

# THE OLD LADY SAYS “NO”: THE LANGUAGE OF DENIAL IN BRIAN FRIEL’S *THE LOVES OF CASS MCGUIRE*

**Giovanna Tallone**

Università Cattolica, Milan

Don’t you know that “No” is the wildest word we consign to language?  
(Emily Dickinson, *The Letters* 617)

## **Abstract:**

In Brian Friel’s *The Loves of Cass McGuire* the presence of negative expressions both in stage directions and dialogue acts as a structuring principle and emphasizes the metadramatic construction of the play. Negative forms underlie Cass’s growing awareness of disappointment and hopelessness, denying the “loves” ironically mentioned in the title. Only the alternative imaginary recreation of her own life – her “rhapsody” - is significantly marked by the absence of negative forms. The language of denial is thus both subject and object in the play.

**Keywords:** Brian Friel, contemporary Irish Drama, metadrama, negativity in language, homecoming.

Brian Friel’s play *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966) is in many ways a play about absence, exclusion, refusal and negation. Providing a portrait of a marginalized returned émigrée, Friel draws attention to

the double exclusion of Cass McGuire from both the country and the family she comes back to, to her refusal to conform to middle-class respectability and to her resistance to the role she has been prescribed. *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is a rich and complex play whose construction sheds light on what is and what is not, what was and what might have been. Negative sentence structures, words like "no", "not", "never", "nothing" predominate in the discourse of the play, and the language functions of refusal, prohibition, correction, protest expressed by negative verb forms or lexical terms have a relevant role. In particular the insistent negativity in the play focuses not only on the protagonist's characterisation, but also on the organisation of the play, so that the language of "no" is a structuring principle involving the play's metadramatic construction. In fact *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is based on the play's self-consciousness which makes it fluid and unstable in Cass's continuous strive to contend for power and authority over her own story. The negative linguistic impact of the play also opens discussion on the theme and concern of home and homelessness, a leit-motif that has marked Friel's oeuvre since *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), thus suggesting doubts on the possible existence of "home" as such.

From this point of view *The Loves of Cass McGuire* anticipates Friel's play *The Home Place* (2005) in questioning the issue of home. Cass returns to a home that does not exist. In *The Home Place* home is explicitly ambiguous, it remains shifting and unstable. The title itself is a pun that questions and destabilises the issue itself of home, "since the 'home place' (family seat, origins) and 'home' (where one lives and feels at home) do not coincide in the play" (Bertha 160). Margaret's insistence "This is your home" (26, 63), "This is my home" (65) and Christopher's realisation that he has "no home, no country" (68) mark the interface between home and homelessness. The compound word "home place" contains a radical division, since the home place in Kent where the English landlord comes from is elsewhere, and where he lives now is a home which cannot be a home. Home is thus double-faced and negatively connoted, so that the home place is both itself and

its own otherness. A negative bearing is thus embedded in the issue itself of home, which is a recurring motif in Friel's plays. In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* the shifting space of the kitchen is not home any more; in *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) a household is "under threat" (Kurdi 309) in changing times and the home of the Mundy sisters cannot be a home for much longer. And as in the case of *The Home Place* the title itself of the play *Living Quarters* (1977) is "a terrible pun", since the place cannot be a home, but lodgings provided by the army (Kurdi 309).

The instability of home and home-related situations is implicit in the process of returning home. In *Faith Healer* (1979) a negative statement marks the account of the return to Ireland of Frank Hardy: "There was no sense of homecoming" (Friel, *Selected Plays* 338). After his wanderings in Wales and Scotland, Ballybeg does not welcome the faith healer back home, as it is there that he will be brutally murdered. The journey home is recounted by each of the characters in turn—Frank, Grace and Teddy—in very similar words: "So on the last day of August we crossed from Stranraer to Larne and drove through the night to County Donegal. And there we got lodgings in a pub, a lounge bar, really, outside a village called Ballybeg, not far from Donegal town" (338, 351, 367).

