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## **Spectrality in Dermot Bolger's *The Townlands of Brazil* and Owen McCafferty's *Quietly*: A Comparative Approach**

**Abstract.** The essay offers a juxtaposition of selected readings of the concepts of spectrality in two contemporary Irish plays: *Quietly* (2012) by Owen McCafferty and *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006) by Dermot Bolger. The former apparently depicts a political ghost-like encounter in a Belfast pub. The latter deals with hardships and dilemmas experienced by those who have lived in Ballymun, a Dublin residential area developed to solve the problem of poverty in the city. Both plays have already gained critical acclaim and both feature Poles whose spectrality lends itself to postcolonial, gendered, and geo-dramatic hermeneutics. However, the processes of “haunting” and “being haunted” discernible in the plays can be interpreted in other dimensions of the spectral experiences shared by Polish and Irish characters, and these will be addressed in the article.

**Keywords:** Dermot Bolger; haunting; Owen McCafferty; *Quietly*; spectrality; *The Townlands of Brazil*.

In “Babel, 1972–2000,” the final chapter of *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601–2000*, Christopher Morash observes that “. . . the Irish theatre in the closing decades of the twentieth century has been increasingly filled with monologues delivered to spectres of the past” (2004: 267). Various dimensions of haunting feature in recent drama by Irish playwrights as well and this

essay aims to compare selected aspects of spectrality in two contemporary Irish plays: *Quietly* (2012) by Owen McCafferty and *The Townlands of Brazil* (2006) by Dermot Bolger. Certain points of convergence, namely the presence of Polish characters in both plays, have already been signalled,<sup>1</sup> and both plays, especially *The Townlands of Brazil*, explicate or just implicate multiple cases of spectrality. These cannot be identified and interpreted in all their totality. The same perhaps also holds true for the notion of spectrality, which is defined, or rather left undefined, in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* in the following way:

Spectrality appears a straightforward term, the normative sense of which has to do with ghosts. . . . There is an entire “family,” as it were, of specters, various species belonging to the genus haunting . . . Anything that goes by the name of spectrality, the spectral, and so forth, cannot be made to form a coherent identity or theory of the spectral, without that which is spectral having always already exceeded definition. The idea of the specter, not to say spectrality itself, escapes being defined, even as one believes that one has borne witness to its apparitional instance. (Wolfreys 2013)

The quotation points to the elusiveness of spectrality, which may refer to the experience of being haunted in the processes of deciphering literary works. Spectrality corresponds to the subtlety and ephemeral meanings and interpretations which are influenced by various haunting factors pertaining to the characters, the text, the reader and the author. And the three last-mentioned concepts have been attributed with various degrees of significance in the creation and comprehension of the meaning of a literary work (see Eco 1990: 182). *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* traces the origin of spectrality to the book *Specters of Marx* by Derrida (Wolfreys 2013), and the book is referred to by Katarzyna Więckowska in her study *Spectres of Men* (2014), in which she gives the following account of Derrida’s stance: “Derrida describes the spectre as the element disturbing the linearity of time and history, but also making their movement possible since it is only by recognising the spectre as an effective component of the present that the new, always harboured

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<sup>1</sup> The plays are listed in “The Polish Diaspora in the UK and Ireland: Migration in Literature and Culture since 2004,” the website devoted to “the theme of Polish post-accession migration to the British Isles,” as reflected in drama ([http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/?page\\_id=481](http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/?page_id=481); see also Ojrzyńska 2016: 50–66). In the section devoted to Ireland, it lists one more play, *Mushroom* by Paul Meade, and it could be completed with yet another recent work, *Shibboleth* by Stacey Gregg.

in the old, may begin” (Więckowska 2014: 12). Thus, the spectre is what disturbs the order and passage of time (or narrative), but what also makes their movement possible (Więckowska 2014: 12). Similarly, in *Quietly* and *The Townlands of Brazil*, the spectral figures, histories and places (cf. Morash and Richards 2013: 157–160; Malone and O’Sullivan 2013: 91) are the major propellers of the plays’ conflicts.

