

Introduction

POST-1922 IRISH LITERATURE IS BY DEFINITION POSTCOLONIAL. Since the late 1980s, there has been a healthy growth of critical scrutiny of the complex situation of Irish history, cultures, society and literature within postcolonial debates. Nonetheless, this book is the first dedicated major study specifically of the postcolonial dimensions of the comparatively neglected post-1922 Irish novel in English. This text attempts to establish a postcolonial Irish novelistic tradition by closely examining five novels that employ formal and thematic attributes of realism to narrate processes of disengagement from British colonial rule. Ireland is, after all, a prime example of a country with a long colonial history: it was the first overseas location colonized by the English, from 1169, after the Norman landings in England a century previous. From this point in history, wave after wave of colonial encounter, settlement, commercial exploitation of indigenous peoples and various forms of oppressive legislation took place. The impact of colonialism persisted in Ireland long after the country was absorbed largely unwillingly into Britain, in the Act of Union 1800, as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It arguably continued long after Irish independence and partition in 1922.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's 1989 survey *The Empire Writes Back* sees postcolonial literatures as texts that work in dialogue with, and often at variance with, the dominant colonial discourses of "English literature". Postcolonial societies, they argue, are those that work to establish difference from the totalizing, imperialistic representations of their peoples, customs and cultures as imposed by their rulers. Postcolonial societies ordinarily develop "through several stages which can be seen to correspond to stages both of

national and regional consciousness and of the project of asserting difference from the colonial centre".¹ The term "postcolonial", as employed in the above gloss, is more descriptive than definitive. Indeed, Bart Moore-Gilbert remarks that when applied as a definitive concept, the term "postcolonial" has such "elasticity" that it has been regarded as some as progressively "imploding as an analytic construct".² While there is and should be thus no clear consensus as to a definition of the adjective "postcolonial", I choose to accept Peter Hulme's proposition that it at least "refers to a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome". Hulme's italicized noun is decisive here, as it means that the prefix "post" does not (or should not) mark some historical point *after* independence from colonial rule.³ Hulme's remark is echoed by critics ranging from Ania Loomba to Alison Donnell, who agree that the term "postcolonial" refers to processes of detachment from the apparatuses of colonial hegemony. While three voices do not a broad consensus make, I concur with them, and propose that Irish texts and writers were in many respects postcolonial, in that they operated within processes of intellectual, historical, cultural and political dissolution from the once-dominant discourse of the colonial age. Ireland experienced the best part of eight hundred years of British occupation in one form or another before it became partially independent in December 1922.

Given that much Irish literature, most particularly poetry and drama, has already been read in terms of its perceived postcoloniality, it is perhaps surprising that the post-independence Irish novel has not been given similar attention: after all, the novel is usually seen as the literary form that pays particular attention to its sociohistorical contexts. For instance, critics outside of the frame of Irish literary studies, from Kenneth Ramchand to Sandra Pouchet Paquet, have indeed read the fictional output from other former British colonies, such as islands of the Caribbean, as postcolonial in that it articulates and reflects disengagement from the mindset and infrastructures of British power. Such critics, by virtue of the focus of their study, evidently regard the Caribbean novel of the 1920s to the 1960s as a key example of literature that utilizes the form of longer prose fiction to portray and analyse the lives of a vast range of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, all living during a period of intellectual detachment from colonial ideology and power systems. However, postcolonial attributes of the post-independence Irish novel have heretofore been understated, if not overlooked. This book will therefore make an original contribution to scholarly research by examining the extent to which these

Irish novels might constitute a postcolonial canon equivalent to their Caribbean correlatives. This examination will be conducted by taking five canonical postcolonial novels from the former British West Indies as an exemplary series alongside which to set five Irish novels, paired based on a number of at least apparent formal and thematic parallels, without losing sight of the specificities of the different historical contexts.

