

Emma Donoghue - Room

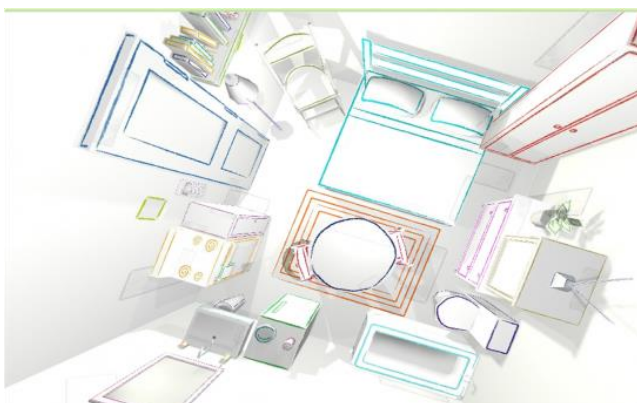


Figure 1: A scale drawing of 'Room', based on Jack's descriptions



Figure 2: Brie Larson & Jacob Tremblay as Ma & Jack

Introduction

In 2010, Emma Donoghue's *Room* was shortlisted for a variety of prestigious literary prizes, including the Man Booker. Though it lost out to the Howard Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* for the latter, *Room* was hugely successful: it has sold over two million copies to date, and has been adapted into an Oscar winning film by Donoghue herself. The novel drew vaguely on the real life case of Josef Fritzl, and his 24 year imprisonment & abuse of his daughter, Elisabeth.

The existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre famously claimed that "hell is other people."

- How does the truth of this philosophy play out in *Room*?

Of the film's director, Abrahamson, Donoghue said "she was convinced of his suitability because "he has a background in philosophy. He picked up references to Plato's Cave, and that kind of thing."

- How could an understanding of Plato inform or affect our understanding of the novel?

When asked why she narrated the novel from Jack's perspective, Donoghue stated that she "would never have tackled such a subject any other way. Originality, strangeness, innocence, laughter."

- Does Jack's voice succeed in these stated aims, or in any other notable ways? Did it limit the effectiveness of the novel in any way?

"Although Room asks many important questions about ethical, philosophical and psychological matters, it offers no clear answers [...] I tried to keep Room balanced on a knife-edge throughout, almost agonizingly ambivalent." - Emma Donoghue

- Do you agree that Donoghue has avoided any kind of moral or moral judgement on her characters in *Room*? Was she right to do so?

The Golden Question

Do you consider *Room* to be a typical Booker prize choice? Should it have won? Why?