



Irish Women between Emigration and Return in Brian Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire*

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ABSTRACT. This article focuses on Irish playwright Brian Friel's play *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (first produced in 1966), the theory of emigration and the suffering of emigrants torn between the hope of living a new life and the desire to return home and filled with the fear that they can no longer live as before. The play depicts the life of an elderly Irish woman who left Ireland and emigrated to America when she was young. It shows how her return home ruins her expectations of what it might be like living in Ireland again, alienating her so that she retreats to her own world of fantasy and illusion as a way of escaping bitter reality. The article engages with the psychological impact of returning home, arguing that Friel was ahead of his time in covering the issue.

INTRODUCTION

Physical exile

Physical exile is encapsulated by Gar in Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), i the iconic Friel play of emigration in which the young Gar leaves Ireland to pursue his dreams in the United States (US). The play taps into the crisis of emigration in 1960s Ireland. However, critical attention to this play has left Friel's later play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, set in 1966, all but ignored. 'It has been called *Philadelphia's* "sister play" and in terms of its story line it certainly seems the earlier play's counterpart'. Cass's story is that of the

returned migrant who has spent most of her life in the US and returns to Ireland to face an unwelcoming family and society, which leads to the character's alienation. In his hand notes, Friel presented one of his themes: 'the reality of dreams – (because of the impossibility of love)'.^{iv}

Both the Irish Government's recent attention to returned migrants and their problems and recent scholarly studies in the fields of psychology and sociology highlight the difficulties faced by the migrant figure. In the 21st century, a number of psychologists and social scientists have embarked upon studies of migration and the impact on the migrants themselves, especially after returning home: 'Only recently has the literature on return migration acknowledged the problematic aspects of the simplistic idea of returning home'. Indeed, in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel discusses the problems facing returning migrants and the psychological issues related to their 'coming home' as outsiders:

Friel produced a counterpart to the narrative of departure in which Cass returns home. In this play, Cass's return is far from triumphant and her illusions about 'home' are well and truly shattered by her return.^{vi}

This article explores the psychological impact of returning home on the migrant figure, arguing that Friel was ahead of his time in covering this issue in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. It first addresses the critical field of migration studies before examining the play in detail.

Theory and impact of the returned migrant

Migration recommends that social change results from the development of a person starting with one social setting then onto the next. As a process, migration involves three stages: pre-migration, the migration itself and post-migration. Martin Klinthäll argues the last is under-researched, noting that 'return migration is obviously an important phenomenon and therefore, the lack of empirical work on the topic is surprising'.

As pointed out by Anh Hua, the notion of 'diaspora' touches on emigration, dispersal, identity, society, worldwide movements and political culture, with 'memory and trauma involved in such a dispersion'. Most migrants share the diasporic feelings of 'longing, memory and (dis)identification'. Indeed, Vijay Agnew defines memory as 'the glow that holds the past and the present together', adding that the diasporic individual encounters an undeniable pressure between 'residing here and recollecting there, between recollections of spots of beginning and entrapments with spots of home'.

According to Mark Wyman there are five key reasons why migrants may be motivated to return to their original country: success in their new home; the collapse and downfall of their new lives; homesickness; inheriting or taking over family property; the refusal to live away from home any longer. Personally, I take homesickness to be the strongest factor motivating migrants' return, although this is problematic for Alistair Thomson because it is used as 'a shorthand explanation which simplifies or even conceals a complex experience'.

Kathleen Burke emphasises two dominant life events experienced by returned migrants: their adaptation to a new and strange place with its customs and traditions and a return to a country that is very different from the one they remember leaving. As Emilie Pine notes, while a sense of estrangement and alienation causes them to miss their home countries and become dissatisfied with what they find in their new homeland, they equally find it difficult to move back:

[...] for many it is the absence of tradition which makes it hard to adjust – they find that Irish society has changed, moved on, and that modern-day Ireland is not centred around small rural communities and close family networks in the same way as it once was.

