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## Truth in Fiction is Truth Infection: A Study of Emma Donoghue's *Room*

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### *Abstract*

Inspired by the 2008 Austrian case of Fritzl, who locked his daughter in a basement for twenty-four years, raped her repeatedly and fathered her seven children, three of whom he imprisoned with her, Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010) is not a mere retelling of the actual story of kidnap and escape. Donoghue's fictional universe is comprised of several possible fictional worlds: a metafictional world that implicitly directs the model reader's attention to the process of fictive composition, a "superfictional" world that takes the shape of moments of enlightenment, a "subfictional" world that houses the author's beliefs and memories that are not in focal awareness, and a "nonfictional" world that houses the author's repressed thoughts that are hidden. The present study aims at unraveling these possible fictional worlds in a novel the naïve reader receives as a five-year-old boy's account of his confinement and subsequent escape to the outside world.

**Keywords:** Irish Canadian Fiction, Emma Donoghue, Narratology, Possible Worlds Theory, Room

How much truth can a spirit *bear*,  
how much truth can a spirit *dare*?  
(Nietzsche 2004, 5)

Possible worlds theory, which posits that the literary text imposes its own laws on the fictional world and opens a new horizon of possibilities (Pavel 1975, 175), stands as a living proof of interdisciplinary cross-fertilization with work in philosophy and modal logic revolutionizing classical narratology, and work in narratology informing philosophical and modal logic enterprise. The main contribution of possible worlds theory to narratology lies in replacing the metaphysical notion of truth as an essential correspondence between world and language by a pragmatic, more relaxed view according to which "[a] statement is true if it 'works', if its assertion is warranted by a state of affairs it produces regardless of referential questions" (Ronen

1994, 37). Possible worlds theory thus marks a shift in the conceptualization of truth from a fixed, absolute standard to a flexible concept relative to a universe of discourse. Accordingly, fictional discourse is viewed as an autonomous universe in relation to which propositions can be deemed true or false.

In her short article, “Les mondes possibles du texte” (1977), Lucia Vaina defines the fictional universe as a succession of states of affairs mediated by events. The sum of these states of affairs constitutes the factual domain of the narrative universe, while the actions that mediate these states form another set of possible worlds, the world of the characters who aim at preventing or producing these states of affairs. To Vaina’s two sets of possible worlds, Umberto Eco adds a third set: the world constructed by the reader to rationalize narrative events. In Eco’s model, a text is “*a machine for producing possible worlds* (of the *fabula*, of the characters within the *fabula*, and of the reader outside the *fabula*)” (1984, 246). According to Eco, therefore, the fictional universe “tells at least three stories: (i) the story of what happens to its *dramatis personae*, (ii) the story of what happens to its naive reader; (iii) the story of what happens to itself as a text (this third story being potentially the same as what happens to the critical reader)” (205).

According to Marie-Laure Ryan, the possible world imagined and asserted by the author constitutes all the states of the *fabula*: the possible subworlds imagined, believed or wished by the characters of the *fabula* that propel the events forward, the possible subworlds imagined, believed or wished by the Model Reader at every disjunction of probability, and “ghost chapters”, that are later approved or disapproved by the states of the *fabula* (1992, 542). “Model Readers”, Joseph Francese explains, “do not allow the author’s biography and poetic vision to condition their reading, but interact only with the work” (2003, 161). Rather than following the author’s point of view, the Model Reader creates meaning and order of the literary text “by constructing a Model Author, who is a projection of the wishes and desires of the empirical reader” (162).

As a further development of Ryan’s view, I posit that the possible world, or rather the fictional universe, imagined and asserted by the author, is comprised of the following possible worlds:

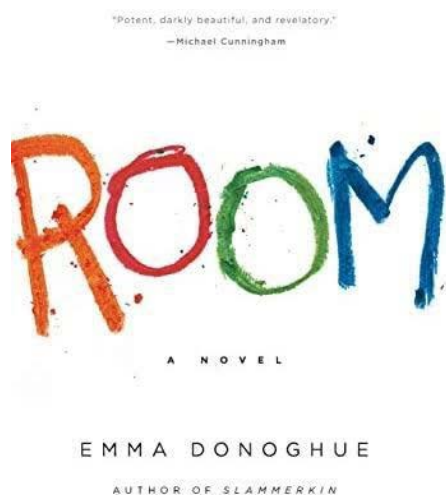
1. A *Metafictional* world: fiction which directs attention to the process of fictive composition. It can be explicit, denotative, or implicit, connotative.
2. A *Subfictional* world: fiction that houses the author’s beliefs and memories that are not in focal awareness. It is intended and usually takes the shape of recurrent use of certain words.
3. A *Nonfictional* world: fiction that houses the author’s repressed thoughts. It is usually unintended and hidden within the fictional universe.
4. A *Superfictional* world: revelatory fiction that transcends ordinary fiction. It happens to the author as a revelation, as a moment of enlightenment<sup>1</sup>.

