

**People Democratic Republic of Algeria**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**M'Hamed Bougara University –Boumerdes**  
**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
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**Trauma and Homelessness in Emma Donnoghue's *Room* (2010)**

**A Thesis Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Master's Degree in Anglophone Literatures and Civilizations**

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**Academic Year: 2022-2023**

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made whenever necessary to the work of other researchers.

June, 2023

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved family for their moral support and encouragement not only through this study but also throughout my life stages.

## **Acknowledgement**

Praise to Allah for his blessing so this study comes into completion.

The deepest gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Kahina ENTEGHAR for her permanent and valuable guidance, enhancing feedback and the time she devoted to me during the period of my research.

I would also like to thank the members of panel of examiners, Mrs. Fatma DIABI and Dr. Hanane BESSAMI, for reading and scrutinizing my thesis. Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has helped and contributed to the accomplishment of this thesis.

## Abstract

This study analyzes trauma in *Room* (2010) . By the Irish – Canadian novelist Emma Donoghue and looks into its causes and impacts on the characters. It delves into the writer’s depiction of a traumatic representation of crucial events and how they impact the characters psychologically and existentially. By relaying on a number of theories and concepts including Cathy Caruth’s *Trauma and the Possibility of History*, Slavoj Zizek’s *Violence*, Sigmund Freud’s “Morning and Melancholia”, and Martin Heidegger’s “Building Dwelling Thinking.” This paper aims at analyzing how Donoghue demonstrates the psychological aspects of trauma and how it may lead to serious existential crisis of belonging and dwelling in the world. The study concludes that trauma plays an important role in shaping the characters’ identities and creates an issue of finding one’s place in the world.

**Key Words:** Trauma, Psychological Persecution, Violence, Melancholia, Homelessness.

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## General Introduction

In everyday life, people exhibit signs of stress. The past cannot be erased from the memories. Hence, individuals endure trauma that obstructs their way of living. In psychology, trauma refers to a series of side effects suffered by human beings due to atrocious circumstances. Mental health issues can be a reflection of past traumatic acts. The concept of suffering is a disorderly experience that “profoundly impacts the selves’ emotional organization and the perception of the external world” (Balaev 360). Survivors experience crucial memories of the accident “the process of remembering and as the event harbored within the unconscious that causes splitting of the ego or dissociation” (361). This means that pain causes lack of confidence and loss in victim’s behavior. Traumatized people expose intrusive thoughts and fear in addition to struggles between their internal and external nature. Furthermore, trauma’s impact lasts with person, and bounces back on his physical and mental health “trauma can be single event or multiple events compound overtime” (Sweeny et al, 2016). This quote shows that signals of stress are revealed through time after they were dormant in the victim’s unconscious.

Psychologists delve into the mind of the survivors and arrived at various types of psychological tensions that based on nature of the incidents. To begin with, acute trauma that is a consequence of a single event, chronic trauma is a result of repeated violence, and finally complex trauma that is called a revelation of multiple severe acts. Thinkers ask the question what are the factors that cause trauma? to answer this inquiry, they suggest that sexual and domestic violence, captivity, childhood abuse and war are highly related to the concept of stress in addition to host factors such as age “the elderly patience response to trauma” (Wardle 745). Also, gender plays an important role in how

women experience headaches due to worry, while men may feel isolated and worthless (745).

The Theory of trauma has been conducted by Sigmund Freud. His research on this issue is regarded as essential contribution to psychological studies. This theory is also present in literary works. Cathy Caruth is a major figure to the development of literary trauma theory. She examines the sense of stress through literary texts. Moreover, literature focuses on the field of trauma. Several authors develop and examine this aspect in their books. Some most outstanding examples are Susanna Kaysen's *Girl Interrupted*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Virginia Wolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

The Canadian writer Emma Donoghue deals with the concept of trauma in her novel *Room*. This study seeks to analyze the factors of trauma in Donoghue's *Room* in terms of social, cultural, and individual aspects. Additionally, it examines the feeling of non-belonging and loss of the sensation of homeliness that is endured by the character of Ma . Moreover, this thesis studies the jeopardy of stress, alongside it's serious effects and consequences.

Emma Donoghue is a contemporary Irish Canadian playwright, literary historian, and award winning writer. The novelist has published several fiction works such as: *Landing* (2007), *Astray* (2012), *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), and her latest fiction *Haven* (2022). A number of her works have been transformed into films and movies such as her fiction *The Wonder* (2016) along with *Room* (2010), the chosen novel for this study. She wins numerous awards for her works including the Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Emma Donoghue's novel *Room* (2010) is a famous novel, the story has been adapted into the big screen, where the leading actress Brie Larson has won an academy award for her performance as the character of Ma. The story is narrated from the perspective of a

five year old boy and revolves around the bond between a mother and her son. The first part of the book discusses the isolated life that Ma lives in a room after being kidnapped and sexually abused by Old Nick for seven years as a result she gives birth to Jack. The events describe how the protagonist raises her son, and despite their seclusion, Ma teaches Jack about the external world. However, they both manage to escape from their captivity. The second part depicts the aftermath of their survival, demonstrating the struggle of Ma and Jack to cope with the exterior world. Nonetheless, the characters overcome the traumatic and the atrocious events at the end of the story and Jack becomes ready to leave his attachment to room, and he returns back to that chamber to say goodbye for the last time.

The choice of the topic of the research carries a great substance and importance. The novel discusses the different aspects of trauma. The study is also motivated by the belief that Donoghue has been triggered by the true case of Fitzgerald's family . Also, this topic has been chosen to highlight the importance of mental health and its' series effect on human beings. Moreover, this investigation has been consigned because of the great passion of both psychology field and literary work.

*Room* is a very important literary work that delves into various issues surrounding traumatic circumstances. Donoghue has succeeded in addressing these themes in the novel, prompting numerous reviews and examinations of her literary pieces. The novelist garnered widespread acclaim and sparked significant interest among scholars, inspiring theses critics to tackle her work from different perspectives and approaches.

Himmah Sofiana Murshyidah, in her article "Ma Anxiety in Emma Donnoghue's *Room*" (2013) focuses on the experience of anxiety by Ma. Using the theory of personality by Sigmund Freud and adapting the concept of stress. This study explains

how the protagonist develops symptoms of anxiety because of rape and abduction. Moreover, she argues about the growth of stress that delves into Ma's internal mind, between her id, super ego, and her ego. Murshyidah states that "shaping of anxiety in Emma Donoghue's *Room* is divided into three parts, reality, moral, neurotic anxiety. Those three things come from Ma's behavior in the novel which is told by Jack's point of view" (3). This means that the protagonist reveals three types of anxiety. Moreover, Ma's character carries signs of obsessive compulsive disorder "the fear of being contaminated by germs or dirt or contaminating others" (3). This demeanor shows the struggle in her daily life. Although this study examines the different types of stress due to traumatic events, the critic does not shed light on how the character adopts defense mechanisms to cope with her previous experiences and her inner conflicts.

Vonny Ellina Watli Lukianto, in her thesis "The Struggle of Ma in Overcoming her Trauma in Emma Donoghue's *Room*" (2018) focuses on the traumatic experiences that have occurred during Ma's kidnapping. Using the theory of past life by M.J Murphy, the critic suggests that the protagonist's trauma is developed after her arduous life in room. Lukianto explains that the character has lived a good life condition before the accident "the writer describes Ma as someone who comes from worth living family in order to share her childhood's experiences with her son. Because they are living in an isolated room with limited tools to express all of Ma's ideas" (21). Moreover, the dissertation examines the emotional and verbal abuse that cause her anxiety "Ma is kidnapped for seven years, and this brought her emotionally and mentally into chock for a very long period of time" (25). This study merely states the use of verbal and emotional insults by Old Nick to oppress Ma during her period of captivity. and the critic did not take into account the physical abuse that she has suffered.

