



## Child Narrators as Voices of Resilience (A Comparative Study of 'Room' and 'The Secret Life of Bees')

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### ABSTRACT

One description of childhood trauma is anything that frightens or damages a person's safety in childhood and is linked to the well-being of the self. When focusing on child characters, researchers have explored themes of self-development, showing how children confront obstacles. This paper, focuses on two novels: *Room* by Emma Donoghue and *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, it adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach based on a comparative literary analysis to examine the theme of resilience through child narrators. It is crucial to highlight childhood trauma in the context of the discussed novels, which shapes the emotional initiatives of innocent narrators and influences their relationships and subjectivity. If closely examined, the plots stress how family bonds, as well as community structures, help in the process of healing and reform. The paper also suggests that employing child narrators brings to the foreground a message of hope when narrating trauma and resilience by depicting the extremes of the human spirit and capacity to survive and even prevail in the worst of circumstances. These works and the psychological analysis of the study highlight the fundamental importance of stability and loving care to effectively prevent trauma from stunting a child's development.

**Keywords:** Trauma, identity, child narrators, resilience, Emma Donoghue, Sue Monk Kidd.



## Introduction

Childhood trauma, which is an experience that threatens a child's safety and well-being, shapes not only the child's psychological self-concept but also their emotional and social self-being. This is because trauma, especially in the early stages of development, defines the child's orientation toward self, other people, and the environment. These aspects have been depicted in different literary pieces; however, works that focus on child narrators, touch reader's heart more effectively because of the intensity of the messages portrayed. A child's limited understanding of traumatic events, combined with their emotional honesty, produces a powerful narrative voice that enhances readers' empathy.

There is no question that childhood trauma has a highly significant role in the lives of innocent narrators and plays part in their personal growth, personality formation, and relationships. According to the psychiatrist Judith Herman: "Repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" (1992, p. 70). *Room* by Emma Donoghue and *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd are two of the most brilliant literary works that depict the subject of childhood trauma with the help of naive protagonists. Donoghue and Kidd have highlighted the prevalence of trauma in the lives of the main characters. Their stories have provided the most compelling evidence of the impact of love and family in the healing process.

Donoghue follows a plot of captivity and love focusing on the point of view of the main character, Jack, a five year old boy. Jack has grown and still lives in a small room with his sick mother, called Ma. What Jack does not know is that Ma was kidnapped by a man they refer to as "Old Nick" and has been in captivity for seven years. The room is actually a prison, but it symbolizes home as Ma does everything to protect Jack from realizing the dreadful situation the two of them are in. Jack's point of view remains rather childish and simplistic because he has been able to only experience a limited version of the world in the confines of the room. Amid this oppression, Ma's creativity and affection pave the way for Jack's vivid experience by incorporating creativity into their daily routines and schooling. The climax arrives when Ma formulates an outrageous escape plan that thrusts Jack into an unfamiliar reality. After the escape, Jack has to face a number of challenges, such as the harsh reality of liberty, being away from Ma, and the difficulties of living in a world that is alien to him. By choosing to tell the story through the eyes of Jack, Donoghue provides the horror and tragedy necessary to understand how traumatic events affect a child both mentally and socially.

In contrast, in Kidd's book topics that include changed personal and family status, race relations, and the desire for maternal love and care; are narrated by a sensitive and rather over looked child protagonist named Lily Owens. The novel is regarded as a powerful story of loss, guilt, and spirituality, as seen through the eyes of Lily, a young girl living in the racially tense South of the 1960s. Lily suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the accidental death of her mother, an accident that she thinks she caused when she was only four years old. She undergoes both emotional and physical abuse by her father, T. Ray, making her feel rejected and

lonely. She escapes her father's home with her caregiver, Rosaleen, seeking answers about her dead mother. Their mission leads them to the Boatwright sisters, three black women beemasters. The sisters offer Lily what she has never experienced; warmth, consistency and a sense of belonging. While living with the Boatwrights, Lily manages to find a way to forgive herself for her sins, and accept who she is.

