

Tehmina at once realizes that she has fallen into a classic trap of the woman where marriage leads to subordination and powerlessness. She says, 'The goal is marriage and once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination. I had no power, no rights, no will of my own.' (Durrani 100). She tries her level best to feel complacent about their marriage and so reconciles it time and again. However she is seen losing her autonomy as she compromises to put up first with vulnerable Anees and later with invulnerable Mustafa. She has to deal with two contradictory males in her life. One is unassuming, placid and self complacent being and the other an authoritarian, overpowering and dominating male. She fantasies a dreamlike and ideal life at the cost of her cravings for autonomy. As a typical product of the feudal and patriarchal world, Mustafa is the staunch believer of a ruler-subject relationship between man and woman.

It is this patriarchal system,' says Kate Millet, 'that limits the role of female to the level of biological experience and determines her subordinate position in the family. (Millet 26)

In the feudal world of Mustafa, women are expected to conform to the codes of behavior that are prescribed by patriarchal ideology. Therefore we see Tehmina bound to the role of a dutiful wife, a glamorous hostess, and a caring mother. A determined rebel in her is later found degenerated into an irresolute weakling who meekly succumbs to Mustafa's irrational prohibitions on her roaming freely, reading newspapers, and talking to other males. She tries to mould her personality to live in harmony with him. With a dim hope of his reformation, she plays an important role in extricating him after quite a long political exile and imprisonment during General Zia's regime. She is seen deconstructing the restrictive images of woman such as a passive, receptive, dependent and less competent entity, which are traditionally accepted in patriarchal society. She proves her mettle by succeeding in restoring Mustafa's political career with her diplomatic means. She also breaks the typical image of woman as the 'other' by her successful delegation and active participation in the stormy politics. Her tactful political moves place Mustafa as the 'other' and she as the 'subject'. This inversion of the role, however, doesn't hold for long, as she bounces back to the earlier place of 'other'ness. She has to dissociate herself from the unforeseen political image that she has created during her attempt to resurrect Mustafa where she is hailed as a lioness, an equal, though not superior to the Lion of Punjab. Tehmina has to retreat from her political life, only because she is expected to abide by the traditional attributes of a woman fostered by eastern culture. As Simon De Beavoir says,

It is not nature that defines woman; it is the culture around her that creates certain characteristics in her which then are perceived as natural. (Beavoir 38)

She has to suppress her political aspirations but she could never give away with her inner voice of rebellion. Commenting on her story of rebellion, Tehmina aptly says, 'It is not just about me and my husband, it is the injustice inherent in the system that I am symbolising.' (Muhammad 4) J.S. Mill in his theory of patriarchal family and its

oppressive practices argues that the subjugation of women is akin to the other oppressive practices like slavery and feudalism. Mustafa Khar is the offspring of both patriarchy and feudalism alike. Tehmina's suffering at his hands is the inevitable result of the fanatic and irreversible ideas that he inherited. For example, Tehmina talks about the sexual confusion that he has created in her (Durrani 106). She fears he may call her a slut, capable of adultery if she shows sexual advances because of her track record of betraying her first husband, whereas the same criterion could not be applicable in case of Mustafa who happens to be disrobing one marriage after another. Her first step of rebellion (i.e. of divorcing Anees and marrying Mustafa by forcing him to divorce his first wife Sherry) was considered as a stigma on her character as a woman and a blot on the image of her family. Her decision to marry Mustafa was so irrevocable for her that she had to bear with its consequences. She is expected to prove her marriage a success and to justify the correctness of her decision. J.S. Mill considers 'Marriage as a legal bondage that a woman is forced to seek because the society has deprived her of any attractive and dignified alternative.' (Mills 84) Tehmina too is denied any other alternative than Mustafa. Tehmina stands by a fallen Mustafa in prison but refuses to reconcile with the rising politician after his release. It is when she hits him back when he manhandles her or she locks him in the bathroom and tells him, 'If you can only understand once and for all that I am not here to take your nonsense, I'll let you out.' (Durrani 214).

Tehmina's freedom is actualized when she cuts her long hair, which was the most loved possession of Mustafa, short. It is at this moment that Mustafa truly realizes the real Tehmina. He gets a severe setback and feels paralysed. Tehmina says, 'Without my hair, he was a weak Samson.' (Durrani 236) This is symbolic of Mustafa's weakness and the indispensability of Tehmina in his life. Throughout the narrative, it can be observed that the source of the fanatic and erratic behavior of the feudal lords like Mustafa, lie in the opportunistic and unscrupulous interpretations of the principles of Islam. They misuse the name of Islam in their exploitation of women.