In his article, Arief Budi Harsanto “Ma’s Sadness: A Psychoanalytical Study in Emma Donoghue’s Novel *Room* (2010)” Arief Budi Harsanto discusses the character’s sadness that leads to trauma. Using the psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud, the critic analyses the protagonist’s personality, and he provides the three aspects of Ma’s id, super ego, and ego. According to Harsanto, this latter shows how Ma aims to forget the atrocious circumstances of her past life in room “ego plays a role to study away from the memory that shouldn’t appear in her life anymore” (8). Moreover, the study delves into the causes of sadness. He states that Ma’s dismal is related to sexual and verbal abuse by old Nick “violence is one of causes of sadness and reflected trauma” (6). In addition he portrays the character as a victim of violence. In this context, Harsanto argues:

Here what Ma is trying to say is about how she got fear to go to sleep because she has been kidnapped by Old Nick. Ma was trying to get away but it was worthless. she got also violence from Old Nick as what has been attached on above that Old Nick knocked her down. This’s the finding that Ma got violence and fear after the violence thing happened. (7)

In this quote, the critic explains how violence deprives Ma from sleeping, and how she becomes mentally displaced. Nevertheless, the scholar neglects the external factors outside the room, that cause trauma to Ma, and only sheds the light on the element of violence.

Further, Andrea Drastichová, in her thesis “Aspects of Trauma in “*Room*” by Emma Donoghue” (2020). The critic relies on the concept of oppression by Marilyn Frye to highlight the signs of trauma. Drastichová emphasizes on the isolated situation that Ma and her son Jack have lived following “strict regimes” (20) inside the room. Moreover,

the study examines the patriarchal system in the novel which is another notion of stress. Thereby, the scholar explains the domination of men over women in multiple fields. He claims “a life in patriarchal system involves men being in authority over women in all aspects of society” (21). Hence, Drastichová links the word “oppression” to Old Nick, who practices this authority over Jack’s mother Ma “apart from the oppression in room, Ma is constantly raped by Old Nick, her capture, rapes kidnapping, and sexual abuse are such an important social problem even nowadays” (21). Although the study points on essential causes of trauma, the critic sheds the light only on social and cultural factors without taking into consideration the psychological effects.

Selma Parlakay Topbas, in her dissertation “Traumatized Victims: Rape Trauma in Emma Donoghue’s *Room* and O. Zulfu Livanli’s *Bliss*” (2021). The scholar adopts the trauma theory by Cathy Caruth to scrutinize the effects of trauma. Topbas considers rape and captivity as an effective factor in Ma’s stressful condition. She relates the character’s depression to the mistreatment that Ma has exposed by her capture “Old Nick . . . who enters . . . room several nights of the week to sexually abuse Jack’s mother” (47). As a consequence, Ma shows symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder such as: “hyperarousal” and “intrusion” due to the above previous causes. The above mentioned thesis sheds the light only on the multiple factors of trauma including captivity, rape, and domestic violence, and only emphasizes on her struggles and weakness. Nonetheless, the critic does not take into account the determination by the protagonist to overcome her trauma.

Regarding the above review of literature, various academics have been conducted to tackle different causes of trauma such as, physical violence like rape and emotional abuse. However, these critics merely highlight the factors of stress. In these previous researches, the representation of trauma consequences is neglected and marginalized.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the major effects of trauma in relation to the character of Ma. Moreover, it focuses on the character's fear of the exterior world, after she has been kidnapped and secluded. Additionally, this study sheds the light on the feeling of not belonging such as, the lack of shelter, and the inexistence of home despite the protagonist being and living in the place of her childhood.

This study will rely on a number of psychoanalytical theories, articles, and books to analyze Emma Donoghue's *Room*. It utilizes Sigmund Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*. The central argument of the book that is these psychological symptoms are related to traumatic accidents, and unconscious memories. Freud and Breuer observe that "trauma merely acts like an agent provocateur in releasing the symptom" (5). Moreover, the book also examines how the memories reborn and appear after survival, both theorists believe that events experienced in the distant past should continue to exert a strong influence (6).

This study will also depend on the literary trauma theory by Cathy Caruth, who adopts the Freudian approach to study the notion of trauma. In her two books *Trauma : Exploration in Memory*. She discusses the repressed emotions that are fixed in the unconscious, and how these brutal events are lived in the memory. This theory will be linked to this study in order to demonstrate the depressed state of Ma due to sexual harassment and social stereotypes. Moreover, Caruth's second book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* focuses on the possibility of history to highlight the notion of trauma. Caruth's model will employ narrative tools to show the traumatic circumstances through Jack's narration. It also relies on Slavoj Zizek's concept of "subjective violence" to examine the physical abuse that has been practiced against the victim.

This research will also utilize the concept of “dwelling” as developed by Martin Heidegger “Building Dwelling Thinking.” This notion focuses on the meaning of “being”. Heidegger states that to dwell means to live at peace “to dwell at peace . . . , or to feel at home” (345). According to this philosopher, not every building or residence is dwelling, which means people build places, but they don’t belong to them (347). In this study, I will employ Heidegger’s concept to show that traumatic state that Ma lives after her suffering for seven years in seclusion in room deprives her of feeling safe in the world. It takes away her harmony and belonging to the place she inhabits.

This thesis will be divided into two analytical chapters. The first chapter will be entitled “The Factors Leading to endurance of Trauma in E. Donoghue’s *Room*.” It will discuss in depth the causes of trauma along with the protagonist’s development of the trauma symptoms. Moreover, it will shed the light on the presence of the issue of mental health. This section will rely on a number of psychoanalytical theories such as Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth. The use of these theorists is to study Ma’s psyche, and to understand the stressful behavior of the character.

The second chapter will be entitled “Home Crisis as an Outcome of traumatic experiences in Donoghue’s *Room*.” It will focus on the notion of homelessness. It will analyze the housing crisis that Ma feels after her escape from captivity. In addition it will shed the light on the character’s attempt to create a safe environment for her son . This research will rely on the concept of dwelling by Martin Heidegger to highlight Ma’s struggle to find safety in the outside world. Furthermore, it will emphasize on losing emotional attachment and belonging that the protagonist feels toward her place of settlement.

Finally, the conclusion will sum up the findings of this study. It will demonstrate Donoghue's representation of traumatic character in her novel *Room*. It will shed the light on the factors by the character to highlight the elements of trauma.

## Chapter 1

### **The Factors Leading to Endurance of Trauma in E. Donoghue's *Room***

This chapter delves into the analysis of Emma Donoghue's *Room* relying on a number of western theories of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narration and History*, Slavoj Zizek's *Violence* and Sigmund Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. It draws attention to the emergence of trauma and depressive disorders in relation to shocking factors such as: rape, captivity, psychological persecution, violence, and loss of a loved one. Besides, this chapter indicates the way Donoghue demonstrates the impact of the traumatic experiences through her character Ma.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section "A History of Psychological Persecution" deals with the crisis of a kidnapped victim Ma under the mercy of her captor Old Nick. It is deliberated to display Donoghue's representation of the character in the light of the theory of Cathy Caruth's depiction of individuals who exhibit a psychological manipulation. Donoghue portrays the suffering of persecuted victims through her character Ma.

The second section is titled "Ma's Agony due to Physical and Emotional Causes". It emphasizes on the external factors that the main character faces and the one struggle with by the antagonist Old Nick. It also mentions the second protagonist Jack, where Donoghue presents his character as a passive victim. The analysis of this section relies on Zizek's theory that focuses on the physical violence that is practiced on Ma's body alongside the psychological effect following this act, and Freud's study that scrutinizes the intense emotional voyage due to the loss of a love object leading the character Ma to adopt a depressive behavior and to create an intricate personality.

## 1. A History of Psychological Persecution

*In Unclaimed Experience Trauma, Narration and History*, Cathy Caruth proposes that trauma is an emotional response to traumatic circumstances that take place in the past: “trauma describes overwhelming experience of sudden catastrophic event in which the response of the event occurs in the after delayed” (11). In this statement, Caruth suggests that traumatic reactions hunt survivors after the incident. Moreover, she links trauma to several responses such as “rape”.

