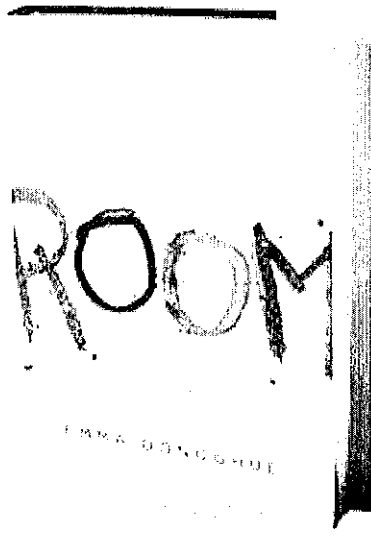




Reading Questions for *Room*

Oprah.com | From the September 2010 issue of *O, The Oprah Magazine*



Warning: May contain spoilers

1. Why do you think the entire book is told in Jack's voice? Do you think it is effective?
2. What are some of the ways in which Jack's development has been stunted by growing up in Room? How has he benefited?
3. If you were Ma, what would you miss most about the outside world?
4. What would you do differently if you were Jack's parent? Would you tell Jack about the outside world from the start?
5. If Ma had never given birth to Jack, what would her situation in Room be like?
6. What would you ask for, for Sundaytreat, if you were Jack? If you were Ma?
7. Describe the dynamic between Old Nick and Ma. Why does the author choose not to tell us Old Nick's

story?

8. What does joining the outside world do to Jack? To Ma?
9. What role do you think the media play in the novel?
10. In a similar situation, how would you teach a child the difference between the real world and what they watch on television?
11. Why are we so fascinated by stories of long-term confinement?
12. What were you most affected by in the novel?

[Read O's review](#)

Use these book club discussion questions on *Room* by Emma Donoghue to explore Donoghue's unique book told from a child's perspective.

Spoiler Warning: These book club discussion questions reveal important details about *Room* by Emma Donoghue. Finish the book before reading on.

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>

Accessed: 12/03/12 jle

If you liked Room by Emma Donoghue you might want to try:

Daddy Love by Joyce Carol Oates - Kidnapping a latest victim in a string of young boys he tortures and rapes, a self-styled preacher confines the child in a small box and gradually brainwashes him over subsequent years into believing that they are father and son; while the boy's mother, who was savagely injured during the abduction, clings to hope that her son is alive.

A Stolen Life: a Memoir by Jaycee Lee Dugard - The memoir of Jaycee Dugard who was kidnapped on June 10, 1991, when she was 11 years old, and was missing for over 18 years before her reappearance in 2009.

The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold - This is the tale of family, memory, love, and living told by 14-year-old Susie Salmon, who is already in heaven. Through the voice of a precocious teenage girl, Susie relates the awful events of her death and builds out of her family's grief a hopeful and joyful story.

Read-a-Likes

Room (2010)



EMMA DONOGHUE

Community Rating ★★★★★

Audio

1607889889 Audio, Other
 9781607889885 Audio, Other
 1611138434 Compact Disc
 1607886278 Compact Disc
 0230755151 Compact Disc
 9781611138436 Compact Disc
 9780230755154 Compact Disc
 9781607886273 Compact Disc

Hardcover

0316098337 Trade Cloth
 0330519018 Trade Cloth
 9780316098335 Trade Cloth
 9780330519014 Trade Cloth

Softcover

033053386X Trade Paper
 031612057X Trade Paper
 0330519921 Trade Paper
 0316098329 Trade Paper
 0330519026 Trade Paper
 9780330519021 Trade Paper
 9780316098328 Trade Paper
 9780316120579 Trade Paper
 9780330519922 Trade Paper
 9780330533867 Trade Paper



The Lost Language of Cranes (2005)

The Lost Language of Cranes is a thought-provoking debut novel about family, sexuality, and identity



Under the Harrow (2010)

Mark Dunn's Under the Harrow is set in the fictional backwoods town of Dingley Dell, Pennsylvania,



Save Me (2011) AWARD WINNER

Rose McKenna took a volunteer position as a lunch mom at her daughter Melly's elementary school to keep