According to feudal tradition, wife was honour bound to live according to her husband's whims. A woman was like a man's land 'the Koran says so,' as a feudal lord he loves his land only in functional terms. If it is barren, he neglects it. I had to accept his interpretations of Koran, says Tehmina, though I believe that a land has to be tended and cultivated only then it could produce in abundance. (Durrani 107)

Tehmina maintains that the real power of the feudal lords was the protection they receive from the distorted version of Islam. She argues at several places that the real Islam was quite different from the noble religion parodied by the feudal lords. The message of god and religion is thus distorted and twisted to such an extent that it has become a new religion completely different from that which is Quran and was preached by the prophet. Her realization of the feudal misinterpretation of Islam discriminating it from the Islam of the prophet ignites in her the spirit of rebellion, for which she uses the resources of religion to rebel against

religion itself. For example, when she discloses his incestuous relationship with her sister she says,

You have betrayed Him again... it is His insult more than mine... because god has forbidden to have relationship with two sisters at the same time. (Durrani 180)

She uses the same Quran to appeal to his senses. She says,

Your marriage according to the Quran was over years ago when you slept with my sister. I have been living with you in sin. (Durrani 180)

She also retorts to her parents for their unethical stand of supporting Mustafa by saying,

Islam doesn't give the sole responsibility of love and duty to the children of parents who do severe injustice to them. Islam fights against injustice. -----I shall rise from the grave that you have dug for me (Durrani 360)

Both she and Mustafa take shelter in tradition as and when it is required. But her understanding of tradition is radical whereas his is dogmatic. She refuses to accept the tradition that suffocates the inner voice of woman. She violates the tradition of a woman leaving her husband's house only in coffin, and sets a new tradition of plunging into the battleground of reality. She tries to overcome her guilt and exhibits a humanitarian concern towards the plight of woman like Sherry who becomes homeless destitute due to Tehmina's marriage. Tehmina comes to believe that it is the divine justice that she too has to be homeless ultimately. Tehmina with a true sense of guilt calls it a 'Crime and Punishment phenomenon.' (Durrani 368). Writing of this narrative is Tehmina's instantaneous reaction to the denial of human rights to her. As a more composed self, she later resolves to live as an independent autonomous being, forsaking her identity as some man's wife or daughter. When Mustafa Khar called her up at the time of the international publication of this book, asking her what she's up to, she reminded him of reproaching her once that she has no identity of her own and would have to introduce herself as Mustafa Khar's ex-wife. She retorts, 'Now the world will soon know you as Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband.' (Durrani 382) Tehmina's struggle with the feudal world ended with her acquisition of the autonomy that she had longed for, for which she had to deviate from the norms of tradition and set her own mark of individuality. Her narrative *My Feudal Lord* thus projects the marginalization of women at the hands of male dominated society motivated by the dogmas of religious fanaticism and reasserts values of religion from feminist perspective.

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Narratological Complexities in Emma Donoghue's *Room*

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Abstract: The present paper seeks to unravel the narrative complexity in Emma Donoghue's latest novel *Room* shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2010. Inspired by a real life incident that took place in the life of Elisabeth, who was incarcerated by her father, Josef Fritzl, for twenty four gruelling years, the novel has an unusual narrative structure. It is built on two intense constraints: a) the limited point of view of the narrator who is a 5-year old boy named Jack; and b) the confines of Jack's physical world comprising an 11'x11' room wherein he is confined with his mother. Donoghue navigates intricately around these limitations. She gently leads us into Jack's world through crisp dialogues alongside careful hints of eavesdropping. The child feels secure with his 'Ma' available to him throughout. Extremely sensitive toward his needs, Ma has created lively regimen of exercise, singing and reading for Jack. The lifeless objects in the room viz., Rug, Bed, Wall, etc. are friends for impressionable Jack. His perception and idiom have been used to challenge readers to view the world from an innocent, sheltered, uniquely fresh perspective. To impart the narrative a complex curve, Donoghue strategically employs relationship between mother and child, family and loss, violence and power to demonstrate her grit to preserve innocence against all odds. Forced to live in a world comprising lifeless objects, Donoghue operates through the voice of the innocent narrator to evoke narrative empathy (*a la* Suzanne Keen) in the reader to trigger transformation deep within.

Keywords: Narrative Complexity, Narrative Empathy, *Room*, Prison.

