

# Contesting Captive Spaces: A Reading of Emma Donoghue's *Room*

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**Abstract-** *Experiencing space in its entire manifold is extremely indispensable to human existence. Our everyday life, social and personal relations and idea of the self are somehow defined by space. However, owing to its ambiguous nature space might not always add a smooth dimension to one's life. Analysing the mesh of complexity and anxiety lying underneath the common understanding of space, an attempt is made in this paper to study Emma Donoghue's Room. Through an examination of its central characters, Ma and Jack, the essay seeks to highlight the trauma borne out of changing spaces.*

**Keyword-** *Space; Emma Donoghue; Room*

*"There is something truly terrifying, or at least rather frustrating, in being lost. Not to know where one is, or perhaps, not to know where one is relative to where one would like to be is a thoroughly unpleasant feeling". (Tally 2)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The course of a human being's life is indispensably characterised by changes; changes which are borne out of multiple experiences at varied points of time. In the words of Jay A. Mancini and Karen A. Roberto, the process of human development is "awash in a sea of biology and heredity, of learning and socialization, of experience and opportunities, of failure and success, and of continuity and change" (Mancini 3). However, change as Robbie Gilligan suggests, "... arises not just from crisis, nor just from conscious intention or effort: change may also arise from chance." (Gilligan 15), and therefore, might produce a sense of anxiety in an individual who might or might not always be prepared to embrace it in its entirety. Also, at forethought, unless a change is not absolutely, at least to a degree assures some kind of benefit, there is more often than not an inclination towards resistance.

The anxiety and resistance towards a change further intensify when it involves a spatial shift; especially from a familiar to an unfamiliar space. Since human beings apart from being social animals are as Robert T. Tally Jr. believes also 'spatial animals', that is, they operate in space as much as they operate within their social environment, "use space, make sense of their various spatial and social relations" (Tally 16), their familiarity to a place (space) especially when inhabited for a long time, usually leads to what environment psychology has termed as "Place attachment"<sup>1</sup>. And when one suffers a separation

from the place which had been a site of his or her emotional attachment, the kind of psychological complexity and anxiety which arises is what the present paper seeks to highlight. Through an analysis of Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010) and its central characters, Jack and Ma, the paper attempts to bring out the trauma which follows from an undesired spatial change.

## 2. DONOGHUE'S ROOM

In April 2008, when news of an Austrian man, Joseph Fritzl having illegally imprisoned his daughter in the basement of his house for twenty four years, sexually abusing her and fathering seven children appeared, the world was taken by storm<sup>2</sup>. The Canada based Irish writer, Emma Donoghue who has "often written fiction based on real people and events"<sup>3</sup> too was seized by the headlines

Identity Theories." *Architectural Science Review* ( March 1 2007): 1-15. Web. 17 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Fritzl Case- On 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1984, eighteen year old Elizabeth Fritzl was awoken by her father who needed her to help him install a heavy steel door. After the two of them had finished installing the door, Elizabeth was grabbed from behind and rendered unconscious. When she regained her senses she found herself in the dark, handcuffed to a metal pole. She soon realised that she was in a prison, a prison that was designed for her by her own father, Josef Fritzl. This was Elizabeth's descent into a nightmare, comprising continual rapes, beatings and enslavement which would last for twenty four long years. Elizabeth was discovered in 2008. See, Cawthorne, Nigel. *Against Their Will: Sadistic Kidnappers and the Courageous Stories of Their Innocent Victims*. Berkeley: Ulysses Press. 2012. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Donoghue's third novel, *Slammerkin* (2000) for example is inspired by a 1763 murder that took place in Welsh. Her sixth novel, *The Sealed Letter* (2008) is based on a scandalous divorce

