# TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUE THROUGH CONNECTION: STORYTELLING AS A HOPEFUL INTERFACE IN COLUM MCCANN'S *APEIROGON*

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## Introduction

As he was writing his previous novel, *TransAtlantic* (2013), one section of which dealt with the Northern Irish Peace process, Irish writer Colum McCann was told by Senator George Mitchell: "If you think Ireland is complicated, you should try the Middle East." (Rankin) Seven years later, the novelist published *Apeirogon*, which tackles the conflict between Israel and Palestine through the stories of two fathers who each lost a daughter to violence: Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian scholar who was previously jailed for seven years after having been caught planning an attack on Israeli forces aged seventeen, and Rami Elhanan, an Israeli graphic designer and former tank mechanic and soldier in the Israeli Defence Forces. Bassam's daughter Abir was killed by an Israeli soldier's rubber bullet and Rami's daughter Smadar was killed in a Palestinian suicide bomb attack.

The word which gives the novel its title refers to a mathematical figure and is defined in the book as follows: "From the Greek, *apeiron*: to be boundless, to be endless. Alongside the Indo-European root of *per*: to try, to risk." (94b)[1] The novel follows this double orientation as it explores what McCann called "backgrounds of war and trauma" (Rankin) in a rather oblique manner, by highlighting the possible contact points between different human cultures, histories, stories, epistemologies and technologies. The formal choices mimic the contents of the book and give it a highly kaleidoscopic quality as it is made of one thousand and one segments of varying length, nature (textual but also pictorial), and topic.[2] These segments, which may at first seem merely juxtaposed, turn out to be intricately interlaced, and the meaning of the novel stems precisely from these interconnections.

This essay hence studies the thematic and stylistic strategies used by the author to weave a multifaceted – rather than simply dual – pattern of transcultural connections and dialogues through the novel, which constitutes an interface, the ethics of which will be interrogated. In order to do so, it first analyzes the (Northern) Irish–Middle Eastern connection presented in the novel, as it is McCann's point of entry into his

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1    The numbers used in the quotations are not page but segment numbers as the novel is divided into 1001 segments. They go from 1 to 500; then 1001; then 500 to 1. To make references to the text clearer in this essay, the segments will be named here as follows: 1-500 (first part of the novel), 1001, 500b-1b (second part).

2    References to *One Thousand and One Nights* are one of the main golden threads in the book; see for instance segments 101, 223-225, 32b, 31b, 27-5b, 15-14b.

subject. It then examines how transcultural connection is created and promoted by various literary strategies. The purposes and effects of the latter raise potential ethical issues; therefore the last part of the essay focuses on storytelling and on the precarious exercise in balance inherent in attempting to produce a text that does not deny that it is necessary to retain some sense of identity, while also trying to transcend essentialist limits.

## Part One – (Northern) Irishness as a Passport to Open Dialogue

The (Northern) Irish–Middle Eastern connection is one of the subthemes that underlie the novel. Irishness appears to act as a favourable interface to open a dialogue about and with conflict zones: "McCann's background also helped, Aramin, 56, said, because many Palestinians often feel a sense of solidarity with the Irish. 'We have the same history of conflict.'" (Khatib) McCann acknowledges that albeit conflictual, the Irish experience is in no way perfectly synonymous with the Middle-Eastern one: "I do come from a background of war and trauma, but it's entirely different." (Rankin) Still, (Northern) Irish history constitutes a "contact zone" with Palestinian and Israeli "backgrounds of war and trauma" (Rankin). As the writer says, his Irish identity was a helpful entry point into his story:

> When I was in Palestine, I walked through several checkpoints. But you know, I had also walked through checkpoints as a child in Northern Ireland. And I think that having spent a lot of time in Northern Ireland was very important to me. Having seen the Irish peace process and its completion in 1998 in close-up was helpful in my understanding of what was going on in the Middle East. (Schayan)

Throughout the novel, there are many possible implicit references to echoes between the Troubles and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. For instance, segments 415b as well as 149-146b deal with hunger striking. On a more peaceful note, another golden thread in the novel is Smadar's love for Sinéad O'Connor's music (see 149, 152-153, 303, 348 for instance), which is itself linked to the Song of Solomon and the Kabbalah (304b-305b).

