

BEYOND THE WALLS: A MEDITATION ON CONFINEMENT AND FREEDOM IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *ROOM*

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Abstract: The liberation of people is a very strong subject in the 21st century. One of the loudest is the liberation of women and children from patriarchal and other oppressive forces. In Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* freedom becomes less of a possibility as the characters Jack and Ma move into smaller and smaller crypts. Such confinement makes both the readers and the characters appreciate the deliciousness of fresh air.

The article entitled, "Beyond the Walls: A Meditation on Confinement and Freedom in Emma Donoghue's *Room*" attempts to analyse the effects of these contrasting perspectives on its characters, Jack and his 'Ma'. Ma wants to embrace the freedom of the world but Jack loves the safety of the room. Told entirely in Jack's voice, *Room* is not a horror story but a celebration of resilience and the love between a parent and child. For Jack, the room was his world. Even the lifeless objects in the room were friends for him. He had no idea about the outside world. Jack relates the great changes that happened in his life by entering into the outside world. But if the story had been told from the mother's viewpoint then it would have been much darker, much more complex and heavy. It would have been more of a victim's tale. The room is a hell for mother and a heaven for Jack. Like a modernist, the mother laments and shows her frustration towards the fragmentation from the outside world. But the boy, like a postmodernist, celebrates that fragmentation.

This article is structured in three chapters. The first chapter begins with a discussion on postmodernism and introduces the novel and its author. The second chapter entitled "From Womb to World" analyses the trope of confinement and freedom from the perspectives and experiences of its characters. The concluding chapter sums up the study by reviewing the core ideas discussed in the earlier chapters and situates the novel in the postmodern context.

Introduction

With the power shifts and dehumanization of the post-Second World War era and the onslaught of consumer capitalism, a variety of artistic, architectural, philosophical and cultural movements took place in the late 1950s. It led to the advent of postmodernism which came as a result of and in reaction to modernism. The founders of the post-modern argument were French intellectuals like Jean Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernism is 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. Postmodernism favours 'mininarratives': stories that explain small practices and local events without pretending universality and finality. Baudrillard is associated with what is usually known as, 'the loss of the real'. In his view, contemporary life is influenced by the images from film, TV and advertising which create confusion between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth. The result is a culture of 'hyper reality'. Jim Powell in his *Postmodernism for Beginners* states that:

Life has become TV and TV life. TV watches us and we watch TV watching over us. It watches over us like whirligigs of DNA, orbiting around us, governing the mutations of the real into the hyper real. TV and life, real and hyper real, contract, collapse, telescope implode into simulation (64).

Postmodernism leads to a simulacrum which is a virtual or fake reality. In other words, the contemporary world is a simulacrum, where reality has been replaced by false images. We have lost the capacity to discriminate between the real and the artificial.

Postmodernism also has its roots in the theories of Hebermas, Derrida, Foucault and Barthes and also can be examined from feminist and postcolonial angles. The Beat generation writers of 1950s are also considered as the forerunners of postmodernism. Such writers include Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg etc. The practice of North and South American writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Marquez inspired British writers like Angela Carter, D.M.Thomas and Salman Rushdie to become the pioneers in giving expression during the last decades of the 20th century.

Modernism and Postmodernism give voice to the insecurities, disorientation and fragmentation of the 20th century western world. Modernism projects the fragmentation and decentredness of contemporary world as tragic. It laments on the loss of unity and centre of life and suggests that a work of art can provide the unity, coherence, continuity and meaning that are lost in modern life. Thus Eliot laments that the modern world is an infertile wasteland and the fragmentation and incoherence of this world is reflected in the structure of his poem, *The Wasteland* (1922). In postmodernism, fragmentation and disorientation are no longer tragic. It celebrates fragmentation. It considers fragmentation and decentredness as the only possible way of existence and does not try to escape from their conditions. In the second edition of *Beginning Postmodernism*, Tim Woods declares that:

Postmodernism is a knowing modernism, a self-reflexive modernism, a modernism that does not agonise about itself... Thus instead of lamenting the loss of the past, the fragmentation of existence and the collapse of selfhood, postmodernism embraces these characteristics as a new form of social existence and behavior (8-9).

Postmodern writing makes extensive use of parody and pastiche, quotational reference, pub-talk, pop songs, novelette scenarios and advertising slogans thereby blending a variety of literary genre and cultural and stylistic levels drawn from different arts. Both modern and postmodern literature represents a break from the 19th century realism, in which narrative is told from an objective or omniscient point of view. Both literatures explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness like the stream of consciousness styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In addition, they explore fragmentariness in narrative and character construction.

Postmodernism in literature is parallel to other movements in linguistic theory and criticism such as Poststructuralism and Feminism. It is also linked to Postcolonialism. Postmodern literature can be considered as an umbrella term for the post-war developments in literature such as the Theatre of the Absurd, Beat Generation and Magical Realism. It is expressed in the writings of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Robbe Grillet, Naquib Mahfouz etc. They presented a world where people seem to be locked in their own non-communicating lives of thought or in fantasies, so that there is never any chance of a sane or healthy society emerging. The character, Stanley in Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* (1958) retreats to a room from the world that threatens him. These works reveal the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying "abyss" or "void" or "nothingness" in the world.

Spatial and temporal practices are closely related in the processes of reproduction and transformation of social relations. The history of social change is captured by the history of the conceptions of space and time. Representations of space encompass all of the signs and significations, codes and knowledge that create new meanings or possibilities for spatial practices. Tim Woods in his *Beginning Postmodernism* tells about space as:

The subject is the space demarcated by the 'I' understood as a selfhood which is coherent, stable, rational and unified. Based upon this sense of individuality, it is believed that people possess agency and can use their capacities to alter, shape and change the world in which they live (9-10).

The appropriation of space examines the way in which space is occupied by objects, activities, individuals, classes or other social groupings. The domination of space reflects how individuals or powerful groups dominate the organization and production of space through legal or extra legal means so as to exercise a greater degree of control either over the friction of distance or over the manner in which space is appropriated by themselves or others. Problems with spatial perception commonly lead to conditions such as claustrophobia and acrophobia. People who are claustrophobic may perceive objects as being closer to them than they actually are, a problem that can make a small space, such as an elevator, feel smaller than actually is. Those with acrophobia may perceive that the ground as being further away than it really is, leading to a fear of high places.

Most of the postmodern works deals with themes like alienated life, claustrophobia, separation anxiety disorder, trafficking and the resultant post-traumatic stress disorder etc. Peter Rock's *My Abandonment* (2008) tells the story of an un-orthodox father-daughter duo living off the grid somewhere on the West coast. When they are discovered, the girl, Caroline is forced to enter public school and struggles with a lifestyle she finds restrictive. Koethi Zan's *The Never List* (2014) centers on

four women, chained in the basement of an isolated house by a man they know only as The Professor. The novel opens ten years after Sarah and the others have made their escape but their tormentor is still out there and he might have more plans for them. Teddy Wayne's *The Love Song of Johny Valentine* (2013) tells the story of an eleven year old Johny and his 'momager', Jane who live their lives in luxury hotel rooms or stately mansions, the trappings of fame prove to be as much of a cage for Johny. Wayne also uses his child narrator's unusual circumstances to highlight the universal struggle of coming of age in a complicated and hostile world. Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010) tells a harrowing tale of a five year old boy, Jack and his 'Ma' locked away by a nameless captor and their eventual escape.

Emma Donoghue was born in Dublin, Ireland in October 24, 1969. She is the youngest of eight children of Frances and Denis Donoghue (the literary critic). She attended Catholic convent schools in Dublin, earned a first class honours BA in English and French from the University College, Dublin in 1990 and also received her Ph.D from the University of Cambridge in 1997. Now she is settled in London, Ontario with her husband Chris Roulston and their children Finn and Una. Donoghue has written novels, short story collections, drama for stage and radio, screenplays and the literary history. Her works include *Frogmusic* (2014), *Room* (2010), *Slammerkin* (2000), *The Sealed Letter* (2008), *Life Mask* (2004) etc.

