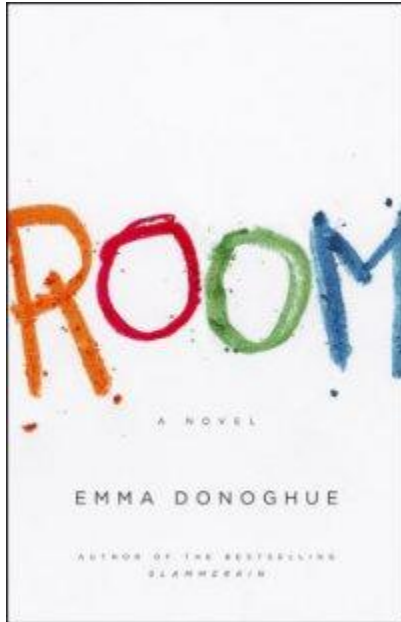


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1395679>

About the Book



Narrator Jack and his mother, who was kidnapped seven years earlier when she was a 19-year-old college student, celebrate his fifth birthday. They live in a tiny, 11-foot-square soundproofed cell in a converted shed in the kidnapper's yard. The sociopath, whom Jack has dubbed Old Nick, visits at night, grudgingly doling out food and supplies. But Ma, as Jack calls her, proves to be resilient and resourceful--and attempts a nail-biting escape.

About the Author



Emma Donoghue was born in Dublin, Ireland, in October 1969. She attended Catholic schools in Dublin and then earned a BA in English and French from University College Dublin. Donoghue then moved to England and earned a PhD from the University of Cambridge. She has made a living as a writer since her mid-twenties. She currently lives in London, Ontario with her daughter and son.

Source: *Book & Authors Database*

<http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Emma Donoghue is an openly lesbian novelist who has also written and edited several books that explore the lesbian experience. Hailing from a literary family, Donoghue had several books completed by the time she was in her mid-twenties.

In *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801*, Donoghue explores the role of lesbianism in early society, a trend difficult to uncover because of the fact that the word "lesbian" was used infrequently before the twentieth century. Her rereading of history, which used words like "Sapphic" and "hermaphroditical" to define lesbianism, reveals much more information on the subject. R.L. Widmann, writing in *Washington Post Book World*, praised the book for its depth and contended that many readers "may find much in this book to delight and inform them."

In a later book, *Inseparable: Desire between Women in Literature*, Donoghue examines relationships between women in literature from Chaucer to the post-modern age. The author's expertise as a scholar, literary critic, novelist, and enthusiastic reader, wrote *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* contributor Heather L. Seggel, makes Donoghue "the perfect tour guide" through this engaging material.

Donoghue's first work of fiction, *Stir-fry*, is a semi-autobiographical novel about three young women attending college in Dublin. Maria takes a room with two other women during her first year, at first not realizing that her roommates are lesbian lovers. Maria searches for a boyfriend but is thwarted at every turn. She finally realizes that she is in love with her roommate Ruth, but the situation is awkward because Ruth's lover, Jael, is still living there.

Natasha Walter, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, commented that *Stir-fry* is "competent, compact and occasionally funny." However, she took exception to the neatness of the plot: "You can judge how sloppily the love story has been executed if you transpose it to a heterosexual model, where its sweetie-pie easiness becomes more obvious." Mary Scott in *New Statesman and Society* contended that Maria's naïveté in not knowing that her roommates are lesbians and her overreaction to finding out is

surprising. "I found this so hard to believe that it ruined my appreciation of an accomplished book," she stated.

Donoghue's second novel, *Hood*, tells the story of a thirty-year-old teacher in Dublin named Pen O'Grady, who has just lost her lover of thirteen years, Cara Wall, in a violent car crash. The story is told in Pen's diary excerpts, written over the course of seven days, while she is deep in grief. Pen must deal with many issues other than her own grief--such as whether she should reveal the nature of their relationship to Cara's family or to the nuns at the academy where she works. Sheena Joughin, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, complained of what she saw as the novel's exclusively lesbian setting. "By setting her work so squarely in an exclusive milieu," she wrote, Donoghue "does risk alienating the general reader--particularly in a novel that is reflective, rather than action-packed." With this in mind, Joughin contended that "Donoghue's narrative becomes wearily formulaic." Catherine Lockerbie commented in the *New York Times Book Review* that the book is "utterly charming. ... Ms. Donoghue displays her confidence by avoiding the grandiose and showy, and dipping into the ordinary with control and the occasional sustaining descriptive flashes of a born writer." Lockerbie felt that this novel shows only a portion of the talent that Donoghue is capable of, claiming that the author "might produce something rather more out of the ordinary altogether" in the years to come.