Afterwards (Lupton, Rosamund) (2012)

Grace doesn't think twice about running into a burning school to save her daughter Jenny, although this



The Good Sister (2010)

Drusilla Campbell's The Good Sister tells of the relationship between Roxanne and her troubled sister



I'd Know You Anywhere (2010)

In Laura Lippman's I'd Know You Anywhere, housewife Eliza Benedict moves with her husband, daughter,



A Stolen Life (2011)

In A Stolen Life , Jaycee Lee Dugard recounts her 18-year-long ordeal as the captive of Phillip Craig



The Slap (2010) AWARD WINNER

The Slap is a novel from award-winning Australian author Christos Tsiolkas. The story, set in a suburb



The Compound (2008) AWARD WINNER

After a nuclear holocaust destroyed Earth's atmosphere, Eli and his family moved to an underground compound.



The Chalk Girl (2011)

Kathleen "Kathy" Mallory returns to work at the Special Crimes Unit as if nothing has happened. She doesn't



The Talk-Funny Girl (2011) AWARD WINNER

In the novel Talk Funny Girl by Roland Merullo, a victim of abuse--now a grown woman and mother--recalls



Wrecker (Wood, Summer) (2011)

Summer Wood's Wrecker charts the adventures of the title hero, a boy who finds himself a victim in



Still Missing (Steven, Chevy) (2010)

Chevy Stevens's Still Missing is a story of suspense, survival, and the painful road to healing and

ME & EMMA

Me & Emma (2005)

Carrie is an eight-year-old with a tough attitude that contrasts sharply with her internal nature: fearful,

Elizabeth Black



The Widower's Tale (2010)

In The Widower's Tale , award-winning author Julia Glass tells the story of a family going through a



The Playdate (Millar, Louise) (2012)

Callie Roberts and her daughter, Rae, have moved into her new neighborhood to get a fresh start. Stricken



Cold Wind (Box, C.J.) (2011)

In Cold Wind by C.J. Box, the discovery of a dead body hanging from a wind turbine attracts the attention



The Fifth Witness (2010)

In The Fifth Witness by Michael Connelly, a woman about to lose her Los Angeles home in foreclosure



His Illegal Self (2008)

Che Selkirk lives with his grandmother who calls him "Jay." His parents are never talked about in their



The False Friend (2010)

In The False Friend by Myla Goldberg, a woman returns to her childhood home to face the truth about

Books & Authors

Where do I find it?



About the Author

Full text biography:

Emma Donoghue

Birth Date : 1969

Place of Birth : Ireland, Dublin

Nationality: Canadian

Occupation : Novelist

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Awards

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Career

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about this author

Awards:

Robert Gardner Memorial Studentship, University of Cambridge, 1990-93; Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Book Award, American Library Association, 1997, for *Hood*; Ferro-Grumley Award for Lesbian Fiction, 2002, for *Slammerkin*; Golden Crown Literary Award for Lesbian Dramatic General Fiction, 2007, for *Landing*; Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year, and Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, both 2010; Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Caribbean and Canada Region, 2011, all for *Room*.

Personal Information:

Born October 24, 1969, in Dublin, Ireland; daughter of Denis (a literary critic) and Frances (a teacher) Donoghue; lives with her Partner, Chris Roulston, children, Finn and Una. **Education:** University College, Dublin, B.A. (with first-class honors), 1990; University of Cambridge, Ph.D., 1997. **Politics:** "Left-wing liberal feminist." **Religion:** "Prayer without a church." **Memberships:** Society of Authors, Writers Union of Canada. **Addresses:** Home, London, Ontario, Canada. Agent: Caroline Davidson, Caroline Davidson Literary Agency, 5 Queen Anne's Gardens, London W4 1TU, England. Kathleen Anderson, Anderson/Grinberg Literary Management, 244 5th Ave., 11th Fl., New York, NY 10001. **E-mail:** emma@emmadonoghue.com

Career Information:

Writer and educator. Host of Irish television series about books, 1994; judge for *Irish Times* literary prize, 1997; occasional creative writing instructor at Cheltenham Literary Festival and Arvon Foundation; writer-in-residence, University of Western Ontario and University of York, 1999-2000.

