of living inside the Room. In Outside world, they tease having some milk from Ma. Jack says: "We really have to go back to Room" (Donoghue, 2010:200). The sudden detach from the Room makes him feel sick in sleeping. He sees many similar things which resemble the same in the Room but he can find the differences in it. He remembers the TV and sees them for real. As a newcomer he doesn't like to mingle with the people outside and he pretends. He tends to wonder if it's really happening for real or just pictures and his head's worn out from wondering. People seem to do funny things in Outside in their clothing. Jack asks whether the Room is still there when they are not in it. When he looks out through the window, he sees the objects from a long distance and feels it is a different planet like in TV. Outside their routine habits have a change, they can do whatever they like and whenever they like. When they tend to expose themselves, they want to wear a mask, because the environment is too difficult for them to adapt, so the surroundings are filled with germs. The reality is not what Jack expects.

Canada is known for its modernity, in this novel, Donoghue refers to the complete development in the modern outside world, in which the boy can't understand what is happening and he has his own instinct about it. Both the Room and the Outerspace are pragmatic but the reality is different. Inside the Room the things they use are very simple but in outside it too modern, as a kid, he nearly mocks at the things in Outside. He sees different shapes of chocolate; he feels it tastes real and looks unreal. Even though they are outside, they are not exposed to the world; they stay only in the Clinic. He avoids seeing people outside and doesn't like to face the real world. He shivers when somebody asks him something. He asks for kids; Ma says the clinic is only a little piece of the world. Dr. Clay brings them

cool shades to wear, Jack says it is 'like rap stars': "They go darker if we'll be in the outside of Outside and lighter if we'll be in the inside of Outside" (Donoghue, 2010:225).

Ma used to comfort him for the things that happen around them. Ma's dressing style differs and he wears pajamas instead of T-shirt. Ma's mom visits them, they share an emotional talk but Jack sees his grandma: "...there's all black drips under her eyes, I wonder why her tears come out black. Her mouth is all blood color like women on TV" (Donoghue, 2010:233). Jack even separates real and unreal for his grandpa; his real grandpa is in Canberra and his unreal is Leo who stays with grandma.

At last, he comes to the right state that the past is not in his future anymore and leaves his instinct about the Room in room itself and leaves from there. Jack realizes that he no longer feels an attachment to it. Then he stays only in Outside world and not in Inside of the Room. Both Ma and Jack come under a dynamic character, "undergoes a permanent change in some aspect of character, personality, or outlook" (Peerine, 1988:69). This novel creates a heart rendering vision of what that type of captivity would be like, with Ma going to extraordinary measures to protect Jack from the full horror of their predicament. Donoghue weaves together a story of bravery in the face of fear and the importance of parent and child bonding with the help of Room and the Outside world. Ma's world before captivity crashes after she comes with the label of Jack's Ma to the Outside world.

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