In her novel, Emma Donoghue portrays a young woman who has been exposed to terrific experiences including mental and physical torture. Donoghue presents the suffering of the character Ma during her seven years of abduction in room. “Old Nick I didn’t even know him, he stole me . . . he made me take some bad medicine so I’d fall asleep than when I woke up I was there” (16). During Ma’s confinement, the presence of sexual abuse by Old Nick increases the mental shock. Throughout the narration of Ma’s son Jack. In the description of the process of rape as regular, he tells the story of Old Nick who comes at night to room, and Jack hides in his wardrobe, while Old Nick creaks the bed (10). As a consequence, the protagonist develops symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Caruth, PTSD is a response to crucial abuses including sexual harassments. As a result, Ma after being violently raped, the character exposes symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder. In this regard, Donoghue’s character Ma grows fear of dirt and contamination. Thus, she forbids her son Jack to play with insects and animals as she says “germs could make you die” (26).

Studies examine that obsessive compulsive disorder as related to depression. Moreover, the traumatic circumstances expand the victim’s intrusive thoughts. Caruth claims that trauma creates “uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and intrusive thoughts” (11). In this case, Donoghue translates Ma’s interrupted thoughts as fear for her son Jack as mentioned

above. Ma is described as a mother who extremely protects her son from any danger. For instance, the conversation between Jack and her about his friend mouse “ also there is mouse, he is my real friend you made him gone, yeah shouts Ma, so he won’t run over your face in the night and bite you” (11). In the fourth chapter, “After” the novelist suggests that the impact of Ma’s stressful condition follows the character in her survival stage. Thus, Jack’s mother keeps reminding her son of the jeopardy of contamination as Jack says “ ok she puts on masks on her and one on me with loops around my ears. I don’t see anything flouting around whisper to Ma “germs she says” (47). In this quotation, Ma shows how she is overly protective of her son since she couldn’t protect herself, and she exhibits a belated notion of fear and anxiety, which is a consequence of external source. Furthermore, the character’s extreme exposure to undesirable situations results in a post-traumatic stress disorder that affects Ma’s behavior alongside her mental state that obstructs her continuity to live a normal life.

Regarding the above mentioned factors including rape and captivity, persecution is another factor of Ma’s trauma. “The possibility of history” by Caruth is a concept that permits “history to relocate it based on our understanding” (11). By referring to the Freudian theory on trauma, Caruth adopts Freud’s history of the Jews in his essay “Moses and Monotheism” to analyze the source of the mental shock. The essential point of this matter is that persecution results trauma that damages the psyche. Caruth states that Freud’s Moses and Monotheism links the theory of trauma with the historical violence (58). As a consequence, catastrophic memories emerge to the surface following the traumatic experiences. Donoghue demonstrates Old Nick as the persecutor. Furthermore, she represents his dominance over his victim Ma as he plays a psychological control and manipulation . Throughout Ma’s seclusion in room, Old Nick punishes her with her son Jack as he cuts the power in the room and does not bring food

to them (21). This behavior from Old Nick illustrates his power to dominate Ma, and how he has succeeded to make her under his mercy.

The act of subjugation reflects severe pain and suffering. Helplessness and hopelessness escalate the sentiment of agony ( Cassell 522- 23). In this context, the protagonist finds herself in vulnerable state. Thus, she manifests signals of obedience. Furthermore, Jack's mother tries to please her abductor and keeps repeating apology statements to absorb his anger " I'm sorry . Ma's saying, I'm sorry, I should have put it somewhere it wouldn't fall, I'm really really totally --" (14). These phrases display the horror and the fear that she feels toward her abductor. Moreover, Ma's battle against Old Nick is hopeless. Thereby, she adopts feelings of vulnerability due to subjugation. This latter builds a lack of hope in the character's life. As a consequence, Ma reveals a psychological dilemma leading to clinical depression. Additionally, persecution is performed in different ways such as: deprivation of food and cloths. In *Room*, Donoghue demonstrates this deprivation when both Ma and Jack suffer a lack of food and electricity. Ma is aware of this atrocious crisis. However Jack does not understand this situation when he speaks about the atmosphere in room after Old Nick cuts the power:

We wake up and the air Shriever . . . I'm glad he didn't come last night, I tell Ma . . .

Jack she kind of haws. Think about it . . . I mean what would happen , where does our

Food come from? . . . I'm hungry so Ma says I can have the last apple, what if Old

Nick doesn't bring more apples? Why he's still punishing us? I ask. (20)

In this passage, Old Nick represents the source for both characters to be alive, Donoghue demonstrates this character as their provider. As a result, the antagonist demands gratitude and appreciation from his victim " I don't think you appreciate how good you have got it here, says Old Nick . . . Aboveground, natural light, central air . . ." (24). Thus, the combination of

psychological and economic persecution occurs a repeated trauma during the years in captivity ( Herman 378). In this case, punishing both characters creates a personal crisis. Furthermore, this brutal and psychological torture leaves agony in the character's psyche

According to Cathy Caruth, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a consequence of trauma, she states that history is a symptom of PTSD (*Trauma: Exploration in Memory* 5). This means that the impact of the past that individuals carry with them forms various distributive responses in people's unconscious mind. As a consequence, human beings exhibit multiple notions of anxiety. Taking into consideration Caruth's idea of mental subjugation. In the novel, Ma has experienced persecution for seven years throughout her history in room including deprivation and penalization. As a result, the protagonist suffers a repetition of invasive reactions. Additionally, the role of these responses increases the level of depression and creates a future stress. Thus, in *Room* Donoghue relates Ma's personality with anger and temperament. Her behavior in the clinic is an example of how Ma simply loses her temper when Dr. Clay says:

I don't know why, I will get into the lab right away to see if they need another sample from both for DNA, he tells Ma DNA ? she got her crazy voice again. You think I had other visitors ? I think this is how the courts work, every box has to be ticked. Ma's sucking her whole mouth in so her lips are invisible. (53)

This quotation illustrates that the outraged attitude Jack's mother has shown is a result of a "shell shock" which means Ma is easily provoked, and the isolation factor in room increases her feeling of anger "arousal". However, Ma's reaction is also a case of defense mechanism to cope with her anxiety and her mental issues. Like any other victim of persecution, Ma shows symptoms of aggression and hostility. Furthermore, she continues this enraged demeanor even in her interaction with her family. The nature of relationship between Ma and her mother is

intricate. Throughout Jack's narration, his grandmother provokes her daughter by her words. During her residence in the clinic, Jack recalls a heated conversation about breastfeeding where Ma expresses a desire to slap her mother:

Dr Clay is talking to Ma now about how she wants to slap Grandma, that's not allowed I say. She blinks at me I don't want to really, just sometimes. Did you even want to slap her before you were kidnapped? Asks Dr Clay. Oh sure. Ma looks at him, then laughs sort of groaning great I've got my life back. (64)

In this excerpt, Ma's desire to use violence is another consequence to traumatic stress after exposing to psychological persecution. Therefore, trauma leads her to exhibit a change in her personality, and to show an aggressive mood that is considered as a defense mechanism to avoid pressure by others.

In short, this first section focuses on the psychological persecution that has been exercised on Ma during abduction. It highlights the oppression by the captor Old Nick to keep his victim under his control. Therefore, she exhibits a series depressive behavior and suffers notions of anxiety.

## 2. Ma's Agony due to Physical and Emotional Causes

In his book *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek divides violence into multiple forms, stating that subjective violence is “performed by a clearly identified agent” (1). He claims that subjective violence is physical and recognizable accomplished by individuals or group of people. The use of physical power is not limited and it can be occurred in different places and cases. Žižek argues that the act of subjective abuse is represented in cases of criminal activities and terror such as killing , kidnapping and physical harm (10). These activities threaten people’s life and their safety. In addition, they jeopardize the health of innocent lives whether the physical or the mental health.