Writings:

NOVELS

- *Stir-fry*, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1994
- *Hood*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1995; HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1996
- (With others) *Ladies Night at Finbar's Hotel*, Harcourt (New York, NY), 1999
- *Slammerkin*, Virago (London, England), 2000; Harcourt (New York, NY), 2001
- *Life Mask*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2004
- *Landing*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2007
- *The Sealed Letter*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2008

- *Room*. Little, Brown (New York, NY), 2010

PLAYS

- *I Know My Own Heart: A Lesbian Regency Romance*, produced by Glasshouse Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, 1994.
- *Ladies and Gentleman* (produced by Glass House Theatre, Dublin, Ireland, 1996), New Island Press (Dublin, Ireland), 1998.
- *Don't Die Wondering* (one-act play), produced at the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, 2005.

OTHER

- *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (nonfiction), Scarlet Press (London, England), 1993, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 1995
- *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (stories), Joanna Cotler Books (New York, NY), 1997.
- (Editor) *Poems between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship, and Desire*, Columbia University Press (New York, NY), 1997, published as *What Sappho Would Have Said: Four Centuries of Love Poems between Women*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1997.
- (Editor) *The Mammoth Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, Carroll & Graf (New York, NY), 1999.
- *We Are Michael Field* (biography), Stuart, Tabori and Chang (New York, NY), 1999.
- *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits. Stories*, Harcourt (New York, NY), 2002
- *Touchy Subjects. Stories*, Harcourt (Orlando, FL), 2006.
- *Inseparable. Desire between Women in Literature*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Astray*, Little, Brown (New York, NY), 2012.

Writer of *Immaculate Conception. Inside a Lesbian Baby Boom* (documentary film); author of the radio plays *Trespasses*, produced in 1996, *Don't Die Wondering*, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Radio 4, 2000; *Exes*, BBC Radio 4, 2001 *Humans and Other Animals*, BBC Radio 4, 2003; and *Mix*, BBC Radio 3, writer of screenplay for the short film *Pluck*. Work represented in anthologies, including *Seen and Heard: Six New Plays by Irish Women*, edited by Cathy Leeney, and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror Eleventh Annual Collection*, 1998.

Media Adaptions:

Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins was adapted by Donoghue as a stage play titled *Kissing the Witch*, produced by Magic Theatre, San Francisco, CA, 2000

Sidelights:

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, *Stranger*, 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 *Horizons*. "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."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

- *American Book Review*, November 1997, review of *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, p. 6
- *Australian*, August 7, 2010, Kathy Hunt, review of *Room*.
- *Booklist*, May 15, 1994, review of *Stir-fry*, p. 1663; March 1, 1996, review of *Hood*, p. 1120; June 1, 1997, Debbie Carton, review of *Kissing the Witch*, p. 1684; June 1, 1999, Whitney Scott, review of *The Mammoth Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, p. 1786; April 1, 2001, Michelle Kaske, review of *Slammerkin*, p. 1451; September 1, 2004, Carolyn Kubisz, review of *Life Mask*, p. 60; May 1, 2006, Brad Hooper, review of *Touchy Subjects: Stories*, p. 71; March 1, 2007, Marta Segal Block, review of *Landing*, p. 61; August 1, 2008, Mary Ellen Quinn, review of *The Sealed Letter*, p. 38; June 1, 1999, Whitney Scott, review of *The Mammoth Book of Modern Lesbian Short Stories*, p. 1786; May 1, 2002, Whitney Scott, review of *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits: Stories*, p. 1506; April 1, 2010, Whitney Scott, review of *Inseparable: Desire between Women in Literature*, p. 12; September 15, 2010, Vanessa Bush, review of *Room*, p. 29
- *Bookseller*, May 14, 2010, Patrick Neal, synopsis of *The Room*, p. 30; May 21, 2010, Benedicte Page, "Room to Think: Emma Donoghue's Latest Novel about a Mother and Child Imprisoned in a Room, Was Inspired by Kidnappings like the Fritzl Case," p. 19
- *Chatelaine*, September 2010, review of *Room*, p. 132.
- *Choice*, December, 1997, "Poems between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship, and Desire," p. 639.
- *Christian Century*, December 14, 2010, Amy Frykholm, review of *Room*, p. 25
- *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, spring, 1997, review of *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801*, p. 321
- *Entertainment Weekly*, May 26, 2006, Whitney Pastorek, review of *Touchy Subjects*, p. 111
- *Europe Intelligence Wire*, August 28, 2010, review of *Room*.
- *Financial Express*, September 19, 2010, "Room without a View "
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September 16, 2010

