

Lacanian Repetition and Recollection: From Trauma to Fantasy in Emma Donoghue's *Room*

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ABSTRACT

The fascination of Emma Donoghue's *Room* relies on the timeless wonder it has presented to the world of literature. In the novel, when the protagonist steps out of the room after seven years of incarceration, she is a mother of a five-year-old son named Jack, after whom the entire story is narrated. The protagonist endures the evil moments of confinement with the desire to return to her home; however, when she is released, she encounters her father's apprehension in accepting them as his child and grandchild. Besides, insensitive social institutions tend to exaggerate the drama of their misery. This article takes a retroactive exploration of the traumatic sensibility before and after the abduction, where it notices the traces of a malfunctioned father's signifier. Such traces emerge after the abduction in the process of repetition and recollection when Ma begins to symbolize how being an adopted girl in the family, repeating in the guise of other miserable occurrences. The truth that the outside no longer protects her subjectivity drags her to lose her phantasmatic structure about the outside as a dear place. Moreover, this article draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis as the instrumental approach to assess the post-trauma human condition in the symbolic structure where the interplay of death drives resigns the fantasy structure. The result will illustrate how the sublimated death drive could invoke the Name-of-the-Father to re-establish the victims in the symbolic order and provide them with the vital fantasy to defend against the intrusion of the real.

Keywords: Fantasy; Lacan; the Name of the Father; Repetition; Trauma

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INTRODUCTION

Emma Donoghue (1969-) is a contemporary Irish-Canadian novelist who benefited from an enriching childhood. Her father Frances Donoghue, an English teacher, and her mother, Denise Donoghue was a literary critic and university professor. From a very early age, she manifests her innate longing to write, as literary passion runs in her educated family. The theme of maternity was an obsession for her, and she expresses a unique yet transcendental orientation toward women and motherhood (Mulvihill, 2006, p. 98). The depiction of mothering can be perceived flawlessly in *Room*. Women appear as passionate creatures who turn to do drudgery work and seem to be the ladies of the celestial. Despite her priority for maternity, she owns a free-floating imagination that is the result of her travelling to other countries where she could see her Irish culture from a distance, as well as gaining vast insight into the reality of cultures (Ue, 2012, p.102).

Room (2010) is classified as the captive narratives genre in which the novelist is inclined to magnify the situation of vulnerable groups like women and children, along with the sense of terror and violence hovering over the symbolic space. When Ma, the protagonist, was abducted, she was only nineteen years old. Shortly after her disappearance, her father held a funeral ceremony to end the sense of shame of her absence. The critical question is whether her father would have done the same if Ma were her biological daughter or not. The answer is uncertain, but he would think twice before doing it. This violation is the result of Ma's real parents who initially abandoned her, so she has led a life as an adopted child. This article perceives this primordial signifier as the origin of a series of traumatic events that operate later in her life. To illustrate her trauma of abduction, this article explores the notion of trauma not as a pure oddity that occurred once but as the persistence of a process of repetition that is inscribed in the life of the protagonist from the very early moments of her existence.

Jacques Marie Émile Lacan (1901-1981) was born into a middle-class family, the first of three children. He attended a prestigious Jesuit school and was an outstanding student. After he completed medical studies, he trained in psychiatry during the years 1927-31 at Hôpital St Anne and Hôpital Henri-Rouselle in Paris. His theoretical framework provides vast insight, yet complicated in the psychoanalysis study, mainly based on Freud's meaning but through a linguistic tendency. That is important to bear in mind that it is almost impossible to figure out Lacanian psychoanalysis without an overall understanding of his three registers: imaginary, symbolic, and real. And all other psychical phenomena that go between them. "My discourse proceeds in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with the others" (Lacan, 1964, p. 89). Therefore, a thorough study is required in order not to misinterpret his complex concepts.

The article casts a round and retrospective look into the life of the protagonist and explores her existence after abduction, and meticulous attention to her childhood to detect the faulty signifier that latently trails her. The significance of the paper is to argue how the sparks of traumatic signifiers get deep-rooted in the life of those who have been subjected to a defenseless situation, so that it is possible to trace such sparks not only in that traumatic event but also as a continuity of malfunctioned signifiers in the life of victims. Since the calculation of trauma forms its narration with a flashback to the history of the subject who was shocked by the overwhelming experience. Lacan suggests the term "après coup", the translation of Freud's "deferred action", which signifies that the trauma intervenes after the fact since it was repressed at the time of occurrence (Lacan, 1991, p. 191). The atrocious effect of trauma is embodied in the subject's collapse of fantasy that plays a protective role in the symbolic space.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable amount of literature has been published on Donoghue's *Room*, which testifies to the potency of the content as an enriched territory of investigation. Undoubtedly, the most trustworthy sources are the talks and interviews with the author who had a direct touch with the phenomena of the story. Emma Donoghue, in an interview with the Journal of Gender Studies (2012) declared her novel was inspired by Elizabeth Fritzl's case, who was imprisoned by his father for twenty-four years in an underground dungeon. But for all that *Room* is different from that real case because she deliberately sets *Room* in a garden shed and eliminates the fact of incest. Outstandingly, she expressed her wonder about the true story of Jaycee Dugard and her children who were discovered in a garden shed in the U.S. just after writing the *Room*, where she delicately articulates that "it because sometimes it's life that imitates art" (Ue, 2012, p.102).

