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Revised Emblems of Erin in Novels by John McGahern and Colum McCann

In “Cathal’s Lake,” a 1996 story by Colum McCann, “a big [Irish] farmer with a thick chest” lives by a lake, “which in itself is a miniature countryside—ringed with chestnut trees and brambles, banked ten feet high on the northern side, with another mound of dirt on the eastern side, where frogsong can often be heard.”¹ In *By the Lake*, a 2002 novel by John McGahern, an aging Irishman also lives by a lake, another enclosed space of tranquility, as is suggested in the opening lines: “The morning was clear. There was no wind on the lake. There was also a great stillness. When the bells rang out for mass, the strokes trembling on the water, they had the entire world to themselves.”² *TransAtlantic*, a 2013 novel by McCann, opens and closes at a cottage on Strangford Lough, an inlet off the Irish Sea in County Down. A woman who lived there evoked its image in a painting: “the cottage itself, the blue half-door open and the lough stretching endlessly behind it.”³ Symbolic sanctuaries all, though McGahern’s retreat is enclosed, while McCann’s is open to a wider world.

These waterside sites, offered by two Irish novelists who compose fictions that focus on issues of personal and national identity, are model portraits of Ireland—important places that link those who live there to Irish history, to holy and pagan landscapes that offer stable grounds on which to stand during times of flux and ferment on the island of Ireland. In “Meditations in a Time of Civil War,” W. B. Yeats speaks of the challenge to poets of his day, a century past, to create “befitting emblems of adversity.” Seamus Heaney, writing in a more recent time of Irish uncivil war, notes, “The question as ever is ‘How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?’ And my answer is, by offering ‘befitting emblems of adversity.’”⁴ McGahern and McCann have met this challenge in inventive, evocative works of prose that offer aesthetically fitting and thematically informing emblems of Ireland.

Born three decades apart, McGahern (1934–2006) and McCann (1965–) span a half century of dramatic changes in Ireland: social, political, religious, and economic—even spiritual. The long-standing Ireland of Eamon deValera—rural, pious, poor, ourselves alone—is long gone. Both writers deal with these transformations in their stories

and novels but with differing representations and implications. McGahern's Ireland, centered in County Leitrim, where he was reared, is comforting but confining, set in isolated, muffled, mid-century Ireland. McCann's Ireland, centered in Dublin, where he was reared, is poor and nurturing but also enclosed in a stressful, late-century Ireland when the renewed Troubles spilled across the border. Both writers left Ireland as young men and married non-Irish women, but McGahern returned to live out his last decades peacefully in Leitrim, while McCann traveled to America and other lands, eventually settling in Manhattan with his family, though he frequently comes back to Ireland.

Both writers offer representative Irish characters who depart their homeland but then return to reconcile themselves to an Ireland changed utterly. Both writers imagine symbolic representation of Erin, sites that concentrate the nation's history and meaning: notably for McGahern a farm in *Amongst Women* (1990) and a lakeside cottage in *By the Lake* (2002); memorably for McCann in a humble Sandymount house in *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and a Strangford Lough cottage in *TransAtlantic* (2013). These symbolic, perpetual places offer insights into the ways Ireland is renewed by the imaginations of two of its best fiction writers.

John McGahern's most compelling embodiment of twentieth-century Ireland is found in that farm, Great Meadow, "a completed world" established by Michael Moran, who fought for Irish independence against the British, then fought again in the Civil War, beside Michael Collins. Over the decades the widowed Moran turns his back on a country he believes was "run by a crowd of small-minded gangsters out for their own good" and shapes his demesne around his five children, "the aristocratic Morans of Great Meadow." But his children escape his patriarchal control and isolated landscape, finding freedom and work in Dublin and London, though they, particularly his three girls, look back to the house, their hidden Ireland, for healing: "when they were away the house would become the summer light and shade above their whole lives." That is, their ideal Ireland can be found only in memory and imagination. Moran, however, feels betrayed by his nation and by his children, who repudiate his shaping of an ideal Erin, his fifth province. "Instead of using the fields, he sometimes felt the fields had used him."⁵ His ideal Ireland was "with O'Leary in the grave."⁶

