

## *The Kaleidoscopic Perspective in Colum McCann's Let the Great World Spin (2009): Trauma and Transculturality*

*A perspectiva caleidoscópica em Let the Great World Spin (2009) de Colum McCann: trauma e transculturalidade*

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**Abstract:** *This article argues that Colum McCann's novel Let the Great World Spin (2009) epitomizes the Irish transcultural novel. It portrays transculturality through a considerable diversity of damaged characters who bond to overcome a common trauma. By engaging with transcultural, transnational, and post-multicultural theories, this article analyses some of the literary features of McCann's formal experimentation that eventually alleviate pain and foster tolerance and empathy among people with different backgrounds. Then, it explores the universalisation of trauma, where the local is made global and the characters deploy similar responses when exposed to traumatic situations. The novel, an attempt to find grace after the trauma of 9/11, presents many characters who advocate for plural perspectives and, as a kaleidoscope, it brings to the centre of the narrative the differences among people and opens possibilities for beautiful and new configurations.*

**Keywords:** *Let the Great World Spin; transculturality; transnationalism; trauma healing; bonding.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo explica por que o romance Let the Great World Spin (2009) de Colum McCann exemplifica de maneira inequívoca o romance transcultural irlandês. A transculturalidade é mostrada no romance por meio de personagens muito diversos que se unem para superar um trauma. Fazendo uma conexão entre as teorias transcultural, transnacional e pós-multicultural, este artigo analisa algumas das características literárias da experimentação formal de McCann que objetiva aliviar a dor e promover a tolerância e a empatia entre pessoas diferentes. O romance explora a universalização do trauma, onde o local é transformado em global e os personagens apresentam reações semelhantes quando expostos a situações traumáticas. Como uma tentativa de McCann de encontrar beleza após o trauma dos ataques de 11 de setembro, o romance apresenta vários personagens que advogam em prol de perspectivas plurais e, como um*

*caleidoscópio, traz para o centro da narrativa as diferenças entre pessoas e abre possibilidades para novas e belas configurações.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Let the Great World Spin; transculturalidade; transnacionalismo; recuperação pós-trauma; estabelecer vínculos.*

## Introduction

Societal changes, migratory flows in particular, affect culture, understood as the space where differences and similarities among people from various places are visible and enable transformations (Anderson; Dagnino, 2015; Gunew). As a result, experiences of dislocation and adaptation have become customary (Dagnino, 2015; Gunew). In Ireland, migration has been a constant feature even before the Great Famine leaving a visible imprint in terms of demography, economy, and culture (Fitzgerald and Lambkin, Barros-del Río). In the last two decades the country has seen a change in the trends of migration, and most particularly during the Celtic Tiger period, altering the ethnic composition of Irish society and their traditional forms of identity construction (Loyal, Morales-Ladrón and Elices Agudo, Villar-Argáiz).

To better understand the impact on societies caused by migration, theories of transculturality, transnationalism, and post-multiculturalism have been proliferating in the last decades. Transculturality has been defined as “a perspective in which all cultures look decentered in relation to all other cultures” (Dagnino, 2015: 2). Transnationalism is a phenomenon that happens within and outside the academia and that has provoked changes in literary and cultural studies such as the “shift in our attention from sameness to difference” (Jay 17). Post-multiculturalism brings “to the centre of our cultural criticism many groups, histories and geopolitical areas that were overlooked in the past” (Gunew, 3) and it engages ethically and sustainably with global cultures and languages. Concerns on migration and transculturality are mirrored in the recent literature produced by Irish writers – living or not in Ireland – as well as by immigrant authors (Fogarty, Villar-Argáiz). The new Irish – the term that addresses immigrants living in Ireland – have been producing literature and being protagonists in Irish born authors’ fiction which reflects the cultural diversity present in the country. (Villar-Argáiz).