The fictional universe of Emma Donoghue’s *Room* (2010) is made up of five chapters and several thresholds. On the Cover page, the thematic title on the Little, Brown and Company edition published on 13 September 2010, is written in four rainbow colors: orange, red, green and blue, representing the LGBTQ+ communities. Moreover, the thematic title, *Room*, refers to a nonspecific place that stands out like the LGBTQ+ people. The rhematic subtitle, *A Novel*, establishes the genre of the work as a fictional narrative; together with the disclaimer on the Copyright Page:

<sup>1</sup> The proposition of possible fictional worlds in this paper was inspired by a conversation with Dr. Alaa Abd al-Hadi, President of the Egyptian Writers’ Union, about the way the author’s mind works subconsciously. During the conversation, Abd al-Hadi suggested researching the difference between the subconscious and unconscious and finding out how they manifest themselves in a work of fiction.

This is a work of fiction. The people, events, circumstances and institutions depicted are fictitious and the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance of any character to any actual person, whether living or dead, is purely coincidental.

it warns the Model Reader against taking the fictional universe as a mere retelling of the 2008 Austrian case of Josef Fritzl, who locked his daughter, Elisabeth, in a basement for twenty-four years, raped her repeatedly and fathered her seven children, three of whom he imprisoned with her. Designating Emma as "Author of *Slammerkin*", an obsolete eighteenth-century term that denoted a woman's dressing gown and was used figuratively to describe a sexually promiscuous woman, is also significant. *Slammerkin*



is a work of historical fiction that is based on the account of the sixteen-year-old Mary Saunders, who was hanged for murdering her mistress, Joan Jones, in Monmouth, Wales, in 1764. The novel was awarded the Ferro-Grumley Award for Lesbian Fiction in 2002. Together with the Acknowledgements, where Donoghue acknowledges her "beloved Chris Roulston", Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, with whom she lives as a female partner, and the dedication of the work to "Finn and Una, my best works" (2010, n.p.), the two kids Donoghue conceived from a sperm donor, this threshold reinforces reading *Room* as a story of the LGBTQ+ communities.

The Model Reader gets another hint of reading the *fabula* as one about the LGBTQ+ communities from the epigraph, a Simonides' poem about the Danaë myth that echoes the biblical story of Jesus Christ's birth:

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. (Simonides c. 556-468 BCE in Donoghue 2010, n.p.)

Simonides is a famous Greek lyric poet whose poetry moved people with pity. The verses quoted above are sung by Danaë to her child, the cause of all her troubles. In Greek mythology, Danaë is the daughter of King Acrisius who was warned that he would be killed by his daughter's son. To counter this oracle, King Acrisius shut Danaë up in a bronze chamber under the court of his palace. Although she could not escape from prison, Zeus, the king of the gods, came to her in the form of golden rain which fell through the roof of the subterranean chamber and down into her womb. Soon after, their child, Perseus, was born (Kingsley 1856, 1).

The Danaë myth thus echoes the biblical story of Jesus Christ's birth that Jose, the young woman locked in the basement and Jack's mother, whom he refers to as "Ma", is keen on narrating to Jack to let him see the similarity between his status as a fatherless son and Baby Jesus. In Simonides' verse, Danaë is lamenting her fate, her imprisonment in the dark bronze

chamber, which parallels Jose's confinement in *Room*, while her care-free child, who represents Jack, sleeps tightly, and shines brightly in the dark bronze chamber. Not only the theme but also the diction, which suggests rainbow colours ("heart" red, "bronze" orange, "shine" yellow, "wood" green, "blue" blue, "blue dark" violet), directs the Model Reader's attention to the LGBTQ+ pride rainbow flag, originally designed by Gilbert Baker as a striped eight-colour flag and consisting, after a series of revisions, of six colours: red = life, orange = healing, yellow = the sun, green = nature, blue = art, violet = spirit.

Can we call the afore-mentioned thresholds metafiction? I believe yes: metafiction can be implicit as well as explicit. Through these sophisticated and well-thought signals, the author implicitly helps the Model Reader understand *Room* as a "potent, darkly beautiful, and revelatory" work, as Michael Cunningham declares on the back cover, that subtly presents the secret world of LGBTQ+ people, thus uniting theme and technique, content and form, mind, and body.

Similarly, the table of contents that contains the titles of the five chapters ("Presents" – "Unlying" – "Dying" – "After" – "Living") calls to the Model Reader's mind the transgender pride flag, designed by the American transgender Monica Helms in 1999. The flag consists of five horizontal stripes: [l]ight blue for the male sex, pink for the female, and white in the middle for the intersex, the gender neutral or those transitioning. The first chapter, entitled "Presents", begins with Jack, who shows male physical traits and stands for Jose's repressed masculine sexual desires. In the second chapter, "Unlying", Jose reveals the truth about the outside world to Jack, who starts to show some feminine characteristics. The third chapter, entitled "Dying", represents the transitional phase when Jack, representing the repressed masculine sexual desires, pretends to be dead. The fourth chapter that takes place at the psychiatric clinic, and is aptly entitled "After", represents the attempt to make Jose conform to her biological sex, with Jack showing feminine traits. However, Jose cannot stand this kind of transformation and attempts suicide. The last chapter, entitled "Living", represents Jose's coming to terms with her internal masculine gender identity.