The ways that Caribbean literary texts have grown in public profile, and have come to be regarded as seminal creative expressions of what is now called postcolonial thought, are as complex as they are various. The role of the BBC Overseas Service's radio series *Caribbean Voices* in this process cannot be understated, as week after week from 1943 to 1958 it demonstrated the capacity to introduce a global listening public to the works and literary concerns of West Indian writers such as Una Marson, Sam Selvon, Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul. The international scope of readership of West Indian writings and their preoccupations was clear when, in 1953, Richard Wright wrote an introduction to the first US edition of George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*. Wright saw strong links between the white-controlled society of Lamming's novel and his own native Mississippi.⁴ African-American writers such as Wright and James Baldwin met with Caribbean writers including Lamming, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon at the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956. The Congress's aim was "that each country and group of countries draw up an inventory of the needs expressed by citizens, individually and collectively, and of cultural resources that might meet those needs in an equitable way".⁵ The following years saw artistic movements, writers, academics and publishers pursuing the objectives of the Congress. By the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement in the United States and the Caribbean Arts Movement in Britain showed similar trajectories regarding how writers and intellectuals in each region sought to draw up inventories of black art and culture. By 1970, the efforts of African-American intellectuals to introduce black writers to US academic syllabi had led to Kent State University in Ohio selecting Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as a thesis topic. Academies began to review centuries of black literature for assimilation into their teaching and research platforms, inclusive of the Harlem Renaissance which had also featured Caribbean figures such as Claude McKay and Marcus Garvey. Then, the 1970 republication of Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* by Collier

Books offered a timely reminder of the importance of Paris in 1956 and those pioneers who had convened to compile a body of black culture that was now tentatively influencing the academy. The republication of Lamming's novel, which towards its conclusion shows the protagonist's friend Trumper returning to Barbados from a long spell experiencing the racial politics of the United States and speaking about Black Consciousness, acknowledged and reinforced the text's canonical place in the origins of a modern black intellectual movement of the Americas.

In Britain, Heinemann's establishment of an African Writers Series from 1962, featuring works by Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and that same London publisher's 1964 launch of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* opened up new vistas for academics and publishers to rediscover works by writers from across those countries colonized by the British Empire. Even though the University of Leeds – the site of the first Conference of Commonwealth Literature – appointed Sierra Leonean academic Eldred Jones to its first fellowship in 1965, it did not directly follow that Commonwealth literature, inclusive of works from the British West Indies, was automatically a contender for assimilation within this, or any, British literary academy.⁶ New Beacon Books, an independent bookstore and publishing company founded by John La Rose and Sarah White in 1966, originated in a Hornsey, North London, flat – hardly at its time (or at any time) an obvious contender for cultural primacy with the grand English publishing houses.

New Beacon Reviews, first published by La Rose and White in 1968, was originally intended only as an occasional periodical. In spite of its inauspicious beginnings, this British Caribbean journal constituted the first effort to revisit the Caribbean literary works of the Harlem Renaissance and *Beacon* era, and to carry such analysis further into understanding these writings' implications for a new period of black British arts and letters. If the *Beacon* era was a period where there was a swell of cultural activity among a progressively self-aware West Indian intellectual society, then the New Beacon project would constitute a renaissance of such thought for the 1960s and beyond. Its first edition did indeed feature essays on Claude McKay, Eric Williams, Wilson Harris and Jean Rhys: all four writers are now regarded as central to Caribbean studies.⁷ The 1970s constituted the high point of Commonwealth literature studies; the 1980s saw in the infancy of postcolonial criticism. Over this period, academics such as Kenneth Ramchand analysed West Indian novels in English written

from the 1920s onwards. Ramchand's 1970 monograph *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* was published a good fifteen years or so prior to the point at which Commonwealth literature switched to the new theoretical and critical practice of postcolonial studies.⁸ However, Ramchand's book anticipates some of the methodology and concerns of postcolonial scholarship in focusing on how early Caribbean writers singled out the novel form as an optimum way to narrate, in a realist mode, the lives of West Indians in the socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts of their late-colonial era.

