Dermot Bolger’s *The Ballymun Trilogy* connects the ideas of home and community with the concept and passage of time. The three plays that comprise the trilogy are entitled *From These Green Heights*, *The Townlands of Brazil* and *The Consequences of Lightning*. Each play presents personal stories that connect to the community as a whole, serving as both an individual as well as social commemoration of Ballymun from the building of the first tower to the eventual evacuation and destruction of the towers. Bolger begins the trilogy with an author’s note to contextualize the building of the towers. He states that in the 1960s there was a great need for housing in Dublin due to the collapsing of many tenement buildings. He goes on to describe that the building of the towers and the plans for adding a large shopping center provided hope for many of the people. However, the lack of heating regulation and the failure of the lifts to work regularly were just the start of numerous problems that would befall Ballymun. As depicted in the trilogy of plays, drug abuse and crimes would become an increasingly large problem amidst the towers.

In addition, families would be moved from close-knit communities into a high-rise tower in which they were separated from friends and barely knew their neighbors. This affected both men and women in that the women no longer had neighbors with whom they felt comfortable talking to and confiding in and the men lacked connections for jobs. For example, in *From These Green Heights*, Christy and his son Dessie argue about Ballymun. While Dessie grew up in Ballymun and defends it as his home, Christy remembers his old home: “I was somebody in Bolton Street. Neighbors came to me to write letters for them. Here I’m nobody, not even a
proper father” (Bolger 41). Christy initially fails to call Ballymun home; he was described as having very neat handwriting and so neighbors from Bolton Street would ask him to write letters for them. At this point in the play, Christy had been out of work for some time and not only felt unimportant due to his lack of work, but also felt insignificant because he believed that he was not providing for his family as a father should. His personal identity as a father figure and as a member of the community is taken away from him due to his lack of work and therefore he comes to the conclusion that Ballymun has made him a “nobody.” Interestingly, after having his son Charlie, his outlook on Ballymun changes considerably. When the government began to give grants for tenants to leave Ballymun, Christy tells his family that they should weigh their options and not be too quick to leave. When his son asks him why he would feel this way since he believed that his father hated Ballymun, Christy replies with:

I do [hate Ballymun], son, with an intensity. But there are only two sorts of people. Those who think that Ballymun is brimming with the salt of the earth but would never dream of living here. And then there’s those like me who think it’s a God-forsaken kip and wouldn’t dream of living anywhere else … I’m just saying that even if the lift stinks and young lads are sleeping rough on the stairs, once we step through our own front door we have the place lovely. It feels like home and Charlie loves it (80).

Christy now identifies Ballymun as his home largely in part because his son Charlie was born there. This change of heart is due in large part to connecting family with one’s idea of home. All three plays explore the concept of what “home” truly means, whether it be the physical aspect of living within the walls of a particular place or the familial aspect of the people one lives with and makes memories with. In Christy’s case, his concept of home changes from
Bolton Street to Ballymun due to the birth of Charlie in Ballymun. Therefore, the fact that his identity changes (he feels needed by his son whose concept of home has only ever been Ballymun) acts as a catalyst for the change in his personal concept of “home.”

Christy’s love/hate relationship with Ballymun seems to be a common theme throughout the trilogy. Most of the characters both despise Ballymun as well as consider it to be their homes. Characters such as Frank from The Consequences of Lightning and Eileen from The Townlands of Brazil who leave Ballymun behind find in the end that they lament for Ballymun and the memories of their lost loves there. Therefore, their sense of belonging due to social and romantic connections forged in Ballymun led them to consider the place as their true home. These connections to Ballymun include an interesting mix of factors dealing with both an individual’s personal as well as community identity. Bolger brilliantly combines the two along the continuum of time in telling stories across generations, such as in the first play of the trilogy, From These Green Heights.

The history of Ballymun as both a community of people as well as a personal home for multiple generations of a family elicits a certain emotional connection from the audience, especially considering the first showing of this play was in 2004 when the audience from that area walked right by the deserted Pearse Tower awaiting its destruction on their way to attend the play (Bolger xv). In this way, Bolger both praises as well as critiques the past history of Ballymun; the stories told will resonate differently with each individual, but their very telling solidifies Ballymun’s place in Irish history. To further the sense of interconnectivity of the characters and their stories, Bolger has the characters sit on the stage as a sort of internal audience when they are not acting. This intensifies the sense of community derived from the
experience of living in Ballymun as well as heightens the emotional experience each individual feels with regard to Ballymun.