The world of the *fabula* thus focuses on the dilemma of transgender, an umbrella term "[d]esignating a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to that person's sex at birth" (OED). Of all rainbow colors, blue, traditionally representing male gender, is mentioned 55 times, white, which represents transitioning, is mentioned 50 times, while pink, traditionally representing female gender, is mentioned 15 times. In addition to the recurring transgender colors, the fictional universe of *Room* is rife with references to numbers five and six that stand for the various types of nonconforming genders: lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and others. Thus, when Jack mentions the "five crayons that are blue, orange, green, red, brown" (Donoghue 2010, 20) and "five chocolates in the bag, pink, blue, green, and two reds" (22), he is referring to the LGBTQ+ people.

Can we call these intentionally recurrent signals of transgender "Subfiction", fiction that houses the author's beliefs and memories that are not in focal awareness? The answer is probably yes. Subfiction works the same way as the subconscious, defined by Malim and Birch as "[the] level below conscious awareness" (1998, 205), which contains our beliefs and memories and allows us to do things without thinking. The repeated references to the LGBTQ+ communities throughout the novel reveal the author's beliefs that lie underneath the conscious level, symbolized by the tip of the iceberg that appears to everyone. Contrary to the visible tip of the iceberg, subfictional references remain hidden underwater to the naïve reader. Only the Model Reader is capable of diving beneath the surface and displaying how the author's subconscious works.

In *Room*, dialogue is used to impart truth to the fictional universe and avoid using third person pronouns that signal gender identity, thus creating gender fluidity. Through dialogue, the reader learns, that Jack is Jose's second child; her first child, a girl, was born dead:

'Did she stay in your tummy? The girl baby?'  
 Ma doesn't say anything for a minute. 'She came out blue'.  
 Blue?  
 'She never opened her eyes'. (Donoghue 2007, 205)

In other words, the female gender identity assigned at birth never saw light; it was born dead. The rest of the dialogue is a reflection on transgender, Jack inquires:

'She got recycled?'  
 Ma nearly smiles. 'I like to think that's what happened'.  
 'Why you like to think that?'  
 'Maybe it really was you, and a year later you tried again and came back down as a boy'. (*Ibidem*)

The idea here is that Jack, who represents the internal masculine gender, was originally a girl but developed into a boy, an act of metamorphosis that represents the LGBTQ+ communities. In contrast to the baby girl who "came out blue", however, the baby Jack is described as hot pink with open eyes:

'What color was I?'  
 'Hot pink'.  
 'Did I open my eyes?'  
 'You were born with your eyes open'. (206)

The suggestion here is that non-conforming gender identity is constructed very early. Ironically, the baby girl "came out blue", that is clad in a masculine hue, and dead, contrary to the traditional representation of women as symbols of fertility and life. The baby boy, on the other hand, was hot pink, a feminine color that stands for sex, and open-eyed, an idiomatic expression which signifies the ability to see the truth. This brings in a long debate about sexuality and whether sexual orientation is biologically determined. Such dialogues are meant to draw the Model Reader's attention to the predicament of transgender and the whole LGBTQ+ communities. They are assigned a sex at birth with which they might not feel comfortable.

It is significant that Donoghue chooses to construct the fictional universe out of the consciousness of a five-year-old boy; that is, out of the masculine id that remains infantile. Jack is five at the beginning of the fictional universe and remains a five-year-old boy till the very end. Jack announces at the very beginning:

Today I'm five. I was four last night going to sleep in Wardrobe, but when I wake up in Bed in the dark, I'm changed to five, abracadabra. Before that I was three, then two, then one, then zero.  
 'Was I minus numbers?'  
 'Hmm?' Ma does a big stretch.  
 'Up in Heaven. Was I minus one, minus two, minus three -?'  
 'Nah, the numbers didn't start till you zoomed down'.  
 'Through Skylight. You were all sad till I happened in your tummy'. (3)

The dialogue with which the fictional universe begins serves more than one metafictional purpose: first, it implicitly tells the Model Reader that the world of the *fabula* is the world of the id, the author's hidden and repressed masculine sexual desires. Second, it directs the reader's attention to the LGBTQ+ communities through the significant mention of number five. Third, it describes the repressed masculine gender identity as a gift from God as Jack miraculously grew in his mother's tummy without a father, just like Baby Jesus. Fourth, it establishes the relative truth of

the fictional universe: the *fabula* is both true and fictional at one and the same time. Though based on a true story, it features an imaginary world; though its world is fictional, it exhibits transcendental truth. Thus, the world of the *fabula* is a revelatory world of “Superfiction”, which parallels the superconscious mind in surpassing ordinary fiction and presenting a vision that transcends ordinary consciousness. Fifth, it establishes the pace of the discourse time (a long narrative is told in a few seconds). That a few seconds can indicate the passage of a whole year and change one’s perspective suggests the relative notion of truth adopted in this fictional universe and points to the nature of discourse time which spans a few weeks but presents a rich fictional universe full of events.