On a more positive note, one returned Irish migrant, Michelle, refers to rewards from her efforts to break into established social relations and networks: ‘people know each other for years and they have their own circle [...] But gradually I have got to know quite a lot of people and I have made friends, but it takes a bit of time’. Anastasia Christou defines return migration as the process of a “migrant’s return to the country/place of origin, parental/ancestral extraction or to the “symbolic homeland’. This implies a voluntary decision” in which return to the motherland is a real process of establishing belongingness through finding oneself there again, even if it is family structure that constitutes the main source of belonging.

In view of the problems facing returning migrants, the Irish government has produced information, assistance and advice on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the title ‘Returning to Ireland’. This website covers different aspects of living in Ireland, such as information on taxes, mortgages, car insurance, bank accounts and accessing social welfare, while the section on the CrossCare Migrant Project provides useful information concerning habitual residence, not to mention advice about getting a job and being eligible to work in Ireland.

To my mind, whether voluntary or compulsory, migration has a singular impact on migrants. Indeed, Vathi and King’s research shows that the various negative effects of migration involve ‘emotionalities of return, sensorial and bodily pain, adaptation difficulties and cultural dissonance and mental health issues or other clinical health disorder’. Moreover, they show that psychosocial wellbeing is a complex concept, primarily conceived as:

[...] a relational state of being with others that enables the pursuance of one’s goals and ultimately the achievement of an enhanced quality of life [...] In the context of return allows an exploration of the experience of ‘going home’ by addressing the multiscale [sic] and temporal aspects of return that may affect wellbeing.

Here, human wellbeing is a state interlinked with psychosocial wellbeing as a process and these theoretical distinctions can also be applied to home and homeland, the latter usually referring to ‘a place of origin to which one feels

secure, emotionally attached' and home indicating 'a stable place of residence that feels secure, comfortable and familiar'.

Despite changes in the home country before and after migration, there is a tendency for policymakers to consider that migrants return to the same position they held before migration and that it is the duty of family and local society to ensure the psychosocial wellbeing of returnees. Although Markowitz and Stefansson believe in the importance of the family's role in helping returnees, it is often the case that returnees' problems are rooted in the cold welcome given by their families and society.

As evident in Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, a play about an elderly Irish woman returning from the US, where she had spent 52 years 'working as a saloon waitress in New York's Lower East Side', most academic studies consider migration to be a one-directional journey to another country, but in literature, return is often viewed as the end of the migrant's journey where there is 'a strong emphasis on the sustainability of return'. Vathi and King point out that not all migrants returning home are necessarily afflicted with psychological problems or mental disorder. Nonetheless, while 'these return migrants narrate their migration experiences in terms of strong discourses of belonging, community and kinship', there remains 'a narrative of "not belonging"—of loneliness, feeling different, or frustration with loss of autonomy'.

The Loves of Cass McGuire

The play takes place over the two weeks leading up to Christmas and the day itself: Act I two weeks before, Act II one week before and Act III on Christmas Day. Cass talks about her work experience and her circumstances in the US: '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, and if you did you thought of the future'.

She takes her decision to return to Ballybeg in Ireland after many years. There, she is initially welcomed home by her brother Harry and her old mother. She is then taken to Eden House, a nursing home for old people, but finds it difficult to adapt and resents her brother's attitude, described by Mary Ellen Snodgrass as 'Harry's need to preserve an aura of gentility in his dysfunctional family, even if it costs Cass her freedom'. Harry's decision shows how selfish he has become, despite the hidden tears he shed upon her departure to the US and his sad memories.

After her arrival in Ireland, she understands that this is not the life she expected, recognising her imposed exclusion from Irish society: 'Home is not the same place you left, or the place you thought you left. Not only does the place itself change constantly, but imaginings of the place and what it means are reproduced'. The 'loves' referred to in the title do not refer to love affairs but to the love Cass has for her people during her life. Cass has sent money home to her family every month over her 52 years away: 'Her only contact with home and family has been the few hard-earned dollars she regularly sent to her

brother Harry and his family back in Ireland'. This supports Stockdale's finding that 'migrants become less beneficiaries and more benefactors in family networks'.