Some of the connections are explicitly stated, such as the one between the Separation walls in Belfast and Jerusalem (385-408). Segment 410 is dedicated to Bassam's visit to Belfast: "Bassam was taken by the names of the streets: Palestine, Cairo, Jerusalem, Damascus. […] There had, he heard, been many shootings here. […] He recognised the relative ease of being Palestinian here. He was listened to. He was authentic." Other segments, such as 413, highlight the adoption of Middle Eastern politics by the two Northern Irish sides:

> In the 1980s the greatest sale of Israeli flags – outside of Israel itself – was in Northern Ireland, where the Loyalists flew them in defiance of Irish Republicans who had adopted the Palestinian flag: whole housing estates shrouded in either blue and white, or black red white and green.

Much in the same way as the two conflicts are paralleled, so are the peace processes between the various sides; segment 412 is about Senator George Mitchell and the Northern Irish peace process:

> The leaders of the parliamentary parties came to his office to sit down and tell him exactly where they stood. […] Loyalists, Republicans, Sinn Féin, the moderates, the socialists, the Women's Coalition, the vast slalom of acronyms: DUP, UVF, IRA, UFF, RIHA, ABD, RSF, UDA, INLA.

A little further in the novel, segment 416 focuses on the Middle East and plays on formal echoes to confirm the links between the two situations:

> When, in 2009, Mitchell was appointed as special envoy to the Middle East, he had a sudden feeling that he was walking into the middle of another smashed jigsaw – PLO, JDL, DFLP, LEHI, PFLP, ALA, PIJ, CPT, IWPS, ICAHD, AIC, AATW, EIJ, JTJ, ISM, AEI, NIF, ACRI, RHR, BDS, PACBI, BNC – only this time it was so much more difficult to find a straight edge with which to begin.

The connections between the two regions are thus presented, with several elements – explorer Christopher Costigan (see segments 490b-483b, 443b-441b 439-437b), music, but also and above all, paradoxically, conflict – acting as interfaces. Nonetheless, the dialogue thus opened by the novel does not only occur between Ireland and the Middle East. On the contrary, the text functions as a palimpsestic and kaleidoscopic interface allowing for a wider, would-be boundless transcultural dialogue.

## Part Two – The Novel as a Palimpsestic and Kaleidoscopic Interface Promoting Dialogue and Connection

It must be acknowledged that due to the very form of the novel, it is difficult for a length-limited research paper to provide an exhaustive analysis of such a rich text, the issues it raises and the formal choices included. For the same reason, listing the various countries, regions, and cultures the novel weaves into its contents and its fabric would be a long and eventually pointless task; rather, this essay will, in the following section, analyze the way transcultural connections and dialogues are created and promoted by various literary strategies, turning the novel into an interface that opens a space for dialogue. While this can be said of all novels, it is particularly remarkable in *Apeirogon* as the text has a defining transcultural orientation. Transculturalism has been defined by König and Rakow (95) as "the quest to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders", with "multi-polarity, multiple perspectives, and transformative dynamics" being key. *Apeirogon* embodies this quest by foregrounding its vital importance through the story/stories told, as well as by formally using several literary mechanisms to convey this message.

One of them is the inclusion of human(e) stories, which very often reveal aspects of the lives of real people and systematically include – and sometimes even focus on – seemingly minor details:

> What fascinated Smadar most about her grandfather's story [in Auschwitz] was that a well-dressed man had slipped Yitzak a piece of seed cake at the train station […] Yitzak

> ate the cake in one sitting – he always regretted this, he told Smadar. He wished he had made it last longer, but he kept the piece of newspaper folded in his pocket all the way through his days in the camp. (266)

> [Bassam] leaned further forward. The microphone squeaked. A mistake. He leaned back. His jacket was warm. He didn't want to take it off. A pale blue shirt. It would show ovals at the underarms. (24b)

Such anecdotal details create embodied, intimate stories which stand out in the middle of more factual or scientific segments. They are deeply humanising and as such, play an essential role, one which is metareferentially hinted at in segment 85 ("So often, thought Rami, the ordinary can save us"). These details are simply human(e), regardless of national or cultural belonging, and facilitate easy empathy, especially as they often, as in the segments above, involve bodily mechanisms or instincts common to everyone.