The lyrical description of the journey contrasts sharply with Frank's feeling of dislocation and estrangement, which highlights the liminal space engendered by the exile's leaving and coming home. This is enhanced by the topographical details of the journey home, as the specificity of Stranraer and Larne contrasts sharply with the indeterminacy of the first night spent in Ireland. The lounge bar is "outside" Ballybeg, it does not belong to the village, and its marginal position is emphasised by the negative implication of geographical location, "not far from Donegal town" (emphasis supplied).

Leaving home and returning home is a recurring theme (Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 3) in Brian Friel's drama, which underlies the instability of the home. Centripetal and centrifugal forces are always at stake. In *Living Quarters* Frank Butler comes

back home to a disrupted family after heroic military action in the Middle East. In *Aristocrats* (1979) the O'Donnell children come back to Ballybeg Hall, the family home, each carrying his/her own disappointments and failures. Owen comes back home as a go-between in *Translations* (1980), betraying his own community by taking part in a "bloody military operation" (Friel, *Selected Plays* 408). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a "summary of the themes of homecoming" (Pine, *The Diviner* 270), homecoming implies leave-taking. Father Jack comes back to Ireland as a renegade gone "native" (39), while two of the Mundy sisters leave home to end up homeless destitutes in London. Michael himself leaves home when his time comes in order to be able to tell the story of the Mundy home. Some form of diaspora is always at the centre of Friel's plays, where the border between leave-taking and returning is often blurred.

Likewise for Molly in *Molly Sweeney* (1994) home is a "borderline country" (67), neither here nor there: "My borderline country is where I live now. I'm at home there", while in the opening scene of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (1997) coming home is only a feeble attempt (Pine, "Love: Brian Friel's *Give me Your Answer, Do!*" 178).

"Home" says Richard Pine "is a destination to be pursued but never fully reached" (Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 195). For the exile coming home is a moment of crisis, which does not bridge the gap between what one is and what one was, but magnifies the *umheilich* (Grene 52)—what is suspicious, disquieting, unpleasant, sinister—in its original sense of far from "Heim", the home. He/she is a stranger at home. Home is thus denied.

This is what happens in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Cass comes back to Ireland and to her successful brother's house after fifty-two years of hard work in New York City and finds out that home is not a home. She is displaced in her own home (Corbett 2). The only contact with her Irish family over the years is the money she has sent them regularly, a tangible act of love. No home welcomes her, however, as her next of kin send her to Eden House, a rest home for elderly people

she refers to as "the workhouse" (15). Here she gradually loses contact with reality to take shelter in a dream world to recreate or retell a past that never was.

The play can be read as a sequel to Brian Friel's first great success, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, as both plays explore similar themes: emigration, love and family (Dantanus 101). Taken together, the two plays focus on the polarity of two crucial moments in Ireland's social history, a time caught between the lack of perspectives for the younger generations and the country's economic boom which comes through in the affluence of Harry McGuire's home. The time and place of the play—"The present in Ireland" (8)—is not neuter, but historically meaningful in shedding light on the 1960s as a moment of transition. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass McGuire* can be considered as two parts of a diptych providing a "reverse image" to each other (Pine, *The Diviner* 4). If the earlier play sheds light on Gar O'Donnell's final hours at home before emigrating to America, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* takes into account the emigrant's return. It is a "sister play" (Dantanus 49) to *Philadelphia*, taking up where the former play had left and telling the "other half of Gar's story" (Leary 132). Cass, the returned emigrant, has not found what Gar, the emigrant-to-be, is looking for. His quest interlaces with her anti-quest, his hopes and dreams with her failures and disappointments. If emigration is seen as the common theme of both plays (Hickey, Smith *passim*), to the playwright's own admission they are "attempts at analysing different kinds of love" (Hickey, Smith 222), parts of a quartet or catechism of love (Dantanus 115) together with *Lovers* and *Crystal and Fox*. *Philadelphia* examines the love between father and son, love within the family and love for place. This love is unspoken, or unspeakable, a powerful but repressed emotion finds no way of expression, so that the word "love" in the play very seldom occurs (Jones 32). The home Cass comes back to has the same emotional sterility (O'Brien 55) as Gar's and in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* the ironic title denies the protagonist's illusion of having loved and of being loved.

