Universidade de Lisboa

Faculdade de Letras

Spinning the City Wheels: how space and time mold the urban experience

Mestrado em Estudos Ingleses e Americanos

Estudos Norte-Americanos

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Dissertação especialmente elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Mestre, orientada por Margarida Vale de Gato e Susana Araújo

2022

Acknowledgments

My warmest love to all my friends and family (also my deepest apology for all the late-night rants and podcasts, I won't stop, but I'm aware of my failings). To my mommy and dad, I can only say I love you and without your love and support I could never be here. You don't understand what I do, but you were always ready to support me in any small way you could, and I could never ask for more. A special thanks to Camila and Vitoria, you believe in me more than I could possibly believe in myself, there are no words to describe my love for you. I must also thank my therapist for bearing with my many insecurities and helping me come to terms with my own limitations. Being a human with emotions can be really hard. My sincere thanks to all clerical and administrative employees, librarians, and other service workers whose labor is often forgotten or overshadowed. Without your collective effort, it would have been impossible for me to finish my degree. I also feel the need to acknowledge the women I met throughout my academic path. You showed me what I could become and so taught me the many different ways one can *look*. I can only wish to one day to be able to call you my peers.

It was at this university that I discovered what support looks like, and for that, I must thank my amazing supervisors. Even though COVID and restrictions prevented in-person meetings, it was a privilege to have you as my guides. Thank you Susana Araújo, even from the other side of the country your kindness and expertise were invaluable; besides, your theoretical work had a great influence on my research. Thank you Margarida Vale de Gato, your guidance and patience were priceless; you helped me become a better researcher and, without you, this work would not have become as rigorous as it is.

Abstract

This dissertation explores how the manipulation of time, empathy, and historical events resonate in Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* (2009). We focus on the novel's ability to weave critical interpretations of the war with dialectical perspectives of New York City. Mainly, we understand how the characters actualize their coping mechanisms into the novel's aesthetics. Borrowing concepts of history and time from David Harvey (1990), Walter Benjamin (1969), and Paul Ricoeur (2004), we attempt to understand the author's connections between form and time and how they complexify historical tensions. The historical context of the wars plays an important part in the amalgamation of form and time. The novel plays with images of the 9/11 and the changing perception of it.

The past sheds light on the present as we trace parallels to America's erasure of marginalized people and racial tensions in urban systems. Much like a living organism, the city is inherently connected to its inhabitants. This ecosystem will form and be defined by the structures of social life. Every chapter shifts its style to reflect the tensions and highlight the internal contradictions. In our close analysis of the novel, the connections between urban spaces and the characters become stronger—as do their relations with historical processes. Revolving around the city, the novel also focuses on the potential for empathetic relationships that are only possible in urban structures.

Prospects of redemption are only made possible through community and connection. Divided into three parts, the dissertation attempts to show us how the novel functions as a postmodern revision of US history. First, we touch on the effects of a particular image within the novel, Vic DeLuca's photograph. Depicting Philippe Petit's unauthorized crossing of the Twin Towers in 1974, its relationship with the text

highlights the importance of images for narrative construction. Secondly, we delve into the two female narrators' experiences of time. Intrinsically connected with urban space, this part analyzes the structures of the text and the city. Finally, we concern ourselves with the ramifications of power within the characters' narratives. Comparing two radically different experiences of the city, we envision how the systems of power can affect life, art, and family. Overviewing the effect of systematic oppression and the images employed in the novel, we attempt to understand how the novel intertwined history in its empathetic process.
Key-words: American Literature, Irish Literature, The City, War, Postcolonialism

Resumo

Esta dissertação desenvolve os efeitos da manipulação do tempo, espaço, eventos históricos e suas projeções artísticas em relação a grandes centros urbanos. Em específico, olhamos para o livro *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), explorando como Colum McCann trabalha estes aspectos em relação à cidade de Nova Iorque. O efeito dessa manipulação é caleidoscópica, mas também um convite à participação empática do leitor, reconstituindo relações entre personagens. A sombra do onze de setembro projeta-se num passado fragmentário e no quotidiano das personagens, sendo que as percepções temporais constantemente se adaptam a estas vivências. Entretanto, há uma sugestão de redenção através de sentimentos de comunidade e empatia.

A diversidade de vivências cria a textura do romance, muitas vezes dando voz às pessoas comuns. Ademais, tentamos entender como o livro se propõe expandir a representatividade de comunidades racializadas, evitando usar classes oprimidas apenas como ferramenta narrativa. Devido à pluralidade de linhas narrativas, temas e perspectivas, torna-se impossível explorar o romance na sua totalidade; portanto, faremos os devidos cortes em nosso escopo. Nosso principal foco será no prefácio, na fotografia inserida dentro do livro, e nos capítulos: "Miró, Miró, on the Wall," "This is the House that Horse built," "Parts of the Parts," "All Hail and Hallelujah" e "Roaring Seaward, and I Go."

Estes capítulos possuem grande variação em estilos, pontos de vista, tempo, espaço e até mesmo contexto histórico. O último capítulo coloca a narrativa em 2007, vinte e sete anos após a primeira parte. O romance em si é constituído por múltiplas peças montadas ao redor de um local, Nova Iorque. Sua diversidade impossibilita qualquer tentativa de resumir sua experiência narrativa, sendo

utilizadas técnicas de fragmentação que refletem a vida moderna. Não obstante, o romance cria uma experiência intimamente ligada ao contexto histórico que se retrata nas narrativas.

Através da incorporação de diferentes técnicas, o romance articula a experiência moderna em suas escolhas estéticas. Temas urbanos expõem a intenção de construir pontes entre experiências pessoais e históricas. Estas escolhas não podem ser entendidas descoladas de seus contextos de criação. O discurso que relaciona o onze de setembro com um ‘ataque à democracia' contribui para o tom justiceiro americano, colocando a invasão ao Iraque e Afeganistão como defesa aos princípios democráticos.

Ao contrário da literatura predominante no pós-queda, o escritor irlandês redireciona a sua escrita com um olhar empático para os habitantes de Nova Iorque. A experiência traumática ressoa no dia-a-dia, em pequenas e grandes ondas que atingem diferentes espaços de diferentes maneiras. Imaginar possíveis links entres os microcosmos urbanos é central para descobrirmos possibilidades de redenção. Teóricos do espaço urbano como Jane Jacobs (1961) veem diversidade de formatos, perspectivas e hábitos como oportunidades para criação. De vários modos, isto é exatamente o que tentamos ressaltar nesta dissertação: como a construção da diferença no livro reflete a construção do espaço, possibilitando faíscas de mudanças e relacionamentos.

Firmamos o nosso argumento na importância do espaço para relações empáticas e investigamos como construções imagéticas centralizam a experiência marginalizada. Para fundamentar os nossos argumentos, esta dissertação será dividida em três capítulos. Primeiramente, propomo-nos dissertar sobre a base teórica e conceitos-chaves, como, por exemplo, imagens dialéticas e o uso de

imagens dentro do livro. Tocamos nos efeitos da fotografia de Vic DeLuca para a narrativa. Retratando Philippe Petit enquanto o artista atravessa as Torres Gêmeas em 1974, a fotografia ressalta a importância de imagens para a construção da história. Quando olhamos para o prefácio, teóricos como Barthes e Butler ressurgem para nos auxiliar no melhor entendimento das variadas ressignificações imagéticas possíveis através do tempo. No prefácio, analisamos a assimilação de perspectivas históricas e suas ressignificações ao longo do texto. No fim, debruçarmos-nos sobre as construções de ponto de vista e exploramos as ressignificações da fotografia de DeLuca.

No segundo capítulo, dissecamos como o autor se apropria dos diferentes espaços urbanos na construção da cidade, atentando nas escolhas estilísticas, bem como na influência urbana nas perspectivas dos personagens e suas relações semióticas com símbolos urbanos. Nesta parte, restringimos a nossa análise aos capítulos “Miró, Miró, on the Wall” e “All Hail and Hallelujah”. Ao olharmos para este recorte, exploramos como suas narrativas experienciam o tempo. Uma vez que a temporalidade se conecta intrinsecamente com o espaço urbano, analisaremos simultaneamente as estruturas textuais e metropolitanas. Uma porção significativa da argumentação se baseia em teorias de tempo e *otherness* desenvolvidas pelos teóricos Lefebvre (2000) e Homi Bhabha (2004). Ademais, buscamos explorar como a presença da cidade ressurge e se infiltra nas vivências dos personagens, influenciando suas emoções e relações. Utilizaremos a técnica de *close reading* para refletir sobre a importância do Outro nas tentativas de superar traumas históricos. Para oferecer uma visão mais abrangente em temas do espaço público/privado, Michel de Certeau (1988) e outros teóricos do espaço urbano nos auxiliam no entendimento de como pontos de vista divergentes

representam um exercício para o olhar. Passado e presente coexistem num continuum que possibilita imaginarmos potencialidades.

A última parte trabalha com criação de imagens através de diferentes perspectivas. Descobrindo como McCann conduz o ato de olhar nos capítulos “This Is the House That Horse Built” e “Parts of the Parts”, questionamos a criação sistemática de estereótipos para promover discursos dominantes. Através de nossa análise, concluímos como o olhar judiciário é conduzido de modo a ostracizar o outro, principalmente quando levamos em conta dinâmicas de poder entre grupos marginalizados. Autores como Coplan & Goldie (2014) e Suzanne Keen (2007) se tornam fios condutores para a compreensão das relações entre personagens. Este capítulo também toca na questão de representações artísticas para grupos marginalizados, e suas ramificações na exploração histórico-urbana do texto. Nos preocupamos, especialmente, em entender as ramificações das estruturas de poder em como os personagens veem o seu local dentro deste sistema e as suas possibilidades de mudança.

Por fim, através de recortes na malha de *Let the Great World Spin,* suplementados por teorias de diversos campos, concluímos que o livro se faz fio condutor para a mudança. Através do exercício do olhar, o romance procura potencializar comunidade e *possibilidade*. Desafiando construções estáticas do passado, torna-se relevante pela sua pluralidade e poder imaginativo. Ao todo, tentamos contemplar como, através de imagens, o texto trabalha com classe e história no desenvolvimento de processos empáticos.

Palavras-chaves: Literatura americana, Literatura irlandesa; Cidade; Guerras; Pós-colonialismo.

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Introduction

National Book Award winner and author of several praised works, Colum McCann was born in Dublin and currently lives in the United States. He incorporates both American and Irish influences in his work while offering insightful perspectives on contemporaneous life and multicultural communities. With an extensive bibliography, he authored seven novels and three short story collections. All of them display marks of his itinerant life and develop themes of immigration and change. McCann lived in different parts of Europe and Asia until he finally settled down in the United States. The influences of both American and Irish culture are acutely clear, which translates into unique views of modern life and in “literary and cultural texts that do not have an ostensible Irish focus” and yet “might be situated in relation to Irish culture but also [position] Irish culture in a global context” (Tucker 110).

Published in 2009, Colum McCann’s *Let the Great World Spin* centers around multiple perspectives throughout a single day—August 7th, 1974. The novel uses a multiple-plot, multiple-voice format to demonstrate its inner web. To fictionalize Philip Petit's high-wire act is a symbolic link in and of itself. The French artist crosses the Twin Towers on a line, creating art on a site now known for its tragedy. The dialectical aspects of performative arts, the metaphor of reading/crossing the book, or even the bridge of two historical moments—past and present simultaneously inhabiting one space—permeate each aesthetic choice. A tightrope crosses two towers. A novel that links past and present times. A picture that was taken 27 years ago is ironically foreshadowing. The greater part of the novel focuses on the past: marginalized and privileged people, artistic and average

perspectives, all influenced in one way or another by Petit's crossing. It is not one single narrative that unites them, but history and the potential for change.

There is a plurality of texture in McCann's work; not only Irish and American experiences are given voice, but also Latino and African-American experiences from different social classes. Characters from different places and backgrounds populate the novel. These perspectives elicit different styles to portray their lives and the city. Due to the novel's diverse approach to storytelling, it is necessary to establish a secure base of references for our analysis. Overall, we shall rely on *Narratology* (1996), by Susana Onega and José Landa, where a critical compilation of essays offers a general theoretical sketch of technical terms. It is impossible to consider all of the inherent complexities of literary terminology within the confines of our dissertation. Therefore, to assist our readers and to establish some uniformity, some overview should be secured in the footnotes.

We shall understand how the novel goes beyond positioning oppressed groups as narrative objects. Instead, it adopts dramatized narrator-agents[1], able to express images of multiple realities—distorted by grief, racialized backgrounds, rooted in systematic oppression, and many others. The novel is composed of four Books[2] with a total of 13 chapters. First, we see an untitled preface, then Book One is composed of: "All Respect to Heaven, I Like It Here," "Miró, Miró, on the Wall," "A Fear of Love," "Let the Great World Spin Forever Down"; Book Two has: "Tag,"

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[1] Susana Onega and José Landa (1996) define Dramatized narrators in "Types of narration," by Wayne Booth, as "Most tales are presented as passing through the consciousness of a teller, whether an 'I' or a 'he'. Even in drama much of what we are given is narrated by someone, and we are often as much interested in the effect on the narrator's own mind and heart as we are in learning what else the author has to tell us. [...] In fiction, as soon as we encounter an 'I', we are conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of the experience will come between us and the event. [...] In a sense, even the most reticent narrator has been dramatized as soon as he refers to himself as an 'I', [...] But many novels dramatized their narrators with great fullness, making them into characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about. In such works, the narrator is often radically different from the implied author who creates him." (147-148)

[2] For clarification purposes, every time we refer to the novel's internal division the word book will be capitalized. When in lower case, it should be understood as a reference to the work as a whole.

”Etherwest,” “This Is the House That Horse Built,” and “The Rising Grooves of Chance”; then Book Three has: “Parts of the Parts,” “Centavos,” “All Hail and Hallelujah”; and finally, Book Four finishes with “Roaring Seaward, and I Go.” Due to the plurality of perspectives, plot lines, and themes, the exploration of the novel in its totality is impossible. Therefore, we are obliged to make some cuts within the fantastic fabric of life that is *Let the Great World Spin*. For the benefit of this analysis, we will focus on the photograph inserted within Book Two, the preface, “Miró, Miró, on the Wall,” “This is the house that Horse built,” “Parts of the Parts,” “All Hail and Hallelujah,” “Roaring Seaward, and I Go,” and, to some extent, stylized graphic signs in between Books (see Fig.4).

These chapters vary in matters of narration, point of view, time, space, and even historical background. The last chapter places the narrative in 2007—twenty-seven years after the first chapter. The novel consists more of several pieces molded together rather than a single plot line, which makes an attempt to summarize the experience of reading the whole work perpetually lacking. The stylistic choices and employment of fractured imagery reflect modern life. The modern experience, nevertheless, is intimately related to history. As the researcher Maria do Rosario Coelho (2015) points out, Irish culture is historically linked to moments of dislocation: “Many nations have faced migration and its consequences throughout history. For Ireland emigration has been an undeniable scar of displacement, loss, and loneliness. Clearly, these displacements have affected Irish society” (Coelho 28).

Let the Great World Spin addresses the dynamics of displacement in multicultural cities while framing historical events through memory and grief. Although not the center of this research, the transnational perspective largely

appears in studies of the author[3]. However, our focus is on how time and space incorporate and transform the modern ideas of displacement within the city. Comparing and analyzing some of these chapters, we become particularly interested in how the characters' empathy (consequently the readers' are empathetically engaged with them) challenge dominant ideologies, such as racism in the judiciary system and American exceptionalism.

The individualistic culture ingrained in the American system provides prolific soil for US exceptionalism (Pease 2018). The notion of being the "chosen people," excelling alone and destined to save helpless undemocratic countries, was at the core of both the Vietnam and Iraq wars. The prevalent discourse was *othering* and exploitative, reinforcing the USA's place as the "champion" of the free world. Furthermore, social segregation persisted in the domestic landscape of the United States. Both hostile external and internal policies expose a culture of estrangement towards all that is foreign to the privileged classes. Although American exceptionalism plays a large role in justifying conflicts, it is important to remember that Europe acted in a similar fashion and regurgitated some of these ideas. As we shall discuss in more detail[4], several countries supported US intervention in the Middle East, which strengthened the idea of Americans as the 'savior' of freedom.

These tensions are explicitly connected to the historical context portrayed in the novel, right after the Civil Rights Movement and just before the Watergate scandal. These disruptions interfere with how narrators incorporate time and space, which highlights how they look at others and themselves. The symbolic importance of me/other interactions resurfaces through the Twin Tower motif, it serves as a

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[3] Across the years, many scholars have looked at McCann's work through transnational lenses, including Maria do Rosario Coelho (2015) and Laura Izarra (2012). His novel *Transatlantic* (2014) is particularly notable in this regard.
[4] For more, see the first chapter of this dissertation, page 19.

metaphor of two verticals/individuals connecting. The high-rope artist draws a thin line between the towers, an image reinforced by the photo present in the middle of the novel (see Fig. 2). Just as the buildings stand tall and connected by the iron line, the characters search for something to link them to each other. Some fundamental concepts to further our discussions in this regard are Walter Benjamin's idea of redemption and dialectical images. In our first chapter, we reflect on these concepts and expand on how they enable us to look at the novel with dialectical eyes. The role of the image and representation of others in books such as *Let the Great World Spin*, where perspectives and narrators change constantly, play a central part in understanding aesthetic choices.

For our historical approach, we adopt Ricoeur's (1994) conceptualization of time as an essential element for storytelling – focusing on time and experience as fluctuating aspects throughout the narration. Humans develop their idea of time at the moment they are able to communicate their past, differentiating *now* time from prior or later time; this establishes a rupture in the moment of enunciation. Therefore, understanding time also means investigating how time is told and how narratives are constructed. To account for those processes, history appears as a tool to register the past. However, there are complications to be considered in the treatment of history. As the novel blurs the lines between historical and narrated time, a differentiation in how the past is perceived is imperative. Aleida Assmann (2008) distinguishes between "institutions of active memory [that] preserve the *past as present* [and] the institutions of passive memory [that] preserve the *past as past*" (98). This difference becomes more evident when we take into account the object inserted in the novel, an old photograph. It does not belong to active memory, defined as works of art and museums, but rather at the opposite end of the spectrum: "cultural relics. These are

not unmediated; they have only lost their immediate addressees; they are de-contextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning" (Assmann 99). The photo assumes the role of an accident and is open to new contexts or interpretations.

By and large, the book's relationship with history is one heavily influenced by present notions. Not only does the author not deny the influence of his position in time but he leans into it. The very composition of the novel highlights the importance of standpoint and placement in time and space. In many ways, when David Hull (1979) states that,

> [h]istories are written not only by people and about people but also for people. The people about whom history is written lived in the past, but the historian and his readers live in the present. No purpose is served by pretending otherwise (Hull 5)

his words apply to McCann's reimaginations of past events as well. Another instance where Hull's reflections are relevant is:

> The point I wish to emphasize is that one way of eliminating the biases introduced into our understanding of past science by our knowledge of current science is not by ignoring the fact that we do understand certain areas of present-day science. If a historian knows anything about the science of his day, and it is difficult to see how that can be avoided, he would be wise to become very clear about his views so that he does not allow them to color his reading of early science. (Hull 7)

The impossibility of accounting for the past without interference from the present leads Hull to defend a conscientious approach to its point of view. The manner in which the author incorporates historical events into the book's fabric

encourages a dialectical reading of history. As we argue in the following chapters, the shift of perspectives, the appearance of photographic proof, and the latent trauma of the war push the historical context to more than background noise. As Guy Debord (1997) poses,

> L'histoire a toujours existé, mais pas toujours sous sa forme historique. La temporalisation de l'homme, telle qu'elle s'effectue par la médiation d'une société, est égale à une humanisation du temps. Le mouvement inconscient du temps se manifeste et *devient vrai* dans la conscience historique (Debord 103)

As Debord explains, society mediates readings of time and history, it is only through narration that time can be conceptualized. The movement of time evolves alongside our historical consciousness. The manner in which one can formulate time is irreparably partial. The novel subscribes to the notion of *historical construction*, which necessarily points to the present time impacting historical outlooks. It is with eyes corrupted by the present that we look at the past. In many ways, our approach resembles the intersection proposed by Alon Confino (2008) in "Memory and the History of Mentalities," where

> [t]hinking of memory in association with the history of mentalities invites the scholar to give memory a certain anarchic quality that will take it beyond the sphere of ideas, ideology, and state and public representations, and into the ways people acted, shaped, internalized, and changed images of the past. (81)

Shining light on narratives constructed around the event, we focus on discourses instead of diving deeper into the significance of places of memory.[5] Together with space, history actively affects the urban experience. The text creates a maze of intersecting and connected avenues, much like a city neighborhood. The streets merge different experiences to give us a glimpse of life. In our first chapter, we shall deepen the problematics of how past and present intersect in the novel's imagery.

Through the incorporation of different techniques, the book articulates modernity in its aesthetic choices. The urban themes expose the author's intention to construct a bridge between historical and personal experiences—conflicting focalizers[6], variations in distance[7], and spatial reconstructions amount to the tools employed for this effect. Nevertheless, some research on the implementation of these techniques is necessary to establish possible outcomes. As David Harvey poses in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990),

> Even when contained by planning regulations or oriented around public investments, corporate capital still had a great deal of power. And where corporate capital was in command (especially in the United States), it

[5] The field of space and memory became exceptionally prolific in the late twentieth-century, much due to contributions of theorists such as Pierre Nora and his masterful work *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1984). He developed concepts such as the *places of memory* where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists" (NORA 7).

[6] Focalization is the relationship between the 'vision', the agent that sees, and that which is seen. [...] Character-bound focalization (CF) can vary, can shift from one character to another. In such cases, we may be given a good picture of the origins of the conflict. We are shown how differently the various characters view the same facts. This technique can result in neutrality towards all the characters. Nevertheless, there usually is never a doubt in our minds which character should receive the most attention and sympathy. On the grounds of distribution, for instance the fact that a character focalizes the first and/or the last chapter, we label it the hero(ine) of the book. (Onega & Landa 119)

[7] Whether or not they are involved in the action as agents or as sufferers, narrators and third-person reflectors differ markedly according to the degree and kind of distance that separates them from the author, the reader, and the other characters of the story. [...] 1. The narrator may be more or less distant from the implied author. [...] 2. The narrator also may be more or less distant from the characters in the story tells. [...] 3. The narrator may be more or less distant from the reader's own norms; for example, physically and emotionally (Kafka's The Metamorphosis) (Onega & Landa 151)

> could happily appropriate every modernist trick in the architecture's book to continue that practice of building monuments that soared ever higher as symbols of corporate power. (Harvey 70-71)

Any serious research on aesthetics is responsible for carefully reflecting on how innovations are appropriated and applied within the work of art. Stylistic choices should not be understood as isolated from the environment and context of their creation. When dealing with pivotal emblems of American power, such as the Twin Towers and Manhattan, the perspective adopted and the concessions made affect the final result. These elements are charged with culturally shaped emotions, as we will see in greater detail throughout the dissertation. The incorporation of 'aesthetic tricks' to amplify traumatic aspects of the event serves a particular narrative, especially when considering the subsequent wars.

The idea that the terrorist attack was an "attack on democracy" contributes to a righteous tone toward the Iraq-Afghanistan wars, justifying the invasion as a defense of democracy. Nevertheless, an interesting feature of life after the fall was the sense of normalcy as the focus was on the event instead of the war. As the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, poses, "the problem is that the US is not in a state of war. For the large majority, daily life goes on and war remains the business of state agencies. [...] We are entering a time in which a state of peace itself can be at the same time a state of emergency" (Zizek 2006). Five years later, works of art were filled with depictions of pain that built an aura around the event; mythologizing the attack would feed into nationalist ideas and endorse bellicose discourses. A number of critical essays debated the ethics of war, its role in US propaganda and the weaponization of suffering.