In keeping with this focus on the ordinary and the minor to facilitate transcultural dialogues, the novel also relies on the use of empathy-triggering mechanisms such as addresses to the reader's imagination, which call for empathy and intersubjectivity, as illustrated by segments 277 ("Try the occupation of your imagination. Go ahead. Try it.") and 162b ("Imagine one [sound bomb] rolling at your feet."). What neuroscientists have identified as mirror mechanisms help create further empathy between the readers, whatever their nationalities, and the characters:

> The same neural structures activated by the actual execution of actions or by the subjective experience of emotions and sensations are also active when we see others acting or expressing the same emotions and sensations. These mirroring mechanisms have been interpreted as constituting a basic functional mechanism in social cognition, defined as embodied simulation. (Gallese)

Gallese and Wojciehowski go on to explain how embodied simulation helps people connect physically, and therefore emotionally:

> Embodied simulation mediates the capacity to share the meaning of actions, basic motor intentions, feelings, and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others. According to this hypothesis, intersubjectivity should be viewed first and foremost as intercorporeity.

While such phenomena occur in the real world between living beings, they also unfold when one is faced with art, including of course literature:

> A fundamental element of aesthetic response to works of art consists of the activation of embodied mechanisms encompassing the simulation of actions, emotions, and corporeal sensations. Mirroring mechanisms and embodied simulation can empirically ground the fundamental role of empathy in aesthetic experience. […] Empathic involvement […] encompasses a series of bodily reactions and bodily feelings of the beholder. (Gallese)

In *Apeirogon*, the inclusion of scenes characterized by a high level of details which make it easier for the reader to visualize the processes described is combined with a focus on banal events or actions, as well as with regular direct addresses to the reader's imagination. Together, they are part of McCann's arsenal to create empathy

and therefore to encourage the connections and the dialogues between his international readers and characters.

What is more, these human(e) stories are spangled with a variety of anecdotes – from all around the world and encompassing multiple fields – which act as metaphorical spaces of dialogue. Throughout its one thousand and one segments, *Apeirogon* indeed dabs in numerous areas of human knowledge, highlighting the connections between them even though they might appear as epistemologically different and geographically disjointed.

First of all, as evidenced by the many nods to *One Thousand and One Nights*, literary intertextuality abounds in the novel, with references to the Bible, to the lives and works of authors such as Borges (101, 306, 10b), Rumi (96), Yeats (96), Darwish (196, 197, 199), Goethe (132b), Artaud (159b), and even to some of McCann's former novels such as *This Side of Brightness* (236-239), *Let the Great World Spin* (through the figure of Philippe Petit: 342, 350-357, 361-363, 365-371, 381-383), or *TransAtlantic* (82, 412, 416, 141b).

Since one of the novel's two protagonists, Rami, works as a graphic designer, it is no surprise that visual arts should also be present in the novel, through textual references to this field but also via the inclusion of photos (27, 153, 317b), reproductions of artworks (234, 374, 31b), blank rectangles (284, 284b), and even a sound diagram (170b).

The multimodal nature of the text reveals its interest in interdisciplinarity, with a striking number of references to various types of art (dance, music, cinema, painting, wire-walking, video games, theatre), as well as to several fields of science (mathematics obviously, but also optics, physics, chemistry, IT, medicine, biology, psychiatry), and the humanities (psychology, post-colonial theory, epistemology, art history, philosophy, translation). The novel gathers these diverse sources of knowledge and creation from all around the world and thus appears as a palimpsestic and kaleidoscopic interface.

This is not to say that *Apeirogon* consists in a mere juxtaposition of anecdotes and facts: quite the contrary. The novel weaves intricate and multiple connections between the various segments and the themes and symbols they feature. It plays on the many ways its formally fragmented contents mirror one another, creating labyrinthine and multidirectional interlacing (see for instance segments 214-220). The manner in which apparently unrelated segments eventually shed new light on others or enable the reader to understand the inclusion of certain elements is a key part of the way the novel operates; it thereby opens spaces of dialogue and understanding. While the readers' inferring task is sometimes rendered useless by some examples of "all-too-obvious imagery" (Peled) and of rather unsubtle underlining of certain ideas or connections, it remains crucial on most occasions. Besides, as the point of view for each segment is not explicitly specified, and as the same themes can often be identified in several successive segments, the transitions are sometimes so fluid that it com-

plicates the interpretation work: it may be easy for the reader to mistake the story as Bassam's (while it is actually Rami's) or Abir's (while it is in fact Smadar's). Such porosity contributes to highlighting the possible existence of a common ground that might act as an interface between the two communities (see for example segments 288-290).