Separation Anxiety

By AIMEE BENDER

ROOM

By Emma
Donoghue

321 pp. Little,
Brown & Company.
\$24.99

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.

Aimee Bender's most recent book is "The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake."



Book: Room (Sep 2010)

Author: Donoghue, Emma, 1969-

Adults Fiction 

Description: A five-year-old narrates a story about his life growing up in a single room where his mother aims to protect him from the man who kidnapped her when she was a teenager and has held her prisoner for seven years.



Book Appeal Terms: Definition of Appeal Terms

Genre: Adult books for young adults; Canadian fiction; First person narratives; Literary fiction; Psychological suspense stories

Storyline: Character-driven

Pace: Fast-paced

Tone: Disturbing; Haunting; Suspenseful

Writing Style: Compelling

EMMA DONOGHUE
Room
Read reviews on
reads
23048 reviews

Persistent link to this record (Permalink): <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=noh&lg=UI&an=355706&site=novelist-live>

Database: Novelist

BookList:

Five-year-old Jack has never known anything of life beyond Room, the 11-square-foot space he shares with his mother. Jack has learned to read, count, and process an imaginary world Outside through television. At night he sleeps in a wardrobe in case Old Nick comes to visit, bringing supplies and frightening intrusion. Worried about his curiosity and her own desperation, his mother reveals to Jack that the Outside is real and that they must escape. She tells him that she was kidnapped by Old Nick and has been held secluded in Room for seven years. Jack is brave enough to carry out their plan, and the two of them are compelled to adjust to life Outside, with its bright lights and noise and people touching. What is reconnection for his mother is discovery for Jack, who is soon overwhelmed by the changes in his mother and a world coming at him fast and furiously. Room is beautifully written as a first-person narrative from Jack's perspective, and within it, Donoghue has constructed a quiet, private, and menacing world that slowly unbends with a mother and son's love and determination. -- Bush, Vanessa (Reviewed 09-15-2010) (Booklist, vol 107, number 2, p29)

Publishers Weekly:

/ Starred Review */* 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. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed July 12, 2010) (Publishers Weekly, vol 257, issue 27, p)

Library Journal:

/ Starred Review */* Five-year-old Jack and his Ma enjoy their long days together, playing games, watching TV, and reading favorite stories. Through Jack's narration, it slowly becomes apparent that their pleasant days are shrouded by a horrifying secret. Seven years ago, his 19-year-old Ma was abducted and has since been held captive--in one small room. To her abductor she is nothing more than a sex slave, with Jack as a result, yet she finds the courage to raise her child with constant love under these most abhorrent circumstances. He is a bright child--bright enough, in fact, to help his mother successfully carry out a plan of escape. Once they get to the outside world, the sense of relief is short lived, as Jack is suddenly faced with an entirely new worldview (with things he never imagined, like other people, buildings, and even family) while his mother attempts to deal with her own psychological trauma. VERDICT Gripping, riveting, and close to the bone, this story grabs you and doesn't let go. Donoghue (The Sealed Letter) skillfully builds a suspenseful narrative evoking fear and hate and hope--but most of all, the triumph of a mother's ferocious love. Highly recommended for readers of popular fiction. [See Prepub Alert, LJ 4/15/10.]-- Susanne Wells, P.L. of Cincinnati & Hamilton Cty. --Susanne Wells (Reviewed August 1, 2010) (Library Journal, vol 135, issue 13, p67)