The widespread acceptance among scholars and readers of the importance of *Beacon* authors such as C.L.R. James and Alfred Mendes, and writers such as Rhys, did not therefore happen overnight or by a clear, programmatic effort. Over the course of the next few years, from 1968, New Beacon Books published intermittently: the first *Beacon* novel to be republished was James's *Minty Alley* in 1971. In 1970 Heinemann's new Caribbean Writers Series began to republish, and in the process facilitate, the reappraisal of older Caribbean novels such as Guyanese writer Edgar Mittelholzer's 1941 *Corentyne Thunder*. Yet it would be another thirteen years before New Beacon saw to the 1984 republication of one of Caribbean literature's most groundbreaking novels, Mendes's 1935 *Black Fauns*.

Eventually, around the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, as the study of Commonwealth literature morphed into postcolonial studies, a broader range of publishers and academics began to take interest in older Caribbean novels and thus between them established a Caribbean postcolonial novelistic canon.⁹ For example, London publisher Longman – a well-known company dating from as early as 1724 and an imprint of Pearson's Schools since 1968 – launched its Drumbeat series, dedicated to African and Caribbean writers, in 1979. Key Caribbean novels of the 1950s featured in this series: Kenneth Ramchand provided a skilful introduction to a 1985 Longman Drumbeat republication of Sam Selvon's 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners*; David Williams gave a critical 1986 introduction to George Lamming's 1953 *In the Castle of My Skin*. Many critics and scholars became involved in providing introductions to volumes in this series, which had the effect of at least introducing the developing body of West Indian literature into schools, colleges and universities.

In focusing their interest on longer prose fictive works produced decades prior to the main wave of island independence from Britain, academics such as Ramchand and Rhonda Cobham effectively acknowledged that the early

Caribbean novel was seminal in the development of an intellectual movement of decolonization from the sociocultural and ideological constructs of British rule. They investigated ways in which early Caribbean writers such as Mendes and James discovered the advantages of using the novel's narrative elements of story, characterization, setting and voice, or its generic modes of social realism and naturalism, to hold a mirror up to the nature of societies who for too long had been neglected or misrepresented by imperial authors.

In his 1985 Longman Drumbeat introduction to Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Ramchand went on to draw comparisons between the Trinidadian Selvon and Dominican writer Jean Rhys, author of *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), in their construction of the migrant novel as a means by which to articulate postcolonial themes of dislocation, passage, limbo and statelessness.¹⁰ Jean Rhys was therefore another Caribbean writer who, after her death, was assimilated into a West Indian and postcolonial literary canon. It was not until the 1970s that Rhys's work began to be examined closely for its West Indian dimensions and tentatively find its way into a postcolonial canon. In light of the growth of postcolonial studies in the 1980s, new scholars focused more and more on the Caribbean aspects of Rhys's life and work.¹¹ For example, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, another early postcolonial scholar, devotes a book-length study to an exploration of the work of Barbadian novelist George Lamming (b. 1927). In *The Novels of George Lamming*, Paquet is particularly focused on discussing how Lamming uses his creative imagination to produce literary texts embodying decolonizing processes in the Caribbean.

How and why texts become canonical may often be a matter of accident, and a protracted process, rather than the result of any clear design or manifesto. With West Indian literatures in English, the former is very much the case. It is over the course of the past five decades that a consensus has slowly evolved among Caribbeanists for the justifiable canonicity – or literary, cultural and historical importance for research and teaching – of novels by Mendes, Rhys, James, Selvon and Lamming, among others.

The early postcolonial academics wrote about Caribbean writers largely because they were from the same general geographical area and knew their works and sociocultural contexts intimately.¹² Since the late 1980s, the geographical scope of postcolonial studies – and with it, the postcolonial canon – has expanded considerably to incorporate new regions, new critics and new postcolonial readings of older literary texts.¹³ Ireland was one such region