For McGahern "the universal is the local, but with the walls

taken away.”⁷ Like Patrick Kavanagh, McGahern was parochial but not provincial.⁸ In *Memoir* (2005)—titled *All Will Be Well* in the US edition—McGahern recounts his own “journey out of that landscape [that] became the return to those lanes and small fields and hedges and lakes under the Iron Mountains” of Leitrim.⁹ In *By the Lake*—titled *That They May Face the Rising Sun* in the Irish edition—he traces the similar journey of Joe Rutledge, who comes of age beyond the Shannon, escapes into seminary training, then escapes holy orders into advertising, then escapes Ireland for London but finally returns home, fulfilling the inevitable arc of many of McGahern’s characters and of McGahern himself, as *Memoir* makes clear. The novel climaxes in the funeral of another local man who had emigrated to England but who then came home to die. Death seems natural in Ireland’s west, Joe believes, as does his own circular journey, for he too has come home to die. While James Joyce’s “The Dead” concludes in the image of snow falling on a gravesite in Oughterard, McGahern’s last novel ends as it begins, with the image of the sun rising over a still lake and a freshly dug grave in the Irish western midlands.

McGahern’s representative fictional characters flee Ireland to the east, to England and to the continent, following the familiar escape route of Joyce and his alternate self, Stephen Dedalus. McCann’s fictional counterparts, however, head west, to that mythic landscape of passion and death, where Gabriel Conroy feared to go and Joyce never visited. But McCann’s characters travel well past that snow-filled or sun-drenched Irish gravesites; they cross the wide Atlantic.

Speaking to an interviewer of the links between Ireland and America, McCann notes, “There is a mythical land in Irish mythology: Tír na nÓg, ‘the land of eternal youth’ and it was always set to the west of Ireland. When we were kids, we’d be told these stories in school about ‘the land of eternal youth.’ It always became an America of the imagination for me.”¹⁰ In America McCann’s representative young men and women find new possibilities for self-realization and face daunting challenges that kill some of them but prepare others for return and reconciliation with Erin.

McCann’s central Irish-born characters create an America out of their aspiring imaginations, but once they settle into their new lives, no longer strangers in a strange land, Ireland takes on mythical dimensions in their minds. In “Stolen Child”—from *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, a collection of stories first published in England in 1994, then in the United States in 1996—Padraic Keegan, who “had

come far across an incomprehensible ocean,” works in a Brooklyn children’s home.¹¹ There he pays attention to the afflicted Dana, empowering her by recounting Irish myths, telling her “about Dana, the Irish goddess who was believed to have come from North Africa in ancient times,” who led “a tribe of druids, the Tuatha de Dannan,” in “ousting the Firbolgs, a goddess with “magic that could control the sea, the mist, the sun, and the very sounds and shapes of the morning.”¹² Here or there, hither or yon, for McCann’s characters, perhaps for himself, a mythical landscape lies over the Atlantic horizon, far enough away so that only the mind’s eye can see it.

Sometimes the dream of elsewhere becomes a nightmare in McCann’s fiction. “America, the country, as someone once said, that God gave to Cain,” cries Sheona, an embittered young woman from Mayo who had been brutally raped in the American West in McCann’s “Sisters,” a story from the 2000 collection *Everything in This Country Must*.¹³ But eventually Sheona achieves reconciliation in a seminary on Long Island, where she has tracked down her dying sister, a Mayo émigré who has found holy transcendence in the New World.

In *This Side of Brightness*, a 1998 novel by McCann, Con O’Leary, age thirty-four, a Roscommon man, is a sandhog digging a tunnel from Brooklyn to Manhattan in 1916 until he and two other laborers are suddenly propelled by explosive pressure through water to the surface. “The three sandhogs somersault in the air above the river. The water suspends them for a moment between Brooklyn and Manhattan, a moment that the men will never lose in their memories—they have been blown upward like gods.”¹⁴ It is just this transformation, this transubstantiation through ascent, that intrigues McCann as he and his characters cross borders and boundaries. They leave their homelands but never escape its memory; abroad, his diasporic Irish men and women are haunted by images of Erin. Speaking of his frequent commutes between New York and Dublin, McCann has said, “I’m up there in those clouds, metaphorically and literally, quite a lot.” So, too, are his most important characters, those adventurous seekers of new landscapes that meet the requirements of their imaginations, which have been thwarted by their Irish experience. McCann has said he likes his characters “to move physically and through the world, and so presenting them with some sort of dilemma that is real and tangible is always something that interests me. So . . . I like the idea of tightrope walkers, I like the idea of tunnel builders, I like the idea of people making these big

journeys.”¹⁵

McCann’s *Let the Great World Spin*, a 2009 novel that won acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, opens with a prologue description of a crowd of New Yorkers who watch Phillipe Petit walk on a wire between the two towers of the World Trade Center in 1974.¹⁶ The witnesses on the lower Manhattan streets below grow silent, agog as he moves “into the middle air”; their “waiting had been made magical, and they watched as he lifted one dark-slippered foot, like a man about to enter warm grey water.”¹⁷ Air and water—the permeable elements between significant places in McCann’s imagination.