Jack’s character was born in Room; that is, inside the mind, and has been locked with Jose therein ever since. Through the following dialogue between Jose and Jack, Donoghue implicitly reflects on the act of character creation:

She grins. ‘I could feel you kicking’.  
 ‘What was I kicking?’  
 ‘Me, of course’.  
 I always laugh at that bit.  
 ‘From the inside, boom boom’. Ma lifts her sleep T-shirt and makes her tummy jump.  
 ‘I thought, Jack’s on his way. First thing in the morning, you slid out onto the rug with your eyes wide open’. (3-4)

The act of character creation is portrayed as a moment of enlightenment like the revelatory moment of giving birth. Indeed, Jack’s character emerges as a real child thanks to the language he speaks, characterized by generalizing the rule of forming regular past and past participle verbs to irregular ones such as “rotted” and “forgetted” (9), generalizing the rule of forming possessive nouns to pronouns as in “why are the eyes of me shut?” (5), coining new words by using root compounds formed from two nouns like “dickey-bird” (28), forming adjectives by adding the suffix -y to verbs such as “meltedy” (7), and taking the meaning of words literally as in his comment on Dr. Clay’s description of him as “plastic”: “[b]ut I’m not plastic, I’m a real boy” (209). Nevertheless, the creation of Jack’s character is not as simple as it seems: although his language is that of a child, his consciousness is that of an adult. In other words, his voice is the internal voice of the author herself, which is quite fitting being no more than the author’s id.

To add a fictional dimension to the character of Jack, Donoghue implicitly compares it to the act of drawing. Jose says: “[y]esterday morning and the day before and the day before that, I put the lamp on and drew you” (5). She tells Jack that she drew him while he was asleep; that is, unconscious. She explains: “[w]ell, I couldn’t draw you while you were awake, or it wouldn’t be a surprise, would it?” Ma waits. ‘I thought you’d like a surprise’ ” (*ibidem*). However, Jack retorts: “I prefer a surprise and me knowing” (*ibidem*). In other words, the narrator emphasizes his separate identity and insists on his right to be conscious of what the author does. On another level, a nonfictional one, Jose, as the superego, tries to impose her vision of how the id should behave, but the id resists these attempts and insists on being in the know of whatever the superego is doing.

Representing the author and the superego at one and the same time, Jose engages in the following dialogue with Jack, the narrator, who represents the id:

‘I wish the drawing was better’, she says, ‘but at least it shows what you’re like’.  
 ‘What am I like?’  
 She taps Mirror where’s my forehead, her finger leaves a circle. ‘The dead spit of me’.  
 ‘Why I’m your dead spit?’ The circle’s disappearing.  
 ‘It just means you look like me. I guess because you’re made of me, like my spit is. Same brown eyes, same big mouth, same pointy chin’. (7)

The author wishes she portrayed Jack's character in a better way, but she consoles herself that at least he resembles the author because he is the manifestation of her unconscious repressed feelings; that is, the masculine side of her character.

Not only does Donoghue reflect on the act of character creation, but she also gives her character the chance to reflect on his own creation as well. Jack says:

I look down at Rug with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other. There's the stain I spilled by mistake getting born.  
'You cutted the cord and I was free', I tell Ma. 'Then I turned into a boy'. 'Actually, you were a boy already'. (4)

Metafictionally, the dialogue is about the act of creating the narrator. He was part of the author's consciousness and then she cut the cord and freed him. On another level, a nonfictional one, Donoghue released the masculine gender identity repressed in the unconscious mind and gave it shape in the character of Jack. Donoghue emphasizes here that she did not create Jack as a boy; he was a boy already. In other words, the id already houses the author's masculine sexual desires; all she had to do was to cut the cord and free it.

However, the creation of a separate identity for the narrator is no easy task. In an implicit metafictional note, Jack says:

For my third turn I do 'Can't Get You out of my head'. Ma has no idea. 'You've chosen such a tricky one .... Did you hear it on TV?'  
'No, on you'. (6-7)

Jack here implies that the author occupies his mind and consciousness. This is tricky, the author believes, because it is self-revelatory. It will disclose her unconscious repressed feelings and desires to the reader.

The fact that Jack recurrently requests to be breastfed by Jose is also a significant, implicit, metafictional remark; Jack says: "[o]h, I forgot to have some when I woke up", to which Jose replies, "[t]hat's OK. Maybe we could skip it once in a while, now you're five?" (6). In other words, the narrator is still being fed ideas by the author. However, he does not need this quite often since he is five now and can represent the LGBTQ+ communities. Jose asks him: "[t]ell me, Mr. Five, would you like your present now or after breakfast?" (4). Metafictionally, the author is receding and giving the narrator a choice. On the nonfictional level, the superego is giving way to the wishes and desires of the id; that is, the repressed masculine sexual desires.