of literary production to attract postcolonial studies. In 1988, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton contributed to separate volumes of the Derry-based journal *Field Day*, with seminal essays attempting to situate discussion of any literary, creative product of Irish culture within the scope of postcolonial studies rather than within the constraints of British literature. These essays were later republished in 1990 as a book, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. In the introduction to that volume, Seamus Deane offered a mission statement for *Field Day*, to show that its assessment of the situation in Ireland “derives from the conviction that it is, above all, a colonial crisis”.¹⁴ Later, the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1990–91) were part of a deliberate attempt by postcolonial Irish writers and editors (inclusive of Seamus Heaney, Deane, Tom Paulin, Luke Gibbons and Declan Kiberd) to compile a canon of Irish writing in Gaeilge and English, from medieval poetry to the present day.¹⁵ Yet it is at this point that attempts by postcolonialists to select – or rather, elect – an Irish canon ran into difficulties and controversy. The perceived androcentric bias of the editors’ selection of literary texts raised the question of the problems inherent in intentional canon-forming by committee: one can take a revisionist approach to literature, but one still risks marginalizing other texts, other voices, in creating a new canon. Opposition from Irish feminist literary scholars finally brought about the additional publication of two new *Field Day Anthology* volumes in 2002, dedicated to Irish women writers, but these were seen by some detractors as tokenistic and too little, too late for *Field Day*.¹⁶

The innovative but incomplete achievements of *The Field Day Anthology* were followed by new, more sharply focused monographs proposing to evaluate, expand and fine-tune understanding of the role of Irish literature within postcolonial studies. I have noted Declan Kiberd’s editorial role in the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology*. Following *Field Day*, Kiberd’s major 1995 work, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, was the first dedicated book-length postcolonial critical survey, rather than anthology, of Irish literature.¹⁷ Kiberd looks back at male and female writers of Irish poetry, drama and prose since the end of the nineteenth century and argues that Irish literature can be read in a postcolonial context, where “a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance”.¹⁸ He believes that Irish writings, whether written prior to or following independence, have an intellectually postcolonial dimension if they seek in their moment of production to

work against colonial hegemony. In its wide-ranging study, *Inventing Ireland* investigates how modern Irish writers have formulated literary strategies to interrogate and resist the ways in which Ireland, over centuries of British colonial domination, was portrayed as Other, as the not-England and as the antithesis of an imperial “England of the mind”. Kiberd writes chapters with largely thematic postcolonial bases, such as “Ireland: England’s Unconscious?”, “The Periphery and the Centre” and “Post-colonial Ireland: A Quaking Sod”, and examines a broad number of authors and texts in this light. However, Kiberd is engaged in a broad survey of Irish writing and thus does not look closely at the novel genre for its decolonizing potentiality.¹⁹

Kiberd’s *Irish Classics* (2000) proposes another selection of canonical Irish writers, inclusive of Samuel Beckett and Patrick Kavanagh: given that Kiberd is engaged in a survey and not a generic comparison, he again does not single out the novel for its decolonizing potency.²⁰ Kiberd certainly improves upon the shortcomings of *The Field Day Anthology* in his two acclaimed volumes. In the two decades since *Inventing Ireland*, Irish studies has become more comparative in its increasingly sophisticated postcolonial research ambition to understand how the forces of colonial capitalism and power in Ireland can be understood by cross-reference to other colonized societies. Conversely, analysis of colonial economics and rule in Ireland, and the impact of British hegemony on Irish society and culture, continues to facilitate an illuminating context for comparative postcolonial studies of other former British colonial regions and cultural practices. Maria McGarrity’s 2008 book *Washed by the Gulf Stream* is highly original in perceiving and investigating Irish and Caribbean literary, historical and geographical crosscurrents.²¹ McGarrity clearly considers Irish literature, inclusive of the Irish novel, as postcolonial. In 2015, McGarrity – together with noted Caribbeanists Alison Donnell and Evelyn O’Callaghan – co-edited a multidisciplinary book, *Caribbean Irish Connections*, which acknowledges a wide range of enlightening parallels, if not confluences, between aspects of Irish and West Indian histories, literatures and societies.²²