Let the Great World Spin, on the other hand, shifts the focus to New York City and its inhabitants. The war's othering characteristics reverberate in everyday life, in small and large spaces, in the past and in the present. Aesthetic choices reflect the pain and desire to build community. They differentiate the novel from other early post-9/11 narratives as "there is no healing or forgetting, but people manage to move on, putting aside their own traumas and living their lives as best as they can. Colum McCann depicts ways of coming to terms with one's own drama, and in all of his texts the presence of the group is vital for this" (Coelho 102). When we look at the novel's aesthetics, empathy emerges as a conscious choice. The galaxy of universes within the city ignites our imagination, as Amy Coplan explains in *Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions* (2004),

> [e]mpathy requires the empathizer to bring a characterization to bear on his or her imaginative process. This characterization will include facts about the target's character, emotions, moods, dispositional tendencies, and life experience, and will serve as a background to the imaginative project. (146)

This becomes especially evident through an attentive reading of the characters' rich characterization. Each chapter immerses us into a universe, the possibilities born through their shared experiences create a prolific space for empathy. Some scholars, such as Maria do Rosario Coelho (2015) and Eóin Flannery (2011) do a great job of studying McCann's aesthetics toward a redemptive modern experience. His use of empathy appears in several studies; however, in this dissertation, we aim at appreciating how empathy particularly manifests in the depiction of space and how characters move through it.

As Jane Jacobs (1961) argues in “Salvaging Projects,” connection is a key element in city reform: “the general aim should be to bring in uses different from residence because lack of enough mixed uses is precisely one of the causes of deadness, danger, and plain inconvenience” (Jacobs 395). Reimagining links to inhabited universes within projects is crucial to redeeming these places. Diversity in shapes, perspectives, and habits assists in the reshaping of the city. Jacobs sees plurality as an opportunity for creation. As she argues throughout her book, cities that avoid difference tend to create even more segregation among their citizens. In many ways, that is exactly what we try to highlight in this dissertation—how the novel’s display of difference reflects on space, enabling the characters to find the possibility for change.

In *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), Suzanne Keen affirms that one should not “assume from the outset that empathy for fictional characters necessarily translates into what Stephen Pinker calls ‘nicer’ human behavior” (xxv). Instead, she asks “whether the effort of imagining fictive lives, as George Eliot believed, can train a reader’s sympathetic imagining of real others in her actual world” (ibid.). Imagination, the ability to form images in the mind, is directly linked to our ability to change. Connecting with others through empathetic lenses bears little resemblance to moral dogmas of "goodness,” but rather paves the way for community and companionship. Through an exercise of imagination, the novel envisions a type of connection that enables characters to break with their traumatic patterns. An advocate for community, bell hooks (2010) puts “love as the foundation of all social movements for self-determination” and “the only way we create a world that domination and dominator thinking cannot destroy. Anytime we do the work of love we are doing the work of ending domination” (176).

We stake our argument on the importance of space for empathetic relations and investigate how the novel's imagery challenges our reading of time. In order to lay the foundation for these arguments, the dissertation shall be divided into three chapters. First, we attempt to express some of the theoretical framework and core concepts, such as dialectical images, by comparing perspectives and the use of pictures within the novel. When looking at the book's preface, Barthes' and Butler's theories on time and photography help us to better interpret Vic DeLuca's photograph (see Fig. 2) and the variable resignifications it suffers throughout time. Along with the preface, we also account for the assimilation of historical perspectives and their resignifications throughout the text. Finally, we overview the construction of urban points of view and past and present co-existence in the same continuum, all enabling sparks of possibility

In the second chapter, we dissect McCann's appropriation of space in the city's construction—stylistic choices, how the city shapes perspectives, and even the semiotic relations with urban symbols. Restricting the majority of the analysis to the sections "Miró, Miró, on the Wall" and "All Hail and Hallelujah," this part of the dissertation makes use of Lefebvre's and Homi Bhabha's theories on time and otherness. We attempt to explore how the city's presence appears and intertwines with the characters' emotions and their relationships with each other. In this part, we reflect on the importance of otherness in overcoming historical trauma. To offer greater insight into themes of private and collective spaces, Michel de Certeau (1988) and other important theorists assist us with how divergent points of view represent an exercise in looking.

The last chapter deals with the creation of imagery through different perspectives. Understanding how McCann conducts the process of looking in the

chapters “This Is the House That Horse Built” and “Parts of the Parts” leads us to question the ways in which stereotypes systematically tint our perceptions and promote dominant discourses. In our analysis, we take into account how the judiciary system promotes the ostracization of the other. The theater-like space upholds power dynamics between marginalized groups and the judges. Coplan and Goldie (2014) and Suzanne Keen (2007) become leading forces in our comprehension of the characters’ interactions. This chapter also touches on the role of artistic manifestation and its ramifications on the text's exploration of history and the city. In other words, we search to understand the effects of power on how the characters see their place in the system and their autonomy for making change happen.

Steering away from the regurgitation of middle-class anxieties, McCann decentralizes his storytelling. The search for companionship, which is at the heart of the novel’s composition, appears throughout our argument. Connection appears in spite of class or background in multilayered, complex ways. Each formulation presents a perspective, and the narrations acknowledge the influence of space and point of view. However, through artistic endeavors, time and space bridge people when similarity is scarce. Art becomes a tool for redeeming connections. More than that, space influences and molds reality; the potentiality for connection and change is expressed in every part of the city.

1. Spinning urban time and dialectic images

Walter Benjamin explores two fundamental concepts for our analysis while discussing history, modernity, and the cosmopolitan experience: dialectical images and redemption. He reflects on these subjects throughout his work, but more prominently in “Paris, The Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” “On the Concept of History,” and “One-Way Street”—all essays present on either *Illuminations* (1969) or *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings vol. 1 and 2* (1999). Most notably, Benjamin’s (1969) text on history brings the following affirmation:

> In other words, our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption *[Erloesung]*[8]. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. (254, emphasis mine)

The word *Erloesung* can be translated as redemption, but also as resurrection or transfiguration. *Redemption* is connected, therefore, to something brought back to life or given a second form of expression. In Benjamin’s view, past and happiness share the common link of possibility; both hold ways to transmute reality. Redemption is closely associated with historical time, as allegorical contemplation aims at the ruination of things so that it can, in its redemptive moment, construct a new whole out of elements of the old (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). In order to revisit History and ignite the construction of redemptive narratives, the writer must find a temporal index. Discussions on literary features that enable transfiguration could lead to more metaphysical readings of history, detaching

[8]The translator uses “redemption” and does not offer the German word in the original version.

the potentiality for change from the material world. However, as Richard Wolin would suggest in his book *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (1994):

> Benjamin accurately identifies the contradictions of the notion of a "poetic politics" ("Anything rather than that!" he mockingly interjects), which deludes itself into believing a mobilization of aesthetic powers alone would be capable of changing the world. [...] His role is that of shattering the affirmative semblance of universal harmony and well-being promoted by the bourgeois "image-sphere" and simultaneously assisting in the production of a radically new image-sphere in which the contours of the realm of freedom are prefigured. Yet, this necessitates a break with the “metaphysical materialism” of surrealist aesthetics and the transition to a more thoroughly profane “anthropological materialism,” which aims not at the creation of an otherworldly, transcendental reality, but the practical transformation of reality in the here and now. (134-135)

In his analysis, the writer points to a transition from a subconscious aesthetic to a more materialistic approach. Wolin attempts to explain a transition in Benjamin’s work and to clarify how his vision translates into redemptive features. If we are to agree with the proposed reading, Benjamin searches to distance us from an ‘otherworldly’ or transcendental view to a more grounded understanding of experience. He emphasizes the political role of aesthetics and its potentiality for change, mainly concerning Dialectical Images.

The concept of Dialectical Images appears in several Benjaminian works and could be best translated as a flashing image of the past which aims to shed light on the *now*. As stated in *The Arcades Project* (1999), “Here, this occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the

appearance of dialectics in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image" (Benjamin 10). To call it a 'dream image' is not to associate the concept with the unconscious manifestation generally regarded as dreams, but to link it to the essential amount of imagination needed to think of new possibilities. To provoke the artist into shedding light on what has been, to welcome into the present the galvanized events of the past. In this way, the "now" is itself experienced as in the 'then;' as its distillation, which justifies the leading motif of "precursors" in the text (Benjamin xii). There is a perspective shift on events, the past is not even the past. Nevertheless, as fugacious as it is necessary, this shift expands the construction of possibilities. In other words, we could understand these images as "actualized"—in Benjamin's words—moments of the past that help us re-imagine the present. They capture the powers of spiritual intoxication in order to produce a "revelation," an insight that goes beyond the empirical reality; to produce a vision without resorting to spiritual devices and remaining within the bounds of possibility (Wolin 1994).

The redemption of experience is, therefore, connected to the potentiality of bringing forward *possibility* through art. The work of art, however, should aspire to go beyond criticizing or proposing easy solutions. One should search in the past for these images, as we shall see in Colum McCann's novel, and renew our perspective on current scenes. The past can expand our grasp on events and, if we consider repetitive events, how it still represents unresolved issues. For example, significant parallels appear when looking at the historical periods treated in the novel.

The act of taking a step back in order to understand the present time is a recurrent theme in McCann's work. In *Let the Great World Spin*, we go back to the seventies to better understand present events. The majority of the novel

concentrates on the farther past, 1974, with only the last chapter coming closer to the present, set in 2007. Time splits only to be rewoven, tensions reignited and amplified, calling attention to the cyclical nature of war politics. In this context,

> [...] we encounter the tragedy of modernity once more, but this time stabilized by the fixed point of monuments that incorporate and preserve a 'mysterious' sense of collective memory. The preservation of the myth through ritual 'constitutes a key to understanding the meaning of monuments and, moreover, the implications of the founding of cities and of the transmissions of ideas in an urban context.' The task of the architect, in Rossi's view, is to participate 'freely' in the production of 'monuments' expressive of collective memory, while also recognizing that what constitutes a monument is itself a mystery [...] (HARVEY 85)

When the novel incorporates the twin towers it plays with the notion of monuments and our collective memory associated with them. If there is an agreement between generations where the present is always aware of the coming future (Benjamin 1969), then the construction of these monuments comes as an attempt to incorporate the past into the present. Monuments signal a degree of righteousness or grandeur—be it a great historical figure or suffering—that pleads to be remembered. In the case of the Twin Towers, we have a monument in the collective memory that lingers because of its absence. Although the construction of The National 9/11 Memorial appears as a reminder of the old buildings, it does not highlight the missing buildings, but the historical event and the associated suffering. The production of monuments in honor of the fall, nevertheless, reveals a collective intention towards the fall. The novel recalls this ever-present ghost of the war in its subject matter, its stylistic choices, and its employment of imagery. The physical

space serves as axis between times—a place resignified by time. The ways in which the author braids together these periods within the text's fabric should appear further ahead; we shall establish the background in which the book was created first.

On the one hand, we are positioned at the end of the Vietnam War, with the rise of anti-war opinion and strong opposition towards the government, with public protests such as rallies, teach-ins, and others. The war would officially end in 1975; Nixon dealt with public hostility at least since the Invasion of Laos (1971), which escalated until the departure of American troops in 1973. The failure of the Vietnam war, together with the Watergate Scandal, led to Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974—an event directly mentioned in the chapter "A Fear of Love."

On the other hand, in the last part of the book, the narration follows Claire and Gloria's adopted daughter, Jaslyn[9], in a post-9/11 world. Memory is brought forward through a photo of Philipe Petit crossing. Jaslyn ruminates on the link between historical events and her personal story, the ways in which "one scrap of history meets a larger one" (McCann 326). As we observe in more detail in the following chapters, her family's journey is one of the threads that guide the reader into empathetic perspectives. The first three Books are set in 1974, while the last follows Jaslyn in 2007. The time gap indicates the relation between the seventies, the attack to the World Trade Center, and the "war on terror." As stated by James Lebovic, the parallels between the wars can be drawn on political leaderships as well:

> [...] public support is connected, but loosely, to the actions of US leaders. True, President Nixon reduced US reliance on the draft to quell public

[9] For clarity reasons the last narrator's name will be written as Jaslyn while the hooker who died in the car accident will be written as Jazzlyn. Both characters share the same name up until the last chapter, where the narrator indicates that she changed her name in adulthood.

outrage against US involvement in the Vietnam War, just as President Obama realized the opportunity in reducing the US troop presence in Afghanistan. [...] Yet presidential action (and inaction) during the Iraq and Vietnam Wars suggest that political leaders can act with little regard for current public support. (Lebovic 54)

As Lebovic highlights, public opinion might have been against American interference; nevertheless, it had little influence on US military decisions (Katz 1997). In both the Vietnam and Iraq, the public regarded the outcome of the wars as generally negative; from its high costs to taxpayers to the great number of casualties (see Fig. 1). The sentiment was present from the start, there was no popular endorsement of the wars throutghout the years of battle. This was a common occurrence in international politics, including in many European countries. As an Irish writer, McCann is highly aware of these relationships, and how international support worked to legitimize the war. Despite protests, several governments, including Portugal, kept their support for the Afghanistan war, and Nixon's intervention in Vietnam (RTP Arquivos 1971). In the now infamous Cimeira dos Azores encounter, the Portuguese Prime Minister Durão Barroso, Tony Blair (Prime Minister of England), and José Maria Aznar (Spain) met George W. Bush to solidify their transatlantic endorsement of the war and Iraq invasion. England, among other countries, had great public demonstrations against the war (The National Archives 2020)—both against USA intervention and the UK's support of the US troops. February of 2003 was marked by several anti-war protests worldwide; rallies occurred in several European cities including Dublin (estimates vary between 80,000 to 150,000 protesters), Berlin (one of the largest demonstrations in several decades), and Rome—considered the largest anti-war rally in the world (Guinness World

Records 2003) under the slogan "Stop the war; no ifs or buts" (Institute for Policy Studies 2013). The lack of care for public demonstrations, however, created a hostile environment between the power and the people. In the novel, social tensions appear in different moments; several chapters display conservative or radical positions, sometimes even indifference. However, instead of focusing on the character's particular stand, we will try to comprehend how the novel set the mood for these constructions—particularly in the *preface.*

This chapter has no title and is not included within the novel's Books, serving as an introduction or preface to the novel itself. It describes Petit's performance through a dramatized-observer[10] narration. Despite not embodying a specific focalizer, the text avoids broad and omniscient descriptions, prioritizing details and the small nuances of everyday life. We are transported to a chaotic New York of expectancy. The author creates a feeling of suspension—the moment when you hold your breath and wait for the resolution. As we can observe in the following excerpts:

> Those who saw him hushed. On Church Street. Liberty. Cortland. West Street. Fulton. Versey. It was a silence that heard itself, awful and beautiful. [...] Others figured it might be the perfect city nike—stand around and point upward, until people gathered, tilted their heads, nodded, affirmed, until all were staring upward at nothing at all [...] But the longer they watched, the surer they were. (McCann 3)

[10] Among dramatized narrators there are mere observers (the 'I' of *Tom Jones*, *The Egoist*, *Troilus and Criseyde*), and there are narrators-agents, who produce some measurable effect on the course of events. [...] Clearly, any rules we might discover about observers may not apply to narrators-agents, yet the distinction is seldom made in talks about point of view. [...] Cutting across the distinction between observers and narrator-agents of all these kinds is the distinction between self-conscious narrators aware of themselves as writers, and narrators or observers who rarely if ever discuss their writing chores or who seem unaware that they are writing, thinking, speaking, or 'reflecting' a literary work. (Onega & Landa 150)

The expectation generated by this strange scene throughout the chapter brings an acceleration. It divides the observers, and, for a single moment, they experience a collective feeling of breathlessness—as evidenced by the cut sentences with street names and parts of the cities. The narration begins by stating that those who could see it were silenced by that strange vision, a unanimous feeling among a selected few. The people are thunderstruck. Tensions divide and unify the audience throughout the chapter.

The first cracks appear in the division between those too busy with city life and those hypnotized by "the man in the sky." The latter stand in silence and "even when they cursed, it was done quietly, reverently" (McCann 4). At first, the description is almost religious, as if people were struck by some divine intervention. Their previous instinct to dismiss the event as a prank is abandoned in the name of awe sentiment as they gape heavenward. This moment of rupture, and many others throughout the novel, is characterized as a religious experience. The theme of religion, mainly in the context of Irish studies, is a complex subject for research; however, in this dissertation, for matters of viability, we will not cover the possibilities the novel offers. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out as a potential matter. For logistical reasons, we shall pursue how the desire for community appears as a desire for unity within plural perspectives.

Uncertainty glues the spectators on the spot. As the narration collects street names and professions, men and city become one—"[...] Woolworth Building. Lawyers. Elevator openers. Doctors. Cleaners. Prep chefs. Diamond merchants. Fish sellers. Sad-jeaned whores. [...] Sandwichboard men. Cardsharks. Con Ed. Ma Bell. Wall Street. A locksmith in his van on the corner of Dey and Broadway" (McCann 4). People are only recognized by their labor and even then, as the use of

plural forms indicates, each one is individualized while concomitantly generalized as a professional group. Citizens are described in a contrastive economic division of labor, which places more importance on their function within society than on their individuality (Izarra 82). The moment the narrator singles out one specific person, in the last sentence, it occurs by evidencing the place, which furthers the fusion between city and people.

Our impression of unity is questioned when the watchers start to discuss the man's intentions, as they digest the experience and give it a narrative form. Here we have the city observing a high-wire artist crossing the space between the twin towers. The real-life unauthorized feat, known as “le coup," consisted of a 45-minute performance where the French man walked four hundred meters above the ground on an iron cable.In the book, their interpretation of the act—a man standing on the edge of the World Trade Center rooftop—ranges from terrorist attacks to elaborate capitalist advertising. They are unable to affirm with certainty the artist's aim. The watchers become restless, the antagonizing groups engage in rivalry over the mysterious figure's destiny, highlighted when some shout “Do it, asshole!” and others “Don't do it!”(McCann 7), the narrator even elaborates in “They were jazzed now. Pumped. The lines were drawn” (McCann 7). At their peak, however, they are fooled into believing the man jumped—only to discover it was a T-shirt flying in the wind—and again the tension rises and they are compelled into a unit; the author concludes:

> [...] the waiting had been made magical, and they watched as he lifted one dark-slipped foot, like a man about to enter warm gray water. The watchers below pulled in their breath all at once. The air felt suddenly

> shared. The man above was a word they seemed to know, though they had not heard it before. Out he went. (McCann 7)

When the group notices their error, those who did and those who didn't cheer for the man's death have the opportunity to take a step back and return to their previous state. Thunderstruck by the sight in front of them, again, they hold their breaths in anticipation. After high emotions peak and come full circle, an unnamed feeling assaults the watchers—a *word* potent enough to assail and unify everyone that saw the man. A sort of paralysis due to expectation freezes them.

There is a constant movement of approximation and distancing between poles. A continuous swing is observable throughout the preface and the work as a whole. We begin with the public in a dazzled state, sometimes skeptical, when first confronted with a disruptive element—their daily routine broken by an unexpected vision. At first, the image is enough to stop the movement of life as the workers stop to watch, which consequently stops the city itself. The parallel between the street and its people is continuous and reflects the breaking point of the first immobilization. The city is responsible for waking the hypnotized watchers. People start to talk and raise their spirits after the sounds of a siren, "A change entered the air all around the watchers and—now that the day had been made official by the sirens—there was a chatter among them" (McCann 5). The city sets the tempo, it lords people's day from start to end, which influences the rhythm of their lives. However, just as the ambulance sound increases and decreases along a road, the story's motion raises only to propel us to another stop. The uncertainty and sensation of unreality permeate people's minds in the closing paragraph, where we envision the tensions between urban and human pace. The conflict points to a return to suspension, as

seen in the chapter’s first part, and it is this anticipation that ignites the beginning of Book One.

A megalopolis as populated as New York City is a vivid image of movement and fast-paced lives. On that note, no other neighborhood could embody such an intense pace as the Financial District. The economic powerhouse of the North-American system, Wall Street, represents the soul of capitalist ideals. The neighborhood plays a deliberate part in the tensions within the story. After 9/11, New York's south became a symbol of resistance to terrorism; notwithstanding, the city was embroiled in an internal war long before the Twin Towers fell. Nixon propelled racial tensions during its era with the “war on drugs” and its dealings with The Black Panthers. When the watchers express their confusion about Petit’s intentions, they cleanly display their fear of otherness—“[...] that he’d taken hostages, he was Arab, a Jew, a Cypriot, an IRA man [...]” (McCann 5) —, the heavy influence and importance of advertisement—“[...] that he was just a publicity stunt, a corporate scam [...]” (McCann 5) —, and the latent political anxiety—“ [...] that he was a protester [...] like some giant piece of sky laundry—NIXON OUT NOW! REMEMBER ‘NAM, SAM! INDEPENDENCE FOR INDOCHINA” (McCann 6). Indeed, the accumulation of struggles leaves the watchers confused, filling the air with chaotic energy that leads people to extremities, or to be “pumped.”

The historical context interpolates with narrated time[11]. Before diving further into the topic of historical time and narrative, we need to look at Bakhtin's understanding of the term chronotope:

> In literary artistic chronotope, spatial, and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (Bakhtin 86)

In many ways, Colum McCann[12] attempts to do just that. The novel investigates how the passage of time shapes reality on both an individual and historical level. Understanding how the author forges time into the different narratives is one of our aims in this dissertation. The historical context is not just the background of the events; it creates tensions, shapes the city and the characters, and, at times, a ghost. Throughout the novel, the city of New York becomes alive and

[11] Bearing in mind Ricoeur's "The time of narrating and narrated time," we must separate time into three categories, "Utterance, statement, world of the text—to which correspond a time of narrating, the narrated time, and a fictive experience of time projected by the conjunction/disjunction between the time it takes to narrate and narrated time. [...] narrating is, to use an expression borrowed from Thomas Mann, 'setting aside' (*aussparen*), that is, both choosing and excluding. We should thus be able to submit to scientific investigation the various mode of 'folding' (*Raffung*) by means of which the time of narrating is separated from narrated time. [...] What we are measuring, under the name of *Erzählzeilt* [fictive experience of time, or pace], is, as a matter of convention, a chronological time, equivalent to the number of pages and lines in the published work [...] anticipations and flashbacks, the interlinkings that enable the memory of vast stretches of time to be included in brief narrative sequences, [creates] the effect of perspectival depth, while breaking up the chronology. We move even further away from a strict comparison between lengths of time when, to flashbacks, are added the time of remembering, the time of dreaming, and the time of the reported dialogue [...] What is it, then, that inspires in this way to transition from the analysis of the measurement of time-spans to an evaluation of the more qualitative phenomenon of contraction? It is the relation of the time of narration to the time of life through narrated time. (Onega & Landa 130-133)

[12] In our Introduction we offer a brief summary of the author's life for reference in order to understand the context of the book's creation. However, from this moment on it is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with the novel's implied author. One of the premises in this dissertation is that the author is always an abstract construction voluntarily or involuntarily made up for the purposes of composing a specific narrative, an "implied author." When referring to *McCann*, we are commenting on the collective choices made in *Let the Great World Spin*'s construction. A work of art is composed by different voices, and "the speaker [..] is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies. 'Narrator' is usually taken to mean the 'I' of a work, but the 'I' is seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist" (Booth 73).

the different focuses create a myriad of city images. Space becomes responsive, and each chapter conditions our reading of events—which the preface highlights well in its formalistic choices.