These aesthetic choices are thus structurally efficient, albeit potentially unethical: while underlining the echoes between the different countries and cultures the novel includes, they may also result in negating essential(ist) differences, a consequence of what Fiona McCann calls Colum McCann's – and many others' – (Eurocentric) universalist agenda. Is the novel facilitating or forcing intersubjectivity and trans-culturalism? Is it celebrating differences while underscoring points of connection or encouraging the erasure of cultural diversity by comparing different situations and concluding that they are the same? Trying to retain some sense of identity while attempting to transcend essentialist lines are the two contradictory poles between which contemporary fiction tries to find its path:

> If I will argue here that the contemporary novel is engaged in a relationship with a new era of modernity […], this is absolutely not to suggest that we have achieved a new, liquid state, in which national, political and material difference has been overcome. If this book argues that it is difficult to avoid a global perspective when thinking about any of our local or national traditions, it does not suggest that we have discovered what Pascale Casanova has recently and influentially called a "world republic of letters", a "literature-world" whose "boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space". On the contrary, what this book discovers, in its analysis of the global production of contemporary fiction, is a new sense of the intractable contradictions between the local and the international, and the stubborn persistence of forms of locally embedded material being, that refuse to be eroded […]. (Boxall 8)

*Apeirogon* is no exception as it strives to achieve a form of balance between contradictory poles, a delicate process the next – and last – part of this essay offers to study.

## Part Three – The Stakes of Storytelling

While examining these questions, Marianne Hirsch specifies a key difference between a comparative and a connective approach to culture, identity and history: "[The term connective] eschews any implications that catastrophic histories are comparable, and it thus avoids the competition over suffering that comparative approaches can, at their worst, engender." (206) Such a distinction seems particularly relevant in the case of McCann's fiction, concerned with transcultural exchanges as it is, and of *Apeirogon* in particular, given its focus on the Israeli and Palestinian experience, as well as due to the inclusion of several other national and cultural traditions in the novel. McCann's fiction may, from time to time, be considered to stray towards questionable comparison,[3] naïve universalism and what Palestinian writer and

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3    See for instance the part dedicated to Frederick Douglass in *TransAtlantic*, a part which highlights the common ground between the plights of African-American slaves and those

activist Susan Abulhawa calls "the stubborn belief that anything can be solved by the benevolent enthusiasm of well-meaning folks". Still, it does appear to be connective more than comparative, especially as allowing space and legitimacy for each voice is a recurring ethical concern for the novelist, one which he has consistently voiced and which is explicitly stated several times in the course of the novel, as in segment 273 ("Nobody wants to be expelled from history.").

Indeed, the message of the novel seems to be that everyone has the right to tell their story/ies, to make sure that the importance of their place or role in history is not erased or minimalized. In *Apeirogon*, the fear that such erasure might happen is explicitly highlighted as both a legitimate concern and as a potential hindrance for peace: "It struck him early on that people were afraid of the enemy because they were terrified that their lives might get diluted, that they might lose themselves in the tangle of knowing each other." (277) What therefore appears as the moral of the story is that retaining some sense of identity is actually crucial to being able to connect and, eventually, to transcend essentialist lines. Whether or not this is enough to save the novel from being what Abulhawa calls "another colonialist misstep" written "with a sense of solidarity and a desire to foster 'dialogue'" but exemplifying how "it is possible to do great harm with the noblest of intentions", is far beyond the reaches and purposes of this essay. What clearly stands out, however, is that the novel highlights the power of stories and storytelling, showcasing how much is at stake in the storytelling process. The latter, along with what might be called the "storylistening" process, is indeed at the core of the novel, through Rami's and Bassam's activism. McCann's focus has been on storytelling ever since the beginning of his career as a fiction writer, but this focus has distinctly sharpened since works such as *Zoli* (2006) and *TransAtlantic*, with *Apeirogon* marking the consecration of this theme.

Not only is storytelling diegetically instrumental in the stories he tells, but it also plays a defining role in the aesthetics and the ethics of his literature; Alison Garden argues that "it is able to subvert the epistemic violence of imperialism through its embodied nature; therefore storytelling can be understood as a form of anticolonial praxis and McCann's use of it strengthens the (post)colonial aesthetic of his work" (279). Garden writes these lines about *Zoli*, which told the story of a Romani poet and singer during the Second World War and the Communist regime in Eastern Europe. Along with *Dancer* (2003), which used a fictional version of Rudolf Nureyev as its prism to portray the Eastern and Western societies throughout the course of the second half of the twentieth century, *Zoli* marks a turn in McCann's fiction. The