### Literature Review

Childhood trauma is one of the most important genres in literature, given that it effectively offers the audience a different perspective on human nature and its victories and struggles. It is typically a consequence of situations that disrupt the normality of a child's early years, including neglect, abuse, loss, violence, or forced displacement. Authors have depicted such experiences as continuing to shape young characters' psychological, emotional, and social development. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee (2006) depicted the prejudice of society and the loss of a loved one through the mature voice of the six year old Scout Finch: "I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year" (p. 86). Scout captured the racism and unfairness in the southern town with innocence and deep understanding. Such stories not only expose children to traumas but also contemplate their potential to withstand adversity and be wise even in difficult conditions. Through analyzing the influence of trauma on young lives, literature becomes a tool to describe the fragility of life as well as the resilience of children.

Identity and self-image are possibly the most fascinating effects of childhood trauma, as portrayed in literature. Trauma may be said to disrupt the child's story and disorient the child in terms of their selfhood as well as knowledge about the world; it might instill an element of uncertainty or vulnerability: "Childhood trauma victims may choose to construct a false self-image in order to hide the impact their adversities have on their wellbeing" (Downey & Crummy, 2022, *Discussion and Conclusion* section, para. 1). This internal conflict is depicted vividly in Alice Walker's (2003) novel *The Color Purple*, especially in the character of Celie who reacts to the racism and oppression that she experiences and in turn, grows as a voiceless child with a warped view of herself: "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man" (p. 22). Similarly, in *Room*, Jack's identity is shaped by the duality of his existence: the secure room and the unknown world outside of it: "In Room I was safe and Outside is the scary" (2010, p. 219). Such representations explain how trauma not only influences a child's baseline feelings but also helps shape the subsequent formation of stable, positive selves. Through such themes, literature provides reflections into the psychological experiences and perceptions of childhood trauma by such young characters.

Child narrators in literature provide the readers with a unique way of viewing the story, particularly when it revolves around trauma, strength, and identity. Children's nativity and lack of comprehension of difficult situations make their stories highly emotional to readers due to their simplicity and uncomplicated views of life. As opposed to a grown-up narrator delivering the story, children do not possess the layers of skepticism or critical thinking that separate the character from the feeling;



thus, children's voices are genuine and touching. For example, in *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2007), the aspects of war, death, and survival have more meanings with concern to Liesel Meminger: "The words. Why did they have to exist? Without them, there wouldn't be any of this. Without words, the Führer was nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation or wordly tricks to make us feel better. What good were the words?" (p. 521). The innocence of a child exploring harsh social dynamics surrounding her leads to a juxtaposition with the events she narrates, which makes the violation of justice more tangible for readers. In the same way, Donoghue has focused on Jack's ability to view reality and understand what has happened to him as he was born and grew up in captivity. His relatively limited understanding portrays his captivity in a way where readers have to decipher between what was actually said, what was meant, and the truth behind his isolation. This complexity indicates how the experience of a child narrator can enhance a reader's emotional concern and make their experiences more resonant.

The difficulties and opportunities associated with using a child's point of view make this task unique and interesting. Authors must maintain the fairly simplistic nature of a child's narration and, at the same time, weave into the narration deep and complex themes that can reach a much wider audience. It is common to see certain levels of naivety and wisdom in children whose stories provide a tender note along with a spark of intellect that makes the audience contemplate. Bruno, from *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne (2007), whose perspective of the holocaust is severely limited, has provided a technique where the child's naivety underlines the grim reality of events witnessed ironically by the protagonist: "And who decided which people wore the striped pajamas and which people wore the uniform?" (p. 100). This question of an innocent child shows confusion, and his childlike perspective highlights the senselessness of such discrimination, urging readers to empathize with the victims. This technique is adapted, especially in works that represent trauma as the juxtaposition of a child's wound and the horrors that they have to endure, which helps readers enter the character's life and feel empathy. As Balaev (2008) explained, "Incorporating a broadened approach to the analysis of trauma in literature that moves beyond a singular psychology model offers greater understanding of the multiple meaning of traumatic experience for the individual and for society" (p. 165). Vickroy (2002) further emphasized this point, indicating that "Literary approaches to trauma . . . have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy . . . making terrifying, alien experiences more understandable and accessible." (p. 3). However, aspects such as misrepresentation of details, limited view, and analysis, or a fragmented understanding of components of the events by child narrators prove to be complex in terms of interpretation of the story. Nonetheless, child narrators still prove to be viable tools in providing unique insight into the nature of childhood and life in general and providing touching, compelling stories that capture the essence of childhood.