Critical reception of the play varies considerably and covers a wide range of very different perceptions and interpretations. Premiered on Broadway in 1966, where it closed after twenty performances (Delaney 47), *The Loves of Cass McGuire* was seen as Friel's "least successful play" because it is "contrived" (A.W. 27) in its contrast between dream and reality, or as a "slight play" sociologically because it does not go deep into the country's "social rupture" (F. O'Toole 16-17) though depicting its contradictions. It has "not much of a plot" (Hogan), and its sentimentality provides nevertheless a "finally balanced ambiguity" (Burke, "The Historical Geography of Brian Friel" 18). And if its theme is considered "tentative", the play is "surefooted" as theatre (B. O'Toole 230).

As a matter of fact, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is a multifaceted play, featuring a complex protagonist (McGrath 71; Niel 352) and anticipating in many respects Friel's more mature production in its inventiveness in the use of monologue and time, and in its technical experimentation with form and structure. In fact the play questions its own identity as a play through a series of expressionistic and non-naturalistic elements, which make it a "gem" among Friel's early work (McGrath 71). It is a daring enterprise in presenting the audience with the shock of an old woman of seventy, a disagreeable character, vulgar, embittered and aggressive, loudmouthed and foulmouthed, "a casualty of disappointment, lost love and semi-senility" (Burke, "As if Language No Longer existed" 21), embarrassing and unwanted (Sternlicht 118), a variation of the stage Irish-American (Lojeck passim). Yet, her energy and strength are revealed early in Act One in her attempt to take control of both the scene and the script. In fact, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* questions the play's text and its authority, as Cass contends with her brother Harry the right to tell her own story:

The story begins where I say it begins [...].  
 What's this goddam play called? *The Loves of Cass McGuire*.  
 Who's Cass McGuire? Me! Me! And they'll see what happens  
 in the order / want them to see it! (15-16)

The metadramatic construction of the play also has "a greater emphasis on Pirandellian theatricality" (Murray, "Pirandello and Brian Friel" 212) in that it involves direct address to the audience, who Cass considers – according to the stage directions – "her friends, her intimates", while the other people on stage are "interlopers" (15). If this technique is strongly present in Acts One and Two, little by little it disappears as the play progresses, as Cass's contact with reality slowly disintegrates. By the end of the play, she is seduced by the siren song (Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 79) of Trilbe and Ingram, two residents of the rest home ironically called Eden House. They are translators of their wasted and disappointed pasts as they try to cope with failure, disappointment and loneliness recreating their meaningless lives into a rhapsodic world of love, happiness and success. According to the Author's Note, each character "takes the shabby and unpromising threads of his or her past life and weaves it [sic] into a hymn of joy, a gay and rupturous and exaggerated celebration of a beauty that might have been" (7). The music of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* accompanies such reveries, suggesting the subtext of other stories of disappointment and thwarted love, so that every character at Eden House is involved in a sort of private opera (White, "Brian Friel and the Condition of Music" 11). Cass's resistance to the lures of the past and dream is finally shattered as the protagonist is seduced into the world of dream of Trilbe and Ingram, which in its fiction is "just as real" (60). Thus she finds in the paradox of Eden House the home she has come back to.

The stage is thus a place of and for voices (Welch 140) because *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is a play of voices (Andrews 96), whose language ranges from Cass's Irish-American accent which makes her "a misfit at home" (O'Brien 96), to the balanced and respectable discourse of Harry and Alice, to the lyrical and musical freedom of the rhapsodies with their irregular and improvisatory nature (Rollins 31). If the relevance of music in the play has attracted considerable critical attention (see Rollins *passim*; White, "Brian Friel, Thomas Murphy and the Use of Music" *passim*; Burke, "Both Heard and

"Imagined" passim), its interaction with the medium itself of drama is magnified in Eden House. The winged chair is specifically used only for the rhapsodies, a parameter of escape in space and time, and therefore it is a stage where each "rhapsodist" enacts an alternative reality. So Trilbe, Ingram and Cass in turn are storytellers and actors: "Eden House is also a kind of theatre, a place where roles are played out, often in desperation, to stave off the reality of aging and death" (Kilroy 13). It is a way to deny what has been and recreate oneself as a more acceptable fiction.

