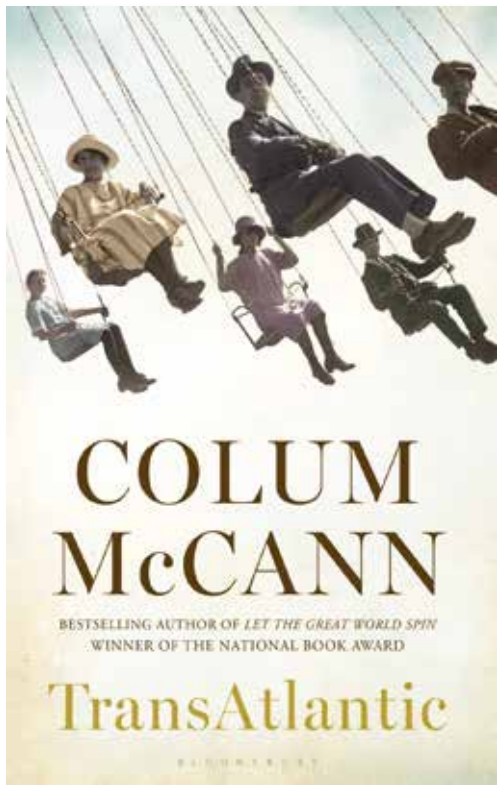




Reader's Guide



Other novels by Colum McCann

Let the Great World Spin (2009)

Zoli (2006)

Dancer (2003)

Everything in This Country Must (2000)

This Side of Brightness (1998)

Songdogs (1995)

Fishing the Sloe-black River (1995)

TransAtlantic Colum McCann

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About the author

Colum McCann was born in Ireland in 1965. He lives in New York with his wife and their three children. He teaches at the MFA program in Hunter College.

He is the author of six novels and two collections of stories. He has been the recipient of many international honours, including the National Book Award, the International Dublin Impac Prize, a Chevalier des Arts et Lettres from the French government, election to the Irish arts academy, several European awards, the 2010 Best Foreign Novel Award in China, and an Oscar nomination.

TransAtlantic

TransAtlantic tells the story of four generations of women. Spanning the onset of the Irish potato famine in 1845, the American Civil War and the more recent troubles in Northern Ireland, it is an epic and engrossing story of slavery, poverty, struggle and survival.

1919. Emily Ehrlich watches as two young air men emerge from the carnage of World War One to pilot the very first non-stop transatlantic flight from Newfoundland to the west of Ireland. Among the mail being carried on the aircraft is a letter which Emily's mother, Lily, wrote when she first left Ireland in 1845.

1845. Lily Duggans is just seventeen years old and living as a maid when Frederick Douglass, a black American slave, lands in Ireland to champion ideas of democracy and freedom, only to find a famine unfurling at his feet.

1998. Senator George Mitchell criss-crosses the ocean in search of an elusive Irish peace. How many more bereaved mothers must he meet before an agreement can be reached?

Discussion points

In *TransAtlantic*, Colum McCann uses the first nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean, as a catalyst. In what ways does this act of daring and skill become metaphors for more everyday acts of bravery?

The first half of *TransAtlantic* features non-fictional stories focusing entirely on famous historical men. The second half is pure fiction focusing on a family of women. How does McCann bring the two sides of the novel together in the second half?

In what way do the women in the novel carry both its sadness and hope?

Freya Johnston, in her Telegraph review of *TransAtlantic*, references Paul Muldoon's poem which summed up Ireland in the image of "men hurrying back / Across two fields and a river". She believes that the poem raises questions that are central to McCann's novel. What are people running from, and why? What have they been up to? What damage have they caused? Where are they going? To what extent does this novel answer these questions?

The majority of *TransAtlantic* is told by an omniscient narrator but uses a first person narrative for the final chapter. What affect does this have on the reader?

Themed reading

EL Doctrow *Ragtime*
Don DeLillo *Underworld*
David Mitchell *Cloud Atlas*

Useful links

[Author's website](http://colummccann.com/) <http://colummccann.com/>

[Essay by Colum McCann](http://nyti.ms/18rAtTp) <http://nyti.ms/18rAtTp>

[Interview with Colum McCann](http://bit.ly/13niwY4) <http://bit.ly/13niwY4>

[Guardian with Colum McCann](http://bit.ly/14GYRAf) <http://bit.ly/14GYRAf>