Room is a unique story of entrapment and escape told from a child's point of view. It revolves around the child, Jack, who was conceived and born 'in captivity'. The narrative reveals that Room is actually a prison, with a villain holding the key, and that Ma (as Jack calls his mother) is being kept against her will. Ma has been captured deceitfully by Old Nick on a university campus, when he enticed her into his truck under the guise of helping his sick dog, and has locked her up in the hedged-in backyard soundproof 11'x11' Room (modified shed). During this period, she had one still birth and the second is her beloved son Jack, whom, in the most bizarre of circumstances, she gives as normal an upbringing as she can. Explaining her situation to Jack, Ma says, "We're like people in a book, and [Old Nick] won't let anybody else read it." (90) While for Ma such an existence is horrifying, for Jack it simply is – this contrast creates the major fissures and complexities in the book: Room is both a jail and a haven. Lacking any other frame of reference, for Jack, Room is neither

small nor in any psychological sense, a prison. Its main objects are given capital letters, which Jack names as beings and friends – Table, Bed, Wall, Plant, Skylight, Meltedy Spoon, and Rug etc. His material needs are met by "Old Nick", who comes at night bringing food and "Sundaytreat" (painkillers, new clothes), and making the bedsprings creak. Jack seems happily ensconced in a routine that is deeply secure, in a setting where he can see his mother all day, at any moment. She has created a structured, lively regimen for him, including exercise, singing and reading. The narrative conceit of telling the story through the voice of a 5 year old is initially off-putting, but the reader is soon piecing together information through his innocent observations. The horrors that unfold with such situations make the reader to end up empathizing with the mother through Jack's narrative. Eventually the pair escapes Old Nick's clutches. The latter half of the book focuses on Jack's introduction to Outside - he and Ma become the centre of a media storm and spend weeks at a psychiatric hospital. Donoghue pulls in amazing detail here - from the facemasks to protect Jack from germs he's never been exposed to before to Ma's defensive interview in which the press seem to have already decided on the story and are just looking for quotes to back up their editorial. The epigraph of the novel sets the tone of the narrative. It juxtaposes the relationship between inside and outside; dreams and reality; captivity and freedom:

My Child / Such trouble I have / And you sleep, your heart is placid; /
 You dream in joyless wood; / In the night nailed in bronze / In the blue
 dark you lie still and shine. / Simonides (C. 556- 468 BCE) "Danae"
 (tr. Richmond Lattimore).

The quote alludes to both a peaceful sleep and a blissful ignorance of the hard, natural world. It suggests that joy is likely found in the dream state and not in the reality of the world. The novel is divided in five chapters namely "Presents", "Unlying", "Dying", "After", and "Living". These chapters seem to suggest symbolically the representation of the religious concept of Hindu way of life and reincarnation, i.e. birth, life, death, life after death and then rebirth. As one starts the first chapter, the narrative is all about confusion, but the consequent chapters takes us along. The first fifty pages were, perhaps, the most difficult to make sense of. The story was confronting, the language grammatically incorrect, and there were too many questions and too few answers. It was then one realizes that this story is being told from the point of view of a five year old boy, Jack. Donoghue has expertly crafted this story, maintaining the authenticity of the five-year-old's narration through the grammar, simple words and inquisitive behaviours. Using Jack's point of view reflects and enhances the setting of the novel in different ways. Like the real room, Jack's language is limited and confined by extreme isolation. Jack's finite and restricted point of view is the only way to offer a perspective unique enough to match the uncommon setting of the book. A small child's limited knowledge and references to objects become the tool that Donoghue uses to highlight things. All of this adds a complex layer of understanding which is contrasted by the simplicity of the setting and the narrative. Donoghue has taken the typical speech patterns of a five-year

old boy including the odd fact that some children can have bad sentence structure while still using an advanced vocabulary and verbal expression skills. The Room's objects are capitalized, like 'Wardrobe' and 'Bath' giving them human characteristics, because for Jack these things make up his friendly environment and take the place of the missing people in his life. In addition to this, Jack's perspective is naturally innocent and sheltered so he has fresh ways of perceiving and describing things. For example, he refers to Ma's birth control pills as "the silver pack that has twenty-eight little spaceships." (9) He also refers to Ma's painkillers as "killers", which symbolically reinforces the true nature of the object, as besides numbing or killing pain, Ma uses them to end her life in the later part of the story. The characters in the novel are not only complex and unforgettable but their naming, which may seem simplistic, is an important technique to note and can often relate to the book's themes. There is Jack, Ma, Old Nick, Grandma, Steppa, Grandpa, Dr. Clay, Nurse Noreen, Officer Oh, Deanna, Paul, and Bronwyn. Some names are generic, indicating status, or emblematic suggesting familiar ideas. They are also simple and easy for a child to relate to. Donoghue looks at each through Jack's eyes. Jack has above average intelligence and is very knowledgeable. Jack is a common boy name used in many fairytales and folktales such as *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Using a common level for her young protagonist, Donoghue creates the idea of an 'everyman' Jack. He has two biological parents— but he barely glimpses the man who fathered him.