In *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, Donoghue retells traditional fairy tales for children from a lesbian perspective. In her version of *Cinderella*, for example, the princess falls in love with the fairy godmother instead of the prince, while in another retelling, Gretel teams up with the witch of the gingerbread house to punish Hansel for trying to rape her. "Sophisticated teenagers (and adults too) will be mesmerized by the powerful voices and intricate structure, while the lesbian endings promise controversy," wrote a contributor to *Publishers Weekly*. Debbie Carton in *Booklist* found *Kissing the Witch* to be written in a "distinctive, powerful, finely honed voice."

Donoghue turned to literary biography with *We Are Michael Field*, the story of two nineteenth-century women who used the pseudonym Michael Field for the many plays and poems they wrote. Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper were not only literary collaborators but lovers as well. The name Michael Field was only gradually revealed to the public as a pseudonym for the two women, a fact that led to some controversy.

Donoghue's account of their lives and careers is "an engaging, informal overview of their history," according to Kimberly L. Clarke in *Library Journal*. A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* described the biography as "brief but absorbing."

For the novel *Slammerkin*, Donoghue drew inspiration from the true story of the short, tragic life of Mary Saunders, an eighteenth-century English prostitute and servant. The title of the book, which is taken from a period term meaning both "loose gown" and "loose woman," alludes to the fetish and the profession of the protagonist. As rendered by Donoghue, Mary emerges as a fiercely determined, aspiring clotheshorse, who turns to prostitution in an effort to satisfy her sartorial desires and avoid the poverty and squalor in which she was raised by her seamstress mother. Mary is introduced to her new trade by Doll Higgins, a prostitute with eye-catching fashion sense. Of their friendship *New York Times Book Review* contributor Laura Jamison observed that "[Mary] and Doll could be any modern-day bad girls, getting wasted and cracking bawdy jokes. But of course they're not, and that accounts for the real fun in reading about them." Upon Doll's death, Mary retreats to her mother's hometown of Monmouth, where she finds work as an apprentice to a seamstress, and, according to *Washington Post Book World* contributor Zofia Smardz, "for the first time in her life, begins to feel truly loved."

Eventually, however, Mary begins to chafe at her lowly social position, and longs for the finery she wore as a London prostitute. When her past intersects with her present life, disaster results. While Jamison felt that "Mary's tragic flaw"--a lust for fine clothing--"is perhaps a bit overdetermined," she nevertheless concluded that Donoghue's characterization of her protagonist is one of "the reasons that many will find *Slammerkin* a more accessible and boisterous read than its classic forebears." Smardz noted that while the novel "is pulpy at heart ... Donoghue is a real writer, and she's elevated her racy story ... close to art and laced it with impressive but lightly presented erudition." Alev Adil, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, called *Slammerkin* "an exhilarating dialogue with the literature of the period and an imaginative attempt to capture the climate of change in the 1760s." He also noted that "Donoghue has produced an absorbing, moving and intelligent work of fiction."

Donoghue followed *Slammerkin* with her collection *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits: Stories* and her novel *Life Mask*. The main characters in

this story are patterned after real historical figures, including Eliza Farren, a London actress who, although born a commoner, is pursued by the unhappily wed Edward Earl of Derby toward the end of the eighteenth century. Derby, wealthy but ugly, resembling a "Velazquez dwarf," is fond of betting on the horses; in fact his surname is the origin of the term "derbies." Secondary characters include writer Horace Walpole, theater owner and politician Richard Sheridan, and actress Mrs. Siddons.

The member of the House of Lords introduces Eliza to London's genteel community, members of which refer to themselves as "the World." Susan Stinson noted in *Lambda Book Report* that in this novel "the World is far removed from the impoverished Eighteenth Century prostitutes that Donoghue brought to such vivid life in *Slammerkin*, although that distance can be bridged by a hurled brick or the gentlemen's interest in an evening's entertainment." Sculptor Anne Damer, a widow, is an admirer of Eliza, whose performances she has seen for years. The two form a friendship that ends when rumors of Anne's lesbianism reach Eliza. They reconcile, but part again when the rumors resurface.