The narrator engages with New York inhabitants, he zooms in and out of the crowd antics and moves along the city streets. The focus in constant movement, the whole city below becomes the focalized object[13]. Soon the crowd on the streets cheers for an outcome in regard to Pierre's crossing. They collectively try to explain their reality. The intensity of the narration finds its peak when it merges the emotions of the city and the crowd in a one-page-long paragraph. Sirens, together with a helicopter, walkie-talkies, and other classical symbols of city life, appear in the lengthy paragraph associated with people's hearts and emotions. With no pause, the narration occurs in one single sentence—only to conclude with a "Do it, asshole!". The absence of a final stop contributes to the sensation of exhilarating speed. The author's stylistic choice to lengthen the sentence while describing the city corroborates for the sense of speed as it gives the reader no breath—no time to stop.

The metropolitan pace of life is criticized in subtle statements when the narrator misquotes the saying 'another day, another *dollar'* for "Another day, another *dolor*" (McCann 4). The text emphasizes psychological effects while criticizing major cities' overly economic logic. In this context, the story's location becomes a key component for analysis. The Financial Districts incorporate all the aspects of modernity the author attempts to question. The relationship between different city

[13] The combination of the focalizor and a focalized object can be constant to a large degree, or it can vary greatly. Research into such fixed or loose combinations is of importance because the image we receive of the object is determined by the focalizer. [...] Without appearing to do so, this presentation interprets. This is clear from the use of metaphors, which points to the fact that the CF attempts to reduce the object it sees, which impresses it a great deal, to human, everyday proportions.In this way, the CF is undoubtedly trying to fit the object into its own realm of experience (Onega & Landa 122)

sectors reverberate throughout the entire novel, which highlights New York's diversity in perspective and lifestyles. Their motivations and personal histories come together in order to reveal possibilities and diverse urban narratives. In this sense, the single chapter considers the moment of interruption as an opportunity to evaluate the relationship between these multiple existences surrounding megalopolises. Furthermore, there are metalinguistic elements which make us look at the preface as a holding-your-breath moment, the second before the walker goes on running. The chapter's position mimics the position of the readers in regards to the entire book—just as the watchers overflow with expectation, so does the reader. The symmetries between the readers' experience while reading and the reality of the New Yorkers are intentional, and shed light on features we observe in the work as a whole.

As the researcher Laura Izarra (2012) contemplates in her essay "Let the Great Narrative Spin: A Poetics of Relations,"

> [...] McCann's readers engage in creative perceptions for which we currently have no definitions as we are immersed in a routine that does not allow us to discover new orders. The coherent interplay of elements of McCann's narrative results in an aesthetic perception of the wholeness of that specific moment when the city stops in order to look up at the sky [...] (the city life) is a unified totality within the dynamics of the transitory moment when senses become null due to strong antagonistic reactions to the unexpected. (Izarra 83)

As the stylistic choices strengthen the rapid pace, the city people mimic the swift mood of urban life in its brevity. The book fortifies the notion of momentary attachment when it creates a network from the perspective of brief acquaintances.

Different characters living in the same city perceive time in a plural pattern. As Izarra points out, the encounters between strangers on the streets reveal “the impersonality hidden behind swearwords [...] when ‘perfect strangers touched one another on the elbows’ (McCann 5) and turned to one another and began to speculate” (Izarra 82). The professor argues that the use of “Wow or a Gee-whiz or a Jesus H. Christ” (McCann 4), as their first reaction to Petit’s intrusion in their routine, serves as an introduction to a proper New Yorker style of addressing. The astonishment and dazzlement before this ‘shadow in the sky’ make us pause at the frenetic pace of life. When this pause assumes an uncomfortable length, the city itself calls for movement and awakens the watchers with its sirens (Izarra 84).

The collective, represented by the urban area, and the individuality of each citizen are constantly sewn together. As observed previously, the city and the watchers stop when the Frenchman crosses, performing his work of art—“a moment uncreated. Another kind of wake” (McCann 164). The moment provokes a mismatch within the core of the Financial District. The small choices made in the characterization of these small organisms highlight the disruption of a city constantly assaulted by distractions. The energetic feeling expected from a global megalopolis is clear in passages such as “Sure, there were some who ignored the fuss, who didn’t want to be bothered. It was forty-seven in the morning and they were too jacked up for anything but a desk, a pen, a telephone” (McCann 4). Nevertheless, Philip Petit’s actions galvanize people's lives.

The narrator scorns those who continue to follow the metropolis’ rhythm. His remarks on their disproportionate care for minor office material while something extraordinary happens outside of their bubble indicate disagreement with this behavior. After that, he concludes with his dolar/dolor (McCann 4) misquote, to

assert the link between office life and economic values, both emblems to the American stock market lifestyle. The word *dolor* is defined as the mental state of suffering or anguish, generally associated with grief (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*), a recurrent feeling in different moments of the novel. To link feelings of loss with the context of the Vietnam War points to the constant news of dead soldiers and the hopelessness that surrounded their families. On the one hand, every day there were death reports, and the quote takes a concrete interpretation; on the other, associating their deaths with money, highlights the connection between power and war. Evidence of an alliance between money, war, and the media appears in several instances throughout the book.

Another evidence of the insatiable pace in modern cities is the hyperfocus on minor activities, which prevents people from disconnecting from the urban rhythm. Therefore individuals are deprived of the ability to convey the experience in a meaningful way. According to Wolin, Benjamin underlined this praxis when commenting on the immanent "shocks" to modern life—"The man on the street betrays the symptoms of this fate no less than the worker on the assembly line: the behavior of both has become strictly regimented, stripped of its individuality, and rendered homogenous" (Wolin 233). In the text, we are able to observe the effect of modernity on these figures; they have drowned in their office habits and are so accommodated to the 'shocks' that they become unaffected by the artistic performance. Their experience intertwines with the materiality of financial transactions, the dollar or the office environment, which prevents them from appreciating the wire walking performance. The text plays a fundamental part in translating the city's composition; the relations between individual and collective, the connection between space and people.

Despite some people being entangled in their automatic driven lives, more and more gather to observe the tight-rope walker—"The bird shot from one eave to another, and it was then the watchers noticed that they had been joined by others at the windows of offices, where blinds were being lifted and a few glass panes labored upward" (McCann 5). The French walker is confused with a bird high in the sky, while people inside the buildings began to stop and look. The hypnotic movement of the bird has a double function in this scene. Firstly the watchers become aware of the rising amplitude of the moment since it starts to draw attention, even from those working inside the office. Those with office jobs are physically higher and most likely better paid than those on the ground. In the chapter 'Parts of the Parts', this situation is mirrored by Solomon's colleagues when he enters his cabinet—all looking outside. The link with the judge would suggest that those inside the buildings are part of a higher middle class, lawyers, judges, or even investors. As their awareness increases, they also detect something within themselves; they realize their sadistic tendencies,

> [...] and then a torrent of chatter was released, a call-and-response, and it seemed to ripple all the way from the windowsill down to the sidewalk and along the cracked pavement to the corner of Furton, down the block along Broadway, where it zigzagged down John, hooked around to Nassau, and went on, a domino line of laughter, but with an edge to it, a longing, an awe, and many of the watchers realized with a shiver that no matter what they said, they really wanted to witness a great fall, see someone arc downward all that distance, to disappear from the sightline flail, smash to the ground, and give the Wednesday electricity, meaning, that all they needed to become a family was one millisecond of slippage (McCann 6)

In this moment of the text, we are able to envision two movements. Firstly, the subtle continuum between people and the city. The narrator indicates the rise of conversation among the observers. Beginning with the connection of those in the offices, going below to the ones on the streets and automatically infusing the city's map as an equivalent for the crowd. The narrator correlates the names of the streets to its people, sandwiching New York's physical location between chitter-chatter and a "domino line of laughter" (ibid.). Afterward, the watchers come to an epiphany that they are unable to cope with: despite their discourses, they are all eager to observe a great spectacle. The narration gives voice to this sentiment, as the watchers are not completely aware of their search for unity—the desire to become a unit. In his famous chapter "Walking in The City," Michel de Certeau (1988) describes pedestrians in the city as

> They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. (Certeau 97)

The individuality of each pedestrian is not erased in face of their numbers. Instead, together, they become capable of change and, in turn, change their surroundings. Similar to the novel, the masses are in constant movement, their singularities and their group experience symbolic of the urban tensions. The author's stylistic choices enhance this connection. The usage of a single-long paragraph to describe the movements mentioned before establishes a continuity between units. The link between city and people is a constant string throughout the narration, as each person becomes part of the urban ecosystem. As commented before, they are defined by their labor or their role within metropolitan logistics. Yet the people seek

connection with each other. Unaware of the subtle change around them, some go on with their routine. The narrator indicates this through the materiality of office work; nevertheless, for a moment, when the growing crowd is confronted with the performance, they shiver and become more present. Their attention ripples all the way from the windowsill and through a series of physical spaces; they become active agents in the remodeling of space. In de Certeau's words, they form a *pedestrian rhetoric* as,

> [t]hey walk—an elementary form of these experiences of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. [...] The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (Certeau 93)

The otherness inherently present within urban life and the modern fragmented experience are recurrent themes of postcolonial literature. The strangeness and fragmentation are deeply reflected in the walker's experience. Their unawareness does not devoid their capacity of integrating and modifying the urban "text." If these network experiences are an indivisible part of life in the city, what the novel attempts in the preface is to be an expression of these fragmentary trajectories. When the text exposes the connection and the possibility for spatial change through characters' experiences, it attempts to capture the "indefinitely other." The narrative unfolds on three levels: first, with the walkers, we observe the particular and individual experience; second with the construction of urban life

through the weaving of me and the other; and third, more subtly, in the macro-picture of History.

If the novel directly engages with the Vietnam war on several points, the way it deals with the Afghanistan war is less obvious. The 9/11 tragedy is present in many analyses and the author explicitly mentions it in interviews, besides the constant symbolic use of the towers. However, the absence of direct references is in itself significant. Instead, the reader needs to dive into the narrative and lean into the images to perceive the connections to the event. Here, the repercussion of traumatic conflicts goes beyond what is written. In *Empathy* (2014), Coplan & Goldie discuss the usage of pictures in eliciting empathetic responses even in absence of the subject—"Moreover, the scene expression can play a referencing role, making features of situations as warranting responses. The cognitive pay-off is that we learn to recognize situations as warranting certain responses even when the expressive element is removed" (Coplan & Goldie133). When faced with the Twin Towers, there is an almost automatic connection to 9/11. The author subverts this expectation and highlights the theme through its absence. The book thrives on the similarities between these periods. The most obvious link would be the American presence on battlefields outside the country land. The novel first presents the Vietnam War in the preface, as the audience unconsciously relates a random event to the war and politics. Throughout the novel, the war emerges on different occasions, either linked directly through death or to the characters' indifference to the conflict. The Afghanistan War, however, appears in indirect ways. A few direct mentions come from Jaslyn when on vacation with her soldier sister, she states that "The past was a jet that was coming in with dead bodies from the Middle East" (McCann 341), but the topic never takes center stage.

The author's subtle handling of the fall only highlights the unspoken event. The attack appears through text and images. Embodying the expression of time through static images, the book brings us Vic DeLuca's photograph (see Fig. 2). The graphic symbol present in every Book (see Fig. 4) bridges the novel's parts and reinforces connection throught multiple representations. The photo appears in the middle of the book, on page 237, after the last chapter with Petit's perspective. However, it will only be mentioned inside the narrative in the last chapter, when Jaslyn wonders about the day of her mother's death. The physical position of the photo within the book, where it follows the "retelling" of its capture, seems appropriate from a chronological point of view. After the artist narrates his performance, we see a piece of physical evidence as if to concede truthfulness to the account. However, a closer look at the picture might present a dreadful sense of *dejá vu*. The image of the World Trade Center, still standing, with a man in the middle almost flying next to an airplane, evokes a collective image of the fall. Again, the myriad of feelings associated with the subject is triggered. An attentive audience recognizes these references and they could set off certain responses even if the expressive element is removed.

At this point, it is appropriate to present the concepts of "photographic referent" and "the photography's *noeme*," as explored by Roland Barthes (1981). In his writings, we distinguish two significant photographic moments: the moment of framing, or the moment we take the photo, and the after. The former is related closely to the actions of both object and photographer, whose outcome can be marginally assessed by looking at the result, the photo. This is the point of capture—where the artist's choices of what is captured within the frames matter the most. The gap between the framing and the present is enlarged when looking at

DeVito's photograph, as the reader's response is closely related to events following the moment portrayed.

Going back to the preface, we are able to perceive similarities and distinctions in the handling of this moment. Both are physically separated from the rest of the novel, either by format or by narrative style. Both rely on a perspective that comes from beneath, a point of view looking up from the ground. The preface takes place at the moment of rupture, anyone in the streets could have been the photographer. The first moment of confusion, when confronted with a man pulling a stand so risqué is followed by the eagerness to give it meaning—both are portrayed in the written text. The recreation of this moment counterpoints the perspective of the photograph. Without context, the photo could appear to be a funny coincidence or a mystic premonition, with all parallels to 9/11 being purely speculative—purely a post-inferred reading. The novel establishes a link with the photo, however, it seeks to further the comparison of both contexts and resignify this picture through art.

The text helps to mirror and to offer a parallel between the American wars of Vietnam and Iraq, whereas the photo comes as reinforcement of the context's similarities. The photograph is given new meaning retrospectively. Therefore, the resignification becomes clearer when placed within the context of the novel. As Barthes states:

> In Photography, I can never deny that the thing had been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. [...] The name of Photography's noeme will therefore be: "That-has-been," or again: the Intractable. [...] what I see has been here, in this place which extends between infinity and the subject (operator or spectator) it has been here, and yet immediately separated (Barthes 76)

The use of present perfect in this translation, a tense form used mainly for actions have happened in a period up to now, a counterpart to its original "*a-été*"[14], enunciates a connection between the reference and referent. Both grammatical formations related to actions in the past that remain. Although separated, the photo bridges a point in the past to the now, dialectically exposing the absence and what lingers on.

Accounting for that which is gone, the photograph has the potential to give a breath of fresh air to something that no longer exists. If fiction has the power to create new possibilities to see, we might understand, from Barthes' theories, that the photo is chained to a single object and point of view. Nevertheless, in their combination, McCann is able to explore the latent potentiality for resignification. Hence his cacophonic use of voices in mediating historical tensions. The assembly created within *Let the Great World Spin* expects an understanding of the whole and its parts dialectically. As a result, seeing the photo or the chapter separately would be detrimental to our interpretation of the work's potential.

In his text, the French philosopher elaborates that "the photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been. [...] language is, by nature, fictional" (Barthes 84-86), which we can observe in our comparison. *Language* here could be related to the preface, the fictionalization of the public perspective. The photograph is the predecessor, as it was taken before the novel was written, and could be seen as the catalyst to the text. When narration emulates the perspective of the people 'behind' the photo, it attempts to express their emotions through fiction. A complement to the "objectivity" of the photograph as

[14] From the original *La Chambre Claire* (1980): "dans la Photographie, je ne puis jamais nier que *la chose a été là*. Il y a double position conjointe: de réalité et de passé. [...] Le nom du noème de la Photographie sera donc: "*Ça-a-été*," ou encore: l'Intrataitable. [...] cela que je vois s'est trouvé là, dans ce lieu qui s'étend entre l'infini et le sujet (*operator* ou *spectator*); il a été là, et cependant tout de suite séparé (Barthes 120)

it is “neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch” (Barthes 87). The text is the representation of this untouchable reality, a reimagination that expands our understanding of the photo’s illusory stagnation. Nevertheless, it is not our intention to theorize that the inaccessibility creates a gap filled by fiction, as this would contribute to the misleading idea of image as a direct format. Judith Butler proposes in her essay *Photography, War, Outrage* (2005):

> the indefinite circulability of the image allows the event to continue to happen and, indeed, thanks to these images, the event has not stopped happening. It was difficult to understand the proliferation of images, but it seemed to coincide with a proliferation of acts, a frenzy of photography. (86)

She defends a continuum, not only a bridge but a repeated renovation of the act or its meaning. Time permits the photo to renew its meaning. The signification of the image is attached to more than its portrayed object, it also regards what it comes to mean throughout time. In other words, the indefinite circulability of the photograph leads to a constant shift of perspective. If we look at the chapters and the photo within the same system, they work with each other to relabel their meaning. Our contact with the photo and the text renovates the “act.” The moment is transported to the present. Time is suspended within the frames, the receptor is transported to the past, while the photo is placed in the present. This unique shift of time is central to understanding the connection between fiction and DeLuca’s photo. The watchers look at Petit’s performance in the same way Butler expects the photo to perform to us: with elusive meaning, shifting constantly, and incompatible with the grasp of a single significance.

As suggested by Susana Araújo in her book *Transatlantic Fictions of 9/11 and The War on Terror* (2015), the “war on terror” was built on highly visual mass-media narratives. The importance of visuality in disseminating the collective fear of others is undeniable. One image stands out for its impact on the years to come after the attack, “The Falling Man” (Fig. 3). The image of a man allegedly jumping out of the towers was taken by Richard Drew and displays a dark vision of the event. The lines of the building, the centering of the man, all collaborate to create a very aesthetic photograph. At the same time, the notion that the man was most likely choosing suicide over asphyxiation is horrifying. The intense contrast within the image contributed to its notoriety among the many images of the event.

In contrast, *Let the Great World Spin’s* photo has a different aim. Petit does not fall, contrary to the watcher’s chanting wishes. He stands tall in the middle of the buildings, balancing on an iron line, awe-inspiring. A demonstration of the human spirit thriving over gravity and society's expectation. Just like Philippe Petit, the novel leads us through a crossing. The preface, the photo in the middle, and the last chapter’s mention of the physical photo mark a *crossing*. This motif appears in many forms; as a graphic cross in every ‘book’, as the crossing lines in the photo, as the physical crossing of the book—from cover to cover and the narrated time of 27 years. The recurrent sign could be associated with the religious theme commented before, with the suffering of Christ, but it could also be understood under the light of dialectic relations. The intersection of time and space together with the intersection of past and present. As the space changes, the photo becomes also evidence of something that is no longer there. The ‘present time’ delivers a different generation of characters, with Gloria’s death and Claire’s imminent passing. The city is still there, ever-changing but somehow something remains. As we shall discuss further in

the following chapters, *connection* is at the core of the novel. Or rather, the possibility of connection. The lifeline, the iron line. Both lead us through the novel to look beyond the pain. There is a repetitive hint of redemption, be it the underlying feeling of community or the hope of transcending past cycles.

The polyphony within *Let the Great World Spin* engages the readers in the constant questioning of perspectives. Their inability to comprehend Petit's crossing leads them to seek answers in historical events. Therefore, experience plays a key role in their interpretation of the performance; in a similar fashion, it influences how the photo might be perceived in years to come. Let us look at the ideas developed by Walter Benjamin, who leans toward a more Proustian approach to photography: “For an experienced event is finite at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it” (Benjamin, vol 2, 238). Photography, for Barthes, is separated from the present, its meaning deeply linked to something that is “intractable.” As discussed previously, the image is linked to the past and because of this link holds an unfathomable aspect to the present viewer. However, in Benjamin (1999), we can envision an alternative. Similarly to Butler (2005), his writings present a reading focused on the ever-changing aspects of memory. Hence its potential tailors our assessments of any image and therefore creates a different form of experiencing it; rebirthing something that is supposedly gone. To relive the moment crystallized by the camera is to resurface the point of time washed in what came after.

When we approach Vic DeLuca’s photograph with ‘post-9/11’ eyes we are able to resignify the details of the image that previously would be less significant. This new interpretation of the same photograph could help problematize our perception of US History. Our collective experience has changed since the late

1970s and now we can afford a second look charged by new readings. The implied author searches for the same effect in his writings; he proposes that we make parallels between the past and the present. The Iraq war and the Vietnam war center this perception, our practice is seen as embedded in our historical time.

The fictionalization of collective experience while displaying the physical evidence of that moment enhances the tensions of what we perceive as factual. The photo serves as evidence of the fictional viewpoint. The scene shifts as it brings new meanings to light, the photograph helps us understand aspects of our own time by looking back and observing the past through new lenses. The photo and the preface put us in the watchers' shoes, to give a new understanding of a frozen moment; moreover, they expand our vision to present issues. Going back to Butler (2005):

> “Haunted" by a photograph, it is because the photograph acts on us in part throughout living the life it documents; it establishes in advance the time in which that loss will be acknowledged as a loss. So the photograph is linked through its "tense" to the grievability of a life, anticipating and performing that grievability. In this way, we can be haunted in advance by the suffering or death of others. Or we can be haunted after [...] (Butler 98)

The idea of *haunting* or *being haunted* could be seen as the memory that persists in coming back. Butler also references double-time; the time of the photo and its after, where we are able to acknowledge grief and loss. Yet again McCann further complicates the duality of time, mainly if we focus on the performative quality of the photo. It acts as a memory of that time and demands that we see through the camera's eyes.

The reenactment of a crystallized moment highlights the way the author performs sorrow. The historical time comes forward as a pivot point, the reflections of our time in a photo that reminisce a "before." The fall is one of the main events that precipitated the "war on terror," which gained force at the beginning of the 2000s. By using an image of the standing towers, the narrative could point in the direction of "peaceful times" and economic prosperity. According to the predominant discourse after the fall, the towers were taken as a symbol of freedom, of America itself. However, as Susana Araújo indicates "Indeed, if the collapse of the Twin Towers was the most photographed and televised event of all time, soon after the launching of the War on Terror, other images, such as the Abu Ghraib photographs, found their way into novels" (Araújo 4). Several authors attempted to use shocking pictures to expose the American treatment of others in warfare. In parallel, the media used the 9/11 images to arouse patriotism. Both feed on the impact of graphic photographs. The goal is centered on shocking the public. In *Let the Great World Spin*, the photo used is not quite so strong.It contains symbolism and parallels, but it is far less provocative. The photo, as the novel itself, is a bridge between two times and one space. It functions as a mirror of possibilities avoiding discourses built around the event—its lack of explicit imagery devoids it from strong emotional responses.

The cyclical aspects of American history stand out in these parallels, mainly in regard to the US treatment of the Middle East and Asia. The ghost of the wars lives on in its citizens' collective memory. The airplane that shadows the building. Pettit's silhouette in the air between towers. Even the characters in the book acknowledge this, as we see in the last chapter with Jaslyn,

> She often wonders what it is that holds the man so high in the air. What sort of ontological glue? Up there in his haunted silhouette, a dark thing

> against the sky, a small stick figure in the vast expanse. The plane on the horizon. The tiny thread of rope between the edges of the buildings. [...] A man high in the air while a plane disappears; it seems, into the edge of the building. One small scrap of history meeting a larger one. As if the walking man were somehow anticipating what would come later. The intrusion of time and history. The collision point of stories. We wait for the explosion but it never occurs. The plane passes, the tightrope walker gets to the end of the wire. Things don't fall apart. (McCann 326)

As mentioned before, Jaslyn is the novel's last narrator. Claire and Gloria adopted her after her mother died in a car accident—portrayed in the very first chapter of the book. As we explore further in the next chapters, pain and trauma seeped out of her family line. She becomes a key character for possibilities of moving on. Nevertheless, for the moment, we can recognize how Petit's appearance evokes feelings of *hauntedness*, a trauma that is barely acknowledged. The language is also telling with its short sentences. The rupture in language mirrors the narrator's impossibility to formulate on the past, both on a collective and personal level. Jaslyn avoids mentioning the attack directly while marveling at the contact between two distant points in history; however, the reader recognized the reference. The deliberate expressions help us bond the events—"collision," "explosion," and "fall apart."

9/11 is told through its absence. The resignification of the photo happens in what it does not show: the aftermath of two wars and the shift of perspectives about the event. The narrator even brings the idea of "intrusion of time and history" as if time and space folded in front of her. The cycles of history are more apparent, to make us more aware of the repetition through works of art; the photo and the novel.