The novel, launched aloft, then spins back in time to the 1960s and across the Atlantic to Dublin, where two brothers, Ciaran and Corrigan, are reared by their loving mother in a small house in Sandymount, a south-coastal Dublin suburb that looks across Dublin Bay toward Howth. An enclosed childhood idyll, as Ciaran tells it: “we enjoyed each other, all three of us, and never so evidently as those Sundays when the rain fell gray over Dublin Bay and squalls blew fresh against the windowpane.”¹⁸

Their idyll is challenged by Corrigan’s religious devotion, his desire to give all to the poor. “What Corrigan wanted was a fully believable God, one you could find in the grime of the everyday.”¹⁹ At nineteen Corrigan studies with the Jesuits at Emo College. By the early 1970s, he is off to New York as a member of a religious order. After Ciaran is injured in a bomb explosion at Dublin’s Dandelion Market in spring 1974, he too abandons Ireland for the Bronx, looking for his brother, who lives as a missionary amidst prostitutes near the Major Deegan Highway. Corrigan leaves Ireland to find God in low places; Ciaran leaves Ireland to seek Corrigan and to escape Dublin’s dangers in, of all places, the squalid Bronx. The novel, then, traces the fortunes of these young Irishmen as they search for meaning and self-realization in the mythic land of opportunity and threat to the west. The result of their joint quests, played off against Petit’s amazing and successful wire-walk, are decidedly mixed.

Petit’s bravura walk, witnessed by many of the novel’s characters, is a metaphor of linkage—only connect—that McCann reflects in his plot and theme. Corrigan, the seeker, and Ciaran, his brother’s keeper, test out the possibilities of compassion and connection. “I have wanted for a long time to write about faith and belonging, especially in a radical Catholic context,” McCann notes. “I wanted a

man who would look at the world in all its filth and poverty and yet still believe that, one day, the meek might actually want it. And Corrigan was the one who liberated me in this book. He was the one who brought me back to Dublin, then zipped me back over to New York, and then introduced me to all the other characters in the book.”²⁰

By the time the novel ends in 2006, Corrigan is dead, the victim of an accident on Manhattan’s FDR Drive while he was driving a van on a mercy mission, and Ciaran is back in Dublin. He is there visited by Jaslyn, the grown daughter of one of the prostitutes Corrigan set out to protect in New York. Ciaran has become CEO of an internet company with an office in one of the new glass towers along the Liffey and another in Silicon Valley. Ciaran and Jaslyn, sophisticated internationalists both, drink in a Dublin pub; then he drives her in his Audi to the house in Sandymount where he and Corrigan grew up. Ciaran had paid over a million dollars to buy it back in inflated, Green Tiger Ireland. Somehow, serendipitously, at the cost of Corrigan’s life, his quest is completed, if not fully realized, back where it began and a piece of Ireland is recovered through the agency of his brother, a transatlantic entrepreneur who has found gold, if not God, in the everyday.

In *TransAtlantic* McCann sets his characters spinning in a widening gyre of spatial and temporal transitions, by sea and air, between Ireland and the United States, circuits far wider than any attempted by McGahern or his characters. McCann’s high-wire act of novelistic invention in this novel crosses boundaries between here and there, now and then, history and fiction, spanning two continents and close to two centuries of Irish and Irish American experience. Set-piece narratives invoke notable historical figures who made memorable Atlantic crossings between these two nations. In 1845 Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave whose books and lectures stirred abolitionist energies in the United States, visited Ireland to advance antislavery causes. In 1919 John Alcock and Arthur Brown, British veterans of the Great War, flew a modified Vickers Vimy bomber from St. John’s, Newfoundland, to Clifden, Ireland, winning the ten thousand pounds offered by Lord Northcliffe of the *Daily Mail* to the first fliers to cross the Atlantic. In 1998 George Mitchell, former senator and Senate majority leader, concluded the Good Friday Agreement, which led to peace in Northern Ireland. Interwoven into these reimaginings of historical figures and events are tales of four generations of women who stitch the narrative together and whose

journeys away from and back to Ireland dramatize McCann's evolving vision of the two countries where he has found a home. These imagined women intersect glancingly with significant historical figures, allowing McCann to express what might be called unspoken Ireland, historically muted voices from the Famine to the Good Friday Agreement. McCann, mixing historical and fictional narratives, has said he set out "to question the notion of what is fiction and what is nonfiction. So I like [that in] these supposedly nonfiction narratives, these fictional women appear and you have to wonder if they're true or not."²¹