Donoghue's *Touchy Subjects: Stories* features nineteen short stories that are "without a hint of pretension but with wisdom extending far beyond the placidness of her prose style," according to Brad Hooper in *Booklist*. The author deals with a wide range of sensitive subjects, such as homelessness and death, in stories that span the world. For example, in "The Man Who Wrote on Beaches," a woman's husband finds God and wants to have a family, but his wife is beyond her childbearing years. The author also tackles more humorous subjects, such as her story about an academic husband and wife and their devotion to their dogs in the story "Do They Know It's Christmas?" Referring to the stories as "engaging," a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote that they are "delightful examples of Donoghue's all-encompassing talent that should be read by fans of her period pieces as well as her gay audience--indeed, by anyone who cherishes thoughtful, warm-hearted fiction."

In *Landing*, Donoghue tells the story of twenty-five-year-old Jude Turner, a historian from small-town Canadian Town, and Sile, a sexy flight attendant Jude meets while making her first trip overseas to London. The worldly Sile and Jude become friends and begin a long-distance relationship that promises to become more but is hindered by other people in both of the women's lives. Caroline Mann, writing in *Library Journal*, noted that the

author "excels at getting to the heart of her two main characters." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor referred to *Landing* as "warmhearted, readable and entertaining."

Donoghue's *The Sealed Letter* is another of her novels based on fact and is about divorce in the 1800s, not nearly as common as it has become in contemporary times. Helen Codrington has long refused her older husband Harry, an admiral, the right to her bed, and when they return to London from Malta, where Harry has been posted, she renews her friendship with a woman with whom she had once had a relationship. Emily Faithfull, known as Fido, owns a print shop in which all of the typesetters are female, and which produces feminist pamphlets. She belongs to the Langham Place group, one of the first feminist movements in Britain, and Donoghue researched letters from members of the group in establishing the environment of the time. Fido doesn't believe in adultery and is upset when Helen uses Fido's home to meet with her lover, Colonel Anderson. Harry initiates divorce proceedings in 1864, but as of 1857, although divorce laws had relaxed somewhat with the Matrimonial Causes Act, cases were tried and decided based entirely on the testimony of witnesses and circumstantial evidence. The petitioners and respondents were not allowed to speak on their own behalf. While a man could obtain a divorce solely on the grounds of adultery, a woman would have to prove other offenses, including cruelty, rape, desertion, bestiality, and sodomy. In Harry's case, he presents evidence that includes a telegram, a stained dress, and Helen's presence in Fido's house and in a hotel.

"The characters don't speechify for the sake of an authorial political agenda, and there's no fact-filled waffle," wrote Alice Lawlor in *Herizons*. "Instead, the reader is an unselfconscious fly on the wall, privy to internal monologues, intimate conversations and public declarations. There's a subtle contrast between the claustrophobic interior spaces inhabited by the women and the vast public sphere of the men. Even the language of the courtroom--much of which doesn't seem to have changed in 150 years--is cold, cruel and misogynist."

Helen, who all the while has been manipulating Fido, will not give up without a fight. She reminds Fido that one night when they were together in bed, Harry attempted to rape Fido. The memory is unclear to Fido, who often took medication for her asthma, which could be rendering it cloudy. The "sealed letter" of the title holds the key to the outcome. It expresses

Harry's concerns about the relationship between his wife and Fido. The idea of exposure is enough to make Fido take the witness stand, but torn as to who she will favor with her testimony. Her involvement in the divorce tears her life apart. The press print shop is vandalized, and other women in the suffrage movement begin to distance themselves from her.

"Good lines there are in abundance," wrote Susann Cokal in the *New York Times Book Review*. "And in the end, *The Sealed Letter* provides both the titillating entertainment readers like Helen and Fido crave and the more sober exploration of truth, commitment and betrayal Harry might appreciate. Donoghue's sympathy for all three of her central characters emerges through intimate narration and lifts the novel out of the tabloid muck, despite the public shaming Harry, Helen and Fido experience. There is, as Fido puts it, 'so much to say, and little of it speakable.'"