In *Room*, Old Nick commits a criminal activity by abducting the protagonist Ma and he physically abusing her. Once Ma tries to escape from room, the antagonist starts the violence and he hurts his victim’s body. Ma narrates this process to her son Jack by saying:

What I did, I took the lid of the toilet, and I had the smooth knife as well and just before  
Nine one evening, I stood against the wall beside the door . . . I knew my chance was to  
Make him give me the code. So I pressed the knife against his throat . . . He jumped up  
And twisted my wrist and got the knife. Your bad wrist? Well it wasn’t bad before . . . .  
(15)

By recounting this atrocious experience, Ma shows the physical terror she has been exposed to by Old Nick. From her description, the act of twisting her wrist is considered as an immediate and direct violence. As a consequence, using force creates a sense of horror and panic which means that Old Nick’s subjective violence creates a deeper form that is objective . In addition, this evil individual produces a radical change in Ma’s psyche, which means her mental state alters from normal and peaceful mind to unidentified instability in her inner self.

In the second chapter, this physical force can be seen on her body when Jack notices the marks on his mother's nape " so I don't. I go up very close, half her face is showing and her neck. The marks are purple now" (26). In this statement, Donoghue describes the marks and the bruises on her character's body to show the direct violence that is exercised on the victim. Therefore, these violent experiences lead the protagonist to suffer an extreme psychological disturbance which are described in Zizek's work by post traumatic subject. In his article, "Descartes and the Post Traumatic Subject" Zizek believes that " trauma is as a rule experienced as a momentary intrusion which violently disturbs our normal daily life" (11). Thus, this external violence destroys the victim's psyche and grows depressed feelings and moods. In the light of the theory, Donoghue links her character Ma with melancholy mood. In this context, Ma spends days absent from the real world. Jack says that she is in a sad state: " today is one of the days Ma is gone. She won't wake up properly. She's here but not really. She stays in bed with the pillows on her head" (26). Jack's narration demonstrates the heavy impact of violence on his Ma's mental health. In addition to, psychological damage that results depression even neglection, which is another consequence of trauma. Al though, Ma is portrayed as a protective mother, she sometimes ignores her son Jack due to an excessive depressed state of mind:

I go up really close and listen till I hear breath I'm just one inch away, my hair touches Ma's nose and she puts her hand up over her face so I step back. I don't have a bath on My own, I just get dressed . . . Thursday means laundry, but I can't do it myself and Ma's still lying on the sheets anyway. (26)

Thus, Ma's behavior shows that neglecting her son is unintentional. However, she sometimes forgets to take care of him due to severe depressive disorder and mental instability.

Consequently, this attitude is considered as a significant result caused by the domestic violence that Ma has endured from Old Nick.

Similarly, the character Jack is another figure who witnesses the act of violence. During their stay in the room, Jack has limited interaction with Old Nick. However, Jack's character has noticed the abuse that has been committed against his mother. Although Jack has not experienced physical violence in the room, he tells Doctor Clay that he has struggled with this sort of violence by Old Nick during his escape. As a consequence, he grows feelings of unsafety, and this fear is shown when he escapes from room he keeps thinking about his mother and what if Old Nick has back to hurt her "maybe he went back to room, maybe he's right now making door beep beep open and he's mad . . ." (42). This quotation demonstrates that tremendous effect on children witnessing domestic violence like Jack. As a result, they develop safety problems and they activate a constant fear. By experiencing such abuse, children feel anxious and frightened "the psychological abuse and the sense of constant fear . . . is a regular feature of their lives . . ." (ICEDA 6). In a case of abuse, Jack portrays notions of fear for his mother and he feels responsible to protect her from any danger and harm. Donoghue represents his protective reaction when Dr Kendrick wants to break Ma's wrist again. However, Jack irrationally says "No!" (48). His reaction illustrates that the relationship between Jack and his mother is constructed by protection and attachment, and his defense is a consequence to the previous traumatic and hurtful circumstances that his mother has lived in room. Thus, he feels unsafe and becomes extremely aware to the imminent warning of violence.

In fact, domestic abuse leads children in multiple cases to protect the abused parent. Therefore, they tend to be highly attached to their mothers. In the novel, Jack refuses to leave his mother's side after their rescue, he shows symptoms of stress and disturbance when he is

separated from her. During his mother's meeting with the doctors, Jack stays in another room and he feels worried about Ma:

The door where Ma went is a bit apart, I think I hear her voice why are they taking her blood and pee and fingernails? She's still there even though I don't see her, like I was doing our great escape. Old Nick zoomed off in his truck, now he is not in room . . . Ma's a long long time in the other room, are they hurting her? . . . (47)

By saying these words, Jack expresses his scare for his mother. The emotions of fear are resulted due to witnessing a regular violence against his Ma in room. Thus, his reaction in the clinic is a reflection of his past traumatic events. However, passive victims in domestic abuse like Ma take the responsibility to protect their children. In this regard, Ma has succeeded to protect her son from direct violence. Moreover, she manages to give Jack the compassion and the needed love to shrink his overwhelming and shocking circumstances in their confinement. As a consequence, Jack does not experience the same level of trauma as his mother as he builds a psychological shield, and he forms a different perspective on room. Ma's good raise has helped him accept the outside world and understand the environment around him. Therefore, Dr Clay tells Ma that he is made of plastic, and he believes that Jack is going to forget his life in room as Ma says "he figures, soon you won't remember room anymore" (61). This means Jack's mental stability has not been totally damaged, and he has escaped from room before he becomes completely aware of the horrible situation.

Zizek's theory also identifies another act of violence which is verbal abuse. According to Zizek, it is a violence that is "embodied in a language and its form" (1). In this context, he points out that abuse can be incorporated in words or speech. In Donoghue's novel, the representation of this psychic aggression is highly present. The character of Ma is not spared from insults and verbal attack. Moreover, Old Nick uses threatening and yelling expressions

to show to protagonist that she is weak and helpless. Thereby, she easily reveals notions of obedience. When Jack accidentally smashes the jeep, Old Nick starts screaming and shouting “Old Nick roaring like I never heard him . . . he is shouting, what are you trying to pull? . . . did you try something? . . . because I told you before, it’s on your head if . . .” (14). This quotation demonstrates the harshness of Old Nick toward his victim to impose his power over her.

Furthermore, Ma’s captor utilizes humiliating, offensive and rude language, and he talks to her like an animal “take it easy. Old Nick sounds like he is talking to a dog . . .”(39). In addition, he treats his victim as an object who does not have right to speak and every time she attempts to open a conversation he asks her to “shut her mouth” (23). By exposing to verbal abuse, a high possibility that women automatically reveal various stress and mood disorders alongside the jeopardy of extreme psychological complications such as eating disorder (Mouton et al. 2006). Consequently, Ma frequently does not feel hungry despite preparing food which is an explicit sign of depression. In multiple occasions, Jack innocently describes how his mother does not show excitement toward food even toward his birthday cake “my birthday cake is the best thing I ever ate, Ma isn’t hungry for any right now” (7). The abusive relationship that Jack’s mother lives with her captor and exposure to verbal and emotional abuse has damaged her mental balance. Thereby, Ma exposes severe notions of depression such as food disorder and loss of appetite that is considered as a psychiatric disorder. Moreover, the latter arises due to psychological exposures to traumatic events that victims have witnessed during atrocious circumstances such as Ma’s case in room.

Sleeping disorder is among depression symptoms, this outcome has a major impact on life. Insomnia is related to mental problems such as anxiety and phobias (Brunello et al. 108). In this matter, Donoghue depicts her character as an individual who finds difficulties to maintain sleep. In the novel, Jack talks about Ma telling Dr Clay “Stuff why she can’t get to sleep”

(52). Hence, her sleeping disturbance is connected to traumatic events as a consequence to indirect and intangible factors including verbal and psychological violence. Moreover, Ma's insomnia represents the mental and the stressful condition she lives, also it is an explicit reaction from the main character to cope with the traumatic thoughts and the internal battles that she faces in her unconscious.