In spite of such developments in postcolonial Irish studies, there has been very little, to date, in the way of dedicated analysis of the Irish novel in the first four decades after independence to compare with postcolonial readings of the Caribbean novel. There has been no concerted effort to try to understand how Irish writers used the novel form to investigate and critique pro-

cesses of intellectual decolonization from the many still largely intact political and ideological structures of British rule. A strong reason for this is that scholars and critics have tended to write about the literary genres that had greater visibility and circulation from the 1920s. By the time of the birth of the Irish Free State, the poetry of the Irish Literary Revival was recognized and celebrated by the new Irish government. Abroad, W.B. Yeats received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923; he was now such an establishment figure at home that he was appointed a senator of the Irish Free State. Yeats's Abbey Theatre constituted part of a drive towards a national culture. It is easier to look back at those literary genres that, in their time, were being read in relation to a parting of ways from British national culture, than to the more obscure post-independence Irish novel, which did not have the public exposure or impact granted to the dramatic form, or poetry, in Ireland. This is because, even if specific Irish novels were not banned by the authorities, they still were not very likely to be distributed by Irish booksellers. In the current climate of comparative study of Irish literature, it is timely and right to return to the much-neglected Irish novel of this period – to resituate it within Irish and postcolonial studies, and to find out the extent to which its apparent formal and thematic parallels with Caribbean novels of the time are due to similar processes of disengagement from the ideological constraints of British rule.

In Ireland, the independence year 1922 brought insularity, sociocultural fragmentation and the censorious influence of a Catholic-led state hegemony upon the country's literary output. One of the first decisions of the twenty-six-county, partitioned and overwhelmingly Catholic-orientated Irish Free State government was to set up a Committee on Evil Literature. Its intention was to "protect" the ill-educated and the vulnerable from allegedly immoral mass-produced art and literature. The 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, under W.T. Cosgrave's Cumann na nGaedheal government (1923–32), had a most deleterious effect on the development of the novel in Ireland. (Films were also frequently banned in Ireland. Likely as a consequence, there was no Irish film industry of any note before the Film Act of 1970.) Other cultural genres, such as poetry and theatre, tended to escape these measures.

Poets, for instance, could escape censorship and get away with writing about most themes by applying ambiguity to mask their content behind elaborate allusions, tropes and obfuscations. W.B. Yeats's poetic collection *The Tower*,

written a year before the censorship act, was not banned, even though its poem “Leda and the Swan” depicts an act of sexual violence. The event of rape in this poem is mitigated thematically in its origins in Greek mythology: it is a story long taught as a staple of a “respectable”, Classics-based education. Yeats’s dexterity in using symbolism in this poem allows for any number of readings of the text, including political ones. Yet the poem is careful not to spell out a single contentious meaning against which censors could protest. It avoids the directness of a prose utterance, and thus escapes the threat of being silenced for clearly spreading immoral ideas beyond an educated elite. The Irish theatre, though hardly confining itself to “safe” topics either, also escaped the censors, for different reasons. Debates regarding audience interruptions of early performances of Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) at the Abbey Theatre became so high-profile and political – with Yeats wading in to give his opinion – that calls to censor Irish plays on the grounds of their themes decreased in the face of opposition.²³ By contrast, the socio-realist novel has a potentially far greater audience than the modernist novel, the limited-circulation poetry anthology or the play. Its forms and themes are also generally more accessible to mainstream audiences. In the main, this type of novel is a popular literary medium usually foregrounding a straightforward story over any elaborate discourse. In the realist mode, the novel is understood quite easily, even by the “vulnerable” audiences whom Irish authorities claimed to protect.

Maud Ellmann discusses the tyrannical hold of the Catholic Church on the Irish novel in the first few decades after independence. She remarks that author Benedict Kiely had three novels banned during the 1940s and the 1950s. She adds, “Although Irish writers managed to find publishers abroad, the Irish public was deprived of the finest writing of the era; the only books available in libraries and bookshops were religious works, or those which celebrated Irish life and culture.”²⁴ Irish novelists of any serious social import simply did not have an audience, unless they published abroad. The five Irish writers discussed in this book – Liam O’Flaherty, Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick Kavanagh, Samuel Beckett and Michael Farrell – all had novels published in Britain rather than Ireland. Consequently, critics outside of Ireland, and indeed outside of post-colonial studies, have tended to approach certain of these texts in relation to various other aspects of their forms and themes. The reception of Beckett’s *Murphy*, published in London in 1938, is a case in point as it tends to be read in relation to late modernism, philosophy, absurdism and comedy rather than

in the frame of fictive representations of the migrant experience at the heart of the British Empire.