Displacement, loss, and migration are contemplated in Colum McCann’s work since the very beginning of his literary career in 1994. He epitomizes the Irish transcultural writer which, according to Arianna Dagnino, a Lecturer of Italian Studies at the University of British Columbia, are the ones who by choice or necessity “experience cultural dislocation, follow transnational life patterns . . . physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures, geographies,

or territories, expose themselves to diversity, and nurture plural, flexible identities” (2015: 1). Particularly relevant to this study is the awarded novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) where McCann uses the French artist Philippe Petit’s performance on the top of the World Trade Centre, in 1974, as an allegory to talk about the tragic events at the Twin Towers on September 11. There is an implicit parallel between the uncertainties people face being high in the sky, as Petit, and down on the ground, as the other characters. Here, transculturality is represented by the mix of people originally coming from different cultural and social backgrounds, who are not necessarily immigrants. Hence, McCann creates communities of heterogeneous groups with no hierarchy of any sort. They are people with common sufferings who bond to seek healing.

*Let the Great World Spin* is a complex and challenging novel that has been the focus of attention of academic work. For example, Ruth Gilligan (2016) focuses on linguistic aspects of McCann’s work in the context of exile literature; Sheila Hones (2014) focuses on his use of space, whether it is geographical or literary; Laura Izarra (2012) explores the poetics of the novel connecting suspended narratives to various types of human experience; Eóin Flannery (2011) engages with the different ways in which McCann gives voice to underprivileged and discriminated individuals; John Cusatis (2011) explores how McCann’s work redefines the Irish novel by transcending geographical, social, cultural, aesthetic, and ethnic boundaries; Cécile Maudet (2010) engages with the concept of memory and recollection as presented in McCann’s writing. All these approaches are complementary to McCann’s works and offer invaluable insights. However, those critics have not engaged with the transcultural essence of McCann’s oeuvre. McCann’s work cannot be related to one single literary space, either Irish or American, as he has repeatedly claimed in his interviews.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, McCann aligns with transcultural principles because his stories are far from geographically or culturally circumscribed, and his main goal as a writer is to trespass boundaries in order to “inspire the creation of imaginary homelands or re-imagine the world at large” (Dagnino, 2013: 8).

In the light of these ideas, this study seeks to analyse *Let the Great World Spin* under a transcultural perspective to prove that McCann not only entertains, but also defends bonding as a strategy to overcome traumatic experiences, and at the same time, encourages tolerance and empathy, regardless of people’s cultural, racial, social, and religious differences. To this end, he shows the relevance of the universalisation of trauma, creates communities, and proposes bonding as a form of trauma recovery and healing. As a result, the novel fosters a sense of belonging, kinship, and mutual trust.

## **Colum McCann: A Transcultural Writer**

McCann, a widely acclaimed contemporary Irish writer, is the author of seven novels, three short story collections, and one book written as a lesson to young writers. Although McCann acknowledges that he talks about Ireland in his literary production, the setting of his work varies geographically from Mexico, Russia, New York, Czechoslovakia, Palestine, Israel, and to Ireland, denoting his transnational mindset. Regarding this issue, Amanda Tucker, Professor of English at University of Wisconsin – Platteville, explains that “he loosens the constraints of both national affiliations and geographical ties” (110).

According to Dagnino (2015), there is an interest to know and take part in other cultures that permeate the transcultural perspective. This idea is particularly evident in McCann’s biography for his behaviour and involvement in organisations and with people who believe that embracing diversity can make a difference in our society.<sup>2</sup> Before becoming a writer, he worked as a journalist and travelled extensively. Interestingly, his fiction includes some of the topics that have always been present in Irish literature, such as emigration (Flannery) and violence towards immigrants living on the island (Villar-Argáiz), as a reflection of what has been happening in Ireland mainly from the Celtic Tiger period onwards. Migration, displacement, loss, and death are frequent themes in his work, as well as empowered women. Minorities also have a voice of their own and find a relevant place in his work. *Let the Great World Spin* is a novel that fosters inclusion. It epitomises what Flannery has named the “Aesthetics of Redemption”, because under this lens, books become “educational spaces in which the author and reader convene in differential imaginative solidarities” (13). The redemptive aspect of McCann’s literature has gained salience and it certainly is present in the novel where prostitutes, hackers, graffiti artists, are part of the story told in *Let the Great World Spin*.