Cass is "a truly memorable heroine" (Roche 147), the first accomplished character in a long line of Friel women (O'Brien 55), developing from Aunt Lizzie in *Philadelphia* (Maxwell 77). Lizzie is "a grotesque stereotype of [...] 'the returned Yank'" (Corbett 43) who boasts her possession as a measure for success.

We have this ground-floor apartment, see, and a car that's air-conditioned, and colour TV, and this big collection of all the Irish records you ever heard, and fifteen thousand bucks in Federal Bonds [...] and a deep freeze and-and-and a back yard with this great big cherry tree, and squirrels and night-owls and the smell of lavender in the spring and long summer evenings and snow at Christmas and a Christmas tree in the parlour and-and-and-(Friel, *Selected Plays* 65)

Her litany of material possessions has the uncontrollable flow later to be encountered in the fantasy of Trilbe's, Ingram's and Cass's rhapsodies, where no restraint is made on words which take possession of the speaker and seem provided with a life of their own. Cass's account of her life in New York City has the same overflow of uncontrollable words with which she is trying to keep a distance from her own experience:

For fifty-two years I work one block away from Skid Row – deadbeats, drags, washouts, living in the past! Washing,

scrubbing, fixing sandwiches—work so that you don't have no time to think [...] . (19)

The choice of introducing the incorrect negative form “don't have no time” marks the polarity between Cass and Lizzie, each other's reverse characters. Cass is “a failed Aunt Lizzie” (Maxwell 77) whose roots can be identified in Friel's early prose work. Boston Biddy in Friel's early journalistic piece “A Fine Day at Glenties” is like Cass a “returned Yankee” (Friel, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* 16) fighting to find a place of her own in her home country (Friel, “A Fine Day at Glenties” *passim*). The prototypes of Cass also reach back to some of the protagonists of Friel's stories (Cronin 8). Grannie in “Mr Sing-My-Heart's-Delight” is like Gar's mother in *Philadelphia* an anarchic and alien spirit (Jones 34; Maxwell 35), whose longing for escape and dream of “the sun [...] the Punjab [...] the Garden of Eden” (Friel, *The Saucer of Larks* 68) anticipate Cass's rhapsody of a life of love and fulfilment (Andrews 13). Aunt Maggie in the story “Aunt Maggie, the Strong One” is a close model for Cass, bearing a wide range of detailed similarities. The “five shillings for little extras” (187) Maggie sends her nephew Bernard, anticipate the money Cass will send her family over the years. Like Cass, Maggie smokes too much (187, 191) and bursts into “rough country songs” (187) in the same way as Cass shouts “in her Irish-American voice” (14) and can be heard “singing at the top of her voice half the night” (12). The innocent yet disrespectful behaviour of Aunt Maggie is magnified in the vandalic destruction Cass provokes in her own environment—her breakages in Sweeney pub are the objective correlative for shattering the family—and like Cass later, Aunt Maggie is taken to St. Joseph's Refuge, a model or prototype for Eden House. The account of the death of Aunt Maggie frames the photographic episodes of her life of fight and endurance.

However, when she first arrives at the Refuge, Maggie asserts her vitality and reckless spirit (Andrews 35) with words that anticipate Cass in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*:

They won't tame me [...] They won't tame Maggie" (188).

The polarity enacted between the subject "they" and the object "me" sheds light on the figures of authority and conformity Maggie is ready to contrast, namely the "damned hypocrites" she identifies in her own sister and her family and the nuns that run the Refuge. The negative form "They won't tame me" enhances her determination and independence thanks to the use of a future tense, implying both a sudden decision and a promise she is determined to keep to herself and to others. A variation of Maggie's words in the story occur both early in the play—"you're not going to move me" (16)—and at the end of Act One, where Cass expresses her determination to resist various forms of authority in the structure of exclamations based on the polarity "they" / "it" and "Cass McGuire" / "us":

You bet, *they'll not* wear Cass McGuire down, huh? [...]  
*No* siree [...]  
*It'll not* get us down. No sree! (23-3, emphasis supplied)