Cass had expected a great, happy welcome from her family, deceiving herself into thinking there would be a kind of appreciation for her and all she had done. However, as Izabela Wojciechowska highlights, Cass discovers that her well-off family has not used the money she sent and that she is destined to go to Eden House. The choice of name for this house 'makes snide commentary on the characters who seek sanctuary from regret and alienation'.

F. C. McGrath underlines Cass's shock when she learns that not only has her brother not used the monthly \$10 and funds sent for his children at Christmas and birthdays, but has placed it all in an account for her. A successful accountant, he tells her that she has about £2,500 saved to make her independent. However, independence here has meanings other than simple freedom: 'the adjective "independent" belongs to the discourse of negativity since economic independence for Cass is a synonym of emotional refusal'. Her first appearance shows her wearing 'a gaudy jacket [...] over gaudy clothes; rings, earrings; two voluminous handbags which never leave her. She smokes incessantly and talks loudly and coarsely'. She does not fit into the respectable middle-class lives of her family.

Indeed, Harry and his wife Alice find Cass's manners and behaviour unbearable as 'the Americanised ass is loud, coarse and vulgar, she drinks too much and quickly becomes a social embarrassment to the respectable and middle-class McGuires'. Moreover, her family members do not like 'to have their gentility shattered by Cass's outrageous language and actions', in addition to a quarrel and upset that takes place in a pub after someone calls her a 'Yankee'. In the opening scene of the first act, the family recount how Cass got drunk and damaged the furniture in a local pub, not to mention her singing loudly at night in her room and calling her mother a 'big cow'. Consequently, they decide to send her to Eden House, where she can live independently with 'other equally deserted and desolate souls' as her behaviour is not representative of a respectable upper-middle-class family.

For her part, Cass 'has limited means to extricate herself from involuntary committal to Eden House, a joyless hospice', where she and other residents 'choose to escape into imaginary retreats'. Cass feels that being condemned to life in Eden House is a betrayal and objects to Harry's assertion that she went willingly of her own accord.

The loss of anonymity can be compounded by a loss of independence, especially for women who may experience temporary mobility deprivation and restricted employment opportunities in rural areas.

Christou makes reference to narratives of return in denoting the importance of family as the main unit for female returnees: 'the place of family, and placing the family in a terrain of belongingness, assigns stability to the family unit'. Cass

views returning home as ‘a return to safety, security, family, even as a kind of retreat’, but this is not at all the world that she faces upon her return:

Since she is no more than a nominal member of her family, and since she has no cultural attachments to the play’s unspecified locale, Cass is given no choice but to fall back on her own psychic resources. Her private self is required to be the inspiration for her public behaviour.

Harry’s home is not the house Cass is looking for; indeed, it is no more than a superficial pretence. Domestically, Harry is a failure because his children do not come to visit at Christmas, but Cass has converted this bitter reality into fantasy:

In Cass’s case, private self is a synonym for memory [...] she can neither resist the force of memories nor rationalize away its pain. She is unable to lie to herself about her memories: she has to play them straight. The memories are of love betrayed – of father deserting the family, of her unsavory and unsuitable New York roommate Jeff, of a family’s implicit rejection of the ten dollars a week Cass sent in order to help them [...] as Harry explains ‘we never really needed it. And now it’s all intact [...] And it makes you independent of everyone’.^{li}

But it is precisely such feelings of isolation, redundancy, and lovelessness that Cass resists, as she must, being incapable of seeing her desire to give continually considered unnecessary by her prospective recipients.

Cass’s fanciful world represents her own happiness, which is built from her past life: ‘At first brittle and wholly in touch with reality, she gradually retreats into a world of fantasy’. She starts talking to other characters, such as Trilbe and Ingram, about events from the past which never happened:

When we long for the past, we long for what might have been as well as what was; it is only by incorporating such longing into our narratives that we can suspend the past and ultimately change its meanings in the present.