### ***Let The Great World Spin*, A Kaleidoscopic Novel of Trauma and Bonding**

In *Let the Great World Spin*, bonding is presented as comprehensive and equitable, emphasising commonalities rather than differences. It works as a kaleidoscope, where ordinary elements such as mirrors and coloured materials are put together in a tube, and by moving the pieces, repeated and beautiful images are produced. Similarly, *Let the Great World Spin* picks fragments from the lives of ordinary people and produces a colourful narrative with different people behaving similarly.

Distinctive literary techniques displayed in the novel include, among others, the use of nonlinear narratives, subtle changes of narrator, and broken narrative lines. According to Anne Whitehead, professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at Newcastle University,

“Trauma fiction relies on . . . a number of key stylistic features” as modes of reflection or critique which “mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma” (84). McCann’s literary representation of bonding as a strategy to overcome trauma, and his use of geographical and literary space are important elements to not only assess *Let the Great World Spin* as a unique work, but as representative of McCann’s transcultural oeuvre. This polyphonic – meaning multiple voices as in Bakhtin’s concept – novel gives way to other imbricated stories. The personal dramas of the characters, how they deal with trauma, and how the unexpected may result in positive outcome are at the core of McCann’s ultimate message. The novel ends in an optimistic tone suggesting a better way of coexistence for communities rather polarized.

The story of two African American little girls, descendants of a matrilineal lineage of prostitutes in the Bronx, is at the core of the novel. Adopted after their mother’s death, the girls lived ordinary lives under the care of Gloria to become: Jaslyn, a social worker, and Janice, a soldier. Gloria, one of the five mothers who mourn their sons killed in Vietnam, lives in the same building of the prostitute and her two little girls. The prostitutes know the Irish priest, Corrigan, who died with Jazzlyn in the car accident. The lives of the characters are put together as in a kaleidoscope producing various encounters.

Structurally, the novel is divided in thirteen sections and each one is narrated by a different character. The sections are organised in four books that could be read as short stories, as they are independent and complete narratives. This unconventional format stresses fragmentation and stands out as a key literary element that illustrates decenteredness, a main feature of transculturality. The first section is about Petit’s performance at the World Trade Centre on August 7, 1974. This is the setting where most of the narratives take place. The last section, Book Four, is devoted to Jaslyn’s narration – one of the orphan girls adopted by Gloria – and serves as a closure of the apparently previous loose strands. McCann places interaction as a centripetal force that soothes pain and trauma, and the structure of the novel presents features such as fragmentation and non-linear narration that serve to convey the message.

Transnationalism is evident in the novel’s geographical space and broken timeline. It starts with Petit’s performance, high in the air, to an astonished audience, down on the ground, in New York, in 1974. While the first chapter of Book One is set in Dublin, in the 1950s, the subsequent chapters are set again in New York, 1974, to finally shift to Dublin and New York in 2006 in the last Book. Fragmentation and diversity are also characteristics of post-multiculturalism, and McCann displays an array of literary strategies that underline this idea. Trauma is particularly rendered in the gatherings of the mourning mothers whose sons died in the Vietnam war. As Kristiaan Versluys, Professor of American Literature at Ghent University, claims, traumatized people must tell to alleviate anxiety, and it works both ways: “a feeling on

the part of the victims that they have the duty to testify and the desire on the part of the listener to learn more about trauma in order to reintroduce it into a network of signification” (4). To reflect the nature of these women’s suffering, McCann discards linearity. On the contrary, their account of events keeps moving back and forth in a non-logical and non-chronological sequence. Voids and silences are also present in the novel, and these go hand in hand with fragmented narratives, leaving gaps for the readers to fill in the story of the characters.

At Claire’s – one of the mourning mothers – it is evident they are unable to talk about some facts or describe some moments. The author masterfully digs into the unknown of trauma and suffering in the passage where the mothers discuss their reactions to the sergeant’s visit when giving the official news about their sons’ deaths. For some of them, a smile was their first reaction to the news, suggesting not only disbelief but also the unexplored implications to their emotional state. In the following excerpt, McCann plays with the verbs “to pass” and “to pass away” to alleviate the tension of receiving the feared news, and at the same time emphasises the traumatic aspect of the situation. Claire reports to the other women her reaction and shock when she realised her behaviour during the sergeant’s visit.