<sup>1</sup> Place attachment is defined as the feelings we develop towards the places that are highly familiar to us. See, Hauge, Ashild Lappegard. "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three

and the outcome showed up two years later, in the form of her novel, *Room* (2010). Given the rather shocking feature of this case where a father dug out a dungeon for captivating and sexually abusing his own daughter and where three out of seven of her children were brought up by him with his wife who was unaware of anything that was happening at the basement, the case came across as one of the worst crimes in recent history. Therefore, Donoghue has often been criticized of 'sensationalism' for being inspired by a sensitive case like the Fritizls' and *Room* is considered her most controversial work. The author acknowledges that the headline about the Fritizls had indeed triggered the idea for the novel but all she "borrowed from the Fritzl case was the notion of a woman who bears a child to her captor and manages to protect his childhood" and "the truth is it's about none of these real people"<sup>4</sup> (Back Bay Readers'). Also, she insists that it was not Elizabeth Fritzl but the five year old Felix, her youngest son to whom Donoghue was more drawn to. The idea of a child, emerging into the modern world, "as if he was a Martian, having heard things about the outside but never known it was fully real" was what had truly impelled her to write the novel. (Medley).

However, apart from being a story of a five year old child's newly formed insights about the world, the novel also highlights certain paradigms of human existence. The most important of them being, the inclination one has towards his or her home. Observing the importance of one's first abode, Gaston Bachelard in his book, *The Poetics of Space* (1958) asserts that "[...] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty" (Bachelard 4). Executing perhaps what Victor Shklovsky propagates in his essay, "Art as Technique", this 'beauty' albeit differently is brought forth by Donoghue through Jack's story. In Shklovsky's views, "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar'" and help the audience in witnessing things differently (Shklovsky). Hence, although the importance of a 'home' in one's life cannot be undervalued, yet the same characteristics of a "sound proofed cell" is what got ingrained in Jack's consciousness.

### 3. THE PLAY OF THE FAMILIAR AND THE UNFAMILIAR SPACES

'Home' as a space is essentially subjective in nature and hence largely indefinable. Various factor including, personal experiences, familiarity and emotional attachment, both with people and other tangible entities,

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that made headlines in 1864 Britain and her latest novel, *Frog Music* (2014) is based on the murder of Jenny Bonnet, a woman who was shot dead in San Francisco in 1876. See <<http://www.emmadonoghue.com/books/novels.html>>

<sup>4</sup> *Room* was also mistaken to be a novel about Jaycee Dugard who was kidnapped in 1991 and discovered in 2009. See, "Back Bay Readers' Picks Reading Group Guide to Room." 3 March 2011. *Emma Donoghue.com*. Web. 12 March 2013.

memories, all contribute to one's understanding of the space called, 'home'. Also, as David Morley while quoting Tim Putman, in his work, *Home Territories* (2000) notes, "[...] research into the meaning of home "repeatedly throws up the same basic terms: privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort and control" (Morley 26), even if these terms are interpreted by different people, in varying circumstances, in quite different ways". However, he further argues that "If home is an inevitably problematic space, still to be without a home in a home- centred culture is a traumatic experience" (Morley 26). It is this 'traumatic experience', complicated further by the characters' unique experience of being former captives which is at the heart of Donoghue's novel. Narrated by its child narrator, Jack, the novel explores how one's 'home' becomes a determinant of one's identity. Born and raised in an eleven by eleven room (a garden shed) and not having known the existence of any other human being other than him, his mother and Old Nick- the man responsible for abducting Ma and continually raping her, the five year old boy finds himself 'lost' when he steps into the 'Outside'. The 'Outside' had been for Jack a place which is only in the television and the five years of his life, he had no more believed in its reality than he had in the characters he read about in books like, *Alice in Wonderland*, "Ships are just TV and so is the sea [...] Forests are TV and also jungles and deserts and streets and skyscrapers and cars. Animals are TV [...] Boys are TV but they kind of look like me, the me in Mirror that isn't real either, just a picture" (Donoghue 66).