Existing scholarship has delved deeply into the multifaceted impacts of captivity and psychological distress within the narrative. For instance, in "Corporeal and Spatial Engagements in Emma Donoghue's *Room*" (2024), the disciplinary gaze turns the mother and son into docile bodies that become mere platforms to be dominated. Even after their breaking free, the traces of the spatial limitation follow them psychologically because transitioning to different spaces further challenges their sense of identity and self-integrity. "Attachment as a Key in the Development of Personality" (2024) explores the role of attachment patterns in the development of a child's personality in Donoghue's *Room*. The main objective is to observe the personality of a restrained mother, Ma, and her child, Jack, who was born in a confinement set by a molester, Old Nick. In "Truth in Fiction is Truth Infection" (2023), Othman alluded to the myth of Danaë from Greek mythology and analyzed *Room* as a multi-fictional universe. To illustrate, Ma's reciting of Simonides' poem draws a comparison between Jack and Baby Jesus, emphasizing their shared status as fatherless sons (231). This observation about fatherlessness, though briefly touched upon, resonates with a broader critical thread that often implicitly points to the Lacanian paternal figure. Jaime de Pablos, in the article "Becoming Resilient Subjects: Vulnerability and Resistance in Emma Donoghue's *Room*" (2022), indicates the doctrines of Judith Butler on the notion of resistance. She expands on the fact that although Ma is deeply affected by the destructive power of Old Nick, she continues to create a fascinating room for Jack, that are, in a sense, a form of resistance (36-37). Hadi and Asl in "The Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic," (2021) seek to examine the characters' development in the face of the existing tensions between the different psychic and social realities. Colin Wright in "Lacan on Trauma and Causality" (2021) alludes to Lacan's neologism "troumatisme" which refers to a "trou" meaning a hole that the encounter with the real causes to the smooth repeating of everyday scenarios, "like the trauma tears a hole in the very fabric of meaning" (239). The neologism then refers to the term *tuché* corresponds to an entirely unexpected encounter with what Lacan calls the real. While these sources mention a kind of loss and lack which Ma experienced, often attributed to the lack of a real family, this study specifically aims to delve deeper into the implications of the "absent father" and its consequences, particularly as a foundational 'hole' or lack that impacts the protagonists' psychological landscape and potential for development.

The psychological ramifications of captivity and trauma are further explored by other scholars. Fazlzadeh et al., in the article "Space and place: The horror of detachment in Emma Donoghue's *Room*" (2021), elaborate on Jack using the verb "live" for the objects in the room as if they are alive and in real interaction with him (452), suggesting a creative, albeit confined, adaptation to absence. Topbaş in *Traumatized Victims: Rape Trauma* (2021) portrays raped

victims and rape-induced trauma that controls the lives of the victims for a long time (6). Ma, after the escape feels more entangled in social judgmental borders (95), highlighting the enduring psychological scars. In the article “Psychological Effect of Captivity to the Protagonist in Emma Donoghue’s Novel *Room*” (2020), Desyara and Sahri discuss several types of psychological effects. To illustrate, Jack is diagnosed with a social anxiety disorder (SAD), showing a kind of social phobia after leaving room. *Trauma and Survival* (2020) by Anijalg analyzes Ma’s journey of traumatic recovery, considering the various factors that cause her trauma and hinder her recovery, as well as the factors that help her cope with trauma and contribute to her recovery.

Additionally, scholars have examined the theme of resilience and adaptation in the face of changing circumstances. Das and Singh in “Contesting Captive Spaces” (2018) seek to highlight the trauma borne out of changing spaces (786). Ladrón, in the article “Psychological Resilience in Emma Donoghue’s *Room*” (2017), interpreted the word “resilience” as the capability to go back, to abandon the previous state (85). She emphasizes that such resilience is functioning more in Jack than in Ma, since, according to psychological studies, children are more competent to adjust to their reality (94). The authors emphasize the fact that the child’s first abode is the space of identity formation for them, which could be a reason why Jack has lost his harmony after freedom. While these studies robustly address the trauma of captivity and the journey toward recovery, they tend to focus on the immediate effects of spatial confinement and liberation. This current research distinguishes itself by moving beyond these direct effects to explore the deeper, more formative psychological consequences stemming from the “absent father” figure, not just as a thematic element but as a Lacanian void.