In *Hauntology and Intertextuality in Contemporary British Drama by Women Playwrights* (2013), Edyta Lorek-Jezińska “argue[s] for the cultural validity of the spectral representations and structures in contemporary drama” (2013: 7). She also postulates that “[t]he ghost comes to signify the processes of being haunted by the past, by other texts, and by those who have been marginalised or silenced” (2013: 7). If the main objective of Lorek-Jezińska’s study is to address selected plays written by British women, the aim of the present study is to explore similar “processes” involving the ostracized, criticized, punished, dislocated, condemned, or dead, who now haunt characters on or off the contemporary Irish stage. *The Townlands of Brazil* is commonly considered by scholars in terms of its structural and plot-related inter-cultural correspondence. By way of illustration, Charlotte McIvor states that the play “focused on the forced emigration of Eileen, a young unmarried, pregnant Irish-born woman, to 1960s London from the area on which the Ballymun Tower Block would be built in 1963. The event is juxtaposed with the story of the relationship between Eileen’s son, Matthew, and a young Polish worker named Monika, who picks mushrooms” (McIvor 2015: n.p.; see also Malone and O’Sullivan 2013: 92; Ojrzyska 2016: 57–58). A reversal of this perspective will serve as the framework for the discussion of haunting in this essay. The analysis will first foreground the figure of Robert, a Pole, in McCafferty’s *Quietly*<sup>2</sup>, and then will address the spectral predicaments faced by Eileen, an Irish woman. Other spectral experiences will be dealt with as well.

McCafferty’s play has been advertised as a “powerful story about violence and forgiveness” (back cover, blurb). Four sentences accompany the 2014 edition to summarize the plot-line: “Northern Ireland are playing Poland on the TV. Jimmy and Ian, two middle-aged Belfast men, are meeting tonight for the first time. They have a shared past. They need to talk” (back

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<sup>2</sup> The drama has recently been examined in “*Quietly* (2012) by Owen McCafferty: Towards a Quiet Reconciliation?” by Brigitte Bastiat (2016: 31–41) and “*Quietly* at the Edinburgh Fringe” by Rosie Lavan (2013), a review linked to *Quietly* at [http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/?page\\_id=481](http://archiwum-emigracja.uni.lodz.pl/en/?page_id=481). However, the explicit dimensions of the play’s spectrality tend to be neglected in such criticism.

cover, blurb). A one-sentence summary would be that *Quietly* in fact depicts both political and personal ghost-like encounters in a Belfast pub. And this sentence brings forth the issue of spectrality which is implied in the opening stage directions: “The stage is in darkness. Lights up. A bar in Belfast, 2009. Northern Ireland are playing Poland in a World Cup qualifier on a big screen TV. Robert is playing the poker machine. He receives a text message” (McCafferty 2014: 11). Each descriptive detail of the set design, the match, and of the character’s activities and movements serves as the preparation for conjuring up the symbolic ghosts onto the stage.

Robert is a Polish barman who plays a crucial role in conveying the spectral dimensions of the play<sup>3</sup>. Apparently, he is not responsible for arranging the encounter between Jimmy and Ian, the ghosts of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. At the beginning of the play, Robert is instructed by Jimmy not to become involved in the meeting: “. . . there’s a man comin in later on to see me—he wants to talk with me—there might be a bit a [of] trouble with him—but it’s nothin for you to worry about” (McCafferty 2014: 16; original spelling)<sup>4</sup>. Later, Ian tells Jimmy “i’m here because you agreed to meet me” (McCafferty 2014: 27; original spelling), to which Jimmy replies “you’re here because i allowed you to be here” (McCafferty 2014: 28; original spelling). However, it can still be argued that Robert facilitates the meeting and prepares the place for the appearance of other ghosts in the stories of the three men and in the dramatic reality<sup>5</sup>. Later in the play, he is even asked by Jimmy to become the symbolic jury in their spectral conflict, notwithstanding Ian’s objection to it: “i think it should be

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<sup>3</sup> In Lavan’s review, the figure of Robert is presented in the context of the conflict between Jimmy and Ian and the unfair treatment of Poles in Northern Ireland: “On the fringes of the main plot we are invited to consider the evolution of intolerance in Belfast and the play ends with Robert cautiously locking up the pub as Northern Ireland fans outside are heard to shout anti-Polish abuse” (Lavan 2013). Such descriptions nevertheless downplay the role of the Polish character in the development of the plot of the whole play and its spectral dimensions.