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of the Irish population facing British rule, offering a variation on the questionable motif of what Negra calls the "flexible racial status of Irishness" (2), defined as follows by Innes: "In the context of the British Empire and the Darwinian evolutionary theory of the mid-19th century, the Irish were often seen as an in-between race, belonging not only to what Bhabha has defined as the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white' but also to the 'not quite/not black'" (14). See also Kiberd, Eagan, and Wilson.

author had always incorporated historical and social elements, in *This Side of Brightness* (1998) for instance, but also in short stories such as the ones in the collection *Everything in This Country Must* (2000), which focuses on the Northern Irish Troubles. However, since *Dancer* and *Zoli* he has started to use real people – mostly artists, as in *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), but also politicians such as Senator George Mitchell or the activist Frederick Douglass in *TransAtlantic* – to act as grounding elements around which multiple storylines expand, giving voice to characters representing those usually forgotten by history. In this general economy of McCann's corpus, opting to focus on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict can therefore be seen as simply another way for McCann to continue his investigation of the storytelling possibilities offered by the coincidences between history and fiction.

These points of confluence between stories and history, but also between stories, history, and space – which, as highlighted by the "spatial turn" in critical theory, cannot be dissociated from history – are also part and parcel of metamodernist literature, which "emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism" according to van den Akker and Vermeulen (5-6). They explain that metamodernism "oscillates between what we may call […] postmodern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections: between irony and enthusiasm, between sarcasm and sincerity, […] between deconstruction and construction and so forth" (11). This orientation is quite in keeping with the three major trends which Boxall identifies in twenty-first-century fiction, namely temporality, the real, and embodiment, resulting in literary texts expressing feelings of uncertainty about our time but also committing to the materiality of history, as they are fuelled by a fresh sense of awareness of the past as well as by the ethical obligation to bear witness to it (see Boxall 13). In order to do so,

> [r]ecent narratives take their cue from postmodernist insights and deconstructive impulses, but explore the ways in which fictionality and meta-referentiality may serve in the endeavour to reconstruct some kind of meaning that allows for intersubjective communication, for human connection and for a paradoxical authenticity. (Huber and Funk 153)

*Apeirogon*, with its fragmented form which yet suggests and encourages connection and a certain form of materiality, exemplifies this trend, much in the same way as it may be said to embody the metamodern stance and sensibility, which, according to Vermeulen and van den Akker (5), can be defined as "a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism" used to describe and interrogate the aspects and ethics of the contemporary world.

The ethics of the novel are therefore to be understood in this larger perspective; it is all the more crucial as the topics of the ethics and aesthetics of (story)telling are omnipresent in the text – especially as regards the sense of individual and cultural identity, and therefore the question of transculturalism and its potential ethical pitfalls such as blind, oppressive universalism. Another ethical concern foregrounded by the novel has to do with Rami's and Bassam's activism: they fight for reconciliation between their two peoples and as such, they frequently have to tell and re-tell the stories of their daughters' deaths. This leads them to think about and to question the

way they tell their stories (see 89, 90, 91), but also the legitimacy of their initiative: Rami wonders whether he is not, in fact, exploiting his grief (see 500). The novel also consistently tackles the theme of manipulation through artistic creation (see 260-263), especially under authoritarian political regimes, while also raising the issue of whose truth gets to be told (see segments 146 vs. 148, or 100b vs. 96b). The reader is thus frequently called on to ponder on these issues and is invited to keep a critical mind while being told a story.

While these warnings appear regularly, McCann has argued that the novel is above all a celebration of what (ethical) storytelling is and can do:

> In writing *Apeirogon*, I followed my different obsessions, and they always ended up coming back to these two girls: 13-year-old Smadar and 10-year-old Abir. And then **I started to realize that from one story is all stories**. In that way we're all complicit. **I felt it was my job as a novelist to go in and connect all the stories back towards these acts of violence that were perpetrated on these girls**. […] If I discovered anything, it's that **I had nothing to say except to reflect the stories of Rami and Bassam in a profound and poetic way so that people will look at it and be changed, shifted, curious**. (Rankin)[4]

In the light of the last part of this quotation (and of course the events that are at the origin of the story), it is no surprise that in *Apeirogon*, storytelling should often be associated with the lexical fields of violence and opening, as exemplified in segment 89:

> It was infinitesimal, yes, but something pulsed at its core, something spare, original, **nuclear**: he liked that word, *nuclear*. **The atoms of his story pressed against one another**. The force of what he wanted to say. […] He wanted to waken the sleep in his listeners. To see a **jolt** in them. **To see an eye open**. Or a lifted eyebrow. That was enough. **A crack in the wall**, he said. **A crease of doubt**. Anything.