The novel *Room* appropriates a vast array of observations for further dramatic analysis. Building on and extending the existing critical discourse, this research confirms previous findings regarding trauma and contributes to our understanding of a new perspective on the issue of trauma through the specific application of the Lacanian retroactive theory. Specifically, it argues that the “absent father” functions as a primal lack, a “trou” (hole) in the Lacanian sense, which precipitates a unique trajectory of psychic development for both Ma and Jack. Besides, this study offers a different look at the Lacanian death drive, arguing that it is not solely a drive of destruction, but possesses the potential to create from a zero state—a crucial re-evaluation within the context of their radical deprivation. The notion of sublimation, which is detected at the end of their ordeal, will be analyzed as the protagonists’ capacity to transform this fundamental absence and the ensuing psychic trauma into a form of creative psychic reorganization and subjectivity in symbolic space. The thought-provoking findings signal the need for additional studies to understand more about the significance of trauma as an unknown wound that can forever scar the psyche, yet holds the potency of acquiring sublimation.

METHOD

This article applies a retroactive look into the novel *Room* through the theoretical framework of Lacanian Psychoanalysis. It detects the traces of a malfunctioned father’s signifier throughout the story, which mainly conveys the inner characteristic of trauma, signifying that it is only through a flashback that its meaning can be realized. Lacan calls this the insistence of the signifiers that resist in the unconscious with an instinct to manifest themselves without control. During Lacan’s years of the 1950s, he employed the term “insistence” to refer to the repetition compulsion by defining the insistence of certain signifiers in the subject’s signifying chain (1993, p. 242). Such signifiers

must be repressed for the subject to maintain mental equilibrium. Here, the notion of “repetition compulsion” that is the fundamental theory of Freudian psychoanalysis arises. Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1959), introduced the function of drives as the impetus of the human desire to repeat certain things. Such repetition, according to Freud, is not pursuing the pleasure principle, but it is the compulsion of the death drive to repeat (31).

Lacan's approach to trauma develops from early seminars to late ones, and this topic is very connected with the category of the real. The latter is one of the three orders in Lacan's doctrines. The theory of three orders of the imaginary, symbolic, and the real theorizes three fundamental dimensions in Lacanian psychoanalysis studies. The real is the realm of ambiguities located outside the language and “resists symbolization absolutely” (Lacan, 1991, p. 66). Therefore, there is a reality of impossibility in the real that provides its traumatic aspect.

Lacan formulates two main characteristics into the phenomenon of trauma; the first is related to its retroactive quality and its tendency to synthesize into the presence and gain its signification. Lacan suggests the term “après coup,” which is the translation of Freud's “deferred action,” signifies the trauma intervenes after the fact since it was repressed at the time of occurrence (1991, p. 191). And the second is its place in the real. Lacan defines trauma as the realm of the real that hinders the smooth functioning of the signifying chain. “The real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely” (Lacan, 1991, p.66). Here, the core of the real is compared with the constant force of trauma, which is always there and at times manifests itself and disturbs the subject's equilibrium.

Another collaborative theory is Lacan's fantasy. As it is observed in *Room*, the consequences of trauma lead to a symbolic death, which is the death of meaning in the face of the Other. This Other is a symbolic Other in the reflection of whom the individual's identity could manifest. The reason for this death is detected in the collapse of fantasy, which is the support of desire. To emphasize the importance of fantasy in maintaining the desire for life, the crucial Lacanian theory of “object petit à” is introduced. That is the object-cause of desire (1964, p. 186), which Lacan expands on in multiple *Seminars*. This object always remains untouched but exists as the critical entity that holds the desire of the subject and helps it to sustain the fantasy. In *Room*, during incarceration, they can connect to the outside through the support of fantasy. In truth, certain Objects imply the role of object petit à, such objects for Ma and Jack are the same, but with different functions.

The last concept that is examined is the “sublimation of death drive”, which is the invocation of the father's name as a prohibitive and protective shield for bringing a position for the subject in symbolic (Lacan, 1992, p.212). In truth, the function of the death drive in the subject is not solely for self-destruction and suicidal tendency but a drive that attempts to remind the subject that the object of the desire is lost, or in a simpler sense, the signifier of the desire is blocked, and it is impossible to integrate with it (Žižek, 2009, p. 62). Lacan raised the point of fusion in the essence of drives, because of this fusion, at times, the aggressively fatal death drive can flip over to the other side of the life drive. “The death drive is not only a will to destruction but also a will to creation ex nihilo. So, after experiencing symbolic death, the subject gains the capacity to reorganize intersubjective relations and to construct a new symbolic order” (Kim, 2015, p.104). Therefore, the crying trauma in the aftermath could be a voice that needs to be recognized.