A recurrent theme in postcolonial discussions[15], trauma appears to resurface through the repetition of repressed memories. We could look at Sontag's *Regarding The Pain of Others* (2003), where she brings up the haunting aspect of the towers when she discusses the relationship between photographs and trauma,

> To acknowledge the beauty of photographs of the World Trade Center ruins in the months following the attack seemed frivolous, sacrilegious. The most people dared say was that the photographs were "surreal," a hectic euphemism behind which the disgraced notion of beauty cowered [...] Photographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful—or terrifying, or unbearable, or quite bearable—as it is not in real life. (76)

Sontag is referring to the experience of art and trauma, the possibility of 'beautifying' events, transforming them into art, and creating a gap of detachment. As discussed beforehand, the relabelling of images is a constant source of tension—and its effect should be questioned. To find beauty in the barbarism, as Walter Benjamin suggests, implicates to believe in an illusion, fated to fade, as Beauty is the external appearance projected by classical works of art, and the barbarism would inevitably resurface (Wolin 64). The concept of Dialectical Images appears to be quite literal for the project of the novel. The image constructed by narrative and photograph re-imagine the present through the reconstruction of the past. The search for possibilities and the shift of perspective is central to understanding the whole. This holds true in the usage of images post-9/11. DeVito's

[15] Besides the works here referenced, David Eng and David Kazanjian's (2002) *Loss* and Cathy Caruth's (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: trauma, narrative and history* are classic studies to be considered.

photo hints at an alternative, it works with the standing towers of our memory, relying on the perspectives of everyday men.

The indirect approach intensifies the connections between the war and the people. Or as Sontag (1977) states: “a war photograph seems inauthentic, even though there is nothing staged about it, when it looks like a still from a movie” (78). The ‘realness’ of the image is inconsequential to its appropriation as an artistic object—stills from movies are often considered to be examples of beautiful framing. DeVito’s photograph differs in this regard; although the photographer[16] aims for artistic flair, the photo is not very innovative or well framed. The photo is neither a graphic depiction of Iraq nor of the fall. If the author were to use “real” photos of the war, of the Middle East or Vietnam, he could have fed into the discourse that the war is something foreign, fought by others in someone else’s land. By closing placing the object within the city, at “home,” the book chooses to close the gap between us and the battle, just as it closes the gap between us and the past. The war is in New York City, it was part of everyday life and its effect can be seen here.

The novel provokes us into a dialectical perspective, transporting us to 1974; the photo acquires new meanings in combination with the text. If we were offered the photo alone, we still could make the case for symbolic elements; however, it is only through their combination that it assumes a multi-layered interpretation. The resignification of the photo is deliberate. As discussed before, the dichotomy of being past and present is something inherent to the photograph. The novel attempts to weave together time and space tensions into its fiber.

Matters regarding the World Trade Center are oftentimes associated with rupture or a unique experience, the start of the American anti-terrorism era.

[16] The narrator from the chapter “Tag," Fernando Yunque Marcano, is the fictionalisation of the photographer.

However, the photo and the novel propose that we look beyond the narratives created around the topic. To reimagine our memory of these events and to resignify the elements presented. The two moments we looked at more closely here expose this attempt to rethink the collective experience. Firstly the readers experience Petit's crossing through the lenses of common people in the preface, and after, they are confronted with a haunting image of that moment. The symbolic elements of that event cause a shift in our perception of historical time, making us more aware of perception.

The photo works as another means for McCann to explore this historical moment—crystallizing a multifaced, dynamic feeling of suspension in face of the unexpected. *Let the Great World Spin* offers a fictionalized retelling through various points of views and (re)framings: through Petit's eyes, the aspirations of a young photographer, its imprint on the contemporaneous watchers, or even the distant mention as a memory in the last chapter. Between these and more moments, the novel goes beyond the sphere of historical time, it creates a universe around a pinpointed moment in History. The stylistic choices throughout the chapters consistently play with the notion of how we experience time; how trauma, technology, and contact with others alter it. The impressions, angles, and perspectives express forms of experiencing the crossing of two buildings as well as the transition of time.

The sign of the cross appears and reverberates at different levels, for example, as the intersection of time periods, spaces, peoples, and history itself. In our last chapter, as we dive into "Parts of the Parts" and "This is the House that Horse Built," the recurrence of crossings and crosses takes yet another feature: the cross for death and memorial purposes. Nevertheless, for now, we can envision how we are at "[t]he collision point of stories" (McCann 326), as the novel puts us at the

center of these tensions. There is not only contact between these subjects, but an explosion, tensions build from conflicts. It is not an easy feat to understand the events of the present, and even a harder one to contemplate them in the lights of the past; however, it is necessary in order to explore the redemptive ways it can help us build awareness. Colum McCann is constantly searching for the point of contact between his characters and their relationship with others. He resignifies historical and personal spaces through the juxtaposition of history's indexes. Characters seem to evoke dialectical images to cope with their reality—so that "things don't fall apart" (McCann 326). In our next chapter, we will continue our attempt to understand how narrators actualize their coping mechanisms into the novel's aesthetics.

2. Inside out: time, place(s) and urban structures

The dialectical movements between time and urban spaces in the novel's construction also surface in the characters' relationships. It is interesting to note how the author works with images of the past at different levels, including the many ways in which he expands on Bakhtin's notion of *chronotope.* He forges the themes into the fabric of the narrative; how the historical context and the city structures directly affect characters' feelings, while also influencing the relationship between Books. We are able to trace parallels and contrasts amount to the novel's parts; beyond that, the author creates tensions and makes aesthetic choices that connect the chapters. Each part brings a specific view of the city and Petit's performance, but it also informs us of how the narrator experiences the city in a unique way. As Henri Lefebvre brings into light in his essay "La Production de L'espace,"

> L'espace, c'est la morphologie sociale; c'est donc au "vécu" ce qu'est à l'organisme vivant sa forme elle-même, intimement liée aux fonctions et structures. Penser l'espace à la maniére d'un "cadre" ou d'une boîte, dans laquelle entre n'importe quel objet pourvu que le contenu soit plus petit que le contenant, et que celui-ci n'ait d'autre affectation que de garder le contenu, c'est sans doute l'erreur initiale. (112)

The space is inherently connected to its inhabitants. As we started to understand in the last section and will attempt to develop throughout this dissertation, space becomes part of the language of people's lives. It is central to understanding the progress of the narrative. When brought to New York's context, the matter leaves a lot to unpack. As a living organism, the city will form and be defined by the structures of social life. Space is not only the surroundings in which

the action takes place but the social morphology. The different perspectives inside the metropolis present a world of complexities; how they interact with space and change the space around them is crucial for the novel's aesthetics.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's (2000) theories challenge some preconceived ideas of time. In regards to how the narrative incorporates space in detriment of time, the French scholar states:

> Or, le temps disparaît dans l'espace social de la modernité. Il ne s'écrit que sur les appareils de mesure, isolés, spécialisés eux aussi: les horloges. Le temps vécu perd forme et intérêt social, sauf le temps de travail. [...] Le temps, ce "vecu" essentiel, ce bien entre les biens, ne se voit pas, ne se lit pas. Il ne se construit pas. Il se consume, il s'épuise, et c'est la fin. Le temps ne laisse que des traces. [...] Cette évacuation apparente du temps ne serait-elle pas un des traits caractéristiques de la modernité? (114-115)

Let the Great World Spin understands space and time as equally important for its narrative. Both present distortions associated with modernity, rejecting the expulsion of time remarked by Lefebvre. From his comments, we are unable to see or read time, that time is in shambles and even asks if this is not a mark of modernity, we might interpret that time is somehow disconnected from space. However, the novel attempts to prove that time is not outside of space but distorted by it. Modernity can be understood in the amalgamation of both. One example of how the author employs time as a feature is how Book One manipulates it.

The author placed the most linear narration of the novel in the first chapter, "All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here"[17], where he covers years of Ciaran's life, from long flashbacks of his childhood, his life in Ireland to his short experience with Corrigan in New York. Yet, in the very next chapter, "Miró, Miró on the Wall," a stream of consciousness covers approximately one hour of the mothers' meeting. Placed adjacent to one another, the change only increases the impact. In addition, Ciaran's chapter has sixty-one pages, the longest in the book, while the second, with forty-one pages, is the second-longest—despite their difference in the fictive experience of time[18]. Although they have a close number of pages, they depict divergent perceptions of time. Their proximity enlarges their discrepancies and highlights their similarities, inviting a comparative approach to their treatment of time. In "Miró, Miró on the Wall," Claire narrates through a haze of memories and thoughts; every second expands and minutes become pages. The observable world is consumed by her mind, chronological time suspended in favor of her inner exploration. The similar physical length of Ciaran's and Claire's chapters only enhances their respective speeds of narration; the relation between a temporal and a spatial measure in the former chapter is opposite to the latter's internal dialogue.

[17] The first chapter is the only time we see John Corrigan without mediation (other chapters offer memories and second-hand commentary on the priest); additionally, his figure appears at the center of many analyses of the novel. Although our focus strays from the Irish brothers, it would be remiss not to point out his connection to some of our themes. His deep devotion to the church, as well as his lifestyle are models of of community and radical empathy (see McCann 2014), frequently incorporating Catholic elements. This character may be evidence of the writer's Irish upbringing and is central among the novel's numerous references to Christian theology, including the presence of concepts such as redemption.

[18] A fundamental time is implied, without itself being considered as a theme. [...] In this respect, we might be tempted to say that there are as many temporal 'experiences' as poets, even as poems. [...] a jagged chronology, interrupted by jumps, anticipations, and flashbacks, in short, a deliberately multidimensional configuration, is better suited to a view of time that has no possible overview, no overall internal cohesiveness. Contemporary experiments in the area of narrative techniques are thus aimed at shattering the very experience of time. [...] Let us admit with Genette that we can only compare the respective speeds of the narrative and of the story, the speed always being defined by a relation between a temporal measure and a spatial one. In this way, in order to characterize this speeding up or slowing down of the narrative in relation to the events recounted, we end up comparing, just as Müller did, the duration of the text, measured by pages and lines, with the duration of the story measured by clock time. (Onega & Landa 137)

Ciaran retells events with a more traditional approach to narration, setting them in chronological order and placing them somehown on an equitable light.

Other chapters play with our notion of time and create contrast. For example, in “Centavos,” Adelita is trapped in her past with Corrigan, while she reminisces and loses herself in memories she leads the reader through the same path. Her grief distorts her perception of time and causes a breach between present and past, reality, and memory. The sensibility of her style stands in opposition to Ciaran’s narration in the first chapter. “All Respects to Heaven, I Like It Here” follows a more traditional narration and, simultaneously, provides a misleading impression of straightforwardness. Nevertheless, the latter presents equal amounts, if not more, evidence of escapism and difficulties to deal with events. The male protagonist's recurrent inability to understand others’ intentions, especially his brother’s choices and Adelita’s visions of the dead are both signs of derealization and disconnection from the *now* time. Observing the intervention of memory in the present helps us see how expressions of time and space are diluted between what is now and what once was.

Looking at the structures, the presence of ruptures becomes evident. The novel resembles a collection of short stories. The chapters dance around time, sceneries, plot lines, characters, and focalizations. This form creates the dichotomous effect; there is a contrast among all parts while also displaying them as a unit. We can observe different techniques, the styles modifying reality and space. The writer creates a universe so complete, with its own partiality and storyline, that every chapter could be comprehended as a standalone short story. However, the book also exhibits the chapters as a web, it creates connections and expects the readers to find unity. Characters appear in more than one storyline, and the same

event is repeated through distinctive perspectives and re-enacted in moments that can be better understood in the context provided by the other chapters.

In this sense, we can start to envision how the chapters establish a dialogue with each other. Beyond that, the whole and the parts are constantly communicating to form a picture, which appeals to the reader's imagination. The chapters' orchestration invites us to connect and puzzle over the stories. Resembling each other, developing contrasts while also complementing points of view. In their content, they explore a variety of perspectives, plots, and feelings. However, one recurrent point is the use of memory or remembering. The act of recalling something is treated differently by each person inside the novel. There are moments of bittersweetness, as in "Centavos," when the memories of Corrigan's sins are revisited with tenderness and special delicacy. In "All Respects to Heaven, I Like it Here," Ciaran remembers their childhood with a sense of detachment and aloofness from people around him. "A Fear of Love" retells a car accident with details and factuality. Not only are the characters constantly remembering moments, but their text also diverges in how to deal with past experiences resurfacing in the present.

The treatment and relationship between memory and style could be developed in many ways. Firstly, our account of events is inevitably dependent on our own limited perspective. The connections made by every subject based on shared norms (rules) and stories (memories) help us experience and create a *meaningful world* (Dietrich 86). The construction of reality and our integration with our surroundings forge our material experience. The novel presents a collective moment, August 6th 1974, and imagines different individual memories. As a counterpart, there is the collective memory, the standardized repertoire accepted by the community that transcends the span of a lifetime (Dietrich 90). McCann

navigates the particular and the collective when balancing the tensions of history, time and space, and the private sphere. Centered on the production of meaning, the narrative navigates collective and particular tensions to forge modern experiences.

Each character develops a singular perspective derived from this collective memory. When weaving narratives within city centers, biases can emerge. What the collective memory agrees as historical fact and the connection between divergent views are elements to bear in mind. When dealing with memorable and commonplace moments of history, frequently we face crystallized images. As pointed out by the researcher Susana Araújo (2015), distinctive reasons motivate the creation of discourse upon events – “This language of unification is not new to theorists of urban space: the use of space in general, and of urban space and public monuments in particular, has always played an important political role in either endorsing or fabricating feelings of social cohesion” (40). Taking into account the narrative built around 9/11, the event was often constructed to generate a sense of unity. The media develops a crystallized narrative of this particular episode in order to fabricate a common memory, one to share with future generations. The consensus in seeing the attack as a traumatic rupture of American life is put into question not for lack of violence, but rather for the political agenda it discloses. Araújo sheds light on the political role of collective memory and the construction of narratives in a highly mediatic society. For now, we shall focus on how the book diverges and navigates in opposition to this general discourse around the attack.

As commented before, chapters establish relations that enrich our readings of the whole novel. Two chapters are particularly interesting in their approach to memory, “Miró, Miró on the Wall” and “All Hail and Hallelujah.” Although none of the chapters in the book could be accused of having happy endings, a

compelling argument could be made when these chapters are paired. Their events develop in sequential order, which would only happen again in Petit's chapters – as they are told by the same person and lead us to the main event. Together they might not leave the reader satisfied and happy, but evoke a sense of hope.

The second chapter of Book One, "Miró, Miró, on the Wall" centers around Claire Soderberg; a married, white, upper-class housewife who is grieving the loss of her son, Joshua. The chapter has a close third-person reflector[19], and through the use of selective omniscience, the author offers a conscious flux of Claire's thoughts. The grieving mother obsesses over her son, lost in the Vietnam war, alternating between her memories and the physical space. Reality is shaped by Claire's character. The outside world and her psychological inside world dialectically change each other. Claire's perception of objects and the memories they awaken in her mind change the narration.

The association of space with a specific timeframe is fundamental in our perception of change. The main way we interact with our past is through memory. Current-day memory studies conceptualize and research the different spaces reserved to memory in our society—museums, statues, memorials, and many others[20]. Although there is an intersection between the official treatment of the 9/11—exemplified by the construction of The National September 11 Memorial & Museum—this dissertation answers to Confino's (2008) "call for the scholar to expand the interpretative, explanatory, and narrative potential of the notion of memory" (77). When we talk about the Twin Towers, the focus is not so much on the

[19] See note n7.
[20] The field has had constant growth in the last decades, with many works dedicated to holocaust and the wars. Intersecting with trauma, memory, and discursive studies, the works of Eng and Kazanjian (2003) and Erll, Nunning and Young (2008) shine some light on the nuances and different approaches within the field. See more in note n5.

physical location, or even on the monuments designed by patriotic narratives—but on interpreting the many ramifications of memory in space.

The relations between time and space become indistinguishable in Claire's mind, and the narrator follows her decline. One particular trigger for these distortions of time is her constant mentions of death and war. The past emerges by the slightest stimulation:

> Solomon, dead against. City boy. [...] His kiss this morning made me feel good. And his cologne smell. Same as Joshua's. Oh, the day Joshua first shaved! Oh, the day! Covered himself in foam. So very careful with the razor. Made an avenue through the cheek, but nicked himself on the neck. Tore off a tiny piece of his Daddy's *Wall Street Journal.* Licked it and pasted it to the wound. The business page clotting his blood. [...] The simple things come back to us. They rest for a moment by our ribcages then suddenly reach in and twist our hearts a notch backward. No newspapers big enough to paste him back together in Saigon. (McCann 81)

What begins as her morning routine, turns into loss and sorrow. Her husband, Solomon Soderberg, is perceived as a remote figure throughout the chapter, positioned as a background character that is unable to fully help or understand his wife's grief. In this passage, his smell brings back a memory encrypted with interesting layers. The expression used to make reference to Solomon, "city boy," indicates that he belongs to the outside world, contrasting with Claire, whose life is constantly depicted inside. The setting expands this idea since her husband's chapter covers the whole southern half of the city while Claire is trapped inside the apartment.

Another interesting point in this characterisation is how the narrator merges space into Solomon's identity. There are different ways in which space defines one's identity; at times to occupy a particular space is to state who you are and how you wish to be perceived[21]. On this topic, we must understand how place-identity "consists of an endless variety of cognitions related to the past, present, and anticipated physical settings that define and circumscribe the day-to-day existence of the person" (Proshansky & Fabian & Kaminoff 62). With this in mind, when Claire calls her husband 'city-boy', she is portraying him with attributes of the space he was raised in. He belongs to the urban machine, he is one with space. We will see this reflected in his narrative when we analyze his chapter in the next section.

Going back to the quote, when their son "makes an avenue" and nicks himself, he uses a newspaper to stop the bleeding. Once again the choice of words, *avenue* and *Wall Street Journal,* calls our attention to space. At this moment two very important connections should be pointed out. Another avenue that appears regularly in this chapter is Park Avenue. Few addresses could embody new yorker wealth and privilege as precisely as the Upper East Side. Known for its high building and even higher prices, the region is an icon of wealth—a fact that Claire is viciously aware of throughout her narrative. She is constantly afraid of being perceived as a snob, especially where Gloria is concerned. Park Avenue is centered as a point of anxiety, as Claire only reveals her address at the last minute and questions herself about what would be the right way to behave around the other mothers. The

[21] A recurrent example is restrooms; commonly pointed as a gender defyning space, one must state in which side of the binary (male/female) they identify. "Yet there are other, subtler ways that spaces are designated for specific identities with the result that they include some, exclude others, and that complicate interactions between people by setting culturally mediated and tacitly accepted expectations on our behavior" (for more see PennState College of Earth and Mineral Sciences *Space, Place and Identity*)

boulevard, however, begins in Union Square and goes through the city until the 189th, in the Bronx. Although it is associated with its most prestigious address, the avenue itself forms a bridge between two very distinct spaces in the city, connecting New York's center with the marginalized region of the Bronx.

Meanwhile, Wall Street, a space representative of capitalist ideals, returns as the homonymous newspaper. The paper is a deliberate choice; it points to the intersection between economic power and the media and how they played a significant part in the war—"The business page clotting his blood" (ibid). The imagery of Joshua's *wound*, again an interesting word choice due to its connection to war, sustains the thematic tensions. The mention is evidenced by the ideological propaganda associated with the newspaper. Warfare runs deep in the American imagination as a way to search or to provide freedom to 'others' in faraway lands, leading to the notions of American exceptionalism. The association of a prominent economic newspaper to the wound of a soldier links the economic sphere, the media, New York city's financial district and the war.

The *simple things* resurface and cause Claire to continuously grieve and rebel against the world. Her perspective is stained with pain at every curve until it becomes blind to the structural problems around the issue. She suspects that nothing from the outside—newspaper, her husband, or the arts—would be "big enough to paste him back together in Saigon" (81). She feels stuck in her memories; time is frozen and she is trapped inside. There is a sparkle of defiance of her situation when she decides to respond to an ad about veterans' mothers, where she goes outside to post a letter:

> She ran outside to Park Avenue, middle of the night, in a snowstorm, the doorman stunned to see her going out the door [...] She knew that if she

> didn't send it right then, she never would. [...] Thought of her letter winding its way through the postal system, eventually to find another like her. Who would it be, and what would they look like, and would they be tender, and would they be kind? That's all she wanted: for them to be kind. (McCann 90)

This is the only moment in her chapter where she ventures outside the apartment, and she proceeds to describe her euphoric feeling afterward. She is aware of her search for understanding, for connection with another person. The sense of wonder about what the other is like, the search for tenderness and companionship ignites her, even if she is aware that it is impulsive. Claire's intentions become explicit to the reader, her loneliness even more pronounced. The figure of the "other" appears as hope, her need to find something of herself in another person—"to find another like her." When she mostly hides from the world and is stuck in her sorrow, space becomes more prominent. As Bachelard, in his seminal work *La Poétique de L'espace* (1957), proposes

> Nous proposons, au contraire, de considérer l'imagination comme une puissance majeure de la nature humaine. Certes, cela n'avance en rien de dire que l'imagination est la faculté de produire des images. [...] L'imagination, dans ses vives actions, nous détache à la fois du passé et de la réalité. Elle ouvre sur l'avenir. (17)

As discussed in our last chapters, there is great importance in understanding images for McCann's narrative. If imagination is the power to manufacture images, then Claire's inability to picture who would answer her letter is tightly connected to her previous experiences. Although imagination is not

necessarily connected to memories, it is imperative to take into account the past when she projects the future. For Bachelard, imagination detaches us from the past and the current reality to propel us to the future. It is through the crack between *now* and *after* that imagination comes as a powerhouse. Claire is unable to imagine the other, as she has never found someone to understand her before. However, in her search, she settles for kindness as an unknown reality but a possible future.

Much can be said about the psychological effects of isolation, for now, we shall trace how Claire designs space in relation to the other. In the spur of the moment, she reaches out and wanders—to get in contact with the other mothers she must step outside of her house. The chapter establishes a contrast between outward vastness and the security of the inside, at least from Claire's perspective. After sending the letter, Claire invites the women inside; she brings Gloria and the others to her home. Her aim is to connect through shared pain in the safe-haven of Joshua's room. There is security in known spaces, and she searches for comfort in familiarity. Nevertheless, Saigon and Vietnam, foreign spaces, become difficult to picture and are repealed. For her, Joshua was forever frozen as a boy, never a soldier—"she never really thought of him [Joshua] as a veteran, or having been in Vietnam—he was a computer operator, had gone to Asia" (McCann 90). The war and the oversea countries are elusive, belonging to the great sphere of the outside. Her son and home, on the other hand, are solid references, concrete parts of reality. As Bachelard's text puts it,

> Rendre concret le dedans et vaste le dehors sont, semble-t-il, les tâches initiales, les premiers premlémes d'une anthropologie de l'imagination. [...] A la moindre touche, la dissymétrie apparaît. Et c'est toujours ainsi: le dedans et le dehors ne reçoivent pas de la même façon les qualificatifs,

> ces qualificatifs qui sont la mesure de notre adhésion aux choses. On ne peut vivre de la même manière les qualificatifs attachés au dedans et au dehors. (Bachelard 160)

There are asymmetric problems in portraying the outside expansiveness and the inside tangibility. We do not experience the world in the same way we experience home. To measure our interest in strange and familiar settings, we must consider our adherence and how we portray space. The qualifiers used to understand the outside cannot be applied to internal logistics—in Claire's case, her anxieties enhance this fact. She sees herself as an outsider, her uneasiness exuding from how she perceives her surroundings. This appears even in small decisions, for example, when she has to decide where to sit:

> Claire dries her hand on the hip of her dress and wonders now where it is she should sit. Should she go right to the heart of the matter, onto the sofa? But that might be a bit much, a bit forward, right beside Marcia, who has all the eye-gaze. And yet to stand on the outside might be noticed too, as if she's not part of them, trying to be separate. Then again, she needs to be mobile, not hem herself in with the coffee table, she has to be able to get up and make refreshments, spread the breakfast out, take orders, make everyone feel at home. (McCann 93)

Her behavior reflects her apprehension toward others. Where she positions herself is meticulously analyzed; always seeing herself as an outsider looking in. The idea of centering herself, or at least being near their collective focus, is rapidly discarded. Her aim is to *not* stand out; the tensions between being part of the collective and preservation are constantly battling. The living room becomes exemplary of her relationship with the whole world. While she is granted a

resemblance of proximity to society by living in one of the *Caput Mundi*, she does not establish concrete links with the outside, not even remembering the doorman's name. There is no adherence to the outside; there is, however, a wish to bring the other inside. As she attempts to find her space and weighs her interactions, she expresses her wish to "make everyone feel at home." The mothers must be welcome and made part of the home.