Winner of the Hughes Irish Novel of the Year award and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, *Room* won numerous rave reviews. Told from the perspective of Jack, a five-year-old who has lived his entire life in a sealed-off room with his mother, the book imagines the lives of a parent and child living in captivity. It was inspired in part by the infamous Fritzl case in Austria, in which it was discovered in 2008 that Josef Fritzl had secretly imprisoned his daughter Elisabeth for twenty-four years, assaulted and raped her, and forced her to give birth to several of his children. Jack has never seen the outside world, but he watches television and has access to some books and toys. He spends his days with Ma, who nurtures his intelligence with stories and games; when Old Nick appears in the evenings, Jack hides in Wardrobe and counts the squeaks of the mattress springs until the captor leaves and the boy has Ma to himself once again. It is a comfortable and secure life for Jack, but a nightmare for Ma, who eventually decides that she and the boy must escape. But the outside world is confusing and overwhelming for the boy, as he copes with the onslaught of media attention, inane responses, and other challenges that threaten his once-complete bond with his mother.

Though the book was hailed as a masterful treatment of its chilling theme, it also provoked controversy. Kathy Hunt, for example, writing in the *Australian*, found the novel "contrived, exploitive and opportunistic," especially because its focus Jack's relationships with his mother deflects attention away from the "actual horror of kidnap, rape and incarceration." But *Maclean's* contributor Brian Bethune wrote that this view misses the novel's central theme: the intensity of the parent-child bond, and the ways

in which, as Bethune quoted the author, "every parent ... "swings between captor and nurturer." Indeed, Donoghue told London *Guardian* writer Sarah Crown that "everything in *Room* is just a defamiliarisation of ordinary parenthood. ... I was trying to capture that strange, bipolar quality of parenthood. For all that being a parent is normal statistically, it's not normal psychologically. It produces some of the most extreme emotions you'll ever have."

The book's mother-child dynamic, in fact, is what many reviewers found most compelling about the novel. "What saves this beautifully nuanced book from being in any way a voyeuristic reaction to true crime," observed London *Telegraph* contributor Catherine Taylor, "is less the descriptions of captivity than the inevitably changing nature of the child/parent relationship, which Donoghue explores here so minutely, recognizably, and exultantly." In particular, Donoghue's choice to tell the story from Jack's viewpoint won extravagant praise. "Jack's voice is one of the pure triumphs of the novel," stated *New York Times Book Review* contributor Aimee Bender. "The reader learns as Jack learns, ... [but] the gap between his understanding and ours is a territory of emotional power."

Though he also noted the importance of Jack's voice in *Room*, *Los Angeles Times* writer David Ulin felt that this narrative device "doesn't always work." At times, readers are drawn completely into the boy's thinking, wrote Ulin, but at other times "things unfold too quickly, without sufficient context, inconsistent with how the characters behave." Bender made a similar point, observing that Donoghue glides too superficially over some material. "The inner claustrophobia, the blurry and often complicated area between closeness and autonomy," noted the reviewer, "is acknowledged but moved through quickly, in favor of managing the joys and terrors of the outside world." Still, said Bender, *Room* is an extraordinary and multi-dimensional story that offers "an utterly unique way to talk about love, all the while giving us a fresh, expansive eye on the world in which we live."

Donoghue once told *CA*: "I have been writing since early childhood, but only in the past few years have I taken it seriously enough, and determined to make a living from it. I grew up in a house full of books in a country full of writers--Ireland; it was an ideal environment. Discovery at the age of fourteen that I was a lesbian certainly gave me plenty to write about, and researching lesbian history has left me with a feeling of having so many unknown stories to tell, but sexuality is not a motive exactly; I write because

I need and love to. All writing has a political impact, and I am aware that doing interviews, etc., is my form of lesbian activism, but the motive for writing is not propaganda: I just want to tell stories in a language as powerful as I can make it.

"I work on many different projects at once--too many! Perhaps on a typical day I might answer letters in the morning, do some research for an essay in the afternoon, make notes for a short story while on a train, edit a scene of a play in the evening. ... I have not needed a routine so far, because my passion for the work spurs me on. A laptop computer makes all this much easier--the best investment an aspiring writer can make. I would also advise new writers not to limit themselves to any one genre, but to let the material dictate the form it will appear in. I want to try new genres myself, including adapting my work for the screen."