Donoghue was inspired to write *Room* because of the Josef Fritzl case in Austria during April 2008. The man locked his daughter Elizabeth, in the basement for 24 years and repeatedly raped her. During this time she had seven children. Donoghue had wondered what it would have been like for Elizabeth's children, as they had lived in the basement all their life and had never been outside. The novel was longlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize and won the 2011 Commonwealth Writers Regional Prize (Caribbean and Canada), was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2010 and was shortlisted for the 2010 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and 2010 Governor General Awards. The novel has been translated into over forty languages including special educational editions in German and Dutch and also has been adapted into a film which was released in 2015, directed by Lenny Abrahamson; starring Brie Larson and Jacob Tremblay. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards in 2016 for Best Adapted Screenplay (written by Emma Donoghue), Best Director, Best Actress and Best Picture.

In *Room*, Jack and his Ma are in a world of their own. The 11x11 room in which they live almost seems womb-like and Jack has never been outside. Ma and Jack at times seem almost like twins- two children located together or even two parts of a whole. The locked room is a metaphor for the claustrophobic, tenderbond of parenthood. Donoghue herself comments on her two characters as a tribe of two.

Jack has never known anything of life beyond the room, which is an eleven square foot space he shares with his mother. It contains a small kitchen, a bath tub, a wardrobe, a bed and a TV. The child feels secure with his Ma available to him throughout. Ma has created a lively regimen of exercise, singing and reading for Jack to keep their days busy. At night he sleeps in the wardrobe, in case the captor, whom Jack names as 'Old Nick' comes to visit bringing supplies. But he did not enquire about the man to his Ma. The fact was that Old Nick kidnapped Ma when she was nineteen and has kept her imprisoned for the past seven years in the room. Jack is the result of Old Nick's rape of Ma. For five years, Jack has had in his life is Ma and Ma only had Jack to return her love. Ma never burdened him with her emotions. Although her son is already five, she still breastfeeds her son. This shows her attachment to her son and she wants to make him feel loved and comfortable the best she can.

Worried about his curiosity and her own desperation, Ma reveals to Jack that Outside is real and that they must escape. Jack is confused at this sudden revelation. She tells him that she was kidnapped by Old Nick and has been held secluded in the room. The most important moment in this novel is when Ma is trying to explain the Great Escape plan to Jack. He does not want to do it, because he is very scared of Old Nick and of outside. Jack is scared to escape, although he knows he has to save himself and Ma. This is very significant because this is the plan that could ultimately save their lives. This goes alongside with the Canadian theme, 'Fear and Freedom', because Ma wants to escape but Jack is very scared. If Jack can manage to pull off the Great Escape, he and Ma will be free from the great fear they have of Old Nick. If Jack leaves room, he will have to adapt to the outside world because it is much more different from the room.

Jack is brave enough to carry out their plan and two of them are compelled to adjust to life outside with its bright lights, noise and people touching. Ma is reunited with her family and begins to relearn how to interact with the larger world; while Jack has problems coping with the suddenly much larger world and wants to return to the room. Ma and Jack experience aspects of hell in room and outside world respectively. In fact, outside is completely overwhelming to both of them especially at first. Jack, never known to anything else, longs to go back to the room. Ma never wants to go back as room seems

to be a special hell created by Old Nick. Jack has to completely change his views on everything. His whole life in the room was basically a lie and he struggles greatly to try to understand how the world works and learn to do things.

What is reconnection for his mother is discovery for Jack, who is soon overwhelmed by the changes in his mother and a world coming to him fast and furiously. Jack becomes more conflicted and frightened by his mother's growing independence and his desire to keep her for himself. At the same time, Jack himself is growing and changing as his world expands. He starts a real life with his mother and finally able to let go of his mother's breast. At last Jack requests Ma for a last visit to the room. But Jack no longer feels any emotional attachment towards it and says goodbye to all the things in the room which once created a world for him. Room now seems small and cramped to him and no longer has the meaning it once held.

Donoghue cleverly lets us make leap between Jack's innocent observations and the harshness of reality in the room. This limited perspective sets up an important contradiction: for his Ma, room is a place of terror, but for Jack, it's the only home he knows, where all his imaginary friends live. The story reveals that room is actually a prison which is similar to Rapunzel's tower or Anne Frank's annex. It's not just childish innocence that is displayed but also a battle of a terrified woman who tries to explain everything to an 'alien creature' who operates on a different wavelength. The following chapters analyse the different mindset of both Jack and Ma towards the room and outside and also about their final celebration of resilience.

From Womb to World

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* is one of the great depictions of maternal determination in contemporary literature. The indestructible bond between a mother and her child is the key theme of the novel. The epigraph of the novel, 'My Child' from the poem, "Lamentation of Danae" of the Greek poet Simonides illuminates the important aspect of the story.

Such trouble I have.

And you sleep, your heart is placid;

you dream in the joyless wood;

in the night nailed in bronze,

in the blue dark you lie still and shine. (Epigraph, *Room*)

'My Child' tells about a woman, Danae who got trapped in a chest and set afloat at sea. She talks to her child, Perseus who later showed his heroism by killing Medusa, the sea monster and married Princess Andromeda. In the novel, Ma views Jack as her own little hero and it is he who frees her from the box-like room she had been trapped for seven years. Jack's heroic escape lands Old Nick in jail. Both the epigraph and the novel deal with complications in the world. 'My Child' introduces the larger theme of *Room* that something good can shine through evil. It also introduces the horrors and miracles of Ma and Jack's imprisonment. Both Danae and Ma share the fact that they have 'such trouble' and worry about their child. At the same time Perseus and Jack appear oblivious to the dangerous and troubled world they live in. Ma feels the unrelenting desire to protect Jack and make sure he is safe and healthy. Similarly Jack shows uncommon bravery in the face of evil and he is able to 'shine' in the 'blue dark' that he faces in life. The epigraph alludes to both a peaceful sleep and a blissful ignorance of the hard, natural world. It suggests that joy is likely to be found in the dream state and not in the reality of the world. In the novel, Dr Clay in the Cumberland Clinic says "World is suddener than we fancy it" (194). He quotes it from the poem, "Snow" written by the Irish poet Louis Mac Neice and refers to the random madness of real life.

At the outset of the novel, we see Jack being very much excited about his birthday. "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" (3). Donoghue does not give any clue that Jack and Ma are in confinement. They are having a common and pleasant conversation in a bedroom on the morning of his birthday and he likes to hear about his birth. "Ma lifts her sleep T-shirt and makes her tummy jump. 'I thought, Jack's on his way. First thing in the morning, you slid out onto the rug with your eyes wide open'" (4).

After that there is a gradual awareness that Ma and Jack are completely alone in a tiny room. Room is their world and Jack feels he is safe with Ma. In David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* it is stated that:

Being is already a value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house... This is the environment in which the protective beings live... In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening... (217).

Then Jack mentions about a 'he' and that is Old Nick who visits them every night after nine. When he comes, Jack sleeps inside another smaller space, the Wardrobe and Jack tells that air quality changes at these times. He is not aware of the world outside and room is his world. He expresses his kinship to room by naming the objects in it with capital letters and referring to them with personal pronouns instead of 'it'. He would not have even expected that his turning of five will bring about a lot of changes in his life. His authoritativeness can be seen in his decision to choose presents. "Now I'm Five, I have to choose" (4). But he did not want to bring any changes in his routine, like to be breastfed from his Ma. "Oh, I forgot to have some when I woke up." "That's OK. Maybe we could skip it once in a while, now you're five?" "No way Jose" (6).

Ma tries her hardest to give Jack as normal a life as she can. She has exercise routines, singing, playing, TV watching schedules and makes him learn and gets him to remember to brush his teeth. Jack and Ma have never been apart except for the hours when Old Nick visits Ma. According to Ma, Jack is like the dead spit of her. "It just means you look like me. I guess because you're made of me, like my spit is. Same brown eyes, same big mouth, same pointy chin..." (7). She wanted to keep him safe especially when they get aware about Old Nick's arrival through the beep beep sound of the door. Then Jack must hide and be tucked away in the wardrobe only to come out when the visitor is gone.

The room is windowless except for a skylight overhead through which Jack sees the sun and the moon and calls 'God's yellow face' and 'God's silver face' respectively. It is through TV that he is able to see the things outside but he has confusion about what is real and what is not real. "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?" (18). For Jack, outside is outer space. In the room he is happy with his daily chores. "We have thousands of things to do every morning, like give Plant a cup of water for no spilling, then put her back on her saucer on Dresser" (8). But Ma found relief through taking pain killers and sometimes took more out of frustration. "Like stuck on a hook, because I'd need them all the time. Actually I might need more and more." "What's wrong with needing?" "It's hard to explain" (9).