<sup>4</sup> Lavan considers Jimmy’s instructions in a more general context of the encounter: “Gradually we realise that what happened on the date of the earlier match has never left him [Jimmy], and that that’s the reason why he is waiting for someone tonight, and why he has warned Robert that there might be trouble. Ian arrives and by this point it becomes possible to predict the story before it unfolds itself” (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Lavan notices that “when [Jimmy] arrives Robert has the television on for the Northern Ireland-Poland match—Robert, we learn, has moved to Belfast from Poland. Jimmy’s knowledge of a much earlier meeting between the national teams, in 1974, is surprisingly precise for a man who claims to take no interest in football” (2013). Still, the critic fails to treat this incident as the one confirming Robert’s role in preparing the setting for the reappearance of the ghosts from the past shared by Jimmy and Ian.

open—if this succeeds we will be seen as the first—we will be held up as a beacon—a fuckin nobel prize maybe—robert will be our committee—our truth an reconciliation committee—won't you robert” (McCafferty 2014: 30; original spelling)<sup>6</sup>.

Robert is very tactful and reluctant to intervene in the spectral encounter between the ghosts of the Troubles. Instead, he conjures up the spirits that haunt him. And he is the only character who “writes” on the stage. As a matter of fact, an exchange of text messages is presented at the beginning of the play even prior to the opening dialogue between Robert and Jimmy:

i can't live like this  
i'm not happy either  
do u luv me  
of course i do  
then what  
i don't know  
i'm feel alone—what am i doing here—i want to go back to poland  
can't talk now the place is starting to fill up  
i need you  
talk later. (McCafferty 2014: 11; original spelling)

The personal problems experienced by Robert are the spectral phenomena which haunt the Polish character throughout the play. As he states at one point, “i've left nothing behind—it's there—i carry it with me” (McCafferty 2014: 13; original spelling), such separation from the past is not possible. Spectral figures and events from Robert's life assume the material form of text messages and memories expressed on the stage, especially the one concerning him being beaten by his father and the fact that his parents were addicted to alcohol. Such distant past haunts him in the verbal exchanges. Three utterances which appear in the conversation between Robert and Jimmy give insightful commentaries in terms of spectrality. One reads as follows: “i didn't come over here to be a barman—Belfast isn't barman mecca—not the fucking capital of the barman world—i came over to work and ended up a barman because i was one before” (McCafferty 2014: 17; original spelling). The other statements are Robert's confessions related to the experiences already mentioned: “both my parents were alcoholics” (McCafferty 2014: 19) and “you [Jimmy] wanted your father to hit you—been hit like me you wouldn't say that. . . . not slapped—beaten” (McCafferty

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<sup>6</sup> For the treatment of “reconciliation” in McCafferty's play, read Bastiat (2016: 31–41).

2014: 28, 29). The statements imply the presence of the ghosts from Robert's past which affect him and the decisions he takes (McCafferty 2014: 19). The first sentence pronounced by Robert on the stage is a salient example of how his recent past, perhaps influenced by his childhood experiences and family relations, haunts him in Belfast: "fuckin torture—she wanted to be here—begged me—i didn't force her—fucking made it happen that's what i did—and what—this shit" (McCafferty 2014: 11; original spelling). The statement is related to the opening exchange of text messages between Robert and the woman with whom he has a relationship, and it implies another aspect of spectrality which tortures the character because of his inability to accept the past—the inability to take the right decision in the past.

The text messages reveal also that Robert is involved in gambling in Belfast, which is implied as well by his activity of "playing the poker machine" (McCafferty 2014: 11). The content of the messages complicates the psychological and ethical constitution of this figure and undermines the naïve readings based on mere victimization of the displaced individual separated from his homeland<sup>7</sup>. At one point, at the beginning of the play, Robert receives the following text message: "poker after work?" (McCafferty 2014: 15). When his answer is not affirmative, he gets the reply: "what about the money u owe me—i want my money" (McCafferty 2014: 15; original spelling). Individual spectres gather around Robert: the ghosts from Poland merge with those he has encountered in Northern Ireland and to which and to whom he falls prey.