It is a devastating reality that traumatic experiences in childhood are capable of distorting a child's psychological growth in ways that may last into adulthood. "Childhood trauma has a profound negative impact on daily life, affecting the



physical and psychological well-being of individuals in adulthood and hindering their normal development” (Huang et al., 2024, *Introduction* section, para 7). Traumatic experiences in early childhood, such as abuse, abandonment or loss of parents, and exposure to violence, affect a child’s trust and, hence, emotional regulation with others. Herman (1997) commented the following:

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience . . . Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community. (p. 37)

For example, after a traumatic event, children may experience increased states of alertness, as the nervous system is geared toward perceiving risks and threats. This is evident in *Room*, where Jack is conditioned to misinterpret the world outside the room as terrifying because of the psychological trauma he underwent in captivity. Likewise, in *The Secret Life of Bees* Lily exhibits avoidant coping mechanisms as a result of emotional abuse by her father and dealing with feelings of guilt over her mother’s death. These portrayals are further backed by research in developmental psychology demonstrating that trauma can disrupt the neurological processes for managing stress, which results in the triggering of fear-related reactions all the time and increased sensitivity to stress stimuli (Ortiz et al., 2022). Furthermore, trauma influences memory and perception, including how children remember such experiences. Children are likely to develop distorted memories as part of the brain seeks to protect them from painful feelings:

Dread memories that are awakened by strong reminders haunt survivors, especially when they have exhausted their emotional and physical resources. And, unfortunately, many survivors live their lives on the edge of exhaustion, and thus are more prone to the intrusion of traumatic memories. Survivors find it is beyond them to accept the painful realities of their lives, and they thus remain stuck in dread, hopelessness and terror. (Nijenhuis et al., 2006, p. 13)

Lily’s conscience stems from her incomplete information regarding the cause of her mother’s death; thus, she blames herself. This is consistent with psychology research which, has indicated that traumatic events might interfere with the normal operation of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that is involved in memory storage: “The hippocampus plays a crucial role in the formation and storage of episodic memories . . . This process may be most important when distinguishing a threatening situation from a safe one based on previous experiences” (Lecei & van Winkel, 2020, *Introduction* section, para. 2). Consequently, children can experience manifestations of PTSD, such as a constant preoccupation with the traumatic event and unexpected reactions to no longer perceiving threats in their current environment. In *Room*, Jack had never left the small space of his room and the routines and

boundaries of his existence. He was unprepared for the overwhelming stimuli of the outside world. This indicates how trauma affects children by preventing them from being able to form a coherent sense of time and consequent reality about events. One must bear in mind how trauma affects memory while addressing the psychological concern of child survivors both in literature and real life.

Another significant change that traumatized children undergo concerns emotional regulation, which focuses on anger, sadness, or fear. For this reason, the affected children can develop behavioral issues because of their inability to control their emotions: “Emotional dysregulation involves having intense and extreme emotions that do not align in severity with a given event. The problem makes it hard . . . to control or manage . . . emotions. It can also be difficult to return to a normal baseline after an outburst” (Giorgi, 2024, para. 1). Lily, often turned her frustration and anger on other characters, which provided an externalization of her intrapsychic conflicts, guilt, and desire for a mother figure. In the same way, Jack also exhibited traits of emotional dependency and anxiety when he came out of the room to face the actual world. Such portrayals align with clinical studies that have focused on the structural and neurological variations resulting from childhood traumatic experiences and subsequent underdevelopment of the cortex in the brain, which distorts the child’s capacity to manage emotions.

Childhood stress, also known as early-life stress (ELS), refers to stress experienced before adulthood. This term encompasses various adverse experiences that a child might face, such as exposure to toxins, nutritional restriction, abuse, neglect, and limited family resources. Prolonged exposure to these situations can have long-term adverse effects on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. (Speranza et al., 2024, *Introduction* section, para. 1)

Gkintoni et al. (2022) also emphasized that such difficulties over time can result in problems or deficits in the ability to form appropriate peer relationships and have age-appropriate social development. These emotional trials and tribulations are fundamental to character development in literary works because they help capture the essence of traumatic experiences and the possibility of hope and recovery via healthy relationships and uniqueness. In *Room*, Jack’s relationship with Ma serves as his only source of comfort, yet it limits his interpersonal growth because of his inability to interact with people in the outside world. Likewise, in *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily initially felt constrained by the Boatright sisters, and did not trust them because of her experiences with her father. These dynamics mirror actual psychological studies that have indicated trauma hinders the formation of a secure attachment with others:

Complex traumatic stressors involve relational/familial and interpersonal forms of traumatization and exposure that are often chronic and include threats to the integrity of the self, to personal development, and to the ability to relate to others in healthy ways. (Courtois & Ford 2013, p. 10)

However, both literary and psychological narratives have signified that children are capable of recovering as they find solace and comfort in healthy relationships. The representation of such experiences and healing processes also points to social aspects of trauma and the need to promote recovery and well-being for individuals and communities. Hence, psychological resiliency is a process that is interdependent with the internal and external resources of the individual:

In this perspective, resilient individuals would be able to rework their individual existence . . . despite the surrounding conditions. They develop the ability to integrate suffering and psychic vulnerability with personal, family, relational, and existential resources, managing to expand them according to their own needs. (Sisto et al., 2019, *The Complexity of the Resilience Phenomenon* section, para. 2)

The concept of resilience is thus portrayed in literature by the actions that indicate that characters are confronting traumatic events through personal strengths or with the help of other individuals to regain control over their lives. In other words, resiliency refers to the source of support that can provide different tools and materials to enable traumatized children to move forward. Often, this kind of resilience is not earned single-handedly but is fostered by significant relationships, a supportive mentor, or a positive culture. Lily from *The Secret Life of Bees* is a purposeful character who goes through the process of discovering the truth regarding her mother's death and, at the same time, building new positive relationships with the Boatwright sisters. Her strength is seen in her ability to transform guilt and self-identity issues into worth with the help of her adoptive family. The Boatwright sisters offer protection and a nurturing environment that enables Lily to confront her past and regain her self-identity. Their guidance helps her come to terms with the traumatic abuse inflicted by her father and the death of her mother, proving that people can heal and change when there are positive influences around them. Similarly, in *Room*, Jack must discover how to live in the world outside – a world he once feared - but now is able to do so with the support of his mother. The loyalty of the character Ma enlightens Jack by providing him with the emotional security needed to confront the difficulties of liberation and the sense of isolation that follows his freedom. Essentially, such depictions resonate with psychological literature, suggesting that it is not the disposition of an individual that defines resilience but rather a tangible asset that is cultivated through relationships, routines, and self-identity: "Internal resources may help individuals appraise experiences and make corresponding decisions; external resources enable social security, and existential resources facilitate making meaning from adversity" (Steiner et al., 2023, *Discussion* section, para. 2). The format and content of these stories continue to underline the agency of an individual and the role of the community in the process of healing, with love, stability, and empathy being key to it. Thus, in describing how people can construct resilience, literature has also highlighted that it is not a pathological journey in isolation. Ultimately, resilience is presented not only as an outcome of one's strength but also as a capacity to foster support and thrive in emotionally, healthy environments.

## Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in comparative literary analysis to examine the theme of resilience as articulated by child narrators in *Room* by Emma Donoghue (2010) and *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (2001). Through close reading and analysis of selected quotations, The research analyzes how each protagonist conveys psychological resilience in response to their traumatic experiences and how their narrative voices shape the reader's understanding of trauma, recovery, and identity formation. Moreover, the comparative approach enables the identification of shared thematic patterns, such as the child's search for safety, emotional connection, and selfhood, across differing social contexts. The theoretical framework of the study draws upon trauma, and developmental psychology and narrative theories.

By integrating literary analysis with interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, this methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of resilience in children's narratives. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on child trauma highlighting how child narrators serve not only as witnesses to suffering but also as symbols of resilience and healing.

## Discussion

Donoghue and Kidd have demonstrated how the lack or presence of a family greatly affects the traits of a character. In *Room*, the character who submits what is most essential in life for Jack and his psychological state during their imprisonment is Ma. Even though Ma has her own traumatic background, she is able to give Jack a life that is orderly and filled with love, keeping Jack away from the harshest realities of their lives: "All I did was I survived, and I did a pretty good job of raising Jack. A good enough job" (2010, p. 304). She helped Jack become and act like any other child by playing, narrating stories, and helping develop his competencies and ways of handling social issues regardless of their difficult conditions. The affection that Ma showered on Jack and the ability to fulfill all his needs ensured that he was comfortable in the confined space of the room. Her role is rather significant even after they manage to escape from the social deviation regime, where she guides Jack through the numerous difficulties of liberty and loneliness and empowers him to be courageous despite his fear: "Scared is what you're feeling. Brave is what you're doing." (2010, p. 36). Through Ma, the author has presented a narrative of survival showing how the love of a caregiver can become a protective shield against trauma and convey the power of familial connections offering hope and courage in the course of adversity.