Until his fifth birthday, when his mother reveals the existence of a world outside, *Room* had been both the 'home' and the 'world' for Jack, it had been the place where he had lived all his life with his Ma and his friends, Bed, Wardrobe, Table, and Bath. Therefore, after the 'Great Escape' when a jarring new world is thrust upon him or more appropriately when like his 'friend' Alice, he falls like into a new space, Jack perhaps suffers from what Heidegger has called a 'sense of uncanny' which has been interpreted by Tally as "fundamentally a sense of not being 'at home' in the world" (Tally 47).

In psychoanalytical terms, "the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us once very familiar" (Freud 1). Building on the German words, 'heimlich'<sup>5</sup> and 'unheimlich'<sup>6</sup>, Freud opined that "not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening...Something must be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny" (Freud 195). And lately, following closely on Freud's ideas of the familiar

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<sup>5</sup> Heimlich- meaning "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home". See, Freud, Sigmund. *Writings on Art and Literature*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997. *Google Book Search*. Web. 12 March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Unheimlich- "unhomely". See, Freud, Sigmund. *Writings on Art and Literature*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997. *Google Book Search*. Web. 12 March 2016.

and unfamiliar, Nicholas Royle in the introduction to his book, *The Uncanny* (2003) notes,

[...] *it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home* (Royle1).

Thus, borrowing from Freud and Royle, it would be apt to suggest that it is not the complete unfamiliarity or alienation with the outside world which causes Jack's anxiety, instead it stems from him being familiar to the outside through books and television but never having believed it to be the natural order of things. Perhaps, the major reason of unfamiliarity arises from the familiar yet unfamiliar physical space around him. Although, while revealing the truth about their captivity Ma familiarises him with the larger world outside Room yet it becomes immensely difficult for him to be able to cope with its vastness. Consequently, he keeps banging into things once he is outside. In Room, despite all efforts from Ma to help her son have a normal growth, the meagre movements across a restricted area of eleven by eleven dimensions do produce certain disabilities in the boy, gauging space being one of them and which is identified only when their tiny world opens up to a larger one. Amidst all scarcity Ma had tried, sometimes by feeding him extra of whatever little they had to provide Jack with more nutrition, sometimes by rearranging things to make more space to allow him more movement but unfortunately enough, these proved insufficient to meet the needs of a growing child. One instance which becomes telling of this is his inability to climb stairs. In spite of the 'Phys Ed' regime that his Ma made him follow religiously and which sometimes would require them to "[...] lift Table upside down onto Bed and Rocker on her with Rug over the both" (Donoghue 18), Jack never had the chance to use stairs and as a result of which when outside he "[...] goes up and down stairs on all fours [...]" (Donoghue 269).

Analyzing the anxieties and complexities of human existence Tally argues that the world we inhabit is not "of our own making" but it is our existence which "requires us to shape our world" (Tally 66). In other words no space that we inhabit is fundamentally familiar to us but it is our existence which demands a constant interaction with it in order familiarise ourselves with it and give it shape and meaning. Similarly, Room was not a world of Jack or Ma's making but was shaped so by their interaction with it over the years in order for them to exist. After they escape, the world that they had shaped for themselves is left behind whereas the new world they find themselves in has been untouched by their existence. And since this new world has not been shaped by them but by

others, it leaves them with a sense of anxiety, which Tally explains, "comes from not knowing whether one's actions are correct [...]" (Tally 65). Hence, apart from the unfamiliarity to its vastness, the 'Outside' also scares him because it is a place where he has to remember his 'manners' which others abide by, has to be careful of not disturbing a person next door and where he and his Ma cannot share the same bed. His insists, "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" (Donoghue 392).