After the introductory conversation between Robert and Jimmy, Ian appears as the third character on the stage (McCafferty 2014: 21). It turns out that he and Jimmy represent the ghosts of the conflicting sides of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and Belfast in particular. Their hauntings began in 1974, when Ian killed Jimmy's father and his colleagues. The two Irishmen who meet are the spectres of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants which involved the 1974 bombing at the pub<sup>8</sup>. However, the

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<sup>7</sup> For such readings, see Bastiat (2016: 31–41).

<sup>8</sup> Lavan notices the centrality of the 1974 event in the plot and criticizes the work for its "equivocation" as regards the undeveloped threads concerning, for example, a kneecapping episode or Jimmy's decisions after his father's death: "But there are things unsaid which the audience wants to know. For example, we learn that Jimmy was, at some point in his youth, subject to a kneecapping, the traditional paramilitary punishment: the inference seems to be that the loss of his father under such sectarian circumstances prompted him to abandon his academic promise and join the IRA" (Lavan 2013). However, such ambiguities and uncertainties allow for spectral readings of the play. The kneecapping episode appears in the verbal exchange between Robert and Jimmy, as the latter states: "the way i walk—you talk a lot

spectral force of the play resides in each and every figure conjured up by Robert, Jimmy and Ian, as well as in the images displayed on the screen and the utterances spoken on and off the stage. Combined, they provide the play with an overriding spectral confrontation whose fragments, perhaps the crucial ones, are delivered to the audience within the temporal limits of the performance. From the perspective of spectrality, it can also be argued that Robert is the character who, having prepared the setting, invites the symbolic ghosts of Jimmy and Ian onto the stage. The invitation is implied not only by the already mentioned football match displayed on the television screen (cf. Lavin 2013), but also in the following verbal exchange started by the Pole at the beginning of the play:

alright jimmy—late tonight—second half just started—  
two one up to yous—evans just scored—not over yet  
though

Jimmy     aye—was thinking about not coming at all—but then  
i've something to do so here i am

Robert    pint is it

Jimmy     i'll try one an see how that goes—a few kids outside on  
the cider—they give you any grief

Robert    no it's fine

Jimmy     do you want me to go out and get rid of them

Robert    no i don't want any trouble

Jimmy     sometimes that's what's called for

Robert    they're only kids

Jimmy     kids can do more damage than you think. (McCafferty  
2014: 12; original spelling)

The initial conversation can be treated as a symbolic comment on the haunting past in the play: Jimmy's father was killed by Ian, who was only sixteen at the time, and Jimmy was sixteen, too, when he lost his father and his faith in God, and when he caused his mother to suffer a lot, as later surfaces in the play. The original context of the bombing attack is to be re-enacted and retold on the stage in such details as the exact place and the match involving the Poland national football team. At this moment, other

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a [of] balls—kneecapped.... shot through the knees—for nothing—robbed a sweetie shop when i was seventeen—well for something but it was nothing—robbed a sweet shop when i was about seventeen—stupid..." (McCafferty 2014: 21; original spelling). The experience of kneecapping is mentioned in the dialogue as the spectral aspect of Jimmy's past which adds hermeneutic complexity to the scenic creation of this figure. The knowledge and explanation of its circumstances is not required in the process of reading the play.



spectral beings from the past and from the present are ready to reappear on the stage.

In 1974 the conflict outside the pub involved the fighting between Irish Catholics and Protestants. The one which at present haunts Robert off the stage concerns aggressive anti-Polish attitudes, also existing among the “kids” mentioned in the dialogue, as expressed by the Pole: “smashed up some pub in the city centre—i was thinking maybe i should put the shutters up on the windows” (McCafferty 2014: 16; original spelling)<sup>9</sup>. However, it is worth noting that Jimmy does not display any of such racial views and one can even detect gestures of friendship between him and Robert. This provides a contrast to the situation and activity described at the end of the play, when other spectres materialize and take the form of the voices heard by Robert: “. . . dirty smelly fuckin bastard—go back to where you come from . . .” (McCafferty 2014: 55). Robert is ready to fight against them: “gets a baseball bat from behind the bar and stands waiting. Lights fade to dark” (McCafferty 2014: 55). The spectral encounter, yet extra-dramatic one, is about to take place<sup>10</sup>.