The retreat into fantasy borne of memory serves as a protection from the shock that Cass faces when she returns to her family and finds an unexpectedly cold welcome after so many years: ‘the experiences of the past are transformed into dream, in a rhapsody which is inevitably verbal in the telling, but predominantly visual in the collection’.^{lv} By sending Cass to Eden House, her family members repress her memories of the past, leading her to refer to her cold welcome in the following manner:

So we’re going to skip all that early stuff, all the explanations, all the excuses, and we’ll start off later in the story – from here. (Light up bed area) My suite in the workhouse, folks. Drop in and see me some time, okay? Where the hell was I? (Remembering) Yeah – the homecoming – back to the little green isle. Well, that’s all over and done with – history; and in my book yesterday’s dead and gone and forgotten. So let’s pick it up from there, with me in the [...] rest home.

As McGrath observes, the rejection by her family grieves and torments Cass, providing a cold-hearted and loveless conclusion to her experience in New York.

Her overwhelming feeling of rejection by the family and the community she used to live in, make Cass behave in an even more vulgar and provocative way [...] The unhappiness and loneliness, which have marked her difficult, hard life, result in Cass's struggle to forget about the bitter past and live only in the present. Therefore, she orders the play to begin at her new home, Eden House, hoping it can help her cut off the memories.

Pat, one of the residents at Eden House, analyses Cass's story and ascertains that she had a love affair with her boss, Jeff Olsen. He guesses that Jeff then abandoned her, which was the main reason for her return. This analysis contradicts Cass's narrative, namely that she has returned after Jeff's death. Whatever her motives for her return, she expects her family to compensate her after all these years. Her problems and her subsequent decisions reveal how most migrants suffer; by choosing to return, they reveal their need for family, relatives and society to find rest, comfort and safety. Any negative reaction from these groups will generate feelings of alienation and isolation. Returnees thus live with the sense of being alienated, being both inside and outside their countries. 'Cass finds herself stateless, left in a limbo between a country which rejects her because she is old and useless and a community which no longer recognises her'.

Here, Anh Hua refers to Radhakrishnan's claim that because diasporic individuals are dissatisfied with their current place of residence, they escape to memories of their home country frozen within the past. In this case, feeling alienated in Ireland and among her people, Cass resorts to memories in the US as a kind of escape from reality.

Diaspora women are caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts, and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways. The lived experiences of diasporic women thus involve painful difficulty in mediating discrepant worlds.

Caitríona Ní Laoire stresses that the family is an important motive and a key factor for returning migrants. This is the case for Irish migrants, who express their desire to return to their parents and spend some time with them while they are still alive:

Interviewer: Why was it you wanted to come home?

Interviewee: I think [...] I've always said I wanted to come home, and every time I came back my brothers were actually getting older, things were changing, things were changing, I was missing that side of it. My parents, I'd look at them [and think] God they're getting older. My granny died, my auntie died, and I thought God no, I think it's time.

This interview suggests that while family may be important to everyone, its importance is yet greater for migrants and their decision to return home; hence, their suffering or psychological distress when all expectations of family and the eagerness to be home are found to be illusory and self-deception is all the sharper. Stephanie Condon explored the desires of migrants to return

to the Caribbean, which I believe to reflect the hopes common to all returned migrants around the world, such as social access of family and friends, or at least being in a community where they are known and recognized.

Cass's return and her brother's decision to send her to Eden House are representative. Although she has continued to send money over the 52 years, he tells her that he has not used it and instead saved it as 'a little nest-egg' in a bank account in her name: 'Cass realises that all those years of hard work were a waste of time'. Giovanna Tallone points out that the 'nest-egg is ironically ambiguous, as the nest of home has refused her gesture of love [...] which enhances the distance between Cass's imagined family love and the reality of refusal'. Yet, right to the end of the play, Cass is still not given this money to buy herself a home and enjoy the rest of her life as she had hoped. Anh Hua refers here to dual relationships and loyalties owing to migrants' connection to both the host country and their country of origin.

