Richard McGuire, *Parallel Visions, Confluent Worlds: Five Comparative Postcolonial Studies of Caribbean and Irish Novels in English, 1925–1965*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2017. 192 pp. (Paper US\$ 30.00)

Bringing together ten Irish and Caribbean Anglophone novels from the mid-twentieth century, a relatively neglected terrain in both critical traditions, Richard McGuire's study argues that they share an evolution through similar themes and forms. He locates the rationale in their colonial experience under the British Empire and its effects, such as plantation cultures, urban poverty, migration, and essentialist gender roles. By showing how the Irish novel during this time was undergoing growing pains similar to those in a literary tradition often overlooked by Irish critics, he is able to register the place of Irish writing within a taxonomy larger than that of its usual frames for comparison.

While *Parallel Visions* is a provocative study and provides interesting close readings of the individual novels, it encounters many of the problems facing comparative projects based on parallel experiences. A prevailing question of traditional area studies approaches such as this one has to do with its limits. In opening up one set of parallels, the study does not convincingly foreclose on any others. For instance, it is fairly clear that novelistic developments that “reworked” forms such as the naturalist novel or the bildungsroman existed in other literary traditions in the twentieth century—on both sides of the postcolonial divide. The lack of a coherent definition for the comparison is apparent in the book's organization. Each chapter focuses on an Irish novel and a Caribbean novel that are linked by a common theme: urban social settings in Alfred Mendes's *Black Fauns* and Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer*, plantation society in novels by Jean Rhys and Rhys Bowen, female characters in C.L.R. James's *Minty Alley* and Patrick Kavanagh's *Tarry Flynn*, migration in Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* and Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, the bildungsroman form in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and Michael Farrell's *Thy Tears Might Cease*. Alas, each chapter presents the novels in a rudimentary block comparison—a close reading of one novel, a transition paragraph, and then a discussion of the second novel, with only cursory glances back to the first discussion. The claim seems to be that just putting them in the same chapter constitutes an argument. Even granting the parallel structure as a sufficient basis for the comparison, more could have been done to reveal insights that depend on the comparison.

Similarly, there is barely any engagement with the wider critical terrain of postcolonialism, Irish-Caribbean studies, or world literature studies, except for references to postcolonial Irish-studies debates that were thought to be long

settled. Notably, the book neglects discussion of world literature studies whose critical examination of the circulation of literary forms and cross-cultural comparison is clearly relevant to McGuire's concerns. As a postcolonialist, it is quite possible that he disagrees with their methods, but because of their overlapping interests the differences would have been instructive. All of this is too bad since each of the book's topics and comparisons could be suggestive for further study if situated and justified more fully. The postcolonial reading of *Murphy* contributes to "Irish" readings of Beckett, and the recovery of Farrell's neglected novel alters the mid-century story of the Irish novel.

The appeal of *Parallel Visions* seems to be to an Irish audience. In arguing that Irish writing is postcolonial, McGuire submits its "parallel" development to Caribbean novels, which are canonically postcolonial, as evidence. Aside from being a questionable premise for an extensive study, this method has a number of problems, not the least of which is the assumption that Caribbean writing is uniformly postcolonial simply because of a critical consensus. It seems to me that one purpose for new frames of comparison would be to question such a consensus rather than confirm it. In an essay in *Irish-Caribbean Connections* (2015), Alison Donnell even suggests that the potential of Irish-Caribbean comparisons is to "queer" such traditional assumptions, not to reify them. But more egregious is the imbalance of this comparison in which the Caribbean texts serve only to enlighten our understanding of Irish writing. Although McGuire examines individual Caribbean novels closely, the tradition is not disturbed. This is most apparent in the introduction and conclusion of *Parallel Visions*, which emphasize the study's significance for Irish criticism with only a nod to "the seminal postcolonial novels of the Caribbean" (p. 161), which is taken as a given. Surely, Caribbean literature and Caribbean postcoloniality are not so simple, and it is my hope that future comparative approaches will go further than this one to reveal their richness and complexity.

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