The method of this study is thus to use a comparative approach in order to understand the ways in which Caribbean *and* Irish writers used similar literary strategies, via the novel form, to give voice to a range of themes and issues concerned with social, political and ideological detachment from Britain. Naturally, this is hardly to deny the crucial historical, cultural, political, linguistic and geographical differences between the British West Indies and Ireland. To over-conflate, or not be mindful of such differences in pursuit of a comparative postcolonial grammar, would of course risk gross essentialism. In fact, as this text will demonstrate, is often *because* of the distance between the specific contexts in which Caribbean and Irish texts are produced that comparisons between them, carefully scrutinized for their nuanced similarities, can appear all the more revelatory to Caribbeanists, Irish studies scholars, postcolonialists and comparative scholars alike.

The reason for beginning in chapter 1 with a comparison of *Beacon*-period Trinidadian writer Alfred Mendes's barrack-yard novel *Black Fauns* (1935) and Irish writer Liam O'Flaherty's slum novel *The Informer* (1925) is that the two novels are early attempts by writers to find a new expressive medium – socio-realist, longer prose fiction – to depict the lives, struggles, hopes and inner worlds of previously under- or misrepresented individuals in the poorest communities of societies set up by colonial economic systems. Thus, the novels also match in that they are, even on the surface and prior to closer study, promisingly compatible in theme. This renders them worthy of closer post-colonial comparative analysis to see how far these corollaries continue. *Black Fauns* explores the midtown slums and barrack yards of Port of Spain and, with a careful and sociological eye for naturalistic depiction, investigates the lives and trials of people who live hand-to-mouth. Mendes tries to convey in novelistic format what happens when the Trinidadian poor are suddenly confronted by the apparent good luck of a financial opportunity or windfall achieved by chance or ill-gotten gains. *The Informer* suggests corollaries with *Black Fauns* in that it holds a microscope to the struggles of a poor Irish slum area, founded on the basis of British colonial economy, where people cannot determine the source of their next meal. Just as in *Black Fauns*, when the chance of money, however questionable its provenance, enters the domain of

the poor and the hungry, people will betray those closest to them just to get hold of even a small sum of ready cash. This chapter will test the strengths of such apparent parallels.

The reason for comparing Dominican author Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) with Anglo-Irish Ascendancy writer Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) is that they are two similar tales of eighteen-year-old female orphans born into declining estates and facing uncertain futures. The corresponding postcolonial dimensions of the novels are to be investigated throughout the course of chapter 2. *Voyage in the Dark* portrays a young colonial Dominican woman in the declining years of her caste's plantocratic dominance, trying to cope with the experience of psychic dislocation from the sureties of the past. Jean Rhys, born in Dominica of a white Creole colonial background in 1890, was well positioned to analyse the effect that the crumbling of colonial power had on its latter generations and their damaged sense of identity, place and purpose. In many respects, *Voyage in the Dark* is semi-autobiographical, although Rhys does not merely translate her life into fiction. Rather, Rhys imagines a particular state of anxiety prevalent among young women of planter-settler heritage just as their socioeconomic and cultural status slips close to irreversible collapse. Similarly, *The Last September* is a semi-autobiographical novel about a young girl who is seemingly lost for identity and place at the end of her forebears' colonial age. Bowen's novel examines the psychology and society of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in its last throes of dynastic planter-settler power. Dublin-born Bowen, writing in 1929, used her advantage of several years of distance from the last weeks of true Ascendancy power in 1920–21 to look back on her caste in its final throes. Chapter 2 will take into account numerous textual similarities and historical specificities of the texts, in order to gauge how they compare in postcolonial terms.