The other, however, is necessarily linked to the outside world. Even more pointedly, when the otherness comes from a Black poor mother, Gloria—the person Claire relates to the most. The urban space, as identified previously by Araújo, is often perceived as a communal space where one carves one's identity through interaction with otherness. The cohabitation with the Other directly influences the *becoming* of the self—a recurrent topic of discussion in identity formation, especially in postcolonial studies. The comparison with the other to measure experience by contrast or approximation is an issue well discussed by Homi Bhabha, especially in *The Location of Culture* (2004):

> Three conditions that underline an understanding of the *process of identification* in the analytic of desire. First: to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, [...] Second: the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. [...] Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image. (64)

As the theorist proposed, the process by which we form our identities should not be understood as "a self-fulfilling prophecy." Hence the subject is in

constant transformation and while producing an image, it also modifies itself. It is through this space of splitting that we are able to glimpse the construction of the self. The demand for identification comes from contact with the other, mainly in large cities, while the splitting appears through the conflict of perspectives. Prompted by otherness, we assemble our memory to form a cohesive expression of our experience, thus paving a path between our past and present selves.

Our discussions merge into two important themes, the other and the city. Until this point, Claire could be perceived as a prisoner to her surroundings, her social standing, her past, and even to her high tower in the middle of the Upper East Side. Meanwhile, there is always a longing to find companionship. The narration closely sides with her perception of the world; time is transformed to fit her understanding just as her experience shapes the space. Tensions between the inner and outer world seem endless. This acceleration and imprisonment project a very cosmopolitan view of modernity, as Simmel (1950) would write,

> Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrast—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowing of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with a small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. (Simmel 350)

Simmel defines humans as differentiating creatures, where the understanding of reality comes through one momentary impression after the other. Even if we only read Claire's chapter, we could see the abovementioned modern effect of the metropolis. Her approach to life is a constant comparison and association between her past and her present ambiance, her mind is stimulated by the difference between what she lives and what is gone. The comparison, of course, is not always straightforward. She is often assaulted by unexpected impressions and memories translated into formalistic choices made to enhance the volatility of her experience.

Going back to identity formation, we can see how both aspects intertwine throughout the novel. Claire's thoughts and self-construction reflect the psychological conditions of the city. Not as a *self*-fulfilling prophecy, but as an amalgamation of impressions that rely on her personal traumas, her physical and financial standing, and her interaction with people around her. The deep contrast created between her desires and her actions is often a point of anxiety and highlights the fissure with the outer world—"Gloria, her favorite of them all, [Claire wishes to] gather her in her arms, bring her back, sit her down, make her coffee, talk and laugh and whisper and belong with her, just belong" (McCann 82). Gloria, the poor black widow who lost three sons, is idealized as a potential partner—one who inspires her to overcome differences and bring the other in. As a counterpoint, or as a complement, the eleventh chapter, "All Hail and Hallelujah," revolves around Gloria.

The chapter begins with the narrator's awareness of her own unreliability to tell her story. She lets us know that everything she is telling us is the past, told as she remembers it, and part of a process to make sense of her decision to adopt—"I guess you live inside a moment for years, move with it and feel it grow, and it sends

out roots until it touches everything in sight" (McCann 285). Memory itself becomes a space to be inhabited, the narrator lets us know that she speaks from an unspecified period in the future—a time corrupted by memory. She is aware of the outcome and the role Jazzlyn's daughters will play in their lives. This story is an attempt to make sense of what happened and focuses more on understanding the events that led her to the present situation. Not only does this establish a clear contrast with Claire's inability to create a cohesive narration about life, but it also highlights Gloria's consciousness about her roots. Right after informing us of why she is telling this story, she proceeds to retell parts of her childhood and ancestry. She dives into the effects of slavery in her mother's life and how her parents were supportive of her "getting a better place in the world" (McCann 287); she only starts to narrate the events of her meeting with Claire after three pages. Throughout the chapter, Gloria's story leads us to see more of the city, to experience the outer world, and to acknowledge the influence of social-political discourse in her relationships.

Her chapter is by far more dynamic as she expands and explores the world within Park Avenue; walking from 76th st all the way up to 128th st (See Fig. 5). There is a double dislocation: a physical movement from high (Claire's penthouse) to lower (streets) and then from central Park Avenue (Upper East Side) to the northern area (Harlem), and an economic movement, from richer to poorer neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the second dislocation was not completed. Gloria intended to walk all the way to her house, however, she never crossed the Harlem River to the Bronx. The ordeal to walk such a length inspires Gloria to reflect on her own family history and her surroundings until she is robbed and chooses to go back.

The sensory experience of walking down Park avenue intertwines with the psychological effects of its social experience. The hostile architecture of the city is

highlighted as we approach the poorer regions as if the city's ambiance foreshadowed her assault. Gloria's experience as a Black person is enhanced in her narrative in every step she takes, be it due to her time—social movements—or her space—Harlem/Bronx. Her personal biography is generally linked to her relationship with her historical condition, emphasizing how, as a Black woman in America, it is impossible for her not to think about social issues. Two stories are juxtaposed, the day Gloria chooses to adopt and her life's story, both uniquely linked to how the city sees her and how she experiences the city. Both overlap and transform her storytelling into a "sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance" (Simmel 350). The brokenness of Gloria's narration forms a mosaic of impressions that paints a more empathic and diverse experience of the world than the one seen in Claire's chapter, even as she recognizes that "everybody [is] perched in their own little world with the deep need to talk, each person with their own tale, beginning in some strange middle point, then trying so hard to tell it all, to have it all make sense, logical and final" (McCann 293). There is vastness within that pushes the barriers of the self, willing to be let out. This desire calls back to the dichotomy of exteriority and interiority and how, according to Gaston Bachelard,

> [n]ous découvrons ici que l'*immensité* du côté de l'intime est une *intensité*, une intensité d'être, 'intensité d'un être qui se développe dans une vaste perspective d'immensité intime. En leur principe, les "correspondances" accueillent l'immensité du monde et la transforment en une intensité de notre être intime. (Bachelard 179)

The vastness from within is the intensity of the being. The outside vastness reflects itself in the inner world, transformed in an intensity of the being. These tensions appear in Claire's relationship with space; when isolated from the

outer world, she increases her intensity on her own suffering and experience. Exteriority and the Other parallel; both are perceived as something at a distance from the self. However, when we look at Gloria, there is a balance between intensities.

Although she demonstrates a larger capacity for understanding others, she has a good portion of her chapter dedicated to her own introspection. During her walk, there is a mention of "These Boots are Made for Walkin'" by Nancy Sinatra, which brings forward the aspect of music in the novel. The importance of sound is a compelling and recurrent theme in the novel. The opening lines from Book One being about how "One of the many things my brother, Corrigan, and I loved about our mother was that she was a fine musician" (McCann 11), and throughout the text, we can see mentions and the interference of sounds as the manifestation of the city. Although we will not try to understand the influences of music, it would be remiss not to point out this interesting avenue of research.

For Gloria, music is a way to escape her physical pain, to dissociate from her reality and keep going forward. She even mentions "*One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you*. One corner to another. One more crack in the pavement. That's the way we all walk: the more we have to occupy our minds the better" (McCann 307). The physical aspects of the street become objects of distraction, external things to keep your body moving with your mind working—the very opposite of Claire's narration. The vastness of the outer world does not suppress the self's inner expression. Beyond that, the contradiction between the statement and her actions is enhanced when the novel changes to her past and reflects upon the choices that lead her to "the city that danced" (McCann 305). Strongly attached to family ties, she speculates on the reasons for her first marriage,

divorce, and how she ended up marrying again. As she walks, the narrative follows in this movement of discontinuity, coming and going; she explains her trajectory upstate and narrates the physical changes in the city simultaneously.

There is an economic and ethnic difference between the representation of Harlem and the Upper East Side that should be considered, even if both are within the Manhattan borough. Harlem's characterization highlights its hostile architecture—"The streets of Harlem felt like they were under siege—fences and ramps and barbed wire [...]" (McCann 306). The war-like description could be understood as an allusion to the 'war on drugs' very present in the neighborhood. It is also in this environment that the protagonist has her change of heart and goes back to the penthouse. After being mugged, she sees herself as losing more than just coins. As the street "throbbed around her" (McCann 308), she is forced to focus on more than just pieces of the city; then, looking around, she sees a woman looking through a window and turning her back. The woman's indifference to Gloria's situation aggravates her pain, it showcases yet another way in which the city fails her.[22] As she transitioned from Park to Harlem, she pointed out the physical hostilities of the buildings. In this scene, she highlights the rotting wood and artificial flowers while exposing the social fissures of the neighborhood. The woman on the window abandoned her, and in this fragile moment she returns to Park Avenue.

However, there are clear tensions in her relationship with Claire that are made obvious from the start. Claire is a white upper-class woman, and Gloria does not shy away from pointing this out from the beginning. Class plays a part in security

[22]In "Uses of the sidewalk: safety," Jane Jacobs argues that a key element for increasing safety in big cities is the collective policing of the streets—"There must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs 35). As we comment bellow, there are different ways to achieve this protection; however, Jacobs highlights the role of community in patrolling and soulving issues without police intervention. In general, with the active participation of the collective, problems such as robbery and mistreatment could be avoided all together in spaces actively inhabited and with small business looking out for each other.

factors as “in some rich city neighborhoods, where there is little do-it-yourself surveillance, such as residential Park Avenue or upper Fifth Avenue in New York, street watchers are hired” (Jacobs 40). The wealthy neighborhood, the penthouse, and even the doorman appear as a safe network, even if Gloria is unaware of these subtleties. The reason why the narrator runs away through the city streets was due to a racist interaction where Claire offered to pay for Gloria’s company. However, after being snubbed by the window woman, Gloria takes a cab back to 76th st—“I had no idea why. Certain things we just can’t explain. I could just as easily have gone home [...] And the Bronx was closer than Claire’s house, that I knew” (McCann 308). Here, the narrator admits her ignorance of why she chooses to go to Claire in a moment of distress. However, it is this choice that changes both women’s fates and it is a central moment for the novel’s understanding. One possible explanation is the security warranted by a privileged neighborhood and the wish to find comfort in another.

While the woman in the window turns away from Gloria, Claire anxiously welcomes her. However, she avoids judgemental attitudes towards the woman as she states that “people think they know the mystery of living in your skin. They don’t. There’s no one knows except the person who carts it around her own self” (McCann 309). A comment on Claire’s anxieties and another allusion to Gloria’s understanding of people around her. After reading Claire’s chapter, we are aware of her desperation for connection, her awkwardness while interacting with others, and the trapped feeling of her apartment. For this, we might be empathetic to her offense against Gloria as she longs for an opportunity to keep company. The very structure of the chapter helps this effect, as it features her spinning thoughts and goes in-depth into her psyche. At the same time, Gloria reminds us how well-intentioned acts can

display subtle racism, and even highlight the structural problems that cannot be discarded.

While Claire's reality puts her grief at the center of her life and decisions, Gloria's goes beyond. The change from observer to an agent narrator seems to have a strange effect on the narrative. Instead of becoming more partial and influenced by closeness to experience, the narration becomes clearer, almost lucid. Gloria has a very reasonable voice in her chapter. In many ways, she recognizes that her experience is limited and attempts to find patterns in the aftermath of it—her ability to look back demonstrates awareness that "an experienced event is finite at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it" (Benjamin, vol2, 238). As seen before, she recognizes how each individual has an inner world that could be unreachable to others; however, she goes back in an attempt to construct bridges to reach the other. In her book *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), Suzanne Keen affirms:

> Social and developmental psychologists, philosophers of virtue ethics, feminist advocates of an ethic of caring, and many defenders of the humanities believe that empathic emotion motivates altruistic action, resulting in less aggression, less fickle helping, less blaming of victims for their misfortunes, increased cooperation in conflict situations, and improvisations on behalf of needy individuals and members of stigmatized groups.[23] (vii)

Gloria's chapter is fundamentally connected to empathetic expressions. Although she reflects on the insurmountable gap between their experiences, she still

[23] See C. Daniel Batson et al., "Benefits and Liabilities of Empathy-Induced Altruism" (2004), 360–70 for a discussion of the recent research on each of these results of empathy.

goes back to Claire without fully understanding her action. The narrator displays a strong sense of ethics in regard to other people's inner life, if not relating to their emotions, at least, accepting and validating their existence. These empathic emotions might motivate altruistic action, which is exemplified in Gloria's decision to go back to Claire—who was clearly in need of company—and in the adoption. The importance of empathy in the novel shall be discussed further in the next sections, however, it is worth noting its influence on Gloria's actions. There is an element of awkwardness, their manifestation is often callous and frequently remarks on the struggle to fill the gap of experience. In our first chapter, we saw how de Certeau (1988) sees pedestrians as capable of "[weaving] places together" (Certeau 97), as they make the physical connection between places. When Gloria explores the streets, she too becomes an agent capable of connection—as her narrative weaves places, people, and different times.

The translation of history into a personal experience can also be felt in Claire's relationship with Petit's act. Trapped inside the apartment, the only moment she comes close to venturing outside is when she goes to the rooftop. At the highest part of the building, she looks out to the city. The presence of war within her narrative and the metropolis' dramatization of historical events take the front seat when Claire expresses how she feels about Petit's performance in:

> But death by tightrope? Death by performance? That's what it amounted to. So flagrant with his body. Making it cheap. The puppetry of it all. His little Charlie Chaplin walk, coming in like a hack on her morning. How dare he do that with his own body? Throwing his life in everyone's face? Making her own son's so cheap? Yes, he has intruded on her coffee morning like a hack on her code. With his hijinks above the city. Coffee

> and cookies and a man out there walking in the sky, munching away what should have been. (McCann 113)

The novel presents the collision of the meeting with the artistic stunt. Claire's son haunts her every interaction, even becoming the source of her hatred toward the unknown artist. Philippe Petit 'hacked' her meeting with the other grieving mothers, just as her son hacked computers. For her, the event is perceived as a mockery and simultaneously a reflection of their times, life becomes disposable in face of "the country" or even "art." The young man on the rope becomes her son, a metaphor for "what should have been," and she is outraged by his carelessness with his life. The other mother, Marcia, has a similar reaction—to see her late son instead of Petit. Their sorrow fills the void presented by a man with no face, and in Claire's case, the brush with death is seen as mockery.

Soon it becomes clear that the French artist is the canvas where Claire projects her understanding of the war. For her, there is only pain to be felt and a sense of derealisation. Death is at the center of this chapter. Her lack of understanding, the proximity and the anger she feels toward death transpire through her questions. Right before this excerpt, we have an entire page with a list of 'deaths by'—"a stupid, endless menu of death" (McCann 113). The agents vary from practical and physical (rats, gangrene, suicide), psychological (isolation, silence, carelessness, boredom), to even political/historical causes (Kennedy, Nixon, Uncle Tom, Kalashnikov). When Claire thinks about her son, it generally revolves around his work in the military or his death. The irony in him helping to count the number of dead bodies in Vietnam. His youth, the lack of closure, and loneliness. Every aspect of her life is affected by the war.

As aforementioned, to explore History, the novel dives deep into the character's personal experience. Through this process, History itself is rewritten, occupying a more flexible place:

> We can begin to recognize the possibility of a *history that is no longer straightforwardly referential* (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma [...] we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed *not at eliminating history but at resituating it* in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not. (Caruth 11, emphasis mine)

As proposed by Cathy Caruth (1996), traumatic experiences shift our understanding of history and the linearity of any historical narrative is contested. The author highlights the impossibility to construct a straightforward line of events in our times. Nevertheless, her proposition is not to disregard any reference but to construct a flexible narrative. The plurality of *Let the Great World Spin* points in this direction. The author resituated both the historical events at play and the city of New York in every chapter, especially in the two parts analyzed here. When the reader is transported to a penthouse on Park Avenue, a place of privilege, the book presents a unique view that enables the characters to see the skyline all the way to the New York General Building, but not the towers. In the wealthiest part of town, two very distinct women are given a voice and different perspectives—both physically and socially. Their perspectives and experiences differ greatly, as does their path to forge a comprehensive understanding of their times.

They show differences even in their coping mechanisms. Claire is hyperfocused on her memories, to try and keep her son alive even if only in her

head. She looks forward to talking and telling stories about her son; in contrast, Gloria seems more focused on her own parents and her personal history. A pattern in “All Hail and Hallelujah” that reflects this divergence is the abrupt cut in the sequence of events. Every time the narrator wants us to know the deeper context for her actions or thoughts, Gloria transitions to her biography. One significant event is the change after Claire’s offer to pay for Gloria’s company.

After the incident, she traces her family background, and her slavery roots appear as the main feature in her mother and grandmother's lives. The proximity to the horrors of slavery fills her digressions, as we read:

> He [great-grandfather] carried a mind-whip with him just in case he forgot. I know a thing or two about what people want to buy, and how they think they can buy it. I know the marks that got left on women’s ankles. I know the kneeling-down scars you get in the field. I heard the stories about the gavel coming down on children. [...] I’ve seen the fists pumping in the air. I joined in the songs. I was on the buses where they lifted their little children to snarl in the window. I know the smell of CS gas and it’s not as sweet as some folks say. If you start forgetting you’re already lost.

Claire’s action triggers a generational trauma and transports her to another time when racialized people were bought. The stories are passed down and the body marks are tokens for remembrance—which are needed to “win the fight.” The slavery stories and scars from her grandparents become protests and construct a link between theirs and her own experience as a black person. Two historical moments are joined; slavery and the fight for civil rights. They must not be forgotten and, therefore, she feels the need to also carry a mind-whip.

At first, when she flees the apartment, it could suggest that for liberation she must deny Claire completely. Nevertheless, her coming back brings another layer to the conversation, as she can "not forget" and still build a relationship with the other. Finding common ground, her experience could be remembered in a multitude of ways, and her episode with Claire is only one of the axes through which she is able to spin the collective trauma of slavery and the decision to adopt. If forgetting is to lose, remembering might not be enough to win. Finding redemptive relations with the other, and even raising the next generation together, might be a better resolution for her narrative.

The question of understanding the experience of another is central to both chapters, but one of them ends with a somewhat hopeful note. Her choice to return does not absolve the racist interaction or even the tensions between them. Her blackness extends to every aspect of her life, and is still present in their later conversation. Much as the city itself, her racialized reality weighs her every interaction and appears as part of reality itself. She decides to walk because cabs do not stop for black women and "no amount of freedom-riding is ever going to shift that" (McCann 300). She did not call the cops when she was robbed. She is thunderstruck when three white women wait for her in the elevator. Gloria's awareness of their differences and even her ability to read the room depict a clear contrast between the characters. Despite all this, Gloria goes back to Claire's apartment in her most vulnerable moment. Afterward, we discover that they lean on each other throughout the years while raising the orphans.

As the chapter comes to an end, there is a link forged between them as both women witness the police take Jazzlyn's daughters. There, in a collective choice, she chooses to adopt the girls—"I was still in Claire's slippers. [...] I looked

over my shoulder to Claire, who was still in the backseat, her face shining under the dome light. She looked frightened and happy both" (McCann 322). The symbolism of stepping into someone else's shoes contrasts with her previous statement of never quite knowing the other person's inner world. If before the protagonist was singing about boots that "walk all over" others, the much softer shoes she is using now help her be with rather than over the other. In an unspoken agreement, when confronted with the little girls' situation, they seal their friendship. At that moment, both women solidify their alliance, their differences in experiencing reality unite them in unexpected ways. Their union triggers a chain of reactions that shape the end of the novel in both plot and form. Their bond enables the book to jump ahead in time, and changes the life of the last narrator.

During the last chapter, Jaslyn, one of the girls adopted by Gloria, feels attached to both women; their presence being a constant in her life. August 7th was the day Petit crossed the towers but also the beginning of a life-long friendship despite all odds. When Gloria states, "[s]ometimes you've got to go up a very high floor to see what the past has done to the present" (McCann 306), we see space and time brought again to the forefront. This statement becomes truer in different layers throughout the novel. The women's link is forged in Claire's penthouse, a physically high space. During the morning they had discussed the past, while in the afternoon and evening, they talked about the present. In most chapters there is a vertical dislocation—characters underground go to the surface, from the streets to high buildings, or from south to north. In a city such as New York, it is important to consider how these movements affected the narrative and created a "wave of verticals" (Certeau 91).

For Gloria, the understanding of how she ended up adopting the two girls and the overall reflection on her present situation comes through digressions. She looks to her past—her divorce, the war, slavery roots, disappointing her parents—while she remembers that day. She begins the narration with these reflections and slides to the memories of the brunch at the apartment. Throughout the scenes of her walk and conversations, we see cuts and commentaries; however, they stop once she leaves the apartment for the last time. She went physically up a building, but she also went economically up, even the name of the neighborhood reflects that—she is in the “upper” east side. In this position, she thinks about the past, puts herself in someone else's shoes, and everything climaxes in her decision to adopt the two little girls.

Furthermore, Gloria weaves the past in an attempt to make sense of what has become, as an “image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”, 5). When she braids tales of her heritage and black background into the narrative, she creates a mosaic, where the past inhabits the same continuum as the present. Both hold the same value for the narrator, they are physically present as pieces of reality. This crossing between space and time reflects the formal construction of the novel.

As pointed out before, the contrast between the chapters’ forms is striking, as is their different perception of events. From poles apart, Gloria and Claire find solace in their common grief, nevertheless, it is neither an easy nor automatic connection. The stylistic choices in both chapters reflect these tensions and highlight their contradictions while still offering a possibility for redemption. The implied author weaves time and space into the characters’ experiences to reveal how time connects

their lives. It becomes impossible to apprehend time and experience separately. Novels like James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) have done interesting experimentations in the connection between form and time[24]; however, in our novel, these are masterfully brought to the forefront and complexified by postmodern and historical tensions. The historical period, with its network of complexities, plays an important part in the amalgamation of form and time—issues such as racialized experience, grief, and the city itself intensify these relationships.

[24] Some other notable mentions would be William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1927), Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Gabriel García Márquez *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). These novels play with formalistic notions to translate different perceptions of time, and many theorists have taken an interest in these experimentations. Bakhtin's theory on the literary Chronotope (*The Dialogic Imagination* (1983)), Ricoeur's *Temps et Récit* (1985) and *La Memoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli* (2000) are some example of studies on the novel's relationship with time.

3. The city stage: imagining images and possibility for change

The most evident movement of time is at the end of Book Three with Jaslyn's chapter. Transported to 2009 New York, we feel a kindred sentiment towards the woman's experience and her attempt to balance trauma and life. The narration comes and goes, similarly to Gloria's chapter, to assemble some coherence in her present conditions. However, instead of traveling down her family tree, she is unable to find roots and describe the aftermath of her search. She traveled to Ireland looking for a connection with her dead mother, only to come back to New York and lie in bed next to her second adoptive mother, Claire. Meanwhile, she recounts her upbringing, her experience as a lawyer, and meets a possible love interest.