The incremental repetition of her exclamations based on future negatives creates a climax at this point of the play marking Cass's assumption of her role. However, the presence of negative statements also highlights the negative outcome of the play, which denies itself and its own nature. Cass herself wonders why the author has given that title – "Why the hell does he call it *The Loves of Cass McGuire*? A gook title, I'll tell you!" (44)–, a pun and a paradox since the play itself denies its own title. Like Maggie, Cass is saying "no" to society that has marginalised her as old and useless and prescribed her role as an outcast. Like Maggie, Cass is saying "no" to the respectability of her family home. She is saying "no" to those who have said "no" to her and sent her to an old people's home. But in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* Cass is also saying "no" to the construction of the play and its authority by trying to take control

of her story. Her words: "The story begins where I say it begins" (15) anticipate a further expression of determination framed in negative forms:

You're *not* going to move me! What's this goddam play called? *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Who's Cass McGuire? Me! Me! And they'll see what happens in the order I want them to see it; and there will be *no* going back into the past (16, emphasis supplied)

"No" is thus a keyword in the play. This is the reason why the language of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is strongly dominated by elements of denial both in stage directions and in dialogue, in language both by and about Cass and covering a wide range of language functions including refusal, protest, regret and dismay. This underlies the protagonist's homecoming in terms of emotional aphasia (Randaccio 10), of love denied and thus life denied. Negative expressions and negation data represent a structuring principle in the play, having a descriptive function, but also suggesting a disquieting deeper layer embedded in the texture of the play.

The verbal instability and uncertainty caused by the massive presence of negative forms are counterbalanced by the rhapsodies closing each of the three acts. In fact a subtext of denial anticipates the creation of a parallel world in each rhapsody, a virtual reality made of non-places and non-people and recounting non-facts, so that the language of "no" has both a destructive and a creative power. Also the identity of the protagonist is caught in this web of "no" as a form of creation and recreation:

TRILBE. [...] By the way, m'dear, what IS your Christian name?  
CASS. Cass.

TRILBE. Cass? Cass? It's certainly *not* Cass [...]  
CASS. I was baptized Catherine.

TRILBE. Agh, Catherine! Now we have it! [...] . (27, emphasis supplied).

By the syntax of negation Cass is given a new identity, which anticipates the fabrication of a new life in her final rhapsody; yet, her alternative name also denies her reality, her real existence (Pine, *The Diviner* 59), and carries her into the “other” world of make-believe.

The significant presence of the language of “no” in various forms and with different language purposes is first encountered in the Author’s Note, as “the winged chair is *never* used throughout the play except during the three rhapsodies” (7, emphasis supplied). The auxiliary verb explaining the use of such stage prop also implies a negative statement, since each rhapsody is a “celebration of a beauty that *might have been*” (7, emphasis supplied), i.e. that never was, which an act of storytelling makes real and valid. Further on in the set “a Cupid statue (illuminated) is frozen in an absurd and *impossible* contortion” (8, emphasis supplied), which provides the objective correlative for love unrealized, denying the “loves” referred to in the title. The negative prefix in the adjective “impossible” anticipates the visual impact of denial evident in the opening scene with Gran McGuire on a wheelchair. Gran McGuire is “*invalided*”, the expression on her face “*never* varies because *nothing* can touch her” (11, emphasis supplied). Also the other members of the McGuire family are introduced in negative terms: Dom, Harry’s 17-year-old son is “*not yet* a young man”, Alice is “expensively, but *not attractively* dressed” (12, emphasis supplied). The cumulative insistence on negative details – “invalided”, “never”, “nothing”, “not yet”, “not attractively” – anticipates a similar pattern in the more accurate and extensive description of Cass McGuire herself when she first enters the stage, which reproduces the scheme of negative prefixed adjective, negative frequency adverb and negatively connoted adverb:

Cass is a tall, bulky woman of seventy. She wears a gaudy jacket over gaudy clothes; [...] rings; earrings; two voluminous

handbags which *never* leave her. She smokes *incessantly* [...] Ugly is too strong a word to describe her, and plain *not nearly* strong enough. If she ever had good features once, *there is no trace* of them now [...]. (14, emphasis supplied).