Kirkus:

/ Starred Review */* Talented, versatile Donoghue (The Sealed Letter, 2008, 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. (Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 2010)

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On "Room" The Q&A: Emma Donoghue, author

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IT'S rare for a novel to earn near-universal acclaim. Rarer still that the novel is as eerie and ingenious as "Room", the latest book from Emma Donoghue

(<http://www.emmadonoghue.com/>), an accomplished Irish author. Summed up in a few sentences, the narrative sounds like a horror story: a mother and child are imprisoned in a tiny space, kept alive by a captor who visits to rape the mother and deliver supplies. Told through the perspective of the child, Jack, "Room" is a tale of otherworldly love and horror, as well as a meditation on captivity, the parent-child bond, attachment and survival. The book has been rightly lauded as a "triumph

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7916565/Room-by-Emma-Donoghue-review.html>)" and "one of the most affecting and subtly profound novels of the year

(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/14/AR2010091406235.html>)"; Ms Donoghue was also the youngest to be short-listed for this year's Man Booker prize (as predicted here).



Here Ms Donoghue talks to us about her choice of a child narrator, the role of faith in her book and the way "Room" is a universal story about parenthood.

Many reviewers have expressed wonderment at "Room" for its sheer inventiveness. In some ways the novel incorporates elements of several genres—mystery, horror, philosophy, even science fiction—while remaining a true literary novel; that is to say, unclassifiable. Did you have a specific mode or style in mind when you wrote it?

My main concern was to avoid the True Crime genre; from the start I saw this novel as having elements of fairy tale, horror, science fiction and those wonderful 18th-century novels with wide-eyed traveller narrators ("Gulliver's Travels", "Robinson Crusoe", "Candide"). I designed "Room" to work on several levels simultaneously. First and foremost to be a clean book: straightforward, clearly and linearly narrated, realistic. But also with lots of extras smuggled in for readers (like my professor partner) who relish that kind of thing: echoes of texts from Plato, to the King James Version, to "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", to "Catcher in the Rye".

The novel is narrated from the perspective of Jack, a five-year-old boy. What were some of your motivations (and concerns) in writing from a child's perspective?

I never considered any other perspective: letting Jack tell this story WAS my idea in a nutshell. I hoped having a small child narrator would make such a horrifying premise original, involving, but also more bearable: his innocence would at least partly shield the reader on their descent into the abyss. I also knew that Jack would have some interesting things to say about our world, as a newcomer to it; the book's satire of modern mores and media, and interrogations of the nature of reality, grew out of Jack rather than being part of my initial agenda. I did have some technical worries about having such a young narrator: I knew the prospect of being stuck in a little kid's head would turn some readers off. But I never feared that Jack would be unable to tell the whole story.

Without unspooling too much of the plot, it's possible to say that Jack and his mother (known in the book as "Ma") are imprisoned together. As a result, Ma seems to raise Jack as a partner or ally as much as a son. Can you talk a bit about their relationship?

Let's start by saying that "Room" is not one of those horror stories in which family members confined together (remember "Flowers in the Attic" or "The Blue Lagoon") turn to incest. Ma and Jack have a strangely intense relationship, but I always meant it to be a healthy one. It's got lingering elements of the mother-baby bond (for instance, in the breastfeeding) as well as aspects of alliance and friendship. For me (though not all readers agree) "Room" is a universal story of parenthood and childhood, and in Jack and Ma's relationship I wanted to dramatise the full range of extraordinary emotions parents and children feel for each other: to put mothering in a weird spotlight and test it to its limits. Because it does have limits. Yes, "Room" celebrates mother-love but it also painfully calculates those moments when Ma has to recognise that Jack needs something other than her protection. Those moments all parents come to when love takes the form of stepping back, letting go.

Both Ma and Jack pray and, especially in the case of Ma, find comfort in their faith. How does faith figure in to "Room"?