Emphasising on the subjectivity of the idea of home, Vincent Descombes argues, "The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without any need for long explanations" (Descombes qtd. in Morley17). And when in the Outside, Jack has to constantly; sometimes with help from his Ma and sometimes independently struggle to make sense of what others are trying to convey and struggle to make others understand what he means. For instance, unlike other children of his age he is not familiar with the five finger handshake and therefore to Dr Clay's "Gimme five?" Jack can only wonder, "[...] I'm not going to give him my fingers I need them for me." (Donoghue 224). Hence, it is not a just a challenge for him to gauge space but also language. This elucidates that the spaces Jack inhabits after the escape is anything but 'home' to him. Perhaps it is then not without reasons that it is the room in the clinic, 'Room Number Seven' which Jack likes the most to be in when in the Outside. He constantly seeks to be alone with his mom in the clinic room because it is the only place where he does not have to face these challenges or has his Ma to help him with them. Yearning to go back to the womb where it was just him and his Ma, he frets, "What I'd like best is to be in Room but I don't think that's in the world" (Donoghue 310).

Paradoxically, the Outside, a space which is apparently familiar to Ma appears no less unfamiliar than it does to her son after the escape. Ma, like Jack albeit differently has to struggle to make herself understood. And 'the reasoning of others' is not something which she can follow without straining herself. The constant questions on her motherhood: both by the media who is hungry for all the horrific details of her captivity and by the concerned medical authorities leave her contemplating the validity of her freedom. While in captivity she had the freedom to bring up her child unquestionably, outside she even has to justify her actions of keeping Jack alive in the unhealthy atmosphere of her prison. It is perhaps this kind of a treatment which often handicaps the survivors of captivity against integrating into the larger society leading them more 'destroyed' than 'rehabilitated'. One of the most significant episodes in this regard is the interview with the media. Questions like, "Now, you'd come to what some experts are calling a strange decision, to teach Jack that the

world measured eleven foot by eleven, and everything else-every-thing he saw on TV. Or heard about from his handful of books- was just fantasy. Did you feel bad about deceiving him?" (Donoghue 297) fall so heavy on her that she collapses under their weight. Unable to come to terms with the questions raised on her motherhood, she gives up the battle she had been fighting for all these years and consequently takes an overdose of her medicines. J Allan in 'Mother blaming: A Covert Practice in Therapeutic Intervention puts, "When a woman perceives herself as not having achieved the standard of what it means to be a good mother, regardless of how the role is defined, the result is feelings of guilt, blame, shame, and marginalization" (Allan qtd.in Walls 8). And because she is made to feel guilty of not achieving the standards of a 'good mother', quite ironically, Ma contemplates suicide not during her days in captivity but after she apparently finds her freedom. More than anything else, her own father's apprehension in accepting Jack as his grandson betrays her understanding of the outside as her home. It is not Jack alone then who is not at home in the Outside. If the five year old boy has to fight his disabilities at gauging physical space and language, then Ma too has to fight greater battles and in these she is as unarmed as her son. Therefore, just as Jack prefers to be in Room Number Seven, Ma decides to shift in a new apartment. In doing so, she probably tries to replicate a space similar to Room, a space which she would have to share only with her son, a space where the occurrence of things would be relatively familiar and better manageable and a space which would be a home away from home for Jack. Thereby also addressing his concern, "If Room wasn't our home, does that mean we don't have one?" (Donoghue 259).

#### 4. "ROOM": MARKER OF IDENTITY

Space is a human scale which defines the nature of our relationship to the environment and to the society as whole. "Where do you live? Figures amongst the key questions which momentarily arrest the narratives of identity, how we answer determining our place within a grid of co-ordinates which plot social subjectivity" (Murphy 103). The shifting spaces also breed in identity crisis in Jack. Since the new space that emerges in his life drag him towards displacement, space and identity becomes contested terrains for him. He contemplates his identity in relation to his relationships, "[...] maybe I'm a human but I'm a me-and-Ma as well. I don't know a word for us two. Roomers?" (Donoghue 342).