The impact of the negative language used in the stage directions supports the extensive use of the language of denial in verbal interaction. This is true also for the introduction of Trilbe and Ingram, the other two rhapsodists, presented in a similar way, and negative forms are an essential part of their identity. Trilbe Costello is an elocution teacher "but *without* the necessary qualifications and consequently *never* recognized by the education department"; Mr Ingram "*seldom* finishes a sentence" (21, emphasis supplied). By introducing the characters in negative forms in the stage directions Friel anticipates the negative forms they will use, which are implied in the three rhapsodies as tales of impossible or unreal past.

Cass's return engenders chaos and shatters the respectability of the family home. Much is said about her long before her appearance on stage. She has called at a pub and damaged the furniture, getting involved with the police. And the very first exchange about her, which occurs between her nephew Dom and his mother Alice, contains an authoritative prohibition:

DOM. What about Auntie Cass?  
ALICE. Still asleep.  
DOM. Can I bring up her tray?  
ALICE. *No.* (12, emphasis supplied)

This "no" of prohibition and authority is the first in a long series, as before Cass's actual appearance on stage nearly all the references to her involve some kind of negative form. A language of control prescribes or contains its referent. Alice's question: "Anything fresh downtown?" has Harry's negative reply "Not a thing", which confirms and reiterates the immobility of the opening scene. This pattern is

repeated by Harry's question on his part "She hasn't appeared yet?" and Alice's reply "Not a sound", while a direct question "Did you find out where she was?" is reversed into a negative statement, "Where was she not" (14). In this case the negative marker draws attention to a sentence which is a false interrogative by being an exclamation where "the semantic force of a negative morpheme appears to be lost" (Portner, Zanuttini 193). The "expletive negation" marks the exclamation as a positive sentence, which in the context of the play sheds light on the interaction between destruction and construction embedded in the verbal creation of an alternative reality. When Cass eventually "charges" on stage (14), Harry's first direct address is a prohibition: "Cass, you *can't* break in [...] ." (15, emphasis supplied). Harry's order works on the double level of plot and metadrama, since by entering the scene by force Cass is also interrupting the performance. This anticipates Cass and Harry's contention about who is to take control of the play, but by using the auxiliary "you can't" Harry is also trying to exert authority over Cass. At Eden House a similar situation takes place in the words of Tessa the maid: "You're almost a week in the house now and you know fine well *you're not allowed* in your bedroom between breakfast and teatime" (20, emphasis supplied).

The protagonist also involves the audience by direct address, often using a tag-question, e.g. "you'd think they'd be past all that now, *wouldn't you?* [...] Kinda sweet, *aren't they?*" (18, emphasis supplied). This rhetorical device which apparently expects an unnecessary reply focuses on the interaction with the audience, thus highlighting the nature itself of the play as metadramatic construction. The audience is Cass's ultimate objective, as it is for them that the story must be told properly. In Cass's reorganization of the plot, negative forms aim at a correct version of facts: "I *didn't* go, Harry boy, I was stuck in" (15, emphasis supplied), which has an immediate effect on the action:

And this *ain't no* visiting day in Eden House. So get the hell outa here, all of you (16, emphasis supplied).

Cass is thus rewriting the script with the language of "no" in a polarity between destruction and construction, and in a way she is also rewriting the stage directions when she introduces herself in negative terms:

The less you see of your Auntie Cass, the better because *she ain't got no money*, and we suspect *she doesn't go to church*, and *we're not too sure* if she's a maiden aunt at all (16, emphasis supplied).

By doing so Cass is also casting doubts on her role as a character and in a metadramatic perspective she discusses her position and characterization. In a way she is taking possession of the language of the stage directions that had introduced her in tentative forms negatively connoted ("never leave", "incessantly", "not nearly strong enough"). On the other hand the grammar errors which characterise her discourse are particularly evident in negative expressions, especially with multiple negations, such as "this ain't no visiting day" (16), "you don't have no time" (19), "I don't know none of them" (39), "never bought nothing" (41). These are part of Cass's sociolect, but they also represent "linguistic strengths" (Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* 45), and as such they are a distinctive feature of Cass's idiolect. Her "loves" are also involved in the contention between what happened and what is imagined in the frame of a negative context. Of Jeff Olsen, the man she worked for in New York City and loved, Cass says:

*He was no sweet guy* but he liked me – I know he did - *he never said it* but I know he did (44, emphasis supplied).