In the final play of the trilogy, *The Consequences of Lightning*, Bolger uses Sam’s funeral to represent the collective mourning of the destruction of the towers. The mourning at the funeral reflects the mourning of the lives of the Ballymun residents and their histories as individuals and as a community. Though some of the memories may be far from pleasant, Ballymun served as a home for many people and is undoubtedly a piece of Irish history to be remembered. Bolger attempts to do just that in immortalizing the towers and their inhabitants through the characters in his trilogy of plays. Some of the characters find themselves remembering Ballymun as a home despite some of the more negative aspects while some characters tragically meet their death as a result of some of these negative aspects. For example, in *From These Green Heights* Christy learns to call Ballymun his home after the birth of his son Charlie who grows up to become a successful man while Sharon becomes a victim of the drug scene that has run rampant in Ballymun, tragically ending her life and condemning her mother to a life of misery. By including these personal anecdotes in the trilogy, Bolger seems to suggest that Ireland cannot move forward in hopes of a happier future without first taking the time to understand and come fully to terms with its past. Ballymun is an integral part of Irish history that is filled with stories of hope and destruction, love and loss. While the characters tell their individual stories in a staged setting, their stories are meant to represent the community of Ballymun as a whole in an attempt to commemorate its history. At the end of the third and final play, Martin speaks about Ballymun: “There’s always been two ways to look at Ballymun: an unmitigated disaster or the scene of thousands of daily unseen victories” (290). Bolger once again connects the experience of the individual to the experience of the community as a whole.
If one were to only look at what Ballymun has ultimately become (in reference to the destruction of the towers and all of the negative issues that plagued Ballymun through the years), one would only see disaster. However, if one were to remember the “daily unseen victories” of a baby being born, a small child learning to tie his shoes, “every first tooth, first communion,” then Ballymun could not be considered an “unmitigated disaster.” The stories of the individuals collectively define the community of Ballymun and because not all of these stories are disasters, Ballymun itself cannot be considered a complete disaster. Bolger implores his audience to remember the past as Ireland moves forward into its future.

Moreover, Bolger evokes a sense of realism from the three plays in that he does not attempt to glamorize the setting of Ballymun, yet he does not overemphasize the negative aspects of Ballymun either. It seems as though Bolger endeavors to present Ballymun as realistically as possible while still attaining the maximum emotional response from his audience with the characters and their stories who collectively tell the story of the history of Ballymun. The issues of unemployment and drug abuse in Ballymun are brought to the surface, exhibiting the humanity of the individuals and how these issues affected the Ballymun community as a whole. These issues also affected family and people’s personal relationships with each other. The plays do a good job of depicting the strain these issues had on individual’s relationships with their families and their community. All of these factors evoke an emotional response from the audience in remembrance of Ballymun and its inhabitants, whether living or dead.

Even more hauntingly emotional is the Ballymun Incantation printed in front of the trilogy. The rhyming paired couplets provide a haunting echo almost as though whispered from the memories of the ghosts of people whose home was Ballymun. The stanzas depict both happy

* Taken from the Ballymun Incantation (Bolger xxi)
as well as depressing life events of Ballymun’s tenants through the years. Some divulge memories of first dates while other more disturbing stanzas unveil the darker fates of people who committed suicide or were addicted to drugs. The incantation also mirrors the trilogy of plays in that it acts as the voice of the Ballymun community as a whole but also dedicates certain stanzas to individuals and their stories. The stanzas which include the personal stories are in the center of the incantation, surrounded by the voices of the community: the incantation begins and ends with “we” and “every” while individual stories complete with names are safely nestled in the middle, at the heart of the incantation. This same idea is utilized in each of the three plays: the individual stories are being told by the actors speaking on stage while the community (the actors sitting in the internal audience as well as the actual audience) surround them listening. In this way, Bolger uniquely connects both the personal stories with the community of Ballymun, establishing an emotional union between the two.

Part of the Ballymun Incantation is featured at the very beginning of From These Green Heights, the last lines reading: “Why won’t the voices stop whispering, / Straining to be heard amid the babbling? / Lives that were ended and lives begun, / The living and the dead of Ballymun (Bolger 4).” Interestingly, the stage directions describe the internal audience of the actors and their role of “listening to and silently supporting each other’s stories with their presence” while “there is no distinction between the living and the dead” (Bolger 3). It seems as though Bolger attempts to immortalize the residents of Ballymun as well as their stories in making it clear that there is no distinction between those who are living versus those who are dead; the residents and their individual stories whether living or dead will always be a part of the community that is Ballymun and that community is one that Ireland must remember as it moves forward towards a brighter future.