Ma has moments of depression due to the constant abuse she has to suffer. Jack cares about his Ma and can pick up her moods and feelings. He has a strong desire to protect her. Love may not heal her physical wounds but it is all they have. Emotionally there is nothing that can help them as much as their relationship with each other- it seems to be all that keeps Ma sane. Jack treats himself and Ma as one. "It's weird to have something that's mine not Ma's...I guess my body is mine and the ideas that happen in my head. But my cells are made out of her cells so I'm kind of hers" (10).

TV is another thing that keeps them alive. Jack loves to watch TV especially, Dora the Explorer and other persons whom he thinks exist inside the TV and are made of colours. He watches them with great awe. "They have clothes instead of skin, their faces are pink or yellow or brown or patchy or hairy, with very red mouths and big eyes with black edges. They laugh and shout a lot" (11). Jack is also curious about Old Nick but he does not try to know about him from Ma. But he finds out that Old Nick is nearly double her age. "Mostly she calls him just *him*, I didn't even know the name for him till I saw a cartoon about a guy that comes in the night called Old Nick" (12). Old Nick spent some hours in the room, takes the trash and delivers supplies during weekends which are 'Sunday treats', for Jack.

What is real to Jack is not necessarily the same as what Ma sees, leading to an interesting dynamic between the two characters. When a child is small, the physical space around him seems very large. Jack feels as though his world is huge and he bounces around in it easily. He does not feel the confinement that Ma feels. They are able to do everything in their small space, including building a climbing-tower to skylight and running track, constructed by putting table and rocker on bed and then lifting up the rug. For Jack, banging on things, screaming and howling are part of their games, but Ma tries to attract the attention of others so that someone will come to rescue them. She tries to create a safe space for her son. She has done the best that she knows how, with the limited circumstances she has. In *Beyond the Frustrated Self: Overcoming Avoidant Patterns and Opening to Life*, Barbara Dowds comments on Ma: Jack's mother (or 'Ma') adores him and depends on him; now that she has a purpose in life—her child—she puts sustained energy into stimulating him and dividing the days into maintaining the environment, getting exercise, creating games, and planning their escape. Whatever the task, it becomes another enjoyable game and reassuring ritual for Jack (28).

Ma allows Old Nick to hurt her so that he will not hurt Jack. "I just don't want him looking at you. Even when you were a baby, I always wrapped you up in Blanket before he came in" (26). During a visit Old Nick calls out for Jack in front of the wardrobe and asks Ma, "you've never let me get a good look since the day he has born. Poor little freak's got two heads or something?" (73). Then Ma diverts him by inviting him to the bed.

Ma deliberately acts an emotional bonding with the captor for survival. This shows the Stockholm syndrome in Ma which is due to the belief that an escape is impossible and also the chance of getting killed by the captor. More than that Ma wants to protect Jack from the captor. She hides Jack in the wardrobe and he stays there counting the creaks of the bed.

When Old Nick creaks Bed, I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do. What about nights I'm asleep? I don't know, maybe Ma does the counting (37).

Jack's life in room is unreal. He is not aware about the reality. TV showed him real things. It is a microcosm of the outside world. But he had no idea about it. "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"(41). For him the outside is outer space with stars, spaceships, planets and aliens zooming around in UFOs. When Old Nick comes, Jacks feels the cool air through the slats of the wardrobe and is curious about what is there in outside. But he saves everything in his mind just like his doubt about the marks he sees on Ma's neck after Old Nick leaves. He does not want to make Ma upset and mad. "I think Old Nick put those marks on her neck. I try saying but nothing comes out" (53).

Jack astonishes to hear the truth from Ma that there are actual people and places like the ones he sees on TV. It all started when he noticed the strange coincidence of Ma's bottle of pain killers showing up on the TV screen. It is a commercial, but Jack does not know about that. He figures that Old Nick goes in and out of the TV to get the medication. But Ma does not want to explain things and Jack is not satisfied with her answer.

The way she says it, it's strange. I think she's pretending. 'You have to know. You know everything.'...

'It's hard to explain.'

I think she can explain, she just won't. 'You can, because I'm five now' (59).

Then he hears the most astonishing thing he has ever heard. "What we see on TV is... it's pictures of real things" (59). But he is not ready to accept it because it was just the opposite of what he had learned all this time. "Nah." Why is she tricking me? 'Where would they fit?' 'Out there,' says Ma. 'Outside'... 'Outside Room'" (60). Ma also does not expect this sudden revelation and took pain killers and the next day she is 'Gone', in the words of Jack. She does not get up the whole day due to the reaction of pills. But Jack is already accustomed with this as she has 'Gone' often like this before. Then he manages to do everything alone as he does not want to disturb her. Jack also gets disturbed about the reality of the outside world, a place that he had no concept of until that very moment. When he finds out that the pictures on TV are real, Jack thinks about incredible number of things floating outside. He imagines that they might all crash into room and he gets scared. "I can't breathe right, I have to count my teeth instead, left to right on the top then right to left on the bottom, then backwards, twenty every time but I still think maybe I'm counting wrong" (62).

Jack is a counter. Jack repeatedly counts his teeth, fingers, toes and sometimes just numbers for their own sake. The act of counting comforts him. Jack counts while Old Nick rapes Ma and also during his escape from room to outside. Jack's counting is a copying mechanism that he gets from Ma. Ma also counts things in the room. Counting is also a way of measuring things and thereby creating order in the world. These measurements form the boundaries of how and where we live. Jack and Ma spent a lot of time measuring things. They count cereal and count how many steps it takes to run along their makeshift track in the room. After their escape also, they make a counting list of all the people and things they have in the world.

Ma is an extraordinary woman, setting aside her own anguish to nurture the joy that Jack takes in their little world. But Old Nick boasts that he has provided them everything with a setup as safe as houses. Jack is happy with his Ma but now the thought about the outside world lingers in him.

Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yo-yos, I have to remember they're real, they're actually happening in Outside all together. It makes my head tired... I'm not there, though, me and Ma, we're the only ones not there. Are we still real? (70-71).

After knowing about outside, Jack was confused with what is real and what is not. He begins to ask questions to Ma regarding whatever things he sees on TV, whether it is fake or real. Dreams also begin to haunt him.

A week after Jack's birthday, Ma learns that Old Nick has lost his job for past six months and she feels that he would make them starve or kill them. Then Old Nick cuts the power and it becomes dark and cold in the room. Then she decides that it is time to get out of the room. Thus Ma tells about the world, she begins by comparing herself to Alice saying, "I'm like Alice...I'm from somewhere else like her" (82). Ma tells about her childhood and her family. But Jack could not accept it. "Why she's pretending like this, is it a game I don't know?"(82). She tells Jack that he has Grandma, Grandpa and

Uncle Paul. Jack feels less interested and he tries to change the subject. Then Ma says, “‘Just because you’ve never met them doesn’t mean they’re not real. There’s more things on earth than you ever dreamed about’” (83). Ma tells that she lived in a house outside and Jack finds it ridiculous as she has never been to outside. She misses being in outside and Jack finds it difficult to understand Ma. She wants me to believe so I’m trying to but it hurts my head. ‘You actually lived in TV one time?’ ‘I told you, it’s not TV. It’s the real world, you wouldn’t believe how big it is’... ‘Room’s only a tiny stinky piece of it’ (84).

This makes Jack very angry and he says her to stop it. But Ma explains that as he was too small to understand, she lied to him all this time and now she thinks he can, as he is five. Then Jack asks,

‘Why you don’t like it in Room with me?’

‘I always like being with you.’

‘But you said it was tiny and stinky.’

‘Yeah, I’d rather be outside. But with you.’

‘I like it here with you’ (85).

Jack realizes that all that he learnt was a lie and now he has to take in new things which are hard to accept. “My head’s going to burst from all the new things I have to believe” (88).

After that we can find Ma hitting on the floor. “‘I need to hit something,’ she says, ‘but I don’t want to break anything.’... ‘Actually, I’d love to break something. I’d love to break everything’” (88-89). This shows her frustration and deep long intention to escape from the room. After letting out her past events which she had suppressed for a long time drives her to some kind of madness. But it was the presence of Jack that retained her normalcy. She really wishes to go back to her family but scares Old Nick. She tells Jack that, “‘We’re like people in a book, and he won’t let anybody else read it’” (90).