In psychoanalytical studies it has been well established that the role of the mother as the first caretaker is central to a child's development and the formation of his identity<sup>7</sup>. However, identity is not formed only just

'internally', that is through one's mind but also "through the body's interaction with the outside world" (Hauge 4). And since for the first five years of his life, he had not come in contact with any other human being other than his mother and the 'outside world' for Jack was everything that that was within Room, it is his Ma and Room that over the years become the strongest markers of his identity. This aspect of Jack's understanding of self<sup>8</sup> becomes powerfully apparent after the escape because it is then that his perception regarding who he is and where and to whom he belongs suffers an impediment.

Elucidating on the development of a parent-child relationship, Kuczynski, Pitman and Mitchell stress that, "[...] parents and children serve as environmental contexts for each other. They are not merely physical entities for each other, but mutually embody meanings and representations that evolve as they interpret and evaluate one another's behaviour". (Kuczynski, Pitman and Mitchell 154) Throughout the novel, the reader gets glimpses of Jack's understanding of his mother and himself as one single unit, his body and mind being part of hers. Phrases like, "It's weird to have something that's mine-not- Ma's", "[...] my cells are made out of her cells so I'm kind of hers" (Donoghue 12), "[...] I belong to Ma" (Donoghue 261), "I didn't know it was hers-not-mine" (Donoghue 275) and his strangely strong attachment with his mother's fallen tooth emphasize the degree to which Jack believed in there being no difference between the two. Hinde and Stevenson suggest, "When two individuals interact on successive occasions over time, each interaction may affect subsequent ones [...] their relationship includes not only what they do together, but the perceptions, fears, expectations, and so on that each has about the other and about the future course of the relationship" (Hinde and Stevenson qtd.in Lollis 16) but over the years, there had been no such 'evolvment' in Jack's relationship with his mother which would prove things differently to him. As a result of this, Jack had always envisioned the 'future course of their relationship' to remain unchanged. The reasons for this could partly be explained as the absence of any other human being in his life ever since he was born and partly as Ma's conscious attempt at feeding in him the idea that she alone brought him into the world. For Jack, Ma had always embodied the same meaning, that is, a whole of which he is a part. The absence of another human being and Ma's efforts at completely negating the concept of a father from his life have such effects on him that he grows up identifying himself only through his Ma.

Also, as Mary Grace Elliott borrowing from Lacan's mirror stage theory, observes that similar to Lacan's depiction of the infant who when looking at

<sup>7</sup> Identity- can be described as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual. See Hauge, Ashild Lappégard. "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories." *Architectural Science Review*( March 1 2007): 1-15. Web. 17 February 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Self- is used in more a abstract context. However self and identity are often used synonymously. See, Hauge, Ashild Lappégard. "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories." *Architectural Science Review*( March 1 2007): 1-15. Web. 17 February 2016.

himself and his mother in the mirror, gets insecure at the appearance of the third person, Jack too suffers from an insecurity when in the Outside his mother's attention is diverted by other things (Elliott 76). In context to the relation between a mother and an infant, psychoanalytical studies on trauma have often associated the function of the mother as that of a protective shield for the infant. Breaches in the mother's role as this protective shield leave the infant in a state of trauma. In 'The Concept of Cumulative Trauma', Masood Khan discusses two typical instances of these breaches; first, when the mother's personal needs and conflicts begin intruding and second, when the infant suffers a separation from the mother. Therefore, Jack's trauma to a large extent can be attributed to Ma's failure at being the protective shield. Once they escape, Jack too suffers a separation from his mother, when he longer remains the sole recipient of his mother's attention. As the doctor at the clinic clarifies about the separation anxiety, "Still, it's not just the two of you anymore, is it?" (Donoghue 260). And a literal separation comes with Ma's attempt at killing herself, thereby adding to his trauma,

*Ma sings me songs but there's no more  
of them anymore. She smashed my head  
on the table in Room Number Seven. She  
took the bad medicine, I think she was  
too tired to play anymore, she was in a  
hurry to get to Heaven so she didn't  
wait, why didn't she wait for me?*  
(Donoghue 320)