Spectrality also resides inside the stories told by Jimmy and Ian, which Robert is supposed to hear. When the Polish character says “i heard what you were talking about,” Jimmy answers “you were meant to—no point in it just being me and him—has to be someone else there to pass the story on” (McCafferty 2014: 53; original spelling). The symbolic ghost of the Catholic side of the conflict mentions the man who, “married for about thirty years,” “had affairs with other women” (McCafferty 2014: 23) and, having learnt about his incurable disease, asks his wife for forgiveness (McCafferty 2014: 23–24). As Jimmy states, “this fucker’s lyin on his deathbed an he wants to get into heaven—big catholic by the way—now here’s this poor woman thinkin for thirty years she’s been in a lovin carin relationship with a man that was faithful to her—on his deathbed this fucker says i’ve been havin affairs for thirty years dear—please forgive me” (McCafferty 2014: 23–24; original spelling). The man’s unfaithfulness can be considered in terms of the haunting experience which did not enable him to die without disclosing the story to his wife first: “he had to offload it on to her didn’t he” (McCafferty 2014: 24). The story is not directly related to the ghosts that appear in the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the predicament and suffering of the Polish community in Northern Ireland, see Bastiat (2016: 39).

<sup>10</sup> The final episode in which Robert is about to fight against vandals is mentioned by Lavan (see 2013) and elaborated on by Bastiat in the context of anti-racial abuse in Northern Ireland (see 2016: 39).



past shared by the two Irishmen; however, Jimmy uses it to show his hope that Ian has contracted cancer and seeks forgiveness for the 1974 killings (McCafferty 2014: 23).

Another spectral dimension is found in the story of Jimmy's childhood and the encounter with a Protestant boy: "there was a wee lad a few years older than me—a protestant—we were only kids but he started wearing a tartan scarf—my dad had bought me a new football—so i brought it down to the bottom a [of] the street—yer wee man kicked into the river as hard as he could—i beat the fuck out of him" (McCafferty 2014: 29; original spelling). The story told on the stage in the context of the encounter with Ian implies that the hauntings experienced by Jimmy do not have their origins in the 1974 bombing attack (as suggested by Lavan), but they started in his childhood, when he was still unaware of the overriding conflict affecting his reality. Jimmy remembers that after beating the boy, he "was screaming in his face—fucking orange bastard" (McCafferty 2014: 29; original spelling), and he admits that "it came out of nowhere—fuckin orange bastard—fuckin orange bastard—fuckin orange bastard" (McCafferty 2014: 29; original spelling).

The ghosts of those who were murdered together with Jimmy's father are conjured up in another story, introduced by the following description: "there was flesh stuck to the wall across the road—where you [Ian] were standin—difficult to scrape off—difficult because it's flesh an you don't want to scrape it off" (McCafferty 2014: 27). In this statement Jimmy notices Ian's reluctance to accept the punishment deserved for the brutal murder whose consequences are later described in detail: "the whole front a [of] the pub had been blown away—so ya could see inside—didn't make much difference everythin inside had been blown outside—includin the people—joe turner had a shaft of glass the length of a sword through his chest—aiden miskelly's legs had been blown off..." (McCafferty 2014: 43; original spelling).

Jimmy is perhaps right in his comment on Ian's inability to take the blame for the murder, as the character who threw the bomb apparently accuses the people who had influenced him: "i've also seen things i shouldn't have" (McCafferty 2014: 44; original spelling), and speaks about those who were similarly subject to such an influence. Sheila is one of them and her name surfaces in Ian's version of the story. Her experience is the most explicit dimension of spectrality in the play. In 1974 she was the woman with whom Ian had sex after the completion of the bomb attack<sup>11</sup>. In the play she is the character who becomes "haunted" off the stage. As described by Ian:

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<sup>11</sup> Lavan argues that "In this male play the remembered character of Sheila is perhaps the most sympathetic: she was given to the shy Ian as a reward for his success and their