Jack is not ready to believe about the outside until he saw an airplane through the skylight. “...it wasn’t a dream. I saw it flying in Outside, so there is Outside where Ma was a little girl” (91). Ma tells that in outside, they will be free and can do whatever they like. She then reveals that she was abducted by Old Nick when she was nineteen and brought her into the room.

I drove myself crazy looking at my watch and counting the seconds. Things spooked me, they seemed to get bigger or smaller while I was watching them, but if I looked away they started sliding. When he finally brought the TV, I left it on twenty-four/seven... (94-95).

Ma had tried everything to get out of the room and even dug a hole, the idea she got from *The Great Escape*. There she found a chain-link fence. Old Nick had hidden a layer of fence under the floor and in all the walls and roof so that she could never cut through and run away. Old Nick found the hole as a funny thing and laughed at Ma. She has even tried to hurt him with the lid of the toilet. But it was not hard enough and then she pressed a knife against his throat to get the code of the door. But Old Nick twisted her wrist and got the knife. Then he warned her that if she ever tries a stunt like that, she will be starved to death. Jack surprises at the terrible story. Soon the power comes and everything changes back as earlier but it is not ‘normal’ as before to Jack.

Before I didn’t even know to be mad that we can’t open Door, my head was too small to have Outside in it. When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I’m five I know everything (102).

Jack is happy anywhere if he is with Ma. That is why he keeps her bad tooth with him as it is a part of Ma, her dead spit. Now he knows that Ma wishes to escape from the room. She writes notes and put them in trash bags, but nobody finds them. Then screaming and flashing the lights are of no use as nobody notices. She has been trying to think of a plan to escape for the past seven years. Now Jack also joins with her to find a plan.

At last Ma comes up with plan--Jack has to act very sick in front of Old Nick and then she will tell Old Nick that he should take Jack to hospital. Then as soon as he reaches there Jack has to shout Help! to a doctor or a nurse. But Jack is tensed to go alone with Old Nick. Then Ma consoles him by saying that, “I know it’ll be really weird to go on your own, but I’ll be talking to you in your head every minute, I promise” (108). Ma knows that this is their only chance and everything is in Jack’s hands. Therefore she fills his mind with courage.

‘You’re my brave Prince JackerJack. You’ll go to the hospital first, see, then you’ll come back with the police... You’ll bring them back here to rescue me and we’ll be together again always.’ ‘I can’t rescue,’ I tell her, ‘I only five.’ ‘But you’ve got superpowers,’ Ma tells me. ‘You’re the only one who can do this’ (109).

Ma teaches him five words to remember his mission-- Sick, Truck, Hospital, Police, Save Ma using maps and they also practice acting sick. But Jack is scared and confused and he says, “I’ll be ready to trick him and go in Outside when I’m six” (113). Jack really does not want to escape, as he likes to stay in the room. Barbara Dowds in her *Beyond the Frustrated self: Overcoming Avoidant Patterns and Opening to*

Life states that, “In protecting ourselves against the excessive, offensive overwhelm, we may also shut out what is nourishing and adapted to our needs” (29). But for Ma, room is small, fake and a poor substitute for the real world. She longs to get out of it and also wants Jack to grow up in the outside world. She knows that it is all new to Jack and she would have waited if they were safe. But they are not. She ensures Jack that he will enjoy the world if they escape. “‘Scared is what you’re feeling,’ says Ma, ‘but brave is what you’re doing’” (116). Actually both are scared but they never give up. They just keep pushing through bravely to go forward into whatever faces them next.

Suddenly Ma gets reminded that Jack has never talked to anyone else other than to her. Then she gets the idea to write a note that explains everything. Then she writes her name on the note but Jack does not like her to have other names that he never knew. He also learns that he has her last name in order to distinguish from other Jacks in the world. “‘There are millions of people out there, and there aren’t enough names for everyone, they have to share.’ I don’t want to share my name” (117).

Ma makes the room stink by not flushing the toilet in order to make Old Nick feel that Jack has diarrhea and put a plastic bag of hot water on Jack’s face to make him hot. She deliberately vomits and rubs it on his head, pillow, T-shirt and even mouth to smell worse. Then they wait for Old Nick. When Old Nick comes, Ma tells that Jack is sick and dehydrated. But he was not ready to take Jack to the public and tells her to give some tablets and then leaves. Thus her Plan A fails. Again she comes up with Plan B. She connects it with Count of Monte Cristo so that Jack can easily understand the next plan. The Count pretended to be dead and the guards threw into the sea and he escaped. She explains her plan to Jack. When Old Nick comes, Ma will tell him that Jack is dead and show him the rug rolled up with Jack in it. Then she will tell him to take Jack’s body somewhere to bury but not in the backyard. After that he will take Jack in his truck to the city and at the first stop sign, Jack has to wriggle out of the rug and jump down to the street and run to find police to rescue Ma. She teaches him five words, this time they are- Dead, Truck, Run, Police, Save Ma and makes him practice the knack of wriggling out of the rug. Jack is not at all ready, but it is important to Ma. Then they make a slight change in their plan- Dead, Truck, Wriggle Out, Jump, Run, Somebody, Note, Police, and Blowtorch. It is a great mission for Jack. “We practice and practice... I don’t think I can keep them in my head all at the same time. Ma says of course I can. I’m her superhero, Mr. Five. I wish I was still four” (131).

Ma wants Jack to go out into the world by himself in order to rescue them both. She convinces Jack about the necessity of the plan, but reassures him that she will be present in his head talking to him throughout the ordeal. Jack wants Ma with him, but he must do it alone, so he takes her bad tooth and puts it in his sock. There is a kind of hatred in Jack towards Ma because of the plan and the escape. At the same time he understands her feeling. But Jack has no hope of success. “I’m going to mess it all up and Old Nick will bury me for real and Ma will be waiting always” (135).

Old Nick comes with some antibiotics and finds Jack rolled up in the rug. Ma tells that it went worse and Jack could not wake up in the morning. She also tells him not to bury Jack in the backyard and warns him not to lay a finger on Jack. Then Old Nick carries him to his truck. Jack counts his teeth and feels for Ma’s tooth. The tooth becomes particularly important when Ma and Jack are separated. Ma’s tooth reminds Jack that he is a part of her just like the tooth is. Tooth is a symbol of Jack’s connection to his mother. During the escape, he checks for the tooth. “You’re a bit of Ma, a little bit of Ma’s dead spit riding along with me” (137). Even when she’s not next to him, he has a piece of her with him, which makes him feel closer to her.

According to the plan he reaches outside. “I’m not in Room. Am I still me?” (138). He finds it hard to wriggle out. Somehow he makes it and sees outside. “Outside is real and so bright... It’s like a cartoon I’m inside but messier” (139). Then he jumps down the truck and his knee hits on the road, but he runs and Old Nick follows him. Jack searches for a ‘somebody’ and finds a person with a baby in a stroller and a dog. The dog jumps on Jack and bites his finger. He tries to scream but no sound comes out. In the mean time Old Nick comes and catches Jack. Jack tries to hit him hard as Ma said if the plan goes wrong. The person doubts at the scene as he sees Jack struggling with Old Nick. He mistakes Jack as a girl as he has long hair. Jack searches for his note that was hidden in his underwear and he finds it wet as he had peed. But he waves it to the man. Then Old Nick tears the note. The man calls the police and notes the truck number. Old Nick then drops Jack and drives away. Jack gets irritated when the man was about to touch him and moves away. He finds it weird to have someone look at and talk to him. Jack is so nervous that he wants Ma for talking but Ma’s voice disappears, “She’s not in my head anymore, she’s not anywhere” (142). The man is Ajeet with his daughter, Naisha and dog, Raja. Soon the police come and the officers ask questions to Jack. Somehow Jack manages to answer their questions. At the same time Jacks thinks that Old Nick might have gone near Ma to hurt her for tricking him. Police take Jack in order to find room and rescue Ma. Police gets confused with Jack’s answers. “Room’s not in a house,’ I

say again. 'I'm having trouble understanding, Jack. What's it in, then?' 'Nothing. Room's inside.'... 'So what's outside it?' 'Outside'" (151).

When Jack tries to explain room to the officers, he compares it to Alice. Alice leaves the real world in order to enter Wonderland. Jack leaves captivity to enter reality. Everything in the world is new to him in the same way that everything in Wonderland is new to Alice.