Awards

Room was longlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize (<http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/>) and won the 2011 Commonwealth Writers' Prize regional prize (Caribbean and Canada)(<http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/Howwedeliver/Prizes/CommonwealthBookPrize>); was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2010 (<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/>) and was shortlisted for the 2010 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize (<http://www.writerstrust.com/Awards/Rogers-Writers--Trust-Fiction-Prize.aspx>) and the 2010 Governor General's Awards (<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/prizes/ggla>).

Reviews

Publisher's Weekly

At the start of Donoghue's powerful new novel, narrator Jack and his mother, who was kidnapped seven years earlier when she was a 19-year-old college student, celebrate his fifth birthday. They live in a tiny, 11-foot-square soundproofed cell in a converted shed in the kidnapper's yard. The sociopath, whom Jack has dubbed Old Nick, visits at night, grudgingly doling out food and supplies. Seen entirely through Jack's eyes and childlike perceptions, the developments in this novel—there are enough plot twists to provide a dramatic arc of breathtaking suspense—are astonishing. Ma, as Jack calls her, proves to be resilient and resourceful,

creating exercise games, makeshift toys, and reading and math lessons to fill their days. And while Donoghue (*Slammerkin*) brilliantly portrays the psyche of a child raised in captivity, the story's intensity cranks up dramatically when, halfway through the novel and after a nail-biting escape attempt, Jack is introduced to the outside world. While there have been several true-life stories of women and children held captive, little has been written about the pain of re-entry, and Donoghue's bravado in investigating that potentially terrifying transformation grants the novel a frightening resonance that will keep readers rapt.

Kirkus Review

Talented, versatile Donoghue (*The Sealed Letter*, etc.) relates a searing tale of survival and recovery, in the voice of a five-year-old boy.

Jack has never known a life beyond Room. His Ma gave birth to him on Rug; the stains are still there. At night, he has to stay in Wardrobe when Old Nick comes to visit. Still, he and Ma have a comfortable routine, with daily activities like Phys Ed and Laundry. Jack knows how to read and do math, but has no idea the images he sees on the television represent a real world. We gradually learn that Ma (we never know her name) was abducted and imprisoned in a backyard shed when she was 19; her captor brings them food and other necessities, but he's capricious. An ugly incident after Jack attracts Old Nick's unwelcome attention renews Ma's determination to liberate herself and her son; the book's first half climaxes with a nail-biting escape. Donoghue brilliantly shows mother and son grappling with very different issues as they adjust to freedom. "In Room I was safe and Outside is the scary," Jack thinks, unnerved by new things like showers, grass and window shades. He clings to the familiar objects rescued from Room (their abuser has been found), while Ma flinches at these physical reminders of her captivity. Desperate to return to normalcy, she has to grapple with a son who has never known normalcy and isn't sure he likes it. In the story's most heartbreaking moments, it seems that Ma may be unable to live with the choices she made to protect Jack. But his narration reveals that she's nurtured a smart, perceptive and willful boy—odd, for sure, but resilient, and surely Ma can find that resilience in herself. A haunting final scene doesn't promise quick cures, but shows Jack and Ma putting the past behind them.

Wrenching, as befits the grim subject matter, but also tender, touching and at times unexpectedly funny.

Literary Criticism

Separation Anxiety

Emma Donoghue's remarkable new novel, "*Room*," is built on two intense constraints: the limited point of view of the narrator, a 5-year-old boy named Jack; and the confines of Jack's physical world, an 11-by-11-foot room where he lives with his mother. We enter the book strongly planted within these restrictions. We know only what Jack knows, and the drama is immediate, as is our sense of disorientation over why these characters are in this place. 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 main objects in the room are given capital letters - - Rug, Bed, Wall -- a wonderful choice, because to Jack, they are named beings. In a world where the only other companion is his mother, Bed is his friend as much as anything else. Jack, in this way, is a heightened version of a regular kid, bringing boundless wonder and meaning to his every pursuit.

Donoghue navigates beautifully around these limitations. Jack's voice is one of the pure triumphs of the novel: in him, she has invented a child narrator who is one of the most engaging in years -- his voice so pervasive I could hear him chatting away during the day when I wasn't reading the book. Donoghue rearranges language to evoke the sweetness of a child's learning without making him coy or overly darling; Jack is lovable simply because he is lovable. Through dialogue and smartly crafted hints of eavesdropping, Donoghue fills us in on Jack's world without heavy hands or clunky exposition. The reader learns as Jack learns, and often we learn more than he can yet grasp, but as with most books narrated by children, the gap between his understanding and ours is a territory of emotional power.