A desperate Irish serving girl—Lily Duggan, born in Dublin in 1829—has a brief encounter with Frederick Douglass in the Dublin home of an Irish abolitionist family, the Jenningses, where she serves; Douglass inspires Lily's escape from a life of servitude, so she walks from Dublin to Cork, to another home where Douglass stayed with the Jenningses; then Lily ships out from Cobh in 1846, just as the Great Famine settles over the four green fields. Lily then gets swept up in the rush of American life—seduced and abandoned, she rears a child who grows up to be a soldier who is killed in the Civil War—but she remembers who she is and where she comes from. "In America you could lose everything," she thinks, "except the memory of your original name."²² Lily marries Ehrlich, a man who cuts and sells ice; she moves to Michigan, north of the Grand River, where she is baptized a Protestant—"it didn't seem too different from what she had already chosen not to believe in" (169). For Lily Duggan "the old life in Ireland was distant to her now: she needed it no more, she had stepped away" (170).

McCann, however, makes it clear that Ireland is not so easily forgotten by its émigrés. Though embedded like a block of ice in her new life, with her husband, her six children, and the ice business, she has to fight against the pull of memory, particularly when her husband brings home a painting as a gift. "A riverside in Ireland. An arched bridge. A row of overhanging trees. A distant cottage. . . . Looking into it was like looking out another window. Clouds. Fast water. Geese gunneling through the sky" (175). Lily—age forty-eight, more than thirty years in America—is overcome by the painting's painful irrelevance to her actual Irish life in squalid Dublin. The painting tells her "she had become American." "At what time," she wonders, "had her life released its meaning? She couldn't locate it" (177). Yet she places the painting on the mantle over the fireplace, preserving a

romantic vision of a land she has never known. Lily's attachment to Irish place, imagined and actual, is then passed on to her daughter and then to two more generations of displaced, home-seeking women.

Lily's daughter, Emily Ehrlich, who becomes a reporter for the *Evening Telegram*, and Emily's daughter, Lottie, age seventeen, a photographer, happen to be residents of the Cochrane Hotel, Newfoundland, in 1919 as Alcock and Brown prepare for their bold flight. Lottie gives Brown a letter to mail when he gets to Ireland, addressed to the Jennings family in Cork, to those who helped Lily make her crossing. Emily thinks "a brand new thought: *Transatlantic airmail . . . transatlantic, trans atlas, trans antic*" (25).

In 1929 Emily Ehrlich, now age fifty-six, and Lottie, at twenty-seven, sail first-class to England to write and take photos for a Toronto magazine. "It astounded her to think that her own mother had been on a coffin ship some eighty years before, a floating boat of fever and loss, and here she was, now, with her own daughter, traveling to Europe, first class, on a vessel where the ice was made by an electrical generator" (197). Their return pilgrimage is an effort to complete a broken circuit, a way to recognize what they hardly knew they missed—the nation Lily has seen only in a romantic painting. But the journey home by Emily and Lottie is circuitous.

In England they are met by a chauffeur, Ambrose Tuttle, a Northern Ireland Unionist, who drives them to Swansea, Wales, to visit and photograph Arthur Brown, who by then is slipping into alcoholic reverie, his glory flight long past, his partner long dead after an air crash. Brown produces the unopened letter, which provides a plot thread for the novel. Emily's article, she decides, will not mention Brown's alcoholism. "She would want, instead, to recall him in the air, between layers of cloud. To give him back that ancient dignity. To hear a whoop as he flew out over the treetops" (219). McCann's most interesting characters remain in motion, aloft in a bright nowhere, uprooted, between known and unknown lands.