The apparent disconnection between her life and the rest of the novel's fragments only evidences their contact points. While the scenes painted in previous Books are vaguely connected by war, grief, and art; “Roaring Seaward, and I Go” brings these motifs to a more familiar, post-9/11 world. Besides the direct mention of DeLuca's photograph, the narrator presents allegories and connections that transform this chapter into the culmination of the novel's themes. Jaslyn's work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, her sister being a part of the military, and her trip between New York and Dublin are all filled with signs of our times. The emphasis on images and their metaphors is clear from the chapter's first lines, with the aforementioned description of DeVitto's photograph. Another point that stands out is the description of Claire's house during her visit. As touched on in our second chapter, the penthouse was the stage of Claire and Gloria's connection and linked to

wealth up until this point. However, as Jaslyn describes it, indications of the 2008 recession contradict the latter;

> The worst thing was the portrait of the dead man on the wall. The painting has been done in such a way that his eyes seemed to follow them. Claire would talk about him all the time, that Solomon had loved this and Solomon loved that. She had sold some of the other paintings—even her Miro, to help pay the expenses—but the Solomon portrait remained. (McCann 335)

The character does not expand on what 'the expenses' would be; however, the chapter is set in 2009; one year after the Great Depression of 2008. Although only hinted at, the novel's timeline suggests that the crisis is responsible for the family's financial loss. The Mirò is no longer present; the absent painting gives name to Claire's chapter and is particularly symbolic of her relationship with space. At the moment that she received the news of Joshua's death, she wonders "Miró, Miró, on the wall, who's the deadest of them all?" (McCann 112). The childish parallel with fairy tales and the association with the physical space unites art and materiality with her own experience of grief. As discussed before, for the most part, her narration reflects her imbalance between public and private realities. This quote captures this tension; the work of art becomes an extension of Claire's relation with exteriority and her subjectivity. She acknowledges spatial influence on her experience in:

> But what is it about the notion [of the tie-rope walker] that she doesn't like? Amazing, indeed, yes. And an attempt at beauty. The intersection of a man with the city, the abruptly reformed, the newly appropriated public

space, the city as art. Walk up there and make it new[25]. Making it a different space. But something else in it still rankles. She wishes not to feel this way, but she can't shake it, the thought of the man perched there, angel or devil. (McCann 103)

Here Claire attempts to cope with Petit's intrusion; first, she acknowledges that his performance is not directly connected to her life. She sees the artistic merits of the act; her interpretation paralleling space and art. However, his appearance still threatens her as she deliberates if his presence is heavenly or hellish. In the previous chapter, we briefly touched on the latent tension between private and public spaces. On a different trend, in our first chapter, we mentioned how the city's sounds appear to galvanize and influence the scene. Here, both characteristics resurface.

When we looked at the preface, we saw how sirens appeared as an urban sign, pushing people to action. A similar event occurs for Claire when Marcia confronts the possibility that the walker might have fallen like her son—"An unfolding of seconds. A siren outside the window. The static broken and thoughts taking shape in their minds, like water in a pitcher" (McCann 106). After hearing the siren the group discusses if maybe the walker had died, and the figure takes the shape of all of their sons. After this, Claire's narrative digresses and takes a personal shift. Turning inwards, her mind plots an increasingly anti-war discourse, until she pleads "Leave the boys at home" (McCann 107). Her request also indicates how she sees 'home' as a safe place, exemplified by her constant state of being inside. Sensing Claire's inner turmoil, Gloria asks her what is the problem, which leads her to talk about a traumatic memory. In a moment of insight, after sharing her grief, she comes

[25] "Make It New" refers to Ezra Pound's (1885–1972) modernist imperative and his homonymous essay collection *Make It New* (1934). In this collection, he asks artist to break from tradition and search for new ways to create art.

to a conclusion about Petit's act—"And then she knows now what it is about the walking man. [...] He was up there out of a sort of loneliness. What his mind was, what his body was: a sort of loneliness. With no thought at all for death" (McCann 112).

The walker's defiance of death is seen as an insult; the possibility that life continues and there are men creating art despite the risk of losing their lives is an affront to her. This seems foreign, it angers her to the point of hatred toward the man and the government. Her yearning for companionship takes over and she wants to share, talk about and relive memories of her son. She folds to her inner world, mentally and physically, as she goes to Joshua's room, the farthest room from the balcony, in an attempt to ignore the outdoors. When she asks Miró for an answer, when she is offended by Petit's appropriation of public space—transforming the city into art —, she reveals a form of resentment. Claire looks for consolation in art as if she could find a form to express her sorrow while, simultaneously, she feels that making something beautiful out of something so painful is offensive. How dare the walker continue to make beautiful things, how does the world continue to spin?

Art becomes an important axis of the book's construction, mainly through the various perspectives that shape the city. The presence of different artists[26], the contradictory feelings awakened by Petit's performance, and the several forms of representations present in the book raise the question of art and suffering. Paintings, in particular, play an important role in the process of mediating the tension between reality and memory. When Jaslyn describes the apartment, she mentions two paintings: the Miró painting and her husband's portrait, Solomon Soderberg. In the

[26] Throughout the novel the narrative engage with multiple artistic endeavours. This becomes particularly prominent in "Let the Great World Spin Forever Down" and "The Rising Grooves of Chance," with Philippe Petit's fictionalized performance, in "A Fear of Love," with rich painter Lara Liverman, and in "Tag," where the book shines light to underground art with an amateur photographer.

last chapter, the former painting's absence only brings out the latter's presence. Solomon's image is centered in three different lights, in three different chapters throughout the novel. Our first contact is, of course, with Claire:

> Past Joshua's door. Past her own bedroom. Past the painting of Solomon on the wall, eighteen years younger and a good deal more hair. Into the living room. [...] No need for all those niceties, the oohs and the ahhs, the embarrassments, what fabulous curtains [...] what a lovely vase, and, Lord above, is that your husband on the wall? (McCann 91-92)

Perceived as another detail in the extensive description of space, the portrait does not particularly stand out. A part of the surroundings, crowding the house where her entire life seems to pass. She is both relieved and thunderstruck that the women are apparently unaware of the decoration, they ignore the image, going straight to the living room. Here the painting is equal to the "fabulous curtains," an object to be seen, an image representing the husband. If art throughout the book appears as a way to overcome traumatic situations, here, however, Claire disregards Solomon's painting as artistic, classifying it as a part of the house.

The second moment we visit this painting is in Gloria's chapter. When Claire is in the kitchen, the grief group makes fun of it:

> He was painted very fine, the husband, like a photograph, sitting in an antique chair with his jacket and blue tie on. It was one of those paintings where you'd hardly notice a brushstroke. He was looking out at us very seriously. Bald, with a sharp nose, and a little hint of wattle at his neck. [...] Janet's hand moved up along the frame and hovered over his thigh. [...] Jacqueline said: "Don't excite the poor man." A hush and a few more

> giggles. [...] I wondered what might happen if I were the one to get up and touch his knee, run my hand along the inside of his leg—imagined that. (McCann 291)

Gloria's reading is strikingly different from Jaslyn and Claire's perspectives. For the latter, the painting is an object, part of the house. The third moment with Jaslyn, as seen before, considers the picture as the "worst thing" (335) in the room; infused by an ominous feeling of eyes that seem to follow one around. Solomon is perceived as a presence that "remained" through the work of art, barely reachable through memories, aloof and distant. Even more, the "portrait of a dead man" in a house affected by economic hardships haunts the living with the past glories, a nod to the money that once was there. During Gloria's narration, nevertheless, the painting is almost alive. The play-act of 'exciting' him demonstrates how those women perceive the figure almost as a living representation of the man. Although Gloria avoids engaging in the women's mockery, her use of the past continuous—"*he* was looking"—conveys her perception of a living subject. The picture is actively looking at them as if Solomon was there. Even when contemplating the details of the image—"he was painted very fine" —, there is a difference in treatment from Jaslyn's use of 'it' when referring to the 'made' object—"the painting has been done" —, not understanding the image as an extension of the real man.

Another contrast between their views is the family's economic status. If for Jaslyn the presence of this particular object comes to highlight the absence of more expensive paintings, in this excerpt, the portrait is a clear sign of wealth. However fine the painting is described to be, it is still not a photograph. The act of commissioning a full-body-length portrayal in the late twentieth century goes beyond

the conservation of an image. It is a demonstration of status and wealth. By the narrator's description, when looking at the painting “you’d hardly notice a brushstroke”; there is little visual difference from a photograph. The detailed depiction, the clothes, and the “hint of wattle,” tell the story of a wealthy ageing man.

When Gloria goes back to the apartment, she reinforces her personification when she alludes to its realism—“It didn't make much difference [the husband being late]—it's hardly like I wanted him to step down off the wall and get all friendly with me, but Claire had a far-off look in her eyes, like she wanted to be asked about him, and so I did” (McCann 315). For her, the man and the image are one—both emitting an aloofness that is not translatable to her experience. In opposition to her hostess, she sees the man on the wall as too distant, too *other* to even conceive the idea of “getting all friendly” with him. While she spends the afternoon with the wife, the husband remains a background image. Claire attempts to convince others of her husband’s redeeming qualities, being highly aware of the privileged light through which they are perceived throughout their whole lives.

Jaslyn and Gloria seem aware and somewhat resistant to accepting her attempts, both expressing disinterest or mild indulgence. Solomon only takes shape in Jaslyn’s narrative through the horrid portrait or stories—“[she] would talk about him all the time, that Solomon had loved this and Solomon loved that” (McCann 335). Her tone is indifferent to the man, more focused on Claire’s wish to keep him alive—the echoing end could even indicate mild annoyance with her repetitiveness. Likewise, Gloria displays a similar attitude toward Claire’s need to talk about Solomon; she indulges the wife because she looked like she wanted to be asked about him, and not because she was particularly interested in the topic. Her disinterest permeates through the majority of her later encounter with the judge, until,

at the last moment, Claire's interference seems to crack their walls. After a private talk with his wife, Solomon comes back to apologize for his rudeness and admits "I miss my boy too sometimes" (McCann 319). After this, Gloria tells us how she has "always known that it's hard to be just one person. The key is in the door and it can always be opened" (McCann 319). The small moment of vulnerability allows her to deepen her perception of the man beyond a static image.

Gloria stands out from the book; she narrates the last chapter set in 1973 and it is through her decisions that the book presents one of the most important spins in the characters' lives. Her openness to others and her ability to move throughout the urban spaces are similar to the book's approach as a whole. The multiple narrators are able to deliver a variety of focalizations, sometimes contradictory, to multiple objects. The novel sews these experiences in unexpected ways, bringing to the forefront the composition of urban life. The narrative avoids inserting any character in a box, even the most privileged characters. Every character within the novel is offered a complex treatment, and we are offered a key to some of their inner worlds.

In "Parts of the Parts," the close narration through a third person reflector allows us to follow Solomon Soderberg's day, as the New Yorker judge becomes responsible for two crucial cases: Petit and Tillie's sentences. The narrator helps us understand Solomon's motivations, frequently adopting a similar voice to the main character, and offering a complex reading of his lost idealism. The chapter navigates his anticipation for Petit's trial and climax during Jazzlyn and Tillie's sentencing, while also offering us insight into his philosophical views and coping mechanisms.

The narration attempts to retrace his path into becoming a judge, and how he conforms to the reality that

> [a]nyone who swung by, anyone who participated in the system in any way, got sideswiped. [...] Everyone was in a jam and it was his job to sit at the center of it, to dole out the justice and balance it between right and wrong (McCann 258)

He even refers to Centre Street as a “shithouse“ (McCann 253). Oftentimes his narration centers on people accused of crimes as guilty regardless of any trial. The notion that those working within the system are entrapped is recurrent, and so is the belief that those caught by the police are undeserving of interest. Solomon’s portrayal of the judiciary system comes from a particular perspective, a wealthy white male point of view. His privileges permeate his interactions and his application of the law, they also resurface in his desire for control—hence his belief that he is in the center of Justice, responsible for balancing “right and wrong” (McCann 258). However, those points do not prevent the narrative to shed a sympathetic light on his character—without swinging into melodramatics or equivalenting his and the defendants’ suffering. The narrative walks a fine line between humanizing and acknowledging his entitlement.

The painting, as an object of art moving through time and being reinterpreted, evokes fragments of Solomon that can be seen in his narrative as well—the wealth and the aloofness granted by power. Nevertheless, the way he experiences the systems around him and how the narration is attached to his reality reveals a perspective of the whole judiciary system. The fact that the narration stops before we are able to see Philipe Petit’s defense, which Solomon tells Claire is the highlight of his day, exposes the importance of Tillie’s trial. Although the judge disregards the whole incident, concentrating on the walker’s notoriety, it is Tillie the novel asks us to focus on.

Because of the chapter's order, the reader confronts Tillie's gut-wrenching narrative in prison prior to her trial. We are already aware of the consequences of Solomon's sentence, and Tillie's disdain for the judiciary system. She already talked about her sentence being longer than expected and how her lawyer convinced her to plead guilty. In the previous chapter of this dissertation, we dealt with mothers whose sons died in the Vietnam war. With Tillie's chapter, "This is the house that Horse built," we follow the perspective of another mother whose offspring was lost in a war, the war on drugs. Contrary to the other women, however, Tillie was not offered the comfort or possibility of a community as she was soon incarcerated with her grief.

Concerning her chapter, we should first pay close attention to how History and narration intertwine with the title. The first association the title brings is to the popular English nursery rhyme "This is the house that *Jack* built"—in it the lines grow as in a chain tale that reiterates itself with longer and longer stanzas. Once again, just like Claire's use of Snow White verses, the narrators return to childhood forms in moments of distress. In accordance with the rhyme's style, the narrator repeats the title throughout the chapter; the parroting aspects highlight the guilt over Jazzlyn's fate, her sense of entrapment, and the cyclical repetition of her life. An interesting point to consider is the contrasting image created between reality and reference. The childish allusion contains violent language—items, animals, and people are waked, tattered, torn, crumpled, tossed, killed, and eaten. The graphic tone underlying the children's tone mimics the violence scattered across the novel, particularly Tillie's life. The imagery of something consumed by larger and larger instances parallels the prostitute's imprisonment: social, physical, and mental. Her profession excludes her from society, the system locked her in prison, and the narcotics confine her to dependence.

The use of ‘Horse’, a colloquial term for heroin, conveys a significant change in the tale, as in the end, everything comes back to Jack’s house, or in this case, the Horse. Drugs are a sensitive subject for both Nixon’s government and Tillie’s personal story. In her biography, the narcotic appears as a constant force in her childhood and her adult life as a prostitute; it is also present in her daughter’s introduction to prostitution—“When Jazzlyn was fourteen she came home with her first red marks on the inside of her arm [...] She didn't even smoke a cigarette and there she was, on the horse. [...] I tried keeping her straight by keeping her on the streets” (McCann 218). Aware of her family pattern, the narrator confirms that theirs is a family ‘built’ by drugs; even going on to say that she should have warned her baby when it was in her womb that all it could hope for in life is to be like her.

Although the novel gives these prostitutes a very personal and touching narrative, the discourse around Black communities and narcotics during the seventies is highly political. The ‘war on drugs’ consisted of several racist policies implemented by President Nixon from 1971 forward; the campaign viewed addiction as a security problem, not as a health issue, therefore, leading to an increase in incarceration and police brutality. As Benjamin Boyce argues in his dissertation *Discourses of Deception: (re)examining America’s war on drugs*, those policies disproportionately affected racialized groups, renewing America’s long-standing

> commitment to white supremacy through targeting people of color. Once incarcerated, citizens become casualties of war: unable to work, unable to contribute to family structures, unable to fulfill parental obligations, unable to provide support to those who rely on them, and unable to build a wealth base to pass on to future generations. (30)

Boyce analyzes the policies presented by the end of the century; nevertheless, these consequences were already present in the seventies. Many important activists have theorized on the subject, names such as Ruth Wilson Gillmore and Angela Davis have largely contributed to our understanding of how race and incarceration in America intersect. In the widespread essay “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex” (2000), Angela Davis argues that “[p]risons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view” (Davis). The ‘deviants’, those marginalized from society need to be hidden, or at the very least put away from public view. The systematic destruction caused by this internal war in the US ensured the impoverishment of hundreds of families; racialized groups and sex workers were particularly targeted. These are the most affected and incarcerated. Another key point for the narrative is how this cycle of addiction repeats itself, as a self-fulfilling prophecy,

> I shoulda swallowed a pair of handcuffs when Jazzlyn was in my belly. That's what I shoulda done. Gave her a heads-up about what was coming her way. Say, Here your is, already arrested, you’re your mother and her mother before her, a long line of mothers stretching way back to Eve, french and nigger and dutch and whatever else came before me. (McCann 219)

On two other occasions, Tillie comments how her mother promised herself that the narrator would not follow in her footsteps, and then when she had Jazzlyn, she made the same promise, that her daughter would never become a prostitute. Both represent this cycle of mothers hoping and failing to secure a better future for

their offspring. Nevertheless, both would grow to become addicts and “walking the stroll” before fifteen. Her recollection draws a clear picture of a generational problem, as Boyce pointed out: these women are alone and unable to build wealth or fulfil parental obligations. The “long line of mothers” goes to the original sinner, Eve, and trickles down through her European and African ancestors. The generational trauma resurfaces in the pain of being unable to create a ‘better future’ for her daughter and granddaughter—which leads to her suicide. Only in erasing herself and the burden of her family history does she see a possibility for change.

After her only period of sobriety, Tillie confesses to going back to her life on the street in order to buy Jazzlyn's school books—evidencing her financial hardships. The juxtaposition of memories when Jazzlyn confesses her second pregnancy and her ‘celebration’ with heroin explicitly describes how the drugs were used as a way to escape her dreary reality. The guilty confessions, the self-hatred, and suicidal intent fill the narrative with signs of untreated mental illness; however, instead of medical treatment, the characters were, once again, met with policies focused on incarceration and brutality.

Curiously, the novel presents another character who committed a crime, suffers from addiction, and is filled with guilt: Lara Liverman. Although we will refrain from analyzing this chapter, in “Fear of Love,” Lara caused Jazzlyn and Corrigan’s death while high on drugs. The artist, however, was a white woman from a prestigious family. Their lives and endings are exemplary of the American government's discriminatory treatment regarding substance abuse. Tillie expresses an awareness of how collective her individual problems with the police and the judiciary system are: “He arrested me even when I wasn't working. [...] Still he took me down the pen. He had his quota. He got paid overtime” (McCann 209). Police

brutality appears in different instances and is generally regarded as the norm, as part of the job. It is the cop's mission to arrest sex workers and substance users, even when no crime was being committed; officers are rewarded for larger numbers of charges, which incentivize and uphold discriminatory systems. Tillie highlights moments where her blackness was an aggravating factor for police brutality, nevertheless, she sees this sort of treatment as commonplace.

Tillie's contempt for the judiciary also resurfaces in different instances; she is aware of how the system perceives her but points out how incomplete that picture is in: "I got a taste for supermarket cakes. You won't find that on my yellow sheet" (McCann 199). The yellow sheets offer physical descriptions, dates, and other practical numbers; however, there is an interiority that escapes her record. The sentiment of being unseen is not limited to papers but is reflected in her interactions with 'official' employees. Although her narrative omits her encounter with Solomon, we see her second trial, with a black judge, and how she ended up with a longer sentence upstate:

> "Your Honor, can you get me my babies? I just wanna see them once." He shrugged and said the babies were in a good place. He never once looked me in the face [...] The judge looked down over his glasses at me and sighed. He said something about *Booker T. Washington*, but I wasn't listening too good. (McCann 232, emphasis mine)

The magistrate does not look her in the eyes, ignoring her distress, and generally acting with contempt toward her pleas. When he finally looks at her, it is downward, signing and resembling altogether a paternalistic approach. He mentions the historical figure of Booker T. Washington, the orator of the Atlanta Compromise speech (1895), valuing accommodation and development of industrial skills by

African Americans above active resistance in defense Civil Rights. The commentary might suggest that the judge found Tillie lacking in education.

However, the black woman knows others perceive her as uneducated and proceeds to question the stereotypical characterization—"I ain't stupid. I don't wear the dunce cap just 'cause I'm a hooker. They did an I.Q. test and I got 124" (McCann 210). She talks about the few books she had access to and how she was at her happiest when sleeping and reading with an old client. At the very beginning, as she talks about her record, Tillie comments and establishes herself as more intelligent than those harassing her—"The cops musta got a D in spelling. The ones in the Bronx write worse than anyone. They get an F in everything except pulling us up on our prop'rties" (McCann 198). In questioning the police spelling, Tillie attempts to challenge the common assumptions about her education. Although her efforts to contradict these suppositions only attest to her lack of formal education, they also showcase her rebellion to be put in a box and her wish to be truly understood.

In much the same manner, Solomon's perception of her is very one-dimensional. The black judge exhibits a degree of insensibility throughout the interaction; he avoids eye contact while sighing. In a similar fashion, Solomon avoids talking directly to Tillie or Jazzlyn during their trial. He checks their rap sheets commenting on their 'illustrious careers' with the reader, and proceeds to talk to the assistant D.A. and the Legal Aid lawyer. The women's presence is ignored up until they start to cause a scene—mainly Tillie as she has a pendant for cursing and using improper endearments. On more than one occasion Solomon is shaken by the hooker's constant defiance and worries about the breach of decorum in front of the reporters—highly concerned with appearances and control. When Tillie thinks back at their meeting, she hopes that the system would sustain the agreement—"Me, I am

not going upstate, no way, I made my deal with the devil he was a little bald man with a black cape on" (McCann 202) —, however, there is a disconnection with what is seen in "Parts of the Parts." She believes that the judge is responsible for her placement, but during the court scene, Solomon states different things. She perceives him as the devil, their miscommunication reflects the variable perspectives on what happens in court. It displays the uneven understanding of procedures and how the parts involved are trapped in a system they cannot fully comprehend. Several philosophers have dealt with this topic, most prominently Foucault in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1977), challenging the premise of impartiality and how power and discipline create a system larger than individuals:

> The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerned distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. (202)

Socially constructed to be a place of judgment, the courtroom is depicted differently depending on the position you are standing. The judge's placement above others gives the impression of power as if Solomon was the one in control. However, as his narration gives away, it is all appearances—a theatre curated to uphold the system's internal *mechanisms*. As the personification of justice, he is able to observe the whole room but is unable to truly see Tillie, Jazzlyn, or even Corrigan. His assumptions are prejudiced and incorrect, reflecting his racism and reliance on automatic procedures. He wields power indifferent to circumstances; Tillie could be

any other prostitute and it would not make much difference. His gaze hypersexualizes her, constructs a narrative around and sentences her even before the lawyers say anything.

Despite all that, the novel avoids bestowing personal responsibility as we navigate the scene. The narrator goes a long way to highlight how the judge is only part of a continuous game—"Every now and then the blinkers had to be lowered. He had to learn to lose" (McCann 255). Both Solomon and Tillie's individualities are irrelevant when confronted with procedures—the distribution of bodies and gazes takes precedence. Discipline appears as a methodical well-oiled machine that continues to receive defendants; judges give sentences, lawyers settle deals—the appearance of justice continues. The deindividualization transforms into the illusion of detachment. Even though there is a veil of impartiality surrounding the justice system, the environment created for its execution is anything but. The system prevails; however, just as in the Panopticon, the positioning and the gaze reveal the power play in place. Keeping that in mind, we can look at *The Image of the City* (1960), where the American urbanist Kevin Lynch argues:

> The creation of the environmental image is a two-way process between observer and observed. What he sees is based on exterior form, but how he interprets and organizes this, and how he directs his attention, in its turn affects what he sees. The human organism is highly adaptable and flexible, and different groups may have widely different images of the same outer reality (Lynch 131)

If the creation of space is constantly in a process of observation, in the courtroom, we are able to find even more constructions of space. The physicality of the room is immersed in power discourses; the placement of the judge on a higher

stage, the theater-like audience in the background, and the defendant centered on his performance of innocence. A court is a place where a person's character is observed and judged. A lot could be said about the structures in place, however, let's focus on how the characters' perspectives and placement consolidate these power dynamics. The narrative offers us different points of view; a vision from the high chair, the accusation side, and the audience. Each of them organizes and directs our attention to specific characteristics of the space, their experience reflecting how they reconstruct the courtroom.