Ma is truly an emblem of mother. She has created a busy and positive world, both physically and intellectually, for Jack. She may be a captive, but her psychological resistance to the concept of being a victim is strong. She retrieves her childhood stories, songs, poems; and the knowledge of nutrition, exercise, play and learning to nurture Jack. She provides simple answer to the complex questions of growing Jack, as she says, "All I did was I survived, and I did a pretty good job of raising Jack." (235) In the absence of a name, her personal qualities and details were lost in her confinement though temporarily as she says in the end: "... everyone should have a room of their own." (304). Nameless and storyless, Old Nick is Ma's captor. Jack calls him such because he comes only at night and brings weekly Sunday treats. His name could be seen as a skewed interpretation of Santa Claus, "Old Saint Nick." Since Jack is not fully aware of the harm Old Nick has done to Ma, he has few negative feelings for this man only because Ma does not like him. Ma's perspective is that, "[he] looks human, but there's nothing inside." (112) Though he comes and goes under cover of dark, his presence however blankets every object in Room with a patina of threat, which Jack senses, even if he can't understand it. "I deliberately restricted his access to the book," Donoghue says. "I didn't give him a childhood because I didn't want to let him off the hook. Once he's arrested he disappears, because I refuse to be that interested in him. As a society we've given disproportionate attention to the psychopaths – the average thriller is about a psychopath who wants to rape and chop up a woman. I wanted to focus on how a woman could create normal love in a box." (Crown 1)

Grandma and Steppa are known in the family by their status. Grandma is an optimistic mother who hopes for her daughter's comeback despite insistence from others that she is dead. Grandpa is Ma's biological father who is divorced. Paul, Ma's brother, is married to Deanna. Together they have a daughter named Bronwyn who is slightly younger than Jack that poses a compare and contrast in their parenting parallels related to the respective environments. Whereas Jack is curious, loving and well-educated, Bronwyn is rude, insensitive and spoiled. Donoghue's choice of name for the police officer, who is Jack's first contact, is very interesting. An expression of awe and wonder, the surname of Officer Oh signals about the feeling that Jack would experience in his initial contact with the Outside. Dr. Clay functions as Ma's psychological anchor whose name is connected to earth. Nurse Noreen acts as protector, nurse, nurturer, and teacher to Jack who helps him to see things inside and outside the clinic. In constructing her story, Donoghue set out to explore various themes in the novel. Framing the story around confinement allowed her to juxtapose and clearly contrast what home is and isn't. The boundary lines are not simple and straightforward. The concept of home is explored in *Room* through the contrast of Jack's initial sense of home as compared to Ma's poignant recollection of a "house on the edge of a city, with a yard behind it, and a hammock." (83) Jack initially feels a strong sense of safety of belonging in Room while they leave, while Ma longs for outside all the time while they are in Room. After Ma's rescue and interview at the police station, Jack is so tired. His adventure is over and he just wants to go to bed in Room. "I've seen the world and I'm tired now." (155) He has lost his home, his place and possibly his definition of himself. Even as he is carried by Old Nick in Rug, Jack thinks: "I'm not in Room. Am I still me." (138) Donoghue uses literary references to establish her sense of home. The fairy tales like *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Runaway Bunny*, *Goodnight Moon* establishes a child's room as the first basic sense of home. Jack's sense of identification to all generic things in his life — Room, Table, Wardrobe, Bed, Skylight — is at the heart of his sense of home. In a typical five-year-old worldview, his mother is his home. She is his sustenance and perhaps, that is why Ma still breastfeeds Jack. While they are in Room, each is the other's home.

Parenting is the skill of gently guiding and transforming the child into an adult. Ma seems to have naturally good maternal instincts. Despite the limitations of their environment, she raises Jack to have curiosity, and she knows that Jack needs intellectual stimulation, physical activities and good nutrition. She teaches Jack science, math and reading. The only subject she avoids is history because then she would have to explain about the real world, the outside world. She instinctively maintains routines "We have thousands of things to do in the morning." (8) There are games, art projects, listening skills, and stories. There are also housekeeping tasks, such as taking a bath with their clothes on so that the laundry gets done at the same time. Donoghue's exploration of reality and fantasy is a familiar theme in literature and is usually presented inside the psychological boundaries of a character's personality. Because Ma and Jack are locked into an 11'X 11' room, they are trapped in a