DISCUSSION

ROOM'S TRAUMATIC REPETITION

The story of *Room*, before anything else, is the story of an unwanted child who was born and endures the chain of suffering. Emma Donoghue intimates this suffering with delicate skill, that is to say, narrating the tense tale must be with sensitive attention since “Stories are a different kind of true” (Donoghue, 2010, p.71). She does not have a clear understanding of the fact that Ma, the abducted girl, was herself an adopted child. By a meticulous look into the story, one observes certain echoes of hurts that happen in new guises. When Ma gives birth to Jack, in that gloomy room, it was not her desire at all; however, he becomes her savior. Jack is the symbolization of Ma's history, an unwanted child that Donoghue never mentioned directly but only through a quote from Simonides, in the opening of the chapters; “My child such trouble I have. And you sleep, your heart is placid; you dream in the joyless wood; in the night nailed in bronze, in the blue dark you lie still and shine” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 1). In Simonides’ verse, Danaë [the protagonist] is lamenting her fate, her imprisonment in the dark bronze chamber, which parallels Ma’s confinement in Room (Othman, 2023, pp. 231-232). This trouble with its repetitive tendency permeates the very hidden fiber of the story, a veiled signifier that dredges up in a new guise to attain its meaning.

Maybe the most heartbreaking part of the story was the moment when Ma was attending the talk show, where she was experiencing something like a traumatic encounter with herself, as an adopted child, and the guilt of giving birth to a son who would be suffering from the truth of being the child of rape. “But did you ever consider asking your captor to take Jack away?” “Away?” “To leave him outside a hospital, say, so he could be adopted. As you yourself were, very happily, I believe” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 195). In the same way, the trauma of Room is going to be remembered in the mind of Jack when he gets older and finds a place in the symbolic, a space where the subject is in the constant force of signifiers and the encounter with the Lacanian *tuché* that signifies the encounter with the real. Similarly, the sense of the Room, that small place, is no longer the cheerful universe of Objects, the things that he used to personify will sense differently, as well as the reason why they were there. It is then that things will start to make sense when he gets on the track of his life.

ROOM THE ENCOUNTER OF THE REAL

The main step to placing trauma in the realm of the Lacanian real is its unchangeable core and resistance to symbolization. “The real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization” (Lacan, 1991, p. 66). Metaphorically speaking, Ma’s constant interaction with the walls of the room in that confined place testifies to her encounter with the real, that impossible place which renders no sense of freedom. The Lacanian real has an unchanged core that is always there and tends to disrupt the very normal function of things. Such encounters that he labels as the “*tuché*” are highly sensed when Ma, in the dreary room, faced with her dying desire and the impossibility of her dream (Lacan, 1964, pp. 53-54). The suffering that Ma underwent was beyond symbolization, since Donoghue did not allow her to have a voice in the novel. So to put an alleviating factor to the heavy intrusion of the real, the five-year-old Jack narrates the tale of who is living in the world of the imaginary. “What wakes me up is a noise over and over. Ma's not in Bed. There’s a bit of light, the air's still icy. I look over the edge, she's in the middle of Floor going thump thump thump with her hand. ‘What did Floor do?’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 78). That is the

first visible violence for a human to be suppressed alive, both physically and verbally. “By looking at that room from his lenses [Jack’s] observe a world that is full of his Ma, who is captivated, exposed to violent pregnancy, and sexual assaults by a man called Old Nick” (Günaydın Albay & Güleşçe, 2023, p. 258). She is constantly living in the real, but the naïve narrator interprets her with bright words, while there is no clarity in the real.

It is beyond Jack’s limited sense to grasp the depth of misery his mother endures. For him, the only traumatic entity in Room relates to the time when Old Nick comes at night and he has to stay in the wardrobe where he suffered from the unknown anxiety intruding on him and witnessing the horrific things, “The marks on her neck are like when I’m painting with beet juice. I think the marks are Old Nick’s fingerprints” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 49). The ultimate trauma in *Room* was the moment when Ma tries to make Jack believe the catastrophe that they are in, that Room is a prison, not the fantastic place Jack believes it to be; “My tummy creaks really loud and I figure it out, why Ma’s telling me the terrible story” (85). Later on, in the symbolic space he becomes disillusioned again when he desperately needs to return to Room where Ma used to be his all-time mom, and she never left him alone even though she was “Gone” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 53). He is so bewildered to digest all those traumatic realities. This disenchantment indeed has a traumatic impact on his innocent being. “I hold on to her hand. She wants me to believe so I’m trying to but it hurts my head. ‘You actually lived in TV one time?’ ‘Room’s only a tiny stinky piece of it.’ ‘Room’s not stinky.’ I’m nearly growling” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 74). For sure when Ma is entangled in the horror of life in that garden shed, she was not aware that she is pursuing an old traumatic signifier that persists to repeat its pulses.