Having stepped out from his cocoon, he discovers at every step that a world is a harsh place to live in, where people are strangers and bees actually sting. The bee here becomes a powerful metaphor for the world. The moment Jack starts appreciating the beauty of the 'outside'; of enjoying the sun and the wind, the bee sting exposes him to the bitter truth that the world is not always friendly and accepting. Also, he is stung by the bee when he does not have Ma around him, thereby teaching him that amidst the harshness of the world he has to stand all by himself. It is indeed the 'survival of the fittest'. And it leaves him declaring, "Ma said we'd be free but this doesn't feel like free" (Donoghue 320)

Apart from the separation from his mother, the separation from Room is equally traumatic because it was only in Room that his perception of his Ma and him as one unit had fostered. Hence, it is the separation from Room which in turn separates him from his Ma and challenges his identity. As mentioned earlier, Jack's home, that is Room is not only a physical location but also the site of his emotional attachment with everything with which he interacted within that space, including Ma, the only other human being. This attachment over the five years had perhaps changed into what across various disciplines is known as 'place identity'<sup>9</sup>. And which is realised only

when he suffers a separation from this place. Commenting on how a place shapes one's identity, Hauge writes, Identity develops as children learn to differentiate from people around them, and in the same way, place-identity develops as a child learns to see her or himself as distinct from, but related to, the physical environment. Among the first determinants are those rooted in the child's experience with toys, clothes and rooms. The home is the environment of primary importance, followed by the neighbourhood and the school (Hauge 5).

Unfortunately for the first five years of his life, Jack had been deprived both of neighbourhood and school. All that informs his relation with his physical environment is the one that is determined through him being in Room. Consequently, being "Roomers" is the only identity that he can think for his Ma and himself.

Further, owing to the strict gender roles he has to adhere to in the society, Jack experiences a dual identity crisis. For instance, owing to his long hair, from the first human he meets after the escape to his grandmother; all initially mistake him to be a girl. Being a boy, he is also discouraged into carrying his favourite Dora bag. When Jack is attracted to a Dora bag pack, his uncle tries to persuade his wife into not getting a one that is in pink and suggests that he gets a Spiderman bag instead. In their essay, "Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation", Bussey and Bandura argue that,

From the moment of birth, when infants are categorized as either male or female, many of the social influences that impinge on them are determined by their gender [...] For most children, both their physical and social environments are highly gendered. Names, clothing, and decorations of infants' rooms are all influenced by their categorization as either female or male. Boys are adorned in blue and girls in pink, Boys are attired in rugged trousers, girls in pastel jeans or skirts. They are given different hairstyles as well. Children come to use differential physical attributes, hair styles and clothing as indicators of gender. (Bussey and Bandura 28)

They further add that, "Much early role learning occurs in play [...] Parents stereotypically stock their sons' rooms with educational materials, machines, vehicles, and sports equipment and their daughters' rooms with baby dolls, doll houses, domestic items, and floral furnishings [...] Thus, the gender-linked play materials arranged for children channels their spontaneous play into traditionally feminine or masculine roles" (Bussey and Bandura 28). However, since Jack had never been forced into learning any of these gender norms, time and again being mistaken for a girl causes such anxiety in him that he decides to put an end to all conjectures by cutting his hair. His long hair was a result of his five years of stay in Room, where his mother did not have enough resources to cut his locks but the Outside provides ample resources

<sup>9</sup> Place identity- described as the individual's incorporation of place into the larger context of self. See, Hauge, Ashild

Lappegard. "Identity and Place: A Critical Comparison of Three Identity Theories." *Architectural Science Review* (March 1 2007): 1-15. Web. 17 February 2016.

which even though unwillingly he has to avail to change himself in order to fit in the world outside Room.