In the audience, Claire has the privilege of indifference, opting not to go there anymore, she describes her memory of the place as "The thugs in court are quiet until they're sentenced, then the anvil comes down and they scream and shout and thrash, call him filthy names. She no longer goes downtown with him to the dark wood-paneled room to observe—why endure the abuse? Hey Kojak! Who loves ya, baby?" (McCann 75). The use of 'thugs' for the accused people evidences her prejudice against them, already finding them guilty in her mind. There is little sympathy in her description for those waiting on the "anvil to come down," the cartoonish description highlights her passive role of a watcher. Much like when watching a well-known play, she anticipates what is coming and waits for the inevitable crash. Although she seems detached from others' pains, she finds the environment aggressive and abusive. The reference to the Kojak show further highlight her role as the audience; the use of Kojak's catchphrase "Hey Kojak! Who loves ya, baby?", in particular, foregrounds her dualistic vision. Kojak is a famous American detective series starring Telly Savalas, whose physical attributes are quite similar to Solomon's description. The title character is a New Yorker policeman known to be incorruptible. Aired between 1973 and 1978, the TV program reinforces

a parallel beyond physical similarities—it solidifies Claire's vision of Solomon as the incorruptible agent of law, and the defendants as "thugs."

In Solomon's chapter, we encounter an extensive description of the courthouse and its responsibilities toward society. While walking within the building he describes his work day, his survival tips, and his personal transformation since starting on 100 Centre Street. He followed the straight line along the floor, only making eye contact when on his elevated seat, following the unspoken rules of power and seeing himself as a cog in the machine:

> The greatest part of the law was the wisdom of toleration. One had to accept the fools. [...] *Try it*, they said. *Buck the system, Soderberg, and you will be eating pizza in the Bronx. Be careful. Play the game. Stick with us.* [...] He refused to believe them for many months, but slowly it dawned on him that they were correct—he was caught, he was just a part of the system, and the world was appropriated, a part of the Parts. (McCann 255-256)

With a series of sentences imitating an accelerated dialogue, the day's summary acquires a rhythm that classifies these undifferentiated cases as meaningless. If the "heroes of the system were the judges who disposed of the most cases in the quickest amount of time" (McCann 257) then the importance is not on the understanding but on the mechanical speed of procedures. For Solomon, the only way to survive the daily court is to resign to its game; there is tolerance towards those who begin believing; however, they are expected to conform soon rather than later. The Bronx appears as a threat to those who do *not* stick with 'us', the enigmatic us being the privileged men in power. He imagines his role to be of a director, his mission is to coordinate the actors in order to achieve an *appearance* of balance

between speed and fairness. Much of the work done in the court feels performative to him. Oftentimes he reinforces the belief that his work is to be a “part of the parts” of the judiciary system, but it also reflects on the way he faces his day. He avoids bulking the chores by breaking down every move of the day into little rules; he tells himself what is allowed and how to keep appearances. The space of the court is treated as a play, more than ever when the audience is filled with reporters for Petit’s trial, and that translates to how he interacts with Tillie.

For her part, Tillie's relationship with the system is longstanding; in her encounters with lawyers and judges, we are able to see the ‘other side’. In “This is the house that Horse built,” there are several instances of how Justice failed her personally. There was constant harassment from the police and correction officers, but most importantly, the agents of law failed to provide her with a fair trial. Firstly, the misleading agreement with the lawyer to free Jazzlyn—“He said: ‘All right, gimme a confession and I'll let her go. You’ll get six months, no more, I guarantee it.’ So I sat down and I sang. It was an old charge, robbery in the second degree” (McCann 211). The lawyer tricks Tillie into accepting the charges, promising something he was unable to keep. To free her daughter, she makes a deal, assured that she would be able to return to her family in a few months. Afterward, in court, she is sentenced to a longer time; moreover, in several moments the reader has the distinct impression that Solomon is more worried about the repercussion among the audience than he is about Tillie’s understanding of the consequences of her plea—“Soberberg knew that he would have to move quickly if he was going to pull out a good performance for the tightrope walker” (McCann 272). The “conversation” between Solomon and Tillie consists mainly of snarky remarks rapidly silenced by the judge’s orders and standardized questions. The defendant parrots the Legal Aid lawyer in order to give

the expected answers, to achieve a smoother trial. She is oriented to say her lines, much as an actor, reinforcing Solomon's statement that "The theater began shortly after lunch" (McCann 247). The appearance of justice surpasses reality; as we will see below, this is yet another instance where Tillie is stripped of her essence and only taken for her exteriority.

Nevertheless, power plays an important factor in this play-act. The judge and the other legal representatives have an *understanding*, they are speaking the same language and are aware of the game rules. Tillie is but a pawn in this place. The use of jargon and the structures of the room only enhance the class struggle taking place. On the topic, David Harvey (1990) states that,

> [s]patial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs. They always express some kind of class or other social content, and are more often than not the focus of intense social struggle. [...] Time and space both get defined through the organization of social practices fundamental to commodity production. But the dynamic force of capital accumulation (and overaccumulation), together with conditions of social struggle, renders the relations unstable. (Harvey 239)

While discussing the partiality of time and space, Harvey explains the instability that capitalist pressures exert on spatial and temporal formulations. Localized in the middle of Lower Manhattan, the House of Justice is at the center of the economic district. The geographical proximity to Wall Street is highlighted when Solomon comments on how many office workers saw Petit's performance through the buildings' windows. However, the presence of capitalist discourse goes beyond location. The dynamics of the judiciary mimic those of an assembly line. The production mindset, the focus on numbers and results dehumanizes those most

affected by the decisions made in the courthouse. When the judge disparages the defendants and uses degrading nicknames, he only reinforces the dominant narrative established during the War on Drugs. Diminishing the other is a powerful tactic; a way to distance one's self from the other and,

> Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding [...] On the other hand,[...] the tactics of individualizing disciplines are imposed on the excluded; and, on the other hand, the universality of disciplinary controls makes it possible to brand [the other] and to bring into play against [them] the dualistic mechanism of exclusion. The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time, [...] the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal (Foucault 199)

Foucault points out the othering discourse behind the systematic exclusion of said other. The individualization of the different upholds the judiciary system's sense of impartiality. To brand and isolate the deviant, a set of institutions must be created to instill fear toward the other, to demonize them in order to reinforce the standard. It is important to pose the question of what the system considers standard; certainly, one that is controversial and not so simple to answer. However, for our analysis, let's focus on the economic division established by the characters. In our last chapter, we saw how Claire and Gloria pose an economic contrast when Claire offers to pay for Gloria's company. With no money involved, the division is less explicit and set by images and space. Solomon's distinction is in the space he occupies (his higher chair in court) and in his profession. In many ways, his

painting on the wall with eyes that follow, always observing, fine brush strokes, and wealth is a reflection of his social standing. In complete opposition, we see Tillie Anderson.

The judiciary fragments people's identities into comfortable stereotypes, even if the novel attempts to subvert the image of the prostitute. The novel plays with images and our changing perception of them. It instigates us to think of crystalized images in dialectical lights—through the use of one moment, or one image, we envision universes around the city. The reorganization of space defies power,

> If space is indeed to be thought of as a system of 'containers' of social power (to use imagery of Foucault), then it follows that the accumulation of capital is perpetually deconstructing that social power by re-shaping its geographical bases. Put the other way around, any struggle to reconstitute power relations is a struggle to reorganize their spatial bases. (Harvey 238)

The geographical reconstruction creates a dialectical image that mirrors power relations in the city. The capital heavily influences how we shape time and space; our relationship with the other is rooted in political discourses. When Solomon's colleagues use the Bronx as a threat, in opposition to Centre Street, they categorize marginal spaces as abnormal. To defy the institutional dynamics could result in an undesired geographical move. In order to challenge these power structures, the novel reorganizes perceptions of space through the creation of dialectical images. The aesthetic associated with 9/11 leaned heavily into the suffering of Americans in the detriment of others, playing into the political discourses of US propaganda. The author is aware of these narratives and writes a novel that

uses similar images, but focuses on the possibility of empathy and their shared experience.

Coming from opposing experiences, Tillie tells us of a similar movement center to the north. Her trajectory is highly connected to the streets. From the moment she arrives in New York, her main source in differentiating the 'stages' of her career in prostitution is the street she walks. The streets she works on are directly connected to the clients and the life she leads—"I saw my rap sheet, [...] You see your life with carbon copies. Hunts Point, Lex and Forty-ninth, West Side Highway, all the way back to Cleveland" (McCann 198). When reading her official record, she summarizes her life through street names; rather than the places she lived, it is the places she worked that dictate her life story. As Lynch (1960) commented, the exterior is interpreted and organized through experience and we are led by what the character sees as worthy of attention (Lynch 131). Her work takes precedence in framing her experience; the city space becomes the main distinctive feature of her quality of life.

On her first day in New York, she goes to work at a hotel on Ninth Street. There she finds a Daddy and gets the best 'stroll'—Forty-ninth and Lexington, where she is the only black girl. It is during this time that she had the best week of her life at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel. After a couple of years, when she takes Jazzlyn back from her mother, she ends up in the Bronx; she tried going back to Lexington, but her new pimp broke both her arms. Then, for the rest of her life, she stayed on the Major Deegan expressway. As she goes north, she distances herself from the economic center and the wealthy neighborhoods, and, gradually, she sees the decay of her lifestyle and body—"I wasn't parasol girl down on Forty-ninth and Lex. The parasol was a thing I started in the Bronx. To hide my face, really" (McCann 217).

The powerful men in the judiciary are incapable of perceiving her, they even avoid looking at her. When she goes back to her happiest moment it comes with no surprise that it is directly connected with being truly recognized and appreciated. As a sex worker, she is used to being looked at; however, in this specific episode, she felt seen beyond physical appearances, able to express herself through art and reading poetry. It was a week-long affair where she stayed in a hotel room with a single client, reading poetry and telling personal stories. This event marks her; she wished to stay there standing in front of the glass window looking down at Center Park forever. Going back to Harvey (1990), the use of glass in modernity can propel an interesting reading of this moment:

> [the author] regards the reflecting glass surfaces of the Bonaventure Hotel as serving to 'repel the city outside' much as reflector sunglasses prevent the seer being seen, thus permitting the hotel 'a peculiar and placeless dissociation' from its neighborhood. (88)

At night, with the city lights illuminating her silhouette, Tillie longs for her daughter while looking outside. When she turns on the lights to keep reading, she realizes her mistake and turns them off again. The scene demands darkness, only the city is lit up, and the effect is close to Harvey's description. When Tillie walks the street, she is constantly the object of observation; however, for the duration of her stay, she becomes the observer. In the Sherry-Netherland Hotel, the height and invisible barrier lend her the feeling of disconnectedness from the city, and the weight of her reality is lifted. There is a change also in how she is perceived; there she is appreciated by her "John." He looks at her standing by the window and appreciates rather than objectifies her—"He wasn't fooling with himself or nothing, he just sat in the chair watching me, hardly breathing" (McCann 213).

Her experience with the male gaze is predominately sexualized, and that affects the way she is perceived. Prostitutes' association with art often unfolds into discussions of gaze and appearances, as seen in Baudelaire's writings. The French poet's notoriously problematic portrayal of women parallels his views in "Painter of Modern Life" (1964), where he affirms that a mistress "lacks practically nothing to make [herself] into a great lady—that 'practically nothing' being in fact 'practically everything'" (Baudelaire 35).

His writings transpire a similar vision to Solomon's: prostitutes live lives dedicated to their image and others' perception, so much so, that they become nothing but what they appear to be. As David Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) summarise, Baudelaire believes "Guys's greatest achievement [was] to have realized in his representations of prostitutes, courtesans, actresses, and dancers that these "object[s] of public pleasure" (Baudelaire 36) are workers remunerated for becoming one with their adornment" (Eng & Kazanjian 405). Being perceived as "adornment" disqualify the depth of one's experience, which is what the courtroom's theater does to Tillie. Solomon only sees Tillie as an accessory to the judiciary protocol, she and all other defendants are pieces of the system, *actors* with no real interiority. In parallel, Claire's role as the audience follows the same path. Actors play a part, pretending to have emotions—they create a display of emotion when "they scream and shout and thrash" (McCann 75)—which allows for detachment.

On the one hand, Claire and Solomon's gaze—truly, the system as a whole—creates distance through the hooker's appearance. Her experience is rejected as abnormal. Not only her, but poverty becomes a ghost behind the threat of being relocated to the Bronx; a position in Centre Street is used as a bargain for compliance. Similarly, Gloria associates the hostile architecture of 127th street,

Harlem, with war settings. The spatial separation is also the division between them and the other. There is an unwillingness to meet the other, through personal or collective traumas. As conceptualized by scholars Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie in *Empathy* (2014):

> For genuine empathy occurs only with matching of this sort. [...] My sympathy with you (or for you) does not require that you feel anything: but at the center of the idea of empathy is precisely a *sharing* of some psychological state or condition. So both your contribution and mine are required. And clearly it will not be sufficient for *empathy* that, say, you are afraid and so am I. Rather, in empathy, I am seeking to enter into your emotional state, if only in imagination: in this sense, success in empathy requires that my emotional state *match* yours. (192)

The observer must preserve a clear self-other differentiation while entering another's emotional state. One must exercise their imagination, create a bond with the other through a shared state. Positioning himself in a different space, Solomon refuses to contribute—so much so that it becomes the only way he can cope with his profession. Gloria, nonetheless, pivots in different emotional states, with a persistent awareness of others' interiority while sharing their views—be it blackness, poverty, loss, or a split moment of vulnerability. Historical conditions play with empathy, their complex context warranting different layers to what empathetic relations could accomplish.

On the other hand, "This is the House that Horse Built" opens the door for an implied reader to empathize with her, but also shows other possibilities for connection—shortening the gap in experience. The narration's closeness allows the reader to see how Tillie has autonomy in the curation of her image. Tillies's

profession demands that she transforms her body into a canvas, painted or concealed to attract the next client. Contradictorily, it is only when the Arabic man observes her that she can feel like more than an object. In performing seduction on the streets, she detaches herself from reality.

Nevertheless, as the man *looked* at her in that hotel suite, hardly breathing, she felt seen. The text does not transform her into a martyr due to her unfortunate reality. She is granted a kind of artistic potentiality, though not as prestigious as Lara Liverman, for a moment she is a storyteller. The novel also does not romanticize her as an object of art, depleting her of materiality. There is potentiality for creation, appreciation for a small moment of rupture—as she acknowledges in the first chapter, she is "[t]oo old to be an acrobat, too young to die" (McCann 29). But for one moment, the man holds his breath for her just as the watchers pulled in theirs for Petit in the preface.

If the gaze is a constant presence in her profession, Tillie's yellow sheet highlights how important location is for sex workers. Previously, we saw how Gloria's ascension to the penthouse brought forward a shift to the novel as a whole—changing the direction of the babies' lives. Yet again we see a character going to a high floor and a significant change occurs. Gloria meets the grieving mothers, women looking for company, while Tillie ascends with a client, albeit one that treats her better than most. When looking at the city, she is overcome with longing for her daughter, which leads her to go back to Cleveland—"And all of a sudden—right there, looking out over Central Park—I got a longing for my daughter like nothing else before. [...] I wanted just to hold her in my arms. It's no less love if you are a hooker, it's no less love at all" (McCann 213). The search for a connection, in her case with Jazzlyn, parallels the feelings in Gloria's chapter. Both women face

the city in their own way, they observe their surroundings and find longing within themselves. The exercise of looking transforms these women's fate and that of their offspring.

Tillie becomes the observer instead of the object of observation for the first time; however, simultaneously, she continues to be perceived by another. There is a difference, nevertheless, in how she feels about the gaze. Even when she tells a story she heard from a client, there is no judgment from the man listening. Tillie's work demands her to always be perceived as a sexual object, her use of the parasol is just another evidence of her care for her image. This man, however, offers a moment of peace and companionship. The city representatives constantly pass judgment on her, the official records are incapable of perceiving her beyond her crimes, and even those who use her body fail to see her. The magistrates barely look at her; their gazes are filled with preconceived ideas as Solomon's chapter demonstrates in several instances—"The way she stood, he knew for certain she was guilty. Just by the lean of the body, he knew" (McCann 272). Her work constantly interferes with others' perceptions of her, always observed and incapable of expressing herself fully.

Moreover, this hyper-awareness of others' gaze influences how she sees herself. When she revisits her life, her profession is greatly associated with her identity. It's the main topic of her institutional record, and although she thrives to be more, it still plays a major influence in her choices. When she traces back her childhood, her relationship with her mother, and her daughter's fate, most of it circles back to the same topic. As mentioned before, the official records identify her through places of work; her whole life is connected and revolves around walking the city streets—the main euphemism she uses to refer to work is "to take a stroll." Although

we saw before that walking for Gloria's narrative correlates to connection, in Tillie's case we have a different side effect. If to be a pedestrian is to connect places for the former, it can also mean to be in no place at all for the latter. Her job is to walk, to be in constant movement with no destination; it is a state of displacement—"To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper" (Certeau 103). She is perpetually displaced; not only does her work ostracize her by moral and legal standards, but it also entraps her into this constant state of 'walking', never in any place.

The only other person to see beyond stereotypes and offer her some comfort is Gloria. The similarities and parallels in their narratives only enhance the differences when they meet in prison:

> [the babies] were sitting there on the knee of a big black woman, long white gloves on her in a fancy red handbag, looking for all the world that she just woke up from the Lord's bed. [...] She said she was rightly conflicted whether she should bring the babies in or not, but she heard I really wanted to see them and they were living in Poughkeepsie [...] now *[the babies] were being well looked after***,** she told me, don't you worry. […] She looked at me a second from under her eyebrows, but she was cool, she was. She wasn't about to say nothing about me cursing. I liked her for that. She wasn't a stuck-up, *she wasn't making judgments.* (McCann 233, emphasis mine)

Even though there is an unspoken understanding between them, their physical description puts them in opposition. While the hooker admits to losing a lot of weight in prison, the other woman is big and seemingly religious. She looks proper with the white gloves and fancy handbag, but she wasn't righteous or condemning.

The image they project to the world is opposed; Gloria is often read as religious—she'd got "a body now, near thirty years later, that people think is church-going" (289)—while Tillie is discriminated against for her manners and appearance. Both could fit stereotypes connected to black bodies: the hypersexualized jezebel and the old mammy[27]. Nevertheless, these readings find no place in their interaction; Tillie and Gloria appear to see something in each other that is just a little beyond stereotypes. In this small moment, they see beyond images. When Tillie decides to trust Gloria and the latter gives the former the opportunity to see the babies for the last time, sentiments of empathy arouses.

The narrator remains fixed on seeing the babies throughout the chapter; with Jazzlyn's death, Tillie's one connection with life outside prison is her granddaughters. There is an element of bittersweetness in their encounter, considering that after seeing the babies Tillie makes the decision to kill herself. After meeting Gloria, she is convinced that the woman was the best option as a substitute mother and could give the children a better future. Tillie is unable to find in herself the same gentleness and absence of judgment she sees in Gloria—as reflected in her several outbursts of self-hatred, "I'm a fuck-up. That's what I am. I took the rap and Jazzlyn paid the price. I am the mother and my daughter is no more. [...] I'm a fuck-up like none you've ever seen before" (McCann 211). Gloria's lack of criticism and understanding alleviates the guilt of abandoning the babies. The book's approach to community points to *connection* as a tool for change; one that pushes against discourses of capital power and individualistic culture.

"All Hail and Hallelujah" embodies the experience of a marginalized citizen, Gloria; it is formed through the narrator's awareness of her condition as a

[27] These are common stereotypes associate with Black women. Mammy: caricature of an obese maternal figure that display loyal servitude towards white people. Jezebel: lascivious by nature, she is portrayed as innately promiscuous and predatory. More in: https://black-face.com/

poor black new yorker. Meanwhile, Solomon's chapter is rooted in his belief that change is impossible, even in his position of relative power. Tillie's self is constructed along a sense of imprisonment, both physically—jail, the Bronx, her body—and psychologically—generational trauma, cycle of poverty, and prostitution. She is aware that the institutions of power were not built for people like her, which generates a sense of entrapment only breakable through suicide.

Gloria's capacity for empathy is a driving force in her narrative; if we consider that these emotional processes could motivate altruistic actions (Keen vii), they could implicitly be the major driving force behind the adoption. As Coplan & Goldie (2014) formulate, "empathy is a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological state while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (5). In the previous chapter, we saw how much of Gloria's narration relies on her awareness and relation with the other, her strong sense of self and her personal history. Following this trend, when we observe her interaction with Tillie, her lack of judgment exposes her ability to empathize with the prisoner's situation despite their clear differences. Characters prone to empathic emotion tended to put less blame on victims for their misfortunes, especially in regard to needy individuals and members of stigmatized groups (Keen 2007). Of course, Gloria is herself part of a marginalized community, as discussed before, which could be one of the reasons for her temperament.

The degree to which similar circumstances influence empathetic response is also related to one's capacity to recognize one's self in the other. On the subject, Suzanne Keen states

> Even if basic human emotions remain the same, the situations that provoke empathetic recognition of complex blends of feeling are quite

> likely to differ in tone, mixture, and intensity in different contexts. Thus, a hypothesis emerges: *Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances.* (81, emphasis from original text)

Keen poses the question of class and history in the process of empathetic emotions, and the part they play in our recognition of the other. Certain emotions are universal; pain, suffering, and comfort; and they all link these narratives. However, the scenario and the intensity of each situation change and create a spectrum amount the characters. We can conceive that her closeness to poverty and blackness allows Gloria to relate more deeply to Tillie's sufferings, therefore she is not judgemental towards the prostitute in prison. Nevertheless, this reading devoids the text from the complexities that come into play when evoking empathetic responses—proximity to the other is one option to raise sympathy, but not the only one. As seen before, the relationship constructed between Claire and Gloria is another example of a connection when similarity is scarce. If in "Mirò, Mirò on the Wall" the city threatens Claire as it forces her to come into contact with the other, in Gloria's chapter, she finds companionship and comfort in the other she once avoided.

In Tillie's case, when we look at the instances she felt comforted, it is the moments she was seen. In her work she performs a curated act of seduction, her job involves around being gazed at and sexualized. When the system takes hold of her, it creates an image of her, putting her in a metaphorical and physical box. She is constantly been observed and broken into digestible images. Always seen in fragments, the moment she is no longer on trial or judged, she can only find peace through suicide in an attempt to break the cycle. When Tillie looks in the mirror and

says “Too old to be an acrobat, too young to die” (McCann 29), time is her warden. In acknowledging this, there is a latent wishfulness for change buried under the weight of time—as we had seen before, the notion of entrapment by the past is a recurrent idea for Tillie. Ultimately, she finds death as the only alternative out of her prison—mental and physical. Only in erasing herself and the burden of family history does she see a possibility for change. Jaslyn challenges this erasure when she searches for her past, a sign that memory might be needed in the construction of a future. Her suicide reflects her disbelief in any possibility of change. She believes that only in death she could actualize a better future for the babies. Nonetheless, the novel appears to point to another possibility in its last chapter. Jaslyn’s search for the family history, for her own roots, denotes a longing for connection with the past. The self-erasure of her suffering creates a void in her granddaughter’s image of herself—a parallel to America’s erasure of marginalized people’s presence in History.