Donoghue's ingenuity also soars as she animates the novel's physical space through her characters' rituals: they run around a homemade track; watch TV, but not too much, because "it rots our brains"; string eggshells together with a needle to make a kind of snake. Toys and books are treated like gold. A lollipop is a revelation.

Although I hate to reveal plot points, some are necessary to discuss the book, and early on, the story 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. Fierce claustrophobia sets in -- what had seemed an odd mother-child monastery is now Rapunzel's tower or Anne Frank's annex or a story from the news about a stolen child living in a hidden compound. Jack, interestingly, does not feel trapped; that the two live in Room against his mother's will is not something the son knows right away, and this contrast creates the major fissures and complexities in the book: Room is both a jail and a haven.

Once it is known that Ma doesn't want to be there, the careful, painstakingly constructed framework of the characters' days takes on a new tenor. That Ma can engage and interest a lively, bright boy while enduring the despair of their situation turns her into a heroic figure. When, later in the book, someone mentions how "zeitgeisty" it is, in our thing-ridden times, to make do on so little, Ma is horrified, and we are horrified, yet we are riveted by her manner of coping -- in the same way we're riveted by Anne Frank's bravery -- and amazed by her capacity for adaptation.

Jack doesn't need to adapt; this is his norm. Room functions like a big womb, the space in many ways a true extension of a mother's body, a limited area of total closeness and care. It is a child's heaven for a time and, were he to grow older there, would be his nightmare. At 5, Jack is somewhat delayed developmentally, still living wholly in the unity he feels with his mother. "Maybe I'm a human," he thinks, "but I'm a me-and-Ma as well."

Which brings up the one part I struggled with a bit. Very early on, we see that Ma breast-feeds her son. The book opens on his birthday, and she tries, halfheartedly, to wean him, but he loves this intimate connection to his mother's body as much as he loves all the walls and objects and routines of Room. There's a flicker of unease in the reader here -- and it's a good and interesting flicker. Room is a sanctuary for Jack, but where are the lines, the boundaries between mother and son? When does security go too far?

Eventually the book takes a turn; I will note only that more characters enter, and that the world extends beyond its original setting. The development is thrilling and at moments palm-sweatingly harrowing. But that darker flicker

of unease around the breast-feeding grows smaller. When Ma is questioned about it a couple of times, she turns on her interrogators with anger. She's a sympathetic figure, and her choices, in her situation, are believable, even understandable, but by shaming the questioners, Donoghue also cuts off a reader who may have similar wonderings. I trusted and valued that flicker of unease, and I wanted to feel it play out more, to see Donoghue go deeper into the mucky, messy territory of growth. When Ma takes an action that ends up resolving some of these questions, I found her choice surprising, even puzzling; it just didn't quite address this issue, which was not about the breast-feeding concretely, but more about breast-feeding as an effective symbol for that initial, primal bond between mother and child, a bond that has to evolve over time. The internal claustrophobia, the blurry and often complicated area between closeness and autonomy, is acknowledged but moved through quickly, in favor of managing the joys and terrors of the outside world.

There's a lot to manage -- the external, vivid, social world is a huge and gratifying resource here, and Jack's eyes remake the familiar. It is invigorating, watching him learn, and the way Donoghue reveals the consequences of *Room* through her attention to detail is tremendous. But in a world where bed is Bed and outside is Outside, I thought anxiety might be Anxiety, and somewhat harder to resolve. Part of Jack's appeal is that heightened kidness in him, and if his wonder is 10 times larger, so might have been the resolutions of his internal struggles and regressions.

But these are objections based on the very high standards set by the beauty of the book. On the whole, Donoghue goes the distance with "*Room*," and she brings her story to a powerful close that feels exactly right. This is a truly memorable novel, one that can be read through myriad lenses -- psychological, sociological, political. It presents an utterly unique way to talk about love, all the while giving us a fresh, expansive eye on the world in which we live.

Source: Bender, Aimee. "Separation Anxiety." The New York Times Book Review 19

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story of *Room* through Jack and not through an omniscient, third-person narrator?