In another implicit Metafictional remark, Jack, the narrator, reflects on the construction of his separate identity, he says:

I still don't tell her about the web. It's weird to have something that's mine-not-Ma's. Everything else is both of ours. I guess my body is mine and the ideas that happen in my head. But my cells are made out of her cells so I'm kind of hers. Also when I tell her what I'm thinking and she tells me what she's thinking, our each ideas jump into our other's head, like coloring blue crayon on top of yellow that makes green. (10)

On the one hand, the narrator metafictionally reflects on what distinguishes him from the author. He first guesses it is the physical characteristics that distinguish him from her, but he soon dismisses the idea as untenable because he is born of her. Even mentally, he finds it hard to distinguish his ideas from hers. They seem to be inextricably mixed like the green color that is formed by mixing blue and yellow. On the nonfictional level, the id reflects on the difference

between him and the superego. He guesses that it is his interest with the physical that distinguishes him from the superego, yet he soon dismisses this idea as he is born of the superego. He then surmises they are different mentally, but he soon discovers that they are not, since they both occupy the unconscious mind.

Marie-Laure Ryan and Alice Bell describe the experience of reading fiction as one of “recentering” (2019, 16); that is, regarding the fictional world as actual in make-believe, as existing independently of the text even though the reader knows it is created by the text. It is this “recentering” into fictional worlds which explains why readers regard fictional characters as real people and why they identify with them. The fictional world, Ryan maintains, consists of both static properties mentioned in descriptions and world-changing events mentioned in the narrative parts.

The fictional universe of *Room* is full of such descriptions that present unnecessary details, or so the naïve reader thinks. Rather than narrating events by a heterodiegetic narrator, Donoghue invites the Model Reader into the secret world of the id to see events from his perspective. I say seeing events because the homodiegetic narrator is so close to what is being observed. Rather than narrating past events, he describes scenes isochronously in the present tense, thus imparting a sense of immediacy and realism to these events. Such descriptions turn the act of reading the narrative into one of watching a movie. For example, Jack describes Wardrobe as a female:

Wardrobe is wood, so I have to push the pin an extra lot. I shut her silly doors, they always squeak, even after we put corn oil on the hinges. I look through the slats but it's too dark. I open her a bit to peek, the secret drawing is white except the little lines of gray. (Donoghue 2010, 6)

The underlying meaning goes far beyond the mere description of a wardrobe by a five-year-old kid. The pin that needs to be pushed is no more than the penis and the silly doors that squeak and need to be lubricated are no more than the *labia minora*. When he opens the vagina a bit to peek, he sees a secret drawing in white, the *vulva vestibule*, with little grey lines. Instead of reading it as a detailed description of a wardrobe, the Model Reader can discover the sexual underlying meaning and perceive the minute description of female genitalia by the id, who is preoccupied with sexual matters.

In wardrobe, Jack remarks: “[m]a’s blue dress is hanging over a bit of my sleeping eye, I mean the eye in the picture but the dress for real in Wardrobe” (6). The narrator, or the id, is thus seen peeking at the portrayal of his character. The juxtaposition of the sleeping eye and the dress is highly significant: while the animate organ is not real, the inanimate dress is real. For the LGBTQ+ communities, the dress is more real as a marker of gender identity than body organs. The blue color of the dress signifies masculinity while its genre signifies femininity, thus reflecting the double gender identity of the id and the superego.

Examples of such detailed descriptions of furniture with sexual connotations abound throughout the fictional universe, Jack notes: “I stroke Table’s scratches to make them better, she’s a circle all white except gray in the scratches from chopping foods” (*ibidem*). Later, he remarks: “[s]pider’s real. I’ve seen her two times. I look for her now but there’s only a web between Table’s leg and her flat [...] She brushes webs away; she says they’re dirty but they look like extra-thin silver to me” (8). The gray scratches on Jose’s curvy, white figure are the result of the repeated act of rape, while the web between her legs stands for pubic hair that Jose gets rid of.

Not only pieces of furniture but also toys made from recycled materials are minutely described by Jack in sexual terms, he says:



We've been making Labyrinth since I was two, she's all toilet roll insides taped together in tunnels that twist lots of ways. Bouncy Ball loves to get lost in Labyrinth and hide, I have to call out to him and shake her and turn her sideways and upside down before he rolls out, whew. Then I send other things into Labyrinth like a peanut and a broken bit of Blue Crayon and a short spaghetti not cooked. They chase each other in the tunnels and sneak up and shout Boo, I can't see them but I listen against the cardboard and I can figure out where they are. (14)

For the naïve reader, this is no more than a child play; for the Model Reader, however, it is a description of female fallopian tubes that look like dark and hidden tunnels. The kid, or id, who cannot insert his penis, sends "a peanut and a broken bit of Blue Crayon and a short spaghetti not cooked" (*ibidem*) down the tunnel or female vagina.

Another toy made from recycled materials is Eggsnake which is described in detail as follows:

Eggsnake is more longer than all around Room, we've been making him since I was three, he lives in Under Bed all coiled up keeping us safe. Most of his eggs are brown but sometimes there's a white, some have patterns on from pencils or crayons or Pen or bits stuck on with flour glue, a foil crown and a yellow ribbon belt and threads and bits of tissue for hairs. His tongue is a needle, that keeps the red thread going right through him. We don't bring Eggsnake out much anymore because sometimes he tangles and his eggs get cracked around the holes or even fall off, and we have to use the bits for mosaics. Today I put his needle in one of the holes of the new eggs, I have to dangle it till it comes out the other hole all sharp, it's pretty tricky. Now he's three eggs longer, I extra gently wind him up again so all of him fits in Under Bed. (21-22)

The Eggsnake is no more than Jack's penis; it grew longer than when he was three years old and is kept coiled up in the underwear. Sometimes it ejaculates drops of milky fluid which gets sticky like flour glue. Jack does not release it much because it gets cracked around the vagina; that is, it ejaculates.