At last police finds the room with skylight through camera and rescue Ma. Thus the plan succeeds. Ma was waiting there and she tells it was the longest hour in her life. Ma is happier than Jack. "'We can do anything now.' 'Why?' 'Because we are free.'" (154). After 'the great escape' Jack is tired and wants to go to the room to lie on his bed. "'I've seen the world and I'm tired now.' 'Oh Jack,' she says, 'we're never going back.' The car starts moving and I'm crying so much I can't stop" (155).

Jack finds it all wrong at outside. He thinks that they really have to go back to room. Ma throws his underwear in the trash. "'You don't need them anymore, we'll get you new ones.' 'For Sundaytreat?' 'No, any day we like.' That's weird. I'd rather on a Sunday" (162). Then Jack and Ma are taken to the Cumberland Clinic and Dr Clay welcomes them. Jack eagerly watches each and everything he sees. He knows that outside world is what he sees on TV. He cannot relate to anything unless he imagines them as characters on animal planet, medical planet, cartoon planet etc. He is an alien taking his first steps on to the human planet.

In the clinic, while the doctors have a checkup of Ma, Jack finds himself and Ma in the TV in a news channel. It becomes a real surprise for Jack. After that when Dr Clay suggests an immediate and thorough physical examination of Jack, Ma becomes really mad at them. "'Jack doesn't need treatment, he needs some help.'... 'He's never been out of my sight and nothing happened to him, nothing like what you're insinuating'" (167). Ma becomes very emotional and defensive because she knows the doctor might want to check Jack's body for specific signs and symptoms of physical and/or sexual abuse. "'All these years, I kept him safe'" (167). These are strong words but Ma begins to cry. Perhaps the impact and implications of the years are beginning to weigh heavily on her.

Everything changes in their life. "'We don't have to do the same as we used to,' says Ma, 'we can do what we like'" (172). When Ma wants to take a shower on her own, Jack grows upset. "'I don't like when you're in and I'm out'" (172). He is not sure, he wants to be inside the shower facing the powerful waterfall but he does not want to be separated from Ma. Physical proximity is a part of Jack's sense of inside. Ma enjoys her first shower after seven years. She puts all the filthy clothes of Jack in the trash and for Jack it seems that "she's wasting everything" (174). Then he remembers about the tooth and finds it in the trash. Even though Ma is with him, he could not part with it.

It is a kind of exploration for both Jack and Ma to watch the outside world- animals, birds, vehicles, colours, people and the list goes on. "'Are they real for real?' 'As real as you and me.' I try and believe it but it's hard work" (176). Jack does not like anyone looking and touching him. Every child is familiar with the five-finger handshake, but when Dr Clay asks for his, Jack ignores him. "I'm not going to give him my fingers, I need them for me" (180). Dr Clay finds Jack as a new-born in many ways but with remarkable talent for words and numbers. He tells Ma that Jack has to face many challenges, like immune issues, social adjustment, sensory modulation, spatial perception etc. as he is only used to the confined environment. He should learn to gauge distance. But the news about the arrest of Old Nick gives a sense of relief to Ma. Now what is in front of Jack and Ma is a new life in the outside world. "'Everything's different here.' 'But what's the rule?' 'There is no rule'" (184).

Later there comes a visitor, Ma's mother and a scene of reunion takes place. "I never saw Ma hug a someone else" (187). Ma introduces Jack to her mother. "'Jack', says Ma, 'this is your grandma.' So I really have one" (187). Grandma accompanies a man named Leo with her, who is Jack's Steppa. Grandpa had a quarrel with Grandma on the matter of Ma's return as he had no hope. Now he stays in Australia. Ma and her mother indulge in their talks and Jack gets tired to hear them.

Jack's favourite bit of outside is the window. "It's different every time." (190). It is like a TV planet for him. The transparency of the glass illuminates the thought that inside and outside can have simultaneously invisible and changing boundaries. This is one of the most important lessons of childhood. It is how the child transitions from his private interior world to an understanding of his place in the outer world. It changes his perception of himself and others.

Even though Jack gets a normal life with Ma in the outside world, room and the things in it has a great place in his heart as he was used to it since his birth. He does not feel a sense of belonging in outside. "We have to be in the world, we're not ever going back to Room, Ma says that's how it is and I should be glad. I don't know why we can't go back just to sleep even" (190).

Jack tries to learn new things and manners of the outside people. Now he spent time with Dr Clay, Noreen; a nurse, Grandma etc. People see both Jack and Ma as victims and sympathize with them. But

Ma is adamant that Jack is not a victim. She also sees herself as a prisoner but not as a victim. She was compliant with Old Nick out of necessity, but she has built a life inside a life, by giving birth and raising Jack. When her lawyer, Mr. Morris suggests that Old Nick stole the best seven years of Ma's life, she retorts, "How do you know they would have been the best years of my life?" (201). With no other apparent reason for hope, Ma creates purpose in her life through Jack. Notwithstanding the miserable situation, Ma looks positively at having Jack to share it and works hard to keep it favourable for him. "People are locked up in all sorts of ways" (236), according to Ma.

When Jack and Ma become free, Old Nick is sent to jail with the accusation of kidnapping for sexual purposes, false imprisonment, multiple counts of rape, criminal battery etc. It is a victorious moment for Ma as she had suffered a lot in his hands. A year before Jack was born; she gave birth to a dead baby girl. The baby got tangled in the cord and died. Old Nick simply stood there, then took the baby and buried it in the backyard. Ma tells Jack that the baby girl was reformed as Jack. Jack also thinks of himself as having been recycled. "I was me for real that time. I didn't go back" (205). Now he thinks whether he is real in the outside world.

It takes a lot of time for both Jack and Ma to adjust and understand the ways of outside, particularly Jack. Since Ma has already been in the world, she has to re-experience it. For her room was not a home but, a soundproofed cell. Jack doubts, "If Room wasn't our home, does that mean we don't have one?" (207). Even though there were memories of room in his mind; according to Dr Clay, Jack escaped from the room at a correct time of age as he will naturally forget it later.

Jack considers himself and Ma as one. He does not like to have any secrets between them. He does not agree with Dr Clay when he asks, "You know who you belong to, Jack?" "Yeah." "Yourself." He's wrong, actually, I belong to Ma" (209). He wants to be and along with Ma. But gradually Jack realizes that, "She's gone ahead of me already, she's at the stairs, I have to run to catch up" (210). She tries to create a space of her own in the world which is strange for Jack. Jack also tries to adapt to the new environment. He gets acquainted with faces other than Ma but he says, "I've seen so many person faces for real now and hers is the most beautiful" (216).

The novel investigates the concept of privacy on a number of levels. Old Nick violates Ma both physically and emotionally, and yet his own right to privacy affords him the opportunity to hold two people captive in his hedged-in backyard. At the same time, the media offers Ma, away to tell her story and earn some cash for Jack's future. While Ma thinks of it selling herself before she is sold by others, Morris puts forward a much nicer thought. She has a lot to teach the world about psychological survival and raising a child under difficult circumstances. But the media also violates their privacy to an extreme degree. The paparazzi are always after them for pictures and Jack has to go out in disguise. The newspaper labels Jack as 'the bonsai boy', thinking of him as someone whose growth was stunned and restricted. They have no idea how hard Ma worked to accomplish the opposite.

Dreams begin to haunt Jack. The sudden expansion of his small world, make him to stuff a lot of things into his mind and head. He could not take it all at once. Dr. Clay says that his brain is gathering up all those scary thoughts that he does not need anymore and throwing them out as bad dreams. But according to Jack, "In Room I was safe and Outside is the scary" (219). David Harvey in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* declares that:

Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all immemorial things are (218).

One day Uncle Paul gives Ma an mp3 player with her favourite music on it. When Jack pulls the ear buds out too roughly, Ma tells to be careful with her present. "I didn't know it was hers-not-mine. In Room everything was ours" (220). Everything becomes strange for Jack. Ma knows that Jack needs her to be his Ma but she wants to be herself at the same time. She does not want to lose herself. This Ma is new to Jack. "But I thought the her and the Ma were the same" (222).

