



9-1-2011

*Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann,  
Random House, 2009

Bill Johnston

Butler University, [bwjohnst@butler.edu](mailto:bwjohnst@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las\\_bookreviews](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews)

---

**Recommended Citation**

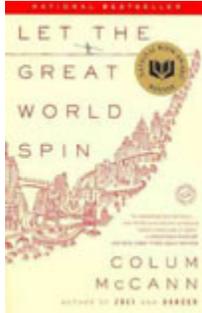
Johnston, Bill, "*Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann, Random House, 2009" (2011). *LAS Faculty Book Reviews*. 88.  
[http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las\\_bookreviews/88](http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/las_bookreviews/88)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in LAS Faculty Book Reviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [omacisaa@butler.edu](mailto:omacisaa@butler.edu).

## Because Ideas Matter...

The faculty and staff of Butler University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences presents

### Recommended Readings



#### *Let the Great World Spin*

by Colum McCann, Random House, 2009

Reviewed by Bill Johnston

Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* introduces New York City through the memory of astonished, cheering New Yorkers watching Philippe Petit, on August 7, 1974, as he walked across a high-wire he strung between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. It was an event they celebrated, or at least could not help but take note of, as they were commuting into the City and as more and more people realized something strange was happening 110 stories up. For at least a brief time, their lives—people who did not necessarily know one another—were connected by Petit's feat and as they shared it: "Will he fall?" "Isn't it unbelievable?" "He's like a dark toy against a cloudy sky." McCann then relays lives of several New Yorkers. To note: Corrigan is a monk from Ireland who feeds and befriends hookers and heroin addicts in the projects. Claire—a woman whose son was killed in Vietnam. Lara—whose male companion's self-concern finally gives her no choice but to leave the relationship. Their lives seem separated, but McCann's story weaves pathways that evolve into connectedness. The book is a masterpiece (it won both the National Book Award and the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award) and will leave you musing whether our lives are similarly intertwined. If so, then how should we approach the unity we must therefore feel as human beings? Will we be supportive and loving, or will our world view lead toward self-centeredness? Will we push addictions and dependencies onto others, or will our individual values promote an honest understanding of our own weaknesses and culpabilities? It's an insightful novel that will surely challenge your vision, as it would for any reader, on how far outward such interconnectedness extends for you.

- Bill Johnston is Professor of Mathematics at Butler University.