Sigmund Freud in his essay, "Morning and Melancholia" discusses the impact of losing a loved one. He argues that the reaction to the loss of a loved one comprises a detachment from the "outside world". Moreover, he describes this experience as a "painful" one where victims deal with feelings of grief and sadness (244). In this context, Freud indicates that people who suffer such a loss, they display psychological and emotional disturbances.

In line with this thought, Donoghue narrates this experience of loss when her character Ma gives birth to a dead baby girl. For the first time Jack hears his mother speaks about the baby with the nurse Morris. Thus, Ma starts to recall the atrocious experience, she delves into the core of her memory to answer his curiosity about the infant:

you told Morris there was a she that did murder. She shakes her head I meant she got murdered . . . Ma puts her face in her hands. The blind cord? I look at it, there's only dark coming in the strips . . . But with the baby girl, it got tangled when she was coming out. So she couldn't breathe . . . He was right there, watching. Ma's nearly shouting he didn't know the first thing about babies getting born . . . I could feel the top of her head, it was sleepy . . . I was shouting help . . . And he just stood there. (59)

In this passage, Ma describes the arduous incident when she has witnessed the death of her child all by herself. Moreover, the protagonist carries feelings of weakness and guilt toward her painful experience. Furthermore, she feels responsible for her baby's safety, but at the

same time Ma holds indignation and blame toward her captor Old Nick. Although, the antagonist has not killed the baby girl, Ma believes that he is the direct reason of her death “Ma’s nodding what about the baby? . . . doesn’t that come as some kind of murder?” (59). Thus, Ma is portrayed not only as a victim of persecution and violence, but also as a victim of losing a child “vilomah”.

Ma’s overwhelming experience demonstrates the sadness and the sorrow she carries within her. By recounting the horrible event, Ma shows that the awful feeling of losing her baby follows the character in her life. She remembers the misery and the pain she has dealt with in room “there’s tears falling all on the blanket. Ma’s nodding and crying but on mute . . . Her eyes are shut but the water still slides out, he took away and buried her under a bush in the backyard. Just her body, I mean, she was blue” (60). As a consequence, her grief morphs into depression and she manifests several mental illnesses. The death of others is considered as one of the studied incentives that bring anxiety and stress (Okun and Nowinski 2012). Therefore, Ma grows a self-pity and negative feelings toward herself “I hated myself ever since you were in my tummy” (27). In this statement, Ma’s self-contempt explains the negative thoughts she feels including emotions of fear and guilt to bring Jack to this crucial world. Another effect of her brutal experience is losing enjoyment and interest in everything. People with “anhedonia” lose motivation, the desire, and the pleasure to participate in daily activities “cessation of interest in the outside world . . . inhibition of all activity . . .” (Freud 244). In this case, Ma loses interest in the external world after her rescue, she displays incapability to experience joy. Therefore, Jack reuses the word “gone” to express his mother’s state and inability to make plans “the adventure! But no we can’t because Ma’s gone” (70). The above mentioned quotation shows that individuals with anhedonia manifest an absolute lack of happiness toward social situations, struggle to enjoy life, and exhibit social and physical symptoms. As a result, studies confirm that losing pleasure is a reflection to previous

atrocities. Moreover, anhedonia is an outcome to major stressful behavior, and a core symptom of extreme depressive illness that human being suffers during their life. As it is mentioned above, Ma's inability to share the adventure with Jack illustrates the melancholic mood the character suffers, which is regarded as another symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

In "Morning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud states that "the patient represents his ego to us worthless, incapable of any achievement morally despicable, he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished . . . It is the effect of the eternal work which is consuming his ego" (246). In this excerpt, Freud demonstrates the melancholic mood that humans develop to deal with the loss of a loved one. He links melancholic personality with severe sadness. Also he shows the complexity of this character, and how it obstructs the continuity to live normally. Moreover, Freud claims that the sorrow and grief devours people's ego, where they experience a psychological journey in their unconsciousness mind including mental fragility and disturbance. Grief is a reaction to loss of a loved one, and it can be a complicated process. Therefore, this feeling generates a losing sense of existence, and they become life threatening. Freud believes that "the patient is aware of loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he lost in him" (245). This quotation illustrates that depressed people believe that the loss object is causing them a persistent harm. Thus, they reject the outside world, and commence to flop in the same whirl of pain, this latter leads the victim to exercise destructive acts against the human body including self-harm and suicidal attempts to control the devastating action. In this context, Ma realizes the change in her personality. However, she is confused whether she has lost her old self. Hence, Ma explores painful emotional experience that leads her to alienate from life. By the time Jack arrives at the clinic after his return from the adventure, he witnesses a devastating accident, his mother lying in a state of half dead:

The bad is vomit . . . She doesn't switch on, she doesn't groan or roll over, she's not moving when I pull her. This is the most gone she's ever. Ma , Ma, she's a zombie, I think . . . Then I see Ma's pill bottles open on the table, they look mostly empty.

Never more than two, that's the rule, how they could be mostly empty, where did the pills go? Noreen is pressing on the side of Ma's throat . . . I'm screaming Ma as load as load as I can but it's not load enough to wake her. (73)

In this passage, Ma's behavior indicates her hopelessness and her fragile state to resist after observing overwhelming events for seven years in isolation from the world. Furthermore, this demeanor explains the difficulty that Ma finds to cope with the above painful feelings. As a consequence, the act of committing suicide is a reaction to her loss.

All in all, Emma Donoghue's *Room* tackles the mental wounds including persecution and loss that her character Ma has witnessed during seven years of seclusion. Physical factors such as rape and violence are assumed to be a direct indicator leading the protagonist to develop traumatic behavior. Donoghue demonstrates the impact of these overwhelming factors on the main character's psyche. Moreover, the novelist manages to examine the concept of trauma through the experience of Ma in room.

## Chapter Two

### Home Crisis as an Outcome of Traumatic Experiences in Donoghue's *Room*

#### Introduction:

The last chapter of this thesis aims to analyze Emma Donoghue's *Room* in light of Martin Heidegger's concept of "Dwelling". This chapter argues that homelessness is an outcome of an overwhelming and shocking experience. In due course, it examines Donoghue's character Ma who struggles with an unfamiliar sense and loss of meaning of belonging in the outside world.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, entitled "Losing the Sense and Meaning of Home" focuses on the protagonist's inability to feel attached or safe inside her place of captivity. This part also seeks to demonstrate Ma's meaningless dwelling inside that room for seven years relying on the concept of "Dwelling" by Heidegger which is based on the idea of people's rejection of considering certain buildings as shelter. The second chapter is entitled "The Unfamiliarity of Space in the Outside World" and focuses on the way Donoghue shows the struggle of losing the sense of harmony and belonging toward outer spaces through the character Ma. The latter becomes a stranger to an environment that she used to be familiar with. It also illustrates Donoghue's creation of incapacity to adapt and cope with the new world through the second protagonist Jack. The section displays Heidegger's notion of "Homelessness" which he believes that the latter is an indicator of the absence of meaning of "being".

## 1- Losing the Sense and Meaning of Home

Martin Heidegger, in his article “Building Dwelling Thinking” suggests that “not every building is dwelling” (347). This means that human beings live in different buildings and residents. However, these places cannot be dwelled for certain people. Moreover, Heidegger believes that the concept of dwelling is linked to a feeling of peace and safety toward the place of inhabit. The essence of dwelling comprises both a physical and psychological accomplishment. Otherwise, people lose attachment to their place of settlement and become homeless.

In her novel, Emma Donoghue demonstrates the loss of harmony and belonging through her character Ma. Ma rejects the place she inhabits for seven years. The protagonist fails to feel connected inside that room. Short time after her kidnapping, she loses control and she starts to behave hysterically “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 .When he finally brought the tv. I left it on twenty four/ seven . . . sometimes I heard voices from the tv telling me things” (16). This excerpt illustrates the struggle that Ma finds to cope with her new place of confinement and also displays feelings of boredom and struggle with every minute which passes. She adds: “but when I was asleep, was the only time I wasn’t crying, so I slept about sixteen hours a day” (16). As a consequence, Ma finds relief in sleeping. The protagonist's estrangement and unfamiliarity with the place. In addition to the unbearable atmosphere in the room, Ma grows physical and psychological dilemmas due to the loss of meaning of “dwelling” in that place.