Can we say that Jack's detailed descriptions with sexual undertones belong to the "non-fictional" world which houses the repressed hidden thoughts of the author, corresponding to the unconscious mind that Freud (1933) viewed as "the repository for repressed memories" (Malim, Birch 1998, 205)? I believe yes, Jack is no more than the id; he stands for the repressed masculine gender identity of the author.

If, in the nonfictional world, Jack represents the id, Jose stands for the superego that imposes codes of conduct and rules on Jack. She tells Jack: "I know you're excited," she says, "but remember not to nibble your finger, germs could sneak in the hole" (Donoghue 2010, 4). She kills the mouse that Jack would like to keep saying: "[i]f we let him stay, we'd soon be overrun with his babies. Stealing our food, bringing in germs on their filthy paws" (32). Moreover, she puts restrictions on watching TV, Jack says:

I'd love to watch TV all the time, but it rots our brains. Before I came down from Heaven Ma left it on all day long and got turned into a zombie that's like a ghost but walks thump thump. So now she always switches off after one show, then the cells multiply again in the day and we can watch another show after dinner and grow more brains in our sleep.

'Just one more, because it's my birthday? Please?'

Ma opens her mouth, then shuts it. Then she says, 'Why not?' She mutes the commercials because they mush our brains even faster so they'd drip out our ears. (11)

Representing the superego, Jose thus imposes rules over the id and restrains his wantonness and insidious desires.

Through dialogue, the Model Reader learns about the daily routine which Jose has established and of which Jack is highly conscious: “Monday is a laundry day” (39), “after nap we do Scream every day but not Saturdays or Sundays” (40), “Friday means mattress time” (65), “it’s Wednesday so we wash hair” (54). Metafictionally, such rules help indicate the time naturally as well as show the power exercised by the superego over the id. Thus, when Jose “points up at Watch that says 08:57” Jack understands: “that’s only three minutes before nine. So I run into Wardrobe and lie down on my pillow and wrap up in Blanket that’s all gray and fleecy with the red piping” (25).

If Jack is the id on whom the superego exercises control, Old Nick – the man responsible for abducting Ma and continually raping her – is the realistic ego who tries to satisfy the desires of the id in a realistic manner. Thus, he buys him a jeep with remote for his birthday, a toy that traditionally suits boys, but refuses to satisfy other superfluous needs that sound unrealistic. Old Nick mediates between the two worlds: the inside world of the mind and the outside world of real life. Jack says:

Men aren’t real except Old Nick, and I’m not actually sure if he’s real for real. Maybe half? He brings groceries and Sundaytreat and disappears the trash, but he’s not human like us. He only happens in the night, like bats. Maybe Door makes him up with a beep beep and the air changes. I think Ma doesn’t like to talk about him in case he gets realer. (18)

It seems that the superego dislikes the ego because of the control he exercises on both the superego and the id, locking them inside the unconscious mind and denying them freedom of interaction with the outside world.

Although Jack and Jose spend years locked in Room, i.e., inside the mind, only two weeks of the discourse time take place in Room. The Model Reader takes an “inferential walk” to construct the day on which the discourse time begins. Through the dialogue that takes place between Jack and Jose regarding the web on the table leg, the Model Reader infers that the discourse time starts on Saturday. Jose tells Jack: “[t]ell you what, I’ll leave it till we clean, OK?” And Jack replies: “[t]hat’s Tuesday, that’s three days” (12). On the other hand, Jack and Jose spend only a month communicating with people in the outside world, but this period occupies most of the discourse time. Jack informs the Model Reader about the day of his escape from Room: “[i]t’s April today so I get to blow up a balloon” (108). The choice of April Fool’s Day for Jack’s trick, pretending to be sick and then playing dead to fool Old Nick, is so apt. The Model Reader interprets Jack’s trick as the id’s attempt to break loose and give reign to his repressed sexual desires. The id succeeds in escaping from the control of the ego and in rescuing the superego as well. When the id and the superego venture into the outside world, they need support to regain their balance. It is at the clinic they receive the necessary care. However, the inside world, i.e., the brain, continues to feel more real. Unable to adapt to the outside world, the superego represented by Jose attempts suicide. After recovery, the superego and the id live together at the Independent Living Facility, a significant name that stands for the independence of the unconscious mind. The discourse time ends on the first of May, spanning merely one month and a half. The following dialogue takes place between the id and the superego:

Tomorrow is May Day, that means summer’s coming and there’s going to be a parade. We might go just to look.

‘Is it only May Day in the world?’ I ask. We’re having granola in our bowls on the sofa not spilling. ‘What do you mean?’ says Ma.

‘Is it May Day in Room too?’

‘I suppose so, but nobody’s there to celebrate it’. (315)

At the urge of the id, the superego and the id pay one last visit to Room, the unconscious mind. Again, the choice of Labour Day to pay farewell to Room is significant. It signifies separation from security and peace of mind and venturing into the world of toil and hard work.