Lottie marries Ambrose Tuttle, from a Belfast linen trade family, in a Protestant church in Belfast; she is as indifferent to sectarian discrimination as was her grandmother Lily. At her daughter's wedding, Emily contemplates the amazing changes in her family. "There was something in it akin to a journey across the sky, she thought, the sudden shock of new weather, a wall of sunshine, or a pelt of hail, or the emergence from a bank of cloud" (222). There is also

something quite tangible that gives Lottie a place in Ireland, a wedding gift of five acres and a dilapidated cottage, “where geese flew over, pulling the color out of the sky.” Emily returns to Newfoundland—“she was already stepping back towards the sea” (224)—but Lottie remains to reclaim a lost family heritage in Ireland.

By 1978 Lottie’s worries center on her grandson, Tomas, age nineteen, son of Lottie’s daughter, Hannah. Tomas loves the cottage at Strangford Lough but dislikes the hunting parties held there. Tomas likes to row out on the lough in the evening to check his star charts, until he is shot dead by paramilitaries of one side or the other who were after his duck-hunting gun. While exile can lead to death in McCann’s vision, so too can trying to lead a peaceful life in Ireland. In a sense, McCann’s fiction addresses the famous Belfast wall graffiti question of the Troubles era: “Is there life after birth in Ireland?”

By the end of the twentieth century, Hannah, now nearly seventy, possesses the undelivered, unopened letter that links her to the past. “It was my grandmother Emily Ehrlich who wrote the letter, my own mother who brokered its passage, but it began with her mother, my great-grandmother, Lily Duggan, if anything truly begins at all” (252). Their lives, like so many Irish lives, have been “thrown into long migratory orbits” (253). Bankers are closing in to possess her land and cottage at Strangford Lough, set not far from monastic ruins where holy books were written fifteen hundred years before. Hannah tries to raise money to save her place by selling the talismanic letter, perhaps somehow connected to Douglass’s 1846 visit. Determined to retain this small piece of Ireland for her family, Hannah recalls how Lottie, the photographer, turned to painting: “there is one of the cottage itself, the blue half-door open and the lough stretching endlessly behind it” (278). Again the image of an idealized Ireland drives one of McCann’s exemplary characters to possess a patch of waterside turf in Ireland. Who, in the end, deserves to own this emblematic landscape, this piece of Ireland, evoked in paintings and realized in fact at the cottage at Strangford Lough?

Hannah’s search for someone to buy the letter that was flown across the Atlantic in 1919 takes her to post-Tiger Dublin, a city she finds alien and not particularly Irish. “Dublin so much like anywhere else. Swerving flyovers. Shopping centers. Streets pepper-sprayed with *For Sale* signs. *Closing Down*. *Liquidity Blowout*. Empty glass towers. The repetitive strain of what we have all become. The vain show” (281). Eventually she meets David Manyaki, a Kenyan historian from University College Dublin who was working on material related

to Douglass's visit. In a Northside Dublin café they see on television Queen Elizabeth visit the Garden of Remembrance, a sight that makes Hannah suddenly feel Irish. "I have never been much for monarchy, and although I grew up nominally Protestant, an ancient part of me still aligned itself with Lily Duggan" (283).

It turns out that David, this black African outlier, knows more about Dublin than Hannah imagined. He tells that her that Douglass and Lily, then a servant girl, met in a house not where they were, on Brunswick Street, as Hannah thought, but at the house of the Jennings family on Great Brunswick Street, now renamed Pearse Street. David, it seems, was becoming Irish, a sign that personal and national identity have as much to do with choice as with heritage.

Later, visiting David's house in Dun Laoghaire, Hannah meets his wife, Aoibheann, "a pale Irish beauty with a sophisticated accent" (286). Hannah wonders at David Manyaki's journey of discovery. "How had he ended up here, at the edge of the Irish Sea? What was it that brought us such distances, rowing upwards into the past?" (287). These characters—the native Irish beauty, the African scholar, and the great-granddaughter of a servant girl émigré—converge through McCann's shaping hand to symbolically redeem Ireland.

Fittingly, Hannah asks David to open the letter from Emily to Isabel Jennings, thanking her for what she did for Lily. "*It is just as likely that this will be lost at sea, but if they make it, perhaps you will receive this from two men who have knocked the war from a plane. . . . We seldom know what echo our actions will find, but our stories will most certainly outlast us*" (295). Hannah makes McCann's point: *story*, the unfolding narrative of circumstances, matters as much as resolution, just as *flight*, the transit between places, means as much as landing. Perhaps in flight, as in proper storytelling, the ambiguities and alternatives of life below can be contemplated, contained. McCann brings his story home.