Conclusion

Let the Great World Spin (2009) is an exercise on urban perspectives. The book wonders and creates a world of possibility within each person in this wide universe of New York City. It imagines connection when modernity attempts to constantly renew and abandon the past. In light of the relevant theories presented here, we draw relations between urban spaces, times, images, and history. Establishing a solid base and elucidating their intersection was crucial for our research. With theory, we explore not only the novel but also the construction of the city itself. We departed from Walter Benjamin’s understanding of dialectical images and history, incorporating elements of David Harvey’s writing on modernity and Paul Ricoeur’s conceptualization of time. At the theoretical heart of this investigation, we lean into Baktin’s chronotope. The importance given to aesthetics and the construction of space is our driving force. For that, we reviewed attributes of the novel through de Certeau and Bachelard’s grounding texts. Their theories and concepts guided us, enabling the rediscover of, not one, but many New Yorks in the midst of historical and racial tensions.

Even though history is such a driving force for the city’s characterization, Solomon addresses New York as,

> a city uninterested in history. Strange things occurred precisely because there was no necessary regard for the past. The city lived in a sort of everyday present. It had no need to believe in itself as a London, or a Athens, or even a signifier of the New World, like a Sydney, or a Los Angeles. No, the city couldn't care less about where it stood. [...] New York kept going forward precisely because it didn’t give a good goddamm about

> what it had left behind. It was like the city that Lot left, and it would dissolve if it ever began looking backward over its own shoulder. Two pillars of salt. Long Island and New Jersey. (McCann 247)

The eerie parallel between New York and New Jersey with Sodom and Gomorrah gives a fatalistic tone to the depiction. The fallen biblical cities complement the premonitory tone of “dissolving salt pillars,” reinforcing the nine-eleven reference. The disregard for the past appears as a threat; if the city looked back at its past, it would dissolve. The fear and disinterest in history create a city that is constantly in the present. De Certeau (1988) states something similar when he says that "unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future” (Certeau 157). New York’s relationship with time becomes an essential part of the urban experience. The emphasis on the present suggests that space is unaffected by change—as if modernity triumphed in erasing its marks[28]. Nevertheless, history has a way of slipping through the cracks; just as the judge echoes future events, the imagery of the novel reverberates differently depending on the perspective.

While playing with time, McCann digs into the roots of what separated us in everyday life—the limitation of our connections and the influence of space in our perception of each other. The ostensive focus on observing and imagining how the common citizen navigates difference is evident. On the surface, postmodernism

[28] As seen in chapter two, “Or, le temps disparaît dans l’espace social de la modernité. Il ne s’écrit que sur les appareils de mesure, isolés, spécialisés eux aussi: les horloges. Le temps vécu perd forme et intérêt social, sauf le temps de travail. [...] Le temps, ce “vecu” essentiel, ce bien entre les biens, ne se voit pas, ne se lit pas. Il ne se construit pas. Il se consume, il s’épuise, et c’est la fin. Le temps ne laisse que des traces. [...] Cette évacuation apparente du temps ne serait-elle pas un des traits caractéristiques de la modernité?” (Lefebvre 114-115)

could be understood as an exercise in translating diversity into aesthetics[29], but most importantly, we must comprehend how the author achieves this. Our goal was to sketch the ways the city supports the ideas of community, temporal structures, and stylistic choices. Therefore, we intend to deliver this conclusion on a twofold argument. Firstly, to reinforce the guiding lines of this research, we offer an overview of the distortions of space and time and the development of empathetic connections with the other. Secondly, we may observe the potential for change these stylistic choices evoke.

Let the Great World Spin expresses diversity in every aspect. As our investigation explains, when applied to different concepts of time, perspective, and history, the text brings out the nuances of each experience in its endless forms. Space is perceived and described through many variants; not one image—or painting, as the case may be—remains untouched by perspective or time. From the beginning, we sought to understand how the novel alters time and space to complement and complexify the processes of empathy. A close examination strengthens the links between urban spaces and the characters, as do their relationships with historical processes. Considering the imaginative operation of simulating another person's psychological state while maintaining a cohesive sense of self[30] as the basis for a deeper understanding of the other, few characters could compare to Gloria. Her relevance for the narrative as a whole is reflected in the

[29] David Harvey (1990), in the introduction of his book, states that postmodernism, “by way of contrast [to moderninsm], privileges 'heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse.' Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or 'totalizing' discourses (to use the favoured phrase) are the hallmark of postmodernist thought” (9). Furthermore, the theorist highlights the importance of how artist “contest [aesthetics processes], embrace them, try to dominate them, or simply swim within them, but the artist could never ignore them" (20).

[30] As seen before in chapter three, “[f]or genuine empathy occurs only with matching of this sort. [...] My sympathy with you (or for you) does not require that you feel anything: but at the center of the idea of empathy is precisely a sharing of some psychological state or condition. So both your contribution and mine are required. And clearly it will not be sufficient for empathy that, say, you are afraid and so am I. Rather, in empathy, I am seeking to enter into your emotional state, if only in imagination: in this sense, success in empathy requires that my emotional state match yours.” (Coplan & Goldie 192)

impressions she makes on others throughout the novel. She often shortens the gap between experiences while being in constant connection with her roots and background. “All Hail and Hallelujah” closes a cycle in the book and bridges the narrative with the future. In many ways, her narration is similar to the novel’s experience. The book constructs a narrative rooted in the period it depicts; the relationship between story and history is a constant source of tension. The novel becomes a conductor between different times, the middle ground between what was and what is.

When Claire attempts to circle back to grief and loss, Gloria states that “[h]er question rankled. [She] didn’t want to think about [her] boys anymore. In a strange way, all [she] wanted was to be surrounded by another, to be a part of somebody else’s room” (McCann 312). The suffering of the past collides with the present desire to surpass it. She understands and feels the loss, but looks for possibilities of overcoming in the other—similarly, the book as a whole looks back to the Vietnam War and the common people affected by it not as tragic cautionary tales but as figures of resistance. In many ways, the book invites us to become “somebody else’s room,” to be part of the space surrounding other people. We could even question Gloria’s desire to be wrapped around another; she does not wish to *become* the other but to be the space in which the other inhabits. Space, and how people conceptualize it, is yet again at the center of the narrative. From the choice of the city to the narrators’ depictions, emplacement and replacement reflect historical and aesthetic themes. The novel's distinct textures highlight the otherness, the universe that each of us carries within us. Experience is formed through its dialectical interaction with the environment, amalgamated with historical events. To talk about empathy in the context of war is also to discuss who is deserving of empathy and the

political intentions surrounding such discourse. As previously stated, images had a significant impact on how these wars were perceived, primarily to elicit sympathy and favor dominant discourses. McCann uses the same weapons, empathy and images, to look at the inhabitants of New York City.

In the last chapter, when Jaslyn states that "[t]hings don't fall apart" (McCann 326), there is some friction with Solomon's previous statement. The reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is clear, highlighted by Colum McCann's relationship with the late author[31]. The African title, along with the judge's comparison with "the city that Lot left" (McCann 247), signals failure or imminent doom. "Roaring Seaward, and I Go," however, turns this narrative around toward possibilities. By looking differently at one moment, we might find that there is still a remnant of hope in the fact that things *do not* fall apart, that even after the tower's fall, even after traumatic events, we remain. Life continues. Tragedy strikes but the city is still standing. Gloria and Claire's dynamics changed Jaslyn's life and broke the cycle of generational trauma. The nursery rhyme from the title "This is the House That Horse Built" finds its end while the last chapter's title, "Roaring Seaward, and I Go"[32], indicates a search and movement forward.

The novel functions as a postmodern revision of US history at its core—pinpointing space while moving through time and discussing what lingers. It contains different perspectives and pulls several threads in its making. However, the incorporation of empathy enables a glimpse into the transfiguration of history and the city. If New York is uninterested in history and has no regard for the past, it is trapped

[31]McCann, the person, was a key speaker in the 2008's tribute to Chinua Achebe for the 50th anniversary of Things Fall Apart at the PEN American Center. *Tribute to Chinua Achebe*. (2021, July 15). Unlocking the History of PEN. Accessed: Out, 2022. From:https://www.pen100archive.org/tribute-to-chinua-achebe/

[32] Although not approached directly, the title is also a reference to Lord Tennyson's *Locksley Hall.* It speaks of continuing the journey against all adversities."Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunderbolt. Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow; For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go."

in a cycle of everyday present. Time confines the city and the characters into an existence of repetitions. Claire saw art as a threat to her son's memory. Finding beauty in the midst of a bleak reality, or even believing that the world would keep spinning, seemed sacrilegious. For her, the contact with Petit's art *rankles* her for an unknown reason—"But something else in it still rankles [...] Is that what rankles her? That they haven't yet said his name?" (McCann 103-104)—on the other hand, Gloria expresses that felling toward, the constant reliving of the past—"Her question rankled" (McCann 312). Claire imagines that persisting in her grief is a way to solve her solitude, which opposes Gloria, as she offers an alternative to regurgitating grief. The solution for the latter is to adopt the children and befriend Claire. It is change and connection that enable the characters to move on. Petit's performance threatened Claire's rituals of grief but also set off a chain reaction that culminates in her lifelong friendship with Gloria. Things did not fall apart. In many ways, the novel shies away from the grand events of history, instead focusing on the small lives, the episodic and ordinary moments of connection. Life becomes about a blend of little things—not only the exemplary, philosophical, or the starting point of a bigger discovery. The intersection of man and city is also the intersection of "one scrap of history meeting a larger one" (McCann 326). Space, history, and art converge.

It was our goal to make explicit connections among visual, political and historical concepts in order to offer an innovative reading of McCann's work. Nevertheless, it goes beyond that; we shed light on the idea of city developed by the novel. The tensions between perceived realities and the city overflow the characters' experiences. Their narratives build a space reflective of latent social tensions. The novel thrives on connecting these narratives, providing the reader with an exercise in imagination. In creating these images, the novel resists the erasure of these

existences by capitalist pressures. Change and the sustainable construction of communities are impossible without imagination. The myriad of perspectives enables a redemptive reading of History. The use of dialectical images and difference demonstrates how othering features can shape reality. When the novel focuses on the city, it also focuses on the potential for empathetic relationships that are only possible in urban structures. It poses an argument for community in this setting; not through a utopic formation, but through revisiting history. As the past becomes present, the characters re-imagine their relationship with each other. Community blooms when we look at the novel through the core concepts developed in this investigation.

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ANNEX

Fig. 1 Gallup polls, *How Watergate Changed Public Opinion of Richard Nixon*. 1973-1974. Pew Research Center: From the archives: How the Watergate crisis eroded public support for Richard Nixon.

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/25/how-the-watergate-crisis-eroded-public-support-for-richard-nixon/

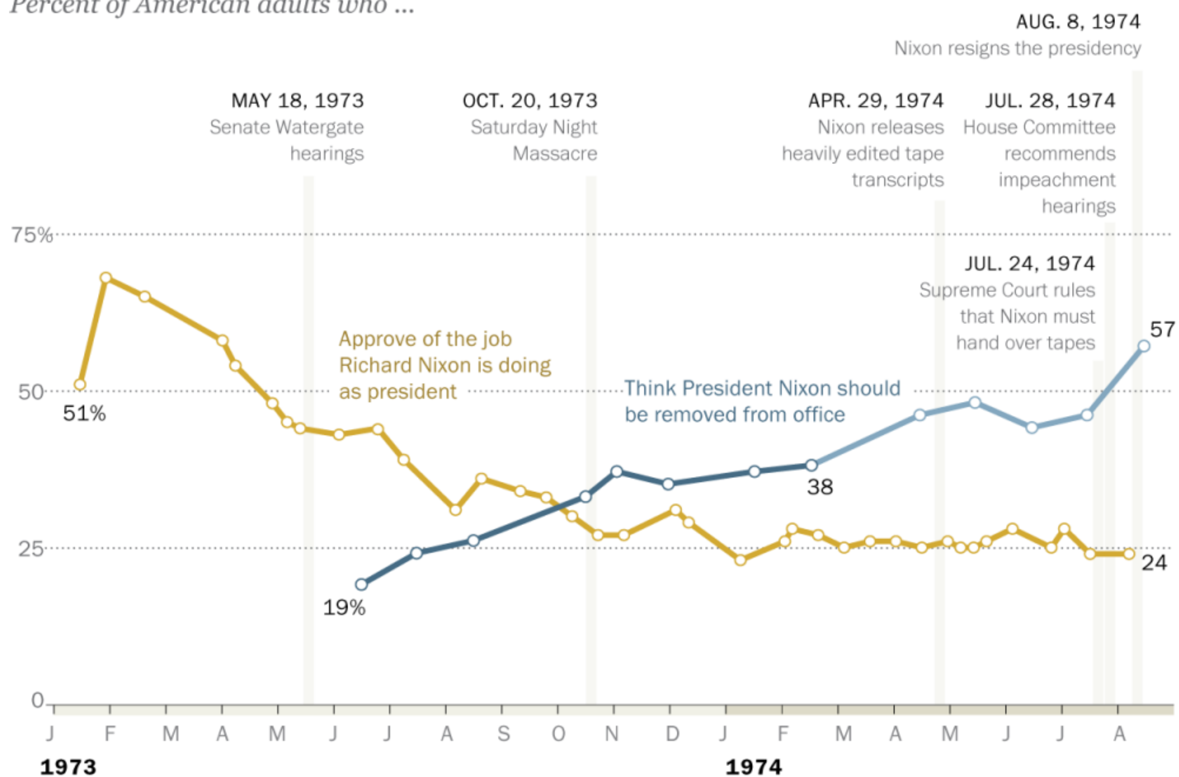


Fig. 2 DeVito, *unnamed*. 1974. From *Let the Great World Spin* (2009).

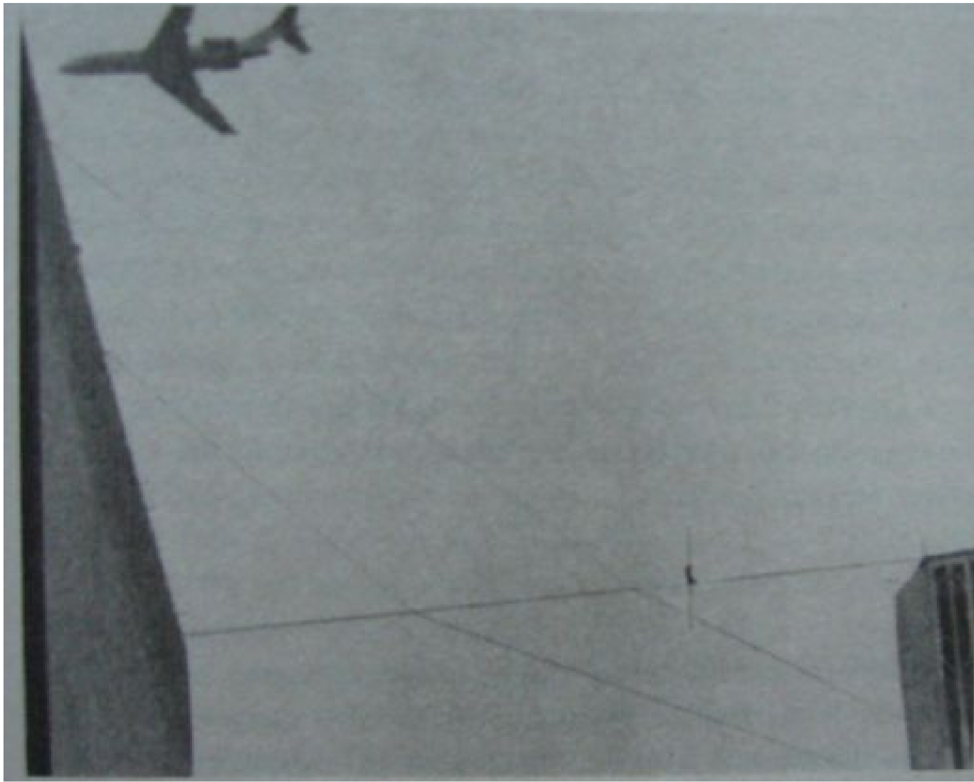


Fig. 3 DREW, Richard. *Falling man*. 2001. The Times:

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/911-the-falling-man-5pp2xhv909d

Fig. 4 MCCANN, Colum. *Let The Great World Spin*. New York: Academic Press, 2009.

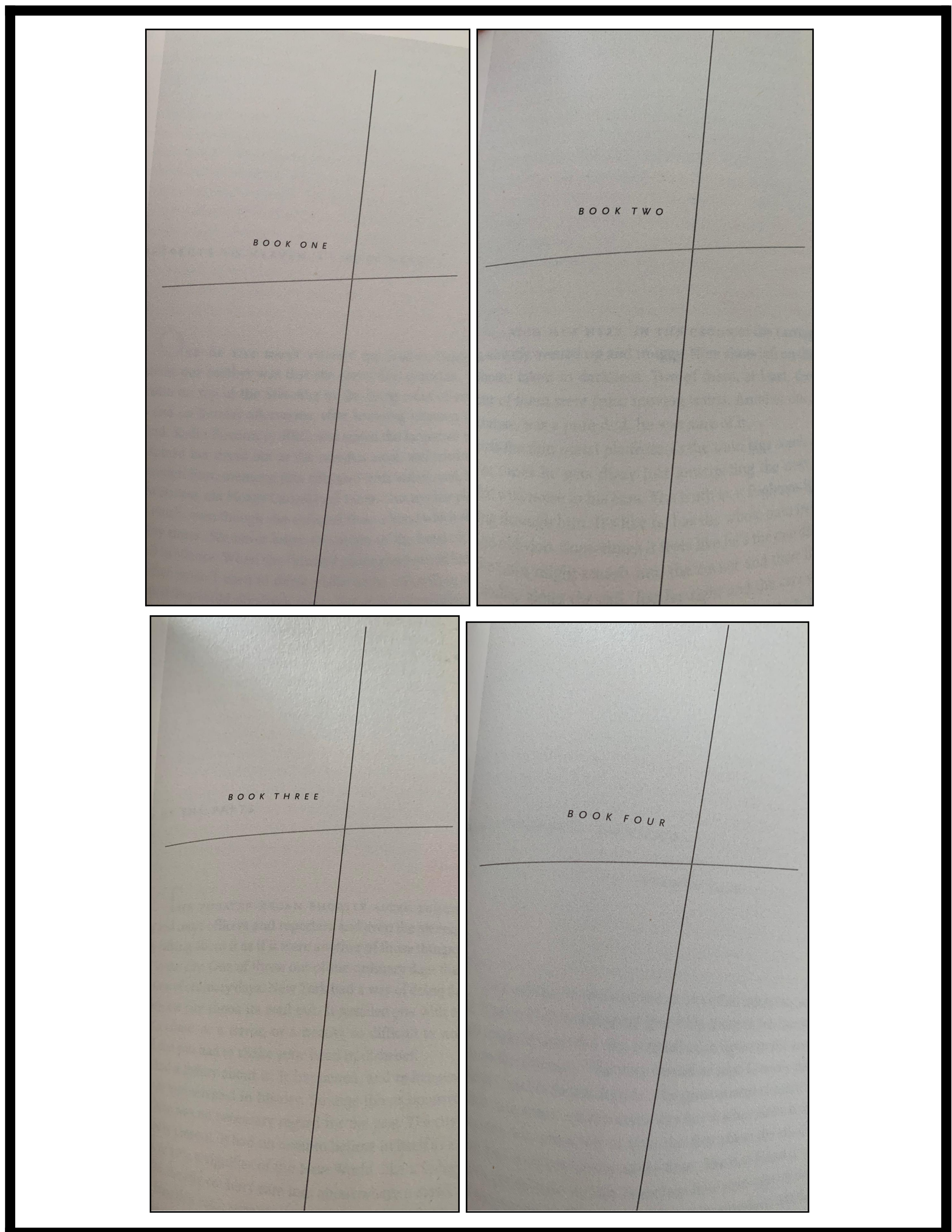
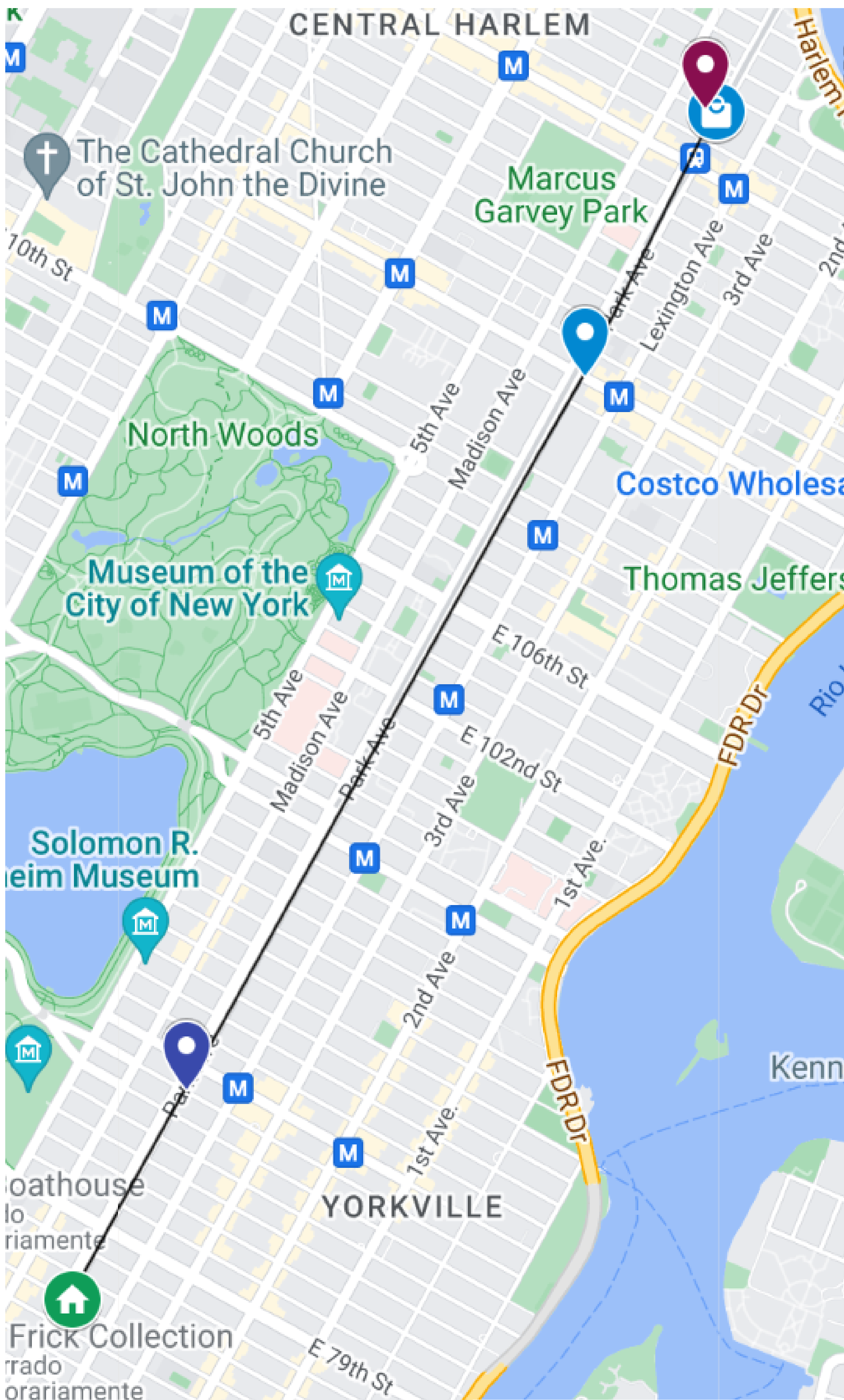


Fig. 5 Map showing New York City. *Google Earth*. Dec, 2022. From: earth.google.com/web/



Gloria's Walk

- Claire's apartment
- First part
- Pg. 301 - Fourth Paragraph "Now I'm going all the way walking to Bronx."
- Eclipsed by flashback
- Pg. 306 - Fifth Paragraph (at a crosswalk) "How am I going to cross the river?"
- Second part
- Robbery - Pg. 307 - "the girl stepped out of a vestibule on 127th"
- Take the cab - Pg. 308