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, the Boatwright sisters become Lily's surrogate mothers and provide her with the love and direction she has lacked. The sisters, August, June, and May, each play a significant role in the process of healing and nurturing Lily because they make her feel protected and appreciated. August takes the role of a mother figure for Lily, imparting knowledge of life to her and instilling self-



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worth in her: “Most people don’t have any idea about all the complicated life going on inside a hive. Bees have a secret life we don’t know anything about” (2002, p. 148). She has drawn a parallel between the hidden complexities of bee communities and humans, implying that everyone has inner complexity. This support helps Lily manage her guilt and suffering as she receives the acceptance and care that T. Ray denied her as a father figure. The Boatwright family dynamics depict how an appropriate social network negates the feelings of loneliness and self-doubt caused by trauma: “I needed all the help that fashion could give me, since no one, not a single person, had ever said, ‘Lily you are such a pretty child,’ except for Miss Jennings at church, and she was legally blind” (2002, p. 9). Lily’s healing throughout the novel and her search for identity is centered on her bond with the Boatwrights, proving that only a genuine family, whether biological or chosen, can help one overcome pain and become stronger.

Both Jack and Lily’s narratives focus on the significance of family in overcoming trauma despite the lack of parental support in the two characters’ respective households. This kind of connection can be forged and perpetuated even in the toughest conditions, and it is best illustrated by the relationship between Jack and Ma. In contrast, Lily’s friendship with the Boatwright sisters also expresses how important it is for an adult to step in and act as family when there is no one to provide support genetically or when the family is toxic. Each story depicts the significance of the roles of love, stability, and empathy in a family to help children with trauma regain their sense of self. One of the most important ways to have a child adapt to their environment is by forming a secure bond with a caring, protective, and consistent adult. This bond will shield the child from danger, help them make sense of the world, and support the development of coping skills for managing stress. (Forkey et al., 2021). Both Jack and Lily learned aspects whereby healing after trauma is a mutual process, and the comfort that families provide can turn pain into strength and despair into hope.

Through exploring the concept of family in *Room* and *The Secret Life of Bees*, the narratives have highlighted the significance of relationships in determining a child’s potential identity and psychological restoration. According to Berman et al. (2020), childhood trauma leads to serious personality and identity issues in children and creates doubt in a child’s basic assumptions of their role in the world. Trauma has the potential to disrupt how a child forms their identity and weaken the stability of their sense of self. Whether it occurred in the past or present, trauma can also affect the internal and external resources that support identity formation. Although in different settings, both Jack and Lily experienced traumatic childhoods, which shaped their characters and perspectives. The two narrators are in states of instability and poignant conditions and underwent challenges that are rather harrowing for children. In *Room*, the physical environment of the room defined Jack’s identity, whereas Ma and Jack’s relationship mirrored a protective cocoon. His self-perception and reality are confined to the room, where he is safe and comfortable: “I’ve seen the world and I’m tired now”; he wanted to return even when there is so much evil lurking behind him (2010, p. 271). As liberating as this world may be, he was unable to fully express

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his individuality because his identity was intertwined with Ma and their daily routines. When Jack escaped the room, he was transferred to a different world where he had a complicated personal identity and had to create a new perception of self that rose beyond the limits of the room. He noticed that “persons are nearly always stressed and have no time . . . I guess the time gets spread very thin like butter over all the world, the roads and houses and playgrounds and stores, so there’s only a little smear of time on each place, then everyone has to hurry on to the next bit” (2010, p. 358). This process is not easy since Jack had to step from the world of clear, definite coordinates to the world of freedom and vagueness. His journey has shown that trauma can interfere with identity development, making children manage changes in their surroundings and affiliation as well as the consequences of abuse. Using Jack’s narrative, the author has captured the traumatic relationship between the physical environment and identity development of a child.