SKYLIGHT AS THE OBJECT PETIT À

The structure of the room was firmly built in the soundproofed layers of materials and lots of insulating foam inside the walls. Old Nick also added a layer of sheet lead, because it kills all the sound (Donoghue, 2010, p. 75). In such a stifling room, when all gets black, the Skylight can shine brighter, which is the petit frame on the ceiling of the room. “It’s all black now except Skylight has a dark kind of brightness. Ma says in a city there’s always some light from the streetlights and the lamps in the buildings and stuff” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 77). Skylight has the power of Lacanian object *Petit à*, to sustain their desire and make them believe that pure satisfaction is possible. Object *petit à* in the Lacanian sense has an unattainable role, but its presence in the subject is a promise to enjoyment, as it is the object cause of desire (1964, p. ix), which is a necessary object of the subject to sustain in symbolic space. “I love in you something more than you—the object *petit à*” (Lacan, 1964, p. 263). It is the necessary element in the structure of fantasy without which the fantasy does not function, and the subject comes in touch with a brutal contact with the real.

There was a scene where Old Nick cut the power of the Room, in such conditions there was no light, still the only beam was due to the Skylight in the daytime and at night, they looked up to see the “God’s silver face” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 24) that is a celestial metaphor alluding to the moon. Or any changes in the skylight show a bit of rejoicing in their hearts. Like all the Objects in the Room, the skylight belongs solely to that space; in the same way, the object *petit à* that is an unachievable entity belongs to the time of desire. In the course of the story, this object proves to be far-fetched since the outside brings the death of fantasy and terror for both of them. The grandeur of Skylight has only been the property of the Room, while the outside seems to be surrounded by the intrusion of the real. Jack could not tolerate the harsh invasion of nature on his immature physical being, he is kind of feeling fright rather than the joy he used to feel in the Room,

“The light’s not like in a window, it’s coming all ways round the sides of my cool shades, it wasn’t like this on our Great Escape. Too much horrible shine and air freshening. ‘My skin’s burning off’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 161). The little window of the Skylight casts the role of object caused of desire, and everything seems flawlessly enjoyable from behind the Skylight. The skylight manifests itself differently in the mentality of Ma and Jack. For each of them, Skylight means something. For Jack, a fantastic unknown place that time to time shows its golden door to him, and for Ma, it is like the lost desire that still seems to await her in the symbolic order.

FATHER, CAN’T YOU SEE THAT I’M ALIVE

The dream case of Sigmund Freud “Father, can’t you see that I’m burning?” (Freud, 1955, p. 513), fascinates a great deal in this research, that how a father can destroy a child’s life, not only physically but also symbolically. The dream case was a testimony of the real intrusion in the symbolic through the dream. To briefly recount the dream, it was an exhausted father who asked an old man to surveil his dead son during the night so that he could rest. But he dreamt about his son who held the father’s arm while begging, “father, can’t you see that I’m burning?” and at the same time, the father senses the noise from the room where his son was burning out of the falling candles. For Lacan, it is the intrusive real in the realm of fantasy and dream that makes the father awake in fright. The traumatic real that the father was not doing his fathering duty. Here, the sensitive phrase that the place of the real stretches from trauma to the fantasy hits the very smooth functioning of the matter (Lacan, 1964, p. 60).

Ma’s father holds the funeral ceremony for her without realizing that she is not dead. “‘He had a funeral for us,’ I tell Noreen, ‘but we weren’t in the coffin’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 185). That led to a stop in the search for her case, then she was in prison for seven years. As previously noted, the chain of miserable signifiers is the result of paternal deficiency at the time that the first signifier established the subject in the symbolic. “Ma contemplates suicide not during her days in captivity but after she apparently finds her freedom. More than anything else, her own father’s apprehension in accepting Jack as his grandson betrays her understanding of the outside as her home” (Das & Singh, 2018, p. 789). This is the reason that leads her deeper and deeper to the symbolic death, where she cannot find the meaning that provides phantasmatic support for her psychical equilibrium; in a sense, the laws of desire cannot find their place in the reality of the symbolic. “‘I can’t be in the same room. It makes me shudder.’ ‘There’s no it. He’s a boy. He’s five years old,’ she roars. ‘I’m saying it wrong, I’m--it’s the jet lag’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 185). Jack was dehumanized by both his biological father and his grandfather, who both addressed him by an impersonal “it” (Ladrón, 2017, p. 89). Here the Freudian dream case rings its bell; the story of an ignorant father whose son was flamed by the drop of candles on him while he was sleeping, he then appears in his dream begging for help, “father, can’t you see that I’m burning?” Now this plea occurs in Ma begs his father to recognize her and her son, to see her alive coming back to the family. Metaphorically speaking, the father does not bother to open his eyes to see her girl’s sorrow; he is drifting into a heavy dream.

