

Novels of newness
and rebirth: 'room',
'pamela, or virtue
rewarded', and
'robinso...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The idea of rebirth and newness are a critically important theme of the novel 'Room' and a principal factor of the story itself. The novel is all about newness, since for Jack, having lived his whole five years of life inside Room, the act of escaping into The World is in a sense a rebirth, and in the novel we learn that Jack is initially completely incapable of functioning in The World, as his development was severely stunted by his upbringing, hence why basic everyday objects like cars or the pavement are so wholly alien to him, Room is a novel about rebirth and living anew in a strange world. Yet, while the newness of the world upon escaping Room is the most obvious point to mention, there is a more subtle sense of newness that will be expounded on; the necessity on Jack and Ma's behalf to invent new games, stories and ways to pass the time in Room in order to stave off madness and boredom, which is an integral part of the former half of the novel. Finally the idea of newness is challenged in a post-modernist sense as the very narrative reflects the situation of the main two characters therein; the first half of the novel is confined and restrictive and very repetitive, but upon their escape, the narrative shifts and more becomes more open and in the same way that the characters are experiencing new things, so does the reader as the prose takes us to new and exciting places.

The formative years of one's childhood is very much a learning experience for them, where they experience the world and begin to develop socially as well as emotionally, where a child might encounter new experiences. When a child is denied the normal method of development, it can leave them severely stunted, as is the case with Jack, so as aforementioned in the introduction, Jack is constantly experiencing new things, yet for the first 5

years of his life his whole world consisted solely of the Room, which is later revealed to be a small shed with a skylight. This coupled with a child's natural curiosity makes the first act of the novel one of surprise, especially since the novel is told through the point of view of Jack, so we, the reader, are hearing his internal monologue. Jack is constantly asking his mother questions; questions about television, questions about his origins, questions about what is real or not, in one instance of which Jack decides " mountains are too big to be real" 1, but of course later in the novel he'll experience all of these objects outside of television. As a contrast to his questioning earlier in the novel, it's interesting to mention his realisation of the world outside Room, on page 85 in my edition, Jack states " so hospitals are real too, and motorbikes" before going on to proclaim "[his] head's going to burst from all the new things I have to believe" 2. This is an important quotation as not only does it illustrate how overwhelming all this new-reality must be to the 5 year old boy, but the language itself is notable - " I have to believe". To elaborate, Jack cannot intrinsically believe in the everyday places and objects that exist outside of his Room, he feels he has to believe however, which seems a matter of faith, specifically, faith in his mother's word, as Ma, who grew up in The World, knew for a fact that there's more to life than that which is contained in the Room, and she told this to Jack through parables and stories and evocations of her youth. From a narrative perspective, Ma embodies the outside world, and Jack personifies a " blank-slate" unshapen and unmoulded by the outside world.

Ma is a particularly interesting character to observe, when one considers that Ma had a life before she was abducted by Old Nick who destroyed that, so

her coming back into the world is a true rebirth and it differs from Jack, while Jack is experiencing things for the first time, Ma is rediscovering them after years, as she says to Jack during the hospital shower scene, " I'm just trying to enjoy my first shower in seven years" 3. There is a considerable juxtaposition between the attitudes of Jack and Ma, Jack wants to stick to the routine learned while in Room, whereas Ma no longer feels obligated to conform to the same schedule as they had while captive. " Breakfast comes before bath" says Jack on page 164, he conforms so rigidly to his preconceived idea of routine and cannot comprehend doing something differently, but consider how in the end of the novel, Jack starts to adapt to his new existence, certainly Jack is not a so-called " feral-child" like some real life cases such as " Genie" who tragically never adapted to fit back into society⁴, thereby establishing that the novel is a tale of regeneration, likewise for Ma. Yet despite Jack finding it harder to adapt to the outside world, it is Ma who attempts to kill herself. This exemplifies the mental torment that must've been inflicted onto Ma, who had her life taken away from her when she was just a young adult. Again, from a narrative perspective, her suicide attempt is representative of the trial that will lead to the eventual and inevitable ' rebirth' in the conclusion of the novel, it also allows an opportunity for Ma and Jack to be separated, for the first significant amount of time in the novel, thus providing the reader with a glimpse of Jack coping without Ma, someone who he has quite literally not been without his whole life. It all contributes to the ever-forming independence and newness that is ubiquitous throughout.