In contrast, Lily faced her trauma in the form of emotional, family, and social breakages that convoluted her efforts at establishing her understanding of herself, enwrapped in so much guilt and a yearning for love. Lily’s mentality that she was responsible for her mother’s death significantly contributed to her view of herself as an inferior person who did not deserve love and acceptance from others: “This is what I know about myself. She was all I wanted. And I took her away” (2002, p. 8). These feelings are further perpetuated by the abuse of her father, which reinforced her negative self-image. Nevertheless, her quest to uncover the truth behind her mother’s death became a path that propelled her into the process of identity formation as she confronted her pain and learned to understand herself. This personal growth was made possible by the nurturing care provided by the Boatwright sisters, whose affection, guidance, and unwavering support fill the emotional void in Lily’s life and give her a sense of belonging. They encouraged her to tell her story to overcome her trauma and search for identity: “Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can’t remember who we are or why we’re here” (2002, p. 107). Because of this support, Lily realized her strengths and how to process her past and regain her self-esteem. She embodies how trauma can disrupt the formation of one’s personal identities while at the same time presenting an example of how one can regain a purposeful life by cultivating valuable relationships as well as self-fulfillment.

Although the circumstances in Jack’s and Lily’s cases are dissimilar, both stories narrate transformations in identity following trauma and allowing its child narrators to confront the questions of who they are and their places in the world. In Jack’s case, it means detaching oneself from the safety of the room and the company of Ma while he navigates the big, dangerous world waving goodbye to the room: “Goodbye, Room.’ I wave up at Skylight. ‘Say goodbye,’ I tell Ma. ‘Goodbye, Room.’ Ma says it but on mute. I look back one more time. It’s like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door” (2010, p. 209). Lily’s account embodies the process of erasing the sentiment of guilt and the feeling of shame that has filled her childhood and proves that she deserves love: “I have more mothers than any eight girls off the street. They are the moons shining over me” (2002, p. 302). This illustrates Lily’s realization that family can be chosen and that love can be found



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indicating to her emotional maturity and the healing of her wounds, allowing her to embrace the future with hope.

Strength is depicted in the characters of Jack and Lily to the extent that they are able to begin the process of healing and accepting the reality of their environment. Their narratives embody the possibility of victory over pain suffered and change undertaken. For both characters, this journey is depicted by episodes of fear and confusion as they come face to face with realities that they have never seen and, thus, never conceived. Collectively, their stories have underscored a point shared by many other works of literature, namely, the significance of positive relationships in strengthening and healing. These similarities have highlighted how trauma, although highly personal, follows a narrative of disruption, adaptation, and subsequent recovery process as well as the significance of external intervention in giving direction toward the recovery process. Hence, it is significant to note that the narrator's identity is determined not only by the trauma but also by the relationships that help in the healing process. These stories have illustrated the dual nature of trauma. Although such conditions make personal identification more difficult and contribute to its erosion, they also present opportunities for growth and self-discovery. Both *Room* and *The Secret Life of Bees* have provided insight into how trauma interferes with the construction of a child's identity and how the potential to move beyond adversity and maintain control of the identity is crucial.

Donoghue and Kidd have meaningfully employed child narrators as a way of enriching the thematic concern with trauma, survival, and identity. In *Room*, Ma is imprisoned with her son, and the story is narrated from his point of view, which makes his limited knowledge of the world and their situation amusing to the reader. Jack's trauma is majorly relational and context-based as he spends most of his childhood in a room and gets used to the conditions of solitary confinement. His concept of trauma is somewhat colored by his mother's desire to shield him, and he is, therefore, not fully aware of their predicament until they finally get out. His coping mechanisms stem from Ma's manipulations. He heals by gaining his freedom and finding out how to live a life that is not so limited and confined. Therefore, the narration from Jack's perspective is simple, curious, and innocent, which simplifies the emotional undertaking of the story powerfully. He has effectively narrated the simple pleasures that come with life in the room and the dynamics and abuse that exist in his stormy relationship with Ma. For example, Jack's perception of the room as his world gives readers insight into how, through imagination, a child can adapt to what may be considered the most unconventional reality in the absence of love and proper guidance. This technique puts the readers directly into Jack's world, with a limited but vivid perception of events. The choice of a child narrator has reconfigured the traditional captivity narrative by presenting the story through an innocent child's voice, who believed he understood the real world: "When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I'm five I know everything" (2010, p. 3). Donoghue has amplified the impact of trauma and recovery. Unfiltered by adult cynicism, this narrative choice allows readers to engage deeply with the emotional realities of childhood trauma and encourages them to reflect on its moral and psychological

dimensions. It also deepens their understanding of resilience, as they witness how children engage with pain directly without relying on the rationalizations adults often employ.