Was Jeff's love true but unspoken? Or unspoken because unspeakable? Or unspeakable because a fiction, like all the other loves? This implicitly recalls Cass's discussion on the paradoxical title of the play which denies all expectations of a story or multiple stories of love.

The unspeakability of love within the family becomes the focus of Act Two. Cass is insistent that she has no words to express the joy of being “at home”, and repressed emotions find a way in the torrent of words abounding in negative expressions:

I *can't even begin* to tell you what this means to me [...]  
 I hope it's *not too much* for me [...]  
 I *can't tell* you [...] (37, emphasis supplied).

Negative auxiliary verbs focussing on the expressive inability of language anticipate the close of Act Two, when Cass's reaction to Mr. Ingram's rhapsody culminates with the temptation and seduction of Trilbe's triple call *Catherine*. The stage directions have her standing “strained between the calling voice and the audience.” Here “her mouth form words but *no sound* comes” (50, emphasis supplied). Cass seems unable to find the words to tell her story because this is not the story of Cass McGuire. This story cannot be uttered in the same way as words of love cannot be pronounced. In a finely balanced introduction based on Harry's rhetorical strategy, negative sentences anticipate a bitter revelation: her wasted life was for nothing, as the money Cass has sent over the years has never been used and is now a “nest-egg” waiting for her (41). “Nest-egg” is ironically ambiguous, as the nest of home has refused her gesture of love. The words of refusal are disguised in rhetorical circumvention, which enhances the distance between Cass's imagined family love and the reality of refusal. Harry highlights a brotherly relationship based on nothing—“I wasn't much of a letter writer” (39)—which anticipates the well-prepared speech on money he shares with Alice, constructed on a dense accumulation of negative sentences and phrases:

I *won't forget* it [...]  
 We *never* really thanked you properly [...]  
*Not* to talk of the children's birthday and Christmas presents [...]

There would have been *no* point in telling you we really *didn't* need it [...]

Thank God we were *never* in want [...]

*Don't* think we *don't* appreciate the sacrifices you made [...]

We *never* really needed it [...] (40-1, emphasis supplied).

This accumulation in rhetorical exaggeration culminates in Harry's assertion that now this money "makes" Cass "*independent* of everyone" (41, emphasis supplied). The negative prefix in the adjective "*independent*" belongs to the discourse of negativity since economic independence for Cass is a synonym of emotional refusal. Such massive presence of negative forms dismissing Cass's gift of a lifetime is followed by another accumulation of negatives: Cass's incorrect and emotionally charged "*None of it ... never bought nothing?*" (41, emphasis supplied) contrasts with Harry's correctness and controlled distance.

In Act Three the need of storytelling and dream is magnified, so that negative statements in a way correct a domesticated truth. Young Tessa's dream of marrying her "*building contractor by trade*" is reworded and corrected in: "*he's not a real contractor yet*" (53). Likewise, Harry's respectable success is redressed in a series of negatives revealing the family's disintegration:

The children [...] *can't* come [...] we *haven't* heard from Aidan for seven years, *not since* he went to Switzerland [...] Betty's marriage *isn't* just as happy as [...] Even Tom at times [...] the secular *didn't* suit him [...] . (56, emphasis supplied).

The readjustment of dream back into reality had been anticipated in Acts One and Two by Pat Quinn, one of the residents at Eden House. The account he gives of Trilbe's life story corrects the dream of happiness she recited in her rhapsody in Act One:

[her father] was a French polisher by trade but *he couldn't hold a job. Never sober [...] never lit* – running from one school to the next and hoping for a square meal [...] *she wouldn't know the difference between a bull and a clucking hen [...]* . (32, emphasis supplied).

The harshness of reality and the impossibility of dream interact by constantly correcting each other in an endless act of creation. However, negative forms are least present in Act Three, because the need to dream of love and home becomes overwhelming. Following the example of Trilbe in Act One and Ingram in Act Two, Cass learns to rhapsodise, providing herself with an imaginative and alternative version of her story. Stylistically the three rhapsodies present common features. They have roughly the same length and conclude with the quotation from Yeats's "He wishes for the clothes of Heaven":

But I, being poor, have only my dreams.  
I have spread my dreams under your feet.  
Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams (31, 47, 67).