Individuals live in physical places but many people do not take these spaces as a shelter. In this regard, Heidegger claims:

The truck driver is at home on the highway, but does not have a shelter there, the

worker is at home in the spinning mill; but does not have a dwelling place there

; the chief engineer is at home at the power station but does not dwell there.

These buildings house men. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them, if

to dwell means solely to have our lodgings in them. (347-348)

This passage demonstrates that not all buildings are constructed for dwellings. The area of the latter is not limited to a physical building or specific place. In this respect, people do not feel attached to or belonged to a place of inhabit. In the novel, Donoghue portrays the setting as a space without spirit. Narrated by young Jack, the novelist describes the room as eleven by eleven feet, the space of the set is like confinement, it comprises a minimum need including a small bed, table, and toilet. Although Jack's world is shaped inside the room, the latter represents an intolerable prison for his mother Ma, and what makes her anxious about that place is the design of the room as she says: "he had a layer of fence under the floor joint, and on all the walls and even in the roof . . ." (15). Therefore, "room" exemplifies the hollow environment and the meaningless experience Ma has witnessed inside that place. As a consequence, the setting is one of buildings that lack the notion of harmony, belonging, and peace.

the room deprives Ma of the meaning of dwelling, and the idea of "being" in the world. During her stay, Ma worries about her safety, she only senses danger and threats in the eleven by-eleven-foot room. The protagonist feels suffocated by that place and she considers the room an unbearable cage. Therefore, she attempts to escape several times. She states "I broke my nails. I threw everything I could think of it but the mesh is so strong, I never even managed to crack the glass . . . And another time I dug a hole . . . She shakes her head, when he was at work I tried to get out, I tried everything. I stood on tiptoe on the table for days scraping around the skylight . . ." (15-16). These above statements indicate Ma's rejection of

the idea of staying in the room where the former stands symbolically for everything she hates. and she never accepts or embraces her place of confinement as her new home as a result of the unpeaceful and traumatic circumstances that she has experienced inside the room.

Ma has faced atrocities alongside psychological manipulation by her captor leading the character to lose the sense of harmony, belonging, and freedom. Consequently, Ma has not succeeded to be attached to the room or calling it home. To many people home is “. . . privacy, security, family, intimacy, comfort and control”(Morley 26). This quote proves the meaning of an ideal home is characterized by safe and warming atmosphere. However, in the novel, room externalizes the feeling of psychological and physical displacement. Donoghue shows that her character has been a stranger to that location. In a conversation between the nurse and Ma, this estrangement is highlighted when Noreen asks her: “probably a bit homesick aren’t you? Homesick? Ma’s staring at her, sorry, I didn’t . . . It wasn’t a home, it was a sound proofed cell”(60). Seen from this angle, Ma's description of the room as a ‘soundproofed cell’ demonstrates how the protagonist has inhabited that place only physically but not spiritually. In this case, Ma has never achieved a subjective connection with the place of captivity. Therefore, she displays notions of homelessness and suffers a home crisis.

Multiple aspects strip places and buildings from the meaning of home. Donoghue asserts that the crisis of space is related to Old Nick. This character is considered a primary cause of leading Ma to lose the true sense of home and the meaning of her existence. To keep feelings of harmony and peace inside any dwelling place, people need to maintain a good relationship with each other. However, in *Room*, Old Nick destroys the original definition of home with his scary temper, his scream, and his roars (14). His cold character influences the place that Ma inhabits, and the room becomes a space without a soul just like it’s dweller. Hence, Ma’s relationship with that place and her captor is only physical. In this regard, Donoghue

demonstrates Old Nick as a man with a disrespectful attitude who oppresses and treats his victim with disrespect. Consequently, Ma loses a good sense of dwelling and grows fear inside her due to Old Nick's barbarian behavior. She says: "I used to be scared to go to sleep in case he came back"(16). This statement indicates that the hostile environment inside the room impacts Ma's existence and being in the world.

Furthermore, Ma's dwelling in a place that is constructed by domestic violence results in a character that reveals a losing touch with harmony and a craving for a peaceful place to dwell. In this regard, Old Nick's harsh behavior toward his victims in the room shows the struggle of Ma to find shelter, and refuge, and face a home crisis leading her to establish a meaningless existence in the outer spaces. According to Heidegger the word "being" refers to human existence in the world. He claims that people only feel belonged to a specific place when they only live in a protected and peaceful one. By adopting Heidegger's concept of "dwelling", Christian Norberg Schulz suggests that dwelling consists of "the way in which you are and I am, the way in which we humans are on earth"(Schulz 5). Furthermore, Schulz emphasizes the idea of *genius loci* to understand the meaning of space. Schulz's "spirit of place" demonstrates the physical and spiritual aspects that give meaning to the dwelling place. In this context, Donoghue shows the spirit of place in Ma's memories. In *Room*, Ma relates her existence and belonging to her childhood place. The protagonist shows a sense of belonging and dwelling in her parents' house, and she expresses to her son Jack multiple experiences and she recalls every detail that she has lived in the house of the hammock " a house on the edge of a city, with a yard behind it, and a hammock . . . And I used to go to the playground . . . and swing . . . and eat ice cream . . ." (19). Thus, the hammock and the playground represents a location that is surrounded by peace and calm. Moreover, Ma's representation of her childhood home illustrates her closed attachment and connection to that place. As a consequence, she misses the idea of being at home. The above statement indicates her

belonging and strong intimacy with her old place of settlement. Therefore, Ma's way of description of the hammock explains the spirit of the place and its meaning and how the physical and psychological view of the swing appears to be a dwelling and refuge place for the protagonist.

The character Ma remembers her childhood house as the place where she feels safe and secure. The joyful atmosphere and the harmonious environment that she has known as a child expresses her dwelling in that childhood place. In the novel, she refers to home as the place where she inhabits with her parents and her brother Paul(19). In this case, Ma always remembers the different activities and plans with her family “I used to go to the playground with Paul . . . your grandma and your grandpa took us on strips in the car to the zoo and to the beach, I was there little girl”(19). This quotation acknowledges Ma's familiarity and belonging with the outside space. Thereby, Ma's surrounding by her family manifests her meaningful existence in the world. Most individuals link perfect dwelling to their childhood. Lawrence J, Hatab believes that “our birth and early experiences are not just a temporal beginning, they are the early manifestation of being”(Hatab 383).In this regard, Donoghue's representation of the protagonist's childhood illustrates Ma's meaningful sense of her existence by living past experiences in a familiar environment in that dwelling place.

In short, this section explored the hostile environment and traumatic experience that lead Donoghue's protagonist Ma to lose the sense of dwelling. Moreover, it has tackled the main character's inability to cope with that place of confinement due to the horrible treatment from Old Nick, and as a result of the seclusion she has been exposed to for seven years. Therefore, she keeps longing for her childhood house, and she fails to consider the room as home.

## 2- The Unfamiliarity of Space in the Outside World

Heidegger links human beings' existence to space. He believes that the idea of dwelling revolves around people's familiarity with the place and being in the world. As explained by Heidegger, the concept of “homelessness” not only represents the lack of physical dwelling but also the loss of meaning of “being”. In his essay, “Letter on Humanism”, he states that “homelessness is a symptom of oblivion of being because of it the truth of being remains unthought”(95). This statement demonstrates that the experience of alienating the essence of existence is homelessness. Heidegger introduces the notion of homecoming as the incident of going back home or being at home (95).