When Hannah's cottage comes up for auction in summer 2011, David and Aoibheann arrive for a visit, bringing along the letter and their two young sons, Oisín and Conor. The novel concludes on a scene in which Hannah overhears Aoibheann read a story to her boys. "Once upon a time, she began." Hannah reflects, "There isn't a story in the world that isn't in part, at least, addressed to the past" (299). Hannah is grateful that they have better understood and survived their turbid histories.

The novel seems, perhaps fittingly, to conclude up in the air,

without final resolution, until the reader recalls how it opened. In 2012, at a cottage near the edge of a lough, an unnamed woman wakes early, before her children, to “odd sounds from the roof”; she discovers it is the gulls, flying overhead, dropping oysters on the slate roof to break shells open (3). The reader comes to understand its symbolic implications: that the cottage is now owned by David and Aoibheann, parents of Oisín and Conor. That Ireland that Lily never possessed but for the glimpses of rural cottages she saw when she walked from Dublin to Cork in 1846; that idealized Ireland represented in the painting Ehrlich bought for Lily; that more actualized image of Ireland captured by Lottie in her painting of the cottage; all of those real and imagined Irelands now descend to this mixed couple who echo Douglass and Lily. Ireland, at least that representative portion of Ireland set at the cottage at Strangford Lough, belongs to those who deserve to own it, those who have helped keep it past alive, those who have crossed oceans and national boundaries to invest in its future, those who moved from an idealized image of Ireland to possession of its dear, dirty ground.

What is that elusive entity: Ireland? In Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, Macmorris, fighting for an English king in France, famously asks, “What ish my nation?” (act 3, scene 2). What is Irish identity? In Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Davin famously asks Stephen “are you Irish at all?”²³ Ireland exists as much in the mind’s eye as it does as a small island just west of England, the last land before America. Irish identity is as much an elective affinity as a matter of birth or genealogy. The Irelands of John McGahern and Colum McCann match in their general outlines but take distinct shapes, differing but fitting emblems of Ireland, that reflect the sensibilities and experiences of their authors. For both authors Ireland is a place to resent and leave but also a place to return to: home as found. For McGahern Ireland offered him and his characters a landscape of imagination that allowed him to replace his harsh memories of the western midlands with evocations of its comforting rituals and natural beauties as he and his characters prepared to die. For McCann, still in the midst of life and a developing art of fiction, Ireland offers a confirming sense of identity for himself, for his characters, and for twenty-first-century Ireland.

Notes

1. Colum McCann, "Cathal's Lake," in *Fishing the Sloe-Black River* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 187.
2. John McGahern, *By the Lake* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 3.
3. Colum McCann, *TransAtlantic* (New York: Random House, 2013), 278.
4. William Butler Yeats, "Meditations in Time of Civil War," in *The Poems of W. B. Yeats, A New Edition*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 202; Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 57.
5. John McGahern, *Amongst Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 2, 18, 2, 85, 130.
6. William Butler Yeats, "September 1913," in *Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 109.
7. John McGahern, "The Local and the Universal," in *Love of the World: Essays*, ed. Stanley Van Der Ziel (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 11.
8. Darcy O'Brien, *Patrick Kavanagh* (Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 14.
9. John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 260–61. Published in the United States as *All Will Be Well: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
10. Colum McCann, interview by goodreads.com, June 2013, http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/867.Colum_McCann.
11. Colum McCann, "Stolen Child," from *Fishing the Sloe-Black River*, 73.
12. *Ibid.*, 75.
13. Colum McCann, "Sisters," in *Everything in This Country Must* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt, 2000), 6.
14. Colum McCann, *This Side of Brightness* (New York: Picador, 1998), 21.
15. McCann interview, goodreads.com.
16. McCann was awarded both the Impac Dublin Literary Award in Ireland and the National Book Award in the United States for *Let the Great World Spin*.
17. Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin* (New York: Random House, 2009), 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 12.
19. *Ibid.*, 20.
20. "A Conversation with Colum McCann and Nathan Englander," in *Let the Great World Spin*, 365.
21. McCann interview, goodreads.com.
22. McCann, *TransAtlantic*, 160. Hereafter, page numbers for all quotations from this book appear in parentheses in the text.
23. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in *The Portable James Joyce* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 466, 468.