The repetition of key-lines and their chantlike intensity (Rollins 27) emphasise their compactness and the privacy of stylised escape. Paratactic sentence structure, and so the iterative use of the conjunction "and", is suggestive of the power of imagination taking possession of the rhapsodists, who on their part cannot keep pace with the flood of creative emotion:

TRILBE. I was called Trilbe because I was born the year the book was published; and father loved it so much [...] and he was so fond of Paris. And it was spring time, and he and I were travelling in Provence [...] . (29)

INGRAM. [...] and every night in the hotel I played the piano and she danced and danced and danced [...] . (46)

CASS. I stood at the stern of the ship, and two white and green lines spread out and out and out before me [...] . (65).

Furthermore, the adjective "golden" is repeated over and over again: "in the shaft of golden sun" (30), "My little golden Trilbe" (30, 31), "children with golden hair" (30), "golden hair as ripe wheat" (45), "hair golden as ripe wheat" (46), "with golden hair" (65), "golden chestnuts" (66). The adjective "golden" is used as a signifier of the characters' creative language. It is a private code giving access to and transforming a disrupted world into a personal El Dorado, making an unreachable dreamland attainable.

Significantly, the private quest of the rhapsody is characterized by the absence of negative phrases and forms. Trilbe's performance recounting her imaginative love story and life of happiness and travelling is a list of wishful thoughts, where only one negative form appears, "never stopping", immediately followed by its positive homologue, "always moving" (30). In Ingram's rhapsody in Act Two, the presence of negative forms is minimal, and limited to the account of his bride's death: "no sound" is twice repeated, followed by "but they never found her" (46). No trace is left of this episode, there is no way to check if this has ever happened at all.

Cass follows in her companions' steps. Her rhapsody, tentative and uncertain at first, is encouraged by Trilbe's reiterated invitation to continue: "no, no, go on, go on" (65). This final stretch based on double repetition is balanced between negative and positive elements which highlight the construction of a corrected and therefore more acceptable reality. Here in the fiction of dream Cass regains the loves she has lost during her lifetime: her father, who has abandoned her, Connie, her first love she has been forced to abandon, her family who have cast her aside. The intimate voice of the rhapsody gives vent to a language of liberation (Heaney *passim*), the power of makebelieve makes the rhapsody a private space of freedom. This is the reason why also Cass's rhapsody is characterised by the absence of negative forms. Notably,

the only two that appear are related to Harry, and contribute to create a reverse image of him, in which he becomes selfless and understanding:

Connie, he wanted us to stay over with his folks in Dublin but *Harry wouldn't hear* of that [...] And then I told Harry that I was going to move out cos' I wanted to be independent, but *he wouldn't listen* to me, not Harry (66, emphasis supplied).

Likewise, the word "love" appears three times in the rhapsody's two final lines, concentrating in the utmost realm of fiction:

Connie and father and Harry and Jeff and the four children and Joe and Slinger [...] and I *love* them all so much, and they *love* me so much; we're so lucky, so lucky in our *love* (67, emphasis supplied).

Cass has thus crossed a threshold beyond which her alternative life story gains ground and her real and imagined personae overlap. Her rhapsody is an agent of transformation, creating a parallel world where she marries Jeff Olsen and the joint in the East Side becomes a "ten-roomed apartment on the West Side" (66). Instead of being sent to Eden House she moves into a house by the sea "to be independent" (66). The adjective "independent" which had been an agent of contention in Act Two now transforms the negative prefix into a positive act of freedom. "My name is Olsen" (68), she says to the newcomer at Eden House, giving a status of respectability to her "arrangement" (44) with Jeff Olsen in New York. A new identity provides the hope of a fresh life. And yet her rhapsody is nothing but a long, implicit negative statement disclosing the wishful thinking of what might have been and the words of what was not. The conclusion of the play is ironical, the ultimate denial: "Home at last. Gee, but it's a good thing to be home" (70). Yet, Eden House is not home and Cass

is not at home. As in Gar's song in *Philadelphia*, she is back where she started from (Friel, *Selected Plays 30*), an exile from the story she has just told.

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