In her paper, Ní Laoire concentrates on those Irish migrants now living in Ireland after spending considerable parts of their lives in the United Kingdom (UK) and US. She focuses on the idea of belonging and not belonging based on interviews with migrants. After their return, most migrants find problems in 'the transition from an urban industrial society to what perceived to be a traditional rural society'. Conversely, some European studies make parallel assertions that migrants differ in lifestyle, socially and culturally, from non-migrant society. In addition, some returnees' experiences are built on their memories, as well as expectations of their future lifestyle. This leads to a dualism in their identity as they are both insiders and outsiders at the same time and the 'postcolonial literature highlights the hybrid and in-between nature of migrant identities'.

Ní Laoire adds that the switch between the role of outsider and insider makes the position of the migrant blurred and complicated. Having returned from the UK, Bill narrates his experience after his return and how his Irish society gives him the sense that 'You're not really one of us any more, you're outside our circle now, you're not one of us now [making a distinction] between Irish in Ireland and Irish abroad'. In addition, local Irish society dislikes complaints or criticism of Ireland from returnees. Michael, who has returned from the US, knows about the stereotype of the 'returned Yank', who has an American accent, criticises the country and compares it with the US. He is careful to be like his Irish compatriots to minimise the gap between him and his society.

Such dualism generates a social tension between Irish stayees and returnees, one the latter find it impossible to reconcile; this leads to various issues such as loneliness, a sense of not belonging and estrangement. It also leads, in some cases, to psychological symptoms, such as schizophrenia, talking about unreal incidents and imagining them to be true. This happens mostly as a reaction to the gap between what they remember and expect and what they find in reality: 'The return journey highlights the contradictions of

migrant identity – between the dream of return on the one hand, and the fear of returning to a place that has changed beyond recognition’.

Indeed, when she talks about the imagined and fantasy reception by her family during her stay at Eden House, Cass presents as a schizophrenic personality; she refers to a party, a chat with her mother and her new house. Friel’s aim is to project the winged chair used by these characters as a station of confession to take ‘flight into a past which one can only remember because it never happened’. This shows the importance of the title, as Cass is rejected by the people she loves.

And when I came back home they were all down at Cork to meet me; and Harry and Alice and Momma; and Connie, he wanted us to stay over with his folks in Dublin but Harry wouldn’t hear of that; and all the cars drove up, one behind the other, like it was a parade or something, some of them with chauffeurs and all, right up Harry’s big wide avenue [...] And Connie and me we slipped out by the back and went for walk out to the crooked bridge and he said to me, ‘Do you remember Cass? Do you remember?’, as if I ever forgot, even for a second. And we must of spend so long out there that Harry, he got worried and went searching for us, and the police they were searching, too. And when we got back the party was over, and the house was quiet, and Momma, she and I had a long chat together [...] 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, he’s too stubborn. But I insisted. So we bought this place close to the sea and we fixed it up and Harry’s kids, they come to see us all the time and play around on the beach.

Cass’s imagination reflects both her inner hopes of love and her reaction to the first meeting with her family after all her years overseas: ‘The illusions in Cass are more than escape or compensation for a hard life; rather they are, like neurotic or psychotic symptoms, painful symbolic negotiations with a reality principle’. Her character makes contact with the audience directly as a means of escaping her memories, which appear through her family members and confirm her alienation: ‘She tries to repress her homecoming memories with memories of New York and of her life in Ireland before she left for New York’.

McGrath suggests that this play should follow *Philadelphia Here I Come!* as a later or updated version. *The Loves of Cass McGuire* stands on the other side of the bridge to *Philadelphia Here I Come!* with Cass constituting a female Gar, who returns to Northern Ireland after a long time in the US: ‘*Philadelphia* addressed the central problem of the 1960s, emigration, while its sister-play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, attended to its reverse image, the returned Yank’.