—And I opened the door. It was a sergeant. He was very deferent. I mean, nice to me. I knew right away, just from the look on his face . . . I said, Come in. And he took off his hat . . .

—And then he just said, Your son is passed, ma’am. And I was thinking, Passed? Passed where? What do you mean, Sergeant, he’s passed? He didn’t tell me of any exam . . .

—I was smiling at him. I couldn’t make my face do anything else . . . (McCann, 2009:110).

Claire recalls a traumatic event and, at the same time, critically describes her own response to the incident. Additionally, the account of the event is expressed in a free indirect style, which allows the reader to have more information about the character’s mind.

In the novel, trauma and bonding go hand in glove, and the positive effect of human relationships is especially evident in three characters: two of the mourning mothers’ group – Claire, Gloria and Lara, the wife of the driver who caused a fatal car accident that killed the Irish priest and the mother of Jaslyn and Janice, for we claim that they are the ones who lean on bonding to heal. The author stresses the diverse nature of the five mourning mothers in the group through Claire’s perspective: “They are all so different, so little in common. But, still, she liked them all, she really did” (McCann, 2009: 78). The comment engages with the idea of a transcultural writer as someone who emphasises “interactions rather than polarities”



connecting “with a wider global literary perspective and, possibly, a new way of imagining and living identity” (Dagnino, 2015: 1).

The informal group of mothers gathers regularly to talk about their sons, their lives, and losses. Claire joins the group after having experienced a long depressive period in bed. In this group, Claire meets Gloria, and their life-long friendship starts. Of course, there are misunderstandings at the beginning of their friendship, especially because of their different social backgrounds. Gloria, an African American granddaughter of a former slave, lives in the Bronx. Claire, married to a Jewish judge, had been raised a Protestant by a racist father, is the granddaughter of a slave owner and now lives in the Upper-East Side. The author skilfully presents the peaks and troughs of their relationship, especially at the beginning, as a result of their conflicting upbringing and circumstances. Claire is hosting a gathering feeling quite uncomfortable by her own wealthy lifestyle. When all the ladies are about to leave, she asks Gloria to stay a little longer, but in a clear misuse of the word Claire offers to pay her for her time, resulting in Gloria getting very offended and leaving in rage. McCann effectively highlights the differences between the two women.

Sure, I didn't want to leave Claire there with all those leftover crumbs on the carpet, and the crushed-out cigarettes in the ashtrays and I suppose I could've easily stayed, rolled up sleeves, and started washing the dishes and cleaning the floor and tucking the lemons away in the Tupper-ware, but the thing is, I had the thought that we didn't go freedom-riding years ago to clean apartments on Park Avenue, no matter how nice she was, no matter how much she smiled (McCann, 2009: 297).

After a while, Gloria reflects on the episode and focuses on the bigger picture, deploying empathy for Claire's behaviour and concluding: “I had liked her when she was fussing all over us, and she didn't mean harm, maybe she was just nervous. People are good or half good or a quarter good, and it changes all the time – but even on the best day nobody's perfect” (McCann, 2009: 301). Gloria reconsiders Claire's attitude and feels empathy as she puts herself in the same condition as Claire. McCann echoes theories of transculturalism (Dagnino, 2015) as he juxtaposes the two characters in a decentred position, sharing common feelings and attitudes.

Bonding is also explored through a transnational approach (Jay, 2010) in the different ways the mothers do their mourning for their sons. They are able to connect with each other despite their various backgrounds, as the following scene explains:

They even walked up to the rooftop without asking. Maybe that's just the way they do it, or maybe they're blinded by the paintings, the silverware, the carpets. Surely there were other well-heeled boys packed off to war. Not all of them had flat feet.

Maybe she should meet other women, more of her own. But more of her own what? Death, the greatest democracy of them all. The world's oldest complaint. Happens to us all. Rich and poor. Fat and thin. Fathers and daughters. Mothers and sons (McCann, 2009: 107).