The idea of rebirth could also be made for the character of Mr. B in Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela*, however unlike Jack and Ma in *Room*, it is not a physical rehabilitation, but a moral one, and even that is perhaps nebulous, but when regarding Mr. B throughout *Pamela*, one can very much see him as a lecherous man who tries to take advantage of Pamela, and yet by the end of the novel is purportedly transformed into an honourable and decent husband. Indeed in one of the final letters, Mr. B is referred to as a "generous husband", for the less cynical, this could be interpreted as a comment on the redeeming powers of love. Definitely it is referable to the full title of the novel itself, ' *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*', as Pamela is 'rewarded' with a husband and a stable income for maintaining her purity. She "enjoyed...the reward of her virtue, piety and charity" 5. Both novels explore the idea of being reborn, whether in a religious, moral or physical sense. Literary critic Janice Harayda, paraphrasing Sue Donoghue, comments on how *Room* uses religious allegory to convey its themes, on how the novel is "a battle between Mary and the Devil for young Jesus" and this is credible, when considering the connotations of the name 'Old Nick'⁶. Furthermore the idea of being reborn ties in to the fundamental beliefs of Christians, how Jesus died and was reborn anew.

Again, if one conflates the idea of rebirth and religion, that is, rebirth as a religious transformation, then *Robinson Crusoe* features such themes prominently, since the whole novel can be read as an religious allegory with *Robinson Crusoe* eschewing his sinful past and ultimately becoming a devout believer in God. At the start of the novel, *Crusoe* disobeys his Father by going out to sea, against his father's wishes. As *Crusoe* says "if I did take

this foolish step, God would not bless me". 7. Even after encountering a storm out at sea and receiving a warning from the ship's captain, Crusoe still ventures out in search of wealth and adventure, so his "imprisonment" on the island takes on the role of sort of an emotional purgatory. From a religious standpoint, Crusoe makes a grave mistake when he "made many vows...that if God would please...spare [his] life this one voyage...[he] would go directly home to [his] father" 8. He blatantly disobeys this prayer and forgets "the vows and promises that [he] made in [his] distress" 9.

Throughout the novel, there are events that if one is interpreting the book through a religious lens, could be a test of faith from God, and indeed there are plenty of instances where Crusoe questions God, upon landing on the island, Crusoe considers suicide due to the "dismal prospect of [his condition]" 10 but then appears to accept his fate, and in that particularly English manner, continues onwards and upwards with a stiff upper lip and makes the best of it. The rebirth aspect comes into play around page 63 in my edition of the novel, this is when Crusoe really starts to have genuine faith in God and the "prodigy of Nature" 11.

Robinson Crusoe is transformed as a man, learning to love the island as the "most pleasant place in the world" 12, the redemptive arc is very much prominent. If one sees Old Nick as the "God" figure in Room, while Jack learns to live away from him and his authority and the Room, in contrast Crusoe abandons his rebellious ways and by the end of the novel is grateful to God for his misfortunes and is quite the devout believer.

The ideas of rebirth, rejuvenation and a sense of newness are explored in Room, Crusoe and Pamela, with Room focusing more on adapting to life after <https://assignbuster.com/novels-of-newness-and-rebirth-room-pamela-or-virtue-rewarded-and-robinson-crusoe/>

a traumatic event, and reintegrating into society, and in Pamela, the rebirth more akin to a religious conversion, manifesting itself in a spiritual/moral sense. For Jack in Room, his departure from captivity allows him to explore with childlike surprise this vast new world of possibilities. The character arc for Jack establishes that he is able to move on from Room and fully embrace his position in the new world. Ma even asks him if he “ would like the door closed for a minute”, to which Jack responds “ no” 13. This solidifies his decision to move on, and is a sign of considerable sign of progress and maturity, further demonstrating the rebirth theme prevalent throughout the novel, for it is here that the Room becomes merely a room. It allows both the reader and the protagonists a sense of closure befitting of their ordeal. While Room and Pamela certainly have religious undertones, Robinson Crusoe is the novel with the most overt religious narrative, as the story decidedly portrays a man’s spiritual redemption amidst the horror of the overwhelming and collective misery of the tropical island. Though tying in with Mr. B in Pamela, not only is Crusoe’s redemption solely a religious one, but a moral one too. Therefore we can see how in each novel there is a sense of newness, and a rebirth of numerous kinds; ultimately leaving each character inexorably changed by the end of the narrative.

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