Dantanus underlines the similarity between Cass and Gar insofar as they both face the same disappointment and hopeless future in Northern Ireland. Hence, they are filled with the same eagerness to migrate and start new lives in America:

The fates of Cass (lived) and Gar (suggested) both express problems inherent in emigrating, problems of uprooting and loss of home and family [...] Perhaps if she had to go, she should never have come back.

Dantanus develops his thesis by mentioning the advice of Gar's school-master that he find a place for himself and not to look back under any circumstances, that is be 100% American and let Ballybeg and Ireland slip from his memory. Whereas Gar keeps thinking and asking about his mother while having no mutual connection with his father, Cass is the precise opposite: 'Each retains surprising tenderness for a deceased parent of the opposite sex who was lost in each character's remote past', '[...] Gar's father and Cass's mother remained at home as the "responsible, respectable" parent who raised the family'. On the other hand, Cass gives reasons and motives for her migration; namely, the absence of her father:

He sailed off when I was a kid – just to fill you in on the background – 'cos momma and him didn't hit it off too well when he took a drop. Never wrote nor nothing. Just got hisself lost in Scotland. So, when I was eighteen, I kinda [sic] got the same idea, you know; not that momma and me [sic] didn't hit it off; we got on okay, I guess, but [...] Well, what the hell was there to do around here, I mean.

As Snodgrass notes, the passing of Cass's father prompted her to leave Ireland and make a new start in New York, where she worked as a waitress for 52 years.. At this point, we could claim that Cass may have an Electra complex with regard to her father, such that he is closer to her than the mother. Indeed, his absence shocked her greatly and pushed her to leave her native country. She realised that nothing merited her staying as her figure of familial safety was no longer available. In addition, Cass lost Connie, her first love, who was forced to leave her.

Robert Stein confirms the importance of the father as a figure of stability, regularity and steadfastness. He is the 'outer and other directed' and the lack of a positive relation with a father makes connection with the outside world more difficult. Cass's departure represents a form of revenge for her father's desertion, which marked the failure of her first important romantic relationship, causing her suffering and forming the main motive for her departure. Having not found what she migrated for, she returns hoping that her family members will comfort her, although it is her father's grave that is her first priority on her return. Nevertheless, what increases her sense of loss is the rejection by her family after all the years of being away.

However, Cass cannot be compared to Gar's aunt Lizzie, who returns from the US to take her nephew, being rich, decent and respectable. In contrast to Cass, Lizzie decides to live in Ireland for a short time before returning to America and her well-established life. Even if Lizzie were to decide to settle in Ireland, she would be able to live independently as part of the upper-middle class, unlike Cass, who returns as an old, poor, rude

lady. As Lizzie asserts, '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'. Thus, Maxwell describes Cass as a failed copy of Aunt Lizzie, as 'Cass's economic relationship to her Irish family is in many ways an ironic reversal of what she assumed – and of what Lizzy achieved in Philadelphia'. Moreover, Boltwood suggests that Cass's return can be explained by the fact that her social and economic failure perhaps constitutes a pessimistic hint at Gar's destiny in the US.

Thus, even after his passing, Cass's relationship with her father plays a crucial role in her life because his death leaves her with a feeling of great emptiness. She learns of his death from Harry by letter three weeks into her time in the US. Upon returning to Ireland, 'her pilgrimage to her father's grave site violently unleashes repressed passions that force her from her brother's home'. She was crushed by his death owing to their close relationship.

Boltwood mentions the three stages of loss Cass goes through with her father. The first was when he went to work in Scotland because he could not live with Cass's mother and escaped to 'commence a second, bigamist marriage'. The second stage was when she was deprived of the opportunity to attend his funeral. The third was her visit to his grave, which again provoked sorrow.