Now it is time for her to overturn the rule of the symbolic since there is no phantasmatic support from the Other. She faces the traumatic reality that Lacan argues, “there is no Other of the Other” (Lacan, 2001, p. 242), then there is no father as an authentic Other. Moving on, she faces the question of “what the Other wants, what is her place as the subject in the Other’s desire” (Glowinski et al., 2001, p. 195). Does that mean what my father wants from me? And the answer is her traumatic encounter with the lack of the Other. The answer to that question would be, my father wants me to die, to not live, since he already thought of me to be dead. She encounters the

void in the Other (Lacan, 2014, p. 276). The Other for Ma voids of significant ability to keep her desire in the symbolic, hence, she relinquishes the fantasy function and no longer perceives the world as being meaningful since the Other/other is a terrifying reality.

MENTAL RAPE OF INSENSITIVE MEDIA

Mental rape is the metaphoric use of the brutality of human language to penetrate the other's unconscious and bring out the repressed, at times, in a very subtle way, so the addressee only feels the teasing sparks of its flames in her psyche. By Žižek's critical attitude toward language violence; using language is supposed to suppress physical violence, but it goes on exerting even more violence in the symbolic structure, he then compares human savagery to animals in a way that human can be even more violent than animals since he owns a tool, that is called language (Žižek, 2008b, p. 61).

The day that Ma decided to appear on a public talk show, she hoped to raise funds for Jack's university; moreover, she never thought about the birth of Jack as a tragedy but a blessing in her dark moments. However, the main focus of the lady reporter was on Jack's birth and the consequences of her distressing confinement. Maybe that is the first trace of symbolic death in Ma, since the way she felt for Jack is beyond the acceptance of the media. She was bombarded with inquisitive questions that she finds unfair for what she feels for Jack;

'We're just trying to help you tell your story to the world.' She looks down at the paper in her lap. 'So. You found yourself pregnant for the second time, in the hellhole where you'd now eked out two years of your precious youth. Were there days when you felt you were being, ah, forced to bear this man's—' Ma butts in. 'Actually I felt saved.' 'Saved. That's beautiful.'

(Donoghue, 2010, p. 192)

Jack was truly her savior; without him, she could not stand the gloomy room. It was Jack who took her back to the world of story and fantasy. However, the media tends to make her seem like a victim of an unwanted child. That is probable that Ma did not choose to get pregnant, "Ma certainly doesn't choose motherhood and she is, as the novel powerfully reminds us, the victim of repeated rape" (Morgenstern, 2018, p. 45). That is also obvious that she repressed the traumatic fact of being the victim of sexual abuse to maintain her psychological equilibrium. However, the intrusive question of the media prompts her to open the areas that must be repressed. Therefore, she encounters the real, that of trauma. "Ma makes a face. 'All I did was I survived, and I did a pretty good job of raising Jack. A good enough job.'" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 193). She accentuates her huge love for Jack, but the reporter tends to ask insensitive questions and adds more pressure on her. As a matter of fact, the media loves the drama of her ordeal. "Now, without necessarily putting it in terms of, say, Stockholm syndrome, many of our viewers are curious, well, concerned to know if you found yourself in any way emotionally dependent on your captor.' Ma's shaking her head. 'I hated him'" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 192). To make the story way tempting to the audience, the reporter tends to ask even the impermissible question that Ma had warned not to be asked, that of her stillbirth. Such ignorance of the media as the Other evokes a sense of terror for her.

The flashbacks of a traumatic condition are mainly formulated in "social process" and analyzed from a social point of view rather than being considered purely as individual emotions (Malik et al., 2025, 850). During the interview, she was attacked not only by the questions but also by her repressed signifiers. The ones that she could not bear, namely, the signifier of the real father

of Jack. This signifier was repressed by the protective mechanism to maintain her psychical equilibrium. However, the media intrusively raise the matter and put her more and more in a severe intrusion of its prurient curiosity. “I was just wondering whether, in your view, the genetic, the biological relationship’. ‘There was no relationship.’ She's talking through her teeth. ‘And you never found that looking at Jack painfully reminded you of his origins?’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 193). Media have the ability not only to construct a parallel reality by decontextualising and recontextualising data, but also to form subjects through injurious interpellation or to signify words and categories to fulfill their intended goals (Jaime de Pablos, 2022, pp. 44-45). Such a raw attack on the broken existence of the victim can be equal to mental rape; it is penetrating her soul to the depths of avoidance. The invasive questions of media drag her even more into the space of the symbolic where nothing makes true sense. But the only signifier was Jack the media brutally attacked, that he is the son of her abductor. The suicidal tendency is a clear reaction of Ma in a society where she intimately strived to be recognized, not as a victim, but as a woman who has found her living reasons in stifling captivity.