Not only does dialogue help the Model Reader construct the beginning of discourse time and establish its pace, but it also plays a major role in arranging the events of the narrative. Through dialogue, complete homodiegetic analepsis, in Gerard Genette's own terms, is realized, thus filling an earlier gap in the narrative; namely, Jose's failed attempts at escaping from Room one year and a half after being kidnapped. Jose tells Jack:

'Exactly. I smashed the toilet lid down on his head'.  
 I've got my thumb in my mouth and I'm biting and biting.  
 'But I didn't do it hard enough, the lid fell on the floor and broke in two, and he – Old Nick – he managed to shove the door shut'.  
 I taste something weird.  
 Ma's voice is all gulpy. 'I knew my only chance was to make him give me the code. So I pressed the knife against his throat, like this'. She puts her fingernail under my chin, I don't like it. 'I said, 'Tell me the code'.  
 'Did he?'  
 She puffs her breath. 'He said some numbers, and I went to tap them in'.  
 'Which numbers?'  
 'I don't think they were the real ones. He jumped up and twisted my wrist and got the knife'.  
 'Your bad wrist?'  
 'Well, it wasn't bad before that. Don't cry,' Ma says into my hair, 'that was a long time ago'. (97)

The retrospective technique helps the author retrieve narrative antecedents and rejoin the first narrative without any gap. Thus, Jose's twisted wrist brings the reader back to the first narrative.

Jose continues to unravel the truth about her kidnap in the second chapter aptly entitled "Unlying" to Jack, the id who has begun to show some feminine characteristics. Jack says: "Ma makes me three braids for a change, they feel funny" (66). Towards the end of the chapter, Jose tells Jack:

'Listen, Jack, I need to tell you another story'.  
 'A true one?'  
 'Totally true. You know how I used to be all sad?'  
 I like this one. 'Then I came down from Heaven and grew in your tummy'.  
 'Yeah, but see, why I was sad – it was because of Room', says Ma. 'Old Nick – I didn't even know him, I was nineteen. He stole me'. (93)

The word "story" calls for reflection on narratology and truth. Jose describes the story of her kidnap as totally true. To the naïve reader, whose moral and social sensitivity has been molded by a condemnation of kidnap, there is no other alternative but to believe the story of Jose. On the level of the possible world of the *fabula*, the kidnap of the nineteen-year-old Jose took place seven years before the narrative began.

No matter how hard Jose emphasizes the truth of the kidnap story, it seems fictitious to the five-year-old Jack, and the Model Reader as well. When Jose urges Jack to listen saying: "[y]ou have to let me tell this story," Jack wonders: "[c]an I pick another?" When Jose insists: "[i]t's what happened," Jack asks: "[c]an I have Jack the Giant Killer?" (94). The dialogue thus serves as a metafictional signal that casts doubt on the interpretation of the *fabula* as a story of kidnap and directs the Model Reader to the intended reading of the *fabula* as a story of the LGBTQ+ people.

Although Jose does not mention that Old Nick is Jack's father, the naïve reader takes this "inferential walk": having kidnapped her at the age of nineteen, imprisoned her in Room and raped her repeatedly, no other father is logically possible but Old Nick. To the Model Reader, however, Jack's words "I came down from Heaven and grew in your tummy" (16) calls to mind the biblical story of Jesus Christ who was conceived by Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit and without sexual intercourse. Earlier, Jose tells Jack the biblical story of Virgin Mary's conception of Jesus, she says:

What started Baby Jesus growing in Mary's tummy was an angel zoomed down, like a ghost but a really cool one with feathers. Mary was all surprised, she said, 'How can this be?' and then, 'OK let it be.' When Baby Jesus popped out of her vagina on Christmas she put him in a manger but not for the cows to chew, only warm him up with their blowing because he was magic. (18)

The parallelism drawn between the conception of Jack and that of Jesus, reinforced with the dedication of Room to Donoghue's kids she got from a sperm donor and the Danaë myth, suggests that the story is about the LGBTQ+ people, the communities of lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, rather than one of kidnap, as the naïve reader is made to believe. Through the following dialogue, the truth about Jack's origin is disclosed:

'Why he said don't forget where you got me? Wasn't it Heaven?'  
Ma is clicking Lamp but he won't wake up either. 'He meant – who you belong to'.  
'I belong to you'.  
[...]  
'Why he told you not to forget?'  
'Well actually, he's got it all wrong, he thinks you belong to him'. (76)

Both Jose, who represents the superego that dictates rules and restrains the wantonness of the id, and Old Nick, who represents the ego that realistically satisfies the desires of the id, claim ownership of Jack, who stands for the id or the repressed sexual desires of the author. However, both Jack and Jose belong to Donoghue's unconscious mind, and they have been locked in there for years by Old Nick, the ego, until they were both released in the present work.