For Ma, Jack is her world. When her father came from Australia to see her in the clinic, he could not accept Jack as he is the result of the disaster that happened to his daughter. "I can't be in the same room. It makes me shudder." "There is no *it*. He's a boy. He's five years old," she roars" (226). He thinks that her daughter is better off without Jack. According to him, Jack is not his grandson but a reminder of his daughter's terrible past. But Ma is not ready to abandon Jack.

After six days of their escape, Ma gives an interview to television. It becomes a bitter experience for Ma. The interviewer is a woman whom Jack has seen in TV. She asks Ma whether she was emotionally dependent on the captor. Ma feels humiliation but boldly replies to her question. Ma says she hated the captor and felt saved when she was pregnant for the second time. She was concerned only on Jack's safety as it was he who kept her alive. Even though they were in confinement, they had happy moments

with each other. Then the woman asks whether she feels bad about deceiving Jack by keeping the outside world as a secret. Then, “Ma looks not friendly. ‘What was I meant to tell him- Hey, there’s a world of fun out there and you can’t have any of it?’” (234). Again the woman asks whether she had any relationship with the captor. Ma assures that there was no relationship and Jack reminds her only himself and not his origin. Then the woman goes on with her arrows of questions. Ma gets irritated and says, “I wish people would stop treating us like we’re the only ones who ever lived through something terrible” (235). Through internet Ma found that there were many terrible stories out in the world besides hers.

...when I woke up in that shed, I thought nobody’d ever had it as bad as me. But the thing is, slavery’s not a new invention. And solitary confinement- did you know in America we’ve got more than twenty-five thousand prisoners in isolation cells? Some of them for more than twenty years (235).

Ma admits that their eleven foot square world was easy to control. She knows it is difficult for Jack to move on, but she thinks he will. But she hates the way media calls him a freak or an idiot savant. For Ma, “It wasn’t an ordeal to Jack, it was just how things were” (236). Ma thinks that everybody is damaged by something. The next question in the interview really went out of the limit for Ma. The woman asks Ma could have saved Jack if she allowed the captor to take him away after his birth so that he could have a normal life outside with adoption or something. Ma replies that Jack had a childhood with her which is a normal thing. Again the woman puts blame on Ma and Ma loses all her control. Thus later it results in her suicide attempt.

Jack does not expect to have Ma ‘Gone’ in the outside world. “I don’t know what to do. In Room if Ma was being Gone I could get up on my own and make breakfast and watch TV” (238). He gets the help of Noreen to get dressed up. Then he goes out with Uncle Paul, his wife Deana and their daughter Bronwyn. They have planned before to go to the National History Museum. Jack is so eager to have an adventure, so he goes with them without Ma. First they stop for a small shopping; to buy a birthday present for Bronwyn’s friend. Jack picks a Dora bag as Dora is his ‘TV friend’. Then he asks to buy each thing he finds fascinated with and Deana tells that bag is enough for that day. After that Uncle Paul takes him to the gents’ bathroom to pee and he found the floppy sinks on the wall as funny things. Then Deana takes him to the ladies bathroom. Jack becomes curious to see Bronwyn’s vagina. From his perspective, hers is different from what Ma has down there. Intrigued he reaches out to touch it and is smacked to the point of bleeding by Deana. She makes it clear that this is an unacceptable act. Deana decides to leave the place without buying the present. On the way Jack finds *Dylan the Digger*, his favourite book. He mistakes it for the book in the room and puts it in the bag. A man comes and tells Paul that the book is not paid.

Thus Jack makes a mess and Paul buys the book for him. Then they leave for Clinic.

When Jack reaches their room in the clinic, he feels the smell of vomit and Ma is not moving. He calls out for Noreen and finds empty pill bottles on the table. Jack has had a good deal of experience with Ma being semi-conscious in Room. But the pressure has built unbearably for Ma and she takes too many painkillers, hoping that this time they will do the final job. But Ma is saved. During her recovery, Jack stays with his Grandma. He takes Ma’s bad tooth with him to keep in touch with a part of Ma. It is a difficult time for Jack without Ma. “I want some, I really really want some, I can’t get to sleep without. I suck on Tooth that’s Ma, a bit of her anyway...” (257). Jack remembers what Ma said to him that they would be free outside but he does not feel free.

Bad dreams continue to hurt him and he finds comfort in counting. Now he must learn new things on his own. “Outsiders are not like us, they’ve got a million of things and different kinds of each thing, like all different chocolate bars and machines and shoes” (264). For Jack, outside is a wonderland where he has to explore many things, like his Dora. He is well versed with each bit of room but the outside world is always changing and he does not know what happens the next minute.

Jack is excited to see the things in TV in real. By getting out of the room, he got many relatives all of a sudden. He has to learn many rules and manners. It becomes very much difficult for Jack to live in reality. Dr Clay quotes a line from T. S. Eliot’s poem, “Burnt Norton”, “‘Human kind cannot bear very much reality’” (274). Jack could not wipe away his days in room. It was fake only for Ma, but not for Jack. Jack finds the outside as unreal.

When I was four I thought everything in TV was just TV, then I was five and Ma unlied about lots of it being pictures of real and Outside being totally real. Now I’m in Outside but it turns out lots of it isn’t real at all (277).

Relationships are a major adjustment for Jack who has only interacted with one human being, his Ma. Like learning the nuances of spatial boundaries in outside, Jack is presented with new social boundaries that he had no idea with. Some of the most obvious of these situations involve Jack’s lack of boundaries around nudity and naked bodies. When Jack takes a bath with Grandma, she is uncomfortable

in bathing naked with her grandson. So she puts on her swimming suit and a shower cap. Jack feels strange. "In Room we were sometimes naked and sometimes dressed, we never minded" (283). Again his lack of knowledge about physical boundaries can be seen when he knocks down a little boy after playing with him. Jack meant to hug him to show his love. But Grandma then tells him that one should not hug strangers even if they are nice.

One morning Jack cuts his ponytail on his own and that shows his embracement of life in outside. Like that, a lot of changes happen in his life within two weeks of his life in outside. Still he does not like touching or holding his hands, even by Grandma. Jack gets to know about many things about the people and the world.

There's lots of every kind of thing in the world but it all costs money, even stuff to throw away... The little cards with numbers all over are called a lottery, idiots buy them hoping to get magicked into millionaires (285).

People are uncomfortable seeing a five year old boy nursing. But Jack is so relaxed that, on a coffee outing with Grandma, he asks a nursing baby which side the baby likes best. Jack is not aware that babies cannot speak and that this is an inappropriate outside comment. Grandma says that, that mother wanted to be private. Then Jack thinks, "I didn't know persons could be private out in the world" (285). Jack realizes that in the world, people are always stressed and have no time.

In Room me and Ma had time for everything, I guess the time gets spread very thin like butter over all the world, the roads and houses and playgrounds and stores, so there's only a little smear of time on each place, then everyone has to hurry on to the next bit (286-287).

According to him, adults do not seem to like kids, not even parents. They call them gorgeous and cute, but they do not want to play with them and spent time to drink coffee talking to other adults.

It is a surprise for Jack, when he gets items from the room including rug which were sent by police. They are so much dear to him. In the absence of Ma, Jack finds relief through those things. Later Ma telephones him and tells him that she is fine. Jack tells her about his new discoveries and asks why she tricked him. Then Ma replies, "'You had so many questions,' says Ma. 'And I didn't have all the answers, so I had to make some up'" (293).

One day when Jack surfs through the TV channels, he finds some persons in a channel having a discussion on Jack himself. They say, "'We're all Jack, in a sense'... 'Reeling from the sensory overload of modernity'... 'Post-modernity'" (293). They compare Jack with Perseus who was "born to a walled-up virgin, set adrift in a wooden box, the victim who returns as hero" (294). They also refer to Kaspar Hauser who had been happy in his dungeon. Like that Jack was also happy in his room. But they find an exception in Jack's case, "'At least Jack had TV.' Another man laughs. 'Culture as a shadow on the wall of Plato's cave'" (294). TV helps Jack to relate things outside.

At a store, Jack introduces himself as 'the bonsai boy' to some women and they get his autograph. TV made Jack and Ma, celebrities. Then Grandma rushes in and tears it and warns him that somebody like Old Nick would have snatched him. Jack thinks, "I didn't know there was somebody like him in the world" (296). She becomes very angry and Jack also retorts back, "'I going back to the clinic,' I shout at her, 'and you can't stop me because you're a, you're a stranger'" (296). He finds Ma's tooth and put it in his mouth, but now it does not taste like anything anymore; neither Ma's nor his. Then Steppa comes and makes him cheer up.