2. Why does Jack call their captor "Old Nick?"
3. Which elements of Jack's developmental delays and/or his integration issues surprised you most?
4. When Ma is interviewed, the interviewer implies that perhaps not everyone would agree with Ma's decisions regarding Jack - first, her decision to keep him in Room when she could have tried to have Old Nick abandon him at a hospital, and second, to teach him that Room was all there is, that things in TV aren't real, etc. What are your thoughts regarding these decisions?
5. Have you ever gotten into a car with someone you don't know, as Ma did? Did you find this to be a believable way for a 19-year-old to be kidnapped?
6. Did you find yourself wanting to know more about Old Nick? If so, why do you think this is?
7. Jack often wishes he were back in Room. Is there any way in which he would be better off back in isolation with only his mother? Why or why not?
8. What sort of problems do you think Ma will face now that she and Jack are out on their own?

Source: <http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubquestions/a/Room-By-Emma-Donoghue-Book-Club-Discussion-Questions.htm>

Multimedia

***In Donoghue's 'Room,' A Child's World Of His Own* (Radio Broadcast)**

<http://www.npr.org/2010/09/27/130143360/in-donoghue-s-room-a-child-s-world-of-his-own>

An NPR review of the novel.

***How To Sell A Book? Good Old Word Of Mouth* (Radio Broadcast)**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129757766>

A discussion of *Room's* success, on NPR.

Further Reading

Landing by Emma Donoghue

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1288906>

(Call number: Fiction Donoghue)

A delightful, old-fashioned love story with a uniquely twenty-first-century twist, *Landing* is a romantic comedy that explores the pleasures and sorrows of long-distance relationships—the kind millions of us now maintain mostly by plane, phone, and Internet. Síle is a stylish citizen of the new Dublin, a veteran flight attendant who's traveled the world. Jude is a twenty-five-year-old archivist, stubbornly attached to the tiny town of Ireland, Ontario, in which she was born and raised. On her first plane trip, Jude's and Síle's worlds touch and snag at Heathrow Airport. In the course of the next year, their lives, and those of their friends and families, will be drawn into a new, shaky orbit. This sparkling, lively story explores age-old questions: Does where you live matter more than who you live with? What would you give up for love, and would you be a fool to do so?

Slammerkin by Emma Donoghue

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1175809>

(Call number: Fiction Donoghue)

Slammerkin: A loose gown; a loose woman. Born to rough cloth in Hogarth's London, but longing for silk, Mary Saunders's eye for a shiny red ribbon leads her to prostitution at a young age. A dangerous misstep sends her fleeing to Monmouth, and the position of household seamstress, the ordinary life of an ordinary girl with no expectations. But Mary has known freedom, and having never known love, it is freedom that motivates her. Mary asks herself if the prostitute who hires out her body is more or less free than the "honest woman" locked into marriage, or the servant who runs a household not her own? And is either as free as a man? Ultimately, Mary remains true only to the three rules she learned on the streets: Never give up your liberty. Clothes make the woman. Clothes are the greatest lie ever told.

The Sealed Letter by Emma Donoghue

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1322745>

(Call number: Fiction Donoghue)

Miss Emily "Fido" Faithfull is a "woman of business" and a spinster pioneer in the British women's movement, independent of mind but naively trusting

of heart. Distracted from her cause by the sudden return of her once-dear friend, the unhappily wed Helen Codrington, Fido is swept up in the intimate details of Helen's failing marriage and obsessive affair with a young army officer. What begins as a loyal effort to help a friend explodes into a courtroom drama that rivals the Clinton affair -complete with stained clothing, accusations of adultery, counterclaims of rape, and a mysterious letter that could destroy more than one life. Based on a scandalous divorce case that gripped England in 1864, *The Sealed Letter* is a riveting, provocative drama of friends, lovers, and divorce, Victorian style.

Sexual violence and American manhood by T. Walter Herbert

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1198960>

(Call number: 305.3 He)

Taking up topics as diverse and timely as the work of FBI profilers, the pornography debates, feminist analyses of male supremacy as sexual abuse, the ritual meanings of fraternity gang rape, and the interplay of racial and sexual injustice, T. Walter Herbert illuminates the chronic masculine anxieties that seek compensation in fantasies of sexual coercion and in sexual offenses against women. His work offers an unusually clear view of this prevailing convention of insecure and destructive masculinity, which Herbert connects with contemporary analyses of male identity formation, sexuality, and violence and with cultural, political, and ideological developments reaching back to the nation's democratic beginnings.