DEATH IN FANTASY DEATH IN SYMBOLIC

The fantasy, according to Lacan gets its authentication from the symbolic structure, so any attempt to reduce fantasy to the imagination is a permanent misconception since the images of fantasy must have support in signifying structure (2006, p. 532). Now the critical question arises: what if the structure of fantasy is demolished due to the victim's traumatic experience? Or when there is no symbolic father to reconstruct the subject in society? The condition of Ma after release is the testimony of a subject who has lost her defense in symbolic, the defense that Lacan calls the fantasy (Evans, 2006, p. 34). Žižek asserts that the victims of the trauma have been altered by the oppressive moments they have undergone, and then a new subject is born in the symbolic again with no connection to the desires he/she used to have, furthermore, he continues that the subject who survives has no congruity to the symbolic space as if they live in a realm of death that is stimulated by the death drive (2008a, p. 12). In *Room*, both Ma and Jack encounter death in the symbolic in different ways. Although the essence of this encounter is different for them, they relinquish the fantasy that already exists in captivity.

The fantasy used to cheer them in looking up at the Skylight, in witnessing the majesty of the outside from a little ceiling frame. “Brightness is coming in Skylight, the dark snow's nearly gone. Ma's looking up too, she's got a small smile on, I think the prayer did magic” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 27). Now that they are outside, the encounter with the objects is so invasive before Jack, who supposed that the rain, which used to be glimpsed magically through the Skylight, now outside, seems to be the gloomy monster that is about to fall on him. “Something falls on my face and I shout. ‘Just a speck of rain,’ says Paul. I stare up at the sky, it's gray. ‘Is it going to fall on us?’” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 197). All connotations are evaporating in Jack's imaginary stage and giving their place to the symbolic, where he could not recognize them but as the real, or as being the none-sense. “In *Room* we knew what everything was called, but in the world there's so much, persons don't even know the names” (Donoghue, 2010, p. 218). Such dissociation from the symbolic equals the symbolic death, a kind of destruction in the structure of the subject. He starts to stay aloof from the people, and the worst is his almost nightly confrontation with nonsense nightmares, similar to his perplexed attitude toward the outside world.

'I go asleep really easy, but I wake up crying.'
'It's OK, it's OK.' That's Ma, kissing my head.
'Why they don't cuddle the monkeys?'
'Who?' 'The scientists, why don't they cuddle the baby monkeys?'
'Oh.' After a second she says, 'Maybe they do. Maybe the baby monkeys learn to like the human cuddles.'

(Donoghue, 2010, p.187)

It is not quite possible to decide on the symbolic death for Jack since he has not yet entered, only at the threshold of accepting the symbolic signifiers. But for Ma is beyond that sense; Ma has already died symbolically, and her only little element that causes her desire, that of Lacan's object *petit à* vanishes at her entrance to the outside world, now that there is no Skylight metaphorically implies hope and freedom. That is all because the outside has lost its phantasmatic role as her dear home.

The thought of suicide is the main testimony of her confronting the impossible, the real, and the death drive, which is the drive of destruction. A tendency that Ma closely felt when the insensitive media made her face the truth of her destiny as an adopted child, and Jack as being genetically the son of Old Nick. A desperation for her father, who does not recognize her and her child, may bitterly remind Ma of her being an adopted girl. Moreover, she does not find her true self from seven years ago; the only one she observes is a shattered woman with no sense of integration with the other. "It's perverse,' Ma is telling Dr. Clay, 'all those years, I was craving company. But now I don't seem up to it'" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 263). It seems as if she tends to stay aloof from Jack and his also shattered imaginary world. He bitterly feels the separation that occurs in their relationship with Ma. "I didn't know it was hers-not-mine. In Room everything was ours" (180). Ma could not help to stay in the old days; she has constantly been exposed to the intrusive memory that her surroundings cause, such a mentality did not exist in Room.