Claire, who judges the other ladies' behaviour in her house and looks down on them, reconsiders and concludes that in the face of death and the universality of mourning, social differences are not that important. Similarly, the complex construction of characters, who are not reduced to their roles of mothers and wives, unveils unexpected commonalities. As the novel unfolds, the reader learns that Claire had sent money to a campaign to free Martin Luther King when she was a student. On her part, Gloria had been involved in student movements to improve black people's lives. Despite their present differences, both characters bring the black movement to the centre, each their own way.

In Lara's case, bonding takes a slightly different turn. Divorcing, remarrying, and leaving the country is her path to deal with remorse after the car accident. She told her husband, Blaine, to run away before the arrival of the police, a decision she would regret ever since. On Book Four, at the end of the novel, and thanks to Jaslyn's words, we learn that Lara and Ciaran, the Irish priest's brother, eventually get married and go back to Ireland where she becomes a successful artist. Particular attention deserves Lara's narration of the accident, once more a fragmented account of events that takes the form of short sentences. The nonlinear narrative emulates her dissociation from the tragic scene. Her recount of events shifts from the moment of the accident to the description of the cars involved in the accident. Sequentially, her narration is directed at the paintings, on the back of their car, that they were trying to sell, and then to the faces of the injured, Corrigan, the Irish priest, and Jazzlyn, one of the prostitutes. She starts,

Being inside the car, when it clipped the back of the van, was like being in a body we didn't know. The picture we refuse to see of ourselves. That is not me, that must be somebody else. . . . There is something that happens to the mind in moments of terror. Perhaps we figure it's the last we'll ever have and we record it for the rest of our long journey. We take perfect snapshots, an album to despair over. We trim the edges and place them in plastic. We tuck the scrapbook away to take out in our ruined times (McCann, 2009: 115-116).

The author creates a dissociative effect in Lara's narrative to explain the character's disturbance and, ultimately, her impossibility of letting it go. She is traumatized by her own attitude, lacking solidarity towards the victims, and her telling Blaine to run away. Despite all her compassion and empathy for the victims, she puts herself first and runs. McCann makes use of



some lexicon related to art such as “snapshot”, “album”, “scrapbook”, leading the reader closer to Lara’s profession, a painter.

Empathy lies at the core of the novel, as McCann himself states in many interviews. It also aligns with theories of transculturality and post-multiculturalism, inasmuch as the plot decentres mainstream communities and voices, giving space to bonding, empathy and solidarity, ultimately aiming to overcome trauma.

### **The Local Made Global: Universalisation of Irish Trauma**

In a multicultural environment, globalisation represents the risk of homogenisation as the boundaries between the local and the global blur. As Paul Jay, Professor of English at Loyola University Chicago, alerts homogenisation is supposedly understood as a villain when the discussion is about globalisation in the sense of local identity’s fading away process which is considered to be one of the nefarious effects of globalisation. The same happens to “agency”, as it is seen linked to the idea of “cultural autonomy” and to “a society’s ability to protect its cultural identity from being watered down or erased by alien cultural forms” (Jay 4). But cultures are shaped by other cultures and agency is much more related to the negotiations resulting from the contact among them. As Marisol Morales Ladrón and Juan F. Elices Agudo, both Professors of English at University of Alcalá, Spain, argue the local and the global are the two extremes of a “continuum of interaction” and, therefore, should not be seen as “opposed concepts” (2).