Also, Jack more than once dreams of tooth and hair, “Me and Ma in the sea, I’m tangled in her hair, I’m all knotted up and drowning-” (Donoghue 321). In his book, *The Nature and Functions of Dreaming* (2011), Ernest Hartmann states that, “A dream may certainly incorporate events that occur the day or days before the dream (“the day residue”). However, the dream does not simply repeat the material, but changes it and weaves it into an ongoing story” (Hartmann 24) and he further suggests that, “[...] dreaming functions in integrating new experience into memory, guided by emotion, which is what makes up our personal sense of meaning and sense of self” (Hartmann 112). Therefore, this dream perhaps echoes Jack’s distress at having gained the knowledge of Ma’s first child- the baby girl who died of strangulation. This in turn functions as awareness that unnecessary attachment to his Ma’s body could also be fatal and thereby compels him to cut his hair. And nearly when Jack is making attempts at surviving on his own, by a stroke of chance, he also loses his Ma’s fallen tooth. The tooth for Jack is not barely a fallen part of his Ma’s body, but also an object which helps him cling to the faith of his Ma being inseparable from him. This in turn helps him sustain amidst all the chaos but the only way Jack perhaps can overcome with this identity crisis and evolve one of his own is by shedding off parts of his Ma; his hair and the fallen tooth, which he had been carrying with himself. However, he reconciles with the loss he has to incur in the process, “I think maybe I did swallow him by accident. Maybe he’s not going to slide out in my poo, maybe he’s going to be hiding inside me in a corner forever.” (Donoghue 384)

Perhaps it would be unjust to critique in a manner which excludes the identity crisis which Ma undergoes after the escape. Ever since Jack was born, the only identity she had known for herself was being Jack’s Ma but after the escape she has to tussle between being the nineteen year old girl who had been abducted from the streets and the twenty six years old mother who has to protect the childhood of her son in a world that labels him the ‘BONSAI BOY’. In Room she had to protect Jack only from her captor but outside there are innumerable people and countless unpredictable events against which he needs to be protected. On one hand Ma wants to make up for all the lost years and reconnect with the lost ties, on another, she has to help her son foster new ones. Since, as Kuczynski, Pitman and Mitchell suggest, “parents and children, as agents, have separate and potentially conflicting needs, perspectives, and goals. However they are also continually embedded as agents within the unity and interdependence of their shared relationship” (Kuczynski, Pitman and Mitchell 156), it becomes immensely difficult for Ma to strike a balance between her own needs and those of her son. While it is not easy for her to grapple with a world that has moved on and had stopped looking for her, it is even more difficult for her to help

Jack in enlarging his circle of trust especially when being around other humans is not a very pleasant feeling to him. These ‘conflicting needs’ pose greater threats after the escape because in Room, unlike Outside, there was almost no interaction with any other environment or social elements. And therefore, other than the rare occasions when she would go into bouts of depression, Ma and Jack were embedded strongly in their interdependence. However, Outside offers more choices to Ma and consequently, her needs which after Jack’s birth largely remained dormant begin to find outlets for fulfilment. She explains her anxieties to Jack, “I keep messing up. I know you need me to be your mama but I’m having to remember how to be me as well at the same time” (Donoghue 277).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) argues that there exists a “[...] universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” and as a result of which “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality is designated as different from “ours” (54). Although Said’s work is essentially a critique of imperialism, his observations hold pertinence to this study because the anxieties and complexities which the protagonists of Donoghue’s novel undergo are largely the outcome of this familiarity and unfamiliarity of spaces. For instance, just as for Ma, Room is her abductor’s ‘territory’, for Jack, the Outside is not a space which is theirs; his and his Ma’s and hence the entire complexity of the situation.