One fine day Ma comes and there comes the end of a long separation between Jack and Ma. Then Ma and Jack shift to a new apartment in Independent Living Residential Facility. When they get into the elevator, Ma shivers. It shows the claustrophobic tendency that comes after post-kidnapping days and/or post-traumatic events. Now she must be get used with the elevator. Jack wishes the apartment number to be five; his favourite number but it is six. Ma tells it is their home, but Jack thinks, "How is it home if I've never been here?" (302). It is a fresh start for them. It becomes a new day for Jack as he bids 'Bye-bye' to Ma's breast.

During unpacking, Jacks finds that he had lost the tooth. He worries, but now Ma is always with him. While curling Ma's hair, he tells "'I could cut yours and then we'd be the same again.' Ma shakes her head. 'I think I'm going to keep mine long'" (303). Jack wants him and Ma to remain same. But Ma behaves strangely and she tries to separate herself from being Jack's Ma to reach a new state of independence. Now he finds Ma does not count cereal like she did in the room. Jack understands that Ma has completely forgotten about room. According to Ma, now they have to make room for each other. "...it would be nice to have somewhere to go that's just mine sometimes" (304). Thus they go from one bed to separate beds to separate rooms. They make nameplates to hang on the different doors: MA'S ROOM and JACK'S ROOM. When Jack takes the rug to find a place for it, Ma does not want it there.

‘Jack, it’s all frayed and stained from seven years of-- I can smell it from here. I had to watch you learn to crawl on that rug, learn to walk, it kept tripping you up. You pooped on it once, another time the soup spilled, I could never get it really clean’ (305).

Jack has no negative feeling for it like her. “...I was born on her and I was dead on her too” (305). Rug has a special place in Jack’s heart. It is a symbol of death and birth. Jack was born on rug; however Ma gave birth to a child before him, that died on rug. Furthermore, when Jack pretends to be dead, he is wrapped in rug. But when the plan works, rug becomes the symbol of rebirth. Now he wants to keep it in their new place, but Ma does not want him to, as it reminds her of their captivity. Jack’s love for his past agitates Ma. “‘If for once in your life you thought about me instead of— ‘I do,’ I shout. ‘I thought about you always when you were Gone’” (305). Then she allows to keep it in the wardrobe only to see for himself and not for her. There arises a big quarrel between them and Jack gets in to the wardrobe with the rug around him. After that Dr Clay and Noreen comes and everything is back to normal. Then they practice calling to each other from their two rooms and Jack finds it not so bad.

Even though Ma is with him, Jack worries about the tooth. But Ma consoles him, “‘People move around so much out in the world, things get lost all the time’” (307). But it is not just a thing for Jack. He does not know whether he had lost it somewhere or swallowed it while he kept it in his mouth. He thinks that if he had swallowed it, it would have slid out in his poo as Ma told him, but it had not. Then he thinks that it may be going to hide inside him in a corner forever. That shows his love for the tooth and also his wish to not become separate with it.

Jack encounters new things each day. Jack and Ma decide to try everything one at a time so that they will know what they each like and make a list. Jack wonders at the changes that come to their life. When I was four I didn’t know about the world, or I thought it was only stories. Then Ma told me about it for real and I thought I knowed everything. But now I’m in the world all the time, I actually don’t know much, I’m always confused (313).

Jack and Ma are on the outside, they need to really define who they are and what they hope to become. They will have to change- to reinvent or reincarnate themselves- day by day, event by event. They will have to change in order to survive, as Ma did in the room. Ma says to Dr Clay that Jack is enough for her. Then he quotes a line from Emily Dickinson’s poem, “The Soul selects her own Society”, “‘The Soul selects her own Society--Then--shuts the Door’—” (314). Ma did not want to end up her life in room, so she made the escape plan to go back to her society. Now she lives in society and she has the opportunity to create a new identity. But she decides to rely on Jack throughout her life even though he is the reminiscence of those days she do not want to remember. Noreen advises her, “‘Don’t forget, you’d have changed anyway. Moving into your twenties, having a child---you wouldn’t have stayed the same’” (314). Ma must consider what she had chosen in her life. Jack too has to change and adapt to a post-room world.

Jack really enjoys his life with Ma. One day he asks Ma whether we come back from Heaven. Ma tells him that it is called reincarnation and some people think that we come back as donkeys or snails. But Jack is interested in reincarnation and asks, “‘If I grow in you again’--- ... ‘Will you still call me Jack?’” (315). He needs reassurance about who he is. He always wants to be Ma’s Jack.

At last Jack requests Ma to visit room, “‘Can we go back sometime?’ ‘Not to live.’ I shake my head. ‘Just to visit for one minute’” (315). Ma is not sure that she will be able to accompany him. But Jack is bent on to go to the room with Ma. Then they are taken to the site by the police. Ma is tensed, “‘Let’s get this over with, Jack, because I am not coming back again’” (317). Police dig up the dead body of the baby to place her somewhere better. Then Ma tells her opinion to turn the baby’s bones into ash and sprinkle under the hammock in Grandma’s house.

It is a surprise for Jack to see the room from the outside. “‘That’s it,’ she says. ‘What?’ ‘Room.’ ‘Nah.’ ‘It is Jack, you’ve just never seen it from the outside’” (318). Ma vomits and then takes Jack inside the room. It seems smaller, emptier, darker and smells weird to Jack. “‘...they’re all different. Nothing says anything to me. I don’t think this is it,’ I whisper to Ma” (319). He simply looks and tries to see how it was. “I guess this really was Room one time. ‘But not anymore,’ I tell Ma” (320). They think room is not room if door is open. When she asks whether he wants the door shut for a minute, Jack says no. Now Jack has no feelings for room like once he had before. He bids goodbye to each and everything in the room and also to room. He also makes Ma to tell goodbye. Then he has one last look, “‘It’s like a crater, a hole where something happened’” (321).

At last room became only a bad dream for two of them that popped out like a bubble. Now it’s not even a memory at all. Jack is a thoroughly compelling and strange little character. Through his innocent eyes and thoughts, Donoghue pours the violence, horror and adult traumas of our outside world. Jack’s narration lightens the harsh and intense emotions of Ma, being a very powerful character.

Conclusion

Human nature consists of faculties, aptitudes or dispositions that are in some sense present in human beings at birth rather than learned or instilled through social forces. Postmodernists insist that all or nearly all, aspects of human psychology are completely socially determined.

Jack's life in room is largely dependent on Ma. More than a mother, Ma is Jack's protector, teacher, doctor, friend and playmate. The novel uses Jack and Ma's relationship to probe the universal nature of the mother-child bond. In the room, joy and terror dwell side by side. Emma Donoghue describes Ma and Jack's captivity as 'descent into the abyss'. Sunday Times comments on the novel as:

Both hard to put down and profoundly affecting...Donoghue has crafted a narrative that moves as breathlessly as a serial killer while convincingly portraying, with the precision of a science-fiction novel, how a boy might believe that a room is his whole world (*Web*).

Ma has quite the imagination she has in order to educate Jack and keep him busy. Jack also has great imagination. He views the objects in the room as the only ones that exist. He creates his own friends and games, his own explanations of his world. They lead a fragmented and decentred life from the outside. He celebrated it, like a postmodern man. But Ma always lamented on the loss of their real life.

Although Jack is conceived as a result of rape, Ma has no ill feelings towards her son. It was through his birth, Ma got a relief from her loneliness and sadness, giving her a reason to live. Old Nick uses Ma to satisfy his sadistic pleasures and Ma uses her body as a way to distract him from doing any kind of violence on Jack. Then Ma recognizes that Jack needs something other than her protection. Ma had to convince Jack that staying in room is dangerous for both of them. This led their way to outside. Ma's rotten tooth gives him the courage to come out into a different material space. Till then room was the determining factor of what Jack became, but it will no longer determine who he will be.

As a newcomer, he has a lot of things to tell about the outside world. He knows a lot of things, but in other ways, he hasn't a clue. In room everything was familiar and predictable. He does not understand the strange knowledge that adults seem to possess in this new world, where the borders between the private and the public spheres seem arbitrarily constructed. Jack's encounter with the outside world led to his rebirth through his act of dying in the room. On the outside in the clinic, Jack bumps into things because he has no deep space perception. He has only learned to maneuver in a very tight space, so large areas become physically confusing. Ma also reveals that she is having difficulty in coping with the transition back to a normal life.