As an example of the power of storytelling, the novel showcases Bassam's evolution from a member of the Fatah to a member of an organisation advocating for peace and reconciliation. The role of storytelling in this radical change is highlighted in segment 196: "It was only in the fourth year of his seven-year sentence – after watching a documentary in his cell – that **Bassam's balance got all knocked to hell.**" This documentary was about the Shoah, and it radically upset all of Bassam's certainties about the people he considered the Enemy. Bassam is therefore the embodiment of how an act (and/or a piece) of storytelling has the ability to create a form of dynamic, positive unbalance. The way this story is foregrounded – the details of Bassam's subsequent trajectory are told at length afterwards – hints that the message that McCann wants his novel to convey is that storytelling is essential to create connections and, thereby, a better world. This impression is reinforced by the inclusion, in segment 254, of a quotation by Freud: "Anything which creates emotional ties between human beings inevitably counteracts war." This sentence resonates with the actions of the organisations real-life Rami and Bassam take part in, the Parents' Circle and Combatants for Peace. It also finds an echo in the missions of McCann's own non-profit organisation, *Narrative 4*, which he co-created in 2012

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4    In the entire essay, unless otherwise specified, all bold type in quotations is mine.

alongside Lisa Consiglio, and whose motto is "Share today. Change tomorrow." It is described on its website as follows:

> Narrative 4 is a global organization driven by artists, shaped by educators and led by students. Our core methodology, the story exchange, is designed to help students understand that their voices, stories, actions and lives matter, and that they have the power to change, rebuild and revolutionize systems.

It aims to have children and young adults from very different backgrounds exchange stories. They are paired with another person, to whom they tell a personal story; their partner then has to re-tell the same story in the first person, and vice-versa. The organization works nationally, but also internationally, and has been focusing both on in-person, local, and remote exchange. Its aim is therefore to put transcultural, embodied empathy into practice through story exchange, in the hope of a better, common future. The novel *Apeirogon*, which focuses on Bassam and Rami who travel the world telling their daughters' stories to promote reconciliation, is thus a sort of literary companion to its author's real-life organisation, as both shine a light on the ethical potential of connection through storytelling.

## Conclusion – "It will not be over until we talk" (65)

"*Survival, in fact, is about the connection between things.*"[5] As shown in this essay, and as illustrated by the inclusion, in segment 153b, of this quotation by Edward Said, McCann's aesthetic and ethical project revolves around connection. In *Apeirogon*, the three main tools that are wielded by the author to create and promote connection are the following: first, multipolarity, with the inclusion of multiple perspectives and transdisciplinarity; second, a focus on transformative dynamics, both for the characters at the level of the plot and for the reader-citizen at the level of the real world; third, an insistence on the power of stories and inclusive storytelling.

Thus, the figure of the apeirogon, "a shape with a countably infinite number of sides" (95b), is not only used for its ability to evoke multiplicity, but also because it reflects life's potential for polymorphism. It also alludes to the endless possibility for multi-directional connection allowing to shed new light and understanding on the various parts of what is actually a whole:

> As a whole, an apeirogon approaches the shape of a circle, but a magnified view of a small piece appears to be a straight line. One can finally arrive at any point within the whole. Anywhere is reachable. Anything is possible, even the seemingly impossible. At the same time, one can arrive anywhere within an apeirogon and the entirety of the shape is complicit in the journey, even that which has not yet been imagined. (93b)

This journey is fuelled by connections, which the text celebrates while acknowledging the legitimacy of persisting differences. *Apeirogon* can thus be read as a quest – successful or not – for an ethically balanced text aiming to unbalance its readers through a kaleidoscopic (or apeirogonal) pattern of dialogue and interaction.

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5    Original italics.

The power, ethics, and aesthetics of storytelling, as well as the role of the latter in preventing conflict are foregrounded as fundamental as they provide this web of connection(s). Walter Benjamin (see 87-107 in particular) wrote that the storyteller supplies stories of experience with the aim of opening up a communal dialogue and a communal space. In this light, and in keeping with the rest of his real life and fictional work, *Apeirogon* embodies McCann's contemporary and transcultural take on Ireland's storytelling tradition.

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