She had an abortion—i didn't know that at the time—didn't know anything about it at all—i knew that wee girl but didn't—so i didn't see her again after that—a couple a years ago i'm standin in this bar and this women comes over to me—asked me did i remember her—drunk like—both drunk—i didn't remember—she told me who she was—i remembered then alright—told her i was sorry i was only a kid—then she told me about the abortion—had to go to england to get it done—her and her friend—got the boat to liverpool—got it done—then got the boat back—never told anyone—too ashamed—she said to me that night—that group a [of] girls—they were all warned whatever one i picked had to do what i wanted—told me it all *haunted* her—and that's how she looked—*haunted*. (McCafferty 2014: 46–47; italics mine; original spelling)<sup>12</sup>

The passage is the only one in which such words as “haunted” are pronounced by any of the characters. However, it can be used to describe all the figures speaking and spoken of in the play, even those whose stories have not been discussed in this analysis, and not predominantly in reference to Jimmy's inability to accept the death of his father (see Lavan 2013). They all appear as spectral and voiceless beings who haunt the men present on the stage and, at the same time, are haunted themselves. Furthermore, the aborted child, who belongs to the spectral reality of the play, is not the only baby featuring in the work. After Ian and Jimmy leave the stage, “Robert turns the TV off. He receives a text” (McCafferty 2014: 54), which reads “i mightn't wait up—the baby has me knackered” (McCafferty 2014: 54; original spelling). The story of this child is nevertheless given little attention in Robert's spectral life events—it appears only in two text messages. One has already been quoted and another is in a telecommunication exchange when the Polish man writes “kiss him for me” (McCafferty 2014: 12). It can be assumed that the presence of this baby in his reality makes Robert an even more spectrally complex character who escapes the common vision of immigrant experience and whose dramatic role should not be limited to the context of the encounter between the ghosts of the Troubles.

Spectrality acquires a community-related dramatic form and subject in the case of *The Townlands of Brazil* by Dermot Bolger. The work belongs

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clumsy encounter outside the bar that night resulted in pregnancy, shame, and a hushed visit to England for an abortion. But even this story, which the unmarried Ian learned of only years later, feels a bit hackneyed” (Lavan 2013). However, the way in which she is treated in the plot also contributes to the explicit spectrality of the play.

<sup>12</sup> The passage is also partly quoted by Bastiat, who considers the figure of Sheila within “gendered narrative,” as the title of one of the sections of her article reads (2016: 37–38).

to Bolger's *Ballymun Trilogy* and is set in the poverty-stricken area of Dublin. Yet the play also focuses on the period before and during the construction of the Ballymun flats, the process initiated to improve the appalling living conditions of the poor citizens of the city. The work is first of all hauntingly entangled in its close inter-plot connections with *From These Green Heights* and *The Consequences of Lightning*, as the three plays combine the stories of related characters, their families, and communities. Moreover, the second play in the trilogy is shaped by a structural and plot-related *vesica piscis*. As indicated at the beginning, the dramatic tension is based upon the intersection of two life stories linked by the place, namely the Ballymun area before the construction of the tower blocks and just on the point of their demolition forty years later (see McIvor 2015: n.p.; Malone and O'Sullivan 2013: 92; Ojrzyńska 2016: 57–58).

Almost at the beginning of the play, we learn about the ghosts who haunt Eileen. She is one of the main characters, the girl who lived in Ballymun, still a village area, before the arrival of the Seven Towers. In the nineteen-sixties, she brought shame upon her family by becoming pregnant as a still unmarried woman (see also McIvor 2013 n.p.). As Eileen states,

I've joined the Ballymun girls who've disappeared from history, like Mary McCarthy who got carted off to the nuns after a Finglas delivery boy delivered only trouble, with his bushy sideburn and bushier lies. . . . And now me, the Tailor Redmond's youngest daughter. Girls who exist only in whispers about sluts. That was the word painted on the road outside our cottage in Balcurris two nights ago. Dada found it at dawn. I knew the flyboys who painted it there, knew how unsafe it was for any girl to go walking among the fields in Coultry with them. Dada painted out the word before neighbours could see it. But a white mark was left on the tar like a public stain on his soul. (Bolger 2010: 112)