Trinidadian author C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley* (1936) is compared with Monaghan writer Patrick Kavanagh's novel *Tarry Flynn* (1948), since the novels' portrayals of female-headed families and matriarchal economy reflect similar contexts of late-colonial or residual-colonial society and economy, worthy of closer postcolonial comparative scrutiny in order to gauge how strongly these parallels withstand analysis. *Minty Alley* is in many respects a socially prescriptive novel. It uses the form of longer prose fiction to reveal in an unfolding narrative how women in ordinary and often menial occupations are responsible for maintaining many of the key comforts and privileges of late-colonial society.

C.L.R. James, as one of the *Beacon* generation of writers in Trinidad along with Mendes, endeavours to present to the reader a depiction of Trinidadian women as a specific and crucial part of Trinidadian society and economy. The protagonist Haynes, a twenty-year-old male, discovers over the course of the events of the novel just how much he is truly dependent on women of less advantaged socioeconomic status. Patrick Kavanagh's *Tarry Flynn* works correspondingly as a satirical, novelistic social commentary: the protagonist is a young male, who fancies himself a young dreamer and poet, living on his family farm in rural Cavan, Ireland. Over the events of the novel, the true heroes of the narrative are shown, however, to be the shrewd, hard-working and ingenious women of the farming community. This chapter tests how strongly a reading of parallel representations of matriarchal economy in these novels stands up to a comparative reading of their texts and postcolonial historical contexts.

Chapter 4 compares Irish writer Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* (1938) with Trinidadian author Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) to investigate how the novels parallel one another as depictions of a key phenomenon of colonialism: the early- to mid-twentieth-century migrant experience in London. *The Lonely Londoners* has become enshrined in the canon of Caribbean and black British writing as a seminal masterpiece in the evolution of a West Indian migrant narrative voice. *Murphy*, however, has had little in the way of postcolonial reception. It has usually been read in terms of its philosophical or comic attributes, rather than as a depiction of Irish migrant life in London in the mid-1930s. By comparing the two novels textually and contextually in relation to their representations of dislocation, passage, limbo, settlement and psychic alienation from the location of arrival, I shall test the extent to which *Murphy* can be read comparatively.

In chapter 5, I read Carlow writer Michael Farrell's sole novel, *Thy Tears Might Cease* (1963), alongside Barbadian author George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) to test their comparability in postcolonial terms as *Bildungsromane* set in periods beset by political violence. The latter novel is foundational in anticipating postcolonial studies, while the former has been out of print since 1999. We shall never know all the reasons why Farrell so jealously clung to his sole, semi-autobiographical novel *Thy Tears Might Cease* up until his 1962 death, and withheld it from the eyes of almost everyone, even though it was mainly drafted in multi-volume format by 1937. The chapter looks at thematic parallels between the novels – the formation of identity in the

postcolonial *Bildungsroman*; the representation of political violence; and the corruption of nationalist ideology by capitalist interests – and seeks to probe their postcolonial comparability to the fullest extent.

The five Caribbean authors discussed in this book, though in date of birth spanning a broader period, from 1890 to 1927, all played a decisive part in the cultural production of the pre-independence period of British Caribbean history. Their work spans the groundbreaking *Beacon-* and *Windrush-*era periods of Caribbean literature, a revolutionary period of emergence in Caribbean literature and thought, which took place between the 1920s and the 1960s. The five Irish authors were born between 1896 and 1906 and were at least sixteen years of age by the time of Irish independence. They were therefore old enough to remember themes and circumstances surrounding independence and its repercussions. It could be argued that all of the writers in this study devised a means to capitalize upon the potentiality of the novel genre. They used it as a way of giving a new and sophisticated voice to their own generations' unprecedented, decolonizing changes in perceptions of identity, community, class, nationhood and culture. This book examines how Irish and Caribbean novelists employ parallel literary strategies to highlight moments of intellectual, social, cultural and political disengagement from the British Empire.