Jack is a very curious boy. He asks questions about everything since all he really knows is room. Anything from outside is new and astounding to his young mind. This curiosity turns to strength later when he has to adapt to living in the real world and leave everything he knew behind. But he does not realize that his past was negative in anyway, as he had far less demons to deal with, than Ma. While the TV interviewer blames Ma for denying a happy childhood for Jack, Ma is sure that he had the best childhood he could, since it was with her. Ma and Jack were like the Mary and the Child caught in Devil's hands in the room. Irish Times, states that; "Emma Donoghue has stared into the abyss, honored her sources and returned with the literary equivalent of a great Madonna and Child" (*Web*).

Donoghue divides the novel into five sections—"Presents", "Unlying", "Dying", "After" and "Living". It is nearly at the end of the first part of the book called, Presents that we discover that Jack and Ma are held in a single room against their will since before Jack was born. The word, 'Presents' refers to Jack's birthday gift, but is also a homonym for 'presence' which refers obliquely to their state of being. For Ma, life in room was meaningless until Jack came. It was only a presence. But for Jack, room was his home. He treasured it even after he reached outside. In the section, Unlying; Ma 'unlies' about the outside world and in the end Ma and Jack are finally free. They are never going back to room. In the sections, Dying, After and Living; Jack's death and rebirth occurs. His old life is gone and a new one is about to begin. Donoghue deliberately starts in a small place and then enlarges the environment. It is not unlike the child emerging from the womb into the world at large.

As room had a poor environment, it was easy for Jack and Ma to cope with. But the outside world lies before them which is unable to contain in their eyes and head. In room, the threat was inside. Ma had to succumb before Old Nick; getting outside was the only solution. When they reached outside, they were followed by their 'fans' and media people. Jack and Ma eventually learn to deal with the outside world. In the outside world, most people forget about what is truly important in life. They let their lives just pass them by without even realizing it. As Jack becomes more and more accustomed to the ways of the world, his perception of room begins to change. Room seems to be smaller as Jack is exposed to the rich, broad spectrum of experiences that exist outside. By growing in the world, Jack outgrows room.

As a postmodern novel, *Room* portrays two characters, Jack and Ma entering to the Outside world from the room. But they never retreat back to the room from the outside world. For them, room is unsafe because of Old Nick; who is actually a part of the outside world. Because of the escape, Jack and Ma may or may not have to face many 'Old Nicks'. Now their future is uncertain.

While in room also, a part of outside was with them in the form of TV. They were connected to the outside world through TV. At first Jack is confused about what he sees in TV. Then he later realizes that TV is the outside world. Sometimes it shows reality and sometimes it becomes a mere reality 'show'.

As a postmodernist, Jack enjoyed his life in room, celebrating the fragmentariness and decentredness. Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory: Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* declares that:

For the postmodernist...fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In a word, the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it (81).

Ma is like a modernist. She laments on their life in room and longs for an ordered life in the outside world. In the room, saneness was not possible for Ma, without Jack. She wants to lead a free life with Jack. She succumbed before Old Nick for Jack. But she was no longer ready to suffer the suppression. In a feminist angle, we can see Ma as a powerful woman who fights against man power for an independent life.

A postmodern novel can also be analysed through a postcolonial angle. Then here, Old Nick becomes the colonizer who captures Ma and conquers her against her will. Because of his power, Ma had to suffer seven years of her life under his control. It was he who determined what Ma and Jack must eat, drink, wear and read. As every colonizer has a seed of destruction inside himself, Ma used it through Jack. With the help of Jack, Ma escaped and Old Nick was arrested.

The quotational references of Dr. Clay from different poems, the small library of Jack and Ma including *Alice in Wonderland* has great impact in the life of both Jack and Ma. Thus *Room* can be again proved as a postmodern novel because of its extensive use of other literary genres like poems, novels etc and also the visual media including Dora the explorer. Each of them helps us to analyse the characters in a subjective way, through their inner consciousness.

The concept of space is a very important aspect in this novel. First of all, it is a transition from a smaller space to a vast space both in a physical and mental way. Jack and Ma are moved from the room to the outside world. It took a lot of time for both Jack and Ma to adjust with the larger world. It was the small space of the room that enabled Old Nick to bring both Ma and Jack under his control. More than that, it was the smaller space of the wardrobe that kept Jack safe from Old Nick. The limited facilities of room made Jack think that everything in outside was wrong. The claustrophobia continues to trouble Ma in the outside. Gradually it changes to a domestic way of life. Both of them embrace the vast space and freedom of the outside world.

The initial phase of insecurity, disorientation, fragmentation, decentredness, loss of unity and claustrophobic elements are been replaced by safety, orientation, unity, coherence and domestic elements. Jack loves the life in room and do not want to escape from it. But eventually he realizes that the life in the outside world is inevitable. There comes a chance in the emergence of a sane or healthy society instead of a claustrophobic condition. Jack no more wants to retreat to the room as he is ready to face the world. It is a kind of an evolution, like how he gradually learned to walk on the stairs with his two legs instead of four legs.

What Ma tries to find is a meaningful life by escaping from the nothingness of room. She survived there due to the presence of Jack and also by responding to Old Nick in a compliant and supportive way. But the isolation, emotional and physical abuse she suffered was severe. She was like, ensnared in Old Nick's web. Jack became her savior and she got reconnected with the world.

Jack felt that he was safe in the room, just like once he was safe in his Ma's womb. It is inevitable for a child to come out of the womb to the world. But Jack came out to another womb; the room. He was happy because of the favourable atmosphere presented by Ma. But he was ignorant about the harsh reality and about the wickedness of Old Nick. He had no idea about the outside world. The womb-like room was not safe for him. Thus there occurs another rebirth of Jack in the outside world. The light, the blue sky, trees, colours, people, houses etc were a shock to Jack. The separation-anxiety in Jack pulled him back to the room. But Ma was more important for him than the room. So he decided to face the world with Ma. It becomes their celebration of resilience.

Jack's narration makes the novel appear more simple, innocent and childish. If Donoghue had chosen Ma as the narrator, then the novel would have shown the first-hand experiences of Ma; her stress,

emotions and feelings. Then the novel would have been filled with terror showing the complications and hostility of the outside world. But through the words of Jack we can understand the trauma she suffered in the room.

Our world is a miracle. As we delve deep to discover it, wonders will emerge out. It is still changing and evolving. Sometimes there occurs confusion between the real and the unreal. There is so much to explore. But man does not realize it. He is behind money and power. He does not have time for others. Jack notices this when he reaches outside. He even realizes that Ma, who was with him always in the room, tries to create her own space when she reaches outside. Maybe she wanted to enjoy doubly for she had lost seven years in the room. Just like an alien, Jack encounters the outside world as he had came from another world, his room. But what is in store for them in the outside world is a question.

Room is a universal story for both parenthood and childhood. It is mainly concerned on Ma and Jack's relationship rather than their captivity. Jack's childhood was devoid of outside and a large family. It took a lot of effort for Jack to navigate the outside world. For Ma, it was a challenge to create a world for Jack in the room while a large world was already waiting for them outside. It was a betrayal on the part of Ma, but she did not want Jack to think that he is a prisoner. Jack was growing and how long she can hide him in the wardrobe? The escape was the only solution. One day she would have to let him go on his own and for that he should get out of the room, know the world and the freedom.

A transformation or change is very important in life. Love, trust and deep relationships help a lot to overcome difficult circumstances. It was the love and close relationship between Ma and Jack made them survive in the room and also in the outside. A real family is not perfect and it will always have some problems and issues. Through love and imagination, people can adapt and overcome anything that they face in their life.

The transition of Jack from room to outside is like how a child enters into the language system described in the Psychoanalysis. As Jack enters into the world, the oneness with Ma is lost. He becomes part of the society. The five years of his life in room was both the Imaginary and Mirror stages. In the outside world, he is going through the Symbolic stage. Thus one can read this novel through myriad lenses— psychological, sociological, political etc. It can also be analysed in various theoretical ways— Postmodernism, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis, and Culture Studies. Thus in many ways the novel can be connected to any academic discipline and also in our life. It presents a unique way to talk with a fresh and expansive eye about the world in which we live.

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