The story, which links its intertextual haunting with *The Scarlet Letter*, gives the plot a spectral dimension and this affects the characters on or off the stage. However, in contrast to the individual dimensions of Robert's spectrality in *Quietly*, the practice of haunting in *The Townlands of Brazil* has a complex multiple-layer collective structure (cf. Malone and O'Sullivan 2013: 91–92). It reaches back to the past and the story of Eileen's mother, the Irish Free State conflict and the mass migration of the Irish to the United States. As Eileen speaks out from the stage, "Mama was always telling stories but there were stories within her stories that couldn't be told. Disappointment seeping out on nights when she sat in the kitchen saying nothing" (Bolger

2010: 115). This reluctance to speak sets free the ghosts haunting the old and the new Ballymun as well as its residents and migrants, the individual beings and the whole communities (cf. Malone and O'Sullivan 2013: 89–91). It provides a salient contrast to *Quietly*, in the case of which, as Lavan argues, some stories are just signalled but not told (see Lavan 2013). In terms of spectrality, these stories surface in McCafferty's play on the level of individual experiences.

In *The Townlands of Brazil*, stories are like ghosts who appear out of nowhere and out of the blue. At some point, Eileen utters the following: "But some still come to discuss world affairs and recent deaths, ghost stories in winter and then, late at night, to rake over their youth again" (Bolger 2010: 115). One of such stories concerns the involvement of Eileen's uncle in the IRA and the murder which he apparently committed (Bolger 2010: 67). Ghosts are not easily recognized and at first there is a feeling of confusion about who they are. Such confusion is present in Bolger's drama: at one point Eileen learns the apparently superstitious ghost story from her mother. At another point, when the ghosts appear for the second time but in different circumstances, the story is no longer that of superstition. Eileen asks Michael the following question: "Did you ever hear the story about a boy named Butler found dead in a field in Brazil after four ghosts appeared to him holding a coffin?" (Bolger 2010: 129). The answer is "Well, you heard it wrong" and the following explanation is given: "Four men appeared all right, but they weren't ghosts. Butler was found beaten to death in a field back during the Troubles" (Bolger 2010: 129). Eileen jumps to the conclusion that the ghosts in her mother's story must have been the British, but the answer is they were not. Butler, who turns out to be Michael's uncle, was killed "by IRA die-hards who heard he was about to cycle into Dublin to join the new Free State police. He was only nineteen. There were executions in Mountjoy that week. His skull was smashed and a note pinned to him: 'Informer.' There's great power in such a rumour. People can use it to justify anything" (Bolger 2010: 129-130). The conversation between Eileen and Michael makes it clear that Butler was killed by the girl's uncle. This realization leads to a resolution in the play's spectrality involving the conflicting ghost stories. As the young man sums it up: "Rumours settle on absent people. Some men believe that your [Eileen's] uncle was the murderer. But those same men probably believe that my uncle was an informer" (Bolger 2010: 131).

In *The Townlands of Brazil* the other version of the ghost story involving the murder of Butler affects the personal spectrality experienced by Eileen after Michael left for Liverpool to find a job there. It brings Bolger's dramatic piece close to that written by McCafferty. The feeling

becomes more intense when the girl finds out that she is pregnant and is on the way to visit Michael's mother: "She saw me at last and came out, with me thinking that she'd call me a slut or a murderer's niece and run me from the door. But she was tender, not knowing me from Eve" (Bolger 2010: 134). As already implied, it is Eileen's pregnancy which specifically makes the play resemble *Quietly*; however, the similar stories develop in different directions, as Ian's child was aborted by Sheila. In the passage quoted, it actually turns out that the behaviour of Michael's mother was caused by the knowledge she had, by the fact that her son had already been found dead in Liverpool: "Death comes in threes: first Pope John the Good, then President Kennedy and now my son. His friends in Liverpool had a collection and sent me a heap of banknotes, as if money could make a difference. It was money that killed him, working in a flooded trench. All autumn they say he worked like a man possessed" (Bolger 2010: 135). And by another analogy to *Quietly*, Ian's unborn child is killed in Liverpool as well (see McCafferty 2014: 46).