Also, when one considers a particular space as one’s own or ‘ours’, then most often than not it imparts characteristics of a home to the individual or group. As discussed, the ambiguity associated with a space like ‘home’ leaves it open for various interpretations, both in terms of it being a physical and a mental space but as Bachelard suggests that in some way or the other, whether in ‘reality or virtuality’, “[...] all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (Bachelard 5). However, the time taken to grant the importance of home to a new habitat varies with individuals and their social interaction and it is only after a change that one usually discovers the inclination and recognition associated with the older habitat. Bachelard further suggests, “An entire past comes to dwell in a new house” (Bachelard 5). Therefore, it might not always be easy to make home of a new space but as human existence demands, one gradually learns not to resist the change. And this universal behavioural pattern is brought forth through Ma’s and Jack’s story.

Ma was put in Room against her will but despite all her detestation for that space, she gradually developed various mechanisms to make home out of her prison. Before Jack was born she would for example leave the television on all day to drive away her loneliness. This in a way probably gave her an illusion of being surrounded by

more people, an essence of the space she was in before she was abducted. And, after Jack was born, Ma tried all possible ways of turning the same prison into a home for Jack too, a kind that she had been brought up in. To a large degree, this was achieved by strongly clinging on to her older habits which included narrating the same stories to Jack that she had heard as a child, playing with him the same games she had played and teaching him the same prayers she had once said with her mother. This not only helped Ma in providing a 'normal' childhood to her son but also in reliving the memories of her old home, in the absence of which existence in the new space probably would have been unimaginable. Later, when they escape and there is yet again a change of space, Ma assumes it to be homecoming. However, as discussed, when one experiences a spatial change, it is unlikely that one does not carry the essence or recognition associated with the old space to the new one. For example, although Ma expects to be at home in the Outside yet amidst all the chaos created by her sudden escape, she realises that, "When our world was eleven by eleven foot square it was easier to control" (Donoghue 295). Perhaps it is only after she moves to a new space that Ma discovers her need for the essence that Room had provided and hence despite being in complete denial of the same she decides to create a similar space by shifting to a new house; separate from her parents'. The way she had tried to replicate the Outside in Room, she later tries to replicate Room in the Outside, thereby providing evidence that, "[...] everyone goes home in the end" (Donoghue 239) or more appropriately, to what feels like home.

On the other hand, while Ma was put in Room against her will, Jack was put in the Outside against his. And just as in order to survive Ma had tried to make herself at home in Room, Jack gradually tries to be at home in the Outside. However, the struggle is not the same because with the first spatial shift unlike Ma's, Jack's world does not narrow down but broadens up. Emphasizing on the importance of one's first dwelling, Bachelard puts, "It is the human being's first world. Before he is "cast into the world," [...] man is laid in the cradle of the house [...] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (Bachelard 7). And so, the change perhaps falls relatively heavier on Jack especially because he was yet not prepared to move out from his 'cradle'. Having led a life oblivious of everything else, it becomes immensely difficult for him to replicate the protection and warmth of Room in the outside. Nonetheless, amidst all the challenges, Jack in his own little ways tries to hold very strongly the essence of Room within him. This would sometimes show in his decision to read the same books which his mother used to read out to him in Room, in his request to his grandmother to bathe with him in his Ma's absence, in his insistence on keeping Rug in their new house and most importantly in his desire to go to Room, "Just to visit for one minute" (Donoghue 395)

Despite their distinctive experience of captivity what becomes apparent through Ma's and Jack's story is that without change there is no development, as, Mancini and Roberto put, "In some respects, development and change are synonymous" (Mancini and Roberto 3) and therefore, like any other change, a spatial change also demands acceptance. The acceptance usually comes in the form of a comingling of the past and the present. In a way *Room* narrates the story of everybody, that is to suggest that it is not barely a tale of captivity or a fictional account of a sensational criminal case but more appropriately a tale about changes. Indeed, the consequences of change intensify when the experience under consideration is that of captivity. Perhaps every survivor like Ma and Jack undergoes these complexities, anxiety and trauma which are resultant of spatial changes before, during and after their captivity but as the author herself puts, *Room* is a very universal story of how we start in a very small world-literally, Room as womb- and then we move into the world of our childhood and we gradually move into the wider world" (book club).

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