The macho paradox: why some men hurt women and and how all men can help by Jackson Katz

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1263438>

(Call number: 362.88 Ka)

This book leaves no man behind when it comes to taking violence against women personally....After reading this book you can see how important it is to be a stand-up guy and not a standy-by guy, no matter what race or culture you come from.

Against our will: men, women and rape by Susan Brownmiller

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1012668>

(Call number: 364.154 Br)

As powerful and timely now as when it was first published, *AGAINST OUR WILL* stands as a unique document of the history of politics, the sociology of rape and the inherent and ingrained inequality of men and women under the law. In lucid, persuasive prose, Brownmiller has created a definitive,

devastating work of lasting social importance.

A Stolen Life by Jaycee Lee Dugard

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1388713>

(Call number: 364.154 Du)

When Jaycee Dugard was eleven years old, she was abducted from a school bus stop within sight of her home in South Lake Tahoe, California. She was missing for more than eighteen years, held captive by Phillip Craig and Nancy Garrido, and gave birth to two daughters during her imprisonment. On August 26, 2009, Garrido showed up for a meeting with his parole officer; he brought Jaycee, her daughters, and his wife Nancy with him. Their unusual behavior raised suspicions and an investigation revealed the tent behind the Garridos' home where Jaycee had been living for nearly two decades. *A Stolen Life* was written by Jaycee herself and covers the period from the time of her abduction in 1991 up until the present. In her stark, compelling narrative, she opens up about what she experienced--and offers an extraordinary account of courage and resilience.

Author's official website

<http://www.emmadonoghue.com/>

News, resources, and information from the author.

Read-Alikes *Source: Novelist*

Trance by Christopher Sorrentino

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1250417>

(Call number: Fiction Sorrentino)

1974: A tiny band of self-styled urban guerrillas, calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army, abducts a newspaper heiress, who then abruptly announces that she has adopted the guerrilla name "Tania" and chosen to remain with her former captors. Has she been brainwashed? Coerced? Could she be sincere? Why would such a nice girl disavow her loving parents, her adoring fiancé, her comfortable home? Soon most of the SLA are dead, killed in a suicidal confrontation with police in Los Angeles, forcing Tania and her two remaining comrades--the pompous and abusive General Teko and his duplicitous lieutenant, Yolanda--into hiding, where they will remain for the next sixteen months. *Trance*, Christopher Sorrentino's mesmerizing and brilliant second novel, traces this fugitive period, leading the reader on a breathtaking, hilarious, and heartbreaking

underground tour across a beleaguered America, in the company of scam artists, visionaries, cultists, and a mismatched gang of middle-class people who typify the guiding conceit of their time, that of self-renovation.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1204058>

(Call number: Fiction Haddon)

Despite his overwhelming fear of interacting with people, Christopher, a mathematically-gifted, autistic fifteen-year-old boy, decides to investigate the murder of a neighbor's dog and uncovers secret information about his mother.

His Illegal Self by Peter Carey

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1301728>

(Call number: Fiction Carey)

When the boy was almost eight, a woman stepped out of the elevator into the apartment on East Sixty-second Street and he recognized her straightaway. No one had told him to expect it. That was pretty typical of growing up with Grandma Selkirk . . . No one would dream of saying, Here is your mother returned to you. *His Illegal Self* is the story of Che--raised in isolated privilege by his New York grandmother, he is the precocious son of radical student activists at Harvard in the late sixties. Yearning for his famous outlaw parents, denied all access to television and the news, he takes hope from his long-haired teenage neighbor, who predicts, They will come for you, man. They'll break you out of here. Soon Che too is an outlaw: fleeing down subways, abandoning seedy motels at night, he is pitched into a journey that leads him to a hippie commune in the jungle of tropical Queensland. Here he slowly, bravely confronts his life, learning that nothing is what it seems. Who is his real mother? Was that his real father? If all he suspects is true, what should he do? Never sentimental, *His Illegal Self* is an achingly beautiful story of the love between a young woman and a little boy. It may make you cry more than once before it lifts your spirit in the most lovely, artful, unexpected way.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extras!

Have members of the group ever heard news stories about crimes committed that affected them on a deep level? Go around the group and

offer stories of real life events they heard through the media that left a lasting impression on them. Think on a smaller scale rather than large events.