I've always been religiously inclined but it doesn't come up in most of my books. I always knew it would be central to "Room" because prisoners cling to whatever tatters of faith they've got: look at those Chilean miners and their daily prayer groups. Between you and me, I'm not sure how literally Ma believes in all that, but it certainly makes sense that she would have taken whatever vague Christian framework she had and offered it to Jack as part of her system for making meaning of their days, and keeping hope alive. Kids delight in 'magical thinking', whether in the form of the Tooth Fairy or the saints: whether you see these as comforting lies or eternal verities, they are part of how we help kids make sense of the world. I think that's why the religious element of "Room" does not seem to bother non-religious readers; they can just put it on a par with Santa. But for me, "Room" is a peculiar (and no doubt heretical) battle between Mary and the Devil for young Jesus. If God sounds absent from that triangle, that's because I think for a small child God's love is represented, and proved, by mother-love.

Finally, can you tell us a bit about what sort of research you did for the book?

Too much. I don't mean in quantity—like any writer of historical fiction, I go by the principle of digging up a hundred times more than I will actually use on the page. I mean in terms of what I could bear. I pushed myself, for instance, to find out how badly and weirdly children can be raised by adults who hate them, what they

can survive and what they can't: I read every case on www.feralchildren.com (<http://www.feralchildren.com/>) . I researched births in concentration camps, children conceived through rape, children living in prison. I researched terrible things that happen to adults too (above all, the mind-breaking solitary confinement of approximately 25,000 American prisoners at any one time). But it's the kids who trouble me most. I always knew that Jack's story would be made bearable by Ma's constant love, but some of the children I read about when planning "Room"... let's just say I can't get them out of my head. I was left with a fierce sense that nothing I do is more important than giving my son and daughter what they—what all kids—deserve.

"Room

(http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/books_9780316098335.htm)
", by *Emma Donoghue* is published by *Little, Brown and Company* and out now

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Room (Donoghue) - Author Bio

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Author Bio

- Birth—October 24, 1969
- Where—Dublin, Ireland, UK
- Education—B.A., University College Dublin; Ph.D., University of Cambridge
- Currently—lives in London, Ontario, Canada

Emma Donoghue is an Irish writer who lives in Canada. She has published six books of fiction, two works of literary history, two anthologies, and two plays.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, on 24 October 1969, Emma is the youngest of eight children of Frances and Denis Donoghue. She attended Catholic convent schools in Dublin, apart from one year in New York at the age of ten. In 1990 she earned a first-class honours B.A. in English and French from University College Dublin, and in 1997 a Ph.D. (on the concept of friendship between men and women in eighteenth-century English fiction) from the University of Cambridge. Since the age of 23, Donoghue has earned her living as a full-time writer. After years of commuting between England, Ireland, and Canada, in 1998 she settled in London, Ontario, where she lives with her lover and their son.

Extras

From a 2004 Barnes & Noble interview:

- The youngest of eight children, I would never have been conceived if a papal bull hadn't guilt-tripped my poor mother into flushing her pills down the toilet.
- The nearest I've ever got to "honest toil" was a chambermaiding job in Wildwood, New Jersey, at the age of 18. I got fired for my "low bathroom standards."
- My lover and I have a one-year-old son called Finn, whose favorite thing is to rip books out of my hands and eat them.
- I am clumsy, a late and nervous driver, and despise all sports except a little gentle dancing or yoga.
- I have never been depressed or thrown a plate, which I attribute to the cathartic effects of writing books about people whose lives are more grueling than mine.
- I am completely unobservant and couldn't tell you how many windows there are in our living room.
- I would be miserable in beige; I mostly wear red, purple, and black.
- The way to my heart is through Belgian milk chocolate.

- When asked what book most influenced her life as a writer, here is what she said:

I discovered Jeanette Winterson's strange, surreal novel about Napoleonic Venice, *The Passion*. I had read some trashy lesbian fiction before, but this was the very first book I found that had lesbian themes and was a work of great art. I realized—duh!—that it was possible to be "out" and a literary writer as well, and I started writing my first novel, *Stir-Fry*, the same year. I haven't liked all Winterson's books since, but I've always admired her uncompromising flair.

(From *Barnes & Noble* and the author's website (<http://www.emmadonoghue.com/>) .)

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