The third chapter entitled "Dying" represents, on both the subfictional and nonfictional levels, the transitional phase in the life of the transgender when the gender identity ascribed to them at birth is buried in preparation for the emergence of true gender identity. The world of Jose and Jack is the secret LGBTQ+ world to which Donoghue grants only the Model Reader access. To the naïve reader, the world of the characters is like the world of the *fabula*, the story of Jose's kidnap and escape. All the naïve reader understands from the following dialogue is that Jose spent seven years locked in Room and has been thinking of a plan for escape:

'We need to figure out a plan'. Her voice is all high.  
'Like what?'  
'I don't know, do I? I've been trying to think of one for seven years'. (69)

The Model Reader, however, interprets the dialogue as follows: as an individual with a nonconforming gender identity, Jose has been trying throughout these seven years of confinement and isolation from society to get into the open and failed. That is why she decides the only way to escape from isolation is through trickery. The original plan devised by Jose, or the superego, was to let Jack, or the id, pretend to be sick so that Old Nick may take him to

hospital where he can ask for help; that is, a transgender surgery. When this plan fails, Jose lets Jack play dead, an act which is later repeated by Jose who attempts suicide to escape societal pressure. The message that Jack carries inside his underwear when he escapes as a dead body wrapped in a rug is the message of LGBTQ+ communities, i.e., their troubled sexual identity has to do with their genitals. To conform to the expectations of society, LGBTQ+ individuals sometimes resort to transgender surgery. When their attempts at conforming fail, they bury their true sexual identity, and their message stays hidden inside their underwear.

The fourth chapter entitled "After," represents the stage that follows the escape from the mind to the outside world. At the psychiatric Cumberland Clinic, the id represented by Jack, and the superego represented by Jose receive the support necessary to regain their psychological balance. They are advised to wear masks; that is, to hide their true gender identity to avoid various social ills, from rejection and prejudice to violence and aggression. Jack, the id who stood for the repressed masculine gender identity, starts to show some feminine traits: wearing long hair, carrying a Dora bag, and using the ladies' restroom. In other words, the id tries to conform to the female gender identity ascribed to the author at birth, and the superego represented by Jose starts to relax her control over the id. Jack wonders why lunch is brought after one o'clock, but Jose tells him: "[r]elax [...] Everything's different here'. 'But what's the rule?' " Jack asks. " 'There is no rule. We can have lunch at ten or one or three or the middle of the night' " Jose replies (184). The lack of rules signifies freedom. Jack asks his mum:

'Are we locked in?'

'No'. She nearly barks it. 'Of course not. Why, are you not liking it here?'

'I mean but do we have to stay?'

'No, no, we're free as a bird'. (191)

Not only the id but also the superego experience freedom having been released from confinement in the unconscious mind and received proper psychological support. However, it is a false sense of freedom. The reality is that both Jack and Jose are constrained in every way: they cannot go out for fear of the paparazzi; Jack cannot walk barefoot and is obliged to wear shoes even if they make his feet sore; more importantly, they cannot leave the clinic until the doctors decide, as the following dialogue makes clear:

'How long are we here?'

'It's only been twenty-four hours. It just feels longer'.

'No, but – how long do we still be here after now? How many days and nights?'

'I don't actually know'. (191)

The sense of time in the outside world, i.e., outside the unconscious mind, is quite different because many events happen simultaneously. Jack loses track of time; he wonders:

In *Outside* the time's all mixed up. Ma keeps saying, 'Slow down, Jack', and 'Hang on', and 'Finish up now', and 'Hurry up, Jack', she says Jack a lot so I'll know it's me she's talking to not persons else. I can hardly ever guess what time it is, there's clocks but they have pointy hands, I don't know the secret and Watch isn't here with her numbers so I have to ask Ma and she gets tired of me asking. 'You know what time it is, it's time to go outside'. (196)

The lack of rules and the ease of the superego's control over the id thus change the id's consciousness of time so much that it seems unreal in the real world compared to the fancy time spent in *Room*; that is, inside the unconscious mind.

The fifth chapter, entitled “Living”, marks the return full circle to the first stage where Jack, as a representative of male sexual desires, and Jose, as the superego, are part of the unconscious mind. Jose says: “[g]uess what, Jack, you and me have our own apartment” (300). The only difference is that the male sexual desires are no longer repressed. Thus, Jack informs the Model Reader: “[t]his morning the kitchen’s empty. I get the scissors from the drawer and cut my ponytail all off” (284). The id tries to exercise some influence on the superego so it adopts the same male gender identity. Jack tells Jose: “I could cut yours and then we’d be the same again” (303). However, Jose decides to keep the female gender identity. She tells Jack: “I think I’m going to keep mine long” (*ibidem*). Having released repressed male sexual desires, the id and the superego can now live together in peace. In other words, the author has finally come to terms with her double gender identity: the outer feminine traits and the inner masculine feelings.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to shed light on the possible metafictional, super-fictional, subfictional and nonfictional worlds imagined by the author of the fictional universe of *Room*, which tackles the problematic of transgender, their isolation from society that is reluctant to accept nonconforming genders, and their various attempts at conforming with their biological sex from medical surgery to psychological treatment. The answer suggested to the dilemma of transgender in this fictional universe is acceptance of their difference. As Nietzsche remarks, “to accept oneself as a fate, not to desire oneself ‘different’ – in such conditions this is *great rationality* itself” (2004, 20).

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