McGrath adds that Cass's estrangement from and lack of connection with her living mother does not affect her to the same degree as the death of her father. Her mother, as Boltwood observes, is no more than 'an empty cipher on the fringe of The Loves of Cass McGuire'. The loss of the only person one has been close to in the family leaving one with cold relationships with the other members would make life difficult for anyone. It is even more difficult for migrants who return home and experience the same sense of alienation and loneliness living among their own people as strangers. Cass finds herself left only with an 'earlier memory either about her life in New York or about her life in Ireland before she left' Indeed, when Oona Frawley addresses the issue of diaspora, she highlights that diasporic memory is distinct in being divided between the two places and therefore loyal to 'both "home" and "away", with those terms frequently swapping places and even becoming interchangeable over time'.

Like Brian Friel's own dual names, Cass has the second name of Catherine, indicating a sense of hybridity. During the section set in Eden House, we discover her original name through the conversation with Trilbe:

Trilbe: There you are. It's a small world, isn't it. By the way, m'dear [sic] what is your Christian name?

Cass: Cass.

Trilbe: Cass? Cass? It is certainly not Cass. (To Ingram) Did you ever hear of anyone being christened Cass?

Cass: I was baptized Catherine [...]

Trilbe: Catherine, m'dear [sic], we are your only world now. We have the truth for you.

Cass: Yeah?

Trilbe: Join with us, Catherine, for we have the truth.

Cass: Sure [...] sure [...].^c

Richard Pine believes that being given a nickname or having a substitute name indicates a denial of the individual's real existence.^{ci} Moreover, in Eden House, Cass introduces herself to the newcomer, Mrs Butcher, saying 'My name is Olsen', as if she is trying to give herself 'a status of respectability of her "arrangement" with Jeff Olsen in New York'. (Tallone 72).^{cii}

McGrath's conclusion is that Cass's identity is symbolic of Northern Ireland as she finds her identity neither in the US nor in the Republic. Rather, she exists within a minor isolated society symbolised in Eden House, a location of common sense where people possess the common desire to remember events from the past that may equally have happened or not at all. This observation reflects Bhabha's notion that identity is 'in between':

Thus Friel's name articulates neither the Irish Brian Patrick ÓFriel nor the British Bernard Patrick Friel but a hybrid of the two is neither the one nor the other [...] Friel's identity is both split and double.^{cv}

Richard Pine agrees with McGrath that the official Brian Friel has never existed and this duplication and denial of existence affects Friel's view of identity: 'It is another recipe for Steiner's schizophrenic altermity [sic]'.^{cvi}

Within this context, the figure of Christmas appears very strange to Cass, especially after being absent for many years. She had thought about her family at such times, having continued to send money for the family at Christmas and for birthdays. She believes that the celebration will take place within her family and will be different now that she has returned to Ireland. Michael Vernon in his essay 'Brian Friel and the road to Ballybeg' argues that Friel:

[...] dramatizes the conflict between the two parties by allowing Cass to evoke memories (in flashback techniques) about significant moments in her past. Ultimately we learnt that Cass's attempt to return to full life is thwarted by her own act of goodness; the money she so caringly sent back to the family was never used as intended and is to be the family's means of ridding itself of an embarrassing and disruptive presence. She goes into the 'home' and takes refuge in fantasy, fending off the full pain of truth.^{cvii}

However, the shock of living alone in Eden House pushes her to pretend to sleep when her brother Harry, his wife Alice and his son Dom visit. Here, Andrews notes that 'In the end, Cass, in a drunken stupor, doesn't even recognise Harry or Alice and talks only to herself [as they make her] face what she fears most – homelessness – after she is rejected by Harry and his family'.^{cviii}

Cass becomes locked in her imagination rather than confronting the incredible and horrible reality. In the private world of illusion that she embraces, she gives the gifts of her family to her fellow inmates in Eden House in the belief and

acceptance that they are her new family. Indeed, on the first night of her arrival in the refuge, she cannot express how happy she is and what 'home' means to her now that she is happy to be 'finally home':

Home! I can't even begin to tell you what this means to me, Harry. This is what it was all for – to come home again [...] I hope it's not too much for me – you know– like a highball on an empty stomach.