The recent history of Ireland exemplifies the changes caused by a reverse trend on migration, and modernity demands which affect the way people live, work, amuse themselves, produce and consume arts. All these modifications affect, above all, the Irish identity itself. In the island, the artistic production has been changing from its past “topical insularity” to “more transnational and universal objects”, yet it also has been trying to keep its own values and identity (Morales and Elices, 2011). As Tucker argues, Irish culture has been at the centre of much debate caused by the demographic changes occurred in Ireland and the immigrant community has been successful in “widening the parameters of the Irish tradition” (2010: 109). According to Stephanie Schwerter, Professor of English Literature at Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, this conflict is present in Irish literature with many Irish writers expressing their will to transit from the local to the global.<sup>3</sup> In an analogous way, McCann stated that it was impossible to determine whether the events of 9/11 had more influence on the arts than the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland or “any sort of spectacular sadness or spectacular incident in history”.<sup>4</sup>

Interpreting events through other's lens is what McCann does in *Let the Great World Spin* making use of a myriad of characters and different narrative voices. The multicultural aspect is represented not only by immigrants in the United States, such as the Irish brothers, a Guatemalan nurse, and a Japanese girl, but also by compatriots from various backgrounds who eventually bond seeking healing. Consequently, looking at the other not as a threat, but as an opportunity for self-improvement is a pivotal issue in McCann's work.

According to Jay, the transnational turn in literary studies is seen as problematic due to its "focus on pluralities, differences, hybrid identities" (4). The critic also argues that the field of literary studies relies on "the strength of new critical approaches and paradigm shifts" (Ibid.). Naturally, McCann's style goes hand in hand with this transnational approach, as he brings foreigners and people from the margins of society to the centre of the action. Equally, he uses frequent and subtle changes of the narrative voice, making it hard to identify who is speaking. In *Let the Great World Spin*, these changes demand close attention on the part of the reader due to unexpected switches between the characters' and the third person narrator's voice. In addition, identifying the narrative voice is needed to fill in the empty spaces left out on purpose by the author. Using this postmodernist literary technique, McCann opens space for multiple interpretations – the readers' – avoiding giving his own. The following excerpt is emblematic of this device. Claire goes up to the roof to smoke and observes the movement of the street, feeling the heat of the summer, when all of a sudden there is a change in the narrator's voice:

She pulls again on the cigarette and looks over the wall. A momentary vertigo. The creek of yellow taxis along the street, the crawl of green in median of avenue, the saplings just planted.

Nothing much happening on Park. Everyone gone to their summer homes. Solomon, dead against. City boy. Likes his late hours. Even in summertime. His kiss this morning made me feel good (McCann, 2009: 81).

The sudden switch of perspectives from an omniscient narrator to free indirect speech close to stream of consciousness, and then, to first person narrator, serves a double purpose; to build the character's relationship with her husband, and to depict the couple's connection through Claire's perspective. It represents McCann's advocacy for plurality and, according to Sneja Gunew, Professor of English and Women Studies at the University of British Columbia, acknowledges the existence of more than one way of interacting or communicating, which questions "entities" that generalise "civilizations", and countries, as well as the relations among family and community members. Post-multiculturalism is also detectable in the complex construction of characters, who, in the novel, are not simply reduced to their roles of mothers and wives.

Another literary technique employed by McCann to approach violence is to disclose it when describing something ordinary. This scheme favours attenuation of violence. No opinion from the narrator or the characters involved is revealed. No emotion is depicted in the narration of the facts. Particularly in the case of domestic abuse, facts are silenced as if they had never happened. The passage below belongs to Book One, at the beginning of the novel. It is set in Dublin in the 1950s. The family consists of a mother and two young sons. The boys never knew about the physical violence suffered by their mother. The only news they have is that their father had left them “years before”, and that every month there was a check sent by him, in the mailbox. Ciaran, one of the boys, describes a happy childhood and with no judgement mentions his mother’s many times fractured a wrist. An abusive relationship is shrouded in secrecy and shame:

One of the many things my brother, Corrigan, and I loved about our mother was that she was a fine musician. . . . Our mother played with a natural touch, even though she suffered from a hand which she had broken many times. We never knew the origin of the break: it was something left in silence. When she finished playing she would lightly rub the back of her wrist (McCann, 2009: 11).

The character is addressed to as “our mother”, her name was never revealed. Working this way McCann creates a global<sup>5</sup> woman with whom any other can relate. Her trauma is not dated or local; domestic abuse is still a global phenomenon.