In Bolger's play Michael was haunted—by the ghosts left in Ballymun, and by the hopes of bringing Eileen to Liverpool. His death leads to another chain of hauntings. Eileen's decision to escape from the religious agency supposed to take the child away from her once he (later we know the child is a boy) is born and to keep the child to herself would be inspired by different spectral encounters. One concerns the new community of what would become the trouble of Ballymun, identified with drug dealing, unemployment and poverty: "I didn't feel lonely because the ghosts of a thousand emigrants surrounded me, carrying suitcases and sacks, striding out in search of new lives" (Bolger 2010: 144). It is noteworthy that Eileen uses the word "ghosts" when speaking of those who are about to move into the Ballymun Tower Blocks, the poor from the inner city of Dublin. Her expression implies that those people are not full of hope and living just to be born again in Ballymun, but symbolically dead somewhere else, and Ballymun is the place, the area, in which they are going to perform their haunting activities.

In the same monologue, Eileen calls for another spectral encounter, this time a more personal one: "I entered Santry Woods and begged Michael's ghost to speak to me. Hours in the dark, too numb to cry, awaiting a voice that never spoke" (Bolger 2010: 144). The emotional intensity of this encounter, and whether Eileen actually felt this haunting presence, is clear when on the point of leaving the child with the agency, the woman decides to keep her son. In the scene of escape we even hear Michael speak to her: "For God's sake, run. For my sake, run" (Bolger 2010: 148). Eileen realizes she has just

taken the right decision, the one inspired by the spectral encounter: “It was your voice I heard, child, and the voice of your dead father” (Bolger 2010: 148). The story of Eileen closes the first act of the play.

The examples presented demonstrate various dimensions of haunting and spectrality in the two plays. They also enable one to draw the following observations. In *Quietly* Robert’s individual encounters with spectrality and the apparitional appearances of the characters spoken about can be treated as the propelling forces of the play, and in this sense they are not dramatically eclipsed by the over-examined conflict between Ian and Jimmy (see Lavan 2013) or by the vision of the community of Poles, either internally or externally harassed (see Bastiat 2016: 33; 39). The spectral composition of Robert’s scenic personality escapes complete interpretation, bearing in mind the mysterious messages he exchanges and the past experiences from his childhood and adolescence. It may come as a surprise that the play contains only one explicit reference to the activity of haunting, or to the process of having been haunted. In the case of Bolger’s play, what is crucial is the way in which the omnipresent spectrality influences the characters’ perception of reality, decisions and activities performed on and off the stage. Finally, it is worth signalling a few more spectral instances appearing in the second act of *The Townlands of Brazil*—in which Eileen’s departure to Liverpool becomes the spectral point of reference to the stories of Polish and Moldavian girls living in contemporary Ballymun (see Ojrzyńska 2016: 56–59). The stories of the young female characters are haunted by the stories of those around them, specifically that of Matthew, the figure who is apparently a superior British construction site worker, but who turns out to be an Irish man raised by his foster British parents (see Morash and Richards 2013: 158). For him the encounter with his real mother, Eileen, has had a haunting effect.

Spectrality surfaces in the stories told on the stage, in the stories of those spoken about by the characters, and, in the case of McCafferty’s work, in the text messages exchanged with those off the stage. Spectral experiences are sieved by the perspectives of those who conjure up the ghosts onto the stage. They are also affected by those who read and interpret the plays as literary texts and bring their own meanings to them, as suggested by Eco. The ghosts themselves cannot confirm their stories and approve of the interpretative paths taken in the reading processes. However, the presence of such ghosts endows the works’ recipients with the possibilities for discovering new meanings and coming up with new interpretations. In McCafferty’s *Quietly* Jimmy addresses Ian in the following way: “... i’m just letting you know what you’re up against—with the others maybe—if you choose to meet



them—if they allow you to meet them—just in case” (McCafferty 2014: 48; original spelling). Ian’s statement can serve as a concluding comment on the spectral encounters in and with both plays: the willingness of the ghosts to appear on and off the stage and the readiness of the characters, and the readers, to see them.

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