Likewise, Kidd has used the character of Lily to address issues of loss and guilt as she tries to look for love and a place to fit in. Lily's narration has integrated childlike naivety with a deep reflection about the traumatic experiences in her life as well as her growth that emerges from them. This is clear from the early pages of the novel: "Someone who thinks death is the scariest thing doesn't know a thing about life" (2002, p. 2). Lily has reflected on the complexities of life and death, setting the tone for the author's exploration of these themes. One of the peculiarities of her voice is the genuine confessional tone, which makes readers empathize with her suffering, including her mother's death and the lack of a maternal figure. The first-person narrative that Kidd has employed gives the reader a raw feeling of being close to Lily as her mentality is revealed. Her voice has allowed for more refined reflections on identity, guilt, and forgiveness. This technique also applies to how one can observe the gradual transformation of Lily's perspective on her existence as she learns more about the Boatwright sisters and the truth about her mother. Resilience, for Lily, is fostered through her journey toward self-discovery; her contemplation through symbolic imagery, such as bees and honey; and the maternal care she finds beyond biological bonds: "I have noticed that if you look carefully at people's eyes the first five seconds they look at you, the truth of their feelings will shine through for just an instant before it flickers away" (2002, p. 104). Lily tells her story in a quiet, strong manner that has reflected both her timidity and her fight for independence. Thus, readers are offered a message of hope and restoration, as the author has shown how love can help someone overcome their tragic past.

The plots of both novels have shown the advantages and drawbacks of child protagonists whose visions of the events are valuable yet incomplete and which the reader has to reconstruct. Because Jack is a child, his voice is quite restricted; thus, most of the explicit genres, such as Ma's psychological issues or Old Nick's perversion, are kept hidden and implied. It also adds a layer of difficulty since readers are constantly experiencing what is going on around Jack, but they are also trying to decipher something different than what is being said. Likewise, Lily does not represent an independent, rational, and objective narrator because of her age and sensitive disposition, which determine how she learns, feels, and tells the story. Her innocence, coupled with her inability to understand adult relationships and the dynamics of society, complements her observations, giving the viewers a sense of the trauma that she endures. Yet, these shortcomings are somewhat compensated by the first-person narrators' genuine emotions, which makes the reader more engaged in the protagonists' experiences. The choice of the first-person narrative given to children in both novels is highly effective in establishing a subjective view of a particular story, which mirrors the emotional consequences of trauma and the process of recovery. Through the representation of Jack and Lily's experiences, Donoghue and Kidd have not only added personal colors to the story but also made readers think about the protracted effects of childhood trauma that can shape one's character.



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**Conclusion**

Early childhood trauma shapes identity, self-sufficiency, and interpersonal relations, as exemplified through the child protagonists in *Room* and *The Secret Life of Bees*. Jack and Lily have demonstrated that trauma can have numerous manifestations, ranging from environmental violations of personal space to psychological damage and that healing and personal growth are always possible. Through these works Donoghue and Kidd have asserted the value of family and social relations in the process of becoming a stronger person and emphasized that love can turn suffering into rejuvenation. Together, these child narrators have provided powerful case studies in how resilience is conveyed in literature. Jack and Lily have demonstrated that although trauma may silence or confuse the act of narration, it can become a means of healing. Emphasizing the role of child narrators serves to increase the narrative's emotional pitch and offers the readers a realistic insight into the processes of managing trauma. Their voices testify not only to the capacity of children to withstand and adjust but also to the literary power of the child narrator as a means of emotional truth and honesty.

Donoghue and Kidd have also illustrated the repercussions of child abuse and neglect throughout life as well as the importance of love and inclusion in forwarding the processes of transforming people despite how hopeless their lives appear. This study has affirmed the significance of child narrators in trauma fiction and advocated for further interdisciplinary inquiry into how voice, language, and perception intersect to portray resilience across different genres, cultures, and historical contexts.

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