Cass's final words, 'Home at last. Gee, but it's a good thing to be at home', are an indication of her suffering and her struggle to rediscover the home she has dreamed of throughout her years of emigration. O'Brien refers to D. E. S. Maxwell's analysis of the technical aspects of the play and quotes the following lines:

There is an irresistible sense of defeat when Cass opts for the world of rhapsody, when the more vital sense of home is conveyed in her statement, 'That's what it's all about, isn't it – coming home?' (78) and the close of the play, when she 'brightens, looks around the common room with satisfaction,' and says, 'Home at last. Gee, but it's good thing to be at home' (139).cxii

These last words seem to indicate that she takes Eden House to be the only reality that can pass as her home. It is hence within illusion that she convinces herself that she has found the love she has always sought. However:

Though Cass has concluded a kind of armistice, a release of sorts for her, hers is for the audience a pitiable end [...] The sense of the play is of loss, waste, defeat neither cosy nor consoling.

The Christmas tree usually indicates unity and family members gathering. With this thought, Cass buys one for Eden House (Wojciechowska 135)cxiv in the belief that it has now become her new home and its people are her family. Hence, as we have discussed, like many migrants, Cass has returned as a stranger after a long period of exile, but where she was an alienated disillusioned and figure in the US, she finds herself very much the same person in a different location, her homeland. Her alienation is complete.

CONCLUSION

Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire* explores the lives of various individuals, particularly women, especially those returning to Ireland. The book affirms themes of separation from one's culture, suppressed identities, and migration as significant issues of the era. This research connects migration with theory while analysing the challenges faced by returnees, which Friel presents from a contemporary viewpoint. Such research often exists in a hidden realm, revealing underexplored aspects of Irish literature that centre on returning migrants, particularly women. Furthermore, the study, centred around Cass McGuire's narrative, enriches migration and diaspora studies, offering a literary perspective

on the emotional and societal challenges encountered by those returning to a homeland that no longer exists.

This article centres on personal alienation associated with figures of exile and return, examining the theories and consequences of returning migrants. In Brian Friel's play *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, the primary challenge for returnees lies in their inability to reintegrate into established social networks. The experience of return migration is often more arduous than exile itself, as the returning migrant confronts a profound sense of estrangement. After spending most of her life in America, Cass McGuire returns to Ireland expecting to reclaim her place in her homeland. However, instead of belonging, she discovers herself alienated from her own people. Although initially welcomed by her family, this acceptance is fleeting, and she is soon placed in Eden House, a rest home. Deprived of the life she had envisioned, Cass retreats into her memories and a fantasy world in an effort to restore her happiness and escape her harsh reality. The struggle of returnees encompasses their pursuit of comfort, happiness, and a sense of belonging; without these, they endure profound psychological and social fragmentation. Ultimately, their experience is shaped by a paradoxical condition—simultaneously belonging and not belonging—resulting in internal conflict and emotional distress.

Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire* presents a profound exploration of migration, identity, and alienation. The play examines the lives of individuals, particularly women, as they confront the challenges of returning to a homeland that no longer feels like home. It emphasises themes of cultural disconnection, suppressed identities, and migration as critical issues of the era. This research links migration theory with literary analysis, illuminating the often-overlooked experiences of returning Irish migrants, especially women. This study enhances the fields of migration and diaspora studies by focusing on the narrative of Cass McGuire.

NOTES & REFERNECES

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The Loves of Cass Maguire. Holograph drafts of the play by Friel in hardback copybooks: • draft with note inside front cover: 'Actual script: Begin 4 Dec 1964 after 5 months of notes. Finished 7 April 1965. Copies to Hilton & A. Wood.

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VIII.ii Articles: Various articles on Friel (generally non-play specific), arranged in chronological order.

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