In Emma Donoghue's *Room*, the main character returns to her place of settlement after seven years of confinement. Although Ma experiences the phenomenon of homecoming, she struggles to create a feeling of dwelling with the outside world. In the first hours of her rescue, Ma shows signs of excitement to reconnect with the outside space, she tells her son “We can do anything now”(45). However, later she starts to feel like a stranger in an environment that she used to be familiar with. Jack's mother grows this sense of alienation when both Ma and Jack receive a special trait from people. After their escape, doctors advise her to stay in a psychiatric clinic leading Ma to question society's look at both of them “. . . and they are on standby for you at the Cumberland clinic, it is a very nice facility. What kind of facility. Ah, psychiatric, we're not . . .”(46). As a consequence, Ma sees and reconsiders herself as different, an outsider, and abnormal from others. Therefore, she loses the feeling of attachment to her dwelling place. The process of coming home is an overwhelming experience. Ma does not feel belonged in the world anymore. Donoghue uses the word strange to explain her character's homelessness. For Ma everything around her is different “I don't know, because everything's strange”(65). Thus, this sense of estrangement expresses Ma's inability to dwell in the place and to achieve a meaningful existence.

Heidegger's main question is the question of being. His essential worry is that human beings struggle to find the lost sense of belonging to the world (78). In this regard, the protagonist Ma faces multiple elements leading her to forget the true meaning of being in the world. Moreover, Ma finds difficulties to cope with society and to battle public judgment especially when the media questions her motherhood and goodness as a parent of Jack. During an interview, Jack's mother finds herself in a hard position to explain the sacrifices she has made to protect her son. Throughout Jack's narration, the interviewer asks whether Ma has made a good decision to keep her son with her “. . . But did you even consider asking your captor to take Jack away? . . . it would have been a sacrifice of course . . . but if Jack could have had a normal, happy childhood with a loving family”(69-70). As a consequence, Ma is disturbed from the question and violently answers “why would I have done that . . . he had a childhood with me, whether you call it normal or not”(69-70). Therefore, the interviewer's words represent people's reaction toward Ma and her son's case and how females are oppressed by society, in which they exhibit a sort of hesitation to consider both the victims as part of the world.

Donoghue's character fails to recognize her old self or to experience things in the outside world. Consequently, Ma goes through the process of the forgetfulness of being. To overcome the oblivion of being, one must recall “the meaning of existence to enable human beings to appreciate the uniqueness and feel home in the world”(Cooper 2). In this context, Ma crosses a journey seeking her old self “I know you need me to be your ma but I'm having to remember how to be me as well . . .”(65). This quotation shows that she has forgotten herself in that place “room” and after being free, she is obliged to remember her old personality to be able to live in peace. Ma's sense of belonging is determined by the connection with her family. As mentioned before, she remembers home as the place that she used to inhabit with her parents and her brother Paul. However, Ma's special crisis increases when she sees the

dispersion of her strong family identity. Through Jack's narration, his mother realizes the truth about her parent's divorce:

Where is dad? Ask Ma. In Canberra right now, but he's on his way, says grandma. There's been a lot of changes, sweetheart. Canberra?. Oh honey, it is probably too much for you to take . . . It turns out the hairy Leo person isn't my real Grandpa, the real one went back to live in Australia after he thought Ma was dead . . . Grandma was mad at him because she never stopped hopping . . . (54)

Thus, the above excerpt shows that the family's unity that has shaped Ma's complete dwelling in the house of the hammock is now sabotaged by her parent's divorce. Another disappointment that leads the character to comprehend the outside world is her father's rejection of Jack when he finds it difficult to accept him as part of his family:

Ma butts in. Dad, this is Jack. He shakes his head . . . He's looking at the table . . . No offense, what do you mean no offense? Ma's talking nearly in a shot. I can't be in the same room it makes me sudden . . . The man who's grandpa gone past me without looking . . . The grandpa man wipe the skin under his eyes. But all I can think of is that beast . . . (66)

The grandfather's reaction causes Ma to feel betrayed by her father. Thus, the protagonist does not feel at home anymore, and she loses trust and a sense of safety in the outside space. As a result, she displays a lack of physical and emotional dwelling.

Ma's incapacity to dwell in any place is related to linking her presence by others' recognition. However, she feels abandoned by her family and the world after her escape. Consequently, outer space becomes foreign to her, and she struggles to find a sense of

existence. This experience creates an inability for Ma to rebuild a stable condition of being. In this context, she examines notions of unfamiliarity with various situations, Thus, Ma is diagnosed with the “jamais vu” disorder. She “shows Dr. Clay her homework, they talk more about not very interesting stuff like depersonalization and jamais vu”(56). Therefore, the latter leads the character of Ma to forget the purpose of her being.

Furthermore, the unfamiliar existence makes it impossible for Jack's mother to feel safe or be strongly attached to the dwelling place which is the main characteristic of one's being. For Ma, the word “home” is a strong element to understand the spirit of her dwelling place. However, this refuge no longer exists. As a consequence, the absence of belonging to the outside space alongside the sense of homelessness not only reveals an existential character but also an isolated one. Thereby, the word “isolation” displays Ma's spatial crisis, which creates anxiety about being homeless in her old environment. Thus, her state requires seclusion from the world as Dr. Clay says: “ she’s in another wing, she needs to be on her own for a while”(80). This statement shows Ma's need to be alone to realize and understand her homelessness.

Moreover, Donoghue's character is aware that the clinic is not her home “the clinic’s not any body’s home, everyone goes home in the end”(55). However, after Ma's return to the hammock house, she does not feel belonged or desired to dwell in her old home. Therefore, she decides to move to a new residence with her son Jack “she takes something out of her pocket and shakes it, it’s a key on a ring. Guess what, Jack you and me have our apartment”(88). Although Ma has never experienced dwelling in another place, she takes a daring decision to live in different house as her mother says: “but you’ve never lived away from home before”(88). By moving to the independent house jack's mother takes this step to recognize her life and to experience the sense of belonging. Furthermore, her decision to inhabit in the new apartment with Jack demonstrates that Ma mere feels safe and secure with

her son, and only his company makes her dwell in the place. In this context, she tells Dr. Clay how she has craved for company in that room, but now she only needs her son to be with her “Jack’s enough for me”(92). This quote illustrates that Ma has lost connection with her family and the world and represents the change in her personality that has occurred due to traumatic and shocking events which result in spatial crisis of homelessness crisis leading her to struggle to achieve a sense of belonging.

Another victim of homelessness is Jack. Jack is a five-year-old boy whose world is confined to eleven by eleven foot room. During his first five years, Jack has never known any connection or relationship with the outside space. Thereby, Ma’s son enters in a complex dilemma to understand the world when his mother tells him the truth about the existence of an actual world “she puts her finger on her mouth to hash me. I came down and I was a kid like you, is it a game I don't know? . . . That’s too many names, my head's full . . . I have to play the game so she won't be met. A house in TV? No outside, that's ridiculous, Ma was never in outside”(19). This suggests that room has been ‘home’ for Jack and all his existence is shaped by that place. Therefore, Jack struggles what Heidegger calls “sense of uncanny” when he discovers the existence of other places outside the room he has always known (Das and Singh 787). In fact, this concept signifies the shift from familiar feelings into sensations of estrangement. In this case, Jack becomes unfamiliar and unaware with the things that really exist “ships are just TV and so is the sea . . . Animals are TV . . . Boys are TV but they kind of look like me, the me in mirror isn't real either, just a picture”(28). The statement above demonstrates jack’s inability to escape trauma in the place he was confined in, his unawareness of other places leads him to display a spatial crisis and a possibility of provoking a severe traumatic response.

