

FICTION BOOK REVIEW

Room

Emma Donoghue. London, UK: Picador, 2010.
ISBN-13: 978-0-33051-902-1. Price: £7.99.
Pages: 336 (paperback)

Perhaps not initially appealing as a novel, this book, with parallels to the Josef Fritzl case, tells the story of a mother and her 5-year-old son imprisoned in one room. "Old Nick" kidnapped Ma when she was 19 years old, and as well as providing them with supplies he returns to rape Ma periodically.

The narrative, told in the voice of Jack, takes a little while to adjust to, but I found this to be a totally compelling and

absorbing read. The child/parent relationship and the intricacies of the private world of this intense family unit are beautifully described. The resilience of both Jack and Ma is at times inspiring. Many reviewers have called the book a celebration of mother-child love, but the author herself refers to it as more of an "interrogation", and it certainly does seem to capture the bipolar nature of parenthood as applied to anyone, but intensified in a world that is just 11 foot square.

The terrifying presence of "Old Nick" is dealt with sensitively and Jack is matter of fact about his nocturnal visits: "When old Nick creaks bed I listen and count fives on my fingers".

There is an interesting strand relating to the fact that Jack is still breastfed, and

other readers I have discussed the book with have found this uncomfortable. I think this is best summed up by Ma who when questioned about this during an interview responds: "In this whole story, that's the shocking detail?"

Many of the clients we see may be in abusive relationships but still parenting to the absolute best of their ability. This book, despite its difficult themes, is a life-affirming hymn to motherhood. I thoroughly recommend it!

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