

***Twist*, by Colum McCann**

Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy

Irish author Colum McCann, esteemed for his lyrical writing style, won the National Book Award for *Let the Great World Spin*. His latest literary novel, *Twist*, focuses on the vast information highway running through cables deep beneath the seas.

Anthony Fennell, the first-person narrator of *Twist's* story, is a Dublin-based playwright and journalist. In his late 40s, Fennell is at loose ends. Estranged from his teenage son who lives in Chile with his ex-wife, Fennell wants to write "a story about connection, about grace, about repair."

Seeking a fresh start, Fennell accepts a magazine assignment to cover a Belgian cable-repair ship, the *Georges Lecoq*, on its mission off the west coast of Africa. Much of the world's international information travels through fragile tubes on the bottom of the ocean which are vulnerable to accidental damage by marine life or fishing trawlers—and occasionally, by sabotage.

Soon after Fennell arrives in Cape Town he meets John Conway, the ship's repair chief: "Slim, lightly bearded, wearing jeans, wire-rimmed glasses, and a red knit cap. There was something calm and unrushed about him. He struck me as the kind of man who would be found in a monastery, somewhere raw, distant, on the edge.... I had seen men like him before, troubled and angelic all at once."

Inviting Fennell to his home, Conway introduces him to Zanele, a stunning Black South African actress who is leaving to star in a London play. Conway met Zanele when she was a theater student on a scholarship in Fort Lauderdale. Conway, originally from Northern Ireland, had worked on oil rigs in Florida as an underwater welder. On and off lovers, Conway and Zanele are expert deep-sea divers.

Aboard the *Georges Lecoq* as it sails up the Ghanaian coast, Conway instructs Fennell about the arduous cable-repair process. Once a cable break is detected, it could take months to pinpoint the exact spot of the rupture and then repair it. The ship's crew knew "it was the life you signed up for. You finish the job no matter what.... Everything gets fixed, and we all stay broken."

As the cable-repair mission continues, however, Conway becomes aloof and distant. He limits Fennell's internet access, prompting Fennell to speculate about the enigmatic crew chief's motivations. Beginning to write his magazine article, Fennell has to decide on its direction: "It is, I suppose, the job of the teller to arrange the scattered pieces of a story so that they conform to some sort of coherence. Between fact and fiction lie memory and imagination."