Once Jack steps outside, he easily finds himself tired of being in the world “yeah. I’ve seen the world and I'm tired now”(45). This quote illustrates jack’s incapacity to understand the

environment that he recently inhabits. Consequently, he struggles to cope with the idea of home outside the room. After the great escape, he suffers unfamiliarity and hardship to accept his new dwelling place. Moreover, Jack's existence is obstructed by multiple anxieties including his battle to achieve a meaningful interaction with people. Humans feel at home when they are able to express themselves freely, Morley states that: "the sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty . . ." (17). In the novel, Jack not only "hasn't needed to gauge distance" (17). But also he has not learned to measure language. In this regard, Ma's son finds obstacles to understanding others' language and their demeanor. For instance, his confusion about the blow kiss from his grandmother "she kisses her own hand and blows it at me. Catch? I think she wants me to play if I'm catching the kiss . . ." (55). The grandmother's gesture shows Jack's challenge to adopt to society's habits. Moreover, people's curiosity and their questions about him always make him feel like stranger. For example, the conversation between him and the nurse Noreen and whether he is tired from these new changes in his life, and how she sees him as a visitor "from another planet" (66). This conversation demonstrates how this unfamiliar environment has contributed to making Jack feel like an outsider in this new place.

The protagonist loses a sense of belonging and safety outside the room. He says in this context: "in room I was safe and outside is the scary" (46). Thus, shift in spaces creates physical crisis in which "the new space that emerges in his life drag him towards displacement . . ." (Das and Singh 789). In this regard, he displays an incapacity to dwell in the hammock house, where he expresses his unfamiliarity about that building as he says:

This house is hard to learn. The doors I'm let go in anytime are the kitchen and the living room and the fitness suit and this space room and the basement, also outside the bedroom that's called the landing . . . The Beth and sink and toilet are green

called avocado . . . The toilet has a lead on the tank like one that Ma hit Old nick . . .

Outsiders are not like us, they've got million of things and different birds of each thing . . . . (77)

Therefore, Jack's description shows his conflict to adjust with the new home and also expresses estrangement and unknown feelings not only toward the physical place 'hammock house' but also toward the whole environment of humankind. Thus, he fails to do well in his grandparent's house and achieves feelings of belonging and attachment to that house, and he keeps yearning for safety and a place to call "home".

To sum up, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate the feeling of homelessness and the loss of meaning of existence in the outside world, as the character Ma shows a home crisis. The analysis of this chapter relies on Heidegger's concept of "Dwelling". It has examined Ma's struggle to relocate again and battles to find safety in the outside space. It has shown that traumatic experiences have taken away Ma's harmony and belonging to the place she dwells. Therefore, Donoghue's character is unable to feel attached to the environment she inhabits, and she displays a sense of homelessness. Moreover, this chapter has tackled another housing crisis through the character Jack, who suffers a sense of unfamiliarity with the new environment and exhibits incapacity to adapt to the outside world. As a consequence, Jack struggles to identify the true meaning of being leading him to create a spatial crisis in which he rejects his new dwelling place, and always remembers the room that used to be his home for five years.

## General Conclusion

This dissertation has discussed both the factors and the outcomes of trauma in Emma Donoghue's *Room* and how the novelist has tackled the impact of shocking and traumatic experience that creates a mental dilemma in the character. Moreover, the research has attempted to investigate the psychological behavior on both Ma and Jack who have been exposed to atrocious circumstances including the conscious and the unconscious phenomena. To prove the aftermath of the overwhelming event and how the protagonist has dealt with it, a number of theories and concepts introduced by several Western scholars have been provided including Cathy Caruth, Slavoj Zizek, Sigmund Freud, and Martin Heidegger.

The present thesis has aimed to examine the source of traumatic experience and its' impact on individuals. To comprehend the concept of the overwhelming shock, a study has been conducted on the notion of trauma from the perspective of multiple scholars, which has focused on different mental disorders and has served as a reason for the growth of the importance of mental health. Thus, this investigation has sought to display the significant role of mental awareness in human beings' life. From this angle, many writers like Emma Donoghue have linked their fiction works with the issue of psychological effects according to environmental factors. Furthermore, this topic has been chosen to analyze characters who experience unmanageable circumstances, also to follow their survival stage and what results in it. It has demonstrated that the novelist has the purpose to show the psychological condition the characters suffer from such as: depression and anxiety and highlight the different outcomes of the crucial experience for both Ma and Jack.

This thesis has also shown multiple risk factors that result in the emergence of trauma through Donoghue's characters. In the first chapter, a complete description has been given to

demonstrate the environmental, cultural, and psychological causes that create mental instability, and unbearable shock in human beings' psyche. *Room* has highlighted several facets of these factors by focusing on an abducted victim who witnesses a terrifying event such as seven years of confinement and seclusion. After exposing to psychological persecution and physical violence by her captor, the victim exhibits a mental crisis that obstructs her daily life after survival leading the character to suffer a past traumatic stress disorder, which she grows a depressed behavior, intrusive thoughts, and negative mood that lead to a change in physical and emotional responses. Therefore, these reactions result in a series of damage to her mental state.

This study has also questioned the outcome of major trauma in Donoghue's *Room*. In the second chapter, the second chapter has examined the consequences of the overwhelming event. The novelist has portrayed the aftermath of the crucial experience that the characters have witnessed during the abduction. Although they are different in age, they both endure the same effect after their survival by rejecting the new environment and the outside world. Furthermore, it has revealed that the characters display a sense of homelessness, in which they find it difficult to dwell in the outside space. As a consequence, the victims crave for safe shelter and a place to call home. Ma and Jack have shown the emotional and inner challenge that they have faced as survivors of traumatic experience. Therefore, they suffer an existing problem, and inability to cope or adjust to the outside universe. This part has depicted home crisis through Donoghue's characters as a long-term effect of trauma that is considered a series of psychological disorders that lead human beings to fail to live in a stable state of mind.

Finally, Donoghue has managed to accentuate the notion of trauma in her novel *Room* which focuses on the traumatic symptoms and the outcomes of the shock. Moreover, the novelist has scrutinized the theory of trauma by depicting the internal conflict and struggle

that her character has felt during her captivity and after her survival. Therefore, this thesis has adapted a psychological perspective to illustrate different psychological behaviors through Donoghue's main character. At the end, this thesis can be a starting point for further research and investigations. It has provided essential information about trauma's factors and outcomes, also it has deconstructed its' major role in human mental health.

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## Résumé

Cette étude analyse le traumatisme dans *Room* (2010), du romancière Irlando-Canadienne Emma Donoghue, et examiner ses causes et ses impacts sur les personnages. Elle explore la représentation traumatique d'évènements cruciaux par l'écrivaine et comment celle-ci affecte psychologiquement et existentiellement les personnages. En s'appuyant sur plusieurs théories et concepts Cathy Caruth *La possibilité de L'histoire*, Slavoj Zizek *Violence*, Sigmund Freud « Deuil et Mélancholie », et Martin Heidegger « Construction Habitation Pensée. » Cette thèse vise à analyser comment Donoghue met en évidence les aspects psychologiques du traumatisme et comment ceux-ci peuvent conduire à de sérieuses crises existentielles d'appartenance et d'habitation dans le monde. L'étude conclut que le traumatisme joue un rôle important dans la formation de l'identité des personnages et crée une problématique de trouver sa place dans le monde.

## ملخص

هذه الدراسة تحلل مفهوم الصدمة في كتاب الغرفة ٢٠١٠، للكاتبة الإيرلندية الكندية إيما دونوهو، وتبحث في أسباب وآثار هذه الظاهرة على الشخصيات. والتعمق في تصوير الكاتب الأحداث القاسية والصادمة وكيفية تأثيرها النفسي والوجودي على الشخصيات بالاعتماد على مجموعة من النظريات والمفاهيم من ضمنها كاثي كاروث الصدمة احتمالية الماضي، سلا فوغ زيزك العنف، سيغموند فروود "الحزن والكأبة"، ومارتن هايدغر "التفكير المسكن". تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى دراسة كيفية توضيح دونوهو الجوانب النفسية وكيف من المحتمل أن تقود إلى خلق أزمة وجودية خطيرة للإحساس بالانتماء في العالم. تلخص الدراسة إلى أن الصدمة تلعب دورا هاما في تشكيل هويات الشخصيات وتحدث مشكلة في إيجاد مكان للفرد في العالم.