SUBLIMATION OF THE SUBJECT IN SYMBOLIC

The term sublimation, which Freud believes is a transcending reaction, could emerge as a transference of traumatic experiences that have no other means but in the form of art, story, narration, or even finding an object that could stimulate the desire once again. The main characteristic of sublimation before Lacan is being socially valued (1992, p. 107). So it is not solely reduced to art, but myriad factors that are defining the subject in the symbolic space. Lacan raised the point of fusion in the essence of drives, because of this fusion, at times, the aggressively fatal death drive can flip over to the other side of the life drive. "The death drive is not only a will to destruction but also a will to creation *ex nihilo*. So, after experiencing symbolic death, the subject gains the capacity to reorganize intersubjective relations and to construct a new symbolic order" (Kim, 2015, p. 104). Surely the birth of Jack testifies to the fusion of the death drive as the drive of destruction and the life drive as the energy of unity. He encourages Ma to stand in that repressing garden shed, which, without Jack, meant the "horrifying undead life" (Žižek, 2009, p. 121), so that it is possible to perceive him as the father metaphor that prohibits and protects the desire in symbolic order. In truth, he was the sublimation of the darkest scenario of the Room. Moreover, it was Jack who encourages her to return after her being confronted with the lack in the Other, in a closer sense, Jack was creating a life-out-of-death two times.

The sentence, "Jack you saved me" has been uttered less than enough but it means a great deal, and again after her suicide, it was Jack to encourage her to return. "Most days... . Jack's enough for me.' 'The Soul selects her own Society Then shuts the Door' That's his poem voice"

(Donoghue, 2010, p. 263). Ma's death drive sublimates into her imaginary transference that she felt for Jack, and also her caring mother. For sure the last parts of *Room* indicate a sense of resolving the symbolic identity of Ma and Jack. They both create their fragile subjectivity to withstand the raw intrusion of the traumatic real. As an illustration, Jack agrees to have his hair cut, to accept the symbolic and put an end to his reinforced imagination that he is only strong because of his long hair. "...and we are thrilled when Jack takes the scissors to his own hair near the end of Emma Donoghue's *Room*, a gesture that he is willing to join the world and leave his trauma behind" (Elliott, 2012, p. 67). The reader encounters varied situations in which Jack, the naïve, imaginative child, tends to accept the rules of symbolic as an inevitable part of his being outside of Room.

There's too many rules to fit in my head. so we make a list with Dr. Clay's extra-heavy golden pen. Then another list of all the new things, like free weights and potato chips and birds. 'Is it exciting seeing them for real, not just on TV?' he asks. 'Yeah. Except nothing in TV ever stinged me.

(p. 225)

Now, Jack, with the assistance of institutions and bodies, namely, Dr. Clay, uncle Paul, grandma, or any non-human being, accepts the Other as the third entity interfering with his dual unity with Ma. Similarly, he acts as the Name-of-the-Father for Ma to place her one more time in the maternal responsibility and provides her again a symbolic stance.

'Do we grow in tummies again?'

'That's called reincarnation.' She cutting the bread. 'Some people think we might come back as donkeys or snails.'

'No, humans in the same tummies. If I grow in you again—'

Ma lights the flame. 'What's your question?'

'Will you still call me Jack?'

She looks at me. 'OK.'

'Promise?'

'I'll always call you Jack.'

(Donoghue, 2010, p. 264)

As discussed in the study, the function of the death drive is not destruction but a yearning to be recognized. Ma committed suicide to be recognized as a member of the symbolic, and also as an objection to her symbolic death. In a closer sense, she craves the lost desire to return to avoid being a dead subject. That is a determining moment in shaping the desire in the symbolic and consequently the formation of fantasy, though fragile, that built the subjectivity of Ma in the symbolic. "'You saved me,' says Ma, she kisses my eye and holds me tight" (Donoghue, 2010, p. 173).

CONCLUSION

In the *Room*, as well as many other captive narratives, the trauma can be examined in its extremity. Donoghue delicately places the two orders of the Lacanian real and imaginary in the story. As the early arguments revealed, trauma is an insistence of a durable signifier that remains unresolved and comes back to the smooth functioning of the signifying chain in the form of Lacanian *tuché*, to remind the subject of a non-symbolized truth. In *Room*, such truth was the failure of the father's function in the symbolic structure of the protagonist Ma, initially manifested in her biological parents, and then in her adoptive parents, who ignored her. Consequently, the atrocious events emerged in between, namely, her seven years of incarceration, as well as the socially abusive attitude toward the drama of her missing that both demolished her phantasmatic support of the outside and brought her the loss of object *petit à*. The last part of the *Room* brought the reader's attention to the sublimation in symbolic space as the only place for the subject to redefine his/her identity and to be recognized. The traumatic Ma that was once thrown away from the symbolic in an abduction crime now reconstructs a phantasmatic motherly sense toward Jack. Although the story of their trauma never ends and it acts as that famous hidden signifier, at least they could resort to the symbolic and create a trembling fantasy, which is a defense against the intrusion of the real.

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