



FROM ILLUSION TO ILLUMINATION – IN EMMA DONOGHUE’S ROOM

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Abstract

A right word in the right place is something one expects to find in most good literature rather than techniques. As soon as one reads a work of art it should make them feel that it is, in some sense ‘real’, Room is one such novel by Emma Donoghue, an Irish-Canadian writer who now lives in Canada was born in Dublin in 1969. Although she has tried her hand at in many genres yet she is well known for her fictional works which have been translated into more than 40 languages. Jack the protagonist of the novel is a boy of five years who does not know about the real world outside. He lives in the world which his Ma creates for him. Its only in the end of the novel that Jack comes to confront reality of the world and finds himself misfit. Donoghue has portrayed this part of the novel very emotionally and draws a positive conclusion. This paper therefore speaks of Jack’s travel from the world of illusion to the realm of illumination.

Key Words: *Illusion, Illumination, Fiction, Reality, Ignorance.*

An Irish-Canadian writer and a literary critic, Emma Donoghue’s has preferred the short story form, her series have been published in more than 30 journals. Emma also wrote for the stage, radio and screen. Although she has tried her hand at different genres, she is well known for her fictional works which have been translated into more than 40 languages.

Emma’s best work *Room* (2010), is an International Best-Seller, and was short listed for the Man Booker and Orange Prize, won the Hughes and Hughes Irish Novel of the year, the Rogers Writers Trust Fiction Prize, the Common Wealth Prize (Canada and Caribbean Region), the Canadian Bookseller’s Association Libris Awards, (Fiction Book and Author of the Year), the Forest of Reading Evergreen Award and W.H Smith Paperback of the Year Award.

Room narrated by a five-year-old named Jack. He lives with his Ma in a room, a small enclosed space. To him the Room constitutes the real world, while everything he sees on TV is completely separate and unreal. There is Old Nick the kidnapper, who supplies them with food and electricity and visits the room on most nights, while Jack sleeps in the wardrobe. Ma tries her best to keep Jack healthy, with both physical and mental exercises, a healthy diet, limited TV watching time, as well as strict body hygiene.

At a particular point of time, Ma realizes the situation and decides to open Jack’s eyes to the reality of the world. She tells Jack that much of what he sees on TV is part of the real world outside Room, which Jack finds hard to believe. They plan to escape and Ma prepares Jack for the escape. She fakes Jack having a fever and diarrhea and that night she demands that Old Nick take Jack to hospital, which Old Nick refuses to do.

However Ma is confident and makes Jack rehearse the plan, which is for Jack to jump down from the truck when it slows in traffic or stops at traffic lights, and then run for help. The next night, Ma wraps Jack in a rug and tells Old Nick that Jack has died. She convinces Old Nick to dispose of the wrapped body in a remote location. Jack follows the plan, and saves Ma with the help of the police. Both Ma and Jack are taken to hospital and treated. Old Nick is punished.

Media attracts much attention in this case and this leads Ma to a great depression. Jack lives with his grandmother and is disturbed a lot because of his new surrounding and being separated from Ma is unbearable. Eventually, Ma and Jack move into an Independent living residence. Jack gets his own room and comes to accept the drastic changes in his young life. Finally he is able to bid good-bye to the “Room”.

Ignorance is bliss goes the saying and that becomes true in the life of Jack, on a different plane. Jacks travel from the state of ignorance to bliss constitute the five parts of the novel. In the beginning Jack is happy with his world and of four things in particular; Ma, Old Nick, Room and himself. Later the truths are opened up and thirdly how they fix on their The Great Escape. The fourth part deals on how well Jack carries out the plan and the finally how life turns to be.

Jack who is happy in his room with his Ma, learns all that a boy of his age would be aware of and even more. Ma has always made sure that Jack has a normal childhood. Jack is able to do calculations, measurements, read books, sing rhymes, tell stories, play chess and checkers, karate, and also help Ma in her works. He has friends like Dora, Bunny, and Bob the



Builder. Although Jack is normal and healthy, he is not aware of the world outside. “I thought the world for us was real. The persons in TV are made up of colours.”(16). He also believes that there are magical powers that makes Old Nick bring the things needed.

When Jack comes to know of the reality of the world he is shocked and becomes confused on thinking what is real and what is unreal. When Ma says “its real store” (73) he becomes surprised as he has believed that stores were only on TV. This is the first time he hears something being real besides themselves. “That’s the most astonishing thing I ever heard” (73). From then Jack has thousands of questions to be asked, ““Nah.” Why is she tricking me? “Where would they fit?” (74). “How can TV be pictures of real things?” (76). “Dora is a drawing in TV but she’s my real friend that’s confusing.” (78).

Jack comes to know the reality around him and realizes that both he and Ma are in bondage. Ma once calls him and narrates to him the story of their life and living. Then a plan is being, planned by Ma and she calls it “The Great Escape” “Dead, Truck, Run, Police, Save Ma.” (156). At first Jack has no confidence to face the world outside, all by himself, but then it is he who carries out the plan and saves Ma. “We did it,” “well, you did it, really.” (192)

Finally when both of them are set free from their slavery, the taste of freedom is different for both. Ma is all happy and strong. “We don’t have to do the same as we used to,” says Ma, “We can do what we like,” (212) but then Jack is unable to accept the reality and has to face many difficulties. He catches his FIRST COLD and he also feels that Ma is moving too fast, “Sweetie--- “ Ma never called me that before” (244), “In outside the time’s all mixed up. Ma keeps saying, “slow down, Jack” and “hang on,” and “finish up now,” and “hurry up, Jack,” she says Jack a lot so I’ll know it’s me she’s talking to not persons else” (245).

In the end Jack and Ma move to live an independent life. Jack makes a last visit to the Room and is now able to totally disconnect himself from it. Now both Ma and Jack have separate rooms and Jack has started to live a life which is much more real and meaningful. “Good-bye-room.”I wave up at Skylight. “Say good-bye,” I tell Ma. “Good-bye, Room.” “I look back one more time. It’s like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door.” (401).

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