It is in the second chapter, Book Three, that there is an explicit reference to an abusive husband. Adelita, a Guatemalan widow and mother of two little children who emigrated to the United States, is the one who brings to light unspoken stories of male abuse. In the excerpt that follows, she speaks about her late husband when her lover – the Irish priest – is having breakfast with her and her children:

My heart shudders every time he sits near the portrait of my dead husband. He has never asked me to move the photo. He never will. He knows the reason it is there. No matter that my husband was a brute who died in the war in the mountains near Quezaltenango – it makes no difference – all children need a father (McCann, 2009: 280).

The universal connection is made clear: both women, the Irish mother and Adelita, have experienced some sort of violence from their husbands and reacted the same, despite their geographical, cultural and time differences. None had ever said a word about it to their children. For the Irish mother, the reasons are not explicit, the reader can only imagine them bearing in mind the social position of women in the context of Ireland, in the 1950s. In the case of Adelita it is explicitly mentioned that it was done to preserve the father’s image to her

children. Although what is made explicit in the Guatemalan's case remains a hypothesis in the case of the Irish mother, McCann's interest lies in linking two women from different places and times to a universal and current phenomenon such as domestic abuse. Despite their different geographical locations and the two decades that separate them, they behave the same, suggesting a common gendered pattern. All in all, McCann underlines the power of silence in the domestic realm, and at the same time favours motherhood as an instrument for bonding amid difference.

In *Let the Great World Spin*, the humanity underlying interpersonal relations is revealed as universal. The particular stories merge into each other and blur the limits between the local and the global.

## Conclusion

*Let the Great World Spin*, one of Colum McCann's most acclaimed novels, epitomizes transculturality and transnationalism in its kaleidoscopic presentation of characters, places and time. It masterly bridges the gap between Ireland and the rest of the world and draws on universal dramas that affect people equally, independently of their culture, ethnicity, political beliefs, and religion. In consonance with theories of transnationalism, transculturality and post-multiculturalism, the novel presents bonding as a means to seek healing and alleviate pain by using universal trauma at the centre of the plot.

Formal experimentation takes the form of fragmentation with thirteen independent and complete narratives that intersect briefly. Subtle changes of point of view alternate from the first to the third person omniscient narrator. Added to the broken narrative, voids and silences are also frequent devices that shape the effects of trauma. With these features, McCann not only enriches the plot, but also advocates for tolerance and empathy towards diversity and fosters bonding despite disparity.

These stylistic features accommodate with the polyphonic tone of the novel, whose numerous characters display different forms of loss and trauma. The transcultural and transnational foundations of the novel connect people through times and places, and so the novel moves back and forth from New York to Dublin, from memories to the present, in order to rescue the invisible and true driving forces of the human heart. Underlying it all, the novel speaks up for a universal connection of human beings by focusing upon commonalities and what lies at the bottom of the human soul. As in a kaleidoscope, *Let the Great World Spin* portrays human life in its richness and creates an ever-changing beautiful view of humanity.

## Notes

- 1 *Let the Great World Spin* Interview ‘Engaging Colum McCann’ by Theo Dorgan. 15/10/2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAd7Uy0DD1M> – Accessed 29/06/2020.
- 2 As the author stated, “The one true democracy we have is storytelling. It goes across borders, boundaries, genders, wealth, race – everyone has a story to tell” (<https://narrative4.com/about>). This vision may explain why he is the co-founder of Narrative4, a “global educational organisation that seeks to foster a next generation of empathetic leaders and citizens” (<http://www.narrative4.com/who-we-are/history/>) by fostering empathy through storytelling.
- 3 According to Schwerter, poets such as Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin and Medbh McGuckian “are among the most influential authors from the North who have attempted to reconsider the Northern Irish conflict through the lens of otherness” (2011: 139).
- 4 *Let the Great World Spin* Interview ‘Artists Reflect on September 11: Colum McCann’ by Julie Bloom, The New York Times. 09/09/2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC-9HZbn5XU&index=2&list=PL310786C5CAEA667E> – Accessed 09/07/2020.
- 5 This idea was presented by José Saramago in an interview to the Brazilian newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo* in 1997. <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/1997/10/17/ilustrada/1.html>>. Accessed 30/12/2020.

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